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ADVENTURE

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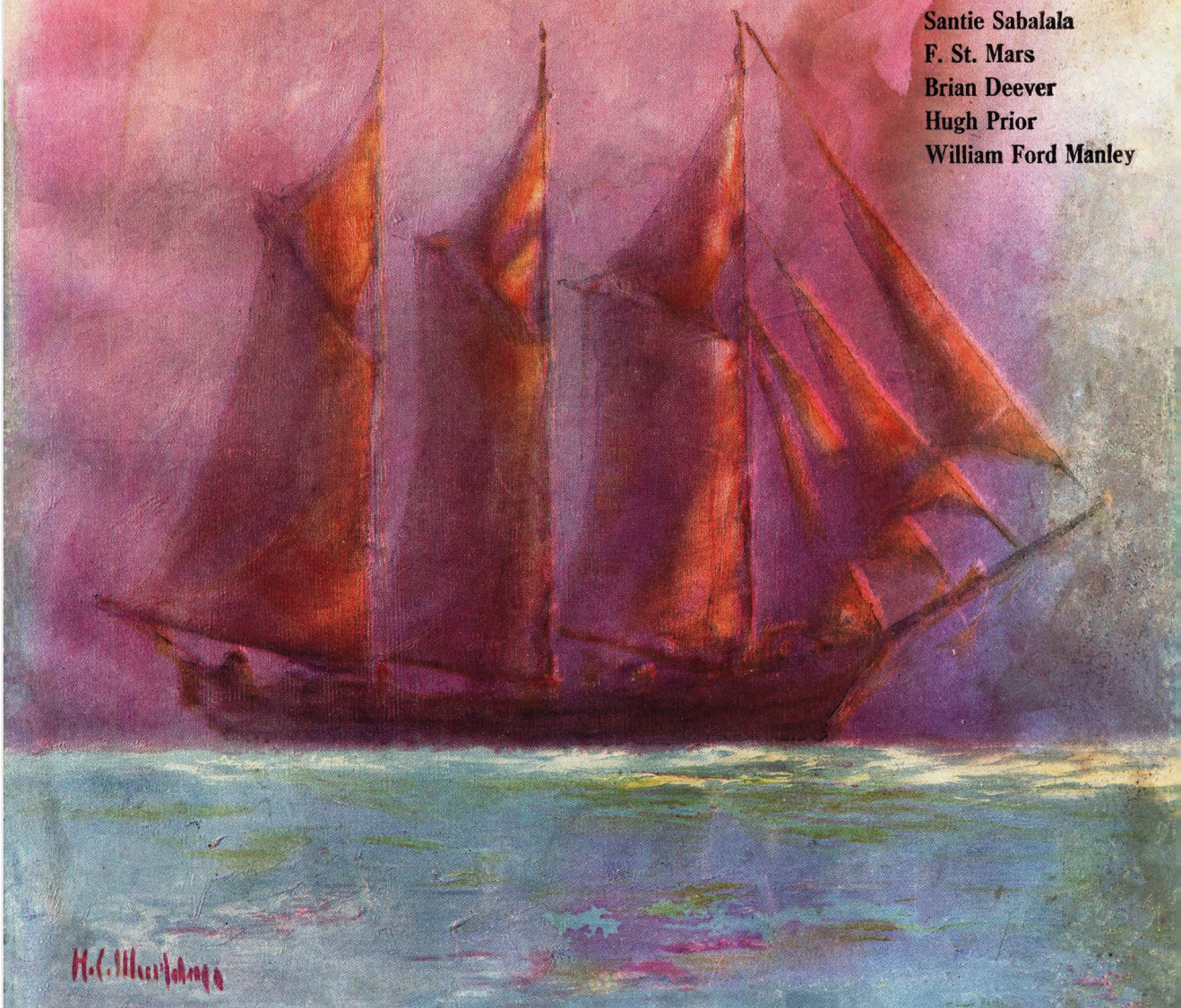

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Thus the Government offers the people an ideal system of saving—absolute safety, liberal interest, ready cash if withdrawn.

Everybody can and should take advantage of this opportunity and learn how easy it is for savings to accumulate.

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United States Treasury Savings Certificates may be purchased at Post Offices, Federal Reserve Banks, banks and trust companies, or direct from the United States Government Savings System, Treasury Department, Washington, D. C.

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT SAVINGS SYSTEM

TREASURY DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON, D. C.

"Life Ain't in Holdin' a Good Hand, but in Playin' a Poor Hand Well"

By R.C. Templeton

THERE IS NO FINER THING IN THE WORLD than courage. It is the warm and beautiful flame which lights the fires of ambition in every man's soul and burns a forward path through every difficulty.

It is easy to be courageous when the odds are in your favor. But the greater hero is the man who smiles a brave smile when days are darkest and keeps on fighting toward the ultimate goal—"to the last a warrior unafraid."

As Grantland Rice so beautifully expresses it:—

"God grant that in the strife and stress
Which all must face who linger here—
Upon the Field of Hopelessness
Or with the laurel swinging near,
Upon the world's red firing line
The battle of the strong and weak—
The fate of all the Fates be mine—
I will not show the Yellow Streak.

If Fortune play me false or fair—
If, from the shadowlands I creep
Up to the heights and linger there,
Or topple downward to the deep—
On up the rugged path of fame,
Where one man falls—another mounts;
God grant that I play out the game,
For there is nothing else that counts."

As the old cowboy saying goes—"Life ain't in holdin' a good hand, but in playin' a poor hand well."

What if you did have to leave school when you were but a boy! What if you have been working for years at a small salary with little or no chance for advancement! Do you think that makes any difference to a real fighter?

What you have done with your time up to now accounts for what you are Today.

What you do with your time *from now on* will decide what you will be Tomorrow.

Your hands can't earn the money you need. But your head can—*and will!*—if you give it the chance.

No matter what your age—your education—or your means, you can get out of the rut and make good in a big way if you grit your teeth and say "I will."

ADVENTURE
Aug. 10th, 1922

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Volume 36
Number 1

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Contents for August 10th, 1922, Issue

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(*Continued from preceding page*)

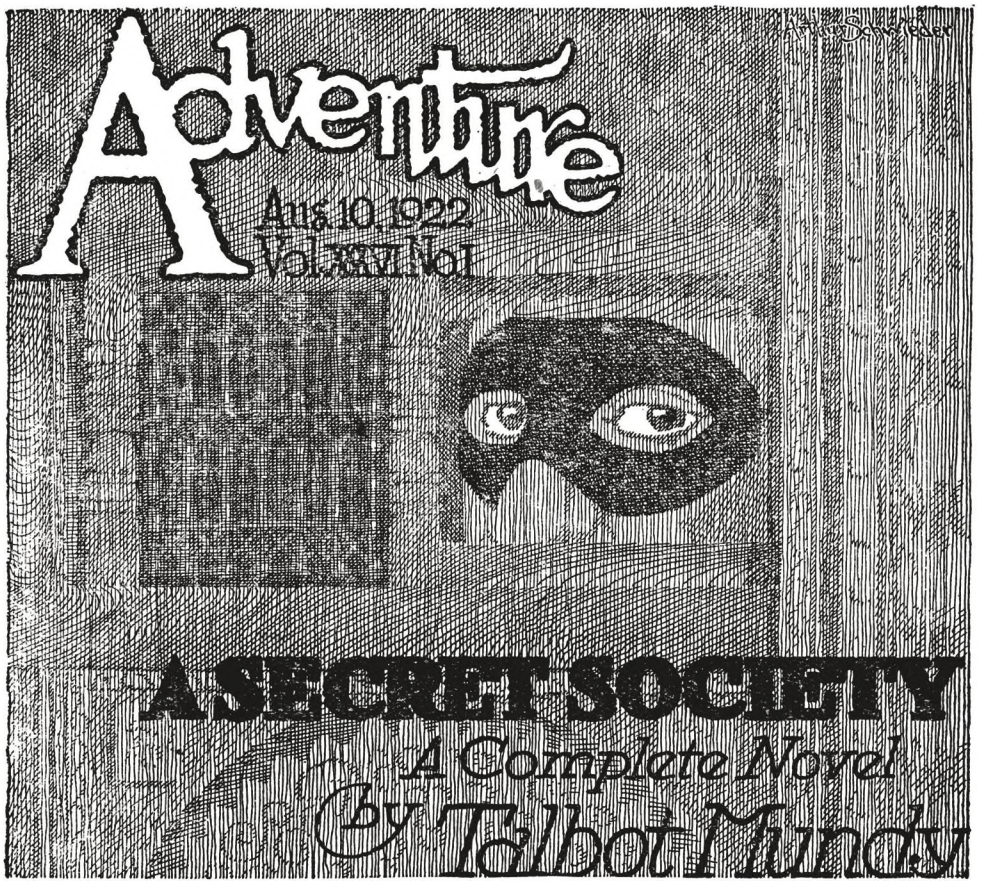
A WHITE man with the face of a youth and silver-gray hair comes to Benin River in a one-woman canoe. The African natives call him "the gray man who never hurries." To those of his own color he is a mystery. Who and what is he? "THE GRAY CHARTERIS," a four-part serial by Robert Simpson, will start in the next issue.

WHEN the Medici dukes ruled Florence with graft and the torture-chamber, *Arcangelo*, the Irish-Italian, intrigues with the contestants for the throne. "KAVANAGH THE FLORENTINE," a complete novelette by F. R. Buckley, in the next issue.

MEXICANS kidnap *Padre Joy* and his daughter, planning to hold them for ransom. But *Groody* of the U. S. Army Air Service makes the next move. "GROODY MOVES ON," a complete novelette by Thomson Burtis, in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Don't forget the dates of issue for *Adventure*—the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month



Author of "The Lost Trooper," "The King in Check," etc.

CHAPTER I

"See here, Jim; you quit the British army!"

D'YOU remember Mark Twain's advice to read the Bible? It's good. There's one verse in particular in Genesis that quotes old Israel's dying words.

He says to his son Joseph—

"Deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt."

To my mind that sums up Egypt perfectly.

No sensible man can blame the Israelites for wanting to get away. It charms you for a while, but leaves you wondering why; and there's a sting in all of Egypt's favors just as surely as there's a scorpion or an adder underneath the first stone you turn, and a hidden trick in every bargain.

Like old Israel, I'd rather my carcass were disposed of almost anyhow than buried in Egypt's finest mausoleum. But it isn't bad fun all the same to sit on the big front veranda of Shepheard's Hotel in Cairo and watch the world go by. Sooner or later all trails cross at Cairo. It's a sort of adventurers' Clapham Junction.

James Schuyler Grim, Jeremy Ross and Narayan Singh were with me in 1920, and Cairo was complaining bitterly that she hadn't a tourist to rob. All of us except Narayan Singh sat at a little table in the corner of Shepheard's Hotel veranda, with Jeremy bubbling jokes at intervals and none of us knowing what would happen next.

My friend Narayan Singh had borrowed a five-pound note from me and broken his rule of only getting drunk once in three months. His periodical debauch wasn't due for six or eight weeks—which was why

"A Secret Society," copyright, 1922, by Talbot Mundy.

I had dared to lend him money—but we had found his bedroom empty that morning of everything except an equally empty whisky bottle. He had even put the furniture out of the window, possessed by some distorted notion of getting even with the world for old wrongs, and we neither knew what had become of him, nor dared inquire.

He might be standing stark naked on top of the Pyramid, delivering a lecture on Swadeshi to the kites. Or he might be trying to invade a harem, proclaiming himself the deliverer of lost princesses. Basing conjecture solely on past occurrences, he was possibly at that minute storming the house of the High Commissioner, flourishing sheets of scribbled paper, wearing no trousers and demanding to be washed in wine. He was certainly being bold, probably prayerful, and perhaps using scandalous language; but subject to those provisos there was no limit to what he might be doing.

The one sure thing was that we were his friends and would hear of it, if he should fall foul of the authorities. And the one best bet was not to call official attention to ourselves or him meanwhile. We weren't going to leave Narayan Singh in the lurch, for he was a man and a brother who had risked his neck with us; but we should have been idiots to go about asking for him at the moment. So we sat still and refused to worry, while Jeremy exploded jokes until he suddenly grew deadly serious and turned his fire on Grim.

"See here, Jim," he said, tossing his head to get the chestnut hair out of his eyes. "You quit the British Army!"

"Why?" demanded Grim, looking calmly at him, unastonished.

You never are astonished at anything Jeremy says or does, once you've known him for a few days.

"I'll tell you why. I know the British Army. They'll serve you the same they served us Anzacs every time after a war was won—kick you and tell you to go to ——. Got any money? No! Got a profession? No! Can you write signs—shear sheep—shave lumbermen—sell canned goods—cook for a fourpenny buster outfit? Those are the chaps who don't have to worry when the job slips out from under them. Can you splice wire rope, or ballyhoo the greenhorns outside a one-ring circus in a bush town? No! And you'll starve, when the British Army's through with you! There you sit, waiting for a red-necked swab with gold lace on his collar and the rim of a monocle eating the skin of his nose to tell you you're fired!"

Grim laughed.

"D'you think it's as bad as that, Jeremy?"

"It's worse! I've seen your sort—sacked from the army to cover a bad break made by some sore-bags in an armchair. They come to Australia in shoals. Sydney and Melbourne are lousy with them. Most of 'em would suicide if they weren't too proud to steal a gun. They end by joining the Salvation Army and calling with a can from house to house for swill and spud-peel! You grin—good lord! With that in front of you!"

"Don't you think I could land a job out here as interpreter or something?" Grim suggested pleasantly.

"You've a better chance of a contract to serve ice-cream in ——! You one-track Yankee visionary! You're so dead set on cleaning up Arabia that you can't see daylight for the dust you've made. For the love of luck, think a minute. Will they fire you for knowing too much, and let you stay here in the country? Golly! I'll tell you exactly what's going to happen. The French Ambassador will tell the King of England to roll his hoop, and the Prince o' Wales will be sent to deputize. He'll apologize for your having saved the French from doing worse dirt than they did to Feisul; and Downing Street will be so bull-angry at having to know of your existence that they'll grease the cables and suspend all other business until you're cashiered in disgrace. You'll be kicked through your headstall, they'll be in such a hurry! It'll be: 'Out o' the country quick! No recommendation. No pension. Your back pay held up for a year in case of possible claims against you. Watch your step on the way out, and don't ever let us see your face again!' The U. S. consul will refuse to ship you to the States because you aren't a distressed seaman. The British won't ship you anywhere because you're not British. And in the end you'll have to do exactly what you might do now, if you'd listen to sense!"

"Sing on, Cassandra!" Grim laughed.

"Who the ——'s Cassandra?" demanded Jeremy.

"A lady in ancient Troy, who got out the Evening News."

"Well, I'm no lady. Jim, you fire the British Empire before it fires you! Write out your resignation and file it, with compliments, before the French Ambassador has time to ring the front-door bell at Windsor Castle! If they ask you what for, tell 'em the War's over; maybe they don't know it!"

"I'd still be out of a job," Grim suggested.

"Join Ramsden and me. Grim, Ramsden and Ross. Thirty-three and a third per cent. apiece of kicks as well as ha'pence. We'll take along Narayan Singh as office murderer. What do you say?"

Grim cocked one bushy eyebrow.

"I've got no money, so I can't buy into your firm, old scout. That's all about it."

Jeremy thrust out his jaw, and drummed his fingers on the table. "I've a draft for two thousand pounds in my pocket, and I don't know how much in the bank in Sydney. Haven't been home for five years and the bank may have busted, but I guess not. Rammy here's been saving two thirds of his income ever since pa died. Never mind what Rammy says at the moment, he'll put in two pounds to my one; take my word for it. We'll make you senior partner, Jim, 'cause you're the one who'll get the worst of it if we lose out, so you'll be cautious. Rammy can do the hard work; I'll think up ideas. I know millions of ways of making money."

That was the first I had heard of any such partnership, but I made no comment, for a man had come up the front steps whom I hadn't seen for years, but whom I have crossed two oceans more than once to have a talk with—a man of about my own size but twenty years older, upstanding and hale, without a gray hair on his head, although carrying rather more stomach than I would care to tote around. He saw me, smiled and nodded, but turned to the left, choosing a table at the other end of the veranda, where he buried himself at once behind a newspaper.

"Wake up, Rammy!" said Jeremy, kicking my shin under the table. "Tell him you'll kill him if he don't come in with us! Tell him it's true that you've got capital. Go on!"

"It's true that I've saved something," I answered. "But a man's a fool who risks his savings. I'd like a partnership with you and Grim, if you've a prospect; but we ought to be able to work it without staking both capital and energy. There are lots of men with capital."

"Not in Egypt," said Jeremy. "All they'll buy here is manicure sets and big expensive cars. We're selling guts and gumption. We'd find ten Gyppies in five minutes to stake money for a crooked deal, but——"

"Suppose you argue a while with Grim," I answered. "I'll go talk with Meldrum Strange."

"Who the ——'s Meldrum?"

"One of the nine richest men in the world. I made a million for him once. Wherever Meldrum Strange is, something's doing. He's on the level, but a durned hard nut."

"Go crack him!" answered Jeremy. "I'll stay here and comb Jim out of the army like a louse out of a dogs' hair. So long."

CHAPTER II

"We three now haven't a parasite between us."

I SAT down beside Meldrum Strange without saying anything and it wasn't until the chair creaked under my weight that he laid the newspaper down.

"Oh, hello," he said then.

"Hello yourself," said I. "How's business?"

"I've gone out of business."

I looked hard at him and he at me. He was good to look at, with a face carved out of granite and a neat black beard. There was a suggestion of Ulysses Grant, with the same look of good humor balancing an iron will.

"I've come all the way from the States to see you," he said.

"Nothing else?"

"Just that," he answered, biting the end of a dark cigar.

"I don't believe you," I answered, "but I'll smoke while you elaborate the fiction."

"You're going out of business too," he said, passing me his leather case.

"I did that during the first year of the War," I answered. "Cleaned up in Abyssinia and quit for keeps."

"Uh. Who was behind that Abyssinian thing? You put it up to me. Colin and Campbell fell, didn't they? Make anything?"

"Three times what they put in."

"Uh. What did you get?"

"Enough," I answered.

He nodded and began chewing his cigar.

"Well," he said presently, "I heard you were wandering in these parts. Tried to reach you by cable, but you'd left no address."

"Any banker out here would have delivered a message sooner or later," I answered, puzzled. I'm not used to being in such demand.

"I daresay. Nothing to keep me in Chicago. Came to look for you—P & O from Marseilles. Saw your name on the hotel register."

"Did you ask for me?"

"No. No hurry. Met some people. Up at Government House. Seems you've been trying your hand at international politics?"

"I've a friend who was interested. Helped him," I said.

"Did you like it?" he asked suddenly, looking sharply at me.

"You bet! We spiked a crooked game and pulled a good man out of a tight place."

"I'm in that game nowadays," he said.

He took hold of his chin in his left hand and eyed me steadily.

"Can you afford to be independent?"

I nodded.

"Got enough, eh? Good. Couldn't use a man who thought he needed money badly."

"What's eating you?" I asked. "The only time I handled your dollars you had me bonded."

"Couldn't get a bond to cover this. Need a man used to acting on his own responsibility, not given to talking—be depended on to keep important secrets—act coolly in emergency—knows the world in the widest sense—willing to have no other ambition than to unknot the international snarls. You'll fill the bill."

"You're wrong," I said. "My gifts are mechanical. You need a man with brains for a job like that. James Schuyler Grim is the man for you."

"Ah. Now let me see; they mentioned Grim—Major Grim, isn't he? American? Um-m-m. What do you know of him?"

"How d'you rate my opinion?"

"Ace-high, or I wouldn't have gone to this trouble to find you."

"I rate Grim ace-high plus, or I wouldn't have gone to Damascus with him on any such risky business," I answered.

"What else can you say for him?"

"The British Government thought highly enough of him to keep him in their Intelligence Department, while they were retrenching in every direction."

"Expects the sack now, does he?"

"Jeremy is trying to persuade him to resign,"

"Who's Jeremy?"

"Jeremy Ross—Australian. Knows Arabic as well as Grim does. Kidnaped in the War and carried off into the heart of Arabia. Made good. Escaped—gathered a following—led them the whole length of of Arabia—discovered a gold-mine—worked it—dollied out more than two thousand pounds—made himself a power in the land—and was finally rescued by Grim and me with the help of Narayan Singh and some Arabs. Made a present of his mine to Feisul the other day, as a private contribution to the Arab cause."

"Um-m-m. Mine any good?"

"Best I ever saw."

"Gave it to the Arabs, eh? Who's Narayan Singh?"

"Sikh. Friend of Grim's. Sepoy in the British Army. On a bat just now—discouraged."

"Broke?"

"Not while I've a nickel left."

"How long have you been acting banker to broken men?" Meldrum Strange demanded, looking at me curiously.

"Nothing to it," I answered. "But I'll back a good man when he's down the same way you helped the market in the 1907 panic. Maybe it'll pay me, same as buying stocks paid you. If it don't I'll take my loss, and you won't be any the wiser, Meldrum Strange."

"Extraordinary!" he said. "Most extraordinary! World full of coincidences. Time was I'd have doubted this. Looks too good."

"Same here," I said. "Few things fit without blacksmith-work and blasting. Study this right carefully before you submit proposals. We'd hate to let you down."

"'We'?" he asked.

"All or none," I said. "When you showed up we were just beginning to talk partnership."

"Those your two friends opposite?"

He sat and looked at them for several minutes.

"The one with his back turned is Ross, I take it, and the other Grim?" he said at

last. "You vouch for both of them, eh? I'm inclined to think you may be right."

He sat for five more minutes saying nothing, chewing steadily at the stump of his cigar, and every now and then casting a sidewise glance at me. At last he threw away the cigar with a gesture that meant he had made his mind up.

"Anyhow," he said, "men like you are scarce. It's like looking for a dime and finding a dollar bill. Bring 'em over here!"

I caught Grim's eye and he and Jeremy strolled over, laughing at one of Jeremy's jokes. I introduced them and they sat down.

"You the old robber who cornered platinum?" asked Jeremy.

"In my youth I was guilty of that," Strange answered dryly.

"Hah! My old dad bought International Platinum stock at bottom on margin, and followed you all the way up! He invested the proceeds in a sheep station. My regards!" said Jeremy, with a wave of the hand that signified a lot of things. "You big whales all have barnacles on your belly. We three now haven't got a parasite between us."

"Isn't there a drunken Sikh?" Strange answered.

"There's a Sikh who happens to be drunk," said Jeremy. "If you want to see some fun, old top, come with us. Grim can tell you. Grim's had to tidy up after him half-a-dozen times."

Grim volunteered no information. All he knew yet was that Meldrum Strange was a multimillionaire with a reputation for titanic thoroughness.

"Came to make Ramsden a business offer," said Strange abruptly. "He tells me you three are inseparable."

"Agreed five minutes ago," smiled Jeremy, with the air of a man raking in a jackpot. "We're Grim, Ramsden and Ross."

"What are you going to do?" asked Strange.

"Oh, anything. The world's full of things to do," said Jeremy.

"What d'you want? We're charter members of the Jack-of-all-trades Union. Exploring expeditions fixed up while you wait. Kings dethroned and national boundaries rearranged to order. Mines discovered, opened up and worked. Revolutions produced or prevented. Horses swapped. Teeth pulled by the piece or dozen. Everything contracted for from flaying whales to raising potatoes on Mount Everest, wholesale jobs preferred. All you've got to do is name your requirements, write your check and sign your contract on the dotted line. We do the rest. Shoot, old top; we're listening."

Strange glanced at me. He looked over at Grim, with no more result. Having agreed to be Jeremy's partners, there was nothing further for us to say in his behalf and Strange saw the obvious logic of that after a minute.

"You didn't mention keeping secrets in your list of offerings," he said, holding out his cigar case.

Jeremy took one, balanced it on the end of one finger, tossed it, caught it between his teeth, apparently swallowed it whole, and handed the case back.

"Count 'em," was all he said.

There was the same number of cigars in the case as before, but one of them bore teeth-marks. Strange pulled it out, examined it and tossed it with a laugh to Jeremy, who caught it, spun it point-downward on the table like a top, and while it still spun brought down the flat of his hand on it as if driving a nail into the wood. He removed his hand instantly, showing it empty. The cigar had disappeared, but a second later he produced it undamaged from his mouth with the other hand. It was superbly done, like all his tricks.

"Do you know how to do that?" he asked.

"No," said Strange.

"I know you don't. I've kept that secret twenty years. Show you another."

"No," Strange answered. "I get the drift of your genius. Major Grim, I understand you're senior partner of this unusual firm."

"We're ready to listen to your proposal," said Grim.

"Can I depend on your silence if you shouldn't like the offer after I've made it?"

"I've kept Government secrets for a number of years," Grim answered. "Depend on all three of us absolutely."

"Suppose you all come to my room."

"Here's the best place," Grim answered. "We can see all ways, and can't be overheard."

So, as happens I daresay oftener than folk suspect, a secret that had never yet passed the lips of its first guardian was trotted out, not within four walls, but in full view of the street.

"I'll begin at the beginning," said Strange, biting on a new cigar. "I'm an egoist. Nothing matters to a man but what he does. Not what he gets, but what he does. That's my religion, and the whole of it. I've amassed an enormous fortune. Never had partners. I regard my fortune as the product of my own use of natural gifts in compliance with universal laws. I never consciously broke a written law accumulating it, but I've often done things that experience has since taught me are not in the general interest, and I believe that what I do in the general interest is the only thing that counts as far as I'm concerned. I'm face to face with a fact, a question, and a condition. I have the fortune. What am I going to do with it? No good comes of doing things *for* people. That's the problem. What shall *I* do? It's up to me to use my money in the general interest."

"Why worry? Pay off a part of your national debt, and go to sleep," suggested Jeremy.

"Huh! I'd lie awake to curse myself if I wasted a nickel in that way," Strange retorted. "Our government would simply buy an extra battleship. If we all refused to pay for war there would be none. I've finished paying for it."

"Oh, are you one of those men without a country?" asked Jeremy blandly. "One red flag for all of us, and a world doing lockstep in time to the Internationale."

Strange liked that. The question threw light on Jeremy's own view-point. He laughed—just one gruff bark like a watchdog's.

"The man who doesn't put his country first might as well neglect his own body and expect to do business," he answered. "On the other hand, a state is composed of individuals, of whom I'm one, with an opinion. I obey the laws. There's not even wine in my cellar. But I make use of every opening the law allows to escape paying for armaments that I don't approve of. I lose income by it, because the tax-exempt securities come high; but that loss is part of my contribution to the general interest. That's what I, personally, do in that particular instance, and intend to keep on doing."

"Do you propose to start a society or hire us to preach?" Jeremy suggested.

"I belong to no societies. I'm an individualist, believing that what I do is my concern, and what other folk do is their concern, subject to the law as it stands on the statute books. Charity leaves me unconvinced. I don't care to endow colleges. I paid the men who taught me what I wanted to know, with money that I earned."

"Well? Where are we getting to?" demanded Grim.

"To this: I made my money all over the world. I propose to use it all over the world. Nobody can fool me with a bald statement that peoples are self-governing. They should be, but they're not given a chance to be. They're herded up in mobs, blarneyed, coaxed, cheated and made fools of; and because some of them have free institutions, they're blamed for the result, while the real culprits get away with the plunder. I'm after the real culprits. I want you men to join me."

Grim whistled. So did Jeremy. So did I. Three notes of a rising scale.

"D'you suppose you've any right to take that on yourself?" asked Jeremy.

"As much right as any reformer has, and more," Strange answered, "for I intend to pay my own expenses! I'll make it my business to fall foul of these international crooks, who are laughing behind the scenes at the world's misery. My business is to seek those swine out, force an issue—a personal issue, mind—and swat them!"

"You want to be a sort of international police?" suggested Grim.

"I do not. An international police would be answerable to an international government, and there is none. These devils I'm after obey no government. Governments are tricked by them into furthering their designs. Governments are made up of individuals, each of whom can be worked, persuaded, bribed, blackmailed or deceived at some time in some way. The rascals I'm after play with kings and cabinets like pieces on a chess-board. They play crooked boss with the whole world for a stage, and they're safe because they've only got to deal with the representatives of majorities. They're persons, dealing with impersonal ministries. I'm going to make it a personal issue with them in every instance. But I have to work in secret, or I'll last about a minute and a half. That's how you three men happen to be the first who ever heard a word from me on a subject that I've been pondering for five-and-twenty years."

"Strange, old boy," said Jeremy. "You

altruists are all plausible; and you all turn out in the end to be feathering your own nests."

"My impression of you is that you're honest," Strange answered.

"Honest? You don't know me," laughed Jeremy. "I posed as a prophet of Islam in an Arab village. They used to pay me to make the dead talk from their tombs, and I charged 'em so much extra for every ten years the corpse had been dead and buried. Sure I'm honest."

"You keep good company," Strange answered. "How about you, Ramsden? Are you interested?"

"Interested, yes," I answered. "Grim is the senior partner. Let's hear what he has to say."

"How about it, Major Grim?"

"How would it pay?" Grim asked.

"Five thousand dollars a year for each of you, and all expenses."

"Would you expect us to obey you blindly? The answer is 'No' in that case," Grim assured him.

"Strict confidence, and the best judgment of all of you. Once we agree together on a course my instructions must be carried out."

"How about additions to the staff? I'd have to choose the men I'll work with," said Grim.

"I approve of that."

"Very well, Mr. Strange. We three will talk it over and give you a definite answer tonight," said Grim; and we got up together and left Strange sitting there.

CHAPTER III

"I have sworn a vow. Henceforward I serve none but queens!"

WE HAD not yet made up our minds, but were dining with Meldrum Strange under a great ornamental palm by a splashing fountain, discussing anything from China to Peru that had no bearing on Strange's offer, when a coal-black Egyptian servant, arrayed in fez, silver-laced purple jacket and white cotton smock, brought Grim a scented envelope.

The scent had a peculiar, pervading strength that commanded attention without challenging. The envelope was made from linen, stiff, thick and colored faintly mauve, but bore no address. The seal was of yellow wax, poured on liberally and bearing the impress of a man's thumb. No woman ever had a thumb of that size.

Grim turned the thing over half a dozen times, the servant standing motionless behind his chair. When he tore it open at last the contents proved equally remarkable. In English, written with a damaged quill pen, was a message from Narayan Singh that looked as if he had held the paper in one unsteady hand at arm's length, and made stabs at it with the other. But it was to the point.

If the *sahib* will bring the other *sahibs*, he shall look into the eyes of heaven and know all about hell. The past is past. The future none knoweth. The present is now. Come at once.

NARAYAN SINGH.

Grim asked the servant for more particulars—his master's name, for instance, and where he lived. He answered in harsh Egyptian Arabic that he had been told to show us the way. He absolutely refused to say who had sent him, or whose paper the message was written on; and he denied all knowledge of Narayan Singh. All he professed to know was the way to the house where we were wanted immediately. So we all went upstairs and packed repeating pistols into the pockets of our tuxedos.

Meldrum Strange agreed to follow us in a hired auto, and to take careful bearings of whatever house we might enter; after which he would watch the place from a distance until midnight. If we didn't reappear by twelve o'clock, it was agreed that he should summon help and have the place raided.

Looking back, I rather wonder that we took so much precaution. Cairo was quiet. There hadn't been a political disturbance for six weeks, which is a long time as things go nowadays. The soldiers of the British garrison no longer had to go about in dozens for self-protection, and for more than a fortnight the rule against gathering in crowds had been suspended. Nevertheless, we were nervous, and kept that assignation armed.

A carriage waited for us in the luminous shadow in front of the hotel steps. It was a very sumptuous affair, drawn by two bay thoroughbreds and driven by another graven ebony image, in fez, blue frock-coat with silver buttons and top-boots. There was a footman in similar livery, and behind the carriage, between the great C springs

was a platform for the enigma who had brought the message. We were off at a clattering trot almost before the door slammed shut, swaying through the badly lighted streets to the tune of silver harness bells and the shouts of the driver and footman.

Mere pedestrians had to "*imshi*" and do it quick.

Lord! That was a carriage. We struck matches to admire the finery. It was lined with velvet, on which an artist had painted cupids and doves. There were solid silver brackets, holding silver tubes, that held real orchids—*cypropedium expensivum*, as Jeremy identified them.

The curtains that draped the windows were hand-made lace—Louis the Something-or-other—half as old as France; and the thing to put your feet on was covered with peacocks' bosoms done in wood, inlaid with semiprecious stones. There were mirrors galore to see your face in, but no way of seeing out of the windows without tearing the lace, and we didn't feel afraid enough to do that.

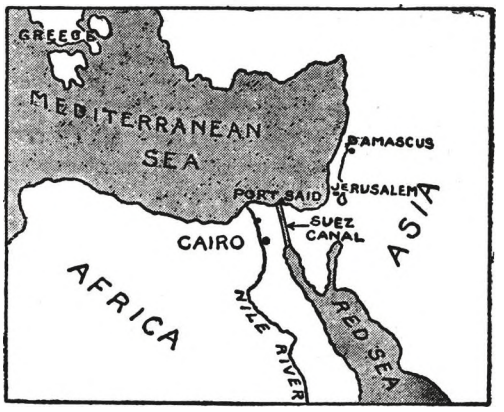
There was nothing to remind us of the ordinary humdrum world, except the noisy exhaust of Meldrum Strange's hired car closely pursuing us, and even that sounded detached, you might say, like the sounds of next-door neighbors whom you don't yet know.

We didn't have to worry about what direction we were taking, since Strange was attending to that, but there seemed to be no effort made to confuse us. We kept to the straight, wide streets, and crossed an arm of the Nile by the stone bridge into the better residential quarter, where mansions stand amid palms and shrubbery behind high stone walls. Nor did we leave the Nile far behind us.

