

WILD WEST



A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE.

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YOUNG WILD WEST PIKE'S PEAK

OF AERTAS STRONG DISAPPEARANCE
By AN OLD SCOUT. AND OTHER STORIES



A cry from Arietta caused Wild and his partners to turn. A noose had been dropped about the girl's body from an opening overhead, and before they could lift a hand to prevent it she was raised from the saddle.

WILD WEST WEEKLY

A Magazine Containing Stories, Sketches, Etc., of Western Life

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Young Wild West at Pike's Peak

—OR—

ARIETTA'S STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE

By AN OLD SCOUT

CHAPTER I.

IN THE ROCKIES.

High up on the mountains of Central Colorado a party of eight might have been seen riding over a crooked trail.

It was near the hour of noon on a clear November day, and beyond the voices of the riders and the sharp click of the horses' hoofs not a sound could be heard in that wild tract of country.

At the time of which we are writing railroads were not so thick in Colorado as they are now, and the population was considerably less.

The Rocky Mountains are noted for their picturesque grandeur and wildness, but in no part of them can be found a more lonely or dangerous place to travel than that portion of the chain that runs through central Colorado.

The trail that the party of eight were following was the roughest kind of a trail, and as they circled a towering peak they were forced to let their horses walk in order that they did not stumble into some unseen pitfall or go sliding to the slanting edge of some yawning chasm.

The party consisted of three ladies, three gentlemen, and two Chinamen, who were unquestionably servants.

The frowning cliffs, dangerous looking precipices, and rocky road, did not seem to worry them in the least, for the girls laughed and chatted as gaily as though they were traveling a smooth road through the heart of some pleasant little village, where no possible dangers could exist.

It was a hunting party, and it was made up of Young Wild West, who was known far and wide as the Prince of the Saddle, and Champion Deadshot of the West, and his pretty golden-haired sweetheart, Arietta Murdock; Cheyenne Charlie, the famous government scout and Indian fighter, and his wife, Anna; Jim Dart, the boy chum of Young Wild West, and his sweetheart, Eloise Gardner; and Wing Wah and Hop Wah, two Chinamen, who were brothers and faithful servants of Young Wild West.

Our friends had come from their home in Weston, Dakota, to Colorado for two purposes.

The first was to pay a visit to the famed Pike's Peak, and the second was to enjoy a couple of week's hunting in the Rockies.

They were well fitted out for dangers and hardships of the journey, and as even the female members of the party were used to an outdoor life and quite able to handle firearms, there was nothing surprising in their being in that part of the country.

They had come to Denver by railroad, with their horses in a special box car, and now they were heading for Pike's Peak, taking their time and hunting by the way.

The two pack horses that were being led behind the Chinamen were loaded with all the necessities belonging to a

camping party, so there was nothing lacking to the outfit. Young Wild West and Arietta were riding at the head of the line, and they surely made a pleasing, not to say magnificent appearance.

Our hero was attired in a fine hunting suit of buckskin, trimmed with scarlet silk fringe, and wore a wide-brimmed sombrero of a pearl color.

His coat, being unbuttoned, showed a fancy silk shirt of blue, and a gold watch chain dangling a short distance from his belt.

The steed he was mounted upon was a clean-cut sorrel stallion, speedy looking and handsome in the extreme.

His finely molded features, keen dark eyes, and flowing chestnut hair made him look to be just what he was—a perfect type of the boy who is born and reared in the Wild West.

Arietta Murdock was a beautiful blonde. There was just enough of a reddish tinge to her hair to make it look all the more beautiful, and in her neat costume and broad-brimmed hat, with the rifle slung over her shoulder and a revolver and hunting knife in her belt, she was all that one could ask for in the way of a perfect young girl, who had never known anything but a life on the boundless prairies and mountains of the wild, healthy and romantic West.

The other two couples were attired similarly to Wild and his sweetheart, and in ages Jim Dart and Eloise Garner compared with them.

Neither Wild nor Jim were twenty-one, and the two girls had scarcely passed eighteen.

Cheyenne Charlie, who was tall and straight as an arrow, with a very dark mustache and a wealth of black hair hanging over his broad shoulders, was somewhere around thirty years of age, while his pretty and charming wife was probably four or five years his junior.

"Wild," called out Cheyenne Charlie. "I reckon we'd better stop at ther next brook we git to an' go into camp. It sorter strikes me that we oughter find some putty good game around here. I jest noticed some marks in ther soft ground back there that looked very much like ther hoof-prints of a buffalo. There's quite a few of 'em up this way, I've heard say."

"All right, Charlie," was the reply. "We will go into camp at the first convenient place we strike now."

"Dat allee lightee," spoke up Wing Wah. "Me gittee allee samee tired, so be."

"You velly muchee tired allee timee," spoke up his brother, smiling blandly as he looked around to see the effect of his remark.

"Me workee harder allee samee my bletcher," Wing insisted.

"No know how to workee," was the retort. "You allee samee—"

"Shut up, the pair of you!" exclaimed Jim Dart. "There

is no need of getting into an argument about it. If you don't keep still I'll make you fight a duel with real bullets."

"Me shutée up, Mislér Jim," Wing promptly answered. "Me no say one wordee!" and Hop shook his head and looked as solemn as an owl. "My blother do allee talkee. He talkee too muchee, allee samee big gleen pallot with um yellow headee."

Hop was one of the kind who cannot be made to stop talking without force.

While the girls were laughing at what he said Jim Dart unfastened the pelt that had been taken from a jaguar that morning and let it go at him.

It was the Chinaman just as he was opening his mouth to say more, and with a cry of alarm, he grabbed his horse about the neck and just managed to keep himself from falling.

"A good shot!" said Cheyenne Charlie with a grin. "Now, then, I reckon he'll shut up when he's told."

Hop Wah did not venture to open his mouth.

His brother smiled blandly, but he, too, kept still.

Jim told him to pick up the pelt and then the party rode on, laughing over the incident.

About a mile farther on they came to a level strip of ground in a group of pines.

A tiny rivulet trickled from the rocks high above and went dashing into a deep ravine in the form of a miniature cascade.

"I reckon here's the spot we're lookin' fur," said the scout with a nod of satisfaction.

"Yes," answered Young Wild West. "We could not find a better place to pitch our camp if we hunted around all day."

So, without any further comment, it was decided to stop there.

It was within a few minutes of noon, anyhow, and the sun was pretty hot, though a stiff wind was blowing from the north.

"How long are we to stop here?" asked Arietta.

"Oh, we might as well stay here a couple of days," answered Wild. "You pigtailed jests be careful and put the tents up good and strong, do you hear?"

"Me hear velly good, Mislér Wild," retorted Hop Wah. "My blother him no hear goodee, though."

"It's funny that Hop is always piling it onto Wing, ain't it?" observed Cheyenne Charlie, as Wing cast a withering glance at his relative. "They didn't used to be that way."

"Well, there is more mischief in Hop than anything else. He used to steal, you know, just for the fun of the thing. He hasn't done that since he came near getting arrested in Denver. He now gets what fun he can out of his brother."

While the two Chinamen were busy putting up the tents and arranging the camp, our friends took a look at their surroundings.

On the north side of the spot they had chosen for their camp was a perpendicular cliff that ran up two or three hundred feet, on the east was a slanting hill, which they had ascended in order to get there; on the south was the brink of a precipice, and to the west was a broken stretch of rocks, hills, gullies, and clusters of stunted pines and towering cottonwoods.

As the gaze of Young Wild West finally turned to the west he gave a little start.

"Do you see that, Charlie?" he asked, pointing to a crag about two hundred yards distant.

"I reckon I do!" exclaimed the scout. "It's a big-horn sheep, jest as sure as you're born."

"Pretty good eating, too," remarked Jim Dart, unslinging his rifle.

The sheep, which was one of a breed that is quite common in some parts of the Rockies to this day, was apparently taking an observation from the crag.

As yet he had not seen our friends.

"Mutton chops for breakfast," said Charlie.

"I guess I'll drop him right from here," spoke up Wild. "But I won't shoot him while he is standing. That isn't my style of hunting. Jim, you just shoot off your revolver, and when he starts to run I will see if I can drop him before he gets out of sight. The big-horn is going to have a show for his life."

"A poor show, though, I am afraid," commented Arietta. "When you draw a bead on anything living it is all over with it."

"Then I might just as well shoot the sheep as he stands," said Wild, with a smile.

"No!" and the girl shook her head. "That would be un-sportsmanlike. Give the animal a chance."

Dart drew his revolver from his belt.

He looked around for something to shoot at, but could find nothing, so he pointed the weapon in the air and pulled the trigger.

Crack!

As the report rang out the big-horn threw up his head and looked that way.

Then the creature tossed the big horns that adorned its head and made a leap for a rock that must have been fully ten feet from the one it was standing on.

As it made the leap Young Wild West's rifle flew to his shoulder.

Crack!

The sharp report sounded an echo among the rocks and crags; the forefeet of the sheep doubled beneath it, and the head went back.

Then down it went in a heap.

"Gracious!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie's wife. "Wild, you shot it while it was in the air!"

"I know it," was the reply. "I shot him right behind the left shoulder, too. I have an idea that it is a young ram, and there is no better meat to be found on these mountains than that."

Charlie and Jim at once started for the spot where the big-horn had last been seen.

They had to pick their way carefully in order to get there, but they soon found the carcass lying in a hollow.

They went right at work at it, and in twenty minutes they were back to the camp with skin, horns, and best parts of the meat.

The scout then put the skin and horns with the rest of the pelts they had, intending to prepare it for tanning before the day was over.

By this time the noonday meal was in course of preparation.

Arietta happened to see a bunch of berries on a bush close to the edge of the precipice, and she walked over to get them.

She had just placed her hand on them when there was a fierce growl right over her head.

Looking up, she beheld a cougar in the act of leaping down upon her.

A startled scream came from her lips, and she started to run.

There was a swishing sound as the animal leaped through the air, and then—

Crack!

Young Wild West had not had time to pick up his rifle, so he fired with his revolver.

But his aim was true.

The bullet struck the beast between the two fiery eyes, and it struck the ground with a thud but three feet behind Arietta.

"I guess we are going to have all the fun we want in the hunting line," remarked the young deadshot, as he took his sweetheart by the arm and led her to the camp.

CHAPTER II.

THE FOUR HUNTERS.

Arietta was rather pale, but she smiled as Eloise and Anna ran to her.

"It was a pretty close call," she said. "But the beast would hardly have landed on me, anyway. I had sense enough to jump as I saw it coming."

"Quite right, little one," remarked Young Wild West. "If you had not jumped as you did the catamount would have struck you and knocked you down—even after I put the bullet in him. You know just what to do under trying circumstances."

"Oh, Wild!" was the girl's reply. "If I do know what to do it was you who taught me. Somehow, I felt that it was impossible for the growling thing to reach me. I was sure you would shoot it."

"Well I shot it, all right, and we have got another pelt to add to our collection."

Cheyenne Charlie took charge of the carcass, and soon had it relieved of its skin.

A little later they all sat down to a good meal, and then the incident was soon forgotten.

It was just as they were getting up that a rough-looking man appeared on the scene.

Where he came from no one knew.

He had happened there all of a sudden, it seemed.

"How do, strangers?" he remarked, nodding in an off-hand way. "I thought I'd drop around an' ax yer what was your business in this particular part of ther country."

"Come and sit down!" exclaimed Wild. "Have a little tobacco. Then we will talk to you."

"I don't want to set down, an' I don't want any tobacker," was the snapping retort. "You can't buy me off that way, so you needn't try. I want to know what you are doin' here."

"Well, we are taking things pretty easy just now, my friend," said Wild with a smile, as he walked over to the stranger. "Just let us know who you are, and what the trouble is."

"I'll do that quick enough. My name is Bob Barger, an' I makes my livin' by huntin' an' trappin'. I've got three pards, an' they makes ther livin' by huntin' an' trappin'. This is ther deestrick we work in, an' if you people are only up here to scare ther game away, you'd better take my advice an' move along. I was sent up here by my pards to tell yer this. We don't own ther place, but we do make a livin' here, an' we ain't goin' to allow a lot of fancy dressed boys an' gals to knock us out."

"Oh, that is the way it is, eh? Well, Mr. Barger, I am sorry we have interfered with your hunting and trapping. To-morrow morning we will get away from here, and then you will have it all to yourselves."

"You've got to get away from here afore to-morrer mornin'; you've got to light out right now! That's what me an' my three pards settled on."

An amused smile played about the lips of Young Wild West.

"Well, you go back and tell your three pards that we are going away from here when we get ready. We would have been satisfied to leave to-morrow morning, to please you, but since you are a little ugly about it we shan't be in a hurry."

"Great jumpin'-jacks!" cried the man, looking at our hero as though he could scarcely believe his senses. "Don't you know that me an' my pards ain't ther kind what takes any sass from no one? But I ain't goin' to fool with yer no more. If you ain't away from this place inside of ten minutes, an' on ther move, you'll git run clean off this mountain. You will, just as sure as my name is Bob Barger!"

With that he turned on his heel and walked rapidly down the slope, losing himself to view at the first turn among the rocks.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Jim Dart, when he had gone. "What do you think of that?"

"It looks as though we were going to have a little trouble," replied Wild, smiling. "That fellow will be back with his three partners in a few minutes, and then we will have to look out that they don't hurt us. But I want you fellows to leave it to me when they come. You act just as though you were entirely indifferent to what is going on. I will show Bob Barger and his pards that I own just as much of the Rocky Mountains as they do."

"An' you'll show 'em a little bit more, too, I reckon," chuckled Cheyenne Charlie.

"Perhaps."

The scout went to work at his pelts, the two Chinamen cleaned up things around the camp, and the rest waited expectantly for the hunters to put in an appearance.

They did not have to wait long.

Barely ten minutes had elapsed from the time the grizzled man went away when they heard footsteps coming up the hill.

Wild walked over so he could get a view of them when they rounded the rocks.

They put in an appearance immediately, and four tougher looking customers it would have been hard to find.

Barger was in the lead, his rifle in his hand as though he was ready to shoot at an instant's notice.

The men might have been anywhere between the ages of thirty and sixty, and they certainly looked as though they had been used to roughing it.

"So you ain't gone, hey?" cried Barger, frowning and shaking his rifle menacingly.

"No!" answered Wild. "I think you fellows are very unreasonable to expect us to go away from here. Why, we

have as much right to hunt here as you have. We are not interfering with you, anyhow. There is game enough here to keep us all busy, for that matter."

"There is, hey?" spoke up the biggest and most ugly looking man of the four. "Well, that don't make no difference. When we tells one to git, we mean it. You had a chance to git away from here without bein' hurt. Now you're liable to go under if you put up a fight."

"So you mean to open fire on us if we don't do as you say, eh?" said Wild, walking right up to him. "You are villains, then, are you? Well, let me tell you one thing! If you don't get away from here in a hurry I'll give you a shaking up that you will remember as long as you live!"

Wild did not give him a chance to get away if he had been inclined to do so.

Before the words were fairly out of his mouth he caught the big rascal's right wrist in his left hand and seized him by the collar with the right.

Then he gave such a sudden twist and a jerk simultaneously that the man dropped his rifle and let out a cry of pain.

But Wild did not stop.

He shook him with all the strength he could command and kept on twisting his wrist.

For probably two seconds he kept it up, and then he let go of him.

Flop!

The ugly hunter dropped to the ground as limp as a rag. Barger was in the act of leveling his revolver as our hero turned toward him.

With remarkable quickness he seized the barrel of the weapon and wrenched it from his grasp, poking the butt of it hard against his stomach as he did so.

The result was that Barger went down in a heap.

The other two men were the picture of amazement.

Wild did not attempt to lay hands on them, but drew his revolvers.

"Do you know what I am going to do the next time I see either of you fellows?" he asked in his cool and easy way. "I am going to shoot you!"

The big man now scrambled to his feet.

"Consarn you!" he cried, "I'll fill you full of holes!"

Wild let the muzzle of one of his revolvers stare him in the face.

"Get out of my sight as quick as you can, or this shooter will go off!" he said, sternly.

But instead of obeying, the rascal sprang toward him.

Crack!

Wild fired and took away a lock of his hair on the left side of his head.

The big man stopped.

Crack!

Again the boy fired, this time clipping a lock off the other side.

"Hold on!" the victim cried. "Don't shoot no more!"

"I will guarantee to cut all the hair from your head without hurting you if you want me to," was the retort. "I hate to kill you, for I think you are a harmless old fool."

"Boys, I reckon we'd better go back to our camp," said the big man.

"All right," spoke up Bob Barger. "I'm willin' to go. But if this gang ain't away from here by to-morrer mornin' there'll be trouble."

"You take my advice and mind your own business," said Young Wild West. "You will find that it will pay you a great deal better in the end."

The four men said no more, but promptly turned and hurried away.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Cheyenne Charlie, and then the rest joined in with him.

The whole thing had been rather amusing to the scout and Jim Dart.

They knew just what Wild could do, so they simply had to wait and see him tame the four men.

Of course, they were ready to interfere in case they had opened fire.

"Well, that settles the four hunters for a while, anyhow," our hero observed. "Now, then, we may as well see if we can find something to shoot."

"An' keep an eye on them fellers, too," added Charlie. "It sorter strikes me that they ain't satisfied with ther way things turned out. They'll be lookin' for satisfaction, see if they don't, afore we git away from here."

"I don't want to get in any trouble with them. But they must let us alone, that's all," answered our hero.

"Probably it would be a good idea for us to move away a few miles or so," Arietta suggested. "This is a fine camping place, but there must be others just as good."

"I don't like to let any one have the least chance to say that I am afraid," retorted her dashing young lover. "If we go away from here they will think that we are afraid of them, in spite of what I did to them just now. That will make them bolder, and the chances are that they would follow us up and annoy us all they possibly could. No! We will stay here until to-morrow, anyhow."

They all knew what that meant. All the coaxing in the world would not have caused Young Wild West to change his mind now.

The party had two double-barreled shotguns with them, and Wild suggested that they go and look for a few partridges for their supper.

He was quite certain that they would not have to go very far from the camp to find plenty of the birds.

Arietta took one of the guns and Jim Dart the other. Wild never bothered with a shotgun.

He could shoot too accurately with a rifle or revolver for that.

The girls were eager for a walk among the rocks and crags of the mountains, so the two Chinamen were left in charge of the horses and the camp with instructions to shoot their rifles off in case of danger.

Then our friends set out. Wild headed for a point where the stubble was plentiful and the bushes low.

It was a good feeding ground for partridges, and he knew it.

At the expiration of five minutes they started a flock of the birds.

Arietta and Jim both fired, and then the sport began. Five partridges were brought to the earth right at the start.

Then the six spread out and started to follow up those that flew away.

In less than ten minutes their guns were banging away merrily.

Wild and the scout tried two or three shots with their rifles and were very successful.

They kept it up until they had really more than they wanted to cook for their supper.

Then they got together, and with the results of an hour's partridge hunt, started back for the camp.

They were half way back when all of a sudden three fleet-footed animals darted across their path and ran into a thicket.

Young Wild West knew what they were, though he had only had a brief glance at them.

"Mule deer!" he cried. "Three beauties, too! I am going to get a shot at one of them."

He sprang upon a slight eminence of rock, rifle in hand. The next moment he caught a glimpse of something gray bounding away at right angles.

Crack!

Wild fired, and the animal leaped high in the air and fell. Then he hastened to the spot, followed by the rest.

"I have never seen a mule deer," Anna declared.

"Nor I, either," spoke up Eloise, whose cheeks flushed under the bracing air of the mountains.

"Well, they get their name from the fact that their ears are longer than any other kind of deer," answered Jim. "In the summer their hair is of a yellow color, and in the winter it is a dark gray. I saw just enough of them to note that the gray color is now taking on them pretty strongly. The skin of the one Wild just shot will make a fine set of furs, I'll bet, for the hair is thick and rather soft."

They soon reached the fallen deer. It was a stag, and it certainly was a beauty.

Charlie got to work at it, and in a few minutes they were making their way to the camp with all that was good from it.

Reaching the camp, they found the two Chinamen playing cards for money.

They sat on either side of a fallen tree, and were so much interested in the game that they did not notice the returning party until Wild spoke.

"Is that the way you guard the camp?" called out Wild. "We watchee, allee light!" exclaimed Hop, covering his surprise wonderfully.

But his brother was not such an adept at deceiving people as he was.