The faintly lighted interior of the carriage grew suddenly as dark as death as we passed under an echoing arch, and out again on gravel between an avenue of trees. We caught the click behind us of an iron gate, and wondered what Meldrum Strange would do, but hardly had time to think of him before the carriage came to a stand under a portico and the door was opened with a jerk.

We stepped out into a realm of mystery. We could see part of the outline of a great stone house, built in the semi-Oriental, barbaric style of modern Egypt; but the only light was from a Chinese paper lantern in the middle of the portico roof, throwing quivering golden shadows on a front door that was almost entirely covered with bronze Chinese dragons.

To right and left was a silhouette of fragrant shrubs against the blue Egyptian night; and there wan't a sound except what we made. When the carriage drove away and the click of horseshoes vanished somewhere around a corner there was utter



EGYPT AND THE NEAR EAST

silence, until the man who had brought the message stepped up to the front door like a ghost and pushed an electric bell.

Did it ever strike you that sound has color? The din that bell made was dazzling, diamond white, reflecting all the colors of the prism in its facets. When I spoke of it afterwards I found that Grim had noticed the same thing.

It was about two minutes before the door opened. Two black six-footers, who looked smug enough to be eunuchs swung both leaves of the door wide open suddenly, and stood aside with chins in the air to let us pass.

WE ENTERED a restfully lighted hall that might have belonged to a monastery, for it was all white stone without an ornament except simplicity. The ceiling was supported by plain stone arches and the whole effect was so unexpectedly different from that outside that it froze you into silence. It was like looking forward to the circus and finding yourself in church. There was even dim organ music descending from somewhere out of sight.

The stairs were on our right hand, of stone, severely plain, with a hand-forged iron balustrade that might have been plundered from an old New England mansion. The same black-visaged minion who had brought the note and rung the bell led the way up them, we following abreast, in step and silent until Jeremy whistled the first few bars of the Dead March from "Saul."

"This feels like kissing a fish," he exclaimed. "There's no afterglow. Let's warm things up!"

But there was no need. We passed into yet another world before the echo of his words had died. I hardly mean that figuratively either. Through a high, warm gray-and-silver curtain at the stair-head we stepped into a nearly square enormous room at the back of the house. Four high-arched open windows along one side overlooked the Nile. Maybe you've seen the Nile through a window at night, with the curved spars of boats as old as Moses motionless against the purple sky and the moonlight bathing everything in silver silence? It's worth the trip.

The light within the room was of several colors, shining through stained-glass shades and causing all the rich furniture to glow in a sort of opalescent mystery. Simplicity was as much the key-note here as below; but this was simple extravagance. The carpet alone—one piece of old rose hand-work reaching from wall to wall—was likely worth the High Commissioner's year's salary; and the tapestry that covered the long wall facing the windows probably contributed to the fall of Marie Antoinette by helping bankrupt the poor devils who had to pay for it.

There was an Oriental touch, produced by long divans with silken cushions ranged against the walls. A door at the far end was hidden by a curtain of amber beads—old amber, each piece polished into ripeness on a woman's breast; I walked over and examined them.

We sat down facing the windows, sinking a foot deep into silken cushions—and sniffed; there was the same scent that was on the envelope—jasmine, I think, mixed with some subtler stuff—and still the same far-away chords of organ music.

"Let's sing hymns!" suggested Jeremy. "Or shall I do tricks? I know a dandy one with cushions."

"Please do both. I would love to watch you!" said a woman's voice; and though we hadn't heard the door move, we could see her behind the amber curtain. She came forward at once.

"Zelmira Poulakis," she announced, when we had told our names.

I may as well say right now, and have done with it, that I know nothing about women of her kind. My mother was a wrinkled old gray-haired lady with nothing subtle about her, but rather a plain straightforwardness that made you understand; and somehow, she has always stood for Woman in my memory, most of the other types being incomprehensible—welcome to anything if they will let me alone in the smoking-room.

I suppose Zelmira Poulakis is a type, although I've never seen another like her. She is Levantine, and those she-Levantines while they're still young are supple, vivacious, with eyes that say more than their lips, and lips that can kiss, curse or coax with equal genius. She had on a frock all stitched with glittering beetles' wings, that just a little more than reached her shins, and they were —— shapely shins; it was charity and art to show them.

She had the poise and ease and grace that go with the sort of education women get, who are "presented" at the smaller European courts, and her jewels, which were few, were splendid, but hardly more so than her eyes.

Jeremy—you can't put him out of countenance—drew up a sort of throne made of elephants' tusks, and she sat down facing us, laughing, speaking English with only trace enough of accent to make it pretty.

"You look rather bewildered and I can't blame you," she began. "What must you have thought! But I've heard such wonderful accounts of you that I couldn't resist the temptation. Will you forgive me?"

"Not we!" laughed Jeremy. "Forgiveness would imply that we didn't like being here. If Narayan Singh is in your hands he's all right!"

"But he isn't! Oh, he isn't! If only he were!" she exclaimed with a comical grimace.

"Suppose you shut up, Jeremy, and let her tell us," Grim suggested.

Well; she told us. She was good at telling things, and a beautiful woman in a gorgeous setting is hypnotic, mistrust her how you will. We three listened to the end without

interrupting to challenge her statements.

"Last night," she began, "there was a ball at the Greek Legation. My husband was Greek, although I am not. I was returning from the ball in my carriage with a friend at about half-past four this morning, and had stopped at the door of my friend's house about a mile from here to set her down; in fact, she had already left the carriage and my footman was in the act of closing the carriage door, when he was suddenly thrust aside by an enormous Indian dressed in a turban and a blue serge suit. My footman is a giant, but the Indian flung him aside with one hand with hardly an effort, and I'm afraid I screamed."

She appeared to be ashamed of having screamed, but Narayan Singh with two quarts of whisky inside him would frighten the Sphinx.

"My footman returned to the rescue very pluckily," she went on, "but the Indian threw him under the horses, which frightened them so badly that the coachman had all he could do to keep them from running away. My friend did run away. She has told me since that she ran indoors to get the servants, but by the time she had aroused them I was gone; so she went to bed, and hoped for the best. Philosophic wasn't she?"

Grim was sitting on my right hand. He made no remark, and didn't change his facial expression; but I did notice a sudden, stiffening of his muscles. You'll see exactly the same thing when an experienced hunter becomes aware of big game creeping out from cover.

"I don't know what the Indian intended in the first place," she continued, "but my scream apparently fired his imagination. He swore terribly in English—said that protecting queens in distress was his only occupation—and jumped into the carriage, shutting the door behind him with a slam that sounded like a big gun going off. That was too much for the horses altogether; they went off at a gallop. Luckily the footman had scrambled out from under their feet, and there is a foot-board behind the carriage; he caught hold of that and climbed on. The carriage went so fast that it was all he could do to hang on, although he tried to climb on the roof and come to my assistance that way; the top of the carriage is smooth and slippery, and the feat proved impossible.

"Really, it was the worst predicament! It was almost totally dark, but I could see the whites of the Indian's eyes, and his white teeth gleaming in the middle of his black beard, and I nearly fainted. But he sat down opposite me with his arms folded across his breast, and presently I grew calmer and began to think. You gentlemen, who are used to all sorts of wild adventures, would doubtless have known what to do; but I didn't.

"I even began to suspect my coachman and footman of being parties to a plot to carry me off somewhere; and the fact that the Indian did not try to molest me made it seem as if he might be acting on behalf of some one else. I found words at last and asked him in English what he wanted.

" 'Nothing under heaven but your Majesty's instructions!' he answered. 'I am Narayan Singh, your servant. Say but the word, your Majesty, and I will accomplish marvels—I will pull the heads off these Egyptians as a crow pulls worms out of a plowed field! Command me! Set me a task! My honor is involved! I have sworn a vow. Henceforward I serve none but queens!' "

"Can you imagine it? I asked him to stop the horses! I couldn't think of anything else to tell him to do! I knew by the overpowering smell of whisky that he was intoxicated, but he seemed mad in the bargain. I wanted to get rid of him and I'm afraid the thought occurred to me that he might get killed in making the attempt, although I hardly hoped he would really try.

"However, he didn't hesitate for a second. The carriage was swaying all over the street, with the wheels grating against a curbstone one minute and skidding sidewise the next, and it was all I could do to keep my seat, to say nothing of standing up. But he opened the door, climbed out, swung himself up on the box beside the coachman, seized the reins, and tugged at them, discovered that was no use, and jumped on to the back of the near-side horse! Both horses nearly fell, and by the time they had recovered he had their heads together and was tugging them to a standstill! Strength—such strength—he nearly wrenched their heads off! And he brought them to a standstill beside a street lamp at a crossing, trembling and too thoroughly conquered to bolt again whatever happened.

"The footman jumped down then, and the Indian struck him, calling him names and ordering him to go and stand at the horses' heads. Then the Indian came to the window and asked what he should do next, and before I could think of anything to tell him to do he was back in the carriage with folded arms, shouting to the coachman to drive on.

"My servants didn't obey him at once, and he was going to get out and kill them, I think, so I called to them to drive straight home, thinking I might be able to get rid of the Indian at the gate. But not so. There is a servant who lives in the gate-house. He opened the gate as soon as he heard the carriage coming; but before we entered I called out to the coachman to stop, which he did, with the horses' heads underneath the arch and the carriage outside. Then I thanked the Indian for having protected me and bade him good night. He bowed and got out; but instead of going away he climbed up behind on the foot-board and called to the coachman to drive on in.

"Nothing would make him get down again. He swore that he was my only protector, and that none should deprive him of the honor. He threatened to pull to pieces any one who sought to interfere, and used such frightful language, and made such a noise that I was afraid he would wake the whole neighborhood and cause a scandal.

"It occurred to me that I have an Indian in the house who might be able to manage him—a gentle old philosopher, who used to be my husband's friend, and whom I have allowed to live here since my husband died, because the house is so big, and he so quiet, and so dependent on charity in his old age, that it would have been hard-hearted not to. He is a wonderful old man. I have seen him calm human passions in a moment by his mere beneficence.

"So I made the best of an awkward situation by telling the coachman to drive on in. And Narayan Singh entered the house behind me, behaving like a family servitor except that he made more noise than ten ordinary men, and demanded to know which was my apartment, in order that he might lie down across the threshold and protect me.

"Narendra Nath—that is the name of my old Indian friend—sleeps very little, spending most of the night on the floor above this one in meditation. I brought Narayan Singh into this room, and sent for Narendra Nath, who seemed to appreciate the situation without my saying anything. He is a very wise old man, and never makes unnecessary fuss. He began talking to Narayan Singh in his own language, and within five minutes the two of them were on their way upstairs together, as friendly as you please.

"I retired. It was already after dawn, and I needed rest after all that excitement. But *déjeuner* was brought to me a little after midday, and after my toilet was made I sent for both Indians, hoping to get to the bottom of the affair and perhaps to glean some amusement from it. Believe me, I was more than amused; I was amazed.

"Narayan Singh, although not yet sober, had begun to return to his senses, and the two men had struck up a strong friendship. The surprizing thing was not that Narayan Singh should worship Narendra Nath, for he is a venerable old man, but that Narendra Nath, who has so few friendships, should reciprocate. The two men had sworn to be inseparable, and old Narendra Nath implored me with tears in his eyes to take Narayan Singh into my service.

"How could I refuse? I would do almost anything to oblige Narendra Nath. But a difficulty arose at once, which seemed to admit of no solution. It seems that Narayan Singh is a deserter from the British Army and liable to arrest for that at any minute. What was to be done? I couldn't imagine.

"Narayan Singh spoke constantly of a certain Jimgrim and his two friends Ramsden and Jeremy—he spoke of you *tout court*—gave you no titles—and he vowed that you could accomplish anything—simply anything—between you. He spent about two hours telling me astonishing stories of your prowess, and it occurred to me at last that possibly you could get him out of the army in some way without his having to pay the penalty for desertion.

"But the problem then was how to reach you, and how to persuade you to take the necessary action, without letting the Indian's whereabouts be known. I thought of a hundred methods. I even considered calling on you at Shepheard's Hotel, where he told me you were staying. But finally I hit on the solution of getting Narayan Singh to write a letter, and sending my carriage for you, hoping that perhaps curiosity would induce you where persuasion might have failed.

"However, the task of persuading remains, doesn't it! Can you arrange it, Major Grim, that Narayan Singh shall be discharged from the British Army, so that he may enter my service?"

Her smile as she asked that favor was the product of experience. She had tried it on a thousand different sorts of men, and used it now confidently. But Grim is a dry old rock, for all his vein of kindness.

"If I could see Narayan Singh himself, alone—" he suggested. And she found him harder to refuse than he did her, because his request was reasonable.

CHAPTER IV

"Jaldee jaldee Secret Society Shaitan-log Eldums Range Kabadar!"

MADAME ZELMIRA POULAKIS did not argue the point, but smiled exceedingly graciously and left the room by the amber curtain route. The beads hadn't ceased clicking behind her when Jeremy started humming the words of one of those songs that follow the British army eastward—

"Widows are *won*-derful——"

You had to admit it. Wonderful she was. But no wise fowler ever caught Grim yet by putting wonderful salt on his tail. He was unconvinced, and looked it.

"Did you spot any flaws in her story?" he asked, and I remembered that stiffening of the muscles I had noticed.

"To —— with her story and your spots?" said Jeremy. "She's perfect. Who cares if a woman draws a long bow? Let's go odd man out to see who takes her to dinner tomorrow night. D'you want to bet me I don't pull it off?"

"Dine with her," Grim answered, "but explain this first: Why did her friend not send servants for the police?"

"Scared stiff, of course," Jeremy retorted. "What Cairene woman wouldn't be?"

"Well, her servants wouldn't be, for they hadn't seen the Sikh. Why didn't they run for the police without her orders? Did she forbid them? If so, why?"

"How d'you know they didn't go for the police?" Jeremy objected.

"It's obvious. The police would have come here, questioned the servants and taken Narayan Singh away. But there's another point; while the horses were running away they must have passed more than one policeman standing on duty. Why didn't the footman yell for help?"

"Too busy trying to climb on the carriage roof," Jeremy suggested.

"D'you believe that? You saw the footman. The carriage was the same we came in, for the paint was off the wheels where they hit the curb when the horses bolted. I'm no athelete, but I could climb from that rear platform to the roof, I don't care how fast the thing was going."

"M-n, yes. But the footman's a Gyppy. He was scared," objected Jeremy. "She told a straight story. Straight enough anyhow. There's a gentleman friend somewhere, I suppose. You can't expect her to drag him in."

"Tell me, if you can, why the gateman here didn't call the police, when the carriage stopped under the arch and Narayan Singh refused to go away. Couldn't the gate-man, the coachman and the footman have kept one Sikh outside the gate until the police came?"

"She didn't want to wake the neighbors," Jeremy remembered.

"Tut! Two more tuts! Half a hundred tuts!" Grim answered. "You know Egypt as well as I do. There are only two things sacred in the whole country. Graft and privacy. You can commit any social crime in Egypt as long as you don't trespass around the ladies' quarters after dark. If she had summoned the neighbors, they'd have had their servants kill Narayan Singh. His body would have been tossed into the Nile and that would have been the end of the story. She knows that perfectly well. Now answer another question:

"Do you believe that drunk or sober Narayan Singh would desert from the Army, or pretend to desert, or imagine himself a deserter? He'd be much more likely to march up to Government House and accuse the High Commissioner of treason! Listen!"

The music that seemed to come downward from the roof, and might reasonably be supposed to come from the upper story of the next house suddenly pealed louder for a moment, and just as suddenly grew quiet, as if some one had opened the door of a music-room and closed it.

It may have been thirty seconds before the door closed again—if that was the secret of the burst of sound. It left all three of

us feeling strangely disturbed. I have felt the same sensation when tigers prowled close to a tent at night. When the amber beads rattled even Jeremy gave a nervous start, although cool gall is his life blood.

But it was only Zelmira Poulakis back smiling and looking archly shy. I got the idea that she knew what Grim had been saying. An idea, according to Heine the German poet, is "any —— nonsense that comes into a man's head." However, you don't have to let people know everything that's in your thought; Grim made a pretty good bluff at looking cordial, I followed suit, and Jeremy is always cordial to a good-looking woman.

"I am going to ask you to come with me," she said.

She stood playing with the amber beads—stage-acting. She would have held breathless any audience that had paid for its seats; but you might say we were "dead-heads," a class that is notoriously super-critical.

And now, you fellows who are never afraid of women, laugh if you like. As I got off the divan I turned to hide the movement of my right hand, making sure that the automatic pistol wasn't caught in the pocket lining. The dead weight of it felt good. That's how much Zelmira Poulakis had me hypnotized.

Grim strode forward and before he reached the curtain I whispered to Jeremy to keep behind me with both eyes lifting. He was humming a tune to himself, and his careless mood annoyed me.

I can't explain why I felt that way. Fear was ridiculous, as in the last analysis it always is; but I can close my eyes today and recall the sensation as vividly as if it had happened an hour ago.

She led us almost completely around the house through a series of magnificently furnished rooms with polished floors that must have needed an army of servants to keep them in shape. Some of the rooms had cut-glass electric chandeliers that blazed like clustered diamonds. And she walked through it all on high French heels as a goldfish swims in water—her natural habitat—she would have missed it if it weren't there, I daresay, but as it was, thought no more about the splendor than the air she breathed.

She led us at last up a rosewood stairway that had rose satin panels painted with Venuses and cupids, up two flights to a floor on which simplicity seemed all the rule again. There was a big, square landing done in plain white plaster, with an open stairway at each end and six oak doors on either side set deep in the wall.

And now we were in the midst of that infernal music. You could recognize it now. It was the stuff they play in Hindu temples when the entrance is barred to visitors and lord knows what strange rites are going on inside. It makes goose-flesh rise all over you—perfectly bloodsome stuff.

Zelmira Poulakis opened a door on the right without knocking and led the way into a room so blue with incense smoke that for a moment you could hardly breathe or see. There weren't any windows. Such light as there was came from about a dozen glowing colored lamps, and when your eyes got used to the smoke the place looked like the interior of a temple.

There was a high gold-painted screen at one end, carved into the semblance of writhing snakes; and a huge wooden image of a god with more than his share of arms was set on a platform in the middle with its back up against the screen. The music was coming over the top of the screen, and through it, permeating the whole place, so that you seemed to breathe that beastly noise instead of air. There were a few rugs and cushions on the floor. And on our side of the screen the room had only two occupants besides ourselves.

Facing us as we entered, cross-legged on a small rug with his back toward the image of the god, sat Narayan Singh scarcely recognizable. He was naked to the waist. The hair on his breast was glistening with a mixture of sweat and scented oil. His beard, that is usually curled and crisp, was straggling wild. And his long black hair, that he usually keeps tucked under a turban so neatly that you don't guess it's there, was knotted drunkenly to one side.

But his eyes were the worst of him. Half as large again as usual, as if he had been staring into the hell he promised we should know all about if we obeyed his summons. Yet they were hardly the eyes of a drunkard. At the first glance they looked terror-stricken, but the suggestion of fear vanished as you watched them. He seemed to be gazing out of this world into the next, and although Grim called him by name he took no notice whatever.

Facing Narayan Singh, cross-legged on a second rug, Narendra Nath sat meditating; and, as our hostess had assured us, he was venerable. Have you ever seen a man so advanced in years and free from care that he looks actually almost young again? That was Narendra Nath. He had a white beard falling nearly to his waist, thinner than a Westerner's beard would be, showing the line of his lean jaw. He was as bald as a bone, but had bushy eyebrows, underneath which shone luminous dark eyes.

The moment we entered he clapped a turban on his head, that made him look twenty years younger. To look from his eyes to his hands was like bridging a century in half a second. His hands were like a mummy's, but his eyes were a youth's, full of laughter and love—though love of what might be another problem.

Zelmira Poulakis and we three all greeted him, but he merely glanced once at us and said something in an undertone to Narayan Singh, who nodded almost imperceptibly. The Sikh seemed to be in a trance, and I suspected hasheesh on top of the whisky.

"You see, he is not really in a fit state to go away," said our hostess. "Narendra Nath will care for him, and under that kind influence he will soon recover. But the days will go by and the offense of desertion from the Army will increase. Now that you have seen him, can't you do something about it?"

Old Narendra Nath's bright orbs sought Grim's as if a great deal hung on the verdict, and for a space of several seconds I alone observed Narayan Singh. His eyes moved at last, closing in the process to their natural size. He studied each face swiftly, making sure he was unobserved, caught my eye, winked, smiled, nodded, and resumed his former mask of semi-hypnotized immobility.

I didn't hear what Grim said in answer to Zelmira Poulakis. Sure now that the Sikh was neither totally drunk nor drugged out of his senses—Sikhs can stand an enormous amount of both—I began edging toward the golden screen. But before I got close enough to see through its interstices, old Narendra Nath came thoroughly to life and jabbered in broken Arabic:

"Stop! Stop! Not there! Turn back! That is not for your eyes! Turn your head away!"

It was dark beyond the screen. I didn't get a chance to see through it. But the disturbance served my real purpose, for our hostess joined her protests to Narendra Nath's, and that gave me full excuse for facing about immediately in front of Narayan Singh with my heels on the mat that he squatted on.

"None of us ever interfere here," Madame Poulakis explained. "It is understood that Narendra Nath has perfect privacy. We never spy on him in any way. Even my husband when he was living never looked behind that screen."

Her statement didn't seem quite to tally with her manner of entering the room without the formality of knocking. However, I wasn't disposed to quarrel with it. I stood with my thick legs together like a Prussian on parade and made apologies, while Narayan Singh tucked something carefully into my patent-leather shoe.

"Haven't we seen enough?" our hostess asked. "I know how terribly such an intrusion must have broken up Narendra Nath's meditation. No such thing has happened since he came to live here, but it couldn't be helped for this once—could it? You forgive me, Narendra Nath?"

I guess old velvet-eyes knew English well enough. He bowed with the air of a philosopher too wise to bear resentment, but with just the added touch of authority required to suggest that he wasn't pleased, and Zelmira Poulakis marshaled us out of the room. The comparative silence in the plastered hall outside was like heaven after the grating, ghastly temple music, which again sounded more like organ notes now that the thick door shut it off.

Our hostess seemed in a hurry to get us away from that scene, but I paused long enough to stick a finger in my shoe. I found a folded piece of paper, and opened and read it as we followed downstairs and through room after room in Indian file.

In the middle of the first room I slipped it into Jeremy's hand from behind. He read it, laughed back over his shoulder at me and passed it on to Grim, who read it in turn and crumpled it into his pocket. It was written on the same sort of notepaper as the message we received at the hotel, in the same unsteady hand and with the same spread nib.

"Jaldee jaldee Secret Society Shaitan-log Eldums Range Kabadar."

It wasn't hard to interpret superficially. *Jaldee* in Hindustanee means quick, or quickly. *Shaitan-log* means devil-folk. Eldums Range suggested Meldrum Strange, although there was room for doubt on that point, for so far as we were aware Narayan Singh had no knowledge of our millionaire friend. *Kabadar* means take care, or beware. Narayan Singh had evidently been interrupted before he could finish, for there was the beginning of another word—quite illegible—and the whole thing had been badly blotted by folding while the ink was wet. I took the message to mean:

"I must write in a hurry. There is a secret society whose members are bad people. Look out for Meldrum Strange."

True, it might have meant "beware of Meldrum Strange," but that was improbable. Joining secret societies wouldn't be in Strange's line, and his motives were indubitably honest.

When we reached that great reception room, and looked out on the Nile flowing lazily in moonlight with the secrets of fifty centuries safe-kept under its abundant mud, I didn't feel enamored of Meldrum Strange's business proposal. Felt more like leaving him to paddle his own canoe.

"Let's get Narayan Singh out of this," thought I, "and beat it for a white man's country." But we were in her net already, and the lines were tightening.

We sat again on the divan with Zelmira Poulakis before us on the ivory throne affair.

"Can't you do anything for him?" she asked.

"I'm no longer in any way connected with the Army, and consequently have no authority or influence," Grim answered.

She began humming to herself, drumming on the ivory with her finger-tips and knitting her brows in deep thought. The frown made a dark shadow that suggested evil.

"Leave it to me," she said suddenly. "Please don't tell where he is. I must have time to consider. It was very kind of you to come. Now I'll ask your forgiveness again and order my carriage for you."

"I'll forgive you only on condition that you dine with us three tomorrow night!" Jeremy answered.

She laughed. No woman refuses Jeremy lightly.

"I couldn't come alone of course."

"Bring a friend. Bring two friends."

"Shepheard's? Do you know a Mr. Meldrum Strange who is staying there?"

"No," Grim answered before Jeremy could get a word in, and for about a second after that the frown on her forehead disappeared. She was palpably relieved to know that we didn't know Meldrum Strange.

"May I leave the answer to your invitation until the morning?" she asked. "I will send you a note."

Then she rang the bell and we talked pleasantries until the carriage came.

CHAPTER V

"The policy of the man in armor."

THERE was no sign of Meldrum Strange when we drove out of the great gate. Unable to see through the carriage windows, Jeremy and I opened both doors and leaned out to look for him until we reached the Nile bridge and there seemed no further use. All we learned by the maneuver was that nobody was riding on the rear platform, and I mentioned the fact to Grim, who had built a sort of fence of silence around himself. The men who make a practise of that can be counted on to spring surprizes. He came out of his reverie the moment I spoke.

"Let's get out and walk home! Quick!" he said. "Don't stop the carriage."

Dress a man in blue box-cloth with silver buttons, put him up in full view of passers-by, and he'll look straight in front of him, either from pride or shame, whichever way he's constituted. Let him be used to getting down and opening the carriage door at a journey's end, and he'll behave as if it couldn't come open without his permission. Nobody heard. Nobody saw.

Jeremy, who jumped out last, closed the door after him, and we went and leaned over the bridge parapet, staring at the Nile, in full view of a policeman on point duty, who noticed nothing remarkable about the arrival from nowhere of three men in evening dress. Excepting the Gyppy policeman we had the bridge all to ourselves.

There being three of us, we naturally had three opinions; and as Jeremy wasn't under the weather or anything like that, he naturally voiced his first, vaulting on to the parapet and sitting with his back to the moon.

"Black is black," he said emphatically.

"That's why we insist on a white Australia. You can turn a white man yellow, but you can't make yellow white. Narayan Singh came mighty near to being white, but, you see, he's 'verted. That message is just drunken stuff. He's full of hashish. He's had a handsome offer of employment. He's fallen back at the same time under the influence of Hindu superstition. And he's just sufficiently sober to remember the Army and us, and to feel ashamed. So he sent for us and then invented that bunk about a secret society in order to excuse himself. The best thing we can do is to send an ambulance for him, and engage a smart lawyer to defend him at court martial on the ground of temporary insanity."

"Why wasn't Meldrum Strange waiting for us outside? He agreed to wait until midnight," was Grim's only comment at the moment.

"Let's go back and get Narayan Singh," I said. "He has chanced his arm along with us and never failed us. The drunker he is, and the more crazy in the head he is, the less excuse we've got for leaving him."

"Narayan Singh is neither drunk nor crazy," Grim said at last with an air of absolute finality. "One bottle of whisky makes him crazy, but the effect wears off in an hour or two. Did you notice his eyes? That's an old trick; lots of Indians can do it. He was sober enough to write two messages; sensible enough to slip the second into your shoe, and sane enough to have asked to be rescued if there were need of that. As for 'verting, he was never anything but a darned good Sikh and he never pretended, hoped, or wanted to be anything else. He has stumbled on the trail of something, and it's our job to follow up."

Jeremy laughed. Young countries like Australia produce men who are young eternally. Unless accident overtakes him, Jeremy will probably be laughing at the world long after Grim and I have died of taking what we know too seriously.

"You're making 'roo-tail soup too early," he said. "Old man 'roo's not shot yet. All you've got is salt and water. See here; if that's a secret society how do they come to send for us, and why did she let us see all that temple stuff and learn where the Sikh is and all that? That isn't the way to keep secrets. Posh! The little widow, bless her, wants Narayan Singh. Probably some other rich woman in Cairo has a Sikh to wait on her, and our little friend is jealous. You can see through her make-up with half an eye. She's probably monkeying with five or six religions—takes up every new craze that comes along—believes in reading palms, astrology, Raja Yoga, Ouija, Spirit-raising, Black Magic and flirting. You watch: Narayan Singh will be carrying love-letters before the week's out."

"It's obvious she wants Narayan Singh," Grim answered. "She needs him so badly that when he insisted on sending for us she had to give in to him. The perfectly good excuse about being a deserter is proof that he's in his right senses. He doesn't know I've resigned my commission, and thinks he can't be accused of desertion after reporting his whereabouts to me. No. There's a deep game on. Why did Zelmira Poulakis ask us whether we know Strange, and why wasn't he waiting outside for us as he promised?"

"Why did you tell her we didn't know him?" Jeremy retorted.

"For the same reason that you don't tell people how your tricks are done," Grim answered, looking at his watch. "It's time to go now. The carriage has reached the hotel. They'll look for us and drive away again. Let's get off the bridge and down a side street before they return this way."

So off we went arm-in-arm, Jeremy whistling truculently because he believed Grim's argument to be all nonsense, and Grim with his thinking cap on, indifferent to criticism. He never seems to worry about another man's opinion.

We had left the bridge and were down a side street when an auto in a hurry overtook us and Meldrum Strange called out to me.

"Jump in, all three of you, quick!" he exclaimed as the car slowed close to the curb, and almost before we had time to jump in the car was off again. It wasn't the same car that he had started out in that evening. He hardly resembled the same man. His urbanity had vanished and his lower lip protruded beyond the upper one pugnaciously. He sat with one elbow thrown back on the folded hood and his right fist clenched on his thigh. Somebody was going to catch it, head, heels and bank account; no question about that.

"You men sleepy?" he snapped. "Bed? No? Go on, go on!" he barked at the chauffeur. "Drive faster!"

"Going to show us the red light district?" wondered Jeremy. "I'm surprized at a man

of your standing! What would the minister say?"

"Red ruin!" Strange exploded. "Somebody shall pay for this night's work! Are you open to consider the offer I made you this morning? Don't answer me! Don't answer me! Wait till you've heard details. I won't take 'No' for answer till you've heard the facts!"

"Fire away, old top!" said Jeremy pleasantly. "We've been seeing things too—luxury—Oh, Lord!—heaven on one floor with Venus presiding—hell above it and the devil making music through thick smoke! Hell on top of heaven—think of that! Talk to me; the other two are crazy!"

"I'll not talk for this chauffeur," Strange snapped. "Wait till we—where's a good place? Tell the fellow where to go to."

"Gizeh!" Grim ordered, and we swung off westward in the direction of the Great Pyramid, where one of Egypt's few good motor roads runs straight as a die between overarching trees.

It was as lonely and silent a road as you could find in the universe. The trees on either hand loomed up like nothing earthly, against a purple sky powdered with stars, and a cool breeze, laden with the stench of Egypt, dried up the sweat on our foreheads. Flat lands, and irrigated fields criss-crossed by motionless shadow spread themselves in a scene that would have made an angel melancholy—until we sighted the Great Pyramid, and were glad we had come.

It looms up on your left above the trees some time before you get to it, and is so enormous that your senses refuse to adjust themselves to its proportions; for you've nothing else that you ever saw to compare it to, and the comparisons they give you in the guide books have no meaning. Men built it; that's the amazing thing—built it three thousand years before the Christian era, using blocks of stone that weigh eight hundred tons apiece. They not only jacked them into place, but fitted them so skilfully that after fifty centuries of constant movement of the earth's crust, with earthquakes thrown in at intervals, you still can't shove a knife-blade in between the joints. Go and try, if you don't believe me.

Its purpose surely is to flatten the conceit of any one who thinks himself a marvel-maker—architect, artist, engineer, politician, financier, labor-leader, or whatever he may be. It fills the bill, and Lord, it makes modern Egypt look a mean, unmanly place.

We left the car by the Mena House gate, with the chauffeur fast asleep in it the moment we turned our backs on him, and walked the rest of the way, none of us saying a word until we came out on top of a new-made government road beside a newly opened tomb, and could see the vast pile dwarfing the two monsters that stand in line with it. Then Jeremy said "*imshi!*" suddenly, and we came to our senses—awake again in modern Egypt with its professional pests.

You wouldn't think a jackal could approach unseen across that moonlit level ground that hides the pyramid's foundations. You wouldn't think, for the silence, that a creature stirred, and least of all that any one would come and beg in that magnificent loneliness. But a hooded Arab had seen us and crept out of a tomb or somewhere to offer his services as guide, and the hale, well-fed ruffian whined as if God had forgotten him.

Nor would he go away. He spoke English, and insisted on his right to act as guide to any stranger coming there. Jeremy kicked him, at which he showed fight—a distinct relief after the whimpering. Then Meldrum Strange unwisely gave him money, and he went to call his friends, who came in a troop, all tagging at our sleeves and demanding backsheesh for nothing whatever.

Finally I made a bargain with the whole tribe. We would pay the market price for being guided through the pyramid passages, but wouldn't go in. Instead, we would sit down outside for as long as suited us, and they should keep watch at a decent distance, making sure that we didn't run off with the pyramid, and protecting us from interruption at the same time.

That being something for practically nothing, they agreed. We sat down on the lowest course of Gizeh's uncovered base, watched from fifty yards away by a row of hooded ghouls, who quarreled in whispers over how much more tribute they might have made us pay.

"Perhaps I was hardly fair with you fellows this morning," Strange began. "It's not my habit to discuss private affairs with any one. Perhaps I gave the impression of inviting you to join me in a hunt that hadn't started yet. If so it was a false impression.

"There is nothing new in this affair. The

scene has only shifted from Chicago and New York to Cairo. I've been following this up since long before the War. During the War our Government engaged my services at a dollar a year, and I was forced to let this slide; but directly after the armistice was signed I took it up again."

"Thought you didn't approve of war?" Jeremy interrupted.

"I don't. But the War was a fact, and I tried to help win it. Some time prior to the War I became interested in shipping—not in a big way—there were four ships of fourteen thousand tons or so that I had to take over if I didn't want to lose all my investment. They were British ships, at that time in the harbor of Alexandria, without cargoes, and not particularly marketable. I planned to transfer them to the U. S. flag, without having much notion at the time what all that involved, and I sent a representative to Egypt to see if he couldn't drum up a cargo for the States that would pay expenses over.

"There was lots of cotton being shipped from Egypt to the States—millions of dollars' worth. My man made a bid to carry some of it, and ran foul of a contract between the Egyptian Board of Commerce and a British steamship line, that gave the British a monopoly of that traffic. The ships weren't transferred yet to the U. S. flag, you understand, but there was one British company that had all the business.

"My man stormed around, but got nowhere. I cabled him at last to get any old cargo that would do for ballast, and to bring the ships over. He met a merchant named Poulakis, who agreed to charter the ships. Have you any idea how tricky a thing is a charter party? That man Poulakis either bribed my agent or blackmailed him—I never could discover which; some men corrupt others automatically. My agent signed an agreement that had more flaws in it than you'd think possible to crowd on to one sheet of paper. I couldn't countermand it; my man had full authority, and our consul in Alexandria registered the contract. —— it! I can see Poulakis smiling now!"

"Poulakis?" said Grim. "Was he married?"

"You bet he was married. Prettiest woman you ever set eyes on; but let me tell you first what happened to those ships. You never saw such a contract. It was stipulated Poulakis was to have unrestricted use of them at a ridiculously low figure for two voyages from Alexandria to New York or Boston, and for six months in any case. D'you get that? Six months. Money paid down in advance to bind the contract, and our consul's seal and signature on the document. Everything absolutely legal, and binding me hand and foot. Yet the name of Poulakis didn't appear. At the last minute he rang in a corporation in which he held shares.

"He had no trouble in getting cotton cargoes for all four ships. I daresay he could only get away with it once, but once was all he needed. He cut rates and loaded the ships full. Sent 'em to Boston. Loaded up a return cargo of Springfield rifles, ammunition, dynamite, bayonets, some quick-firing guns, revolvers and lord knows what else—all down on the manifest as hardware. Ordered the ships to sea, and tried to run those cargoes into Egypt for some —— revolution or other!

"Maybe you don't know the law. I wasn't as familiar with it then as I am now! Those ships of mine were still under the British flag, you understand. Well, Poulakis spent no money on repairs or overhaul; one ship put into Gibraltar with her condensers out of kilter, and it took a week to fix 'em, but it didn't take the British a tenth of that time to learn what was under her hatches. They let her proceed on her voyage, but as each ship drew near the Egyptian coast, bum-boats came out at night to run the contraband. British caught 'em red-handed of course. British flag; British law; inside the three-mile limit. Confiscated everything, ships included.

"If I'd already transferred 'em to the U. S. flag, I might have been able to protect my investment. I don't know. As it was, all I could do was to fire the fool who had got me into the infernal mess, and try to get Poulakis into jail in order to clear my own character. I sent a trustworthy man to Egypt with orders to hire the best lawyer in the country and dig to the roots of the whole business. You'd think that should be easy, wouldn't you? Nothing more difficult!

"D'you know what the courts are like here? Each foreign consul has jurisdiction over his own nationals. Poulakis claimed he was a Greek, and set up a cast-iron alibi of being an innocent shareholder in the corporation that chartered the ships. The

corporation was bankrupt and the directors had all bolted abroad.

"On top of that the British had their hands full of local politics and didn't want the abortive revolution advertised. The lawyer we'd hired was an Englishman, and I daresay honest, but English first and all the time. I don't blame him. From his point of view I was an American providing ships for gun-runners and trying to fix the blame on some one else? Besides, I wasn't on the spot; busy with another lawsuit in the States that might have cost me a couple of million if I'd neglected it.

"Nevertheless, it seemed to me that something should be done about Poulakis. It's a public duty to jump on a brute like that, and I owed it to myself to clear my name. So I saw the British Embassy in Washington and—you know how they are—made friends with them. Kind of politeness that reminds you of the way they finish the bearings of their machinery—but nothing doing—no ships back—only a friendly offer to soak Poulakis if that could be done without international complications. And mind you, they're men of their word.

"They must have got after Poulakis promptly; for the next thing Poulakis himself arrived in New York with a brand new wife, —— good looking woman she was, and she contrived to meet me at the house of a friend.

"I couldn't help be interested. She was wearing diamonds paid for from the profit made out of my ships, and that gave me a parental interest you might say. Amused me, too, to figure out what her game might be. She wasn't more than twenty-two or twenty-three. It was possible she'd blab out just the hint I needed to flatten her husband thoroughly. And a pretty woman is—well——"

"We've seen her too," said Jeremy. "Go on."

"What do you mean?"

"If you've seen her, you know very well what I mean! Finish your story and we'll tell you ours."

"Well, she was direct; I'll say that for her. She had the impudence of a modern college girl with the skill of an old campaigner. I don't dance. We sat out in a corner of my friends' conservatory, and she asked me point blank whether I'd had enough of defeat at her husband's hands. I assured her I hadn't started on him yet, and she laughed.

" 'Isn't he clever?' she asked me.

" '—— smart,' said I.

" 'Then why not make a truce with him,' said she, 'and form a partnership, and have the benefit of all his brains?'

"When a thing like that is sprung on you, you're mighty clever if you have an adroit answer ready. To draw out more information I asked her what sort of partnership her husband had to offer.

" 'He doesn't offer,' she answered. 'He compels!'

"I naturally smiled at that, and she elaborated.

" 'Mr. Poulakis,' she said, 'never makes friends until after he has given a taste of his power. If I could tell you the whole story of his courtship, you would understand me thoroughly. He loved me, but he did not marry me until my parents as well as I were aware that he could ruin all of us if we opposed him, and now I love him all the more because I know his power. His is the policy of the man in armor. The weak ones, who yield too easily, he makes use of, never trusting them; from among the strong ones he picks his friends. He has given you a taste of his strength, and unlike other rich men I could name you have started to fight back. When you went to the British Embassy you caused him inconvenience. He inquired about you, and came to have a look at you, unknown to yourself. Then he made ready to destroy you; and now that he is quite ready he has sent me to tell you this—that you may choose between peace or war.'

"Imagine listening to that kind of talk from a twenty-three-year-old girl in a house on Fifth Avenue! I didn't know whether to laugh or get furious."

"Why didn't you kiss her and make her furious?" suggested Jeremy.

"That's precisely what I did!" Strange answered. "But I asked her first what peace between a man like Poulakis and me would mean.

" 'You would give guarantees,' she said, 'and join us.'

"I asked her what she meant by 'us,' and then she let the cat out of the bag.

" 'We're the most powerful secret organization in the world,' she answered. 'Much more powerful than the Camorra. We make use of others, and leave to them the sardines, as it were, that are too small for our big net. We are so secret that we

haven't a name. Our existence is known and terribly feared by many governments, but none can identify us. Our affairs are conducted by individuals, but very few individuals know more than two or three other members, so none can betray us.'

" 'And what do you mean by guarantees?' I asked.

" 'You will find them profitable,' she answered. 'You will be given a chance to redeem your losses over that ship transaction, in course of which you will break the laws of the United States and two or three other countries. And you will receive protection just as long as you behave. If you were to misbehave, you would be exposed and go to jail. There wouldn't be much that you could tell, but if you should try to be indiscreet you would be killed; and all the newspapers would denounce the Black Hand or the Ku Klux Klan, or the Camorra, or some other society that has a name. And if you don't accept this opportunity, Mr. Meldrum Strange, you will be hammered and whipped and bullied and defeated at every turn until you change your mind; for my husband is one who never allows another human to refuse him. If you elect to give your answer now to me, you will save yourself trouble. Otherwise the taming of Meldrum Strange will begin tomorrow morning!'

" 'All right,' said I. 'I'll give you my answer. Tell Poulakis I've kissed his wife. I take it he'll know what that means!'

"The most remarkable thing about it was that she didn't resist—at least, not much. She wouldn't let me kiss her a second time.

" 'I like you,' she said. 'You're the kind of man it's fun to fight with! So it's war, is it? Well, take this.'

"She took a diamond ring off the third finger of her left hand and gave it to me.

" 'Send or give that back to me whenever you admit you're beaten!' she said.

"That was the last word I've had with her from then until now, although she sent me her photograph by mail at the time of her husband's death, or shortly after it. He died in his bed like a Christian, and I'm told the funeral was attended by representatives of every foreign government that keeps a consulate in Egypt. Here's the ring."

Meldrum Strange pulled out his watch-chain, and unfastened from its end a hoop ring set all around with diamonds. The stones weren't very big, but when he passed us the ring to examine and Jeremy struck a match they flashed splendidly; and they were set, with skill that is rare nowadays, in a brier branch carved from platinum. It wasn't a ring that could be easily mistaken for another one; there was probably not another like it in the world; and inside it the initials Z. P. were inlaid in yellow gold.

"The fight began next morning at nine o'clock sure enough," said Strange. "The office safe in which I kept my private ledger was broken open when I reached the office, and the ledger was missing with most of my secrets in it. A few securities that were in there hadn't been touched."

CHAPTER VI

"The more I'm defeated the harder I fight."

STRANGE paused to light a cigar, clasped the ring on the end of his chain again, and smoked in silence for several minutes. The only creatures moving were the bats flitting between us and the moonlight, and the only sound was the murmur of the Arabs' voices from a hundred yards away, still discussing ways and means of making us pay tribute. The shadow of the Sphynx looked like the pit that silence came from.

"You've no idea what the loss of that ledger meant to me," Strange went on. "It wasn't so much the difficulty of recalling intricate details of business known to few except myself. Whoever stole it had the inside facts of my positions. If I'd chanced to be overextended at the time I'd have met my Waterloo. I still was disposed to laugh at the notion of war waged on me by a secret society; but within two days I had to fight like the old guard to keep myself out of the receiver's hands.

"Every interest I owned was attacked simultaneously. I'd no sooner bolstered up one angle than I was squeezed in another. Rumors began to be whispered in the street about my solvency. Bankers who had hitherto trusted me implicitly began to ask for detailed statements at awkward moments, and to call loans without any definite excuse.

"It was no use squealing. You can't go to the police with a yarn like that. They'd laugh at you; and if I'd gone with it to bank directors they'd have shut down on my credit like a ton of bricks. There wasn't

a thing to do but fight on the defensive against an invisible enemy; and as always happens, when you really take your coat off and show what you're made of, it left me stronger than I started. It forced me to concentrate on stability, building up real resources. I had a clean stable by the time I'd won the first round.

"So when the War came the fall of prices on the Stock Exchange didn't mean much to me, except that bankers who had sent for me a few months before began coming around to talk with me instead. I had big sums on demand deposit—and the shoe was on the other foot. I made millions supporting the market, saved the bacon of men, who'd have been tickled to death six months before to see me down and out.

"And I'd learned principally this—that governments are figureheads. Governments don't want war. Nations don't want it, when they think; but they're never given a chance to think. War is brought on by the rascals who profit by it. They work the game in a thousand ways, irritating first one nation and then the other. The men who do the actual irritating are mostly blind victims of an inner clique of devils, who make mischief for sheer delight in doing it.

"I'd been twenty-five years pondering over the why of things, and that sharp experience I had served to tear away the veil. When we got into the War our Government put me just where I wanted to be, for I'm a hard man to put anywhere else. I was attached to the Secret Intelligence Department, and you'd be amazed to know what trails and cross-trails came under my notice. Of course, the game was to win the War. I'd no time to follow up ninety per cent. of what came my way, but I learned what my business was going to be after the War.

"I made up my mind, in the same way that other men take up charity or education. I decided to go devil-hunting. That's the name I call it by. And I didn't see why I shouldn't start on this Poulakis gang first of all.

"So I went to the British Embassy again, and had a long talk. That was rather like pulling the plug before starting, but it couldn't be helped, for I had to establish understanding with men who might otherwise put insuperable obstacles in the way of my doing anything.

"I did the same thing at the French and Italian Embassies, with the result that I have *carte blanche* as far as they can give it to me. On the other hand, in every instance some one in the embassy reported the conversations I'd had, and there were three separate attempts made to murder me within the week. On top of that, I was sent for by our people and cautioned not to take law into my own hands.

"It would take too long to tell you now all the ramifications of what followed. I had to lie low for a while, and I occupied the time in rearranging my affairs, making investments that can't be shaken as long as the U. S. holds together, and quietly picking up a man here and another there who'd be the makings of a first class team. Then this man Poulakis died. I was rather sorry. I'd hoped to lay him by the heels, and I supposed his death would mean the end of his organization. However, he hadn't been dead and buried thirty days when a man walked into my office as calm as you please and asked me for Mrs. Poulakis' diamond ring!

He gave his name as Andrieff Alexis, and he said with a smile like a well-fed cat's that he supposed I understood on what terms he would accept the ring back. We had quite a chin together. He told me the name of every man I'd talked with at the different embassies; the name of every man I'd hired for my private team, together with some of their past history; and many details of the steps I'd already taken toward the task I have in view.

"He ended by offering to take me over, gang and all, and he promised me more power in the world than I'd ever dreamed of if I'd swallow my prejudices and come on in. He said incidentally that Poulakis had only been a minor agent of the society, which he assured me was stronger than ever but in need of some new genuine American blood.

"So I threw him out of the office. He had the impudence to call the police, and I had to give bail for appearance in the magistrate's court; but when the case was called he didn't appear to prosecute. He'd gone. Left the country.

"Well, I sent one of my best men to Egypt—a fellow who knew French and Arabic—with orders to do nothing but mix with the people and investigate. He lasted two months. He sent me a letter every day

reporting progress, and by the time his information was beginning to be worth while they'd got him, and all that he knew of me into the bargain. He married a Levantine woman, and he's in the jail in Alexandria this minute on account of some dirty work. The truth is they'd no further use for him, so put him out of the way.

"I sent out a second man, with three assistants. Strict orders to do nothing but investigate, and to report to me in code. Fortunately it's one of those codes that can be changed completely in ten seconds, for the Poulakis-Alexis people had possession of it in a week, and actually had the gall to write me a letter composed in it. It was a clever letter, and the joke was on me, I admit.

"So I cabled for those fellows to come home and this time I sent a woman—a rip-snorter—Angel Halliday—a she-devil if ever there was one, but true to her salt. She'd worked for newspapers, and for several years for a detective agency. Face like a frozen chorus girl, and a brain that was one perennial question mark. She lasted three months, and got drowned—by accident according to the coroner—in a boating party out at Ramleh. They tell me there's a dreadful undertow at that place. They said she got drunk and fell overboard, but I'll believe it when I see that stone Sphynx the worse for liquor?

"I don't know how you men are, but the more I'm defeated the harder I fight. Casting about for ways and means I thought of Ramsden and decided to come here and see whether he wouldn't lend a hand. I took every precaution; started West by train, and returned to New York by auto in the night—boarded the Adriatic secretly under an assumed name, and kept in my stateroom all the way to Southampton. There, if you please, I was met by a gentleman who called himself Antonio Gambetta, who said he'd reserved a compartment for me on the London Express, and presented the compliments of Madame Zelmira Poulakis and Mr. Andrieff Alexis! Can you beat it?

"I had a powwow in the British Foreign Office in London next day. They gave me afternoon tea and a letter to the High Commissioner out here, requesting him to accord me facilities, whatever those mean.

"I saw the High Commissioner, and he's a dandy. He explained more Egyptian politics in an hour than I could have picked up in a year from other people. Told me with one of his dry, explosive laughs that if I'd uncover that gang I'm after he'd resign his job in my favor! Made no bones about their being too much for his people. Says they've undermined the whole police force and corrupted every politician who wasn't already rotting to pieces! He admitted quite frankly that even if martial law were reimposed there'd be no chance of scotching any but the small fry.

"Nothing remarkable happened between that talk I had with you fellows this morning and dinner-time, except that I was conscious once or twice of being watched; and in the afternoon, when I went to call on the bank through which I propose to draw on New York for funds, the manager told me that 'business firms' had been making inquiries about me. He refused to name any one in particular; said the inquiries had come through regular business channels.

"Can you wonder that when that note came during dinner I was willing to follow you in the auto? It crossed my mind that the message was a trick to get you fellows away from me. When you drove off, and I followed, four men got into the car behind and followed me. They kept their distance, and when we reached that bridge they had disappeared for the time being. But when you fellows drove through the gate of that house and it shut behind you I made my man drive to a corner, where there was a street lamp, and told him to put up the top.

"It occurred to me I'd be invisible inside the car then, but the car itself would be standing in a flood of light so that nobody could approach unseen, and I could watch the house conveniently.

"Well, he put the top up—sulkily muttering to himself; and he'd just finished when the auto that I had thought was following dashed up from the opposite direction—must have driven around several blocks to take me by surprize. Did it too. I was caught napping.

"The four men jumped out and into my car, knocking my chauffeur aside. Two of them sat on the seat in front of me with pistols pointed at my head, one man drove the car, and the other sat beside him. They weren't native Egyptians; they were Cairene dudes with polished finger-nails, physically contemptible, and out of breath from excitement and the mere jumping from one car

into the other. But they had business-like guns, and I sat still, and I didn't make any motion that would suggest I had a gun of my own.

"I'm not given to making a fuss. The other fellow's sure to say something if you keep still long enough. The dude who sat on my left had a long, inquisitive, triangular nose with a smart smile underneath it, and he couldn't keep silent to save his soul.

" 'Let us hope for your sake that you have the ring with you, Mr. Meldrum Strange—the ring of Madame Poulakis,' he said. 'We are acting on the theory that you have decided to be sensible. We are willing to pretend to believe that you came to Egypt for the sole purpose of capitulating. We are generous enough to suppose that you accumulated all those nice liquid resources in America, and arranged with bankers here, in order to be able to contribute substantially to our funds. At the house to which we will escort you, you will find all facilities in readiness for writing instructions to your bank; we even have a gold pen for you with a diamond on the end to scratch your nose with.'

"Well, as soon as he said that, of course, I realized that the odds were in my favor. A dead man can't write checks; they wanted me alive and fit for business. The car wasn't going fast; the driver didn't seem to know his business very well, and they were turning every corner they came to, with the idea, I suppose, of confusing my sense of direction; and as luck would have it we ran right into an accident. Two huge limousines with women in them had collided and were swung across the street. There were two Egyptian policemen, about eight extravagantly dressed females, two chauffeurs and two footmen all arguing at the top of their lungs, and a crowd was collecting to watch the fun.

"The driver of my car tried to pass on the sidewalk, and he used the crowd as if they were weeds and he driving a mower. But a lamp-post stopped him, and I just opened the door and stepped out. I guess they'd have used their guns in that pinch, but you see the cops were sore with them for disobeying the order to stop. They'd come near hurting quite a bunch of people. Maybe the cops wanted a change of argument anyway. They had to put their guns out of sight in a hurry, and I was glad I hadn't exhibited mine.

"I cleared out, as you may suppose. Didn't run. No need to. Simply walked back in the direction we'd come from. Hadn't much notion where I was, but guessed I'd find my way to somewhere if I kept on walking. I had it in mind to ask for police headquarters and start a hue and cry for you fellows, but hadn't much faith in the police after that talk with the High Commissioner. Walked along weighing the pros and cons of it, keeping to the broadest streets and out of the shadows as much as possible.

"I can't have been far away from the house you fellows entered—I knew I was heading toward the Nile—when my four friends turned up again in the same car, overtaking me; and although there were two or three carriages in sight, and half a dozen pedestrians, they slowed down while three of them opened fire.

"They made poor shooting, lord be praised. Broke a window and splintered a painted wooden gate, but missed me by yards. However, I made believe I was mortally hit. Spun round once, and fell, as I once saw a man do on Fourteenth Street New York when the gangsters were fighting outside Sharkey's Bar. And same as he did, I got up as soon as their backs were turned.

"Nobody inquired whether I was hurt or not. The carriages hurried by. The people on foot ran for cover, and nobody seemed to be home in the house with the broken window. Not a cop in sight. I walked on, cursing the authorities and everybody. My dress suit was in a beastly mess.

"However, I came on an auto that had just brought some one home, and the chauffeur had a whisk-broom. Made him brush me down, and hired him for the night at any price he asked. Then, as it wasn't yet midnight, I drove to a street corner near the end of the bridge and waited. Didn't have to wait long. Saw that unmistakable carriage go by with the doors open and two of you fellows rubbering—waited a while longer to find out whether you were being followed—came after you—saw you standing on the bridge—and there you are. Now tell me what happened to you, and after that whether you won't all three help me bring these swine to book."

We had told him about half of our experience, first Jeremy, then I taking up the tale, with Grim tossing in a word or two at

intervals, when I noticed a disturbance among the Arabs who were watching us. Desert moonlight outlines everything sharply, yet conceals all details; at a fair distance you can see a man distinctly, but can't tell his face from the back of his head. However, it seemed to me that some of that gang of licensed freebooters had turned about and were looking the other way. At the end of a couple of minutes I was sure of it.

Jeremy bit off a word mid-way. All four of us froze motionless in answer to that eerie thrill that warns you of something that is going to happen in the dark. It was absurd to imagine danger out in that place, for those Arabs would be deprived of their perquisites if visitors should come to serious harm. Yet danger frequently is absurd. Absurdity makes it dangerous. You refuse to believe in it, and it gets you while you laugh.

But we were in no mood to feel safe anywhere that night. If those pyramid custodians had suddenly attacked us none of us would have been surprized. But as a matter of fact it was their business alertness, that saved our skins whole, and when it came to settling with them I never paid extravagant largesse more willingly.

Their claim is, and they enforce it chiefly by grace of clamor and importunity, that no man may approach those pyramids without their escort and without paying them for the privilege. It's a sure thing nobody gets by them.

The hotel, near which we had left our car, was well beyond normal earshot, as well as out of sight, so we had heard no other car come to a stand there. However, a car had come. During the interval while our chaffeur was being interrogated the Arabs sat still, with some of them facing toward us and the rest turned about on the alert for new arrivals. So that, although six men presently came creeping uphill, avoiding the white road, the Guardians of Gizeh spotted them as owls spot mice; only, unlike owls, they promptly made a noise about it, not swooping down on silent wing, but setting up a view-halloah as they leapt to their feet and ran to meet the intruders half-way.

Quite a number of them—four or five at any rate—continued to watch us, and even came closer, lest in the disturbance we should escape without paying our shot. About twelve of them pounced on the newcomers, and the cat-and-dog-fight argument that followed was typical of Egypt—wonderful, colorful calm slit to tatters by foul cursing that sounds like smashing dishes!

I don't care how phlegmatic you are by temperament, you'll hate that voice of Egypt, cursed and cursing. It's the mother of bad tempers and the poisoner of judgment, and how the British have lived and ruled in the midst of it these fifty years passes understanding. Though I am told there are idiots who envy them and want to grab their heritage.

"——! Let's get out of this!" exclaimed Jeremy. "Tourists, I'll bet you, come to knock souvenirs off monuments! Rammy, you pay the holdup men. Jim, I'll give you and Strange a minute's start and race you to the car."

Instead, we laughed. Danger had announced itself, incongruous again. As if answering Jeremy's proposal for a race the starting shot rang through the stillness and a nickel bullet clicked on the ancient stone behind us, neatly bisecting the distance between Meldrum Strange and me.

CHAPTER VII

"We're invading the United States this year, you know!"

YOU couldn't pick a worse place in which to attack four able-bodied men possessed of repeating pistols—provided they know the Great Pyramid intimately, as we did not. We'd all of us read about the thing, and seen pictures of it; I had even been inside it twenty years before, and had a rather hazy memory of the entrance passage. I knew it led upward at a sharp angle, after first starting downward, but forgot all about Al Mamoun's forced opening that leads into the ascending passage, enabling you to reach the so-called King's Chamber without first tackling the rather difficult descent.

The Mamoun opening was up above us. In the dark I mistook it for the proper one, which is several courses higher up and the others clambered up to it after me. Imagining ourselves then in the mouth of the only entrance, peering out like insects from ninety million cubic feet of granite and limestone, we laughed to another tune, minded to stay there until morning if necessary. But again the unexpected happened. The pyramid Arabs decamped.

I suppose that having no firearms they preferred to watch the battle from a distance, and I'd be hard put to it to say why they should have risked being shot in order to prevent strangers of an alien race from shooting one another.

The Arabs had hardly vanished before the game, whatever the game might be, was on in deadly earnest.

The enemy were not using pistols after the first few rounds. They had rifles fitted with Maxim silencers, and made —— straight shooting. Out of seven shots, for instance, they put three through Jeremy's tuxedo jacket; he was propping it on a stick and fooling them beautifully, but there aren't many men who could beat that shooting at three hundred yards by moonlight, especially when you consider we were fifty feet above ground level. These evidently weren't the dudes with polished finger-nails who had missed Strange in the street. They were gunmen.

Because of the silencers we couldn't tell for a long time how many men there were. They were behind some debris thrown out of a newly excavated tomb, but the clip-clip of bullets kept up so steadily all around us that we supposed at least six m :n were blazing away. It was Grim who spotted there were only three of them.

"I've been watching the flash. Three men shooting to keep us occupied. What are the other three up to?"

"Laying a blasting charge under the Pyramid!" suggested Jeremy. "Who cares what they're up to? I like to see 'em work!"

I had said we were safe in the only entrance, and we had all been intent on watching the shadow creep slowly sidewise as the moon pursued her destiny, inch by inch uncovering the ground our enemy had chosen. They lay at last distinctly visible—three men crouching on a heap of broken rock—three parallel dark blots. And there had certainly been six men.

"I counted six," said Meldrum Strange. His voice sounded nervous.

"Six there surely were," said Grim. "If they're active men they may have climbed on the pyramid somewhere behind us. They could come along one of the upper courses then and jump on us from above."

"If that's all we needn't worry," I answered. "Dropping down on top of us in face of their friends' fire would be a bit too dangerous for men who're not committing suicide. All we need do is retire farther into the hole whenever there's a pause in the shooting."

It was conjurer Jeremy who saved that night for us, and only in the nick of time.

"The hand deceives the eye," he said, and whistled. "There's a game on. We've watched three. The other three worked it. We didn't build this pyramid. Who said it's solid? Jim, you're skipper; shoot!"

"All right. Back into the hole!" Grim answered. "The light'll be in our favor if they try to rush the entrance."

Strange struck a match, but the draft blew it out. We entered in single file, Grim leading, all bending low because the bullets coming upward at an angle threatened nothing but our heads. It's no use trying to tell how dark it was. Each kept one hand on the shoulder of the man in front and we did a lockstep into the womb of dreadful night, pursued by bullets that clicked overhead and sent noises like the ticking of enormous mechanism along into the dark ahead of us. Those sounds and their echoes were almost our undoing, for they prevented our hearing others that were less assertive and more deadly.

Mamoun's forced entrance that we were in isn't very long. We began to see ahead of us a patch of darkness less opaque. Whereas we might have been blind before, there was proof now that we had eyes; we could actually see the darkness, which was puzzling because the farther we advanced the less light there ought to have been. But we had forgotten about Mamoun's passage. It was Grim, groping the way in the lead who first got the hang of things and realized that our passage was a false one, leading at an angle into the real.

"Something wrong," he said. "The stone's all rough."

His voice went booming away ahead of us until the echoes died in a gurgle somewhere. Then suddenly he shouted:

"Down everybody! Flat down!"

If our nerves hadn't been strung to the jumping point that would have been our last experience in this world. But we went down like a set of ninepins all together, just as two pistols each flashed three times, and I swear I could feel the wind of a bullet breathe along my backbone as I fell prone alongside Jeremy.

I've never been able to believe those tales

about taking in a whole situation by pistol-flash. I think they're usually what the French call *l'esprit d'escalier*—the things that occur to a man on the way down-stairs, that he might have thought of at the time if he'd had wit enough. The first and only instinct aroused by a pistol flash a few yards from my face is the necessity to fight like two men and a boy and I'll answer for four men on that occasion—Grim, who has met as many emergencies as any fellow living; Strange, a millionaire, whose fighting had all been done hitherto in law-courts and on the Stock Exchange; Jeremy, self-trained for the love of it in the art of legerdemain, which means swift hand, swifter eye and swiftest wit; and myself. Not one of us knew quite what had happened. Not one of us failed to fight back instantly.

Our antagonists came on before we had time to draw our own pistols. Having the advantage of surprize they made the most of it, and were on top of us before the after-flash had left our eyes. But they were on top of the wrong outfit for what you'd call a comfortable time, and three to four in the bargain, which is awkward odds.

I don't know what the others did. I got a man's leg in both hands, and a kick in the teeth from Grim's heel that didn't pacify me any to speak of; and I'd hate to have to go through life with what was left of the fellow's leg when I had finished with it. We weren't fighting in the dark any more, for they loosed their pistols off like fireworks; but a gunman is at a disadvantage at close range, for he puts faith in his weapon and is just that much handicapped. There's a little nick in my right ear that I came by that night, and Jeremy's cheek got burned a bit; Grim's left hand was barked by a bullet; Strange got a kick in the stomach that took his wind and made him vomit, and a bullet through the skin under his lower left rib. Otherwise, although they had emptied their pistols before we really got going, those three men had nothing much to brag about.

SO FAR so good. I dare say thirty seconds saw the end of that, with my great rump planted firmly on the stomach of a man too stunned to squirm much, and Strange close beside me making noises like a sea-sick excursionist. Jeremy was holding down two men—the one whose leg I'd twisted and another, and Grim was already scouting forward to see whether by any chance the enemy had reserves in hiding around the corner in the other passage. I guess we should have been caught again, and done for this time, if one of Jeremy's prisoners hadn't started screaming.

Funny, isn't it, how old memories crop up. The only man I ever had heard scream that way was a tramp, who was being washed against his will in a small-town lock-up; you could hear him all over town, and the women sent a committee of twenty to investigate. That was forty years ago, but the whole picture came to mind that instant; the tramp was given ham and eggs for supper and five dollars, which at the time impressed my schoolboy mind in a way no scream ever did.

Yet I don't believe I recalled the incident for thirty-five years until that fellow started screaming in the pyramid passage, and I knew he wasn't hurt but merely summoning the neighbors.

They came with rifles, in place of ham and eggs—three of them, scrambling up the rough stone blocks outside—and I heard them, thanks to that uncleanly but strategic tramp, whose shade may Allah bless!

"Out of this!" I shouted. "Straight on—up the ramp—into the King's Chamber—we can hold out up there till Christmas!"

Grim led the way with a hand on the wall. Jeremy pulled Strange along, half-supporting half-dragging him until his wind should recover; and having nothing else to do with one hand, I seized the fellow who was doing all the screaming and dragged him last. I was possessed of a good notion and a bad one, although opinions may differ as to which was which.

I thought that a man who could feel so sorry for himself, if made a mite more sorry could be induced to tell tales out of school. And it further seemed to me that, since he had been so keen to summon the riflemen, he might as well act as a shield between us and their bullets. He wasn't much of a shield, for he wriggled like an eel and didn't weigh more than a hundred and twenty pounds or so; moreover, he managed to draw an ordinary pocket-knife and tried to stab me with it, neglecting fortunately in his panic to open the blade. If I had let him have his way and break free he would have been shot dead by his friends, for we were hardly around the bend in the passage

before the three riflemen stopped to fire a volley, and I guess they fired low by the way the bullets acted.

They surely were ruthless. It didn't matter to them whom they hit, provided they killed us in the bargain. The man I had been sitting on was shot, for I heard him yell, and the other fellow, whom Jeremy had been holding, roared out to them in French to hold their fire. They dropped him with the second volley. It didn't seem to me to be a good gang to belong to, and I wondered whether they had drawn lots, or what, for the privilege of taking us in the rear. Anyhow, I had saved the life of my enemy, so for once was a Christian in deed if not by intention.

Have you ever seen a diagram of the inside of the Great Pyramid? The passages bear about the same proportion to the whole bulk that a worm-hole does to an apple. There's a long, low straight narrow passage leading upward at an angle of twenty-five degrees, that opens into what is called the Grand Gallery, which leads upward again to the very center of the Pyramid and to what guide-books call the King's Chamber. The authorities had laid wooden boards on the narrow floor of the ascending passage with frets across to make the ascent easier for tourists; so, once Grim had groped for the lower end in the dark we went up at a fair pace, Jeremy falling back behind me as soon as Strange had his second wind, shooting his pistol off at random to delay pursuit.

There's a well-shaft, leading down into a cavern in the foundations a break in the floor, and another passage leading into the small Queen's chamber at the point where the ascending ramp opens into the Grand Gallery, and there we stopped to consider matters. Provided we kept back out of the line of fire we were safe there against any one or anything unless they tried to smoke us out, which was almost an impossibility without cans of poison gas, for it would take hours and limitless fuel to produce smoke enough. Neither did running away any further from three men, although they had rifles, seem to be the game.

"Let's go for them!" said Jeremy, who never recommended or enjoyed Fabian tactics in all his life.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a fool at the bottom of the ramp switched on a flashlight, and the man beside him fired a shot at random. All four of us returned the shot. The flashlight fell, with the switch on, and across the pool of light it made we saw the legs of three men vanishing. I guess two of them were pretty badly hit, and Jeremy, who went down at once to get the flashlight, reported considerable blood on the stone at the foot of the ramp.

It looked rather like the end of hostilities for that night. It was dusty and hot inside that mountain of stone; we were all getting thirsty, especially Strange, and there was nothing amusing in the prospect of a vigil in there until dawn. But, as Grim remarked, we'd probably get sniped on our way out if we tried to escape before daylight.

"And besides, we've a prisoner."