"Me no!" he cried, jumping to his feet as though he had been shot at. "Whatee matter?"

"Who's ahead in ther game?" queried Charlie, as he stepped up and coolly pocketed the three or four dollars that lay on the log.

"You, allee samee!" retorted Hop, smiling blandly.

This caused a laugh all around. But the scout did not intend to keep the money, though he made out that he was going to.

"I reckon I am, you yaller-faced heathen!" he said. "Now, jest git to work an' pluck ther feathers from these birds. We want 'em broiled for our supper—do you understand?"

The brothers jumped forward in an effort to be the first at work.

Charlie chuckled and watched them. "Gamblin' seems to be a great thing with ther most of folks," he observed. "I rather like it myself."

"Give them their money back—divide it between them, Charlie," spoke up his wife.

"Sartin! I'm only foolin' with 'em." He soon gave it to them, and they pocketed it and went on plucking the partridges, grinning as they did so.

It was a very fine meal they sat down to at sunset. They had brought all they could possibly need in the way of stores with them, and the game they shot put the finishing touch on.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT TWO OF THE HUNTERS DID.

Bob Barger and his three pards were a rather crestfallen lot when they hastened away from the camp of our friends.

Their bullying tactics had utterly failed, and it was in silence that they walked away.

Barger finally broke the silence.

"Well, what do you think of it, boys?" he asked. "I ain't had time to think yet," growled the big man, who had been handled so roughly by Young Wild West.

"He was only a boy, too!" ventured one of the others.

"But, jingo! He must be as strong as an ox to handle Bateman ther way he did."

Bateman was the big rascal, and he simply shook his head as the remark was made.

The camp of the four hunters was not far away.

They were men who made their living at hunting and trapping, as Barger had said, and they were of the sort who think that no one else has a right to trespass on the ground they called their own.

None of them were above committing a crime, if they thought they could make something by it and not be caught.

Heretofore they had always had things their own way when they ordered hunting parties to get out of what they termed their district.

But the party of "tenderfoot boys an' wimmen folks," as they had called our friends when speaking of them, had given them a surprise.

They were much angered when they reached their headquarters, which was a big cave.

Skins and pelts were hung up and piled around in every direction.

Twice a year they took the results of their work to Denver and got good prices for them.

They had been in the business so long that the four men were almost in a half-civilized state.

They preferred the wildness of the mountains to the cities and towns, and they were really beginning to think that no one else had a right there to hunt.

It was bad enough to have travelers crossing their grounds every now and then, so they thought.

"Them fellers ain't tenderfeet, after all," observed Bob Barger, as he threw some wood on the fire they had left burning. "Gee! but that youngster with ther long hair must be a dead shot."

He looked at Bateman as he said this.

"Yes, I reckon so," the big man answered. "He started in to cut my hair for me."

"An' you could tell by ther way he acted that he knew jest what he was doin'," spoke up one, who was called Sprockett.

The other, who bore the name of Tom Mundy, nodded and grinned.

"There ain't no use in tryin' to make that gang move till they gits good an' ready, I guess," he remarked.

"Well, you kin jest bet that I will git square with that

young feller, if I have to foller 'em clean into ther heart of ther Manitou Caverns!" exclaimed Bateman. "I don't let a man go scot free after he shoots some of ther har off my head, I kin tell yer!"

"That's right, Bateman!" chimed in Barger. "You kin count on me to help yer!"

"Well, what one of us does ther rest will do," declared Sprockett. "We're pards, ain't we?"

"An' good ones, too!" spoke up Mundy. "Say! Them gals was putty good-lookin' ones, wasn't they?"

"You bet!" nodded Barger. "I've an idee that they knows how to shoot, too."

"Oh, I reckon that none of 'em is tenderfoots," said the big man. "They know what's what, all right. But did you notice that not one of 'em interfered wher ther young feller with ther long hair was 'tendin to our case? They jest sot there an' grinned, as though it was a regular picnic."

"An' I s'pose it was—to them," grunted Barger. "But we ain't through with 'em, boys. Ther chances are that they are on ther way to Pike's Peak. Looks as though they might be out jest fur pleasure. They've got a fine campin' outfit, an' with two Chinese to help 'em an' do their dirty work, they're bound to have a good time—that is, if we let 'em."

The minds of the villainous quartette seemed to be much perturbed over what had happened.

They talked about it the rest of the afternoon, and when night came they were all the more decided upon getting revenge.

"It will pay us better than huntin' an' trappin' to foller 'em till we git 'em in a good place an' rob 'em," Bob Barger declared, as they sat down to their supper.

"That's jest what we'll do!" the others declared.

After it was good and dark Barger proposed that one of the men crawl up close to the camp of our friends with him and see what was going on there.

"I'll go with yer!" Sprockett hastened to exclaim.

"All right. Tom, you an' Bateman kin stay an' watch ther camp. I seen some gray wolves sneakin' around jest afore sundown. They'll be up here lookin' fur what they could find in ther way of ofal, an' sich like. Jest plug it into 'em if they come too close."

The two men said they would be on the lookout, and then Barger and Sprockett set out on their mission.

"I reckon we don't want to let 'em ketch us sneakin' around ther camp," observed Sprockett, as they headed for the place our friends occupied.

"I reckon not," was the reply. "I don't s'pose it would take very much to make 'em shoot us if they got sight of us creepin' up there now. In ther daylight it was different."

The distance was not very far, as has been stated, and pretty soon the two villains saw the glimmer of a fire through the trees.

They went in a sort of roundabout way, not taking the course they went by when they went to the camp that day.

In about five minutes they had reached a point where they could look upon our friends.

It was as comfortable a camping scene as could well be imagined that the two rascals were looking upon.

Anna and the two girls were seated on a log near the fire sewing the garments that had been torn by the journey, and Wild, Jim, and Charlie were smoking and chatting near by.

Wing and Hop, the Chinamen, had built a fire for their own convenience a little aloof from the rest, and they were just getting ready to do some card-playing.

The horses were tethered close by, and the noise made by the trickling rivulet just added to the peacefulness of the scene.

"They looks kinder comfortable like, don't they?" Sprockett whispered.

"They sartinly do," was the rejoinder. "My! but them gals is sartinly good lookers!"

"You bet! I must say that you've got a great eye fur beauty, Bob. Which one do you think is ther best, now?"

"Ther one with ther reddish hair."

"I don't. I like that one with ther dark hair. She's what they calls a blunett, I reckon."

"Yes, I reckon so, an' ther red-haired one is what they calls a bronze, or somethin' like that."

"Ther stout one, which is a little older than ther other two, ain't neither a blunett or a bronze, but she's a good-lookin' gal, all ther same."

"Oh, they're all good-lookin'. Even ther two boys an'

ther man is good-lookin' fellers. Ther two Chinese is ther only homely things about ther camp."

"Right ye are, Bob. Say! What do you think of them horses they've got with 'em?"

"Fine, Sprockett—fine!"

"That there sorrel looks as though he could beat ther wind."

"He's a fast one, I'll bet!"

"Well, I wouldn't want him to be chasin' me up with that long-haired boy on his back."

"I should reckon not."

The two villains now remained silent for a minute or two, and watched the movements of the campers.

Presently they thought they would like to get a closer view of the two Celestials, who had now got their game well under way, and had produced some money.

The latter was what attracted the attention of Barger and Sprockett, probably.

They were quite experienced in woodcraft, and so they began to move closer to the two gambling Chinamen.

They did not stop until they were within a dozen feet of them.

Then they settled down to watch the game.

The players got a little excited as the game proceeded, and they began piling up the stakes before them.

"All Jackee-pot!" they heard one of them say. "Me win pullly soon."

"Me win, my blother," was the reply.

"Me bettee five dollars."

"Me raisee five."

"Me callee. What my blother gotee?"

"Four laces!"

"My blother cheatee all samee Melican man! He no takee pot!"

Then they both got up and glared at each other.

It was near a bush where the money lay on a piece of bark, and unable to resist the temptation, Barger motioned his companion to stay where he was, and he crept softly toward the bush.

He reached it just as the brothers were settling their dispute.

But before they sat down Barger's hand reached out and scooped in the majority of the money that was in the pot.

It was a very neatly executed trick, and when the Chinamen discovered that the money was gone they promptly accused each other of taking it.

But Barger was back by his companion now, and the two crept silently away, well satisfied with their visit to the camp.

They could hear the excited voices of the quarreling Chinamen as they made off, and then finally other voices joined in, after which all was quiet again.

When the two villains got back to the cave they surprised Bateman and Mundy by showing them something like fifteen dollars in silver and gold.

"I reckon they ain't so bad to hang around," observed Barger, with a grin. "We'll jest foller them till we git all they've got!"

"You kin bet we will," the others declared.

And the villains meant everything they said, too.

CHAPTER IV.

AT MANITOU.

If Young Wild West had only known that there were two men in hiding close by the two Chinamen when they were quarreling, things would have been different.

But he did not.

Neither he nor his companions paid any attention to them until they were on the verge of fighting over the disappearance of the money they had been playing for.

And then it was too late.

Of course, our friends thought that one or the other of the brothers had taken the money.

Hop Wah was a regular prince of liars, anyhow, and Wing Wah was not much better when occasion demanded it. So the matter rested, with each thinking that the other was the thief in the case.

The evening wore on and presently it was time to turn in.

Young Wild West and his friends always made it a point to retire early and get up early in the morning, unless circumstances forced them to do otherwise.

It was a little after nine when Cheyenne Charlie and Wing Wah went on guard for the first two hours and a half of the night.

The merry laughter and talk of the girls ceased, and soon a silence prevailed about the camp, which was only broken by the tread of the two sentinels.

The first watch wore on, and when the time was up Charlie aroused Jim and Hop Wah to take their turn.

The change was made without waking the others, and then things went on as before.

Jim and the Chinaman had not been on duty more than an hour when the yelping and snapping of wolves could be heard not far away.

"What's the trouble with those fellows, I wonder?" Dart remarked. "If they keep on they will arouse Wild and the girls."

"Wolves fightee allee samee mad," Hop replied, not knowing what else to say.

"Yes, they are fighting over something," Jim said. "Suppose you go over that way and drive them off?"

"How me drive away?" and the Chinaman shrugged his shoulders.

"Throw stones at them and make them go."

"Wolves bitee Hop Wah, allee samee bones."

"No, they won't. Go ahead. If they should turn on you give them a couple of shots with your revolver."

"Allee light. Me go allee samee Melican man."

The Mongolian sallied forth in the direction the unwelcome sounds came from, and a couple of minutes later the sounds ceased.

But another two minutes passed and Jim heard nothing of him returning.

Suddenly two rifle shots rang out, and then—

"Ow, stonnee! Lookee out! Me no fightee Melican mans!"

It was the voice of Hop Wah, sure enough!

Jim could hear him quite plainly, and he at once started in the direction the sounds came from.

He had not gone far when he heard a crashing in the bushes, and the next minute a form appeared.

It was the Chinaman.

He was running for all he was worth.

"What's the matter, Hop?" Jim called out.

"Me gittee to camp of bad Melican mans," was the reply. "They see me an' shootee at me; they no shootee staight, so no hittee."

"Well, if they come close enough for me to see them I'll show them how straight I can shoot."

"They no come," nanted Hop. "They only run a lily ways; they afraid, allee samee wolves."

He was evidently right in what he said, for though Dart listened carefully, no signs could be heard of any one approaching.

They made their way back to the camp, and found both Wild and Charlie awake.

It was quickly explained to them, and they lay down again. Nothing further happened to disturb them during the night.

The occasional wail of a catamount and the barking of a wolf in the distance would not arouse them, as they were quite used to such noises.

They were up with the sun and ready to do some more hunting.

After breakfast was served they got ready to go out.

"Wild, how far are we from the Great Caverns of Manitou?" Arietta asked.

"Not more than twenty miles, I should say," our hero answered.

"Suppose we break up camp and go over that way? We can hunt on the way, you know."

"I like your suggestion, Et, all but one thing."

"What is that?"

"It will make those four hunters and trappers think we are afraid of them."

"Oh, if that is what you think, we could go over to where they are camped and tell that we were going away of our own accord, and not on their account."

"By Jove! That's right. We will do that, then. Break camp, you Chinamen! Load the pack-horses."

All were satisfied to do as Arietta wanted to.

Charlie helped Wing and Hop, so calling Jim, Wild said: "We will go and find Bob Barger and his pards and let them know we are going."

"All right," was the reply. "I know just about where they are."

"Hop came near getting caught by them last night, so you said."

"Yes, they fired two shots at him."

"Well, let's get over there. We must be on the lookout, too, for I don't believe they are any too good to fire at us when we are not looking."

"Of course they ain't any too good for that."

Jim led the way almost in a straight line to the place where the villains held forth.

They had just got up when they came in sight of the cave, and one of them was kindling a fire.

"Hello, there!" called out Wild.

"Hello!" and the man, who was Sprockett, nearly jumped out of his boots when he saw our two friends.

The other three very quickly showed themselves.

"What do yer want?" called out Barger, rubbing his eyes and blinking at them like an owl.

"Oh, we thought we'd come down here and let you fellows know that we are going away," answered Wild.

"Where are yer goin' to?"

"I don't know as that is any of your business. We are going away from here, but not on your account, please understand."

"Well, you ain't got no business around here scarin' all ther game away, so folks who make their livin' by huntin' can't git a show."

"We have got just as much business around here as anyone living has, my friend. But we are through hunting right around the place you seem to have made your headquarters, so we will go on. Now, then, I want to give you a little advice, which is that you had better not bother people who come this way. If you do you'll get dropped some of these times. You must not labor under the idea that you four are the whole thing, because there are plenty of men who could handle you all at one time. I am only a boy, but I guess I can wipe you all out in about four shots."

The villains looked at each other uneasily when Wild said this.

It was quite evident that they believed this.

None of them vouchsafed a reply, so Wild and Jim turned and walked away.

"I guess they are well satisfied that we are not afraid of them," our hero remarked as they made their way back to their waiting companions.

"I am certain of it," declared Jim.

The pack horses were about loaded when they got back, and after telling Charlie and the girls how they made out, Wild gave the word to start.

A few years ago the Manitou Caverns of Colorado were not visited so much by sightseers as they are now.

Some of them have never been explored to this day, and there is no telling what will be found in them yet.

The views in some of them are grand, not to say awe-inspiring.

In one of them are what are termed the Seven Columns, and this magnificent spectacle surely looks as though it was the handwork of man.

The Grand Concert Hall is what another is termed, while others have been given various names suitable to the general appearance of them.

Arietta had heard about these wonderful caverns, and she had always wanted to visit them.

She knew they were not a great distance from Pike's Peak, and that is why she asked Wild about them.

Our hero wanted to go to the top of Pike's Peak merely to say that he had been there.

But as the Manitou Caverns were right on the way, he decided to inspect some of them first.

As the party got a couple of miles away from their camping place they ran into a herd of antelopes.

There was some exciting work then, and three of the fleet-footed animals fell under the unerring aim of Wild, Charlie and Jim.

Wild knew there was a settlement not far away, and he was looking for the trail that ran to it.

They were pretty well loaded with pelts by this time, and he wanted to dispose of them.

At the settlement it would be quite easy to do this, even if they did not get much for them.

It was a little before noon that they suddenly came upon a trail that showed signs of being used quite frequently.

A few minutes later they came in sight of a small settlement of log houses.

"That is ther place they call Manitou, I reckon," said Cheyenne Charlie.

"Yes," answered our hero. "I have heard say that a party of capitalists were buying up the land around here because of the mineral springs that are to be found. In due time I suppose we will have a regular watering place here."

"An' Pike's Peak will be used for a picnic ground, then, I s'pose," chuckled the scout. "Speakin' of Pike's Peak, it ain't long ago that I seen a couple of pictures about it. One was a team of mules draggin' a prairie schooner through a very wild country, with an old feller with whiskers an' one suspender drivin'. There was a sign on ther side of ther prairie schooner which read, 'Pike's Peak or Bust!' The other picture showed where ther outfit had come to grief. Ther two mulés was dead, an' ther bones picked clean by ther carrion crows; ther wagon was broken down ker-flunk, an' ther sign had been changed to read, 'Busted, by Gosh!'"

"Pretty good, I must say!" laughed Jim.

A few minutes later they halted in the center of the settlement, and found it pretty well peopled for such a small place.

The man at the trading store looked at them in surprise.

He was an out-and-out Yankee, and a very shrewd man to do business with.

The neat appearance of our friends probably led him to think that they had been hunting more for pleasure than profit.

"We've got some pelts and fresh venison here," said our hero, as he dismounted. "Want to buy it?"

"Waal, I don't know about that," was the drawling reply. "What do you want take fur 'em, flour an' rice an' sugar an' sich like?"

"Oh, we will take some salt, pepper, bacon, coffee, and sugar, and a little cash too."

"I reckon you won't take no cash from me, young man. You don't look as though you need any money, anyhow. None of you don't, fur that matter. Let's see what you've got, an' then I'll make you an offer. But you don't git no cash, that's a foregone conclusion, bergosh."

"Charlie, you can do the dickering," said Wild to the scout. "I guess you will be able to do better than I can."

"All right," was the reply, and then Charlie went at the storekeeper just as though he was bound to get the real value of the pelts and fresh meat.

It took him nearly half an hour, but he managed to drive a pretty fair bargain.

The trader got the best of it, of course, as he could charge what he liked for his goods.

While the deal was being made Wild managed to secure accommodations at the biggest building in the settlement, which was called the Manitou Inn.

When Charlie came over dinner was ready, and they all sat down to enjoy their first meal at a table in three days.

While they got nothing better to eat, they enjoyed the change, and they lingered longer than usual.

When they were through eating Wild felt a longing for a smoke, so he suggested to his two partners that they go to the bar-room and get some cigars.

They went out without delay, and just as they entered the front door who should come in but the four hunters they had had the trouble with the night before!

CHAPTER V.

HANDSOME BARGER PUTS IN AN APPEARANCE.

Wild was not a little surprised when he saw the men, for he thought they would remain at their cave.

But it was possible that they had come to the settlement for something they needed, so he did not think a great deal of it.

But Jim Dart made up his mind right away that the villains had followed them there.

For exactly what purpose he did not know, but he noticed something that his two partners did not see.

It was a nod of satisfaction that Bob Barger gave to the others as they came in the door, after he saw our friends.

Jim happened to be looking straight at the door when the four entered.

That gave him a chance to get his eyes on all that happened.

"How are yer?" said Barger, walking up to Wild. "We didn't expect to see you here. I hope you ain't sore ag'in us."

"Oh, no," was the reply. "We are not sore on you. But I thought you were so anxious to hunt; you can't shoot game and be here at the same time."

"Well, you see, we was out of a few provisions, so we brought in some pelts to trade for 'em at the store. We're goin' back an' 'tend to our business soon—ain't we, boys?"

"Yep!" came from the three unanimously.

But there was something in the way the man said this that caused Wild to think that he was not speaking the truth exactly.

But he did not care whether he was or not.

He had already satisfied himself that they were a set of blustering cowards, and he had only contempt for such as they.

So, after speaking to them, he paid little attention to them.

Wild bought the cigars he wanted, and then walked out with his two partners.

When they got outside they found the horses of the four men standing in front of the place.

To all appearances they had just got there, and there were no signs of any skins or pelts with them.

"I guess they came here because they were following us," Jim Dart observed. "They have nothing with them to trade at the store."

"That's so. I'll bet they haven't been to ther store yet!" declared Cheyenne Charlie.

"Well, if they are following us they mean to rob us. That's the only way I can figure it," said Wild. "And if they do rob us they will be smarter men than I take them to be."

"I reckon so," chuckled the scout. "Ther measly coyotes is makin' ther mistake of ther lives if they've got any sich thing as that in their heads."

While our friends stood smoking and talking a horseman galloped up and halted in front of the Manitou Inn.

He was a young man and attired in a fancy riding suit, and sported a sombrero on the side of his head.

That he was a first-class horseman was evident by the way he reined in his steed and dismounted.

"Hello, strangers!" he called out. "Fine day, ain't it?"

"Yes," answered Young Wild West. "This weather is all right. A fellow couldn't ask for anything better."

"That's right. Belong around these parts, stranger?"

"No, we only struck here a little while ago."

"Oh, then you don't know a man by the name of Barger, then?"

"There is a man by that name inside."

"Is that so? I thought I'd find him here. Bob Barger is my father."