Jeremy turned the flashlight on him. He started to yell again as if he were being tortured.

"You're making a noise too soon," said Grim. "We're going to question you, and if your statements don't tally with what we know, we're going to put the glowing ends of cigarets to all the tender places we can find."

I disliked the prospect of that nearly as much as our prisoner did. When Grim says a thing he means it, and I would not have refused to help him.

The prisoner was a good-looking fellow, a little bit too smoothly groomed and rounded off to win instant favor with any but the underworld. His silk suit was torn, but he still looked foppish. One side of his face was almost intellectual, the other obviously criminal, and both sides were impudent, his bright eyes peering at you sharply like a sparrow's. There was a something pathetic about him that you couldn't exactly diagnose, and he had little bits of feet encased in patent-leather shoes, and jeweled rings on three fingers of each hand.

"We'll take you where your yells can't be heard," said Grim. "Where's the King's Chamber, Ramsden?"

You couldn't miss the way, now that we had a light—up the Grand Gallery, climbing along the ramp on one side—under a low block that they call the Granite Leaf through a tiny antechamber into the Mystery of Mysteries, the oblong room with unadorned, polished granite walls, containing a stone sarcophagus that never held mummy nor had lid. I've read eight or nine books that pretend to tell the secret of that thirty-four by seventeen room in the midst of ninety million cubic feet of squared stone

and don't believe that any of them have it right. It's still the mother of all secrets—as the Sphinx, smiling outside in the desert admits—and the very place in which to hear secrets told. We sat our prisoner down on the dusty floor with his back to the sarcophagus, and Grim squatting down in front of him got busy.

Grim is an expert. He goes at his man as if unraveling a knot, picking out the key-snarl cannily. I would have asked what the fighting meant, beginning at the loose end, as it were, but not so he. He began by requesting us all to light cigarets, so we leaned with our backs against the wall facing the entrance and smoked, although the sweat was streaming from us and tobacco tasted like salt fish; but the hint wasn't lost on our prisoner.

"You gentlemen wouldn't do such a thing as that?" he whined in English. "You look like decent men, surely you wouldn't demean yourselves by burning a little man like me? You're not seriously injured, and it wasn't I who——"

"Answer me!" Grim commanded. "On what terms may Mr. Meldrum Strange surrender, and to whom?"

If he had turned and shot me, I wouldn't have been more astonished. The face of Meldrum Strange was good to see.

"Why—to Madame Poulakis—he must marry Madame Poulakis—that is understood. He must marry her and make settlements."

Strange coughed explosively, too contemptuous for words.

"Maybe I'd do instead?" Jeremy suggested. "I'd settle a rosy future on her. Strange, old boy, why not hire me to act substitute?"

"It's not too late to surrender?" demanded Grim.

Our prisoner answered excitedly:

"Why no; no, no; of course not! Our people would be quite satisfied—only we all have to commit ourselves, you know, or there'd be no loyalty."

"Your people, eh? What's your name? Quick! Out with it!"

"Oh, I don't mind telling you Poulakis is my name. I'm a nephew of the great Poulakis; everybody knows that. Ask any one in Cairo, and they'll tell you I'm mixed up in all the 'Hig' Lif'*. But you can't get evidence against me; that's where the rub comes in! I've been tried lots of times. I've even been court martialed. Hee!"

He was recovering his vanity, which is what some men pack instead of pluck. It's often hard to tell the difference, until you prick the container.

"Suppose we take off one of those silk socks and a pretty patent-leather shoe. They say there's a place between a man's toes where fire hurts horribly," said Grim.

Mr. Poulakis junior sat on both feet at once like a Turk and shuddered. Jeremy held the spotlight on him steadily and he hadn't a private emotion left—couldn't glance timidly sidewise at us without Grim knowing it.

"What proof have we," demanded Grim, "that if Mr. Meldrum Strange surrenders he won't be murdered?"

"No proof. Absolutely none. We never offer proof. We simply keep our promises. Never fail to do that. Never, never. That's all the trouble with that man Strange; we promised we'd get him if he didn't accept the offer that was made him, and we'll do it; you needn't doubt that for a minute. We'll certainly do it. If we broke promises there'd be no fear of us or faith in us."

"Are you authorized to make promises?" Grim asked him.

"Oh, no, not at all. I'm working my way in, you know. I'm what we call a gentleman cadet. You see, I had influence of the best sort, being the great Poulakis' nephew."

"Knew awkward secrets, I suppose?" Grim suggested.

"Oh, yes. I knew a thing or two. But that wouldn't have helped. It was even a disadvantage. But the family connection helped to offset that. Oh, that's no secret; every one in Cairo knows my influence. I get more practise than perhaps you'd think."

"Practise?"

"Oh yes. I'm a lawyer. Belive me, I win cases for the right people. If the people who are slated to lose bring a case to me, I tell them I'm too busy and send them elsewhere."

"Why should Mr. Meldrum Strange marry Madame Poulakis?" Grim demanded. "Wouldn't settlements be enough without that?"

"Oh dear no. We find wives for all the big fish that come into our net. They'll make me marry, when I'm strong enough to

*High Life—all that the moneyed cosmopolitan Egyptian cares about.

be dangerous. The rule is that you mustn't trust a man without a woman to keep him from turning honest. So many men, you know, get sentimentally moral as they grow successful."

"Madame Poulakis is considered strong enough to manage Mr. Meldrum Strange?"

"Oh certainly. But, if you want my candid opinion, she's a bit of a handful for them as things are. She's inclined to be romantic, and that's the deuce. All Cairo has heard of her goings on. She believes in esoteric foolishness. Keeps an Indian magician to study the stars and do hocus-pocus. I've heard a story about her being in love with Meldrum Strange. No doubt she wants to be the wife of an American millionaire, and that would suit our people finely. We're invading the United States this year, you know."

"You want Mr. Meldrum Strange to go back there and work for you?"

"Yes, that's it. He'd be heavy artillery, wouldn't he! Of course, as I told you, I'm not in the inner council, only a gentleman cadet. We have cadets, too, who aren't gentlemen, but they never learn anything except how to do the rough work. The five who were with me tonight were plain cadets. They just do what they're told. The highest promotion they can get is to be master-craftsmen; except that there's said to be one grand master-craftsman who is on the inner council. But I don't really know about that; only members of the inner council know who the inner council really are."

"Fortunate we caught you, isn't it!" said Grim.

"For me, yes. Not for you, unless you're sensible. Your only chance of escaping with your lives is to be sensible and yield. We never fail to keep our promises."

"How d'you make it out fortunate for you that we caught you?" Grim demanded.

"Well, you see—that's obvious, isn't it? I was sent out tonight to get you. If I'd gone back with a failure against me, I expect that would have been the end of my prospects. But if I deliver you alive they'll consider me for a more important post. I'm glad to have this chance to talk with you. You can kill me, but that won't help you. You can take me back with you to Cairo, perhaps, and lodge me in the jail—also perhaps; but I think you would never reach Cairo. If you do reach Cairo, you can report all I've said; somebody will write down your statement with his tongue in his cheek, and you can all four solemnly swear to it. Unofficially quite a number of people will believe you, because you will be telling what quite a number of people know. But the newspapers will say you are mad, and officially your story will be described as a mere mare's nest. Also you will die. Our agents are everywhere."

"Whereas, if Mr. Meldrum Strange surrenders?" Grim suggested.

"Ah! Then it is equally simple. If he surrenders and gives proper guarantees, there will then be initiation. Once initiated, he may recommend you others. If recommended, you will be given a chance to prove your availability. But if he prefers not to recommend you, you will be killed, of course, in order to protect him."

"What is the use of listening to you, if you're not allowed to make promises?" Grim asked him.

"I am allowed to accept the surrender of Meldrum Strange."

At that he raised his voice, and his eyes sought those of Meldrum Strange among the shadows.

"Let Meldrum Strange take a leaf out of our book," he said slowly. "Let him remember promises. I'm told that once in New York he kissed Madame Poulakis and said to her 'when you're tired of your crook of a husband, come to me. I'm single.' They tell me Meldrum Strange has never married. What a romance for him! What an adventure! I wish I were in his shoes!"

Grim thought a minute, in the way a man studies a chess-board, taking his chin in his left hand.

"Give me that torch, and take him out of earshot, Jeremy," he said at last.

So Jeremy took our prisoner by the shoulder and shoved him out under the Granite Leaf, through the so-called anteroom into the Grand Gallery, whispering out of the corner of his mouth as he handed the torch to Grim—

"Cast my vote, Jim."

Grim waited until Jeremy's whistle announced that he had reached the farther end of the Grand Gallery; but he had already made his mind up, and his face as he went and leaned his back against the sarcophagus was a picture of satisfied amusement.

"How about it, Strange?" he asked. "If Grim, Ramsden and Ross agree to join this

hunt with you, are you game to surrender to that gang and track things down to a conclusion?"

CHAPTER VIII

"Indiscreet if subjected to sympathy."

MELDRUM STRANGE hesitated palpably. He didn't like handing over to Grim the direction in general, which was what Grim's proposal amounted to. I don't think he was afraid of being killed; but he didn't enjoy the possibility of being found with proof on his person of connection with crooks. Obviously, if ever the crooks should begin to suspect him, their simplest course would be to expose him and leave the law to take its course.

"You see," said Grim, making the flashlight dance on the ancient wall in front of him, "the only possible way to destroy this organization is from the inside. Their strength must lie in having accomplices in government departments. So if we join them and try to protect ourselves at the same time by informing the authorities, some spy in a high place is sure to give our game away. It's the whole hog or nothing. Either quit, and escape with our lives—which I think I can show you how to do; or turn our backs on society and plunge right in, trusting to clear ourselves at the proper time. My advice to you, Strange, is to back out of it and run for cover. That's personal; man to man."

"I won't do that," Strange answered, beginning to chew one of his cigars. "I suppose we could take the High Commissioner into our confidence."

Grim laughed.

"He'd put the hat on the whole thing right away. Imagine yourself High Commissioner. Imagine an American millionaire coming to you with any such proposal. Think what a fix you'd be in if he should get scuppered, with the U. S. newspapers roaring for your blood, and the members of this secret gang working to prove that the dead millionaire was really responsible for all the sins of Egypt! You would tell the millionaire to get out of the country quick. You made a bad break consulting him yesterday, if you don't mind my talking frankly."

"Then you propose to join this gang?"

"Exactly. There has got to be a point of contact. You can't catch fish on dry land. You can't squelch crime from an armchair. You've got to dig down in."

"Good enough, but —— it, you heard what was said about guarantees. They'll expect me to commit a murder, or something like that.

"They'll know you wouldn't take to murder. They know human nature. They'll have everything arranged. Depend on it, if you accept their terms, they'll take a first mortage on your freedom, as well as considerable cash. And after that, if one of us makes one false step, *'Mafeesh*—finish!' as the Arabs say. Watch your step, Strange!"

We discussed the pros and cons for half an hour, and little by little, what with the ancient mystery of the place with its four smoke-blackened, hand-rubbed granite walls that have stood for five thousand years without as much as hinting at their purpose, the excitement of fighting in that ancient place, and all his determination that had brought him as far as Egypt on a quixotic mission, Strange did what was inevitable.

"I'll go you, Grim," he said at last. "I've no family to speak of; only distant relatives, who'll contest my will if I don't outlive them. There are clubs I belong to that—oh, well, all that looks rather small from this distance. Call your friend Jeremy. I'll go you."

So I whistled and Jeremy drove Poulakis junior along in front of him, taking the flashlight back from Grim and turning it on each of our faces. He didn't need to ask questions. Neither did Poulakis.

"How should I communicate with Madame Poulakis?" Strange demanded.

"Easily!" Poulakis answered perkily. Send me. If you were to leave this pyramid without sending me in advance, you would never reach Cairo alive, you know. Even if I were with you, that wouldn't help. They'd kill me too! The only thing is for me to let the right people know that you've surrendered at discretion."

"How do you propose to return to Cairo?" Strange demanded.

"Well, I shall not use your car, for it will not be there. By the way, you owe me for the hire of that car. I paid the man two pounds and sent him off, so as to get him out of the way. I expected to recoup myself out of your pockets after we had shot you. I have saved you three pounds; you

had agreed to pay him much too much. Suppose you liquidate the obligation; honor between thieves, you know!"

It was as good as a show to see Strange battle with emotion as he peeled two one-pound notes off a wad and passed them over. He enjoyed it about as much as a missionary would like putting wood under a cannibal's cooking pot, and Grim turned his face away to hide a smile. But Jeremy jumped to the occasion, establishing himself firmly in the good opinion of Poulakis junior.

"Match you for it!" he said instantly. "Come on. I'll toss you for the two pounds!"

Jeremy's silver coin rung in the air. Poulakis cried "Heads!" and Jeremy gave him two more pounds, hardly glancing at the coin as he caught it.

"Again—double or quits!" he insisted, and this time it was Poulakis who spun a coin; but Jeremy cried "Tails," and it was Jeremy who caught it in mid-air, and displayed it in his palm head-upward. He passed over two more pounds.

"I've only one pound left," he said then. "Want to toss for that?"

Poulakis won. Jeremy paid with a laugh. Grim took the flashlight and led the way out into the Grand Gallery, Jeremy falling behind to whisper to Strange and me.

"Let that sort of snipe think you're a gambler and he's easy forever after. Play high and lose to 'em. Nothing makes 'em trust you sooner. Let's all bet like the —— whenever we think we're being watched. Show the cash. We can straighten up afterward."

If Jeremy could have his way, the world would be run like a Gilbert and Sullivan opera, with Jeremy flitting from pillar to post uncovering laughs as swiftly as the audience could stand it. We agreed to become gamblers.

At the foot of the first ascending passage the blood had almost vanished, soaked up in the limestone dust. There was no sign of a dead man, although there was blood on the floor of Al-Mamoun's tunnel, where the rifle-volley had just missed us and caught our opponents. Our assailants had sneaked in and carried away their fallen.

Moreover they had gone, for the pyramid entrance was blocked by the Arab guides, who clamored for their money, demanding ten times what they had bargained for because a fight had taken place. Poulakis himself drove a bargain with two of them to carry him as far as the Mena House Hotel "because the sand might get into his shoes."

So they bore him off, we continuing to sit there yawning, watching the dawn rise mauve and golden, watched in turn by the remainder of the guides. We didn't propose to pay them as long as they would sit there and protect us by their presence from another surprize attack, any more than they proposed to let us out of arm's reach until they had our money.

And you know, the dawn makes an awful lot of difference to the aspect of a plan. Be as enthusiastic as you choose within four walls in the dark, you'll need to be a man of iron resolution to feel the same way outdoors in the early morning. The earth begins to look more real, and the ideas visionary. Difficulties, that in the dark were part of the dark and as intangible and vague, grow raw and real in daylight. If any one had come to us then with an ounce of commonsense persuasiveness I believe he could have talked even Grim into abandoning the plan within five minutes.

But no one came who had any interest in changing our course, and none of us cared to hoist the white feather, so we sat there in as deep silence as the Arab guides permitted—which is to say, in the midst of a crow's chorus—until the two who had carried Poulakis came back to tell us that a car was waiting for us near the Mena House Hotel. Even so, we didn't pay them until they had accompanied us all the way to the Mena House, and seen us into the car. They formed a fine unconscious body-guard, and we were sorry to leave them.

The car was a truly magnificent affair, with leopard-skin robes and a driver who outshone any darky ever seen in the States. All traffic rules—if there were any—went by the board, and we drove to meet destiny at fifty miles an hour, bellowing through a horn like Gabriel's trumpet to the early farmer-folk to clear the ways. They cleared it, too, right into the ditch quite frequently, being used to the ways of the Egyptian pasha.

I really don't know what we expected—what we supposed our destination was. I had a vague notion that we were on the way to Madame Poulakis' palace where conspiracy would be already working full blast. But that was leaving Egypt out of the reckoning. Few criminals are habitually early risers.

We were taken straight to Shepheard's Hotel, where the only suggestion of intrigue was two scented envelopes handed to Grim by a sleepy Soudanese porter, who professed not to know who had brought them. The first was from Madame Poulakis, addressed to us all:

You dears, how happy I am! I have sat up waiting for the news and fearing the worst! How I congratulate you! And myself! And all of us! *Mon dieu*, how you must be tired and sleepy, for I can hardly keep my own eyes open, yet you must have spent ten nights in one. So rest yourselves. This evening must find you well recovered. It is with delight that I accept your kind invitation to dine with you. As I shall take such advantage of your kindness as to bring three friends, please perfect your generosity by inviting Mr. Meldrum Strange to your dinner to meet me! After the dinner, if agreeable, we will all attend a little rendezvous *chez moi*. Yours most cordially, Z. P.

The second was from Narayan Singh, written in a much more sober hand than his former communications.

To Major J. S. Grim, the respectful salaam of Sepoy Narayan Singh.

Jimgrim, sahib,

Fortune that forever favors your honor's interest sent me to this house suitably drunk, in which condition brain is too torpid to expel what enters ears, and eyes are too slumbrous to avoid seeing things not meant to see. Subject your approval, shall continue debauch, disposing of drink and drugs unofficially but accumulating official intoxication. Key to situation is *Memsahib*, who might prove indiscreet if subjected to sympathy. Details of little affair in Gizeh already known to many people. There are several spies in the hotel, but small danger until this evening, when the *memsahib* will attend dinner with other *memsahibs* appointed to prevent indiscretion. Much murder, including *memsahib* and all of us, will definitely take place after midnight unless plans regarding Strange sahib work without hitch. In haste,

Your honor's obedient servant,
Narayan Singh.

"—— it! Is that Sikh for us, or against us?" Strange demanded, passing the letter back to Grim.

Grim answered.

"He has the eastern view-points," Grim answered. "He'll not respect western squeamishness. But he's one of us, first last and all the time!"

CHAPTER IX

"I understand you have changed sides!"

IT WASN'T any use sitting there wondering what Narayan Singh might mean by "indiscreet if subjected to sympathy." We disgusted the hotel folk by ordering light breakfast, and went to bed as soon as we had swallowed it, doubling up for extra safety. Then we disgusted the hotel folk a second time by insisting on lunch at three o'clock. So far we might have been prepaid tourists, seeing sights in the sweat of our brows.

But three-thirty brought an ambassador on the wings of impudence, if that's the right name for an imported sporty model car painted maroon and yellow, with a brace of pug-nosed Egyptian pages in the rumble up behind. And lord, how that ambassador did like himself!

We were sitting on the veranda in cane armchairs when he approached, doffing his imported straw hat daintily and pulling off his yellow imported gloves. He wiped his forehead with an imported silk handkerchief that smelt of imported opopanax, lifted the knees of his London trousers to display his Paris socks, and sat down uninvited in the chair in front of us. Then he smiled to show his nice white imported American teeth, and waited for us to say something. We said nothing, all four of us simultaneously and with one mind.

He consulted his gold wrist-watch; but if he meant that for a hint we didn't take it. As he polished his finger-nails with the inside of a glove he kept looking at Strange as if expecting him to speak first.

I never saw a man I like less. I think he had rouge on his cheeks, although I won't swear to that; it may have been a high complexion resulting from a little mixture of Hamitic blood. There was a dark, suggestive iris on the finger-nails he polished so thoughtfully that entitled him to the benefit of the doubt regarding rouge.

What made the effeminacy worse was an evident strength of physique. He had a swordsman's wrist, and was wiry from head to heel, packing none of that fat under the ribs that makes most Cairenes over thirty years of age incapable of serious exercise.

His face was sly and arrogant—the face of a rascal who understands human weakness and habitually trades on it—almost classical at the first glance, totally repellent at the second. You could see he was confident of possessing influence, contemptuous of all who might lack it, but really brave or courageous never.

No man possessing his combination of inquisitive nose, cruel mouth and yellowish eyes that strip naked whatever they see,

could sell me a quarter for twenty-five cents, let alone get information from me. But he was used to being treated with great respect, and our silence rattled him.

"A little different to our last meeting in New York, isn't it, Mr. Strange?" he said at last, with a hint of a sneer in his unexpectedly musical voice. I guess he sang love-songs to a guitar in his less inhuman moments. "You remember me, of course?"

"I remember kicking you out of my office," Strange answered.

"No need to tell you, then, that I am Andrieff Alexis. I propose that we take the rough-handling to which you were subjected last night as tit for tat, and call the personal score even, Mr. Strange. Is that agreeable to you?"

Strange growled something or other half under his breath and went on chewing one of his cigars, sitting back with his stomach out and both hands gripping the arms of the chair. It was surprizing that with all that stomach for handicap he had been able to throw out such a man as this who called himself Alexis. Maybe it gave a true line on the latter's courage.

"Good. Let us call that balanced, then. I understand you have changed sides."

Strange made no answer. I began to suspect that Alexis was putting a bold front to a weak position, and the glint in Grim's quiet eyes confirmed my guess.

"You see," he went on, "we don't allow personal quarrels among members. Before a new member can be admitted there is inquiry into such questions as whether any member has a grudge against him. Unless I were to give my personal assurance on that score you couldn't be approved. People who apply for admission but fail to be approved are put out of the way. I made up my mind to do the handsome thing and call on you to bury the hatchet."

At that Strange showed his caliber. He seized the upper hand.

"I guess you mean your mind was made up for you," he retorted. "You're not the kind of person who gets kicked and forgives it. Your organization made war on me because they want my help. They won't let such a little matter as your personal feelings stand in the way of my joining them. That's what brings you here, now isn't it?"

"I assure you——"

"No use your assuring me of anything! I challenge your authority to represent any one except yourself!"

"Oh, very well," Alexis answered. "If you prefer to keep on quarreling——"

"Quarreling?" said Strange. "Ten men like you couldn't quarrel with me! If you want to make your peace with me, you can do it by taking care not to offend me in future."

Alexis showed his false teeth in a smile that was meant to suggest resources in reserve, but it hardly hid exasperation.

"Well," he said after half a minute, "we've no use, of course, for sentiment. Nobody expects you to kiss me on both cheeks. I accept your statement that you have no personal quarrel with me. I have none with you. My dealings with you have been official. Your assault on me in New York was therefore as impersonal as that of one soldier on another on a battlefield. I am glad you appreciate that. But let me tell you something, by way of warning; a rule of our society is that members must submit their personal differences to a committee of three, whose decision is absolute. A new member who picked a quarrel with one of long standing would be sentenced to death. A case of that sort happened recently to my knowledge."

"Is my understanding correct that I am to be passed on for membership tonight?" demanded Strange.

"I believe perfectly correct."

"Will you be present?"

"Er—no. No, I imagine not."

"Umph! You have to report to some one, though, that you've made your peace with me?"

"I shall do that presently."

"Very well. Will you carry a message from me?"

"I am willing to repeat it."

"Tell 'em this, then. If there's to be peace it's between your organization and mine. These men you see with me are members of my organization. They come in with me or I stay out. There's nothing to argue about."

"But you're in no position to dictate on what terms you will come in," Alexis answered rather hotly. "We're self-perpetuating, we select our membership."

"That's my message," Strange retorted. "They come in with me, or I stay out!"

"I will convey your message."

Alexis sat fanning himself with an ivory-handled horse-tail fly-switch. I think he expected us to offer him a drink. At the end of three or four minutes' silence he got up, doffed his wonderful straw hat very gracefully, and drove away in the maroon and yellow car with the exhaust wide open to call attention to his finery.

Grim nodded. "Excellent! He'll report every word of that."

"We're being watched," answered Jeremy. "Gamble. Quick!"

We began to play "Two up," Australian style, betting in pounds and fives and tens on every toss of the coin. Lord knows how many hundred pounds of Strange's money changed hands in twenty minutes, for it's amazing how the luck runs when you mean to return your winnings afterward. We were hard at it, when another individual crossed from the far end of the veranda and took the chair vacated by Alexis. Grim glanced once at him and kicked my shin. I nudged Strange and Jeremy. We stopped the game and ordered whisky-and-soda, which gave the new arrival an opportunity to show his hand. He looked like an Englishman who had been drilled—perhaps a retired Army officer.

"I wish you men would invite me to drink with you," he said suddenly. "I've just come here from Kantara on purpose to talk with you and I don't want to attract attention."

We obliged him and he studied all the other people on the veranda rather dramatically before broaching his subject.

"My name is supposed to be McAlister," he began then, sipping slowly at his drink. "You, I believe, are Mr. Meldrum Strange and Mr. Ramsden, Americans; Major Grim, also an American but of the British Army; and Mr.. Jeremy Ross, Australian. Am I right?"

There was a slight slip, but Grim didn't correct him; technically, perhaps, he still was of the British Army, and anyhow, it isn't wise to squander information at the first excuse.

"The Administration is quite familiar with most details of your present predicament," the man who called himself McAlister went on. "All that took place at the Pyramid last night is known. The Arabs reported it."

"Oh, I'm glad to hear that," said Grim. "What did they say took place inside?"

"They reported everything—told all about the fighting, and how you carried a man named Poulakis up into the King's Chamber. Everything's known."

Grim nodded—more to us than to him, and there was a smile behind his eyes. Strange started chewing a new cigar. The Arabs weren't there when the fighting took place; they couldn't possibly have seen us carry off Poulakis, and that was all about it.

"It's understood, of course," he continued, "that your sole purpose is to expose this gang. I've been brought specially to Cairo to get in touch with you and act as liaison officer between you and the Administration. So if you'll take me into confidence, we'll set a trap for this gang and catch the principals."

Grim shook his head. " 'Fraid not," he answered. "After what took place last night, we'd be afraid. It seems perfectly clear to us that the Adminstration offices are honeycombed with crookedness, and we've decided to let things take their course."

"Well, at least you'll give evidence?" asked McAlister with an air of being scandalized.

"I guess not," Grim answered. "We'd only get murdered. We prefer to live."

McAlister said no more, but swallowed the remainder of his drink and walked away.

"Page one, chapter one of our initiation," Grim remarked when he was out of earshot.

"Clumsy stuff!" Strange added.

"The funny part is," said Grim, "that I know that fellow. I've a long memory for names and faces. His real name is Smith. He was cashiered out of the Army for misappropriating money, and I suppose the poor devil picks up a living how he can. He's no insider. He hasn't brains enough to be."

The next man they sent to test us was more dangerous. He was an honest to goodness Government official, with the title of pasha and a suitably worried air—a neat, nice-looking little man, wearing a red *tarboosh* but otherwise dressed in European style; and in order to establish his identity beyond all question, he had one of the hotel under-managers come and introduce him to us.

"Ibraim Noorian Pasha!"

He accepted a cigaret, lighted it nervously, and smoked for a minute or two with

his knees close together and his ebony cane laid over them; —— diffident he was.

"Hem! I am a department secretary. Police department. No, nothing to drink. Ahem! That affair last night. At the pyramid. Disagreeable business. Going altogether too far. We shall get a bad name here in Egypt. Ahem! No sooner self-government in sight than things like this happen. Won't do! No. It must be stopped. Selfish individuals spoiling the future for everybody else. Spoiling everything."

"What do you propose?" asked Grim.

"Ahem! Delicate matter." His voice, too, was delicate. He had delicate brown eyes that kept you thinking of a mouse. "Quite frankly, I'm taking my life in my hands to talk to you."

"Oh, nonsense!" answered Grim.

"No, not nonsense! Unfortunately the police are totally corrupt. Can't depend on any one. All the fault of the English. Things completely out of hand. A few of us might straighten matters out, if we had assistance. Ahem! I want you gentlemen to help me—confidentially. Quite confidentially. We have spies. Police department spies. They bring us information. Ahem! The rascals who attacked you last night hope to get you to go to America. Work for them there. Bold people. Agents everywhere. Quite too many for us, unless we get assistance. Police need people like you. Now—ahem! Why don't you pretend to agree with them? Then expose them to me? I'm quite frank with you. I'm hoping for reformation that would almost be revolution in the police department. A coup such as that would promote me to be head of the department. We would have a practically new police force in no time. I can guarantee your protection meanwhile. Ahem! Will you do it?"

"No!" said Grim. "I don't believe in your police protection. How much were we protected last night?"

At that Ibraim Noerian Pasha taxed us with supine immorality. "The white races are growing degenerate!" he announced with an air of pained conviction. But Grim uncovered the weakness of his position.

"If you don't like our attitude why don't you arrest us as material witnesses?" he asked.

"Pffaah! The English would order you released immediately."

And he got up and left us, walking away in a fine fit of assumed anger with his *tarboosh* set at an angle that made him look like a bantam rooster.

"Here endeth the second lesson!" announced Jeremy.

Nothing further transpired until we dressed for dinner and came down again to the veranda to await Madame Poulakis and her friends. There is no limit to Egyptian surprizes. They came half an hour ahead of the appointed time in two closed carriages that wouldn't have looked badly at a coronation. Up on the platform behind the front carriage stood no other than Narayan Singh, sober as a judge, gorgeous in new turban, and silk from shoulder to heel, with a simitar, if you please, tucked into the sash at his waist. It was he who got down to open the carriage door and escort Madame Poulakis up the hotel steps.

We had ordered a special dinner. There was no use going to the dining-room at once for it wouldn't be ready. The three women whom Madame Poulakis had brought were married, if rings on their hands meant anything, and well used to being waited on hand and foot with all the luxuries. "Cocktails in a corner! Who'll play?" asked Jeremy, striking an attitude—and they would all play, obviously.

Jeremy led the way to a corner lounge, and Grim managed to get a word to me.

"Cairene women are never punctual," he said. "There's purpose in this. Suppose you walk right on through and see whether Narayan Singh doesn't follow you."

MAKING no excuses, I shoved both fists into my jacket pockets and strolled through to the palm garden. There I sat down on a bench beyond the big fountain in the center, with both eyes lifting to make sure there were no spies in close attendance. It is in just such simple ways that fish escape from nets and plots crack open. Nobody paid any attention when Narayan Singh, dressed as a servant, followed me through the hall ostensibly toward the rear where he belonged. He came straight to where I was waiting, and sat down beside me.

"*Sahib*," he said, "our Jimgrim has a dangerous friend in Meldrum Strange. It is all one to the gods whether a man is drunk or sober, and at times they need a

drunken man. Yesterday in the very early morning I was drunk. But the whisky was good, and I only had a bottle of it. I rang for more, but the black *badmash** who answered told me impudently that the bar was shut; so, being wrathful and indignant at such limitations, I set the furniture outside on the veranda, leaving a naked room, and went out in search of some place where conviviality knows no limit and a man's thirst isn't held answerable to the clock.

"But they run this city like an army canteen, *sahib!* I walked far, but found no liquor. And having found fault with an Egyptian policeman, who refused to direct me to an open drinking-place, and who blew his whistle lustily from underneath the garbage in a night-cart into which I thrust him to teach him manners, I set out to put great distance between this hotel and me, not wishing that you *sahibs* should be disturbed on my account.

"So I crossed the Nile by a bridge, cursing the water for being unintoxicating stuff; and if curses have value, *sahib*, the Nile in its next life will be a sewer flowing in the dark under unclean city streets! Ever seeking whisky, I walked on and on, not drunk enough to be unreasonable, but with a certain ardor in my veins for conquest and the clash of forces. My intellect was alert and rational, for I recalled that I spoke to myself in English, French and German as I walked along; but my heart had the mastery, and intellect could only serve the heart that night. First I desired more whisky; but after that I longed above all else to find a damsel in distress and to smite her enemies. At that hour the gods had use for a man exactly in that mood!

"There was a fracas, *sahib*, a fracas in the dark, and it was music to me! I approached a house that resembled nothing else so much as one of those new palaces our fat, degenerate rajahs build—a pastry-cook's delirium, made up of all new fashions blended, with sufficient of the old to cause the lot to ferment like indecency within an old man's body. Phaugh! A house of money without brains! There was a great carriage outside this abortion of a house, and a woman within it screaming; so I came swiftly.

"No fewer than nine men, *sahib*—for they seem to call such creatures by the name of men in Egypt—were endeavoring to drag this woman from the carriage. And another woman helped them, while only two men took the other side, and they timidly, using more voice than violence. All this I saw as I came upon them, thinking how I might best apply my strength and whatever skill I may have picked up in course of a few campaigns.

"It was nothing to me what those Egyptians wanted with the woman, but a very great deal it meant to stand between them and their desire. I burst on them as a typhoon smites the trees. I hurled, flung, smote! I threw men under the horses! I trod men underfoot. To their eyes I must have seemed to be a dozen men! I was swift, crashing their heads together, attacking now this and then that one, aided a little at last by the coachman and footman, who took courage.

"The other woman ran. I know not what became of her. She may have entered the house. A fool aimed a pistol at me dwelling on the trigger and I ducked. I seized him around the belly, he firing as I lifted him. I flung him under the horses, hoping they would tread him into red mud, and what with his carcass striking their forelegs, and the pistol-shot, the horses, which were mettled beasts, took fright and bolted, but not before the coachman had scrambled up and seized the reins.

"The gods take charge of a man's intellect in moments such as that, *sahib*. I was minded neither to remain and defend myself against nine men, nor to forego the acquaintance of that lady in the carriage, who might wish to acquire merit by thanking me for service rendered. So I seized the carriage and jumped in, she screaming. I doubt not that in the dark I was an apparition to terrify any woman, with my turban all awry and one thing and another.

" 'O, Queen,' said I, 'I will defend you against your enemies. There is no need to fear me at all.'

"And I sat on the front seat with my arms folded thus, that she might see I had no intention of affronting her. Even so in the dark I could see that she was young, and more beautiful than the moon and stars, and I thanked the thoughtful gods who had brought me there. I had just sufficient whisky in my belly to make me adventurous, without unsettling discretion. Clear, reasonable, discreet my mind was.

" 'O, lady, I have sworn an oath this night to serve in future none but queens,'

*Rascal.

said I, 'so if you are not yet a queen, lo! I will make you into one. Trust me!' said I.

" 'If you have ten thousand enemies, they shall die ten thousand deaths, one each, and that is all about it! Charge me with a service. Name but a deed, and I will do it!'

"So she bade me stop the horses, which were galloping pellmell, we swaying this and that way like a big gun going into action, first this wheel and then that striking against a curb-stone as the coachman wrenched at the reins.

" 'If you could save us from an accident,' she said, 'by doing something that would stop the horses, that would be a kindness beyond words.'

"Well, *sahib*, that seemed a very little thing to me in the state of mind that I was in. I climbed out on to the driver's seat. I thrust aside the coachman, whose wits fear had taken from him, I leaped on the back of the near horse. I come of a race of horsemen, *sahib*. No pair of horses lives that can say 'yea' to my 'nay' for more than a minute or two. Presently they stopped, and I climbed back into the carriage, sitting as before with folded arms.

"By that time the lady had regained her self-command, and eyed me curiously rather than with fear. She began to question me, asking my name and who I might be; and I, not squandering truth as some men do when strong drink is in them, but inspired by the gods to tell the first lie that crossed my mind, said I was a deserter from the British Army.

"Whereat, *sahib*, she clapped her hands delightedly and offered me a place to hide, saying I should be her private bodyguard and strong protector. And I, caring nothing what the future should bring forth, provided only that the present should continue interesting, fell in with her suggestion, protesting with great oaths that I would tear up Egypt by the roots at a word from her.

"And after a while we came to the palace in which you found me. There at the gate the carriage stopped, and the footman, who had ridden on the platform behind the carriage, opened the door and offered me insolence. I was minded to pull his head out by the roots, but she checked me in time to save his life. She said it would not look well for me to ride up to the house inside the carriage with her so I sprang on the footboard. Thus we drove in, the footman walking, hugging at his throat where I had twisted it, and the great gate clanged behind us.

"So far, good. My walk had produced no whisky, but some amusement nevertheless. I was in a mood for great adventures, *sahib*. Said I: 'O, queen, lead me to your apartment, that I may sleep in front of the door and guard you. Impudent devils who would try to drag you from your carriage would stop at nothing less than such an obstacle as me! These servants of yours are muzzled dogs that can't bite,' I said; and she laughed with no little reassurance.

"So we entered that palace in which you found me, and she led me to a great room like a chamber in paradise, overlooking the Nile, which nevertheless is no heavenly river. And she sent for Narendra Nath, an old fool of a Hindu soothsayer. His perpetual study is of all the world's religions. His wisdom is a patchwork of craziness. He is teller of fortunes. He had foretold to her that she would be attacked, as any child might have done, knowing already what Narendra Nath knew; for she tells him everything.

"Narendra Nath said that the gods had sent me, which is doubtless true. She bade me go with him and learn what is required of me, he saying to her in an undertone that a little drunkenness in the circumstances was no bad thing. My ears are sharp, *sahib*. So I feigned greater drunkenness, behaving as one from whose brain the fumes of liquor are fading, which is a stage in which few men have their wits about them; and he took me to the room upstairs in which you found me, where certain bigger fools than he set up a wailing on wind instruments such as is never heard outside of India, and only there in the performance of certain secret rites during which they hypnotize the neophyte. None can hypnotize any man, *sahib*, who is not afraid to do his own thinking—which, I take it, is why the British govern India.

"Narendra Nath plied me with drugs, which he said would relieve my headache. But Jeremy *sahib* has been teaching me legerdemain, and I was able to palm the pills and make away with them. Nevertheless, observe, *sahib;* see how I can make my eyes grow large, as if drugs had dazed them. That is a muscular trick; I have used it to get into hospital at the end of arduous service, when I needed a rest and a change of diet.

"When he believed me under the influence of drugs and music, he sent for her; and they asked me questions about you *sahibs*. I left nothing unsaid in praise of you. I recalled a multitude of things that never happened. I magnified real deeds until they sounded like the miracles of gods. Then they asked me about Meldrum Strange; but knowing nothing about him, I said less than nothing, being satisfied to look perplexed.

Too many men prefer to look wise, *sahib*, when they know nothing, which causes the sensitive gates of uncertainty to close on confidence; whereas a look of perplexity tempts indiscretion.

"So they told me about Meldrum Strange, believing me to be hypnotized and receptive to all manner of suggestions. She told me how her husband had been a member of a society, so secret that it has no name. And then Narendra Nath took up the burden of the tale, and told how the lady Poulakis had continued to be a member of the society, because of their rule that none may escape from membership except through the door of death.

" 'She is a bird in the net,' said he, 'too young to wish to die; too potentially useful for them to desire to kill her; yet doomed to death, unless she shall serve their present purpose.

" 'And their suspicions of her,' said he, 'are well founded. She is weary of this wicked business. She is anxious to be free from them, yet can find no way out of the net. So little do they trust her,' said he, 'that, as you yourself have seen, they sought to make her prisoner in another woman's house, where the pressure of tenfold fear could be brought to bear on her. Therefore, let your duty and your highest pleasure be to guard her day and night. Be devoted to her service.'

"To which I, speaking as a man who dreams, made answer that I am liable to be arrested for desertion; for it seemed to me, *sahib*, that that might open a way of communication with Jimgrim. As in truth it did. Later on, when they had well considered matters, they bade me write a letter, as you know.

"Then they had an argument as to whether they should tell me more, he taking the nay and she the yea of it, and she prevailing, as a woman will. 'His inner mind,' said she, 'is opened. It will be an inner secret, to be well kept, and will add to the inner impulse that governs his waking brain.' That is the way people argue, *sahib*, who have a smattering of occult knowledge.

"So she told me, Narendra Nath unwillingly consenting. Said she: 'I am required to marry Meldrum Strange, whom they seek to control for the purpose of great financial undertakings in America. Now I am not unwilling,' said she, 'to marry Meldrum Strange, having met him and not disliking him at all. He offers my one path of escape. But there is this great difficulty—he undoubtedly believes me to be a wicked woman, and he is the last man who would choose a wife from among a society of criminals. Yet unless he consents to marry me they will murder him. And unless I succeed in this matter they will murder me. So what can I do but protect myself, if that is possible, and hope for the best, and see what happens?'

"I made no answer to all that, *sahib*, being supposed to be in a sort of trance, and aware also that folk who made use of such practises believe themselves able to arouse all the wisdom hidden in the recesses of a man's inner mind, so that, although he cannot answer, being in a trance, he will none the less apply great wisdom to his conduct in the matter when the trance is ended.

"So then she retired to her apartment, and old Narendra Nath continued his schooling of me, suggesting to me that it were an act of wisdom to involve all you four *sahibs* in this matter, by persuading you to conceal my whereabouts, thus conniving at my desertion; by which means a certain hold over you might be obtained, with the aid of which a pressure could be brought to bear that might compel you to act on behalf of Madame Poulakis. But to tell the truth, *sahib*, the old man is at his wits' end, not knowing what to say or do, yet afraid to admit to her that his occultism and astrology and what not are of no avail.

"After a while it seemed good to him to put me into a deeper trance, which suited my convenience exactly. Life in the Army, *sahib*, is a matter of discipline, which has its profit as well as loss—profit of self-control to balance loss of liberty. Certain things are done at certain times, and a man who has the soldier spirit to begin with soon learns to sleep lightly and to wake himself, whether at the right time or at the first unusual sound. A little liquor makes

no difference—not such a little as I had had. So I fell asleep with perfect confidence that I would wake when necessary. And so I did. But I awoke with only one eye open, and closed that almost instantly.

"There came into the room a heavy man of coarse build but with a voice like oil. He had puffy, white hands, with a large emerald ring on the right one; but I saw little else, for the first thing he did was to examine me.

" 'He is in a trance,' said Narendra Nath.

"But the man kicked me three times to make sure, putting me to the utmost exercise of self-control. I have prayed that I may break his neck for those three kicks he gave me. Never have I suffered sharper pain, even when wounded on the battlefield. Yet I lay still; and he believed I was in a trance.

" 'Who and what is he?' he demanded.

" 'Merely a madman,' said Narendra Nath. 'I have calmed him by the exercise of certain powers I possess.'

" 'Mad he must be!' said the other fellow. 'Is he that —— who made ninepins out of nine of us early this morning in the street and drove away in the Poulakis' carriage? The same, eh? And you have him hypnotized? Well, he has qualities that we can use to good advantage. You'd better pour some sense into his ear while he's in that trance. He'll make good gallows-meat. And another matter, while I think of it; what has come over the servants in this house? I had to threaten them before they'd admit me!'

"Narendra Nath swore he knew nothing about that; but the other threatened him with dire consequences if it ever should happen again. Said he:

" 'You're only allowed to live here as a spy on her. It's your business to see that her servants understand to whom to look for orders. She has been growing willful of late,' he said, 'and her servants follow suit.'

"Narendra Nath was very humble in reply, and then the other in a voice more oily than ever went on to say really why he had come.

" 'Cast her a new horoscope!' said he. 'Cast her a horoscope in which her second husband is an American millionaire. Make it clever. Let there be a dividing of the ways; if she takes the right hand way and becomes the American's wife, good; if she takes the other, and refuses, promise her a terrible death! Better hear voices, hadn't you? And one other thing; if Meldrum Strange should refuse he'll be too dangerous to leave at large. He'll have to be disposed of. We'll make use of this fool. Hypnotize him! Tune him up, and keep him tuned!'

"Then he went away, I seeing nothing but his back, which was not remarkable, except that his neck was thicker than ordinary, with a roll of fat protruding above the collar. And I slept on and off like a fox until evening."

CHAPTER X

"And, no boaster though I be——"

IT WAS past the dinner hour and Narayan Singh caught me looking at my watch.

"They will think I have gone to the servants' quarters, *sahib*. Madame Poulakis knows my real purpose. It is important to hear the end of this."

"Jimgrim will invent an excuse for me," I said. "Go on."

"Aye, trust him, *sahib*. Well, as I lay between sleeping and waking, I thought, for there was nothing else to do. And when the gods have use for a man they give him wise thoughts. So when Madame Poulakis came again and brought note-paper, and I wrote you the note that brought you to the house, I wrote a second note and hid it. That second note was the one that I slipped into your shoe. And at the same time I pretended to recover entirely from the trance and made no small fuss about being a deserter, who could be arrested and put in prison; so that they were all the more eager to get you here, and sent a carriage with the note.

"Then Narendra Nath gave me more drugs, and tried to put me to sleep again, she maintaining that you *sahibs* would insist on taking me away if I should be too sane in appearance. Moreover, I was of the same mind, and I did not wish to be taken away, having taken great pity on this woman who flutters like a bird in the net. The gods had also put into my head a rather high opinion of Narendra Nath. The old man is a charlatan and practises much nonsense, but nevertheless he believes the half of what he says and persuades himself of the other half. Thought I; he loves her, and the poor old fool would help her out of the net if he could contrive it.

"And while I made believe to fall asleep, she cooked up with Narendra Nath a story

to tell you *sahibs* that should account for my presence without disclosing secrets; for she and he are in terror of disclosing a hint of the secret society's doings. It was Narendra Nath's idea to have that music playing while you were in the house. He said it would help to bewilder your minds and make you amenable to the right suggestion. Men whose minds are superstitious are readily trapped in just such ways, and he did not know you are not superstitious.

"Well, *sahib;* after you had come and gone again, I spoke to old Narendra Nath as man to man. Said I, 'My father, you seem to me like one who struggles in a whirlpool, seeking to save another but unable to stem the current, which carries you round and round.' And he stared at me, making no answer.

" 'Furthermore,' said I, 'it must be plain to you that your sorcery doesn't always work, for here am I, who have deceived you easily, even while drunk. I have heard and I have seen all that took place in this room, said I, and I know that you are an honest old man, in so far as you understand honesty, although not nearly as wise as you wish to believe. Whereas,' I told him, 'I not only am an honest man but a wise one also, the proof of which is that I became drunk when the gods wished!

" 'You are not only an impudent trickster,' he answered me, 'but a conceited Sikh heretic as well!'

" 'Nevertheless,' said I, 'I crave to acquire merit by defending the distressed, which is the essence of the Sikh doctrine.'

"Said he, 'If I raise my voice there will come men, who are less merciful than any in your experience!'

" 'I, too, can be merciless,' I said. 'I gave nine of them a taste of my quality already, and no boaster though I be, I tell you this house will never hold enough Levantines to keep me prisoner should the gods once cause me to dislike the place. I am the father of typhoons,' said I, 'and I know four *sahibs*, all true friends of mine, who compared to me in cunning and strength and fury are as mammoths to a mouse!'

"Well, *sahib;* the old man stared at me, and began to think like a man instead of like an abstraction.

" 'There are five miscreants,' said he, 'who direct this present wickedness. They call them the executive committee. They have no books, nor any written rules or records and it might be that if something were to happen to those five this whole accursed society might fall to pieces. This executive committee is as it were the neck between the body and the head of the thing. The head would die, and the body would die, if the neck were severed!'

"That was man's talk, but old Narendra Nath cannot remain a man, *sahib*, for too long at a time, since charlatanry grows into a habit. He closed his eyes and murmured for a while then, describing a vision he had seen of strangers from the East and from the West, who came and smote a devil with five heads, thus setting free her who is nearest to his old heart. I knew that he made up the vision even while he spoke, for that is the way of self-deception. Was I not born in India? Hah! My mother's uncle was just such an one as this Narendra Nath, forever seeing visions after the event and claiming to be a prophet!

"Then came Madame Poulakis again with news that you *sahibs* had been tracked to the Great Pyramid, where gunmen had doubtless already murdered you.

" 'And that means that they will next come and murder me,' she said, 'for they will think me of no further use, as well as dangerous.'

"But I reassured her on that point, saying that you *sahibs* are difficult men to murder, and moreover that first they must murder me before they can kill her. And instead of being shocked to discover that I had not been in a trance at all, she seemed overjoyed at it, declaring that she had found a man at last who has brains as well as courage!

"Then there came more news. I was thrust hurriedly behind that gilded screen, and the music-makers were sent away. Unseen, I could hear all and see a little. There came three men, he of the thick neck not among them, and the first, who had a little black beard of a sort some missionaries wear, said:

" 'Your future is yet before you, Madame Poulakis. Is it true that you are invited to dinner at Shepheard's Hotel? Then write a note of acceptance, with the request that Meldrum Strange be included in the party. Where is that drunken Indian?'

"They said I was very sick, and had been put to bed. Narendra Nath said darkly:

" 'He will recover. He is under the influence. It has seemed wise to me to attach him to Madame as personal servant.

He will account for her, for I have found in him fine qualities of obedience and faithfulness, which can be trained into the proper channel.'

"They were pleased at that, *sahib;* for they understood him to mean that I would slay her at a word from Narendra Nath. And Madame Poulakis, who has a woman's quickness, made believe to be afraid of me. Whereat those three men, thoroughly believing Narendra Nath to be their tool, insisted that I shall be Madame's bodyguard, she consenting only with reluctance. Then said the man with the missionary's face:

" 'This man Strange has surrendered to us. We shall put him and his friends to various tests this afternoon, and if they do not walk into the traps, so that we believe their surrender to be genuine, then tonight there will be initiation.

" 'Thereafter you must marry him, Zelmira. Among the guarantees that we shall insist on will be the settlement of enormous sums on you. So we have brought these papers for you to sign now. They are cleverly drawn. They consist of records of various supposititious transactions of a financial nature extending over a period of years, resulting in a loss to you of more than a million pounds.

"You will sign these papers now, admitting liability; but you will say nothing about them to Strange. We shall require him to accept responsibility for your debts when he makes the marriage settlement; and when the proper time comes we shall collect, either from him, or from you, or from both of you. In the event of his death these papers would be extremely valuable.

" 'So make yourself attractive,' he went on, 'and after the dinner at the hotel bring him and his friends to the house you know of, where the Five will have a final session with him. If he agrees then to our terms, well and good—you will be married at the United States consulate tomorrow morning. But if we find flaws in his attitude, that will be the last of him and his friends—and incidentally of any one whose existence might make us nervous. You understand me, Zelmira?"

"And at that, *sahib*, one of the three piped up in a thin voice and asked what means would be used for making away with Strange and four others, if that should prove necessary. He said it would be hardly as simple as killing unknown men. And the man with the face like a missionary laughed.

" 'Did you never hear of Sarajevo?' he demanded. 'Who slew the Archduke of Austria? A fool of a fanatic. What about this Indian then? He came here from Syria with those friends of Meldrum Strange. What could be simpler than to have him kill them all? The safest tool that can be used is a religious fanatic, or an anarchist fanatic. Let Narendra Nath fill the Indian up with hashish and whisper the right suggestions to him. Then, even if some one else must do the actual killing that won't matter; we can come out like honest men and accuse the Indian. What defense will he have? He will be an Indian who ran amok under the influence of hashish, and we will provide him with a lawyer at his trial, who will get him hanged as surely as we sit here!'

"They all seemed to agree that that was an excellent proposal, *sahib*, and after they had made Madame Poulakis sign those papers they went away. She became hysterical for a while, but Narendra Nath comforted her, and I made great boastings such as women love to hear. This afternoon they fitted me up with this livery you see. Do I look like a popinjay? Hah! I smell action, *sahib!* There will be blood on this simitar before morning, or I am a poorer prophet than Narendra Nath! Tell me, *sahib;* of what is this Meldrum Strange made—iron or beeswax?"

"Iron," said I, "and not much rust."

"Good! Then get my news to Jimgrim, and all is well. But how to get the news to him? Those women who accompanied madame are spies."

I did not know how to answer him for wondering.

"There is a spirit in man—" That, and nothing else, occurred to me. Whoever wrote the Book of Job answered with another riddle any question you can ask about humans and their ways. How a sepoy—a number on the muster-roll of the British Army, and drunk at that—should have been selected by what he called the gods to uncover evil, that was a mystery that seemed to dwarf all others at the moment.

We're taught to regard colored people as the agents of the enemy of man. Our missionaries go out to convert them, lest the heathen in their blindness overwhelm the

world in another chaos any old night. They've educated us, these missionaries have, into believing things that aren't so; and we commit the indecency, in consequence, of being astonished when a man with colored skin acts "white."

I ought to have known better. I was so surprized by the resourcefulness and courage of Narayan Singh, to say nothing of his wit, that I could hardly summon presence of mind enough to order him to the kitchen, while I went forward to devise some means of getting an account of his doings to Grim.

CHAPTER XI

"It's nice to know a millionaire who isn't wiser than the rest of us!"

IT WAS no easy matter to discover a means of getting Grim to leave the dinner-table without exciting comment or arousing the suspicion of the three women who had accompanied Madame Poulakis.

They were probably already exercised about my absence. In addition to that, there were probably spies keeping watch on us, who might, in fact, already have seen me talking with Narayan Singh, although I did not think so.

Guests entered the dining-room at Shepheard's from the corridor at one end, so that any one expecting me would watch in that direction. Our table was in mid-room, preserved from being conspicuous by a fountain and palms, which shut off the view of people coming in. I figured all that out, and looked for a side door opposite to where Jeremy was sitting. The door I selected was locked, but the gardener had left a hoe under some bushes near-by, and the lock came away without much noise or effort. I opened the door and stepped inside, finding myself behind a screen, as I expected. Watching from between the end of the screen and a palm, I could see our table, and particularly Jeremy, who faced me—was near enough, too, to hear almost every word that was said.

Being no respecter of sedateness or convention, Jeremy was doing tricks with table-knives, producing day-old chicks out of napkins, and all that sort of foolishness. One of the guests at a near table had a huge dog lying beside him, and Jeremy used his ventriloquial gifts to make the beast talk, getting off comments on Egyptian society from what he called a "dog's-eye point of view." The attention of half the people in the room, and of everybody at our table was fixed on him. But when Jeremy is doing tricks his own bright eyes are wandering everywhere, and it wasn't many minutes before he caught sight of me.

And he's quick, is friend Jeremy. He didn't check or falter in the patter he was reeling off—made no signal to me—glanced away, in fact—and finished the trick he was doing to an outburst of laughter and applause. It was his favorite old trick of pulling a live day-old chick in halves and making two of it, after producing chick number one in the first instance from a hard-boiled egg or a billiard ball.

"Oh, that's nothing," he said airily. "I know a much better one. But you'll believe I've had help if I let Grim sit at the table. I'll prove he isn't my accomplice. Grim, old top, suppose you go and hide behind that screen, where you can't see me and I can't see you. Don't come back till I call. It's going to take me several minutes to accomplish this. Now, watch my hands, everybody."

Grim got up with an air of thinking the whole business childish, and strolled over to the screen; but the instant he stepped behind it he was like a spring, coiled ready to go off.

"Quick! Spill it! What's the news?" he demanded.

Well, I tried to condense into a fifty word telegram all that Narayan Singh had told me. Try it for yourself, and judge what luck I had! Jeremy saved the day by purposely blundering his trick and beginning all over again, calling out apologies to Grim for keeping him waiting.

"Now think!" I said when I had finished "and for the love of Mike tell me what to do; for I'll be blowed if I can figure it out."

I don't believe that men like Grim do think, as a matter of fact, on such occasions. It's a species of instinct or intuition, or both combined. Long experience and a habit of meeting emergencies combine to produce a state of mind that figures instantly, like one of those adding machines.

Grim glanced at the door I had come through, looked me full and fairly in the eye, and gave his orders—terse—quick—unmistakable—as if the automatic wheels inside his mind had cut them out of steel that instant.

"Let your eye follow a line diagonally across our table from Meldrum Strange to Jeremy. Carry straight on for twenty feet. Small round table. There sits Kennedy. Gray-haired man—evening dress—Intelligence Department—all alone. Go out here; come in the front way; make some excuse; sit down at his table. Tell him everything."

Promptly Grim returned to the dinner-table, resuming his bored expression, and I went out into the garden. All the way around the building I racked what brains I have for an excuse to approach this man Kennedy without arousing the suspicion of spies. I'm not a man who can walk into a public dining-room unobserved; I look bigger than ever in evening dress, and I was sweating with anxiety lest some stupidity of mine should upset Grim's calculations.

But I was reckoning without the other fellow, which I take it is the cause of ninety-nine per cent. of this world's difficulties. Kennedy got up and came to meet me the minute I entered the room—a lean-flanked man of fifty-five or sixty, with a sort of literary look due to his iron-gray hair and quiet manners. He had extraordinary bright eyes with heavy gray eyebrows, and a deep cleft in his chin.

But his most remarkable asset was a penetrating voice that he seemed to have in absolute control; when he first spoke, every word he said carried all over the room, but presently, when he reached his table and sat down, although to all appearance he was talking normally, and certainly didn't whisper, I don't believe the nearest waiter could have heard a word he said.

"You're Mr. Ramsden, aren't you? You can do me a favor, if you'll be kind enough. They tell me you've hunted elephants in the Lado Enclave. My leave starts tomorrow, and I'm going there. Won't you sit at my table for half an hour and give me some pointers?"

I told him that my friends would have to be asked to excuse me first; so he took my arm, and made his own excuses to the party, begging for what he was pleased to call the "use" of me for half an hour. None of the women liked it, but they couldn't very well refuse, and Jeremy had their attention again almost before we had turned away.

The moment Kennedy and I sat down together I began on him.

"Grim has just told me to take you entirely into confidence," I said. "I don't know why. If you're off elephant hunting a thousand miles from here——"

"I'm not," he answered. "However, there's no hurry; wait until I've ordered you some wine and sent for your dinner to this table. I've been watching that little side play behind the screen."

"I understand there are others watching," I warned him.

"No, I think not. There were five, just before dinner began; one waiter, a head-waiter, an ex-Englishman in evening dress, a Cairene cotton-jobber, and an Italian. They're in the lock-up. It's now eight-thirty. By nine o'clock your party—the men, I mean, yourself included, would also have been under arrest for your own protection unless one of you had made this move. Ever since Meldrum Strange called on the High Commissioner we've been considering some such step. We have Poulakis junior under lock and key, and fortunately we bagged him without any of his gang knowing anything about it. Caught him in the house of a woman whom he visits now and then, and locked them up together. She's an agent of ours. He talked."

So when the waiter had brought my dinner I talked too, telling Kennedy everything I knew about the whole affair, he laughing quietly most of the time, behaving, in fact, as if I were recounting reminiscences.

"Tell me," he said when I had finished, "do you know of any other nation than America that could produce a man like Meldrum Strange? The man is right, but not within his rights. What would you think of me, for instance, if I went to America and did there what he proposes to do here? However, it's too late to help that now. We've got to go forward. I'll say this for him; he has forced our hand, and personally I'm in his debt; I've been trying for months to bring this gang to book, but there was obstruction at headquarters. Tonight we're going to let the law go hang, act *ultra vires*, and feed these devils some of their own medicine. I'm likely to lose my job over it, but that doesn't matter, I'm about ready to retire. Out of a hundred and eighteen murders we know of ninety

in recent months that have been committed at the instigation of this gang or by its members. Can't prove a thing. If we bring them to trial there's no evidence. We shan't get the real ring-leaders tonight, but we'll get the five who call themselves executive committee, and let's hope they're ugly!"

"Why?"

"No search-warrants. Didn't dare apply for them. Information would have leaked out. We've got a special, hand-picked force made up entirely of British officers, who've no connection with the police. They're supposed to be on their way to a party; and if they should suddenly become a rescue party, that would possibly not involve the Administration in a breach of its own laws. Individually the officers may find themselves in rather hot water, but they're willing to run that risk for the sake of rendering a public service."

"Where are the officers now?" I asked him.

"In this room."

I looked about me. There were twenty or thirty officers in uniform dining at different tables—no unusual number. You would never have suspected them of being there with a common purpose. There were not more than two dining together, and they were of various ranks, from major downward.

"Tell me," said I, "have you had any communication with Grim about this business?"

He chuckled. "No. Grim's an old crony of mine. We all know Grim in the Intelligence. When he sent in his resignation we wondered. When we saw him linking up with Meldrum Strange we knew. Grim's an old war-horse—answers to the trumpet. Can't help himself—goes for the heart of trouble automatically like a needle to a magnet. Grim saw me on the job once yesterday and twice today—spotted me here as soon as he entered the room—saw that head-waiter taken in charge by one of my men—and possibly drew his own conclusions. However, we've discussed elephants long enough. Suppose you join your friends. Just go ahead with the evening's performance. Protect that Poulakis woman if you can; she's in danger. They'll suspect her of having betrayed them. Don't be surprized by anything that happens!"

SO I joined our party, and was aware of being suspected by the women. None of the three was in the Poulakis class. They had neither her charm nor her well-bred self-control; they laughed too noisily, ate too greedily, and laid a lot too much emphasis on their own importance, besides making jokes about Strange and Zelmira Poulakis that would have been in rotten bad taste in any circumstances. It was difficult not to laugh at Strange, for he was getting red under the collar and almost ready to explode.

Nobody was drinking much. We laughed through dessert with Jeremy until the dark-eyed woman sitting on my left began hinting that it was time to go. Then, and not until then, Zelmira Poulakis began to betray signs of nervousness, mastering herself with difficulty, looking suddenly much older, and apparently at a loss for words. However, she managed to smile, and to make the next move gracefully.

"Now for the experience of your lives!" she said. "You will learn that this dinner has been a delightful overture to Grand Opera—Faust, let us say, for you are going to meet Mephistopheles!"

Narayan Singh came forward to meet us in the hall, looking solemn and magnificent in all that finery, and escorted Zelmira Poulakis to the carriage as only an Indian can. He induced the impression that she was a semi-deity, in whose footsteps flowers should spring up presently; whereas the rest of us were merely to be tolerated, on the ground that she had condescended to acknowledge us. I suspect that half the reason why aristocracy is dying out is that impresarios as skilful as Narayan Singh are scarce in these days; a woman or man on social stilts needs a clever rogue to go in front and provide the proper atmosphere. On the way out I tried to speak to Grim, but one of the three chaperons spotted it and prevented by coming between us. It was her suggestion that he should ride in the front carriage with the women, and Grim couldn't well refuse.

Looking back as we drove away I saw automobiles assembling in the dark in front of the hotel steps, and not long afterward we began to be pursued at a distance by the purring of six or eight cars. One passed us, and stopped to let us pass again under pretext of a stalled engine; but the others

kept well to the rear, trusting to the first to keep us in view.

We drove over the Nile and past the Poulakis mansion, down two or three streets to another house bigger than hers, standing gloomy and aloof with its sides all wan in moonlight. The shadow of one tree fell in the shape of a human skull across the front of it, and the urns on the pillars of the great gate looked like those you see over a cemetery wall. It was a perfect house for the sort of performance we were in for.

"Close enough to the Nile for dumping corpses without unnecessary scandal," as Jeremy sweetly expressed it. "Feel like a swim, you fellows? How about it, Strange? They tell me swimming with your throat cut's easy—no work to it—just drift down with the stream!

"Have we all got guns?" he demanded, as we drove in through the echoing gate and it clanged shut. Strange had none. I offered him mine and he refused it testily, for his nerves were on edge.

"No use for one," he answered. "Out of my line. I was a fool to bring you fellows on this errand. Save yourselves if there's any trouble, and——"

"Sure you're a fool!" laughed Jeremy, "but we like you, Strange, old top. It's nice to know a millionaire who isn't wiser than the rest of us! Here we are! Now for act one!" But they kept our carriage waiting several minutes before the first moved on and let ours draw up opposite the front door.

CHAPTER XII

"Crooks are just crooks."

I WONDER how many men there are who can go forward into the unknown without making mental pictures in advance of what's coming. I believe Grim can. I know I can't. It may be that ability to refrain from "imagining vain things" leaves you free to imagine truly and successfully. We who imagine in advance form judgments in advance and I expect that's why we're so frequently wrong.

I fully expected to find Grim and all four women waiting for the rest of us, either outside the door of the house or else just inside it. I also expected to find Narayan Singh standing there, for he had ridden on the platform behind the women's carriage, and would naturally get down to open the carriage door for them. I couldn't have guessed wider of the mark. It was a one hundred per cent. miss.

We stepped out into darkness. The other carriage was already disappearing into deeper gloom, and ours proceeded to follow it. There was a porch in such deep shadow that you could hardly see its outlines, but enough dim light came out through the partly opened front door to prove that nobody was standing outside. Somebody standing behind the door opened it wide, and we walked in one by one, Strange leading.

The door clicked softly shut behind us, and it was almost too dark to see, for there was only one lamp in the hall, and that shrouded with black silk; but we could dimly discern three solemn individuals dressed in black from head to foot, who stood in line to receive us. They looked like undertakers.

"Your weapons, please!" said the man in the center in sepulchral tones; and all three held their right hands out.

"Do we get brass checks?" asked Jeremy.

The middle man of the three didn't answer, but continued holding out his hand. Meldrum Strange said crustily that he had no weapons.

"Do you mean that we won't be admitted otherwise?" I demanded.

There was still not a word said in reply, but the first and third men each took a threatening step toward Jeremy and me. They obviously meant to search us, and I can't say what I would have done about it, except that I never yet did surrender a weapon to anybody on demand, and old dogs find it difficult to learn new tricks.

But Strange solved the problem for us, by going clear off his head. I guess the nervous strain was too much for a man of his temperament, used to having his own way in the world.

"You swine!" he said; and clenching his right fist he swung with all his strength and weight for the chin of the man in the middle. It was the sort of blow that wins world's championships. Any man caught off-guard would have gone down under it. The fellow in black collapsed like a corpse.

I'm entitled to no credit for what followed. Jeremy did the thinking. I simply followed suit, doing the only thing I could do. Jeremy closed with his man, and I believe hit him with the butt-end of his Colt.

The fellow in front of me tried to stop my left fist with the peak of his jaw, and the men who can do that successfully bulk about twice his size.

It was all over in half a second almost noiselessly, for they fell on thick carpet, making no remarks. There was a door on Jeremy's left and he opened it.

"Quick!" he whispered. "Here's an empty room."

You couldn't see a thing, but Jeremy picked up one man, hove him in there, and turned to help me with the second. I had already gathered up Strange's victim. If you've ever watched the U. S. Navy police throwing their captured drunks into a boat in some foreign port you'll realize that an unconscious man can be handled pretty roughly without being seriously hurt; it's only when they struggle that bones get broken.

I tossed number two through the door on top of Jeremy's number one—or so I supposed—and together we picked up the third man. We swung him like a sack and let go. It was only then, as his feet disappeared through the opening that we realized that all three had fallen, not on to a floor, nor down-stairs, but down a dark hole where a flight of stairs had probably once been.

They made no noise and we didn't stop to investigate. We locked the door and Jeremy pocketed the key.

If you allow two minutes from the time the front door clicked behind us until that other key was in Jeremy's pocket you'll be well on the right side. The next thing Jeremy did was to find the front-door latch, slide it back, and fix it in that position, so that any rescue party would simply have to turn the big brass knob outside and walk in unannounced. But what to do then was too much for even Jeremy to guess, so I said:

"Grim's inside somewhere. We can't leave Grim and Narayan Singh."

There was nothing in that to argue about; but you can suggest as many explanations of what followed as you like without being sure you have given the right one. A friend in the U. S. Federal Secret Service, whom I have known for twenty years, laughed when I told him it couldn't be explained; he said:

"Me boy, that's aisy. Crooks are just crooks. Ivery mother's son has a quirk in him that works wan way. If it weren't for that we'd niver catch the smart wans. They're all alike. They play safe. Be ——, they take more pains playin' safe than a boid takes buildin' a nest. But did you iver see a boid take an inventory wance the nest was built an' the iggs laid? They figure that when precaution's took, it's took. An' that's where we come in. We look for their precautions. It's as plain as the nose on y'r face that those crooks had set three men at the front door 'at they knew they could bet on. An' bet they did. An' bettin's chancy. Chance is scaircely iver on the side of the law, because the law don't dale in chances, but in the long run it's always agin the crook!"