"Well, that's jest ther feller that's inside," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie. "He told us his name was Bob Barger."

"Good! I haven't seen the old man in nigh six months. I live in Denver when I'm home, and he keeps to the wilds of the mountains pretty much all the time. He makes his livin' by huntin', you know."

"Yes, we know," answered our hero.

The young man, who had quite a dashy way about him, now walked into the bar-room of the inn.

Our friends could hear the greetings that he got from his father and the other hunters, but they did not go in.

They had an idea that the young fellow would come out pretty soon.

And they were not mistaken.

In less than five minutes he came out, followed by the four rascally men.

There was an angry gleam in his eyes, too, and when he looked at him Wild knew something was coming.

"May I ask who you are, stranger?" came from the young man.

"Yes; I go by the name of Young Wild West," answered our hero, calmly.

"Oh! So you're Young Wild West, are you? Well, I've heard of you. I'll say right here, though, that I didn't think you was the one to abuse an old man for nothin'."

"And I am not the one to do that," retorted Wild. "I never abuse anybody. I always make it a point to mind my own business, under any and all conditions."

"Well, my dad says you abused him pretty strong yesterday, an' just because he talked to you in a civil way."

"Your dad knows better than that. It was he who did the abusing, and I stood it as long as I could. Then I simply tamed him and the rest of them down a little."

"Well," said the young fellow hotly, "I go by ther name of Handsome Barger, and I'm a man who not only says things, but does 'em. Do you think you could abuse me like you did the old man?"

"If you call what I did to him abusive, certainly!"

Handsome Barger looked surprised when the answer came. He was bigger than Wild, and he looked as though he was very strong and active.

And the best part of it was that he counted himself as being unbeaten in the art of quick shooting and coolness.

If his father had told him everything that had happened when Young Wild West abused him, as he called it, probably he would not have been so anxious to pick a muss with the boy.

What he had heard about him Handsome Barger put down as a bluff and cheap talk.

He did not believe that Young Wild West was anything out of the ordinary.

But he was going to find out what he was before he was many minutes older.

He sized Wild with a critical eye, and then his hand slid toward the butt of a big six-shooter that stuck out of a holster.

Our hero had risen to his feet and he had a faint smile on his handsome face as he watched the fellow.

"I don't think you are any more than anybody else," went on Handsome Barger, and then his fingers touched his revolver.

"Well, perhaps I am not. But look out for yourself when you pull that shooter!"

"I haven't pulled it yet, have I?"

"No! If you had you would have been lying on the ground with a bullet in your heart. When a man tries to get the drop on me while he is talking to me I generally shoot him. That's what I am going to do to you if you pull that shooter from your belt."

A shade of pallor crept over the face of the young desperado.

"Look out for him, Handsome," warned his father. "He's quicker nor chain lightning," he is."

"Oh, I ain't goin' to get shot, dad; don't worry," was the reply.

"Well, what are you going to have done to you, then?" queried Wild, who knew well enough that he would have to show him that he could do him if he felt like it.

If he did not do it now Handsome Barger would certainly have an idea that he was just the least bit afraid of him.

Wild made up his mind what he was going to do in a jiffy.

"Hold up your hands, Handsome Barger!" he cried, suddenly.

"What for?"

"Hold up your hands!"

Out came one of the revolvers our hero carried and the muzzle covered the desperado's breast in a twinkling.

Up went his hands.

By this time quite a crowd had gathered about the front of the inn.

The girls had heard the loud voices, and they were at the two windows of the sitting-room, looking on the scene.

"Just to show you who I am, I am going to do a little fancy shooting," Wild went on in his easy way of talking. "Landlord, just bring out a couple of playing cards from a pack that is no good."

"All right, sir!" was the reply, and the next minute the cards were handed to Wild.

He walked over and placed one in each of the uplifted hands of Handsome Barger.

"Now, then," he resumed, "I want you to hold the cards perfectly still. I am going to fire three quick shots. Two of the bullets will go through the cards and the third will rip off the buckle you've got on the side of your hat. If you don't hold your head still some of your hair and a part of your scalp will go, too, so it will not be my fault. I never miss anything I shoot at, unless it is pulled away from my sight just as I pull the trigger. I guess you have nerve enough to stand still, though, haven't you?"

"I—I guess so," was the trembling reply.

"You are a man who not only says things, but does them, so you say. You ought to be able to keep perfectly still while I show you what I can do in the line of quick shooting."

"You've got it all your own way, Young Wild West. Go ahead. I ain't goin' to squeal; an' you'll find that I'll keep still enough for you, too."

"All right!"

Wild stepped back a few paces.

Then he took his other revolver from his belt.

He now had one in either hand.

The crowd got out of range very quickly.

The face of Bob Barger was as pale as death as he saw his son standing there as a target for the handsome young deadshot.

But he did not venture to say a word.

"Steady now, Handsome Barger."

As Young Wild West uttered the words every eye was turned on him.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Three shots rang out in rapid succession.

Handsome Barger stood as still as a statue, holding fast to the cards as though his life depended upon it.

At the third shot the leather band about his big hat parted and one of the ends dropped over the brim in front of his eyes.

"Put down your hands."

The young desperado did so.

Each of the cards had a hole through it, and the buckle was gone from the side of his hat.

Wild had fired two shots with the revolver he held in his right hand, and one with that which was in his left.

Cheyenne Charlie grinned when he saw the looks of astonishment on the faces of the people in the crowd.

Arietta, Anna, and Eloise waved their handkerchiefs from the windows.

They all knew what our hero could do in the line of shooting, but it was always pleasing to them to see him give a sample of it.

"You're a good one, Young Wild West," said Handsome Barger, quietly. "Just let it drop, will you?"

"Certainly. But I don't want you to think that I ever abused your father. Just ask him to tell what happened when we met, and if he does you will understand that I did not abuse him."

"I suppose the old man stretched it a bit, just because he was a little sore on you. Let it drop."

"All right."

Wild walked toward the window where Arietta was looking out and Charlie and Jim followed him.

Handsome Barger then caught sight of the girls for the first time.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "What a splendid-looking girl!"

"Ther one with ther red hair, you mean, I reckon," said his father, who overheard the remark.

"Yes, that is the one. Who is it, dad?"

"Oh, them three wimmin folks belong to ther party we followed here. She's Young Wild West's gal, I calculate."

"She is, eh? Well, come in the back room of the inn, where we can have a little talk. Dad, I believe I've fell in love with that girl."

"I come mighty near doin' ther same thing myself," and the old fellow winked knowingly.

"The deuce you did!" and the son laughed as he looked at the ugly face of his parent.

"Yep! But I reckon I'll give way to you, Handsome."

"Dad, I wonder if I couldn't cut Young Wild West out? They tell me that I am one of the best-lookers that comes into Denver!"

"I reckon it could be managed all right."

The four hunters and the young desperado went in the back room.

Then they ordered a bottle of whisky and some glasses, after which they settled down and had a long talk.

Handsome Barger was a scoundrel from the word "go," and when he listened to his father's story of how they had followed Young Wild West's party for the purpose of robbing them, he agreed to go in with them.

"I'll take the red-haired girl for my share of the booty," he said. "She'll be my bride, whether she wants to or not."

CHAPTER VI.

THE VALLEY OF FLOWERS.

"Well, Wild, you certainly made that fellow come down a peg," said Arietta, as her dashing young lover approached the window. "I wonder when men will stop picking on you?"

"I don't know, Et," was the reply. "It seems that no matter where I go I always find some fellow who takes a dislike to me. In this case, though, it was the old man's fault. Bob Barger is the father of the fancy-looking young man, you know."

"Oh, is that it?"

"Yes. The young man who calls himself Handsome Barger came out and said I had abused his father. He then asked me if I thought I could do the same thing to him. I told him I could, if he called it abusing him. That's the way it started. You saw how it ended."

"Oh, I felt sure that it would end all right. I am glad you did not drop him, Wild. I never like to hear of you shooting a man unless it is to save your own life."

"And I never do. I always do my best to keep from shooting a fellow, but it has to be done sometimes."

"Right you are, Wild!" spoke up Cheyenne Charlie. "There's lots of measly coyotes in ther world that ought to step out in a hurry, but they don't always do it."

As there was nothing to hold them in the settlement, our friends decided to start out and have a look at some of the caverns that afternoon.

When they had explored some of them and satisfied the curiosity of Arietta it was our hero's intention to strike out to the southeast and work around to the Denver trail, hunting on the way.

The trip had been planned for pleasure, and he was the one to see to it that all hands enjoyed themselves.

It was an outing for the girls as much as anything.

It was a little after two o'clock in the afternoon when the party mounted and rode off.

When they left the settlement behind them one would hardly believe that the foot of man had ever trod that section, so wild and picturesque was it.

Game was plentiful, too, and the growling of wild beasts could be heard as they rode along.

As they had traded off nearly all they had brought to the settlement they shot enough for their use as they rode along and halted only long enough to gather it in.

When they were about ten miles outside the settlement and with nothing but the tall pines and jagged rocks of curious formation about them a rather startling thing happened.

A monster wildcat dropped from the branches of a tree overhead and landed squarely on the shoulders of Wing Wah, knocking him from his horse.

It was hardly likely that the beast had made an unprovoked attack on the Chinaman; it was more than probable that it had missed its calculations in jumping from a limb and had dropped by accident.

Arietta happened to have her head turned when it happened.

She saw the whole thing, and as Wing fell from his horse from the force of the shock the girl swung her rifle to her shoulder.

As the wildcat leaped back a couple of yards and stood at bay she took quick aim at it and pressed the trigger.

Crack!

As the report rang out the animal leaped forward and fell dead right at the side of the Chinaman, who was in the act of scrambling to his feet.

"Good for Arietta!" cried Jim Dart. "That is what I call a quick shot, and don't you forget it!"

"Whatee matter?" cried Wing Wah, looking around him in a dazed way.

"Ther wildcat knocked you off your horse, Wing," Jim answered. "Did you feel his claws?"

"No. He knockee off allee samee big bag of flour hittee me."

"Well, it is a good thing his claws didn't strike you. If they had you wouldn't feel so comfortable just about now." All hands dismounted and took a look at the cat while Charlie was skinning it.

Arietta was proud of the shot she had made.

She had got ahead of any one else, but she knew that was because she was the only one who had seen the wildcat strike the Chinman.

"I don't hardly think that the beast would have jumped on Wing," she said, "but I shot it, anyhow."

"And you shot it quick, Et," spoke up Wild. "It was a wonderful shot, as Jim just said. You showed great presence of mind."

All hands agreed with him when he said this.

But there was one in the party who regarded the incident as funny.

It was Hop Wah.

As they resumed their journey he kept laughing every now and then.

"What's the matter with you, you yaller-skinned galoot?" asked Charlie.

"Me have to laughee; velly funny when my blotter gittee off horse; he not know what de matter. He, he, he! Hi, hi, hi!"

"Maybe you'll laugh on the other side of your face before we git back to Weston," the scout remarked with a look of disgust. "Ther chances is that you'll git your turn yet."

"Me no! Me too smartee, allee samee Melican man."

"Don't argue the question, Charlie," spoke up Wild. "Come on!"

"All right."

Hop Wah knew by the tone of Wild's voice that it was best for him to keep still, so he did so.

Five miles further on and they came to a vast cavern that opened into a crooked gulch.

"I guess we are at the caverns, Et," said Young Wild West, as he brought his horse to a halt and looked into the depths of the underground place.

"That is about the biggest cave I have ever looked into," was the girl's reply. "Why, it is all open under there as far as the eye will reach."

"Yes, this is one of the entrances to what some sentimental fellows has named the Grand Caverns. One way of speaking, they are grand. But to get lost in them, as I have heard you can, and not find your way out until you were nearly starved, would not be so very grand."

"Oh, I should say not. But say, Wild, there is a stream of water right over there and there appears to be fodder for the horses quite plentiful around here. Suppose we camp here until to-morrow?"

"Just as you say, little one; we came here to please you, anyhow."

"That is right," spoke up Anna. "Eloise and I had nothing to do with urging you to come, though we were nearly as anxious as she was."

"Well, we are here now, and I want you all to become thoroughly satisfied with the Manitou Caverns before you leave them."

All hands dismounted now and the Chinamen set about to get the camp in order.

The sun was yet more than two hours high, so when the horses had been seen to Arietta took her rifle in her hand and turned to Wild.

"Shall we look inside the cavern a bit?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered. "Jim, go and cut a good pine bough for a torch; then we will all take a look at the interior of the cavern. We can leave the camp in charge of the two Chinamen, I guess."

"I should reckon so," spoke up Charlie. "It ain't hardly likely that they'll be bothered. I don't s'pose we'll stay there more'n a half hour or so."

"No, hardly."

Jim soon found a torch, and smearing it well with the pitch that had run from a break in the bark of a tree, he declared that he was ready.

"Now, you two fellows just keep an eye on things and don't get to gambling," said Wild to the Chinese brothers. "You have enough to keep you busy till we get back."

"Allee light!" was the reply as if in one voice.

Our hero then started into the opening, with Arietta at his side.

The rest followed.

It was plain that Cheyenne Charlie did not take a great deal of stock in exploring the caverns.

But he did not say anything.

"I reckon we'll strike a nest of wildcats or a lot of rat-

blers afore we go very far," he remarked to Jim. "We've got to be on ther lookout all ther time."

Once inside the natural chamber that was hollowed out in such a wonderful way they viewed it with admiration, especially the girls.

Fantastic columns were on every hand and curiously formed grottos were scattered about here and there.

Points of solid rock ran upward in many places, tapering down to the thinness of mere needles.

This was all pleasing to look at, more especially to those who took an interest in what nature has provided.

Not knowing how far into the bowels of the earth the cavern extended, and wanting to make sure that they would not get lost, Jim Dart had provided himself with a pocketful of leaves.

He dropped one here and there as they passed into the depths of the cavern.

They kept on, walking slowly, and finally Wild judged that they must have traveled half a mile from the opening.

A couple of minutes later they found that the cavern narrowed down to a passage that appeared to run along almost level.

As they came to it Jim held the torch forward so they could see what was before them.

The sharp eyes of Wild then caught sight of an inscription that was rudely carved on the smooth face of the rock.

He called Jim's attention to it, and then the boy held his torch so our hero could read the inscription.

"This passage, wide enough for two horsemen to ride abreast, leads half a mile almost straight ahead to what I have named the 'Valley of Flowers.' Discovered by Jean Balado, October 10, 1877."

That was what Wild read.

"The Valley of Flowers!" exclaimed Arietta. "Oh! Let us go to it, Wild!"

"All right," was the reply. "But I hardly think we will find many flowers there now. It is too late in the season, you know."

"Well, let us go, anyhow."

All were enough interested to want to see the place, so without any hesitation they started ahead.

When they had covered perhaps a hundred yards they found that they were going down an incline.

But it was a gentle one, so they did not hesitate to keep on.

Half a mile is no distance to walk, especially for such rugged, healthy people as they were, but it seemed a rather long time before they saw the glimmer of daylight ahead of them.

"The valley!" exclaimed Arietta. "We are coming to it!"

"Sure enough!" answered the scout. "I had an idea that maybe some feller jest scratched that on ther stone for fun. But I reckon it is all right, after all."

"Well, it is either a valley or some sort of an opening," Wild remarked.

A couple of minutes afterwards they emerged into a rather wide opening, and a few seconds later they were standing in a truly beautiful spot.

It was not more than an acre in extent, if it was that, and the steep, smooth sides that not even a goat could have climbed, ran up for hundreds of feet, showing naught but the blue vault of the heavens above.

As the sun had long since sunk below the rocky barrier that walled in the little valley there was a certain dismal look about it.

But notwithstanding this there was such an air of peace and quietness to the place that one would be apt to look upon it as a resting place—a resting place after the cares and hardships of a long campaign are over.

Though it was late in the fall, flowers were still blooming, and through the center of the little valley a stream of sparkling water flowed, coming from the bowels of the earth, only to be swallowed at the other side.

The grass and herbs that grew there were still green and luxuriant, and as our friends looked upon the scene they agreed with the man who had named the place the Valley of Flowers.

"This are what I call putty good!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie. "But my, wouldn't ther horses like to git a nip at ther grass here!"

"You're right, Charlie," said Jim Dart. "But let us look around and see if there is a way to get out other than the way we came."

"There may be, but I doubt it," answered our hero. "We will take a look around, anyhow."

They did walk around the valley, but they got back to the starting point without finding an outlet to the place.

The girls gathered bunches of the flowers that were still blooming, and then they started back through the passage, resolved to come there again with the horses, so as to give them a good feed on the grass before they left that part of the wonderful country they were traveling in.

They walked back to the entrance of the cavern without coming to a halt.

The leaves Jim had scattered made it easy for them to find the way after they left the passage.

As they emerged from the cavern they were surprised to find that both the Chinamen were missing.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CHINAMEN.

We must now return to Handsome Barger and the four hunters.

Our friends had scarcely started to leave Manitou when they went for their horses.

The villains had resolved to follow them till they got a chance to rob them.

But they meant to do worse than rob them, too.

They wanted the girls!

And if they were compelled to take the lives of Young Wild West and his partners in order to accomplish their point they would do it.

Handsome Barger was the leader now, his father having given way to his superior skill and deeper villainy.

"I guess we will show them a thing or two before we are done with them," he said to his four companions, as they mounted their horses. "Young Wild West might be a little quicker than I am and he may be a better shot, but you can just bet all you're worth that he ain't any more determined than I am. I'm going to make him sorry that he ever handled me the way he did, and, Dad, he'll wish a thousand times that he had taken your advice and moved on when you told him to."

"I reckon he will, Handsome," retorted the old man, and then he grinned knowingly to his three companions.

"There's three gals, you say. Well, that red-haired one is for me. Then there'll only be two left; but there'll be two Chinamen, too, so you can divide them among you. I guess there won't be anything left of Young Wild West an' his partners but what they own—their horses and possessions that they've got with them, I mean."

"Well, what's left will be good enough to divide atween us," observed Bateman, the big man.

"That's what!" declared Sprockett.

"I don't want no gal, anyhow," said Bob Barger. "Ther money what is in ther gang is his I'm after."

"Well," and his son smiled, "this is not the first time I've been around these diggin's. I know about all that's to be known from here to ther top of Pike's Peak."

"How fur is ther top of ther peak from here, anyhow?" asked Bateman.

"It's a good fifty miles journey to get to the top."

"Good enough! There's where Young Wild West's gang will most likely head fur."

"But they won't git thar!" chuckled old man Barger. "Somethin' will happen to 'em afore they git as fur as that."

The five villains were soon following the trail of our friends.

As has been said, the four hunters were experienced in all sorts of woodcraft.

They could follow a trail without being discovered by those they were after as good as ordinary scouts.

And Handsome Barger was an adept at the business, having served his time in all phases of life in the wild West.

They kept along, and when Young Wild West and the rest went in the cavern they were within sight of them watching just what they were doing.

The villains chuckled when they saw where our friends were going.

"We'll rob ther camp while they're away," said Bateman.

"Well, there ain't a great deal that we could carry away with us," retorted Handsome. "It wouldn't do for us to go back to Manitou with their horses."

"But we oughter do somethin' while they ain't there," persisted the big hunter. "Let's have some fun with ther two Chinamen, if nothin' else."

"That's it!" chuckled Barger. "They've got some money about 'em, I know. We'll git that, too."

"All right," answered his son. "We'll wait a few minutes to give Young Wild West and his gang a chance to get inside the cavern. They act as though they are goin' to explore it, for they took a torch with them."

They waited probably ten minutes and then began sneaking upon the camp, where Wing and Hop were busy fixing things in shipshape order.

Wing was in a happy frame of mind, for he began singing a Chinese ditty.

In less than a minute his brother joined in, and then it was that the five rascals laughed.

It was just possible that it was not a comic song the brothers were singing, but that made no difference to them; it sounded funny and they laughed.

They did not have to use any extra caution about creeping upon the Mongolians.

When they got to within twenty feet of them they arose to their feet and walked boldly upon them.

"Hold up yours hands and keep your mouths shut, you almond-eyed heathens!" exclaimed Handsome when he was within three yards of them.

Wing and Hop were very much surprised.

The fact of Young Wild West having left them there alone led them to believe that there was no danger, and they had not the least idea that there was any danger.

"Whatee matter, so be?" gasped Hop Wah, who could not refrain from saying something, in spite of the fact that the muzzles of five revolvers were pointed at them.

"Hold up your hands and shut up, or you will be dead Chinamen in no time!" retorted Handsome.

"Me gottee hands up," was the answer. "What Melican mans do with Chinamen?"

"Kill ther pair of yer!" spoke up Bateman, with a hoarse chuckle.

The brothers looked terrified.

But they said nothing.

Even Hop was silenced.

"Go through them, Dad!" said Handsome. "Take whatever there is of value from them."

"All right, my son!" and the old man proceeded to do so.

Now, it so happened that neither Wing nor Hop had much money about them just then.

They had been very suspicious of each other since the money had disappeared the night before, and they had hidden the majority of what they had unknowingly to the other.

The stock of Wing's gun had a place for caps on the side of it and he had placed about twenty dollars there and shut down the brass lid.

Hop had a still larger sum hidden under the flap of the packhorse saddle he had in his charge.

But they had enough to make the villains believe they got all they had, and when they had been divested of everything they had except the clothing they wore, Handsome told them to follow him.

"You fellows walk behind them, and if they don't move fast enough prick them with the points of your knives," he said.

As might be supposed, the two prisoners moved fast enough to suit them.

"What are you going to do with 'em?" asked Sprockett. "Give 'em a slide downhill," was the reply. "I know this country pretty well, as I said. There's a fine little valley back here where the grass grows green all winter. It is a very nice place to look into, but if one slides down into it he's got to stay there for the rest of his life, unless some one happens along with a rope about four hundred feet long, which is not apt to occur."

"I should say it wasn't!" and the men laughed brutally. They cared no more for the lives of the two Chinamen than they did for a mongrel dog with no friends.

Handsome led the way up a steep ascent and then took a short cut for a flat elevation about half a mile distant.

Pike's Peak lay right beyond this, and as its top was covered with snow, the men looked at it shiveringly.

"It wouldn't take a long while to git up thar," remarked Mundy.

"No! We could do it in a couple of days, I guess," was the reply.

"This is the nearest way to get to it, too, for you can go straight ahead to that little peak over there and get there before you would arrive at the table-land four miles below yonder. I've been there and know all about it."

Wing and Hop were very much scared as they were forced to walk along.

Once or twice the latter was going to make a bolt to get away from the men, but he did not do so when he thought about them being armed.

Hop did not want to get shot.

When they had covered about half the distance to the spot they were heading for one of the men remarked that it would have been better if they had brought their horses along.

"Well, perhaps it would," answered Handsome. "But never mind; it isn't so very far now. It will be easy coming back, since it will be nearly all downhill."

If ever there were two badly frightened Chinamen they were Wing and Hop.

They surely thought they were going to their deaths.

They understood English well enough to realize that they were going to be put in some place where they would have to stay until they starved, unless they had the good fortune to have some one come along and help them out.

On the villains tramped, forcing their prisoners to keep step, just as they were marching in a parade.

The top of the slope was at length reached.

"Hold fast of the heathen Chinese, boys!" called out Handsome. "Don't give them the least chance to run away, for I want to enjoy the sight of them taking the slide. Just look down there. A pretty place, isn't it?"

"It is a putty place!" Sprockett exclaimed. "Jingo! I'd like to go down there if there was any way of gittin' out."

"I don't know how you would get out," and Handsome laughed. "It would take quite a few lariats to reach down there."

"An' you are sartin that there ain't no way to git out without gittin' up the sides?" his father asked.

"Certain of it, Dad. Why, I have heard lots of men tell about this valley. The story goes that a man once slid down there and when he found that he could not get out he drowned himself in the stream you see. The stream runs underground, and a month after that some of his friends found his body fifty miles from here in a pool among the foothills. They identified the body by his watch and some other things that were still on it. That is what the two Chinamen can do when they find that they have got nothing further to live for—they can commit suicide by jumping into the underground stream."

The villain laughed as though it was a great joke, and then it was that Wing Wah began to plead.

"Me no wantee go down there!" he cried. "Me goodee Chinese, allee samee Melican man."

"You're like an Injun, you'll be good when you're dead, an' not till then," chuckled Bateman.

Handsome now began looking for a suitable place to send the two luckless Mongolians on what he thought would be their last journey on earth.

He soon picked out a place.

"Here you are, boys!" he cried. Here is a pretty smooth spot. They will go down there with the speed of an express train. There is no need of fooling any longer; just start them going down, feet first, and we will see such a sight as few have ever witnessed."

"Let's start 'em both together," suggested Sprockett. "Then we'll bet on the race."

"Good!" cried the hunters in unison, while Handsome gave a nod of assent.

Then each of the Chinamen was seized by two men and hustled to the brink of the long slant.

"Few places in the Rockies are to be found like this; I'll bet!" observed Handsome, as he looked at the sloping sides that hemmed in the little valley.

Wing and Hop screamed and squealed as they were seized by the villains, but it was of no avail.

They had to go, and in less than two minutes their feet were over the ledge.

"When I say three let them go!" exclaimed Handsome. "One!"

The Chinamen struggled for all they were worth.

"Two!"

They yelled in terror.

"Three!"

There was a rattling of loosened dirt and stones and down they went, putting out their hands to catch themselves and yelling at the top of their voices.

But there was nothing to catch hold of, so they went on.

Then the villains began betting as to which of them would reach the bottom of the descent first.

Near the bottom there was a spot where the slant lessened to an angle of perhaps fifteen degrees, and when they got there Wing and Hop did their best to stop themselves.

But they did not succeed.

In less than fifteen seconds from the time they started they landed in a clump of thick bushes at the bottom.

The five villains waited long enough to see them scramble to their feet a minute later, and then, laughing at what they thought was the greatest joke out, they turned their footsteps to the spot where they had left their horses.

CHAPTER VIII.

WING AND HOP ARE FOUND.

"What do you think of that?" cried Cheyenne Charlie, when he made sure that neither Wing nor Hop were to be seen about the camp. "A fine set of guards they are!"

"I should say so," spoke up Jim. "I wonder where they are?"

"Oh, they are not very far away, I guess," remarked Arietta.

"They would not leave of their own accord and remain away long, I am certain."

"I agree with what Et says, boys," said Wild. "If the two Chinamen don't show up in a few minutes you can bet that something has happened to them. I'll venture to say—Ah, what is that I see? Something has happened to Wing and Hop, for I just caught a glimpse of a man over there. He dodged out of sight the instant he saw me looking that way."

Our hero had turned his head from the way he had been looking, for he knew that their movements were most likely being watched, and he did not want to show whoever it might be that he knew of his presence.

"Where did you see him, Wild?" asked the scout, eagerly, as he fingered the trigger of his rifle.

"I'll show you in a minute," was the reply. "Let us act as though we are not alarmed over the disappearance of the Chinamen. We will settle right down as though everything is all right."

This they proceeded to do.

But they looked around and made sure that nothing was missing.

The man Wild had caught a glimpse of was one of the five villains who had sent the two Celestials shooting down the slippery descent into the valley.

They were returning to their horses, having done their heartless work just as our friends turned and left the valley through the passage.

If they had got there with Wing and Hop two minutes sooner they would have been shot down the slope right in view of our friends.

But it happened just so there was a mystery in the disappearance of the brothers.

The camp of our friends was obscured from the view of any one who might be watching from the point where Wild had caught such a brief view of the man, and our hero now decided to work his way around there and see what was up.

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised if Handsome Barger and the hunters have followed us here, and that they have got our Chinamen," he observed. "Well, I'll know something about it inside of ten minutes, I'll bet!"

"What are you going to do, Wild?" asked Arietta.

"I'm going to scout around and find the fellow I saw," was the reply.

"Oh!"

"I'll find him quick enough, too."

"I bet you will!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie.

"You all stay right here and don't leave the camp unless you hear shots fired. In that case you will know that I have got into trouble."

"All right."

Without any further words Wild set out to make his way around to the spot where he had seen the fellow.

There were so many rocks and stunted trees there that it was not such a very difficult task that he had ahead of him. To such an expert as he was it was easy, anyhow.

Young Wild West moved rapidly, not making a particle of noise.

He worked his way around and in less than three minutes he was at a point where he could see the spot where the man had been.

But there was no one there now.

Wild moved around so he could look the other side of a little ridge.

Then he suddenly caught sight of five men.

He recognized them instantly as Handsome Barger and the hunters.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, under his breath. "So they are after us, are they? I wonder what they have done with Wing and Hop? Can it be that they have been had enough to kill them? If they have I'll guarantee them that they'll suffer for it!"

The villains had fixed up a camp near the face of a cliff and were preparing to take things easy.

Wild crept a little nearer so he could hear what they were talking about.

Just then Handsome started to climb a tree.

"I am going to have a look at the camp of Young Wild West and see what is going on," Wild heard him say.

The young rascal did not go very far up the tree.

"They are taking it very quietly over there," he said to his companions below. "I guess they must think that the two Chinamen have simply gone off on their own hook."

"They'll find out different, though," retorted his father.

"My, but didn't the two heathens go slidin' down into that valley where their green grass is! Their slide never hurt 'em much, either; but they can't git out of there, an' they'll sartainly starve to death. That was ther greatest thing I ever seen done!"

Our hero gave a start when he heard this.

It struck him right away that the old man was referring to the Valley of Flowers.

But what had possessed them to put the two Chinamen there?

That was a puzzler.

But he learned all about it a couple of minutes later, for the villains seemed just in the humor to talk about what had happened, and they rehearsed enough of what had happened to give Wild all the particulars.

"Anyhow," one of them said, "it couldn't never be said that we killed ther yaller heathens, 'cause if they die they'll die of starvation."

"Well, they won't die just now," thought Young Wild West. "But you fellows ought to, for any man who would send a fellow-being down into a place where he knew there was nothing to eat and left him there to starve is about as much of a murderer as there could be!"

He remained there for ten minutes longer, and just as he was going to leave Handsome pointed to the snowcap of Pike's Peak.

"There's where we want to git Young Wild West an' his gang," he said. "It wouldn't be much trouble to finish 'em up there. It is too bad we didn't clean out their camp before we made way with the Chinamen. We won't get such an easy chance soon again, I guess."

"Why can't we shoot 'em?" spoke up old man Barger. "Handsome, you'll have to shoot 'em if you want to git ther golden-haired gal for your bride. It won't do to let Young Wild West run around alive if you steal away ther gal."

"No, it won't do, Dad. That's right. But wait till we get them on Pike's Peak, then we'll fix 'em!"

"We're on ther side of it now, I reckon," spoke up Batsman.

"Well, we are at Pike's Peak now," answered Handsome, "but we are not on top of it."

"And you will never get there unless I miss my guess!" muttered Wild, who felt like shooting the young scoundrel for what he had said about Arietta.

But he was too cool to allow himself to do anything like that, so he simply crept away from the spot and made his way back to the camp.

"I found the man I caught sight of," he said as he joined his companions.

"Did you know him?" asked Arietta.

"Oh, yes! He is one of the hunters. The four of them are there, and Handsome, as he calls himself, is there with them. That bright young scoundrel says you are to be his bride, Et! They are going to follow us to the top of the peak if it is necessary. I am to die and so is Charlie and Jim. Then you are to become the wife of Handsome Barger. Won't it be fine when it all happens?"

"The scoundrel!" exclaimed Arietta. "Just let him dare lay his hands on me! I will shoot him as though he were a rattlesnake!"

The flash in the blue eyes of the beautiful maiden told what she meant what she said.

"I know you would protect yourself, little one," said Wild. "But I hope you don't get in trouble. I will be the one to attend to Handsome Barger, if it has to be done by anybody."

"Did you see anything of the Chinamen?" asked Jim Dart.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you about them. They are in the Valley of Flowers."

"What!" cried Jim and the scout in a breath, while the girls looked amazed.

"It is a fact. The five ruffians captured them, and after they had taken their money and other things they had, took them up on the hill over there and slid them down into the little valley. They have the idea that there is no way to get out of the place, and that Wing and Hop are doomed to stay there until they die of starvation."

"They put 'em there, thinkin' that, did they?" cried Charlie, twisting his long mustache angrily. "Their measly coyotes oughter git plugged with lead for doin' it, then."

"They certainly think that they sealed the doom of the heathen brothers when they sent them sliding down the slope."

"It is a wonder they were not killed in making the descent," remarked Anna.

"Perhaps they were," spoke up Eloise.

"No. They were not killed, for I heard one of the gang say they scrambled to their feet a second or two after they landed," answered our hero. "Now, I suppose the best thing we can do is to go and get Wing and Hop out. It may be that they will not find the passage, and if they do find it they might get lost in the cavern. My idea is to rig up a couple of dummies here and then all of us go to the Valley of Flowers. I hardly think the villains will attempt to attack us before sunset, anyhow."

"Are you going to risk leaving the horses here?" queried Dart.

"No, there is no need of that. We will give the horses a chance at the grass in the valley. It will not be dark in an hour and a half yet, and in that time they can get a good feed."

Charlie nodded.

"I reckon we kin make a couple of dummies," he remarked, "an' put 'em where ther measly coyotes kin see 'em if they look this way."

"And we can kindle a fire, too," put in Dart. "That will be apt to make them think that we are here."

"Right you are, Jim!" exclaimed the scout, while our hero nodded.

Wild was quite certain that they could get to the entrance of the cavern without being seen by the villains, unless they happened to have one of their number behind a tree watching them.

But he hardly thought they would do that just now.

He had heard Handsome say that they were not going to bother them until they got on Pike's Peak, so as long as they knew they were going there they would not do anything.

Wild could have gone alone after the two Chinamen, but he had got it in his head that the horses should have some of the excellent succulent grass to eat, and he was not the one to see the animals go without the best, so long as it could be so easily had.

Charlie and Jim began rigging up the dummies.

They had brought an extra hat apiece with them, and these, with the aid of some blankets, soon made what looked to be a couple of men seated on the ground not far from the tents.

While they were doing this Wild and the girls led the horses around the rocks to the entrance to the cavern.

They had them all there and were in waiting when Jim placed a pile of fagots on the ground and lighted them.

As soon as he had a fire going the boy put on a couple of sticks of green wood, so it would last for a while, and then he and Charlie joined the others.

"Now," said Wild, "before we go in to hunt up Wing and Hop I'll just take a look at the five villains and see whether they know we have left the camp or not. It will be an easy thing to do from here, and it won't take me more than five minutes, either."

The rest kept well inside the cavern while he started off around the rocks and bushes.

Wild soon found that the men were taking it easy, and before he came away he heard them say that they were going to try to shoot something for supper, and that they were not going close enough to the camp of Young Wild West for the shots to be heard.

This was very satisfactory, so he hastened back to his companions and gave the word to proceed.

Jim had a torch all fixed up, and he promptly lighted it. Then he hurried through the cavern and soon reached the mouth of the passage that led to the Valley of Flowers.

The inscription told the truth when it stated that two horses could walk abreast through the passage, so with Wild and Arietta in the lead they passed on.

It did not seem so long this time, and when they reached a place where they could see the glimmer of daylight they were on the tiptoe of expectancy.

They were all wondering where Wing and Hop were. Out into the valley they rode, and then their eyes rested upon a scene that might have been called a picture of misery and despair.

The two Mongolians sat near the bank of the little stream that flowed through the valley, their heads down as though they were expecting every minute the Angel of Death to come and take them.

CHAPTER IX.

ARIETTA'S STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE.

"Hello, you yaller heathens!" bawled out Cheyenne Charlie. Wing Wah and his brother could not have jumped higher if they had been given a shock of electricity.

"Wha—wha!" stammered Hop, finding the use of his tongue first.

Then he stood upon his head and kicked so violently that he lost one of his wooden shoes.

The shoe hit Wing on the shoulder as if flew off and he uttered a cry of alarm.

But it brought him to his senses.

"Oh!" he cried. "Misler Wild has come to save poor Chinamen! Whoop-ala! Hoolay!"

"Hoolay!" yelled his brother, righting himself up until he assumed his natural position. "My blother, we no starvee after all."

He got his shoe and then ran to meet Wild and the rest, carrying it in his hand. Both were scratched and bruised and their clothing torn.

Cheyenne Charlie laughed heartily at the two fellows.

He was bound to take the comical side in viewing them and he could not help laughing.

This caused the rest to smile.

Wing and Hop did not mind it, however, and they fairly cried tears of delight.

"Me feel allee samee likee Melican angel!" declared Hop, when he had settled down to something like his usual form. "Me gladee, an' no mistake."

"Me feel samee as blother!" Wing spoke up, not knowing what else to say.

"Well, you ought to feel glad," said Wild, as he turned his horse loose, after taking the bride from his mouth.

The rest followed his example and soon all the horses were enjoying what surely must have been a feast to them. The horses were allowed to have about forty minutes at the grass, during which time our friends alternately walked around and sat among the sweet smelling flowers.

It was really wonderful to see the luxuriant flowers right in the shadow of the snow-capped top of Pike's Peak.

When they got ready to leave the bridles were put on the horses and the girths tightened.

Then they mounted and started into the passage, the

Chinamen leading the packhorses and riding their own, just the same as they usually did.

They, both declared that they never expected to ride horseback again when they went sliding down over the slippery rocks.

They rode along two abreast, Wild and Arietta fetching up the rear this time.

The girls chatted gayly as they rode through the narrow passage, and all declared that they were having a great time of it.

"I am well satisfied with the Manitou Caverns, as far as I have seen them," Arietta said.

"Well, you will find them all about the same as this one," Wild retorted.

"But they won't all have a passage leading to a Valley of Flowers, though," the girl observed with a merry laugh. "No, that is true enough. I doubt if there is another such place around here."

"Well, we will let the caverns drop. We will set out to climb Pike's Peak to-morrow, and when we get up where the snow is I will be satisfied with the trip. Then we can start for Denver and do some hunting on the way."

"All right, little one; we will do just as you say. But we must keep an eye on the fellow who intends to make you his bride, though, or things may not pan out the way we want them to."

"Don't speak that way, Wild," and Arietta showed how disgusted she was at the thought of anything like that.

The mere mention of Handsome Barger was galling to her now.

They kept on, and soon the passage came to an end.

The Chinamen and Anna and Eloise were the first to ride out into the spacious underground chamber.

Charlie and Jim were just leaving the passage when Arietta suddenly caught sight of something bright and shining.

"Bring the torch back, Jim," she said. "I want to see what this is. It looks like a diamond."

She turned her horse and it trotted past her lover as she spoke.

Then it was that something really startling took place.

A cry from Arietta caused Wild and his partners to turn. A noose had been dropped about the girl's body from an opening overhead, and before they could raise a hand to prevent it she was lifted from the saddle!

The next instant she had disappeared from view!

A simultaneous cry of consternation came from the lips of the three.

Arietta's horse remained standing still in its tracks, but the fair rider had vanished.

And there was nothing to be seen above but a hollow in the rocky ceiling.

At first it had looked like an opening, but now when they strained their eyes and looked closely above them there was not even a crack to be seen.

Anna and Eloise had heard Arietta's cry, too, and they now came around the bend of rock that was there to see what was the matter.

Jim sat in the saddle holding the burning torch as still as a statue.

The light reflected on the faces of Charlie and Wild, and one glance at them told the two that something dreadful had happened.

Suddenly they noticed that Wild's sweetheart was not on the back of her horse.

"Arietta! Where is she?" Anna cried wildly.

"She has disappeared in a very strange manner," answered Young Wild West, checking his emotion by a great effort. "It is rather mysterious, I will say, but human hands did it, for I saw a noose drop down and tighten about her body. She was whisked out of sight in a twinkling, and she only uttered a single cry."

"Tell us what to do, Wild!" spoke up Cheyenne Charlie, who was very much agitated over what had occurred.

"You and Jim stay right here; I will go outside," was the quick reply. "I have an idea that Arietta is not in the cavern at all. There may be some secret opening—there must be. If you can find it while I am gone, do so."

Our hero started to leave, but when he thought that they had only one torch he stopped.

"We will all go out!" he exclaimed. "As I said, I do not believe Arietta is in the cavern. We will find the spot

that is exactly above where she disappeared. Then we will have a chance."

No one objected, so they hurried for the entrance of the cavern.

They made quick time and got out just as the sun was going down.

Once outside Young Wild West cast a swift glance around and saw a way that led to the high ground above the vast cavern.

It was right near the spot where the five villains had their camp.

Of course he could lay the strange disappearance of Arietta to no one else but them.