Maybe Clancy put his finger on it—I don't know. The gang up-stairs had certainly left the guarding of the entrance hall exclusively to those three men. They were careless when they least could afford to be. We went forward.

There was no furniture in the hall, except two carpets one on top of the other presumably to deaden footfall, and that one dim hanging lantern shrouded in black silk. The stairs turned around to the right in front of us, and we walked up as softly as we could, I leading this time and going slowly.

After making two turns they gave on to a dark landing, also thickly carpeted, and we found ourselves faced by six shut doors, with a window on our left that admitted moonlight through its narrow top pane; the rest was curtained. There was nobody waiting to receive us, but we could hear voices, I cleared my throat loudly and a wooden shutter moved on the panel of the door immediately in front of us, exposing a small round hole. Light streamed through the hole and was shut off instantly by the head of some one who scrutinized us for about a minute. Then the whole panel moved downward, and his face appeared in the opening, but you couldn't see much of it; the upper half was covered with a black mask; the lower part, that you could see, framed a mean, anemic smile.

"Simon should have brought you up-stairs," he complained suspiciously. "Why didn't he?"

Jeremy lied with genius—for I suppose that is genius which gets believed.

"There were three men downstairs," he said. "Two of 'em went and stood on the

porch in the dark, Simon closed the front door and told us to come on up."

"Oh. Well Simon knows his business. Come in here."

We entered a room about ten by eight that had doors on either hand opening into other rooms. We were in the middle of a suite of apartments. The heat in this small connecting room was stifling, for there was no window and the light came from a huge oil-lamp against which about a hundred moths were busy beating themselves to death.

The man who admitted us had evening clothes on, but over them, in addition to the mask, a black cloak like a pew-opener's that reached his heels, and he seemed to be sweating more than was good for him.

"Where's Grim?" demanded Jeremy.

He didn't answer but, whether intentionally or not, permitted the front of his cloak to open and show a heavy revolver in a holster. Through the door on the left we could hear women's voices—men's through the door on the right; no words were distinguishable. There was no furniture in the room except a carpet, a camp-stool and the lamp on a bracket on the wall. Our host sat down on the stool between the two side doors, and there seemed to be nothing for us to do but wait and look at him. But waiting isn't Jeremy's favorite amusement.

"—— uninteresting cage!" he said. "What's in the next one?"

"Wait for your turn!" the man in the mask answered.

"Turn?" said Jeremy. "We're done to a turn! So are you. Let some air in. If you don't, I will!"

"Keep quiet!" said the man in the mask.

"What d'you take us for?" asked Jeremy, purposely raising his voice, and striding forward to open one of the doors. But his purpose was already accomplished. The door on our left opened suddenly and Narayan Singh's face appeared; he smiled, said nothing whatever, and closed the door again at once. Strange looked alarmed, for when Narayan Singh is deliberately trying to look like a hasheesh-maddened fanatic a sight of him would freeze his own mother's marrow-bones. But there wasn't anything reassuring that I could safely say to Strange just then in front of that fellow with a mask.

Jeremy was just about to irritate him further when somebody tapped out a signal on the right-hand door, and with a bad-tempered sneer at us the fellow got off his camp-stool and produced a key from under his cloak. He very nearly unmasked us in the process, for as he made that movement Jeremy and I both felt for our pistols. Luckily he was too intent on fitting the key into the door to notice it.

We went in one by one, passing around a high black screen beyond the door, and found ourselves in a square room furnished with a long mahogany table in the midst, and about a dozen high-backed chairs. There was no other furniture, except for a bench against one wall on which three men were seated.

Facing us at the table as we entered were five men, all in evening clothes. Those on the bench against the wall wore long black cloaks exactly like that of the fellow in the anteroom. Every one of the eight men in the room was masked to the tip of his nose; but the middle one of the five was recognizable from Narayan Singh's account, for he had rolls of fat protruding over his collar, and the end man on our right had a short beard "of the kind that missionaries wear."

We heard the key turn in the lock behind us, which was hardly reassuring, but there were no weapons in evidence, and there was nothing on the table except blotting-paper, pens, ink-pots, and a lot of printed blanks that looked like checks and promissory notes.

"Good evening, Mr. Meldrum Strange! Good evening, gentlemen!" said the man with the fat neck. "Pray be seated."

"Evening!" Strange answered gruffly.

"Where's Grim?" demanded Jeremy.

"Be seated—be seated, gentlemen!"

"Where's Grim?"

"You will learn that presently. Be seated."

We sat down facing the five. There was a door in the middle of the wall behind their backs, and another door on our right, so that we were obviously open to attack from two sides and behind, to say nothing of the three attendants on the bench. There wasn't much to be gained in the circumstances by glancing about the room nervously, so I concentrated my attention on the fat-necked man, reasoning that if there were going to be any violence he would be the one to give the signal. Strange concentrated on him too.

"See here," he began, with his right fist

set characteristically on the table in front of him. "I made my conditions plain this afternoon. Negotiations are to be between my organization and yours. One of my men, who entered this house ahead of us, is missing. Where is he? He has got to sit here on this side of the table before negotiations can begin!"

"Pardon me, Mr. Meldrum Strange," said the thick-necked man, with that sort of suave inflection that suggests sarcasm without exactly expressing it. "Do you consider yourself in a position to dictate to us?"

"I do! If you think you can deal with me on any but my own conditions, you'll discover your mistake," Strange answered, pulling out a cigar case. "Produce my friend Grim, or there'll be no conference!"

He proceeded to chew the cigar. One of the five pushed over a box of matches. Strange ignored it.

"Well, Mr. Strange," said the thick-necked man, "I may as well tell you first as well as last that your friend Grim has been in here and has been examined. The examination was unsatisfactory—to him, I mean. Your organization will have to get along without him."

"Just exactly what the —— d'you mean by that?" demanded Strange.

The thick-necked rascal smiled.

"We asked him two questions. The first was, whether he is willing, in the possible event of your rejecting our proposal, to cut your throat in our presence. The second was whether he is willing to commit suicide. He answered both questions in the negative. His answer to the first made it clear to us that he is not to be depended on; his answer to the second proves him to be a man who is blind to his own best interest. Suicide is easy; murder is unfortunately sometimes—well—you know how ill-mannered and rough the underworld can be!"

CHAPTER XIII

"Ho!"

"MY DEAR Mr. Strange——" Meldrum Strange snapped his jaw shut and sat bolt upright. The cigar dropped to the floor; he had bitten off the end of it.

"I'll have no dealings with you whatever until you produce Major Grim!" he said sharply.

"My dear Mr. Strange," the thick-necked man repeated, "you have put yourself entirely in our power. Do let me impress that on your mind! You have no weapons. We have an assortment of them. Your party consists of three. There are three men sitting on that bench. If they should fail, there are plenty more in the next room, and we five are not exactly impotent or without experience. No noise that you might make would do you any good, for the houses to right and left are each more than a hundred yards away, and incidentally they are both empty. So, unless we come to terms——"

"You have my ultimatum!" answered Strange. "Produce Major Grim!"

All five men smiled and the masked men on the bench moved restlessly, perhaps to call attention to themselves. The man with the thick neck took up the argument again.

"Of course, Mr. Strange, we appreciate that we are dealing with a gentleman of iron nerve and resolution. In fact, we pay you the highest compliment in our power when we invite you to apply for membership in our society. Permit me to elaborate that. Our rule is that applicants for membership must pass through a great number of degrees, entailing severe tests as each higher degree is reached. There is a system of constantly increasing guarantees. We require every member to be so involved in illegal transactions that his liberty and even his life rests on our discretion. Hitherto there have been hardly any exceptions to that rule; but we have decided to make you an exception. You see, Mr. Strange: it is our experience that only men of high character, whose habit is to keep their given word, and at the same time to be ruthless in their dealings, are fit to share the control of our society. We consider you that kind of man."

Strange pulled out another cigar and started to chew it, but made no answer. The thick-necked man continued:

"We have decided after due deliberation that all we shall require from you—without specifying for the moment the financial part; that we will come to later—is an apparent crime. To a man in your peculiar circumstances murder would be exceedingly distasteful and might even result in undermining your nerve. In our profession we find the study of psychology extremely useful. And after all, what courts consider

evidence is the principal thing. So, if you and your two friends will carry the bodies of the two men whom you shot in the Pyramid passage, and throw them into the Nile in the presence of witnesses, whom we have ready, we will be satisfied."

"You say we killed two men?" Strange demanded.

"Well, not exactly. You killed one. The other was injured, and if we had taken him to hospital there might have been inconvenient inquiries. The corpses are downstairs. The way to the Nile lies straight down the garden belonging to this house."

"——!" exclaimed Jeremy. "I hoped we were in for a real initiation, with red-hot pokers and a black goat! Soon as I'm a member there'll be changes made! I know stacks of ways of making an initiation hum. We'll have it creepy, and——"

The whole executive committee waved aside the interruption.

"Permit me to continue," said the chairman. "Mr. Strange, we may as well outline the whole of our requirements to begin with. You must agree and give the required guarantees, or share the fate of Major Grim. Now, among the guarantees we require that you shall marry Madame Zelmira Poulakis, and settle on her cash or negotiable securities to the amount of a million pounds. She is a charming widow, on whose account you will have no qualms when introducing her as your wife into United States society. At the same time she appreciates and understands our point of view and is sufficiently controlled by us to make her a suitable consort for you. She is waiting close at hand, with witnesses, to sign a marriage contract."

"You lucky old stiff!" laughed Jeremy, nudging Strange in the ribs. Accidentally he nudged the spot that the bullet had touched in the Pyramid passage, and Strange swore explosively.

"For the treasure chest of the Society," the chairman went on, "all that we require from you is half a million pounds. We propose to make further enormous sums with your aid in the United States. An agent of ours in the United States, who has access to the income tax returns, has informed us that your accumulated resources amount to nearly a thousand million dollars. We have no wish to impoverish you. Our plan is that you shall select certain stocks dealt in on the New York Stock Exchange and, after notifying us, accumulate them steadily. We shall buy the same stocks. What is called a bull market will ensue, and we will all unload on the public when you give the signal."

Meldrum Strange began to smile at last and I think the chairman mistook that for a symptom of complaisance.

"You see," he said, "we are not requiring you to engage in a business that you don't thoroughly understand. This Society likes nothing so well as to see its individual members prosperous—although too much prosperity is not always good for the lower ranks and is seldom permitted for that reason. We like power. We enjoy the power that the secret use of money and influence provides. We keep the power in the right hands. We keep an absolute hold over all our members. Subject to that, you may say we have no use for an indigent or helpless member."

"You've heard my condition," said Strange. "Produce Major Grim before I'll as much as consider your proposal.

The chairman didn't answer, but changed his tone.

"Mr. Strange, permit me to show you the reverse side of this exceedingly attractive medal. Let us suppose that you are unwsie enough to reject this offer. What then? Well, in the first place, your two friends will be killed at once. You will see that happen, and for the sake of its effect on you the process will be painful and somewhat prolonged. After that, you will be given your choice between a swift, quite painless death or one even more atrociously disagreeable than theirs that you will have witnessed. For the privilege of dying painlessly, you will have to pay whatever sum we name, signing before witnesses such papers as we shall set before you; and, as it won't make much difference to a dead man how much money he has paid to escape torture, the sum demanded will be — er — well — immodest!

"Let us clearly understand one another, Mr. Strange. This business will be settled in this house this night, one way or the other, and you have no alternative but to join our Society or die. Moreover, you can only become a member on the terms we stipulate."

Undoubtedly psychology did form one of the principal ingredients in that executive committee's method. They had their moves worked out carefully. The chairman

brought his speech to an end by rapping on the table with an ebony ruler, and the answer to that was as instant as if the actors in the drama had been drilled for weeks.

We heard the voice of Narayan Singh raised in a babel of Punjabi, pitched high and quarrelsome, behind the door we had entered by. It was followed by a terrific pounding on the door; but as that only made the executive committee smile, none of us was much disturbed by it. Nevertheless, something was going to happen, that was obvious. Something staged in advance.

The voice behind the door was that of a fanatic declaiming. The words seemed a jumble of jabbering nonsense, out of which "kill—kill—kill" in its various tenses emerged in a frequent scream. Then the speech changed to English.

"I tell you I have killed him! Let me show them! They called me a coward! They said I did not dare! They said I loved him! They lied! They lied! Let me through to prove they lied! I will show them the corpse! I will cut the head from the shoulders in their presence! Open that door and let me show them, or I will slay you! Open, I say! Open!"

The pounding on the door resumed more fiercely, to the accompaniment of blasphemous torrents in three languages, such as the half-breeds use in Bombay when the drink is in and they revile both sets of ancestors; only it was worse than I ever heard from a half-breed, for it had more imagination. The chairman leaned over the table and smiled at us.

"That is your Indian friend," he said. "No doubt he looked nice and mild this evening in attendance on Madame Poulakis. We selected him on purpose, because of his known previous loyalty to you. A little hypnotism goes a long way with Indians, but a little drug that we use in such cases goes longer yet! It makes even a white man murdering mad. But you shall see for yourselves."

He made a sign to the men on the bench and one of them walked over to the door, where he tapped a signal. A moment later we heard the key rattling in the lock, and then, knocking down the screen before him like a whirlwind, Narayan Singh strode in with blazing eyes, brandishing his simitar and dragging Grim by the collar with his left hand.

Grim hung inert and dropped to the floor like a sack when Narayan Singh let go of him. I couldn't detect the slightest sign of breathing, and when I stooped to feel his back—for he lay face-downward—Narayan Singh swore savagely and lunged with his simitar within two inches of my neck.

You wouldn't have believed he was the same man who had talked with me in Shepheard's Hotel an hour or so before. There was spittle running down his beard. His mouth was all awry with frenzy. His breath came in volcanic gasps, as if the fires of hell were burning in him, and every muscle in his body seemed to be twitching in unnatural excitement. We three jumped to our feet; there was no sitting down in face of that ghastliness—at least, not for us; the committee seemed to like it.

"Yah!" he yelled, brandishing the simitar until the air whistled and the blade rang. "I am Hathi the elephant, and I am *musth*, and whom I love I kill! I am the wrath of all the gods! I slay! I am the sword of the Avenger! I work for Yum!"*

I don't know what the next amazement on the program would have been. Incredulity fought against the evidence of eyes and ears. There lay my good friend Grim stone dead, so what was the use of recalling what the Sikh had said when sober? He was drunk and drugged now—worse than a blood-crazed wolf. It crossed my mind to shoot him, but Meldrum Strange without meaning to or knowing what had crossed my mind stepped between us.

"You swine!" he thundered, facing the committee. "You dogs! You dirty, cowardly, sneaking, filthy swine! Kill me and be —— to you! That suits me perfectly! Kill me and see what happens! If there's a God, as I believe, the whole foul pack of you will hang!"

"But you see, we're not superstitious," smiled the chairman, veiling savagery under a quiet sneer. "Very well, we shall have to kill you, for you mayn't escape to tell tales about us. We always keep our promises. Guards!"

The three men rose together from the bench and started for us—in no hurry—they seemed very sure of themselves. Jeremy and I drew our pistols. Instantly one of them shouted for help; but he only got one word out, for I drilled him clean and he dropped. The crack of my repeating pistol turned chaos loose.

*The god of the dead in Hindu mythology.

Grim came suddenly to life almost between my legs—Narayan Singh turned sane and sober. Grim rushed the table on all fours—upturned it on the committee of five—and shoved me with all his might, saying nothing. Jeremy and Narayan Singh took either end of it, and shoved too, upsetting all five chairs. I heard Narayan Singh laugh, and the pistols going like a machine-gun as the scrambling committee tried to shoot through the table-top, or under, or around it—loosing off like crazy men as they struggled among the chairs, hoping to kill with a chance shot, or summon help, or both.

But I couldn't stop to help or look, I had my hands full. One of the three guards rushed for the right-hand door and tugged at it, shouting to some one on the other side, and the third man opened fire on me at a distance of twelve feet. I shot him, but too low, for he lay on the floor and continued to blaze away at me. He got me in two places, and I felt the bone of my left forearm go numb. Meanwhile, the third man had dragged the door open, and a dozen men, all masked, came running in with knives and pistols. It looked like our good-by, whatever else it might be.

I STEPPED in front of Meldrum Strange, who was out of breath from shoving at the table, and managed to drop three men, one after another, as they entered; a fourth fell over the first three, and that ended my present usefulness, for my pistol was empty, and with my left arm out of action I couldn't reload it, although I had a spare clip in my vest pocket. I shouted to Jeremy, who cut loose in my stead, and the room began to look like a shambles. Meldrum Strange reloaded my pistol, fumbling with excited fingers, and the enemy beat a retreat to consider a new method of attack, slamming shut the door they had entered by, and smashing a panel in order to shoot through it from cover.

But everything happened at once. None of us was clear afterward as to the exact sequence of events. I balked the hole in the door game by picking up the bench the three men had sat on throughout the interview and upending it against the door—a temporary stop-gap, but a good one while it lasted. Strange came and added his weight to mine. They smashed a second panel, but we lifted up the bench and held it crosswise. It seemed there was a narrow passage outside that prevented them from bringing all their weight to bear against the door, and we two held it shut for I dare say two minutes.

Meanwhile Grim and Narayan Singh, both without firearms—for the men downstairs had deprived Grim of his pistol at the front door—were beginning to have the worst of it. They had the table shoved all the way back against the third door with its legs against the wall; and in the space so left, crouching among upset chairs, the committee of five were about impregnable. Narayan Singh was alert with his simitar to swipe at the first hand or head that showed, and Jeremy stood back with pistol ready, but it was likely to be only a matter of seconds before a volley of shots should end that situation.

Then two things began to happen simultaneously. Men began trying to burst open the door behind the table, but the table, committee and chairs added to the weight of Grim and Narayan Singh prevented that for the moment, until it dawned on the five that they only had to set their legs against the wall and shove in order to release the door and admit their friends.

Just as they commenced doing that, the door by which we had entered the room burst open and five screaming women struggled in, forcing along in front of them the masked man who had admitted us. He was trying to help four of them restrain Zelmira Poulakis, who was using a long thing like a hat-pin to some purpose. And just as the struggling potpourri of women forced him backward into the room the man drew his revolver and aimed at Zelmira's head pointblank. Jeremy shot him promptly, drilling a hole exactly through his temples.

That staggered the four women for a moment—three of them were the same who had attended our dinner-party—and Zelmira shook herself partly free of them. She was a wild sight with her bronze hair down and her clothes ripped nearly off her, bleeding where the other women had torn her with their finger-nails, but beautiful in spite of it—or maybe because of it; for there was courage there, as well as frenzy; furious action in place of masked intrigue.

"Kill those five—the committee of five!" she screamed. "Kill those monsters! Are you men! Kill those devils before you die!"

Strange and I could no longer hold that

door we had propped the bench against. They burst it off its hinges and we sprang back to the center of the room. I shot the first two men who entered, Jeremy shot another, but the rest rushed, and when my pistol was empty a second time three of them closed with me. I had only one hand to fight with. Three more of them pounced on Strange, and one man, standing in the door, fired on Zelmira, but missed her and killed one of the other women.

"Kill those five! Oh, kill them!" Zelmira Poulakis screamed. "Never mind the others! Do a good deed! Kill those five monsters!"

Then the door behind the table burst inward and half a dozen men stepped forward cautiously between the upset chairs and the scrambling committee. The committee got to their knees to shoot over the table-edge and it looked as if the end had come.

"There they are! Kill them!" Zelmira screamed.

I saw them killed. I was down under three men, struggling to break the neck of one, whose head was in chancery under my right arm. A second lay still on top of me, for Jeremy had brained him with the butt-end, and the third was trying to hold my legs, which is no job for a weakling. I turned my head to see what was happening to Strange, whom Jeremy was doing his best to preserve alive until the last possible second, when that simitar flashed across my line of vision—flashed like Summer lightning under the hanging lamp.

Gosh! But I never saw the like of it—I, who have seen the sword-dance under Sikaram when the rival clans were showing off before the women! I've seen a shark, too, taking fish—left-right, left-right and away again; and more than once I've seen a lion spring between the watch-fires, make his kill and escape. But never, on all the continents, have I seen action that could hold a candle to that sword-work of Narayan Singh's.

He slew those five committee-men in five strokes so swift that they resembled one, and then went blazing, berserker mad in mid-room, swinging, swiping, lunging, shouting "Ho!" as his blade struck home, and driving the astonished foe in front of him as a bull clears men out of a field.

Some of them fired, but fired and ran too quickly for straight aim, most of them facing him, but crowding backward in one another's way; and in thirty seconds more the thing was over. Kennedy stood in the door of the anteroom in evening dress, smiling, holding a loaded pistol behind his back.

"That will do now," he said quietly. His voice had that peculiar penetrating quality that I had noticed in the hotel when he first came forward to meet me.

And it did do, for behind him, and through both the other doors his hand-picked corps of officers came surging in; and one of the most peculiar things in this cantankerous old world is the resemblance between a sudden fight and an explosion. When it's over, it's over—done with—nothing left of it but wreckage and the acrid smell of powder.

Kennedy's arrangements had been neat, and they worked in the nick of time, which of course is a sign of genius; but as Grim argued afterward, over a whisky and soda with a man whose name must not appear, if he hadn't been so particularly careful to catch all the small fry by first surrounding the house and then having his posse enter from every side at once, he might have taken those five principals alive; and that in turn might have led to the capture of worse rascals higher up.

But, as Kennedy suggested, it wasn't a bad night's work for all that. There were ambulances ready, and we had twenty-eight living prisoners including women to stow in them, all of whom had seen the committee-men killed and, no longer having them to fear, were anxious to tell all they knew.

Some of the officers drove away with the prisoners, to see them safely under lock and key, and the rest of us, with Zelmira Poulakis, foregathered in another room to patch up wounds and compare notes.

CHAPTER XIV

"I but acted as other men would act!"

ZELMIRA POULAKIS had the floor first, when old Narendra Nath had finished putting strips of plaster on her scratches. We found the old man cowering in another room, making magic under cover of a purple cloak.

"I don't care what happens now," she said. "I have been a criminal ever since I was married; first because Poulakis taught me, and it seemed good fun; later on because I was compelled. I hoped this forced

marriage to Mr. Meldrum Strange might prove a way of escape for me. I didn't believe he would marry me, and yet I half-hoped he would, because there was no other hope in sight. And then this Indian, Narayan Singh, said that if Major Grim and his friends had anything to do with Meldrum Strange, then Meldrum Strange was "*pakka*," as he called it, and he offered to wager his right hand against my slipper that if he could only talk with any of the *sahibs* there would be no doubt of the outcome. So it was agreed that when we reached the hotel this evening he should seize his opportunity."

"She speaks truth," said Narayan Singh. "But I have told my end of the tale already to Ramsden sahib. Let Jimgrim tell the rest. Those women had orders to bring Jimgrim in their carriage, and I had orders to slay him; but old Narendra Nath, who brought the order to me, knowing well by that time that his magic took no effect on me, bade me not slay.

" 'I am an old man,' said he, 'and I dare not wholly disobey these men; but I have seen a vision, and the stars are favorable. So I say; slay not, but make believe to fall in with the plan.'

"And so I did as he said, being minded to do so in any case, whether he so advised or not. And when we reached this house, and the men at the door disarmed Jimgrim, I seized him from behind, whispering two words in his ear; and I dragged him upstairs into a room beside that in which the women waited. There he and I held a conference, and later I did as Jimgrim bade me."

"Then it wasn't true," I asked, "that Grim was taken before the committee and examined ahead of us?"

"No, not a word of truth in that," Grim answered. "Narayan Singh gave me the general layout; and I knew that Kennedy had most of the facts from Ramsden, so it was a reasonable gamble, as well as our only chance, that Kennedy would act swiftly. I've worked under Kennedy, and know his method fairly well; I figured he'd surround the house and rush it. So the one important thing to do was to gain time. Narayan Singh had orders to produce me—dead—at a given signal. They thought he was hypnotized and were sure he'd obey. So I had him drag me into the anteroom, and he looked so wild that the fellow in there didn't dare examine me to see whether I was properly dead. But the credit for the whole business belongs to Narayan Singh. My share in it was——"

"Nay, nay, *sahib!*" the Sikh answered. "I but acted as any other man would act. I take no credit. I did no more than to scout a little, and convey my information to the proper quarter. Yet, if there is any little merit in what I did—if burra sahib Kennedy considers that the *sirkar* is beholden to me—then, there is a favor I might ask, if permission were granted."

"What is it?" demanded Kennedy. "I can't grant requests, you know. I can only recommend that they be granted."

"The lady Zelmira, *sahib*—what is to become of her? I swore to serve her to the end of this affair. I beg, then, that she be not thrown in jail. That is surely a little thing; will the *sahib* grant it?"

Kennedy laughed. Everybody laughed, except Zelmira Poulakis and Narayan Singh. The Sikh looked offended, and she miserable.

"I suppose it must be amusing, since you all find it so," she said, holding her chin up bravely. "But it does not seem funny to me. What do you intend to do with me? May I go home first and get some things?"

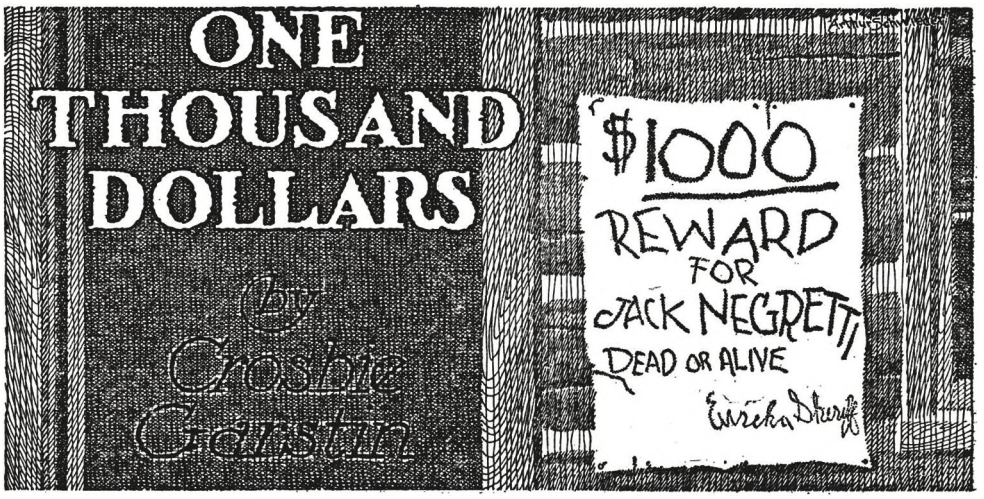
"I humbly beg your pardon," Kennedy answered. "We were laughing at our friend Narayan Singh's naïveté, not at your predicament. I don't know, Madame, what is to be done with you. My authority is limited. But if you should offer to turn State's Evidence——"

"Which I do!" she interrupted.

"—and should undertake to help the Administration in every way possible to bring the members of this gang to their deserts——"

"Which I certainly will!" she assured him.

"—then I would take upon myself the responsibility of requesting you to return to your own home, where, if you will stay indoors and keep quiet, you will be subjected for the present to no other inconvenience than a trustworthy guard, who will protect you from gang-vengeance. If your evidence should be accepted by the State, you would afterward be set entirely free."



Author of "The Last Cartridge," "At Stroud's," etc.

YOUNG Billy Eldred left his black pony "Beetle" tied to a cotton-tree and worked his way with extreme caution toward a clump of willows in the creek-bed.

Over the shoulder of the coulée he could see a wisp of smoke arising from the Macpherson homestead. Over the shoulder of the coulée came the Macpherson cows, off to the day's pasturing. Hamish, youngest of the Macpherson brood, herded them with a lot of unnecessary fuss. He was pretending to be a cowboy and came capering barefooted over the grass, flogging an imaginary pony with a willow stick and whooping shrilly at the Holsteins—who took not the slightest notice. The real cowboy flattened himself out behind a boulder and let the fanciful youth go by; he was in hostile country and suspected enemy scouts.

At length, when the dimming *tinkle-tonk* of the cow-bells told him that Hamish was over the hill and out of sight, he forged slowly ahead and, after a lot of Snaky maneuvers, gained the willow clump unperceived.

In the middle of the willows was the Macpherson well; hither Jean would presently come haling the Macpherson buckets.

Young Billy Eldred squatted as comfortably as possible behind the thickest cover and waited; there was nothing else to do.

The reason for all this caution was Pa Macpherson, pa of Jean, a sour old crab-apple of a man, who was not infatuated with young Billy Eldred. On one occasion, discovering Jean and Billy in each other's arms behind his barn he had pursued the latter over two acres of heavy plow-land with agility positively immoral in one of his years, snapping a blacksnake whip the while and roaring information as to what he would do with Billy's gizzard when he caught him.

A five-strand fence, which the fugitive took in his stride, saved the gizzard for the nonce; but the episode taught Billy that pa was a force and Discretion the Godmother of Romance. Presently a clanking of pails and fresh voice singing "My Southern Roorose" betokened that Jean was at hand and the coast clear.

He poked his head out of the thicket.

"That you Jeanie?"

"No love, it's pa—I'm a mile away knocking in fence-posts."

Billy heaved a sigh of relief, and stepped into the clearing.

"Oh, quit yer kiddin' honey—but, is pa well away, then—honest?"

"Oh you great fool! Do you think I'd let him catch you here and load you up with buckshot?"

"Buckshot?" Billy echoed with alarm. "What do you mean?"

"He's toting his scatter-gun with him now. 'If I catch that no-good young varmint round here,' he says fifty times a day 'I'll shoot him all to chicken-feed' he says, and he means it. Oh, Billy love, get some money quick and take me away!"

Jean collapsed into tears, wove her arms round his neck, and buried her face in his shirt. Billy groaned; this scatter-gun business was a new development; he couldn't think how old man Macpherson could be so wicked.

"Money!" he groaned again. "Money, ——! Where am I goin' to get money; pick it off bushes? Be half-ways reasonable, kiddo, give a feller a chance. Money!"

Jean lifted a pair of misty, beseeching eyes to his and sobbed aloud. Billy felt desperate.

"Say Jeanie, d'yer think he'd let me have you if I had just money?"

"Y-yes," sobbed Jean—"if you had enough of it."

Jean was soft and little and pretty; young Billy let her blubber on his chest for full five minutes for the feel of the thing, before he attempted to comfort her.

"Say now, Jean lovey, don't cry like that, I'll get some dough sure enough, if I have to murder for it. Oh my dear I——"

Suddenly he noticed a long shadow sliding across the sunlit patch at their feet; some one was coming—pa! He disentangled himself from Jean and gained the sheltering foliage in one bound, but no roar and rip of buckshot followed him, no raucous Scotch voice demanding his gizzard; instead he heard some one give Jean a courteous "Good day," and Jean as courteously reply. He stepped back into the clearing with all the dignity possible under the circumstances, which was not much. The some one was a horseman, a tall, dark man sitting crumpled up in the saddle with every weary muscle relaxed. His unshorn face was furred with a graying stubble; about his long limbs hung the rags and tatters of old cowman finery. Both he and his horse were powdered all over with alkali dust and soaked with sweat, they must have come a long way, and fast. But what caught and held Billy's eye were the two sinister Colt revolvers "strapped down" for instant action on either thigh. The stranger noted his start and winked.

"No cause to get scarey, son, I'm all right—see?"

He turned the flap of his leather vest displaying the nickel star of a United States sheriff.

"Out after Jack Negretti," he remarked casually.

Jean squeaked at the name of the notorious outlaw.

"Oh, is he in these parts? That fiend!"

The sheriff nodded.

"Yep, but he won't touch you, missy. We pushed him outer Red Hills at dawn s'mornin' an' he was headin' for Bull Buttes on a bald-faced bay when last seen, but I guess we got him corralled good and tight now, and I'll get him before dark."

He tapped one of the long Colts and grinned.

"I'll slip him a pill he won't cough up. Could you let my cayuse rinse her mouth, missy, if you please?"

"Pa might lend you a new pony," said Jean doubtfully.

"At time," answered the sheriff.

Jean drew a bucket of water, and let the tired pony suck a mouthful, no more, for the sheriff dragged her head up.

"No, good old girl, don't water-log yourself, you've gotter go on till I can get another horse."

He tilted the pail to his own cracked lips.

"Let me draw you a fresh one," Jean offered.

"No time," said the officer again setting the pail down and swinging stiffly to the saddle again. "Well good day friends, and thank you kindly."

He twisted his jaded mount about and rode off through the bushes without another word. They watched him down the creek until he disappeared behind the spur.

"Do you know I—I feel almost sorry for that man Negretti," said Jean.

"He's a mean, low cuss, a man-killer," Billy retorted hotly.

"I know, I know; still it must be awful to be hunted on and on, with no way to turn, by men like that."

"It's men like that that keep you from being murdered in your bed. If Jack Negretti——"

At that moment the discussion was cut short by the stentorian voice of Pa Macpherson in the homestead yard bawling for his favorite ax—as if he expected it to answer him—and the lovers went skipping their respective ways: Jean up the path with her pails, and young Billy Eldred, by a repetition of his snaky maneuvers, back to where Beetle stood, switching his tail and chewing the bark of the cotton-tree.

He mounted and rode slowly off toward where Jonesville lay grilling in its hollow. He was greatly exercised, was young Billy Eldred; Jean's tears were still damp on his

shirt, and he loved her dearly. She had suddenly called upon him to take her and keep her; he only wished he could.

The problem, boiled down, amounted to "Money, how to get it." He hadn't the faintest idea. Apart from Beetle, a tastefully vamped saddle, a couple of blankets, a revolver, the clothes he stood up in and a dollar bill—won the preceding evening from a Mexican at stud poker—he hadn't a possession in the world. Hardly enough to start housekeeping on. Personally he, Billy, was quite content to bed down on any old bundle of hay and could eat his meals comfortably off the lid of a cracker tin—reversed for sweets—but Jean might be more particular; girls had funny ideas.

It was true that Whitey McClintock paid him "twenty-five per" for riding the spacious ranges of the Lazy B, but always with the reservation that it was from motives of the purest charity. He didn't think he could very well tackle Whitey for a raise, Whitey was a quick-tempered man, likely to say a whole lot of things he'd regret afterward. The Mexican could not be reckoned as a steady source of income; greasers were unreliable at the best.

Prospects looked pretty black altogether—still Jean had wept upon his breast, he had promised, it was up to him. Young Billy Eldred puzzled his wits till they ached under the unwonted pressure, but he could think of no scheme.

He wished to goodness he was a rich man's son, or the lost heir to somebody. He'd wished he'd find a letter in Jonesville saying Rockefeller had adopted him or that he was the lost Duke of London and was free to go the limit with an unlimited bank account.

Jean a dukess! Coated a foot deep in diamonds and ostrich fluff—gee whizzle! When he was a duke he'd make old man Macpherson graze in the backyard and say he liked it. B'gosh he would!

He wondered if by any dog's chance he had one of those Caruso voices hidden in his throat, a wonder-voice, a dollar-a-note voice. Why not? He guessed he could sing doggies quicker than any other night-herder in the Lone Star State, and none of the boys ever threw boots at him when he intoned "My Lulu Girl" by the fire at night—it might be. In imagination he saw himself singing to vast, spell-bound audiences; frantic ladies hurled bouquets at him, frenzied gentlemen pelted him with rolls of greenbacks, and in the biggest, swellest box of the lot sat Jean, smiling—'way back on the two-bit benches Pa Macpherson writhed and gnashed his remaining teeth. Charming fancies! Beetle plunged at a sunning rattler, and Billy was jarred from his Spanish castles to drab realities again. Actually he had a precarious twenty-five dollars a month, neither more nor less.

Somehow he couldn't picture himself interviewing Pa Macpherson and the scattergun with only that at his back, it wouldn't be fair to risk making Jean a widow before he had made her a bride, so to speak; she was far too fond of him. Were he only half a man he'd ride up to the homestead, swing Jean up before him and head Beetle into Mexico without consulting Pa Macpherson at all. Then he reflected that even in Mexico people eat and possibly have to pay for their meals, also the pommel of a stock saddle would hardly be comfortable sitting for a sustained tour.

Money always money, to —— with money! But he'd got to find some for all that.

The one game he knew inside out was the cattle game, but there was no profit in it for such as he *sans* capital, unless, unless—An ugly light came into his eyes and two heavy puckers furrowed his brows—"unless a feller did a bit of rustlin'." It was dangerous work, dirty work; but he wanted Jean more than anything on earth, and money meant Jean.

Those beeves of Brennan's; he could cut them out single-handed with a good dog; run them into that hidden *cañoncito* he had discovered last Fall when hunting strays, leave them there until the din died down, then work them gradually over the Rio Grande into Mexico; in Mexico they asked no questions or were contented with lies.

It should not be so dangerous after all, Brennan was rich, would hardly miss them, in fact it was doubtful if stealing from a man as wealthy as Brennan was stealing at all. It would only be for once anyhow, once he'd got Jean he'd go straight, no man straighter. He rode on, steeped in thought, hardly noticing where he was going, shaping his plans and visualizing the run of the hills where his secret valley lay.

THE lusty southern sun reared high over the heave of silver peaks and looked down on the saddest sight on earth, a clean boy going wrong. Thus he brooded blackly as Beetle brought him down the main street of Jonesville and, from force of habit, stopped at the hitching-rack of the principal saloon.

Billy came to himself with a guilty start and looked about him, there was an unusual bustle in town. A dozen mounted men were galloping out of the north end, kicking up a haze of dust behind them. Some women and a score or so of citizens watched their departure with demonstrative interest.

One Barney Sheenan, a young Bar X cow-punch of Billy's acquaintance, was tugging up his saddle cinches at the saloon rack. He seemed hurried, which was foreign to his nature.

"What's doin'?" Billy inquired.

"Jack Negretti close here s'mornin'. Eureka folk done smoked him outer Bull Buttes at sun-up. Jim Cannon has raised a posse and gone along too."

He jerked his head toward the flying dust-cloud and jumped for the saddle.

"Oh, shucks, I *sabe* all that!" said Billy, conscious of his superiority. "The Eureka sheriff himself told me that much and more early on. Negretti's ridin' a bald-faced bay, if that's any use to you."

"Eureka sheriff! Bald-faced bay!" Sheenan retorted as he spun his rearing pony about. "Why, you mutt, Negretti shot the Eureka sheriff yesterday, an' he's ridin' the sheriff's mare, a buckskin."

He brought down his quirt with a swish and galloped after the vanishing posse.

Young Billy Eldred's jaw sagged and his eyes bulged.

"A buckskin mare! The sheriff's star, by——"

Then he, he Billy Eldred, had been talking to Jack Negretti that very morning—Jack Negretti, the bad-man, the murderer, with a thousand dollars on his head.

One thousand dollars! And only he, Billy Eldred, knew which way he was headed—By ——, into his hands, into his hands!

He dismounted quickly, spent his remaining dollar on revolver shells, mounted again and rode back the way he had come. By the well at Macpherson's he picked up the outlaw's trail. It led down the gulley, over the hill-saddle and across the flats above. At one place it merged with the footprints of some wild range mares, but the buckskin had a sand-crack in her near hind hoof which stamped her sign as unmistakeably to Billy, a plainsman, as if he had read it in a book, and in a few minutes he had disentangled it and was following hard up the out-running spurs of the foot-hills.

In places, sometimes for a mile at a stretch, boot-prints by the side of the hoof-prints told Billy that the buckskin must be pretty near done; your cow-man does not walk until the case is beyond desperate.

Negretti had had possibly two and a half hours' start; but Beetle was fresh and sturdy, and Billy felt he must be gaining two miles in every three. Nevertheless he pushed the black to the utmost, for he knew he must be on terms with his man before night-fall. There was the posse to beat as well.

The afternoon drew in, purple shadows began to lengthen and thicken among the mountains crags above him, but still he could catch no sight of his quarry.

The country grew steeper and rougher, the oaks gave over to stunted hill spruce and large lumps of rock cumbered the track.

Negretti's signs showed he had urged the jaded mare into a lope.

"If he gets into them rocks in the dark I'll never get him out," said Billy, and rubbed spurs into Beetle.

Far down on the plain below he could see a line of specks sweeping in clouds of dust toward the foot-hills—the posse. The timber grew denser and shut out every view, but that of the trail winding ever on and up.

An evening hill breeze toyed gently with the tops of the spruce; but for its gentle soughing and the scramble of Beetle's hooves on the shale, there was no other sound.

THUS he came into the clearing before the deserted lumberman's shack known locally as Bethmann's, and here Beetle suddenly pricked his ears, sniffed and whinnied.

Billy instantly silenced him with a quirt blow on the nose, whipped into cover behind some tree stumps, and waited. Nothing happened. However the pony was still carrying his head high and his ears cocked well forward; there must be something about. He waited some two minutes longer, then stepped to the ground and commenced working cautiously round the shack under cover of the timber.

Three-quarters of the way round he almost stumbled over the buckskin mare. She was lying behind an out-crop of quartz, her saddle and bridle still on.

At first he thought her dead, but a quiver of overwrought muscles and a fluttering of her flanks contradicted this; she was merely dead beat.

He wondered where Negretti could be, probably gone on into the rocks on foot, not likely to be in the shack, as the loggers had left it only a week before and might be back at any time; still he must try it.

He worked round the blind end of the shack across the open space on his stomach, then on under the wall to the door, here he paused.

Negretti might be there after all, he was a sure shot too, Negretti. Young Billy Eldred's heart began to fail him; he felt horribly lonely. Life was a delectable thing it seemed to him that evening, with the sunset blood-red over the Sierras, the plains below—his native plains—hazy with the swift-striding dusk, a wild bird singing in the bush and the scents of the timber tingling in his nostrils. Life was a sweet, desirable thing, worth more than one thousand dollars. If he crept away as he had come, nobody would be a whit the wiser, nobody.

On the other hand some persistent voice kept whispering "Jean, Jean, Jean!" in his ears. A thousand dollars would mean Jean; he poignantly remembered her in his arms that morning, pretty, soft and tearful, calling on him to play the man and take her away.

He stood up and cocked his revolver hammer carefully. He loved life, but he loved Jean more; he would go through with it. He was no coward, young Billy Eldred, for all that he had done a record hundred yards before Pa Macpherson's blacksnake.

He fingered the latch, drew a deep breath, then kicked the door violently inward, and threw up his gun. There was nobody there. He peered into the gloom of the interior, but could make out no living thing—nothing but the rough board table and the outlines of straw-littered bunks. He laughed aloud with relief and stepped in.

"By gee I pretty nigh scared myself to death," said he, then froze slowly solid, for a cold ring of metal was being pressed into his neck, just behind the ear.

"S'up," said a chilly voice behind him, and young Billy Eldred put up his hands, his gun clattering on the floor, from whence it was immediately garnered by the invisible man.

It was Negretti, he knew well enough; the outlaw had been watching him all the time, had been standing quietly behind the door—fool that he was not to have thought of that!

He wondered vaguely how long it would be before he was killed; he wondered how it would feel, that lump of lead tearing through his head, mashing bone and brains; he hoped he wouldn't moan and quiver much, like one man he had seen.

He felt a blundering nervous hand feeling down his shirt and pants for any concealed weapon, then tug his loaded belt loose, and toss it across the floor.

"Turn around—let's see you," said the voice, and he turned full to the light of the door. It *was* Negretti.

"By —— the kid down by the well s'mornin'! Huh! You taken to man-huntin' too? D'y hear me? You taken to man-huntin' too?" he roared.

"N-no—yes," stammered young Billy Eldred through dry lips, lying would not help him now.

The outlaw glared at him, snarling. He was not a hopeful sight, he looked even more disheveled than he had that morning. The gray stubble on his chin seemed longer and dirtier, his eyes more heavy-lidded and bloodshot, his cheeks more hollow.

"You cub you—you dirty sneaking lil' yellow pup! So you thought you'd belt my scalp, didyer? Me, Jack Negretti! H'ain't the Jonesville country got any men left, that they must send you along you crawling lil' sucker?"

With every word he seemed to work himself into further heights of passion and go temporarily out of his senses. He sprayed Billy with the filthiest abuse, trembling all over, a dribble of saliva running from the corner of his mouth. As a climax he spat twice in the boy's face.

Eventually he paused from sheer lack of breath, seemed to recover himself somewhat and regarded Billy curiously for some seconds.

"Say bub—what harm did I ever done you?"

"None," Billy choked, the sweat was beading from his every pore, cold sweat.

"Then what didyer wanter get me for?

'Cause I'm a bad-man, a killer eh? ——, so I am, I suppose."

He stopped as if the full import of this had never struck him before.

"Bad-man, killer," he muttered to himself once or twice. When he looked up at Billy again, his eyes were no longer maniacal, but almost wistful.

"Listen you here—s'posin' you'd worked like —— for fifteen years to get a lil' place together an' you get her an' you keep her by the skin of your teeth for two years. By'mby when things is beginning to look kinder easier along comes a bad season an' your calves die, an' your cows peg out of milk-fever. Then one day you finds a few strange calves—strays—a-suckin' on your cows—only five mind you. What would you say? You'd say, 'Oh, shucks, let 'em ramble,' an' maybe fake the brands a bit, you bein' a poor man an' hard hit.

"But s'posin' some one *does* happen along what *do* miss them calves, an' *can* identify them on account of them bein' tattooed on the gums where you'd never thought of lookin'. You're for it then, penitentiary, years of it—you who'd lived in the open all your life. What would you do? Run for it? Shore you would.

"S'posin' somebody trails you an' is for arrestin' you, to put you in penitentiary, you what's lived in the open. You pulls a gun maybe, jest to bluff him like, stall him off, but the crazy fool rushes you and your gun goes off—you're a murderer now.

"All the country's up an' after you, you're hunted round like a cayote, night an' day, week in week out, they cuts you off the water-tanks, they hunts you in bunches, they hunts you in relays, when one lot is tired, a fresh lot takes on—but there aren't no one to take on from you, nobody on earth. Now an' again they gets a bit too close an' you does a bit more shootin', bein' naturally riled-like an' tired of it all. Why look here," he drew his hand over the gray bristle, "that was black two months ago, black I tell you!

"Well, s'posin' all this happened to you, son, what would you have done if you'd been a growed man an' had run on the range all your life? What do you say?"

"I'm real sorry," said Billy, and meant it. "I never thought of it that away—I only thought on the——"

"On the—what? Spit it out."

"On the dough," Billy answered and hung his head.

"The dough, the thousand dollars. B'gosh I'm shore some muck fat beeve these days, one thousand bucks on my carcass! I'd admire to have that painted on my gravestone some time. 'He was wuth one thousand dollars, dead.' But what are you wantin' a thousand for all that bad? It's a lotter money, son."

"I wanter get married," said Billy in a whisper.

"To that filly-girl at the well? She what give me a drink?"

Billy nodded.

"Say did she chase you out after me?"

"No—she don't know nothin' about it."

The outlaw lowered the barrel of his revolver.

"Well you'll have ter think up some other scheme now."

"D'yer mean—d'yer mean you ain't goin'—to shoot me up?" asked Billy astounded; such clemency was unbelievable.

"——, yes—why for should I gun you? You ain't never caused me no bother, baby, I'd as soon shoot a woman. I'm goin' to take your pony and go on again."

He looked through the window to where the Sierras were fading rose-colored into a violet sky—the lands of freedom.

"On again. I'm goin' to take your gun and shells and if them bloodhounds come too close I'll make 'em sorry they comed huntin'. I'm goin' now, an' don't you move for fifteen minutes or then I shore will blow your head in; I'll be close around. Sit over ag'in that bunk!" He stepped sidewise out of the door, closed it and was gone.

Billy sat obediently on the bunk-edge and waited, he did not want to move, had too much to think about, he did not try to comfort his pride, its wound was mortal. He sat still, as if in a trance, while the thoughts rioted through his brain. Once he imagined he heard a shot without, and supposed the posse had come up—not that he cared. He tiptoed to the window, but could see nothing through the thickening dusk. At the end of a further ten minutes, he opened the door and crept across the clearing.

Something rustled under the trees, and he threw himself face downward on the ground. A horse nickered, walked out from under the trees, and nosed him where he lay in the grass. It was Beetle. Negretti hadn't

taken him after all, neither had he taken the buckskin mare; she was lying where he had left her earlier on. He rose to his feet and walked forward perplexed. Listened, but could hear never a sound.

Then he saw a scrap of paper gleaming white in the dusk. It was pinned into the crack of a windfall by the stump of a pencil. He picked it up and, as he did so, saw the shape of a man lying on the far side of the log. He knew instinctively that it was Negretti and that he was dead. He was lying face downward in the pine needles, his head pillowed on his arms like a man who has come to the end of a long trail, and falls heavily asleep.

The boy picked up the paper and laboriously spelt the scrawled lettering out.

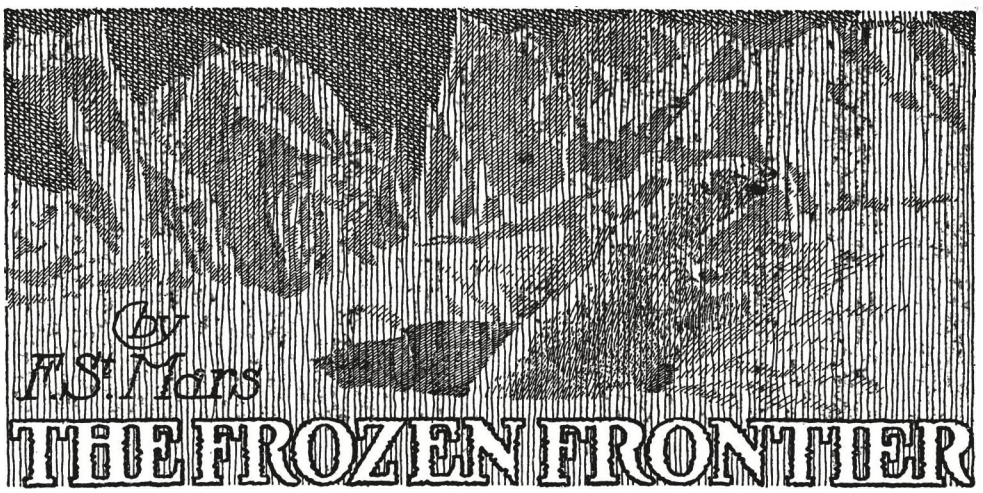
"You kan keep yore pony I ain't goin on. I is too tired and it is no use anyway. Trade yore gun for mine and tell them you shot me with her the barel is dirte.

"Giv the $1,000 to yore gurl for the drink she giv me. I am goin' to get all the slepe I am wantin' rite now. They won't put me in no pennytenshary.

"J. M. NEGRETTI."

Young Billy Eldred crushed the paper into his pocket, and taking his hat in his hands gazed over the windfall at the man who had found one false step irrevocable. His mouth quivered and two hot tears ran down his boyish cheeks, for he knew that there, but for the grace of God lay himself, Billy Eldred. He picked up the long Colt, twisted it over in his fingers, then dropped it back in the grass and turned away.

"I guess me'n Jean can win through without that—that blood-money," he said and mounting Beetle rode off down the hill trail.



Author of "None But the Brave," "The Mystic," etc.

IT WAS not so much the dark but the fog that troubled. You could certainly see your hand before your face, but no more, and the cold was fearful, and on all sides the damp, cold fog curtains, welt upon welt, shut in all but bitter sullen sea that became ice where it splashed and seemed as if it wished for nothing more than to freeze and be still.

Once there came the cry of some sea birds invisible—eider ducks, most like—but save for that there was only silence, the terrifying iron-bound silence of the arctic night.

Land, if there was any, must have been a very long way off—a day's journey, two days or even three. Certainly it was far.

In the sea, floating along, rising and falling upon the icy waves, raising from time to time a little splash and a seething of bubbles as the lifting swell caught it, was a patch of dirty, yellowish ice. Save that it had a black spot at one end of it, and was drifting rather fast, it was just like any

other loose, worn patch of ice floating about masterless on that cruel sea through the fog and the night. You or I, had we been so unfortunate as to find ourselves in that lost and frozen spot, might have passed it by without even a second glance.

The wet and warty seal, heading along southward—so many flapper strokes to the minute, in his best traveling style—who merged suddenly out of the night, did actually pass that ice by with one uninterested glance, but not by any means without a second. She reared up in the water, treated the block of ice to one horrified stare, and went under with a splash like a sinking rock.

She vanished, and the ice drifted on steadily, making no sound but its own splashings and small seethings of spray.

Then came another and a very huge shape. It was by no manner of means a seal, but it might have been an iceberg, if it hadn't been alive and dark colored—except when it rolled, when it showed black and white, ribbed and grooved in wavy lines longitudinally—and it was going very fast indeed. This last was a youngish whale, nearer forty than thirty feet long, and it left a broad track of red water behind it, like the wake of a ship, which proved it somehow wounded, and it was fighting for air—like a "towering" partridge—on the surface.

Presently it would die, but meanwhile it was alive, and any creature that happened to be foolish enough to remain in its path would die first.

Thanks to the interminable fog and its speed it had appeared—to the accompaniment of threshings like the blades of a paddle-wheel steamer—and was upon the lump of floating ice almost before one knew. It seemed that that block of ice must cease to exist as one piece, and become several separate pieces, as one vast flipper of that whale not less than thirty feet long it seemed heaved high aloft above it and began to come down again—bash! Then it didn't seem so.

The ice-block had, without any unnecessary delay, quickly and most certainly dived!

There could be no manner of possible doubt about it, the ice block had gone under like a sounding porpoise, and almost as easily, and the gigantic flipper of the whale struck the place where it should have been but was not, with a concussion like a bursting six-inch shell. The blow—merely the ordinary fling of the beast in torment, as an asphyxiating man flings his arms abroad—arrived with sufficient force to brain an elephant, two elephants, let alone pulverize a piece of ice.

As it was it shot up a cascade high as a tree, and the snarl of the falling water again sounded all about.

Goodness knows where the piece of ice had gone! But—what was that white thing that had risen so quietly to the surface some thirty yards away on the other side of the whale, and was swimming like a thing possessed across a small gap in the fog? Close inspection would have revealed it, not as an ice-lump, but as a bear, a dirty yellowish-white one, and a monster among bears at that.

It was only while he had been swimming slowly, drifting with the current mostly, since he knew that that, if persisted in, would lead him eventually to ice, if not to land, that he had, all save the tell-tale black nose-tip, looked like ice. Now that he was going fast and for his life, his outlines were revealed as very much of a bear.

The beast had been lost in the fog on the high seas, had been lost for hours, ever since he had left an ice hummock to swim to another which was not there in the fog when he arrived, and his own hummock had in the meantime drifted equally out of sight.

Somehow it seemed strange to see that great brute as at home on that sullen, dark, heaving deep as a porpoise, or a seal almost—almost, but not quite. He had swum; he had drifted untired; he had dived, and come up again as effortlessly and confidently as any of the sea dwellers; but—well, he did crave to feel under his paws something more trustworthy than the back of a dying whale, or, for all he knew, at any instant, the teeth of a "killer," who is a grampus, and will stretch the measuring tape to a good fourteen feet or more between head and tail.

Men say that beasts in a desert can smell the water long before they are near enough to see it. So and not otherwise, it may be that bear could smell the ice. Anyhow, he headed for home straight toward it through that blind fog, as if he held a compass in one of his vast paws, and knew how to steer by it, for presently there grew into the silence and the night a sound.

There is no sound quite like it on earth or on the waters surrounding the earth. Also it is indescribable. Once heard it can never be forgotten. It is too immense, too sinister, and grim, and grandly unalterable to compare—the thunder of a heavy sea against the vasty fringe of the terrible arctic ice-pack.

The quick small ears of the swimming bear caught the first faint, deep mutterings and grumblings of it on the air from afar, and as he sat up upon his tail, mermaid fashion, in the chopping waters, his low-browed, sleek, small head—small, that is, for the great size of the animal—all wet and matted, caught the icy chill of the first numbing breaths of a rising wind. Then he rolled over, as a barrel rolls, in the trough, and set himself really to swim, straight toward the sound, and the fog peeled off like breath from a window, as he did so.

Being low in the water, the noise had increased to a nerve shattering, grinding, rending, thunder, that filled the air, and heaven above the air, in one stupendous, terrifying turmoil, before he got sight of the ice itself. Then he paused, as well he, or any other living thing, might.

The whole of the horizon from starry, brooding sky-wall to sky-wall in every direction except back over his shoulder, was filled with a heaving, tumbling, rearing, pounding, grinding, plunging cataclysm of floating ice floes, from a few feet broad to acres in extent, from two feet high to ten or twenty or thirty, where they were flung up on end, and tottered, crashing, with a noise as of falling cliffs on to their fellows—and well he knew that for every foot of ice he could see rising above water-line, there were eight or nine feet solid as a rock beneath the foaming waves.

And he had to land there; had to go through that frozen—and freezing while you looked—inferno; had to face that icy hell, or swim about along the edge of it for ever. Moreover, he could not even do that, for the waves were freezing in thin, crispy slush around his great shoulders even as he swam, and parted with a noise like chewing meringues before the push of his deep chest.

He must face it, or turn about and head for the open sea. Before dawn the water all about him would be ice too, was becoming ice even while he hesitated, and dancing blocks, growing rapidly in size, began to float past all around, to pack, and jamb, and freeze to larger blocks, and toss against the edge of the ice-pack, growing more and more numerous every minute.

Also there were other inducements to land. A sharp, big, black fin, like the blade of some large guillotine, cut the surface, creaming it in a long thin white line for an instant, before vanishing again only fifty yards away from him. And he knew its owner. He was himself a big beast, of course, a huge beast, half way between ten and nine feet in length from black nose-tip, to stumpy tail-tip, and his massive forearms and enormous loose claws made one shudder to look at them.

All the same, although he may not have known his own limit, he knew that there was no profit worth speaking of in taking on a fourteen or fifteen foot killer whale, with the speed of a torpedo, the teeth of a steel punch, and no fear whatever of any living thing on the seas or under them.

So he headed for the tumbling, thundering inferno of the ice pack fringe at speed, hunting here and there, choosing his point of attack craftily, and then, with a long deep breath, he dived.

It was a mighty undertaking, that dive, an effort of enormous risk.

Deep, deep down he sank, a great body of faint silver from above, a blue-black mass as seen from below or around, kicking out powerfully with his massive hind-legs, like an otter, steering mainly with his forepaws, heading straight as a die toward the spot in the ice at which he had aimed when going under, silent in a dark, forbidding underworld of silence and icy death, through which even the volcano-like thundering upheavals of the ice chaos came to him only as faint shudderings.

Dawn—so called—was at hand, and the faint hint of a circle of lesser darkness above him told of it. It allowed him to be a little less blind than he was before. The rest was whisker work and judgment.

It allowed him to guess at that other blue-black shape—for all that it was snow white underneath—vastly bigger than his own, which shot undulating horizontally, strangely, as no fish ever would, up behind, and snapped at him. That he could imagine but not hear down there. It missed, as he tucked in his hind-legs and sank like a stone, and streaked by overhead at the speed o' knots, and, flashing to a silver sheet as it encountered the below water wall of

ice ahead, turned on its side, displaying white length of belly to the light from the surface. When it righted again, hurtling off at a tangent, it became merely blue-black, white belly and all merging into its surroundings, whose colors it reflected, just as the white bear did.

That represented friend killer, the terror of the deep, delivering his first attack. The second would follow as quickly as you pleased. But the bear's lightning turn had given him the depth and position of the pack ice ahead.

Then the bear really began to move, thankful that the killer had aimed badly and left him two hind-legs to move with. Almost hissing along, ducking as a man ducks who crawls through a low arch, his great limbs working like piston rods, driven by all the power and ferocity of his obstinate unflinching brain, he dived below the tossing, grinding, ducking, lifting and falling black wall of the ice pack's base, literally with his life between his immense jaws. One blow, one slip, one fiftieth of a second's misjudgment, one tiny accident, and his crushed and smashed body would have—gone to the killer.

Lesser darkness, as representing the open surface of the sea above, shut down like a drawn curtain.

He was in blackness like the plague. For an instant an enormous blade of ice, twenty foot long, and keen as a razor, forced under some heavier ice block atop, jabbed down at him, missing his back by inches; for another second his body seemed literally to float suspended between two hundred ton walls that dropped on either hand, and, turning over bodily, came together like the falling of mountains not a yard behind his furry hind-soles. And then—and then, it was over, and he was swimming calmly, in a still world, with a still canopy of ice above him. The bear had passed beneath the raging edge of the pack ice, and was in the comparative calm beyond.

But that was nothing. The real risk began now. Above him was an unbroken sheet which represented the bottom of the ice pack, reaching down many, many feet below water. If he could not find a break in this large enough for him to rise to the surface, he died—there was nothing else for it.

He was not a porpoise, or a walrus, who, though they must have, appear to have almost no limit to their submersion power. His lungs must have fresh air. If they did not—he simply drowned, like a rat held under water. There would be no time to go back. He must find an opening, any opening, even a crack large enough for his nose to poke through, or—just simply cease to exist. And, moreover, he had only seconds to do it in.

Those who have only seen the great white bear of the locked North shambling along on the ground, or ice, would have been amazed if they had been able to behold the big beast down there under the pack ice then. He fairly flew through the water, hunting here, there and everywhere for an opening and not finding one.

Things began to look bad. Even he could not have much more unused air left in his lungs, and when that was gone— But it was then that, in the increasing faint imitation of light, he espied a dark body lying horizontally up against the bottom of the ice.

Brimful of stealth, he approached, an almost invisible greenish thing as seen from above, and then he saw, and his eyes became fixed and fierce. It was a walrus, lying on its back, hammering out with its tusks a hole to breathe through, where the ice happened to be thin. He could see the pick-ax motion of the monster's odd head, but in the silence that is one of the chief terrors of the under-water world he could hear no sound of the blows.

The mighty brute had already smashed a small hole and was rapidly enlarging it to take its own vast body. As it lay there, it looked as large as the "killer," perhaps was, or nearly so, but no matter. It was a chance, and the polar bear took it. No other seemed likely to offer. And needs must when the devil drives.

The charge of that bear was unexpected and wicked. He hurled himself at the walrus with his life for sale, clawing and biting all of a heap, like a mad beast, and in grim silence. Defeat for him would mean death, but not for the walrus. It could retreat, and, taken completely by surprize and from the back, it was, for a few seconds, helpless.

It "sounded," therefore, like a sinking rock, and the bear, breaking off hostilities, thrust his nose wildly through the hole into the air, snorting and gasping, almost done for.

But even if he is a ponderous fool, and

clumsy to boot—out of the water, not in it—the walrus is no coward. Moreover, in his native element he can put up some startling exhibitions in the process of moving. This one, who did happen to be a gentleman of the clan, came back with little eyes all red with rage, looking for the imbecile who had clawed his back. He found him, still drinking down great gulps of air, madly scratching at the ice, and keeping one eye, the weather one, upon the gloomy depths beneath him.

Our bear did not stay to interview that walrus. He removed, at top speed and straining every muscle, the walrus after him, and going like the wind.

That bear knew fear—few animals in the wild are such fools as not to know that—but that was a different thing to being a funker. He could die fighting, if need be, but he would rather live eating. Wherefore, he fled, swimming like a master of the art, if only there hadn't been a greater master behind him.

On the actual speed game I do not think his chance was insurable, but once or twice he side-stepped cleverly, getting in a bone-shattering tat-tat with his shovel claws that would have knocked any beast other than a walrus silly.

All the same, he twice saw those terrible three-foot tusks hurl down only just behind his flank, and once felt the sting of fire as they ripped, shallowly, luckily for him, through fin and skin and flesh. The water was already growing red in streaks under the ice-pack all about them, and if he had waited to think, he might have been afraid that the same would call up the killer, or some other wolves of the sea, to attend to his death. There was no time, however, to consider. He wanted to live.

At last he turned—for the twentieth time—and came back, heading straight up to the hole, and putting every last ounce of his enormous strength into the effort. There was no slackening of speed as he came to the hole, on the contrary, he drove himself upward faster than ever.

It was a chance. He was staking his all on a single throw, and heaven help him if he lost.

His nose shot through the aperture—beautifully aimed too, at the very center—his long neck as bear's necks go, followed, and his great shoulders hit the ice with a heavy thud behind.

There followed a noise like breaking up crisp "puff" pastry, a crack, another, a splintering series of crackles, and the gurglings of water, all mixed up with the frenzied scraping of the big beast's claws. Then he yelled as a streak of something red hot caught his hind-leg, which announced the arrival of the walrus and his tusks; and then he was through, up, and out, rolling over and over upon the spotless snow, the great grotesque pantomime mask-like visage of the walrus blowing and snorting like a waiting steam engine after him.

Luckily the ice was thin at that point. Probably the walrus had selected the spot to pick out a blow-hole, knowing that the ice was rotten there, just as a woodpecker knows where to hammer at the rotten tree. Otherwise, the bear could never have got through.

However, that was not the point. The point was that, where his head shot into the open something white flashed past his nose with a whiz that made him duck and blink. Also, as his body followed his head, a deep and threatening growl rumbled into his ear. And now as he lay on the snow, panting, gasping, nearly choking, and licking at the blood that dyed his ivory coat in a neat straight line eight inches long down his off hind-leg, a sudden roar from the walrus in the blow hole, the clash of tusks on ice, and a short, sharp, savage growl, all coming almost together, struck him into an immovable statue on the instant.

He stared, and what he saw was enough. He saw a big white she bear, biffing—there is no other word to use in the case of the peculiar, clumsy, round-arm sweep of a bear's paw—at the enormously whiskered face of the walrus, and he saw that beast throw back his head, and the gleam of the long tusks as he struck.

Then, perhaps, because his wounds hurt he shot forward, grunting, and struck too, but at nothing. The walrus was gone, and he on one side of the blow-hole, and she on the other, stood looking down into the aperture beneath whose sucking waters somewhere the enemy swam. But neither of them seemed burningly anxious to go in and find him there.

They waited for a full minute, with great paws crooked back, ready to strike if he came up; but he did not. Fool he may have been, but not such a fool as to paddle into that trap. Then they looked up, staring

straight into one another's eyes across the little patch of water; noses not two feet apart. And then, after a long tense pause, they growled. It was their greetings, a strange one, a savage one, an uncouth one; but bears are strange, savage, and uncouth beasts.

Finally the she bear spun on her heel, as bears can, and slouched off over the rough snow and ice, over the hummocks, high as sand-hills, some of them, through the "pane" of half-frozen water, in and out, up and down, unchecked, unhurried, and yet perhaps twice as fast as a man could have traveled there, whether running or walking. And the big male bear—who was perhaps nearly two feet longer than she from nose to tail-tip—followed.

She had made no sound, yet he seemed to understand perfectly what she would convey. She was hungry; she would lead him toward somewhere she wanted him to follow. He followed. I don't know how this wordless, signless language was worked. There is, however, there must be, in many of us, perhaps all, a more or less dim consciousness of somewhat the same sort of instinctive understanding, used or not, listened to or no, according to the character and circumstances of the individual, but handed down to us assuredly from the eons when man had canine teeth like a beast, and put more store upon a forceful silence, than monkey-gibbering words.

Now the pack ice is very much like the sand dunes, petrified sand dunes, if that could be, and it is possible to go a very long way without knowing what is directly around you unless you mount to a high hummock and look out. This the two bears did, and what they saw was a dark object lying by the edge of an open patch of water—what is called a "lead"—dotted with floating pieces of ice. Dark objects, objects of any sort indeed, are not so common upon the pack ice that hungry bears usually confuse them.