Dismounting, he made his way cautiously to the place where he had spied upon the scoundrels twice before.

He was going to find out whether they were still there or not.

When he reached a point where he could see the place where he had last seen the men he found it deserted.

"Just as I thought," he exclaimed under his breath. "They have left here and they have taken Arietta with them. It is going to be Handsome Barger's life or mine now!"

He quickly called out for his companions to break up the camp and follow his trail and then started off, following the tracks of the horses that were quite plain there.

He had measured the distance well when below in the cavern, and he found that the trail led in just about the direction the mouth of the underground passage was located.

Wild knew that there should be no time lost if Arietta was to be found that night.

When it got dark it would be difficult to follow the trail over that rough country.

He kept on until he judged that he must be somewhere in the near vicinity of the spot he was looking for and then he dismounted.

It happened to be a soft patch of ground, and he instantly saw several footprints.

But that was not all!

As he carefully looked about the spot he suddenly came upon a piece of blue ribbon!

Arietta had had her hair tied up with it; he knew it almost as well as he did the girl's face.

"That settles it!" he cried. "I know that Arietta is not in the cavern, anyhow. Handsome Barger has got her, but how he accomplished it I don't know. I do know, though, that I am going to find her, and then voo to the scoundrel!"

Placing the piece of ribbon carefully in his pocket, our hero mounted the sorrel stallion and started along the trail.

He followed it for about half a mile and then it ran into a timber belt.

It was now getting dark, and in the somber gloom of the woods it was no longer possible for him to see the hoof-prints.

With an exclamation of disgust, Wild came to a halt.

"This is too bad!" he said. "I can't follow the trail! I will have to wait till the rest come up. Then perhaps we may be able to do it with torches. One thing, though, it is hardly likely that the scoundrels will keep ahead all night. They will go into camp before morning, or it may be that Handsome Barger is making for some particular place to hide. I heard him say that he was well acquainted with the country around here."

There was nothing else for him to do but to sit down and wait, so the dashing young Prince of the Saddle did so.

It was fifteen minutes before he heard his friends coming.

They had worked lively to break up the camp, but that was the best they could do.

The pack horses could not be driven as fast as the rest could go.

Wild called out to them as their forms loomed up in the darkness.

"What's ther matter, Wild, can't you see ther trail any more?" Charlie asked.

"No," was the reply.

"Just about what I thought would happen. But are you sure that Arietta is out of ther cavern?"

"Yes, certain of it."

"How do you know for certain, Wild?" Anna asked.

"I found her hair ribbon."

"What!"

"I picked it up in just about the spot that I considered was over the place in the cavern where she disappeared."

"I am glad she is out of that dark and forbidding place. I feel that we will not be long in finding her now."

"I did feel that way until I got to this woods. Just look! How can we ever follow a trail through there in the dark?"

"We might follow it by using torches to light the way," suggested Jim.

"I was thinking of that. But it might be that the villain is not as far off as we think, and in that case they

Handsome the light made by the torches and ambush us." "I

scout around through their woods a bit. If you take notice, their trail is leading uphill all the time, an' them

measly coyotes ain't goin' to travel very far in their dark."

Wild determined to act on Charlie's advice.

"Pitch the camp," he said. "Charlie, you and I will strike into the woods and look around a bit. Just take a look at that star up there and remember where it is; you go to the left and gradually draw in till that star is apparently but the width of your hand from the other one there, which is more dim. I will strike out to the right and walk till I bring the two stars together. We will meet then, if we make no mistake. We will have a chance every now and then to get a look at the stars through openings in the woods. If the scoundrels are camped anywhere around within five miles we ought to come across them."

Then the two walked into the mazes of the woods together and a minute later they branched off.

Wild had not got more than a couple of hundred yards when he struck a path.

He knelt to the ground and struck a match.

It was a deer trail, but in it were the fresh prints of horses' hoofs.

CHAPTER X.

JUST HOW ARIETTA DISAPPEARED.

Young Wild West had scarcely left the spot where he had come to learn what the five villains were up to when Handsome and Sprockett got ready to go out and shoot some game.

So they started off around a spur of rock and worked their way up to a wooded plateau.

When they reached it they were more than a mile from the spot where our friends were camped and about on a level with the edge of the place where they had sent the two Chinamen down into the valley.

Somehow game appeared to be scarce just then, and they walked around in a half circle until they reached the edge of the cliff that surrounded the little valley at a point that was almost directly opposite to the mouth of the underground passage that led to the cavern.

"Gosh all hemlock!" cried Sprockett; "if there ain't ther place we slid ther two heathen Chinese into!"

"It is as sure as you're born!" answered Handsome. "I didn't know we were so close to it. I—but look! What do you think of that?"

He pointed to some horses that were grazing on the luxuriant grass.

"Thunder!" ejaculated his companion. "I thought you said there was no way to git out of there! There's some folks over there takin' it easy. There's wimmen there, an'—by jingo! If it ain't Young Wild West's crowd!"

"There must be an outlet through the big cave," said Handsome. "Well, we didn't have as much fun with the Chinamen as we thought we did."

"Nope! I should reckon not. Say, but this is rather wonderful, ain't it, Handsome?"

"Yes, I must say that it is," was the reply.

"What are you goin' to do now?"

"Give up hunting and find how they got in the valley. Come on!"

The two villains turned from the spot and headed straight for the mouth of the cavern.

When they got around a ways Handsome informed his companion that they were riding over the passage that

led into the valley, providing it continued in the direction it started from.

"It's mighty funny, I think!" Sprockett declared.

They rode along rather slow now, and a few minutes later they were started to hear a rattling of dirt under them.

Handsome was off his horse in a twinkling.

Close by was a good-sized boulder, and it was from beneath that the noise seemed to come.

"Lend a hand here, Sprockett," he said in a whisper. "Let's turn this over and see what's under it."

His companion quickly came to his aid, and then they easily turned the boulder over.

As they did so a hole that was almost circular in shape was disclosed.

"By jingo!" exclaimed Handsome. "We are finding out things such as I had no idea existed around here."

He reached down with his rifle and could just touch the butt of the stock on a rock that gave forth a hollow sound.

"Sprockett, I am going down there!" he exclaimed. "I am satisfied that I will gain something by it, though just what I don't know."

"All right," was the rejoinder. "It do remind me of a grave, though."

"Well, never mind that. Now, just let me put my lariat around under my arms and you hold on, so in case anything happens."

Sprockett got the lariat from the villain's horse and he quickly adjusted it to his liking.

Then he let himself into the hole and stood on the stone that had given forth the hollow sound.

Once there he produced another match and lighted it.

Then the villain saw that the stone he was standing upon was but a thin slab of a V-shape.

He got hold of the end of it and lifted it up.

As he did so a draught of air came through and blew out the flame of the match.

"There's a passage below," Handsome whispered, as he leaned the slab against the side of the little cave. "Sprockett, you just keep hold of that lariat."

Just then Handsome heard the sound made by walking horses.

Then human voices came to his ears.

"Sprockett!" exclaimed the young man, standing up straight so his voice would not be heard below. "Sprockett, as sure as you are born, Young Wild West and his crowd are coming through the passage under me! I have an idea. Hurry! Give me your lariat! I will surprise those people, or my name is not Handsome Barger!"

His companion got the lariat in double-quick time.

Then Handsome dropped flat on his stomach and looked down into the darkness, the nose end of the lariat in his hands as though he meant to drop it over the head of some one.

The next minute he saw the glimmer of a light coming along beneath him.

Then horses walked directly beneath him.

It was not until Jim Dart passed with the torch that he caught sight of Young Wild West and Arietta.

He was going to drop the lasso over the head of one of them, but they got past before he could do so.

But his chance came the next minute.

If it had all been prearranged it could not have happened better for him.

The fates must have decreed that Handsome Barger should get Arietta in his power.

She rode directly beneath him and paused.

Then with the greatest of luck imaginable he let the noose fall and it went right where he wanted it.

Once it was about her body he pulled upon the lariat as quickly as he could and with all his might.

He had the girl through the opening in a twinkling, and forcing her back on the ground with his left hand pressed over her mouth, he let down the slab of stone with his right.

Then two or three winds of the lariat about her arms and Arietta was helpless.

"What in thunder have you got?" gasped Sprockett when he saw Arietta's head just above the edge of the hole.

"It's the red-haired girl, can't you see?" was the reply. "Lift her up! Be careful and hold fast to her, too. I've performed the neatest trick that was ever done by mortal man, Sprockett!"

He lifted Arietta from the opening as gently as he could, for, villain as he was, he had great respect for a female.

Handsome came up after the girl in quick order. Then he produced his handkerchief and turned to Arietta and said:

"What is it going to be—shall I gag you or will you keep quiet?"

"I will keep quiet," replied the girl in a tone that showed that she had not lost her courage.

"You ride over to the camp and fetch the rest here," he said, turning to Sprockett. "Hurry, now! We want to get away from here. I know a nice hiding place between here and the top of Pike's Peak, and there is where we are going."

Sprockett mounted and hurried off, while Handsome proceeded to tie his fair captive in a neater style.

"I guess I had better cover your mouth a little," he observed. "You might take a notion to yell out, in spite of your promise not to."

In spite of her protests he tied his handkerchief so it covered her mouth.

"Now, you will please get upon my horse," he said. "You must do it, so you may as well take it easy and raise no objections."

Rather than have him lift her whole weight, Arietta assisted all she could in getting upon the back of the animal.

She was not the least bit doubtful that Wild and the rest would save her, though her position was not a pleasant one, even if it was not going to last very long.

It was not long before the four hunters came along. Then Handsome mounted and they rode straight for the snow-covered peak that lay before them.

They went along at a good gait, too. The horse owned by Handsome was a powerful bay and did not seem to mind the extra weight of the girl in the least.

"How far are you going?" asked old man Barger when they reached the woods just before it got dark.

"Only about three miles further to-night," was the reply. "I know a snug hiding place where we will be safe from pursuit as long as we want to stay there. This part of the country is full of caves, you know, and I am going to one that Young Wild West or any one else can't find, unless it is by pure accident. It is just about three miles from here, and a mile before we reach it the ground is so hard and stony that there is no possibility of our leaving a trail. That will make it an impossibility for Young Wild West to find us."

They rode on, only slacking pace when the thickness of the undergrowth compelled them to.

Finally they reached the hard ground. There were very few trees or shrubbery of any sort here, and up the ascent they made their way until finally the cave Handsome had spoken of was reached.

The mouth of it was concealed by a dense mass of overhanging vines, and though it had been some little time since Handsome had been there, he was not long in finding it.

Once inside, the young villain chuckled gleefully.

CHAPTER XI.

WILD IS CAUGHT.

Wild's heart gave a bound when he discovered the deer trail.

The fact of the prints of the horses' hoofs being there told him only too well that the five villains had gone that way.

He gave the hoot of an owl twice, which was the signal always used by himself and partners.

Cheyenne Charlie heard it and answered it right away. Then our hero gave it again, remaining stock still meanwhile.

The fact that the sound came from the same place as the first was sufficient to make the scout come that way. He appeared in short order.

"What is ther matter?" he asked in a whisper.

"I've found the trail," Wild answered.

"Good!"

Wild lit a match and showed it to him.

"I guess we can follow it pretty easy," he added, as the match flickered and went out.

The two now started along the path. They had no trouble to do it, and soon they had covered a mile.

Then they came to a place where the deer path, ended in a little glade.

Wild lighted a match and looked at the ground.

The hoofprints were no longer to be seen.

The villains had cut away from the path.

"We will go back a ways and see if we can find where they left the trail," said our hero.

They were just turning around to do so when an angry growl came to their ears.

It was right close to them, too, and they drew their hunting-knives in short order.

Both knew only too well what it was that n-and-growl.

It was a grizzly bear!

Neither of them were afraid to tackle the animal, and since it had challenged them they waited for it to appear.

There was a crashing in the bushes not ten feet from where they stood and then the growl was repeated.

This had scarcely happened when an answering growl came from the other side of them.

"Two of 'em, by jingo!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie, clutching the hilt of his knife firmly.

Wild jumped back a few feet and quickly lighted a match. The scene was illumined for a few feet and he saw not only two full-grown grizzlies, but three cubs.

Then it was that he knew why the animals were so ugly. The nearest animal made a dash for him, and, jumping aside, he struck a blow with his knife.

The blow landed where he had aimed it and the heart of the big bear was severed in two.

As the animal ran a few paces and fell to the ground a sharp cry came from Cheyenne Charlie.

He had not fared so well as our hero. The other bear had struck him with its huge paw and knocked him down.

There was only one thing to do now, and Wild knew it. He whipped out his revolver and sprang forward, running squarely into the grizzly in the dark.

Crack!

He fired, the muzzle almost touching the hairy breast of the powerful creature.

Crack!

Again he fired, jumping back as he did so. Cheyenne Charlie was now on his feet and he made a quick stroke with his knife.

But one of Wild's bullets had found a vital part and the bear dropped.

The cubs were yelping and snarling at a great rate, and, lighting a match, the scout saw where they were.

Two kicks from him sent them rolling into the bushes, and then he looked at his shoulder where the bear had struck him.

Both his hunting coat and silk shirt were torn and the blood was showing.

"He give me quite a scratch," he remarked, "but it ain't deep. It's too dark to fight grizzlies, I reckon."

Leaving the grizzlies where they had fallen, they started in to find where the villains they were following had left the deer path.

But they could not do so. Reluctantly they gave it up.

"There is only one way to do, and that is to split off as we were going to do first," Wild said.

"All right," was the reply. "Let's get our bearings."

They managed to find a place where the sky could be seen through the branches of the trees and then they located the big star and the little one near it.

Then they parted company.

We will follow Young Wild West.

Carefully he made his way through the tangle maze of vines and undergrowth, and in a few minutes he came to the place where the ground was hard and stony and the trees and shrubbery few and far between.

He could see the two stars and knew that he was following the course agreed upon with Charlie.

But he was doing something else, too, though he was not aware of it just then.

He was making his way straight for the cave the villains had sought seclusion in!

Rod after rod was covered, and finally he reached the foot of the cliff.

It all depended upon which way he turned now. If he turned to the right he would go and miss the cave. If he went to the left he must certainly find it. He paused for a moment and then proceeded to the left. Wild had not taken more than twenty steps when there was a slight noise ahead of him and then two forms leaped upon him and bore him to the ground. He had walked squarely to the mouth of the cave, and Bateman and Tom Murphy, who happened to be on guard, saw him before he did them. It was a genuine surprise, and before Young Wild West could recover he was overpowered. "Here, Handsome!" he heard the voice of Bateman call out. "We've got a man!"

Handsome and the other two scoundrels came out of the cave in a hurry. Our hero struggled to get away from them, but it was useless.

He managed to utter a cry that was something like the hoot of an owl, though.

If Charlie was in hearing he would come that way. Into the cave and around a jagged point of rock Wild was carried.

Then he found himself in the glare of a lantern. The villains had lighted the lantern because there was no danger of it being seen from the outside.

The rocky wall ran right across, and in order to get in or out a point must be turned.

The moment Wild was in the light the men recognized him.

"It's Young Wild West!" cried Handsome, in a voice of exultation.

"That's jest who it is!" chimed in his father.

"Well, if this isn't jest too good!" Handsome went on. "Here we have the very one we wanted to get. First we catch his sweetheart and then along he comes!"

The men were busy binding and gagging Wild now, and when they were through he was rolled into a corner and ordered to remain perfectly quiet.

Wild was angered more than he was frightened by what had taken place.

He regarded it as one of the misfortunes he was bound to come across, but he blamed himself for being so careless.

He did not say a word until he became perfectly cool.

Then he called out:

"Say, you fellows!"

"What's the matter, Young Wild West?" retorted Handsome, and then he laughed mockingly. "Want to get away from us?"

"If you only knew how near death you are you would be glad to set me and the young lady free and make for some hiding place better than this," he said, speaking as though he meant all he said.

Then he looked around and caught sight of a blanket that was drawn across the opposite corner of the cave.

That Arietta was behind the curtain he felt certain.

He thought it rather strange that she had not spoken to encourage him.

His words had considerable effect on Handsome and his companions.

They thought that they had been tracked to the cave.

"We've got to be mighty careful," observed Bateman, in a whisper.

"Keep a good watch outside there, and if any one comes shoot them! We've gone that far in it that it won't do to be captured now," said Handsome, showing how uneasy he was.

"You will be captured soon enough—or shot, perhaps," retorted Wild. "There is only one thing you can do to save yourselves, and that is to let me and the young lady go."

The villain made no reply to this.

"Arietta!" called out Wild, looking at the curtain. "Are you all right, little one?"

There was no reply.

Handsome was as much surprised at this as Wild was. He stepped over and lifted the hanging blanket.

There was no one behind it! Arietta was not in the cave!

CHAPTER XII.
CONCLUSION.

Arietta was surely missing, but it is quite an easy thing to explain why.

The improvised curtain had been placed there for her special benefit, and it had been put up in a rather hurried manner.

The light from the lantern had failed to show the villains that there was a sort of double wall just at that point in the cave.

Within a foot of the almost square corner a thin slab of rock ran out, and behind this was the rock and earth that formed the side of the underground place.

But there was room enough to squeeze between the two, as Arietta found out shortly after she was left to herself behind the curtain.

There was a narrow passage there that led somewhere.

When she thrust her head in it the girl could feel a draught of fresh air.

That assured her that it led outside.

She did not undertake to leave as soon as she found this out, however.

She knew the villains would be apt to offer her something to eat before long, and she concluded to wait until after that happened.

Then she figured on getting a good start before they missed her.

Arietta was right when she thought the men would offer her something to eat.

They had not been in the cave ten minutes before one of them brought her a piece of dried beef, some crackers and a tin cup of water.

She took them, drinking the water at once and handing the cup back.

Then, without waiting a minute, she squeezed through the opening and found her way outside.

This was just about ten minutes before Young Wild West arrived on the scene.

Arietta started off in the direction she thought they had come.

She had a revolver concealed in the bosom of her dress, and knowing that she could not be much over three miles from the place where she had been taken from the passage, she hurried along.

But the girl was going the wrong way, and if luck had not been with her she might have fared badly.

As it was, she came in contact with Cheyenne Charlie.

When the scout met her he was overjoyed.

"Where is Wild?" he asked.

Before the brave girl could answer a cry that sounded something like the hoot of an owl sounded.

"Ah!" she exclaimed; "that is Wild, Charlie!"

"You're right," was the reply, "an' it sounds as though he was choked off."

"The five villains are in a cave right back here. Maybe he has been caught by them."

"Lead, ther way, Et! I'll make ther measly coyotes think a hurricane has struck 'em if I set eyes on 'em! I'm goin' to shoot to kill if they turn a gun on me."

The scout was now desperate.

When he got that way he was one of the most dangerous of men.

Arietta knew this.

But she did not hesitate to lead him back to the cave. On the way she told him how she had got out, and when they got there Charlie insisted on her leading him in the same way.

They succeeded in getting into the passage and were halfway through it when they heard Wild's voice call out the name of his sweetheart.

The scout pressed the girl's arm to keep her from answering.

He wanted to take the villains by surprise, now that he knew Wild was in the cave with them.

They got to the end of the passage and found the curtain held up.

Then it was dropped again.

"The girl isn't here!" cried Handsome. "Men, what do you make out of this?"

"Go on in there," whispered Charlie. "Go on in an' fool 'em; say anything."

Arietta did not need to be told twice.

"Did you call me, Wild?" she asked.

"Yes, Et, where are you?"

"Why, right here behind this hanging blanket."

Handsome sprang forward and tore the blanket down. There stood the girl, a calm smile on her face.

"Where was you a minute ago?" the villain gasped.

"Oh, I have a way of disappearing whenever I feel like it," she replied. "Now, I want to tell you something. You just cut the ropes that bind Young Wild West as quickly as you can, do you hear?"

She whipped out her revolver and leveled it at the scoundrel's heart, stepping toward him at the same time. "Put that plaything down," cried the man. "You are getting crazy, girl!"

"Am I? Well, you will find out that I can shoot pretty straight if you don't do as I say."

The four hunters now rushed to the spot. Bateman raised his shooter as though he was going to shoot at the girl's arm and make her drop the weapon.

At that instant Cheyenne Charlie squeezed from behind the rock.

"Hands up, you measly cowboys!" he cried. "Your race is run! Hands up, or you'll all die in a heap!"

The words were not spoken before Handsome made a leap for the exit.

So quickly did he do it that he got around the angle of rock before either Arietta or the scout could fire at him.

The hunters started to follow him, and then Charlie fired a shot, bringing Bateman down.

"You'll all die if you don't stand still an' hold up your hands!" he cried.

Sprockett made a desperate effort and managed to fire a shot from his revolver.

But it was badly aimed and simply struck the ground near the scout's feet.

Crack!

Cheyenne Charlie was out for business now.

Down went the villain, and then the other two broke for the outside of the cave.

Crack! Crack!

There was no mercy with the scout now.

As the last shot sounded there was a clatter of hoofs.

It was the horse of Handsome.

The fast of the five scoundrels was making his escape, and he was heading right up the mountain.

Charlie ran to the mouth of the cave and saw the direction he took, while Arietta stepped over and released her lover from his bonds.

Wild was no sooner on his feet than he grabbed his weapons, which the villains had taken from him.

"I must catch Handsome!" he cried. "I would not let him escape if it took me a week to find him."

"He's gone on up ther mountain," said Charlie.

"All right. Which is the best horse here, I wonder?"

There were four of them hitched to trees outside the cave and the daring young deadshot found one that suited him.

The steed was quickly saddled and bridled, and then turning to Charlie and Arietta, Wild said:

"Go on back to the camp. I will meet you there later. If I am not back by sunrise you can strike out this way. Et wants to go up to the snow line, anyhow."

He sprang upon the back of the horse and rode off on the trail of Handsome.

It was very lucky that Wild took that particular horse. It happened to be a mate to the one the villain took when he made his escape in such a hurried manner.

The boy soon found that the animal would take him the right way, so he let him have his own way.

It was pretty cold in that altitude after the sun went down, but as the horse went on up the winding slope it gradually got colder.

The minutes slipped by and turned into hours, and still Young Wild West kept on the trail, halting now and then to give the horse a breathing spell.

The long night passed finally, and Young Wild West was just as determined as ever to overtake the villain who had planned to make Arietta his bride and kill him.

As the sun came up our hero saw a glistening mass of ice above him.

It was so cold up there that he had to beat his hands to keep them warm.

He kept a sharp lookout, and about half an hour after sunrise he suddenly caught sight of the object of his search.

Handsome had halted and was in the act of kindling a fire.

Probably he thought he would not be pursued that far, since Young Wild West had got back his sweetheart.

The smoke curled upward through the icy air and the villain warmed himself over the blaze.

He was tired out from the all-night ride up the mountain, and, seated on a cedar bough, he fell asleep.

Wild found him thus some ten minutes after he first saw him.

Our hero dismounted without waking him.

Then he stepped up to him and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Wake up, you scoundrel!" he cried in a ringing voice, which sounded strained and piercing on the ears of Handsome in that high altitude.

"Young Wild West!" he gasped.

"Yes," was the calm rejoinder. "I made up my mind I was going to get you if I had to follow you a thousand miles!"

"And that means——"

"That you have either got to surrender and go back with me a prisoner or——"

"Or what?"

"Fight it out!"

"I'll fight you willingly if you give me a square show."

"All right. Step off ten paces!"

Without the least hesitation the scoundrel started to do so. Then it was that something happened that Wild was not looking for.

Instead of turning when he had walked the ten paces, Handsome fired a shot in the air and leaped over the cliff that was there.

There was a scream that sounded like a cry of triumph and then all was still.

Young Wild West stood still for a couple of minutes and then walked to the edge of the cliff.

He looked over and found there was a chasm there that appeared to have no bottom.

He shrugged his shoulders and walked back to where the horse was standing beside its mate.

He led the steeds until it was safe for him to mount one of them and then he rode slowly down the mountain.

It was about three hours later that he caught sight of a party riding up toward him.

Wild recognized them instantly as his friends.

Fifteen minutes later he was with them, telling of his long night's ride up the mountain.

Arietta glanced up at the snow and the lonesome looking pines when he had finished and said:

"Wild, I guess we had better set out for Denver. I have seen quite enough of the Manitou Caverns and Pike's Peak."

So after a rest they went on down, and when they came to the spot where the villainous hunters had met their just deserts, they stopped long enough to bury them.

Two days later they rode back to Manitou.

After a rest of a day there they set out for Denver, reaching it finally and bringing in a good supply of game.

From that city they went by train to Weston, and when they got there all hands were glad to be home once more.

But Young Wild West and his partners were not the sort to remain idle long.

They were eager for excitement, and were simply waiting for a chance to get out again.

"I can't help it," Wild said, "but I like danger and excitement. The more narrow escapes I have the more anxious I am to have them, it seems. But I will say that I have had enough of Pike's Peak, and I can't say that I would like to have Arietta's strange disappearance repeated."

Next week's issue will contain "YOUNG WILD WEST'S SIX SHOTS, AND THE CHANGE THEY MADE AT DEAD MAN'S MARK."

SEND POSTAL FOR OUR FREE CATALOGUE

CURRENT NEWS

For more than an hour Otto Olson, employed by the New York Telephone Company, was imprisoned in a manhole at Fifty-first street and Eighth avenue by a horse which shied at a surface car and plunged into the hole. Two hundred volunteer rescuers helped firemen extricate the horse. Olson was uninjured.

The Chinese Government has contracted with the Siems-Carey Company of St. Paul, Minn., for construction of an additional 300 miles of railway. The line is to run from Chowkiakow, in Honan province, through Nanyangfu to Siangyangfu, in Hupeh province. Work has been begun by surveyors. It was a previous contract made with this American contracting concern by the Chinese that caused the Russian Government recently to lodge a protest at Peking against the action.

Japan will spend about \$53,316,470 on her navy in 1917, an increase of \$2,194,507 over the previous year's estimates. More than half the total is classed as "extraordinary" expenditure for various items, some of them due to the war. The sum of \$7,164,694 is for continuing the seven-year building programme, among the ships being three battle cruisers, three large and six small scout cruisers, twenty-seven destroyers and eighteen submarines.

The Ministry of Munitions of Great Britain is making a special appeal to university women and other women with a good education to join classes for training in skilled branches of engineering work. Classes are being opened in London, and the complete course lasts from eight to nine weeks. To those who pass a preliminary test at the end of a fortnight or three weeks a maintenance allowance is to be paid for the remainder of the course, and when proficiency is attained a minimum wage of about \$10 a week may be expected.

Much pressure is being brought to bear upon Congressman Charles C. Carlin, of Virginia, to push his bill urging the purchase by the Government of the land upon which was fought the battle of Bull Run. The bill was first introduced December 6, 1915, and is now before the House Committee on Military Affairs. It has been approved by Army engineers. Among other items, the resolution provides for the building of a highway from Manassas, Va., to the actual battlefield, the entire project to cost not more than \$50,000. Mr. Carlin, it is understood, has promised to try to put the measure through at the present session.

Moving pictures showing typical American manufacturing processes, welfare work in industrial institutions, and other details of American economic life are to be exhibited in South America, under the auspices of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce. United States Commercial Attaches in South America are to make arrangements for having these films shown in the motion picture houses of cities where they are stationed. It is hoped that such exhibitions will be a preliminary to an extensive campaign by American manufacturers in South America. Already plans for such a campaign are being made.

It is reported that the tests of the aerial torpedo of Lested Barlow, a young man who perfected his invention under the auspices of the United States government, have been entirely successful. The torpedo was dropped from 2,000, 3,000, 4,000, 5,000, 6,000 and 7,000 feet. In two of the tests light charges of high explosives were used, and these are reported to have rocked the houses within a radius of four miles from the Mineola aerodrome on Long Island, where the tests were conducted. The Barlow torpedo is seven and a half feet long and weighs about one hundred pounds. Normally inert, the torpedo sets itself after it has fallen 300 feet, and detonates at a given point automatically no matter from what altitude it may be dropped. The torpedoes are carried in traps below the aeroplane, and are released by the moving of a small lever when the sights register on the target.

When the United States took possession of the Philippines only 20 lights of all classes were in serviceable condition on the coasts of the islands, and of these only a few were actually in operation, as many had been extinguished during the revolution against Spanish power previous to the American occupation. Many stations had been damaged or partly destroyed by the insurgents, and the rest had been sadly neglected. At the present time there are 151 lights of all classes, including 4 first-order flashing, 9 second-order, 9 third-order, 8 fourth-order, and 12 sixth-order flashing; 20 sixth-order occulting; 9 automatic flashing acetylene; 2 electric; and 85 minor fixed lights. The system is, however, far from complete. The total coast-line of the islands is about equal to that of the combined Atlantic, Pacific and Gulf coasts of the United States, not including Alaska, and there are more than 5,000 nautical miles of coasting routes and tortuous channels regularly navigated by vessels trading among some 300 separate ports.

PLUCK AGAINST LUCK

OR

THE BOY WHO WOULD NOT GIVE UP

By DICK ELLISON

(A SERIAL STORY)

CHAPTER VI.

BACK TO THE FARM.

In all his life Bob had never received a greater shock. He rubbed his eyes to make sure that he read aright.

Ransom Clark dead!

It was inconceivable! His father's treacherous partner, the man who had in underhand fashion schemed to ruin his fortunes, had gone to his last account.

Bob arose from the table. He could eat no more. In a sort of daze he paid his score and left the restaurant.

Still in a stunned and bewildered state of mind he went downtown. When he entered Mr. Blake's office the lawyer greeted him with a sharp cry:

"Why, Bob, are you ill?"

"I—I guess so!" muttered Bob, as he sank into a chair. "You have heard the news. It is all true?"

"That Ransom Clark is done? Yes."

For a moment Bob sat there looking at his legal adviser. Then he asked:

"What effect will that have on my affairs?"

The lawyer shook his head.

"I am afraid a very bad effect."

"Why?"

"Well, the settlement of his estate will be necessary before your rights can be determined. Young Clark will be at the helm. He is a shrewd young villain."

"Then the suit I was to bring against Clark—what of that?"

"It will have to be brought against his estate. It will require a long time, perhaps years, to get it into a court of equity and secure a hearing. You see, the Clark estate must be settled first. All your father's estate now is involved in his affairs. What your rights will be it is hard to tell."

"Well," said Bob, painfully, "what have I got to start life with? How do I stand?"

"You have—nothing that you can readily avail yourself of. Even your father's private bank accounts are now attached."

"Then I have nothing beyond the Clark affairs are settled and your right defined."

"But I must live."

"Wait! I had almost forgotten. There is the homestead at Skattles——"

"That is claimed by old Uriah Benson."

"And the mine at Lodestone, Arizona."

"I have no capital to work it with."

"I shall be pleased to have you make a home with me."

"Thank you!" replied Bob. "You are good and kind, Mr. Blake. But I must at once get into business for myself."

"My boy, you can't do it."

"What?"

"It is the truth. You cannot imagine what a state the country is in to-day. It would be madness to start any new enterprise. The worst panic our nation has ever known is upon us. You have no capital. The banks will loan no money. Credit cannot be obtained. Great firms are tumbling every day! No, you cannot make a start at present."

Bob was aghast.

"But—what am I to do?"

"You must wait patiently. Let me see! I think it will be easy to set aside that absurd claim of Benson's on your homestead at Skattles. Drive him out, and that will be your harbor of refuge. Many a man will be driven back to the natural way of making a living from the earth itself."

An inspiration seized Bob. He sprang up with flashing eyes.

"You are right, Mr. Blake. That is my one chance. I will go to Skattles."

"I have already entered a demurrer to Benson's suit," said the lawyer. "I don't think he can make good his claim on the farm. Go right ahead and keep possession anyway. I will fight him."

"All right, Mr. Blake," agreed Bob, with renewed confidence. "I know that farming does not pay very well. But I have a friend in Skattles who understands it well, and I shall put him in charge of the agricultural department of it. I refer to Jed Skeggs."

"Oh, all right," agreed the old lawyer. "I wish you success. I will keep you informed as to matters down here! Also let me hear from you."

"If there is any new development——"

"I will let you know."

Bob shook hands with the lawyer. An hour later he was packing his effects to leave the city.

Lawyer Blake had placed in his hands a thousand dollar check, saying that it was a small sum he just learned that he had saved from the wreck of the estate. Bob's eyes filled with tears as he wrung the hand of the old lawyer.

Bob decided to take the night train for Skattles. He proceeded to the Grand Central station, and secured a Pullman car berth. He would arrive at Skattles in the early morning.

Bob was tired, and had decided to retire at once. He crept into his berth and for the first night in many slept soundly.

The thought of beginning life in Skattles had not been dreamed of by Bob. But it was not an unpleasant one.

He liked the lively little country village, and he was popular there. He reflected upon all sorts of plans for improving the homestead.

He had sent a telegram to Jed Skeggs:

"Meet me at the train with Daisy. I am leaving New York to-night.—Robert Cutter."

It is hardly necessary to say that when Jed Skeggs got the message he danced with joy. In a short space of time the report spread through the whole town, and Jed was speeding down to Sue Skilling's home to bid her get ready for the wedding, for he was sure that Bob meant to keep his promise and give him control of the old farm.

Daisy was the perennial farm-horse, and hitched to the old buggy was at the station when the New York express rolled in. A few moments later Bob was on the platform shaking hands with the depot-master and a score of other old friends.

"Gosh!" ejaculated Jed, as he whipped up the old mare. "There ain't nuthin' happened fer a long time in Skattles ter please folks so much as to know that you're comin' ter stir things up a leetle. You're jest the kind of a man tu du it. Skattles will be quite a town yet."

"Yes," laughed Tom. "After I get through with it."

"Waal, yu kain't know how good it will seem tu hev the old homestead opened up agin. Things are progressin' in Skattles, yu bet. There's a mighty rich New York man has bought the old Kitson place on Holler Pond, jest by ther Five Corners! I reckon his name is Dunham."

"Dunham!" gasped Bob. "Not Joseph Dunham, the banker?"

"Yes, I reckon so! Goin' tu spend ther hard times in Skattles, he says. Ain't goin' back tu ther city till ther panic is over."

Bob experienced a queer thrill of joy. So the Dunhams would be residents of Skattles also. He thought of Bessie, and his heart leaped.

They now drove by the post-office and Bob saw old Uriah Benson at his post. The meanest man in Skattles had not changed a peg.

"I reckon he thinks he's got a hold on ther home-

stead," ventured Jed. "But I'd ruther see thier place burned down than him in it."

"You'll never see him in it," declared Bob. "Ah, here's the old place. Looks as trim as ever."

Bob sprang out and went through the yard to the house. There was the old well with its sweep and bucket. The two great elms still shaded the porch. Nothing had changed.

Jed's mother and Sue Skillings had opened the house, and had everything cozy and ready, even to a hearty breakfast. Bob felt like a king just returned to his domain.

After breakfast he went over the place with Jed. All arrangements were made at once for the "carrying on" of the place, and Jed was to be the manager.

Bob had no idea of making a great lot of money farming. But the place would furnish a home for the present at least, and until he could see something better. A week later Jed's wedding took place. There was high jinks on that occasion, and Bob had the happy opportunity to kiss the bride.

Then life at the Cutter homestead began in earnest. Jed was a worker, and things at once began to shine.

"Gosh! I'll never fergit my trip down tu York," he would declare. "I never cum so nigh a lickin' in my life as when them Bowery kids jumped into me. If it hedn't been fer Mr. Bob I don't know how I'd ever have come out."

So affairs progressed for a month at the farm in Skattles. Bob was in daily communicatio with Lawyer Blake. Affairs in New York seemed to remain in statu quo. Only one item of interest came to Bob's notice.

"It is reported that young Bert Clark, since his father's death, is getting to be quite a sport," wrote Lawyer Blake. "He is very dissipated, and seems to have developed vicious tastes. Ransom Clark would turn in his grave if he knew it."

Bob was not surprised. He knew Bert Clark's nature well. He felt sure that all would come out in the end.

So matters progressed for a time at the Skattles farm. Bob was a frequent visitor at the summer home of the Dunhams at Hollow Pond, a mile or more away. He saw much of Bessie.

And at no time did he dream of the fact that a black cloud hung over his head, ready to break with dire results. Not until he saw two men come into the farm-yard one day. One was Uriah Benson. The other wore the badge of a sheriff.

"Mr. Cutter, I have here a warrant for your arrest," said the officer curtly.

Bob was dumbfounded when the officer with Benson declared him under arrest. He looked at the old postmaster and then at the sheriff.

(To be continued.)

FROM ALL POINTS

GIRL DANCES ON FALSE FEET.

Little Grace Riven, of Baltimore, Md., four years old, romps and plays, and even dances, the same as other children, although she lost her feet in a street car accident some time ago. Grace has artificial feet, and with her pluck and confidence she has learned to dance and to use the artificial feet almost as well as if they were natural.

MULE KICKS OFF BOY'S EAR.

Clement, ten-year-old son of Jacob Rossman, of Peru, near Norwalk, O., had his left ear kicked off by a mule recently as he was leading the animal to pasture. The boy was thrown into convulsions, and surgeons are awaiting improvement in his condition before operating.

Vina C. Mullinix, Postmaster at Wilder, Tenn., a town of less than 500, obtained six recruits for the regular army in December, the War Department announced recently. She received \$30 for her work. Army officers say if one-twelfth the number of Postmaster available as recruiting agents had done likewise, the army now would be considerably in excess of the authorized strength.

DEER PLAY HAVOC ON FARMS OF SCOTLAND

Scotland is suffering from the deer pest. Hundreds of herds are descending on farms and devouring crops. Farmers and land agents are demanding amendments to the game laws so that more deer may be shot and the food supplies increased.

Some 9,000,000 of Scotland's 19,000,000 acres are officially described as "mountains and heath grazing land." Of this more than 2,000,000 acres are deer forest proper, and on much of the rest deer compete with sheep and cattle for the pasture. One of the biggest sheep farmers in Scotland declares that a nation less inured by tradition to the dominance of the great landowning families would long ago have demanded that deer should be confined to the poor lands, and that the better lands should be used for crops, pasture or forestation.

SEA FOODS BIG YIELD.

Canadians took fish, fish products and other sea food of a marketed value of \$35,860,708 from the sea and inland lakes last year, according to the Fisheries Branch of the Department of the Naval Service of the Dominion. The British Columbia catch alone amounted to \$14,538,320, while that of Nova Scotia came second with \$9,166,851, and New Brunswick third with \$4,737,145. The catch was far greater than in any preceding year.

The coast line of the Atlantic Provinces, from the Bay of Fundy to the Strait of Belle Isle, without taking into account the lesser bays and indentations, measures over 5,000 miles. British Columbia, on the Pacific Coast, with its numerous islands, bays and fiords, has a sea-washed shore of 7,000 miles. In addition to this salt water fishing area, Canada has 220,000 square miles of fresh-water lakes, abundantly stocked with fish.

On the Atlantic Coast there are two classes of fish—the deep sea, which takes in the cod, haddock, hake, pollock and halibut, and the inshore or coastal, which includes, besides these, herring, mackerel, alewife, shad, smelt, flounder and sardine. The most extensive lobster fishery known is carried on along the eastern shore of Canada, while excellent oyster beds exist in many parts of the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

TREE CISTERNS.

The baobab tree, *Adansonia digitata*, a member of the hollyhock family, common in the Sudan, is one of the freaks of the vegetable world. It has a large bottle-shaped trunk which, though scarcely reaching the height of sixty feet, is often more than a hundred feet in circumference and is therefore one of the largest of plants. The stubby branches which spring mostly from the top of the stem, are so broad that the natives can sleep on them. The interior of the trunk is soft and spongy and, as in other trees, may decay and form large cavities in which rain water accumulates. Acting on this hint of nature, the American Botanist says the natives of Kordofan have hollowed out the trunks of many specimens and in rainy seasons fill them with water for use when the rains cease. A hole is often bored near the base by means of which the water is drawn off as wanted.

In a recent Kew bulletin an officer in the Darfur campaign says that in Kordofan they have no water for hundreds of miles and the natives live in the dry season on water stored in hollow trees called tebaldis. They are ugly, bottle-shaped trees, all trunk, from six to twenty feet thick, and a good one holds 1,000 gallons. Each family owns certain trees and each tree has its own name. The natives scrape a small hole at the base of the tree and after a rain everybody turns out to fill tebaldis trees. A man stands at the top of the hole, about twenty feet up, hauls up the water in a skin bucket and pours it into the tree. It keeps sweet and is better than well water.

The fruits of the baobab are oval, brownish green, about the size of a cucumber and contain an edible pulp of which the monkeys are very fond. From this fact the trees are sometimes called the monkey bread tree.

OUT FOR HIMSELF

—OR—

THE HARD FIGHT OF JACK CLARK

By "PAWNEE JACK"

(A SERIAL STORY)

CHAPTER I.

MAKING A START.

"What do you mean, you young whippersnapper? I've a mind to break every bone in your body for your impudence! What do you think I'm supporting you in idleness for? You're no flesh and blood of mine, and if I had my way I'd send you to the workhouse, where such brats as you belong."

Jack Clark's ears burned and his cheeks flushed redly. He did not reply at once to this ill-tempered attack made upon him by Judson Smith, his stepfather.

Since Robert Clark's death many things had happened to lower the fortunes of his family. Very unwisely, at least in the opinion of many, Mrs. Clark had married a second time. Her two children, Emily, aged twelve, and Jack, of sixteen, were in school, and she believed that she was making a home for them.

And all might have been well had her choice been a happy one. Judson Smith, however, developed many vicious traits, and became a hard drinker, so that the Smith home became a wretched place indeed.

From the first Smith had manifested a dislike for the two children. It galled him bitterly that he was contributing to their support. At last in open rebellion he demanded that they be sent away.

"I'm not bound to support 'em, Emily," he said to his wife. "They may be your flesh and blood, but they're none of mine. I hate the sight of that simpering girl, and, as for that milk-faced boy, I despise him."

Mrs. Smith wept and pleaded, and Judson went off on a four days' drunk. When he came back and found Jack and his sister still there he grew furious and began to break up the furniture.

When Mrs. Smith remonstrated he struck her and hurled her to the floor. This was more than Jack Clark could stand, and he seized a heavy chair and swung it over his head and cried:

"You miserable coward! Dare to touch my mother again and I'll knock you down!"

This exhibition of grit on the boy's part so surprised and angered Smith that he made the savage

remarks with which this story opens. Jack still faced him, with the fierce determination to defend his mother from the drunken brute.

Mrs. Smith had arisen, and now faced her worthless husband with the first exhibition of spirit she had ever shown toward him. "Judson Smith, if you dare to lay a hand on that boy you shall be put behind bars!" she cried. "I have suffered your insults and cruel treatment just as far as I intend to. I will call upon the law to deal with you!"

Smith was flushed with drink and in a savage state of mind. But the woman's words and her resolute mien sobered him. As is often the case with the victim of liquor, his mood changed to that of maudlin sentimentality.

"So that's all you care for me, Emily," he said, staggering to the door. "I can see that you think more of those brats than of me. All right for you! It's the last you will see of me!"

But it was not the last they saw of him. A few hours later he returned, and creeping into his bed, lapsed into a drunken stupor. And all this was but a repetition of many such scenes in the Smith home.

That night Jack Clark realized more forcibly than ever that he must get out for himself. He felt that he would like to finish his high school course. But things had become so unbearable at home that he could stand it no longer.

He said nothing to his mother or his sister Emily. He knew they would try to dissuade him. But he felt that it would be for the best to take his leave.

He could neither hope nor expect help or sympathy from Judson Smith. Whatever he did must be done without aid from any of his relatives.

It was no light undertaking for a boy of his years, inexperienced and wholly without resources to start out alone in the world to make his living and cut his way to a possible fortune. His heart almost failed him when he thought of it.

Lying in his small bed under the eaves, he pondered the subject well. His only fear was for his mother and sister. They might suffer more abuse from Smith, and there was no one to protect them.

But he felt that he could stand Smith's taunts and sneers no longer. He could not eat at his board or sleep longer under his roof.

So in the early morning hours Jack arose and

silently made his preparations. He made a small bundle of his extra clothing and strapped it to his back. He had a few dollars which he had earned in various ways. This was the sum total of his worldly possessions.

Jack paused a moment at the door of his mother's room. He dared not enter to kiss her good-by, for he knew that she would restrain him.

But he crept to little Emily's bedside and touched his lips to her brow without awaking her. Then he crept down the stairs and out into the morning light.

The sun was just gilding the eastern sky with flame. Beyond that golden horizon lay the world which he had never seen, and which he was to seek.

It was a critical moment for Jack Clark. He was breaking away from old ties. What the new might be he could only guess. A new career and a new life was to open before him. The rest was absolute uncertainty.

But he had set his face toward it, and he walked on. He passed out of the yard and into the highway. Not until he had reached the crest of the hill did he pause.

Then he looked back and a great flood of emotions came over him. Sitting down on a rock, Jack gave way to them.

He glanced back at the old house where he was born and which had been his home for so long. It would be many weary months before he would see it again.

Jack arose finally, and turning his gaze westward, resolutely went on. The homestead dropped out of view. Gradually his spirits revived.

The air was balmy and grateful. Birds sang in the wayside bush, and the landscape was fresh and green. The world was in a jocund mood.

So as he went on the elastic spirits of youth came to his aid and instinctively he began to build plans and hopes for the future. There was a great world before him. He was young and strong. He would cut his way.

He was out for himself.

It would be his own fault should he not succeed. He was very determined.

The little town of Woodville, nestled among the New Hampshire hills, was of the usual type. A sawmill on the river which rushed down from the mountains furnished occupation for some. There was a small shoe factory and a few stores. These were the business interests of Woodville.

In the summer the place was filled with tourists. These found quarters in the farmhouses, for nearly every one kept summer boarders.

Jack knew of nothing to do in Woodville. He was not old or strong enough to work in the sawmill. The stores employed only a few clerks. He knew nothing about work in the shoe factory.

So he decided not to remain in Woodville. He would take his chances in the world beyond.

As his resources were slender, he chose not to pay railroad fare. He kept on along the highway,

which was the old stage route southward into Massachusetts and to Boston.

Until long after the sun was up he kept on over the dusty highway. A few teams passed him on the road, but all were going toward Woodville until Jack reached a log bridge which crossed a stream.

He was now five miles from Woodville. The next town was barely two miles distant, and was a place known as High Falls, somewhat larger than Woodville. Jack had heard much about High Falls and decided to try to find employment there.

On the log bridge Jack paused a moment to rest. He sat down on the log railing and looked below into the current. The water was clear and bright.

A trout swam in the current. Once in a while he rose lazily to a fly. But suddenly Jack saw another object.

It was a man's foot, just visible at the base of the abutment. Between the abutment and the current was a dry sand-bar a few feet wide.

Jack leaned forward and was startled to see that the foot belonged to a man who sat with his back against the abutment, under the bridge.

His face was upturned, a face sun-burned and roughly seamed, yet not a bad one. His gaze caught Jack's, and he grinned, at the same time exclaiming: "Hello, kid! What's the time?"

For an instant Jack felt distrustful. He knew that men of evil traits, tramps and thieves, lurked in the woods and out-of-the-way places. Perhaps this was one of that class.

But something in the man's eyes seemed to reassure him.

"I don't know, sir," replied Jack, plainly. "I haven't a watch. But I think by the sun it is after eight o'clock."

"Well, I might know that myself," replied the stranger. "I own to sleeping overtime. Ugh! I feel a bit stiff. It's a nice cool place under there, but perhaps too damp. By cricky! What a morning it is! Makes a man feel that life is worth living! Is not that so, young fellow?"

The next moment he was over the edge of the bridge. And with him, to Jack's surprise, he brought a great pack with a leather strap and a stout pole.

And now, at close quarters, Jack saw that his new acquaintance was a most extraordinary personage.

Short and thickset, yet supple as an eel, the stranger stood before Jack. He was a man of possibly fifty years, with hair a trifle gray and shoulders somewhat rounded. He wore a heavy beard, and dressed in a quaint, old-fashioned way. His coat was cut in the style of a previous generation, and he wore stout shoes.

But his face was open and genial. His blue eyes sparkled with humor and kindness.

He glanced at Jack in a pleasant way, and rested his pack on the edge of the bridge. To say that Jack was interested would be a mild statement. He was now wholly reassured by the other's face.

(To be continued.)

TIMELY TOPICS

MISTOOK EAGLE FOR BUZZARD.

R. H. Beckley, a farmer of Kiowa, Kan., mistook an eagle for a buzzard the other day and set his dog upon it. After the great bird had made way with the dog the farmer took a hand. He was being close pressed when he obtained a pitchfork and killed the eagle. Beckley was torn about the face and back.

CHOCOLATE.

Chocolate is obtained from cacao, which is the seed of the cacao trees. It is quite often called cocoa, although this is not quite the correct way to spell the word. The cacao tree grows to a height of sixteen or eighteen feet when cultivated, says the Book of Wonders, but to a greater height when found growing wild. The cacao pod grows from the trunk of the tree, and is, when ripe, from seven to ten inches long and from three to five inches in diameter, giving it the shape of an ellipse. When you cut one of these pods open, you find five compartments or cells, in each of which is a row of from five to ten seeds, which are imbedded in a soft pinkish pulp. Each pod then contains from twenty-five to fifty seeds, which are what we call "cocoa beans."

The cacao tree was discovered by Columbus, so that we have good reason to remember him aside from his great discovery of America. The discovery of either of these would be enough for any one man, and it would be hard for some boys and girls to say just which of the two was Columbus' greater discovery.

Columbus found the cacao tree flourishing both in a wild and in a cultivated state. The Indians of Peru and Mexico were very fond of it in its native state.

Christopher Columbus took some of the cacao beans back with him to Spain, and to this day cacao is much more extensively used by Spaniards than by any other people. The first record of its introduction into England is found in an advertisement in the Public Advertiser of June 16, 1657, to the effect that:

"In Bishopgate Street, in Queen's Head Alley, at a Frenchman's house, is an excellent West Indian drink called chocolate, to be sold where you may have it ready at any time and also unmade, at reasonable rates."

ABOUT RATS.

The only wild animal that lives under the same roof with man is the rat, says the Literary Digest. We pay for his keep, although we are not on friendly terms with him. In return he plagues us in many ways; he gnaws our walls and furniture, steals

our food, and, above all, is active in the spread of disease. The annual rat-bill of the United States for food alone is estimated by Mary Dudderidge, writing in the Forecast, at one hundred and sixty millions of dollars.

The rat not only disseminates bubonic plague, but carries tapeworms, trichinae, flukes, roundworms and other parasites, besides being suspected as an active agent in communicating leprosy and infantile paralysis. It can gnaw through any common building material except stone, hard brick, cement, glass and iron. It destroys whole fields of grain, climbs trees to steal fruit, eats both fowls and their eggs and destroys game. It steals costly furs and laces for its nests, when it can get them. Much of our annual loss by fire is due to the rat, and he also starts floods by burrowing in dams and levees. He is a great traveller and is fond of living on ship-board, though, fortunately, he journeys little by rail. Finally, his fecundity is prodigious, the fond mother presenting him with numerous additions to the family circle sometimes as frequently as once a month.

The modern way of attacking the rat, this writer continues, "is to build it out." The rat-proofing of buildings is described as "a cheap form of insurance against fire and pestilence," Miss Dudderidge continues:

"When rats get into rat-proof buildings we have to resort to traps and poison to get them out, the former being the least objectionable. In the use of traps it must be borne in mind that the rat is extremely cautious and will not enter strange looking contrivances in search of food if plenty of other nourishment that is not open to suspicion is available. The trap should be strong enough so that the rat cannot force its head between the wire and escape, and should be dipped in boiling water or smoked before being set, to kill the human smell, or that of rats previously caught. It should not be placed in an open space, but along the wall or in a narrow runway, for the rat's vision is somewhat defective in the daytime, and depending on its whiskers as a guide it has to keep close to some wall or other boundary. Fish makes an excellent bait, but any odorous edible different from the animal's customary diet is likely to attract it. Poisoning should not be resorted to in dwellings, and some of the most efficient poisons are so dangerous that they should be used only by experts.

"Dogs, cats, weasels and ferrets are all useful, but the ordinary house-cat is too well fed to care for such diet, and if not inured to the hard things of life is not equal to a combat with a full grown brown rat. Non-poisonous snakes have been employed with considerable success in warehouses."

WILD WEST WEEKLY

NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 23, 1917.

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Good Current News Articles

It is asserted by army surgeons that the expressions on the faces of soldiers killed in battle indicate the cause of death. There is a look of repose on the faces of those who have perished from sword wounds, while there is an expression of pain on the countenances of those slain by bullets.

A warrant has been issued for Charles G. Poppleton, of Wichita, Kan., after police officers investigated a complaint by George Poynter, a crippled tenant, that Poppleton had removed the windows from the apartment he and his family occupy. Poppleton removed the windows in order to freeze out his wife and small children, stated Poynter. His wife and little ones were shivering with the cold before the removal of the windows, because Poppleton turned off the gas.

Scarcity of wheat flour in Holland may make that country resort to the bread card system, already in vogue in belligerent countries and adopted also in Holland for a period of two months last year. It is rumored that there will be a season of compulsory brown bread and no white bread, owing to the shortage. Other rumors have it that bread cards will soon be issued for all Hollanders. The shortage is largely due to the sinking of wheat-laden ships bound for Dutch ports.

Proposals to establish a course in Chicago high schools in military work for girls, teaching them to act as Red Cross nurses and first aid workers, is under consideration by the local board of education as an adjunct to the plans for military training for school boys, now under way. Captain Edgar Z. Steever, U. S. A., who is supervising the boys' training in Chicago, said of the movement: "If the school board is willing we shall probably have such a course. All this work will be done by the women teachers."

A California watchmaker has invented an eight-hour clock which he purposes for use under the eight-hour law and with which he hopes to revolutionize time-keeping in the United States. The clock, as described in the Popular Science Monthly, has but eight figures on the dial, with a small square in its centre which shows M from midnight to eight in the morning; N from eight in the morning to four in the afternoon and E from four in the afternoon to midnight. He suggests that uniform time be kept all over the United States with Washington, D. C., as the heart of the system.

Grins and Chuckles

"How are you getting on in your suit with Miss X?" "Well, she has promised to give me a wireless kiss."

Feeding a girl chocolate cream once a week and feeding her beefsteak three times a day are two different things.

Blobbs—So your investment turned out badly, eh? I thought you got in on the ground floor. Slobbs—I did, but it looks as though some other fellows had sneaked in through the cellar window.

He—If you loved me, why did you at first refuse me? She—I wanted to see how you would act. He—But I might have rushed off without waiting for an explanation. She—Oh, I had the door locked.

Paying Teller—I can't cash this check, madam, until you are identified. Mrs. Bright—You mean I have to identify myself? Paying Teller—Yes, ma'am. Mrs. Bright—How simple! Have you a looking-glass?

Mrs. Nuritch—I want to get a pair of swell white gloves to wear to a ball. Clerk—Yes'm. How long do you want them? Mrs. Nuritch—See here, young man, I ain't talkin' about rentin' 'em. I want to buy 'em.

Miss Chuckover—Since our engagement is off I shall return the diamond ring. Stingerly—Well, you've had it six months, and as diamonds have dropped 10 per cent, can't you inclose a check for the balance?

"The best life-preservers are made of cork, are they not?" observed the hardware drummer. "Not to any great extent," replied the gentleman from Kentucky. "The best one I ever saw was made of glass, with a cork in one end of it."

Ida—I don't believe Mr. Smart believes my handkerchiefs are linen. May—Why not? Ida—I told him I had my pin money wrapped in my handkerchief and lost it. He said there was a great deal of money lost in cotton these days.

DRIFTING TO JUSTICE.

By Col. Ralph Fenton

I am only a common sailor, I know, but then even common sailors have their likes and dislikes, and it was downright aversion I felt for Ralph Randell from the very first hour he put foot aboard the Jettie.

We had left port but a few days previous, and under the calm sky and pulseless sea were now fairly out upon the mighty Atlantic.

As I have said, I am only a seaman on board the Jettie, one of the fastest steamers upon the A—line, plying between New York and Liverpool, while Mr. Randell and his rather masculine-looking wife were widely removed from me, as passengers of the first cabin, but for all that I never could bear the man.

His wife was a mild-eyed woman, with an oval face, and a broad, massive chin—not at all the woman you would have imagined such an elegant gentleman as Ralph Randell would have chosen for the partner of his life, and her coarse laughter was masculine, not to say vulgar in the extreme.

We had been out a week, when one of the young lady passengers, Newton—Annie Newton, I think her name was—came upon deck at the close of the afternoon, reading a paper, and, drawing up a camp-stool, with a sweet smile she sank wearily into it and went on with her perusal of the sheet.

She was a lively young creature, probably twenty years of age, and, in the companionship of her maiden aunt, was on her way to London for some business of which I was unaware.

I watched her as she sat there in the declining light, casting her gaze over the paper, and fancied I saw a tear fall upon the sheet.

Stepping up beside her, and taking a fresh chew of tobacco to keep down the lumps rising in my throat at the sight of her tears, I asked kindly:

"Are you ill, miss?"

She lifted her eyes to my face and smiled.

"Oh, it is you, Ben. No, not ill," she replied, with a mournful shake of her pretty head, "only reading about the death of my poor papa."

I knew she was in mourning, but for whom was beyond me.

"Try to be calm, miss; tears will not bring him back," I ventured. "Did he die violently?"

I saw the slender, white fingers close convulsively around the paper, her head dropped upon her breast, and amid her sobs she replied:

"He—he was murdered!"

"Murdered!" I gasped, feeling my old limbs quiver with terror, and sinking down upon a coil of rope at her feet.

"Yes—listen, Ben—that is not the worst!"

I thought she would never come out of the violent paroxysm of weeping she then went into, but drying her eyes she turned toward me again.

"My father, whom I had always believed wealthy

while living, was found lying dead one evening upon the threshold of the porch leading from the library window, with a heavy bronze instrument, shaped like a club, lying beside him.

"In one of the clenched hands lay a few strands of golden hair. The private drawer of his desk, and the great iron safe, had been rifled of their contents and every penny, including the jewels of my late mother, was gone. Upon examination, it was found that he had withdrawn every dollar of his possessions from the bank, and, save the real estate he had owned, I was left a penniless orphan. The money was nothing to me compared to the loss of my parent, and so I determined to use every cent in discovering, if possible, his cowardly assassin, never dreaming of the bitter end.

"The murderer had escaped through the library window, leading to the garden below, and upon the white wall was left, beside the golden hair, the only trace of identification—the print of a human hand—the left one, with the third finger missing.

"The detectives scoured the country for months without the slightest clew to the murderer, and just two weeks ago the Atlantic cable brought me tidings of the bitterest woe.

"Mark Shultis, the man to whom I was betrothed, and who had left for Europe a week previous to the murder, had been found in London with the family jewels upon him.

"The news almost broke my heart; and this is the reason I am on my way to England to prove to my poor heart his truth or base deception.

The paper slid from her nerveless grasp at this, and rising softly, she glided away.

It was the New York Herald, and the description of the awful tragedy lay in great black letters before me.

I read it all there—the terrible story she had told me, and just as the shadows of the night began to deepen over the ocean Ralph Randell stole to my side.

"You seem interested, Ben," he said. "What have you there?"

"The Herald—an old copy."

The hand he had laid upon my shoulder clinched, and there was just the faintest shade of a quiver in his voice as he asked:

"And what, pray, are you reading?"

"An account of the awful murder of George Newton. Look there."

I heard his teeth grit hoarsely, a sudden pallor overspread his handsome face, and with a low, suppressed exclamation he staggered back.

"Are you ill, sir?" I asked, quickly.

"No, only a slight pain in the heart—I am subject to it," he replied. "Let me see the paper."

I passed the sheet to him, and in the darkness I saw the black curls upon his forehead damped with a chilling dew.

He glanced quickly over the paper, and then, with a sudden motion, tossed it into the ocean, now rapidly swelling with the approaching storm.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Ben," he said; "the wind blew it from my grasp. I am very sorry. Here is a dollar in payment."

I followed his action, and the next moment the note was dancing on the waves in our rear.

"I beg your pardon, sir," I said calmly, "the wind blew that from my grasp."

I heard him grit his teeth again, and turning upon his heel, he went below.

The storm that had all day been threatening broke over the mighty ocean, and at midnight the great ship was foundering in the Atlantic's heart.

I never shall forget the awful sight of that night while I exist.

Often in my dreams I live it over again; the white faces, the maddened waves, the groans of the men and the screams of the women, rise like a vision before me.

I saw the life-boats filled to overflowing, and as they were lost in the darkness, followed them with prayers.

Into every one Randell and his wife strove to spring, but the captain's hand forced him back, and she crouched at his side.

The last boat lay tossing upon the waves, and as Annie Newton placed her foot upon it there came a sudden snap, a lurch, the rope had broken—the boat was gone.

A howl from Mrs. Randell, as she sprang up, that chilled my blood.

The wreck lurched, she fell forward, and as I grasped her left hand to stay her, her dark curls slipped from her head, and a wedding-ring rolled glittering to the deck; Mrs. Randell lay at my feet, and a waxen finger was clutched in my palm.

A shriek rang from Ralph Randell's lips as he precipitated himself upon me.

The woman rose quickly to her feet, a man's face met mine, but her hand clutched a gleaming knife.

"Murderer!" I hissed, as three hands grasped my throat.

It was a battle for life; but I meant to die, if need be, fighting for justice.

Wildly I struggled; and even as I tore the curls from Ralph Randell's head, and the blonde ones beneath gleamed in the lightning's awful glare, there came the rush of feet, a mighty crash, a roar of thunder, then the great vessel parted, and as the after-deck bore us away on its bosom across the turbulent ocean all was black as death.

"Ha—ha—ha! water—ha—ha—ha!"

I heard the cry as one awakening from a dream, and rubbing my eyes, I started to my feet.

My throat was parched and burning, but one glance around me told of the awful condition of my messmates.

Mechanically I passed my hand to my head and felt the deep gash Ralph Randell's pal had given me.

At my feet lay the man himself, and, grasping the rail, totally divested of his woman's attire, the man who had passed as his wife howled and shrieked for water.

The burning in my throat began to increase, my head began to spin, and through a scarlet mist I saw the floating raft surrounded with hungry sharks.

Thump—thump! beat my heart, and splash—splash! the heaving waves replied.

For days we had been doing thus, until the half-naked wretches around me howled and screamed like tortured fiends:

"Water—water!"

Oh, for a single draught, while yet it heaved about upon every side—not a drop to drink.

Higher—higher arose the sun, scorching my wounded head with its beams of living fire.

I saw the sea sharks, the men spin around in a blaze, and flames seemed rushing up my throat.

Great Scott! what did it mean?

"Water! for the love of Heaven—water—water!" I gasped, as I seized the negro's arm.

Useless—useless!

Whir—whir—whir! spun around my head, then came an awful shriek.

I saw a form dash through the air, as one of the men flung himself into the seething waves; a scream, another slid from the wreck.

I felt my senses leaving me.

"Water—water—water!"

The arms of the negro circled my body, and his voice arose to a yell as he screamed:

"Boat—boat—we are saved!"

The black and pointed over the waves, and with a supreme effort I sprang upon the rail.

"Saved—saved!" I cried, as I fell back, and the dark prow of a boat cleft the boiling waves.

God in his mercy had spared our wicked lives!

It was days after when I awoke to reason in the cabin of the Fearless, with Annie Newton's lovely eyes gleaming down into mine.

Dear girl! she had been picked up before she felt the horrors to which we had been doomed.

But three of us had survived the awful wreck.

Three did I say?

I had forgotten the doomed murderers, who recovered their reason soon after, and were put in irons until our arrival in port.

I have witnessed much of joy, much of sorrow in my life, but everything wanes before the meeting of Annie and Mark.

Her father had given him the jewels to have them reset in Paris as a surprise to Annie, but it had been almost a fatal one.

She wears them now as she stands yonder at the altar with her hand in Mark's, whispering the words which shall make her his wife.

Well, no, I don't think I shall ever follow the sea again. I am old and feeble, and the home they offer me with them will be a happy one, I know.

Weeks ago the two assassins paid the penalty of their crime with their lives, and upon the scaffold they realized the power of the Great Creator to right the wrongs of life.

FACTS WORTH READING

CHURCH CLOCK IS NEVER DUSTED OFF.

St. Paul's Chapel, in Manhattan, New York, was completed in 1766, but until 1794 it was without the steeple, and it was not until four years later that a clock was installed. The clock, which still runs, although in the last few months it has developed rheumatic tendencies, causing it to fail to keep up with the steady march of time, bears the inscription, John Thwaies, Clerkenwell, London, 1798. It is soon to give way to a modern clock, made in Boston. The sexton is jealous of the dust which has accumulated for a hundred years in the steeple, and will permit no light to menace the structure. It is built entirely of wood. There are two bells. The first, a small one, long ago outlived its usefulness, says the *Indianapolis News*, but when the larger one, upon which the hours and quarters are now struck, was installed, the smaller one was allowed to remain, a kind of pensioner. In making the trip to the clock the sexton is careful about the time, for if the clock struck when the explorer was in its immediate vicinity he would be deafened by its thunderous tones in a restricted space. The clock is wound by raising two weights, weighing 1,400 pounds each, to the top of an eighty-foot shaft, from which position they descend slowly, operating the clock. In former times the weights were wound directly on a drum, and the operation cost much labor. Now a geared crank has been installed, and the clock can be wound in two hours. There is an unpleasant rasp in the machinery of the clock, and instead of ticking it emits a ponderous, rhythmic beat, which has kept up for over 100 years. But the oak timbers in the tower are as strong as ever, and the new clock will be bolted to them just as they stand.

HOW TO MAKE A XYLOPHONE WITH GLASSES OF WATER.

Some rainy day when you have "nothing to do" make a xylophone.

Secure any number of glass tumblers or bottles of similar shape. Set them in a row on the table. Get a pitcher full of water and fill several of the glasses or bottles to various depths. You will note that when you lightly strike these glasses with a spoon or pencil each one gives out a different tone or note. The more water in the glass the lower the note.

With this information it will be easy for you so to fill each glass that the entire set will represent the musical scale. At least one octave, or eight notes, should be so provided, instructs St. Nicholas. Of course, if desired, you may so fill glasses as to give sharps and flats, thus requiring thirteen glasses to the octave.

With a little practice you can play simple tunes

on this arrangement. Indeed, if good bottles are used, the tone will be very pretty. Perhaps you have seen one of these water xylophones used in vaudeville.

The principle is simply one of sound-wave frequency. Sound is caused by disturbing the air. If the air is made to vibrate in regular impulses, a note or tone results. If the air is violently disturbed, a crash or noise is heard. When you strike a glass tumbler with a spoon, the walls of the tumbler vibrate and make sound-waves in the air, just as a pebble, dropped into water, will make water-waves. The faster the glass vibrates, the higher the resultant note will be; thus, when the glass is partly filled with water its vibration is slower and the sound note is lower. The more water there is in the glass, the lower the note will be.

AMERICAN ANT-EATERS.

North America, or more properly the United States, has an ant-eater of its own. To be exact, it has several of them, but all belong to the feathered tribe rather than to the quadruped vertebrates, as do the ant-eaters of tropical countries.

The most important of America's ant-eaters, according to scientists of the Department of Agriculture, is the flicker. If you were reared on a farm you know the flicker, probably, as a "yellowhammer," because that's his commonest name. Golden flicker is another name. He belongs to the woodpecker family and gets the name of flicker from his flickering, up-and-down manner of flight.

The flicker is the only member of the woodpecker tribe that spends much of the time on the ground, says the *Washington Star*. Perhaps the bird's appetite for ants has compelled it to forego trees and the diet of boring insects enjoyed by its relatives. There aren't ants enough in and on trees to satisfy a healthy, normal flicker, so very often the bird may be seen scooting along the road or hopping over lawns searching for its favorite food. Scientists of the Department of Agriculture examined the stomach of one flicker and found in it more than 5,000 ants. Two others contained more than 3,000 ants each. But perhaps these flickers were gluttons.

The flicker may be recognized by its mottled brown and black body, somewhat resembling in its plumage a meadow lark; its red patch on the head and the black crescent on its throat. The golden color of the under side of the wing feathers is another noticeable characteristic, from which the bird gets the "golden" part of its name. If any other identification is needed, watch it when it flies; mark the undulating line of flight and notice the white patch beneath the tail feathers.

INTERESTING ARTICLES

LIFE OF 12-INCH GUN

Sir Robert Hadfield, the noted English maker of projectiles, is authority for the statement that the useful life of a modern high-velocity gun is about three seconds. Which is to say that the time taken by a shell in traveling through the gun, from powder chamber to muzzle, multiplied by the total number of rounds that can be fired before the rifling is so worn as to impair the accuracy, gives a total useful life of only three seconds. Rather a short life for, let us say, a 12-inch gun costing from \$50,000 to \$60,000.

NEW GIANT ZEPPELIN TESTED.

A new monster Zeppelin, the L-40, has made its first trial flight over Friederichshafen and Lake Constance. It is equipped with specially designed propellers, which make virtually no noise. There is a machine on board the craft which when put into operation quickly covers the airship with smoke, resembling a cloud, so the aircraft cannot be seen from below. A gun of larger caliber than those previously used on Zeppelins is mounted on top of the L-40.

The new airship will soon join the airship fleet on the North Sea. A second Zeppelin at Friederichshafen is half completed.

CANDLE LIGHT FOR PARIS.

As a measure of war economy, a drastic lighting order has recently been announced in Paris. With a view to effecting a saving in coal and fuel, it is decreed that in future shops must not be lighted after six o'clock by gas, electricity, petroleum or alcohol. An exception is to be made in the case of shops dealing in foodstuffs, druggists, hairdressers and tobacco dealers. Shops are not compelled to close at six o'clock, but after this hour they must find other means of lighting such as candles or acetylene. The hours of lighting of theaters and other places of amusement are unaltered, but all such establishments will have to close one day a week. It is also contemplated that cafes and restaurants will close in future at nine-thirty in the evening.

MAGNITUDE OF BRITISH FLYING CORPS.

"The Allies to-day," states Patrick Y. Alexander in a recent issue of Flying, "have complete superiority of the air, but it has been achieved at a tremendous expenditure of efforts and money. We have not less than 500,000 persons in the British air service alone, including thousands of aviators, the mechanics and the manufacturers of aeroplanes and aeronautic supplies. Aeroplanes can be seen in flocks anywhere. Every ship that leaves British

ports is escorted by aeroplanes until it is quite a way beyond the Irish coast. We also have large airships which we expect will be superior to the very latest Zeppelins. We have in use at present hundreds of small dirigibles, less than 300 feet long, equipped with aeroplane bodies instead of the usual nacelle. They are capable of staying in the air 50 hours and go at a speed of about 35 miles an hour. They are very useful in submarine warfare and coast defense."

A REFUGE FOR TRAMPS.

Not all the tramps are spending the winter at the Berks and Lancaster County (Penna.) Almshouses, according to reports made public by Henry Heft, a prosperous farmer, who since the first of the year has provided lodging to 595 tramps in his barn, an increase of fifteen tramps over the same period last year. Only one woman was given lodging.

Near the barn is a fine grove, and during the summer a good many sleep under the trees. Here Heft has provided a fireplace, and in a wash boiler they made their coffee. Heft never gives them a full meal, but if they agree to do their own cooking he often hands them potatoes, flour, salt, pepper and other necessities.

Mr. Heft says it has been the custom of his father and grandfather to provide lodging to the tramps, and that for the 109 years that the farm has been in the Heft family no tramp was turned from their barn, and that they never had any trouble with them.

ANCIENT HAIRPINS.

Women used to lose their hairpins a thousand years ago much in the same way as they do today. That, at least, is the impression one gets from the antiquities found a short time ago at the Silchester excavations. The most interesting discovery was the building which formed apparently the principal baths of the Roman town. The exploration of the baths yielded a number of architectural fragments, including a small altar, portions of capitals and bases, part of a large basin of Purbeck marble, and some singular pieces of metal. In a filled-up hypocaust were found at least 100 bone pins, which had evidently been used to adjust the back hair of Roman women who used the baths. Probably they had been dropped in the way women throughout the ages has shed pins, and were collected by the keeper of the baths. Some of them are quite three inches long, and would make passable hatpins for the present fashion. A pair of gold earrings with uncut green gems are so bright that they look as if they might have just come out of a jeweler's shop in Bond street.

CUFF BUTTONS. Gold plated, bright finished, assorted shapes, set with fine brilliants. Price 10c postpaid.
H. F. LANG, 1815 Centre St., B'klyn., N. Y.

MARBLE VASE. A clever and puzzling effect, easy to do, the apparatus can be made in minutes. Effect: A marble can be made to pass from the hand into the closed vase, which a moment before was shown empty. This is a beautiful enamelled turned wood vase.
 Price, 50c.
C. BEHR, 150 W. 62d St., New York City.

The Bottle Imp. The peculiarity of this little bottle is that it cannot be made to lie down, and yet by simply passing the hand over it, the performer causes it to do so. This trick affords great amusement, and is of convenient size to carry about.
 Price, 10c.
C. BEHR, 150 W. 62d St., New York City.

THE INK BLOT JOKER. Fool Your Friends. The greatest novelty of the age! Have a joke which makes everybody laugh. More fun than any other novelty that has been shown in years. Place it on a desk, tablecloth, or any piece of furniture, as shown in the above cut, near any valuable papers or on the waiter's apron. Watch the result! Oh, Gee! Price, 15c, each, postpaid.
H. F. LANG, 1815 Centre St., B'klyn., N. Y.

THE SPIDER WEB PUZZLE. A very interesting little puzzle. It consists of a heavily nickeled plate and brass ring. The object is to get the ring from the side to the center and back. This is very hard, but we give directions making it easy. Price, 10 cents each, by mail, postpaid.
H. F. LANG, 1815 Centre St., B'klyn., N. Y.

THE SPOTTER CARD TRICK. The performer exhibits a die. The ace of spades and five cards are now taken from a pack. The ace of spades is thoroughly shuffled with the other cards, which are then placed down in a row on the table. The die is now thrown, and the number it embodied with superhuman intelligence, the exact position of the Ace is indicated. Without touching the die, the performer picks up the cards, gives them a complete shuffle and again spreads them on the table. The die is rolled as before by any person, and is seen to come to a stop with the ace of spades in the uppermost position. The card is then turned over and found to correspond in position. Price, 10c, postpaid.
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"KNOCK-OUT" CARD TRICK. Five cards are shown, front and back, and there are no two cards alike. You place some of them in a handkerchief and ask any person to hold them by the corners in full view of the audience. You now take the remaining cards and request anyone to name any card shown. This done, you repeat the name of the card and state that you will cause it to invisibly leave your hand and pass into the handkerchief, where it will be found among the other cards. The word "Go!" you show that the chosen card has vanished, leaving absolutely only two cards. The handkerchief is unfolded by any person, and in it is found the identical card. Price, 10c, postpaid.
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NAIL PUZZLE. Made of 2 metal nails linked together. Keeps folks guessing; easy to take them apart when you know how. Directions with every one. Price, 6c, postpaid.
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HAPPY HOOLIGAN JOKER. With this joker in the lapel of your coat, you can make a dead shot every time. Complete with rubber ball and tubing. Price, 15c, by mail, postpaid.
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LAUGHABLE EGG TRICK. This is the funniest trick ever exhibited and always produces roars of laughter. The performer says to the audience that he requires some eggs for one of his experiments. As no spectator carries any of the kind, he begs, and the top of his mouth. This is repeated until six eggs are produced. It is an easy trick to perform, once you know how, and always makes a hit. Directions given for working it. Price, 25 cents by mail, postpaid.
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THE DEVIL'S CARD TRICK. From three cards held in the hand anyone is asked to mentally select one. All three cards are placed in a hat and the performer removes the two that the audience did not select and passing the hat to them their card has mysteriously vanished. A great climax, highly recommended. Price, 5c, each.
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JUMPING CARD.—A pretty little trick, easy to perform. Effect: A selected card returned to the deck jumps high into the air at the performer's command. Pack is held in one hand. Price of apparatus, with enough cards to perform the trick, 10c.
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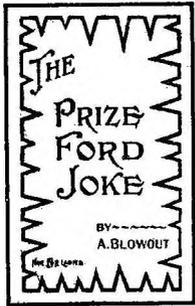
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SNAPPER CIGAR. The real thing for the cigar grafter. If you smoke you must have this. He sends a few choice cigars in your pocket and makes no bones about asking you for one. You are all prepared for him this time. How? Take one of these cigars snappers (which is so much like a real cigar) you are liable to smoke it yourself by mistake. Bend the spring backwards the lighted end, and as you offer the cigar let go the spring and the victim gets a sharp stinging snap on the fingers. A sure cure for grafter's craves. Price, by mail, ten cent each, or three for 25c.
C. BEHR, 150 62d St., New York City.

FUNNY KISSING GAME.

These cards, from No. 1 to No. 16, run in rotation, but must be mixed and dealt, a white one for a boy and a red one for a girl. They are then read alternately, and the questions and answers make funny combinations. The right lady is rewarded with a kiss. A very funny game. Price, five cents a pack by mail, postpaid.
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THE PRIZE FORD JOKE.



Looks like a story-book, but it contains a cap and a trigger. The moment your innocent friend opens the book to read the interesting story he expects The Pop! Bang! The explosion is harmless, but will make him think the Germans are after him. Price 25 cents each by mail, postpaid.

Wolf Novelty Co. 168 W. 23d St., N. Y.

MAGIC PENCILS.



The working of this trick is very easy, most startling and mystifying. Give the case and three pencils to any one in your audience with instructions to place any pencil in the case point upward and to close case and put the remaining two pencils in his pocket. You now take the case with the pencil in it and can tell what color it is. Directions how to work the trick with each set.

Price 25 cts. each by mail, postpaid.
Wolf Novelty Co., 168 W. 23d St., N. Y.

IMITATION RED BUGS.

This toy is an exact imitation of the friendly little fellow who shares your bed, eats out of your hand or leg and who accepts your humble hospitality even without an invitation. The fact that he also insists on introducing all his friends and family circle, sometimes makes him most unpopular with the ladies; most every woman you know would have seven kinds of fits if she saw two, or even one, of these imitations on her bedspread. Six are contained in a transparent envelope. Price, 10c by mail.

H. F. LANG, 1815 Centre St., B'klyn, N. Y.

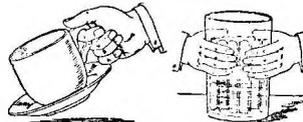
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This is the prettiest and daintiest little article that we have ever seen. It consists of a miniature French shoe only 1 1/2 inches in length, to which is attached a perfect and thoughtfully reliable thermometer. They are made in Paris by skilled workmen, and the workmanship in every detail is simply perfect.

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Rubber Vacuum Suckers

The latest novelty out! Dishes and plates will stick to the table, cups to the saucers like glue. Put one under a glass and then try to lift it. You can't. Lots of fun. Always put it on a smooth surface and wet the rubber. Many other tricks can be accomplished with this novelty. Price 12 cts. each by mail, postpaid.

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In each set there are ten pins and two bowling balls, packed in a beautifully ornamented box. With one of these miniature sets you can play ten-pins on your dining-room table just as well as the game can be played in a regular alley. Every game known to professional bowlers can be worked with these pins. Price, 10c, per box by mail, postpaid.
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THE CREEPING MOUSE.

This is the latest novelty out. The mouse is of a very natural appearance. When placed upon a mirror, wall, window or any other smooth surface, it will creep slowly downward without leaving the perpendicular surface. It is furnished with an adhesive gum-rod underneath which makes it stick very amusingly to both young and old. Price, ten cents by mail.
Wolf Novelty Co., 168 W. 23d St., N. Y.

TRICK CIGARETTE BOX.

This one is a corker! Get a dog right away, if you want to have a barrier of joy, here's the secret. It looks like an ordinary red box of Turkish cigarettes, but it contains a trigger, under which you place a paper cap. Offer your friend a smoke and he takes the lid of the box. That exposes the cap, and if you are wise you will get out of sight with the box before he gets over thinking he was shot. Price 25c, postpaid.
Wolf Novelty Co., 168 W. 23d St., N. Y.

BINGO.

It is a little metal box. It looks very innocent, but is supplied with an ingenious mechanism which shoots off a barless cap when it is opened. You can have more fun than a circus with this new trick. Place the BINGO in or under any other article and it will go off when the article is opened or removed. It can be used as a funny joke by being placed in a purse, cigarette box, or between the leaves of a magazine; also, under any movable article, such as a book, tray, dish, etc. The BINGO can also be used as a burglar alarm, as a theft preventer by being placed in a drawer, money till, or under a door or window or under any article that would be moved or disturbed should a theft be attempted. Price, 5c each by mail, postpaid.
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