Most of the wild people in those parts affected white as a livery, and dark objects of any size on the ice must be seals or walrus, in the bear's mind. Man they did not count, for so seldom they saw him that he was still a negligible quantity in their estimation. A long dark object, therefore, must be a seal, if it was not large enough to be a walrus, and seals are the white bears' bread.

Then the stalk began.

The female dropped into the water, breaking through the thin treacherous crust of snow and ice that overhung the edge, and after taking bearings, dived in silence.

The male drew back from his hummock top and, belly flat, headed for the next. For so ponderous an animal it was amazing how he managed to pack himself away into his surroundings, using every fold, every lump of snow, every jag, every crack and seam almost in the ice to hide his advance. Three or four times he crossed shallow treacherous pans, swimming one of them which had a big hole in the center, going right down through the solid ice to the bottom. Several times he peered most cautiously from the top of a hummock to see how near he was getting, and if the quarry was still there.

The quarry was, but it had moved a little farther back from the edge of the ice, and it had developed a tusk, one tusk, somewhat after the fashion of a narwhal.

The big bear stopped. He was not at all clever in regard to suspecting danger. In fact, like most polar bears, he was rather a fool in this regard, but he had lived rather a long life and blundered into quite a lot of arguments with various creatures that he had tried to kill, and he was growing careful. Moreover, he was still a little nervous and tired from his battle with the sea and the walrus. He was near enough now to make his rush, but that meant showing himself, and he thought he would rather keep where he was with his head flat on the snow at the top of the hummock, and see what the she bear did.

The she bear, working along the ice edge, alternately lifting her eyes and nose only above the water; and diving, had got near enough to make her rush too. And he saw her make it, saw the sudden swirl in the blue depths, saw her heave herself up over the ice-edge, saw the little stab of flame lick out from the end of the horn that the supposed seal had developed; heard her squeal like a stuck pig; beheld her subside as if the ice had been slidden from under her feet, and watched the "seal" get up on its tail—man!

Then that bear slid backward down that ice hummock and invited himself into the cold and barren landscape. Twice he heard shouts, and, looking round, saw men to the number of three following him. Once a

shot shattered the immemorial frozen silence and a singing bullet chipped off ice flakes behind him, but the range was too long, and it never grew shorter. Though he only walked, apparently quite leisurely, and the men ran, when they could, he got over that rough ground at about twice the pace they could, and was soon alone in that endless expanse of undulating white and gray.

Two hours later the big bear, an almost invisible patch of dirty white on a field of dirty white, was standing motionless upon the edge of one of those "leads," like locks, that run up into the floating ice-pack, themselves covered with floating masses of ice, like islands. Under one of his great paws he held a still twitching seal, which he had just stalked and caught.

Around him overhead two great white gulls wheeling and slowly floating down. A third had already alighted, and was perched motionless and waiting on the edge of the ice. He watched them for a few moments, and then began his meal. He did not know what they had done for him.

Far up the "lead" appeared slowly one patch of ice which did not float with the rest. It moved in and out quickly at first, then more slowly as it approached. At last it was very near. Finally it stopped, and there followed a pause, while the three big white gulls stood about watching.

Then suddenly a little snake's-tongue of fire flickered out from that patch of ice and back. A heavy, butting report followed. The bear heaved himself to his feet, lurched, shambled swiftly away, lurched again badly, like a drunken man, ran another fifty yards, and pitched on to his nose—dead.

The patch of ice was two canoes—kaiaks they call them—bound together, and holding two men dressed from head to heel in white.

The gulls rose and dropped again upon the torn carcass of the seal, oblivious of the men. They fought and tore at the flesh in a horrible and starving manner while the men landed and ran to the bear. It was the gulls which had given the bear away, had revealed him to the hunters, and brought about his death, which was lucky for them, for had it not been so, had he lived and probably eaten up all that small seal, they themselves must have died from starvation.

REVERTING TO TYPE

by Hugh Pendexter

WHEN General Hancock opened his campaign in the Indian Spring of 1867 he was waited on at the outset by some Cheyenne chiefs and asked to hold a council. Among other matters brought up for readjustment was one of two Indian children, supposed to be survivors of the Chivington massacre at Sand Creek, Colorado. Taken as waifs by the Government, they were placed in homes and educated. Because of their extreme youth it seemed an easy task to eradicate the "Injun" and bring them up in the white man's road.

One of the two, a boy, was taken East. The other, a girl, was placed with a family near Denver. They were dressed and educated according to civilized standards. Then their people demanded that they be returned. The Government had promised by treaty to return such, and the boy and girl, eight or nine years of age, were ordered back to their people.

The little girl was easily located, but the boy seemed to have vanished. It was not until something of a still hunt had been conducted that he was located and identified beneath his veneer of civilization. To all outward appearances, including habits and mannerisms, the two were like any white children.

When delivered to their people they showed no desire to quit the white man's road. Inside of a year's residence with the Indians the two lost their veneer, had forgotten, or at least claimed to have forgotten, all knowledge of the English language, and were quick to avoid contact with the whites. The blood of the wild claimed its own.

Author of "The Crocodile's Bride," "Umlimo, Lobenguella's Witch-Doctor," etc.

UMTETO is the word "law" in native tongue.

Umteto is very definite, and he or she is a brave individual who tries to break the *umteto*. It may be broken once, and the lawbreaker suitably and painfully punished. A second time means death. There is no higher court of appeals.

A man may have as many wives as he can afford—paying a *labola*, or dowry, of cattle for each wife. However, under no consideration whatsoever must his number of wives exceed the king's.

Si Mbinduwan was a tall, slim young man. He was looked upon by the other young warriors as being strange and quiet, but he had passed the test of manhood as creditably as any one of them.

Of course, his name might have been the explanation of his queerness—Si Mbinduwan, signifying "the man with the liver." It may have been that when he was younger, he had been very fond of this part of the ox, or perhaps he of a morning woke up with a barbed temper.

But maybe when he was born he resembled perhaps a liver—that is, in color. Some babies look as if they have had a wash in a strawberry patch on the journey to the earth.

The girl, Matanga, lived in the same kraal as Si Mbinduwan, though in a different hut. Both were about the same age. Si Mbinduwan about eighteen and Matanga, sixteen or seventeen. Both fully developed and rated as full grown.

From the time he is ranked as a cattle-herder, till he puts on his first loin-cloth—which corresponds to the first long pants of a boy in civilization—the only difference being that this is the first scrap of clothing for the native—the native boy is a careless scrap of humanity.

As has been remarked elsewhere, the native is very fond of warmth, especially fire. The native boy is extremely fond of it. Where two or three of them are gathered, there you will find a fire, with the small boys haunched around it or rolling about in the ashes.

This habit makes them look grayish-slatey, in appearance, not unlike a badly scratched slate. As washing is not a habit and soap is unknown, the effect is not unlike the coloring of a camouflaged battleship.

To repeat, it is not until he puts on his first loin-cloth and tries to ape the ways of the dandified warriors that the native boy begins to take a certain pride in his appearance.

SI MBINDUWAN had gone all through that. He had first noticed Matanga on a certain afternoon, as she and a dozen other girls passed him in the jungle with loads of fire-wood on their heads, for the kraal.

There had been the usual horseplay of

chasing the girls to tickle them, in order to make them drop their loads. The more experienced or artful of the boys had commanded the girls to let them carry their loads for them within a certain distance of the kraal.

Si Mbinduwan had grasped the point of this idea at once, and had commanded Matanga to let him carry her load for her. She had coyly obeyed his demand. Boy-like, he and his companions had showed off before the girls by running and jumping with the neck-breaking loads over big rocks and small ant-hills.

When they were near the kraal, they took off the cords of wood and placed them on the girls' heads. All this was done behind the shelter of a small hill, for had the boys been seen so near the kraal at that time of day, away from the herd of cattle, which is a native's heart and pride, their punishment would have been very painful in the extreme.

Matanga said—

"Thank you, Si Mbinduwan," with fluttering eyelids and half a smile, for no reason whatsoever.

Si Mbinduwan gruffly ordered his companions to hurry their unloading. One of their number did not quite respond quickly to this request, so Si Mbinduwan cracked him over the head with his stick. There was a fight in no time. Si Mbinduwan worsting his opponent easily. The watching girls smiled, as even Matanga did also, and Si Mbinduwan was satisfied that he had passed the test of manhood.

Si Mbinduwan, on getting back to the kraal, made himself a native-piano with eight steel keys that the kraal blacksmith forged for him. These keys were thrust under a crosspiece of steel, that ran from one side of a piece of wood to the other, and bent over on both sides. A calabash was tied to the bottom of the board to make a sounding-board. This contraption complete, Si Mbinduwan went out one moonlight night to serenade his heart's desire outside of her hut.

It is the tradition in native love-making that the lover shall sing outside of the hut of his heart's desire. Should the girl in the case have any feeling for him, she will come out of the hut and have speech with him. If she does not care for him in any way at all, he may sing till he is hoarse and grow green in the face, she will not come out.

X MARKS APPROXIMATE LOCATION OF SI MBINDUWAN'S KRAAL

Si Mbinduwan arrived at the hut where Matanga lived with her mother and several other girls who were related to her. He nervously cleared his throat and thumped his foot to a rhythm of music in his mind. He made a false start two or three times. Again he cleared his throat in a worried manner, and shook his shoulders to get a grip on himself. He jangled the steel keys of his hand-piano at last, and sung a verse of one of the popular love-songs.

"My father has wonderful children;
My mother has wonderful children;
My father has wonderful children;
Maiden! Come here!"

He sang the verse and refrain over three or four times. Nothing happened; Matanga did not come out. He flung his piano to the ground, and taking his spear that he had brought with him, began the opening bars of another song that begins sadly and finishes with an individual war-dance demonstration.

"My father has wonderful children;
My mother has wonderful children;

I stab and stab and stab it;
I drive and drive and drive it;
I beat and beat and beat it;
It yells it yells it yells;
I stab and stab and stab it;
It yells it yells it yells;
It is vanquished it is vanquished!"

All the time Si Mbinduwan had been repeating the lines quoted, he had been stabbing his spear at many imaginary foes. In his excitement and enthusiasm he had stabbed the side of the hut more than a dozen times in as many different places, leaving gaping holes.

He danced and yelled and made as much noise as if there were three of him instead of one. The dust was so thick that the crowd of admiring small boys who had come out to see him dance, lost sight of him. He ceased his antics when he uttered the words, "It is vanquished," and emerged from the cloud of dust, his body pouring with sweat from his exertions.

Matanga came slowly out of the hut and with head hung down, coyly advanced toward Si Mbinduwan. He caught hold of her hand as she murmured:

"Oh, Si Mbinduwan, you are like a brave leopard. You ought to be an induna."

Si Mbinduwan heaved his chest, and gruffly said—

"Perhaps."

He reached to the low, thatched roof of the hut, drew out one of the grasses and stuck it gently on the crown of her head. She looked at him under fluttering eyelids. Si Mbinduwan sighed, gulped once and questioned—

"Do you like me?"

"Yes," whispered Matanga.

"I want you to marry me," said Si Mbinduwan.

Matanga raised her shoulders and circled her head around them teasingly.

Just then the crowd of small boys yelled—

"Waaa! Waaa! Waaa!"

Si Mbinduwan's eyes blazed into a fury. He picked up his piano and flung it at the crowd of boys—and then chased them out of sight. He tripped over his spear on the ground, coming back, skinning his knee badly. Matanga helped him to his feet and asked was he all right. He grunted—

"Yes."

Looking up at him Matanga said—

"Yes, Si Mbinduwan, I will marry you."

He smiled and told her the lover's usual talk of sweet nothings. Matanga listened till the moon waned and set.

NEXT morning after the cattle had gone Si Mbinduwan came out of the young men's hut and went to the kraal that Matanga's father lived in with his right-hand wife.

It might be said here that the first wife is always the right-hand wife. The second wife is the left-hand one. The first one is supposed to bear the heirs. In case she does not the second may—if the "council of men" and the chief of the kraal are agreeable.

The last wife is the servant of all the other wives. No matter whether a man has five or a hundred wives, she has to acknowledge all the other women as her mistresses. The position of the last wife is not very enviable. The first wife is mistress of them all and knows how to rule the large household of her lord and master.

ON HIS way there, an old woman stopped him and in a shrill voice demanded of him:

"What is it now? You break up my house and dig holes in it. Do you think I am an ant? You are going to mend the hut. I will break your neck, I will."

Si Mbinduwan made his peace with the woman, and promised to see that the holes he had made should be walled up with mud.

Several boys passing by hummed loud enough for Si Mbinduwan to hear—

"He dances at night and works all day."

He whirled about and charged into them in a temper. They joyfully lambasted him, for they had sticks and he was unarmed. After a dozen sound blows on his body and head, Si Mbinduwan fled back to his own hut to get his fighting sticks. In a moment or so he came back armed with a long black "hitting" stick and a red "guard" stick, but the boys had gone, for they knew of Si Mbinduwan's raging temper. So he bent his steps toward his sweetheart's father's hut.

He looked through the partly open door, the top half being open whilst the bottom one was closed. Native doors are sometimes made this way, the reason given being that the evil spirit can not enter except the whole be open; and it is left thus when some one inside is having a late sleep, the door being the safeguard against the little spirits taking the occupant unawares.

"Nqo! Nqo! Nqo!" he said, making the usual knocking noise.

"Enter," a voice from inside commanded.

Si Mbinduwan pushed the door open and bent his head in order to pass through the low opening. He sat down near the door on the right until he was commanded to

come near the fireplace in the middle of the place.

On being asked what he wanted, he informed Matanga's father that he wanted to *labola* his daughter, Matanga. He was informed that the *labola* would be—

"Nine cows and one ox."

Si Mbinduwan was not very well off as far as cattle were concerned. No raid had taken place since he had become a member of the kraal *impi*. He only owned several head of cattle, five or six goats, and no sheep. He was what might be termed in civilization an orphan, for "he did not know his father." A native child may not know who his mother may be, and that is not accounted very strange, but not to know one's father is a great misfortune indeed.

As to how it came about that Si Mbinduwan did not know his father, I do not pretend to know. He, Si Mbinduwan, might have got "lost" in the kraal. A child will sleep in one hut one night and in a different one the next. A mother takes great interest in her child till it attains the age of about three or four years, when the interest seems to cease.

This may be because the child leaves her control, as the child has to fend for himself as soon as he reaches a certain age. This applies to boys. Girls are in a different class altogether. Some one is "always" related to a girl—she is worth something.

And anyway, the paramount chief is legal father to all the children in the tribe. This will explain the reason why most Africans when they reach civilization always claim they are princes. They have the "legal" right to do so under the tribal law. But not the "blood right," as none could ever sit on any throne—they are not royal or blue-blooded.

Si Mbinduwan informed Matanga's father that he had only three head of cattle with some goats. The father said he would accept the cattle in part payment, if Si Mbinduwan wanted him to do that.

"Yes, father," said Si Mbinduwan.

Therefore he had only to get five cows and one ox.

Si Mbinduwan promised that he would have the rest of the cattle in four months. He left the hut and went in search of Matanga, and found her stamping corn. He told her that the wedding would be soon.

Once again sweet nothings were said, and Si Mbinduwan left before high-noon, to go and get the rest of the cattle.

SI MBINDUWAN had been gone about a whole month when a warrior prince came to the kraal where Matanga dwelt, in search of a tenth or eleventh wife for his household.

He took a liking to Nosikade and Matanga. The relations of Nosikade were delighted beyond all measure. They went about the kraal very proud and puffed up, making themselves a community nuisance, as they airily remarked—

"We are of the royal household now and will leave this kraal for a better one."

Mqidiqidi, Matanga's father, did not dare to oppose the royal warrior, although he might have done so under the law, as Matanga was promised to another. Instead, he turned profiteer, giving Matanga to the prince for seventeen head of cattle which were driven over from the induna's kraal in three or four days' time.

The double wedding took place a month later, and was a grand affair, although both fathers were nearly bankrupt as far as cattle were concerned. It had taken all their available stock to feed the thousands of guests who had come to the double wedding.

Matanga cried low and bitterly, instead of loud and long, joyously and triumphantly as Nosikade did. She cried so loudly that glowing prophecies were made about her future domestic life by the old women at the wedding.

First Nosikade was taken out and given over to her lord and master with the waiting oxen. Then Matanga's turn came. She bit, tore and scratched at everybody in a very determined and vindictive manner.

The perspiration poured off the bodies of the induna's friends as they stood around Matanga in the white chalked-marked hut. The assembled guests shrieked and shouted—

"Bring her out! Bring her out!"

Impatiently they poured into the hut till it strained at its foundations and seemed about to burst as it bulged here and bulged there.

Matanga was pushed here and pulled there by scores of hands inside the hut until she was out of the hut. When she was hustled to the back of the other spare ox

and the three—the induna and his two wives on the oxen—went galloping out of the gate to his kraal, accompanied by his retainers who ran as fast as they could to keep up with the oxen.

ABOUT two months after the double wedding of the induna, a small herd of cattle driven by a young man was seen coming towards the kraal where Matangas used to live. That the young man was happy could be seen by his antics as he did different steps of different dances, and sang the songs of the harvest, war and marriage.

The chorus of the wedding-song he kept on repeating:

"Oh marry her, oh marry, though she is crying;
She will yield, oh she will yield, though she is crying;
She wanted him, she wanted him, though she is crying;
Oh marry her! Oh marry her! Though she is crying."

The singer threw stones at the herd of cattle as they broke into a run, yelling and shouting at them. They galloped like mad till they were a hundred yards or so from the gate where a number of young men were sunning themselves in the late morning sun.

The young man, who had been driving the herd, came up to the gate where the others were and with a broad smile on his face greeted them.

"Oh you're the one that has been making all that noise. What is the matter?" They answered and questioned Si Mbinduwan, for it was he.

"I have brought back the cattle. How is Matanga?" He answered.

The *abafan* looked at each other with mysterious smiles on their faces. Then one of them said:

"Did you not know? She was married long ago."

Si Mbinduwan looked at the man for a second or so and then sprang at him and choked him till his tongue hung out of his mouth blue-black. The other men got up quickly, but did not interfere.

There is no law against murder or homicide, one may kill and be killed and nothing will be said or done. If the person killed has influence and relatives complain, an excuse will suffice and nothing more is said. The chief's word is final.

Si Mbinduwan dropped the now limp man and with glittering eyes turned toward the gate and strode into the kraal. He went straight to Mqidiqidi's hut and walked in without making the knocking sound. Mqidiqidi—which means the "nobby man," he being nobby all over—looked up and saw Si Mbinduwan, who shouted—

"Where is Matanga?"

"The young prince took her," Mqidiqidi replied.

Si Mbinduwan went over by the hut-wall and selected a red stick from the many hanging there, one that would not bend, and lambasted the astounded Mqidiqidi on his naked shoulder-blades. As he cowered beneath the blows, Mqidiqidi foolishly tried to reason with the love-mad Si Mbinduwan.

At last Matanga's father shot out of the hut, roaring for his friends, and ran to the council hut. There was no one there. He dived into the hut of the head of the kraal and demanded of him in a babbling voice, "Was it right that an *umfan* should hit an old man?"

The induna only laughed at him and said—

"Go and fight."

As he came out, Si Mbinduwan was waiting for him, and beat him soundly as they ran together toward the gate, and out. The whole kraal went outside the thorn-fence and had a hearty laugh as Si Mbinduwan beat a rapid tatoo on Mqidiqidi's back, for Matanga's father was a well-built man who had a fine career, but had a greater future behind him; and Si Mbinduwan beat it till it fairly glowed. They vanished from sight behind a hill.

Late that afternoon, Si Mbinduwan came back alone to the kraal. He asked the other men to which kraal the prince had taken Matanga. They told him. He informed them that he was going there right away to get his girl Matanga.

All the men were interested. They warned him that she was the wife of a royal prince, but Si Mbinduwan was deaf to their protestations, and he commenced his journey that same evening, when the forest was just awakening to the voices of the jungle.

SIX or seven days later at high noon, the royal prince marched into the kraal with a regiment of the royal *impi*. Mqidiqidi was with them. The kraal was taken by surprize at the

sudden appearance of the *impi* with the prince. The old and young men of the council were called and questioned as to Si Mbinduwan's treatment of Mqidiqidi. Different versions were given by persons who had different interests at heart. The council was dismissed till next day.

The sun had hardly set when to the surprize of the men-folk, Si Mbinduwan walked into their common hut. Their surprize was greater when they were informed by him that Matanga was outside waiting for him. A warrior—one of the number brought by the prince—got up slowly and walked to the hut to inform the prince that the man that he sought was here with one of his wives.

Si Mbinduwan's friends whispered to him, fiercely, to run away, as the prince was in the kraal. Instead of heeding their advice, he went into a rage. A few moments later a squad of the *impi* came to the young men's hut and seized Si Mbinduwan. He tried to fight them, but was overpowered. He was hustled out of the hut to the council hut.

The men sat around the large fire in the council hut watching the door expectantly. Si Mbinduwan walked into the hut at the head of the squad. The prince was sitting on the right-hand side of the hut, away from the door and fire.

As Si Mbinduwan came to a halt by the door, the prince said:

"You do not seem to know the law, heh? My wives are like women of another tribe to you?"

Si Mbinduwan did not answer. His breath came in short, sharp gasps as he shivered in terror. The cold sweat of fear broke out on his body. The prince looked at him for a long moment as the fire-wood crackled and hissed in the terrible silence of the hut. The prince spoke once again to the leader of the squad——

"Take him to my kraal. Go!"

As Si Mbinduwan was taken out of the hut, the prince called out to the leader of the squad—

"You! I don't want to see him." This meant that on the way to the prince's kraal, as Si Mbinduwan walked ahead, a warrior would raise a knobkerrie, swing it in the air and hit him at the back of the neck, breaking his spinal cord; and he would be left lying there dead near the pathway, the body to be later on eaten by any passing wild denizen of the jungle.

The prince questioned one of the men in the council—

"Where is Matanga?"

"Outside, your highness."

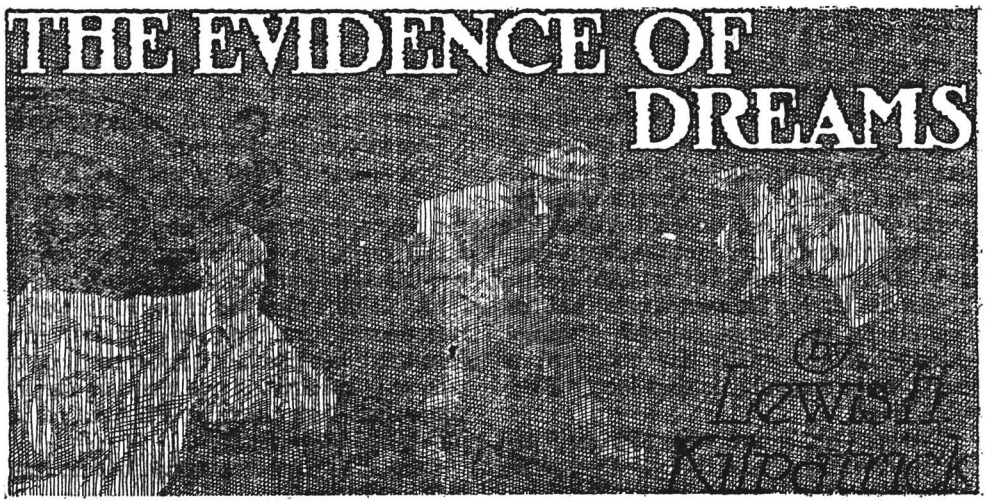
"Bring her in."

Matanga walked in erect and self-possessed. The prince looked at her and said:

"To be the wife of a prince does not suit you. You do not behave like one of royal blood. You are like a female dog—low down. I will divorce you. Go and kill yourself."

Without a word, Matanga left the hut and went out of the kraal in the dark night, to go to the top of a high cliff and fling herself over it and drop down below two or three hundred feet sheer. That is the law, and this the divorce. Marriage or any of the other laws are very seldom broken, as the punishment is swift and sure.

Next day, in the early morning sun, a flock of vultures could be seen swooping down from the clouds in a long gliding volplane to the bottom of the cliff. A hyena laughed long and loud over the feast, for Matanga had obeyed the mandate of the royal divorce.



Author of "The Quality of Honor," "The Littlest Cuss," etc.

COMMONWEALTH ATTORNEY BLODGETT, with grim deliberation, reached into a drawer, took out a folded paper and proffered it across the desk to Clint Hawkins.

"Here's your warrant, Mr. Sheriff," he said bruskly. "Now go get your man."

Sheriff Hawkins looked at the paper as if he half-feared it, half-despised it, and made no move to take it from the attorney's hand. His jaw sagged beneath his flowing blond mustache, a dullness clouded the usual jovial gleam in his blue eyes, and from the depths of his thick chest sounded a sigh that was akin to a groan.

"Lawyer, I'd hate to have to serve that warrant," he declared, shaking his uncovered head. "Jim Fugate's my best friend, we've favored each other a heap, and I trust him as much as I do any man in these Kaintucky mountains. I'm pretty shore he didn't kill Zach Lawson, and I can't see that you've got enough evidence against him to make me put him under arrest. Suppose you study on it a little more," he suggested, "before you send me after him."

The attorney dropped the folded warrant on the desk and leaned back in his chair, frowning.

"How the —— can I enforce the law in this county when the chief police officer hesitates to do his duty?" he exclaimed.

He pointed a didactic finger at the sheriff.

"Mr. Hawkins, it's the court's function to weigh evidence, not yours. And for the first time in its modern history this community has a court in every sense of the term. Now when I order you to serve a warrant, whether it's on your own brother or your mortal enemy, it's your business to do it without pause or question. Is that plain?"

Few people who knew big Clint Hawkins would have dared speak to him in such a manner; but instead of retorting or showing anger, he actually flinched before the rebuke. The attorney was a youngish man, with smooth-shaven, scholarly features; and while he came from the one Blue Grass county that, with three hill counties, composed the judicial district, he was no stranger to mountain thought and custom.

"Furthermore," he continued, eying the sheriff steadily, "I feel in a measure responsible for Zach Lawson's murder. But for me he might still be alive. Do you remember the circumstances of his appearance in court the other day, as witness for the prosecution in the case of the Commonwealth vs. Renick?"

Clint nodded. He remembered the circumstances well. Zach had been summoned, had failed to appear, and Attorney Blodgett had sent a deputy sheriff after him with a bench-warrant. When he arrived, the circuit judge publicly reprimanded him and demanded a reason for his tardiness. The

reason was unique, even in mountain annals.

Zach had had a dream the night before, so he explained in open court, which he accepted as a prophecy and a warning. In it, with convincing clarity, he saw himself obeying the summons, coming to the county seat, testifying as a state witness and afterward starting back home. On this visionary return journey he was waylaid, killed; and he named the murderer that the dream foretold. The judge scoffed at such an excuse, despite Zach's fearful earnestness; but, influenced by the Commonwealth attorney, he imposed no penalty for contempt of court. Clint remembered that too, to Blodgett's credit.

"We got Zach's testimony all right," the attorney went on, "and thought that ended the matter. But, as you know, Mr. Hawkins, it didn't. Early the next day we received word that Zach's body had been found, pierced through by a bullet. He had been killed going home from court, just as his dream predicted he would be if he came. And, sir—" Blodgett sat upright—"the murderer he saw in that dream is the man you are going to arrest at my order. Understand?"

Clint Hawkins avoided the attorney's gaze, and this time it was a distinct groan that vibrated through his set teeth.

"Now you shorely ain't going to make me lock up Jim Fugate just on account of that fool dream!" he protested. "Why, that's acting as crazy as some of these old folks, who believe in witches and signs, or like Zach Lawson himself. Lawyer, there wasn't no trouble between him and Jim—there never was. They've always been friendly, them two. I can swear to that myself."

Blodgett took no offense. He bent toward the sheriff with a faint smile.

"Mr. Hawkins, have you studied much psychology?" he inquired. "You haven't. Well, I'll try to make my point clear anyway. You say that Jim and Zach never had any trouble between them. Now I say they have had, unknown, perhaps, to third parties. Maybe it wasn't serious trouble at the moment, but the memory of it was stamped forever on Zach's brain.

"He probably didn't fear Jim consciously, and outwardly they were friends. Yet when he was asleep his subconscious mind molded his dreams from past thoughts and experiences, as is true of all of us. And on this particular night, of which he told, the memory of Jim's former enmity was revived; it coupled itself with Zach's summons to court, and wrought the vision which made him believe that his life would be in danger if he ventured away from home on that date."

The attorney continued:

"Of course the dream would mean nothing to us if he hadn't been killed; for, like most ignorant mountaineers, he was abnormally superstitious. But, as there were no eye-witnesses to the crime, it is an important lead. It isn't the kind of evidence I'd offer unsupported to a jury, but it convinces me that there was bad blood between those two men and indicates where the damning evidence can be gathered. Do you get my point, Mr. Hawkins?"

Clint didn't get it exactly, but he mumbled a sullen—

"Yes."

To himself he frankly admitted that his belief in Jim's innocence was by no means so strong as he had expressed it. It was he who had investigated the murder, examined Zach's corpse and questioned those who discovered it; but, acting according to an official code of his own, he had not reported all his findings to the attorney. In spite of that, however, the Commonwealth already had begun to make out a case. Nor was Blodgett the sort who would be thwarted for long by deliberately suppressed evidence. The sheriff realized that now; and he knew that, whether or not he served the warrant, Jim Fugate would surely be taken prisoner and brought to trial.

"Wal, since somebody's got to go after him, I reckon it might as well be me," he decided, reaching for the folded paper.

"Good! That's the right spirit, Mr. Hawkins," applauded the attorney. "And while you're doing your duty, I'll begin to round up witnesses——"

But Clint did not wait to hear him further. He jerked on his slouch hat, hurriedly left the room and went downstairs to his own office. There, behind closed doors, he hesitated, swayed by the mountaineer's uncertain emotions.

"I can't tote a gun when I'm arresting Jim," he muttered; "it wouldn't be friendly." Then, with determination: "Yes, I can! I'm sheriff of this county even if me'n him have been as thick as brothers—" squaring his jaw. "He's got to come back here, no matter if I have to bring him in front of this .38."

He stuck the pistol into a holster beneath his left shoulder.

"And I'll take this one along, too."

A second pistol went into his hip pocket.

"——!" he swore aloud. "What in —— made him so keerless as to leave such a thing laying almost on top of Zach Lawson's corpse!"

A FEW minutes later the sheriff was astride his horse, riding at an easy gait along the road to the Red River country. He was not used to making arrests at the command of a higher authority. When a crime was committed in his county, he first took account of those who were guilty. If they were folk who had transgressed before, he turned them over to the courts for proper punishment or acquittal; but if it was their initial offense and anything short of second degree murder, he constituted himself as judge and jury, administrated justice on the spot, warned them against breaking the law again, and always managed to have the case filed away.

Knowing and loving his people, he thus shielded them from their own ignorance and primitive passions, holding that Kentucky law which could be enforced to the letter in the cultured lowlands, should have wide gaps between its lines when applied to the semi-illiterate mountains.

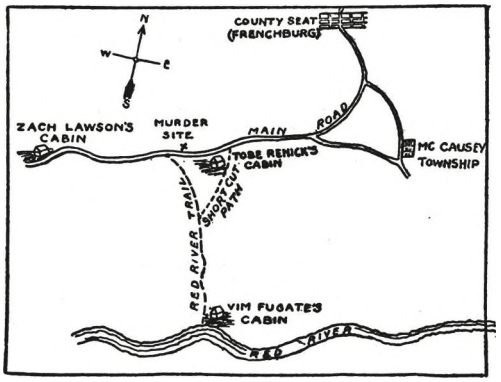
Aroused by Attorney Blodgett's indictment of this code, however, he contemplated it from a broader view-point as he rode deeper into the hills, hardly conscious of whom or what he passed along the way. Perhaps he did owe stronger allegiance to the law than to his friends, he brooded; possibly there would not be so many violations of that law in the hills if he and his fellow officials enforced it impartially.

Thus self-engrossed, he branched off a seldom used bypath, to save time, and drew abreast of Tobe Renick's bachelor cabin, which was the only habitation on that route. From within the cabin came loud grunts mingled with oaths—but Clint Hawkins did not stop to inquire their cause.

"Tobe's still cussin' over having to pay that fine," he thought absently, "for cutting up at the meeting house. Served him right, too; but he really ought to 'a' been jailed."

A mile farther, at the path's junction with the Red River trail, he met Nat Oaks carrying a heavy jug, who stepped aside to make room for him. But the sheriff barely glanced at the jug, said a brief "Howdy!" to Nat and cantered on.

It was midafternoon when he checked his horse at Jim Fugate's stile-block, close by the banks of the river. Jim, lank and unshaven, wearing little more than a pair of overalls, a linsey shirt and an old felt hat, was working in an adjoining field. He saw the sheriff before he reached the stile.



"Come in, Clint, and sot yerself a cheer," he called, dropping his hoe and ambling forward. "Stay fer supper, stay all night, stay as long as ye kin. Hit ain't of'en that ye make these parts a visit, but we're al'ays tickled to have ye when ye do."

The sheriff, however, did not accept the invitation to dismount; and Jim, nearing the stile, changed from the hospitable host to the anxious friend.

"Why, ole feller, what's wrong?" he inquired. " 'Pears to me that ye air troubled about somethin'. Kin I help ye any?"

"Yes." Sheriff Hawkins looked down at him gravely. "Tell your woman that you're going away for a spell, get your hoss and come with me. Be quick, Jim, I'm in a powerful hurry."

Jim saved further questioning until later. He knew the big man well enough to realize that something was terribly amiss when he wore such a haggard expression and spoke so abruptly, and he wasted no time in doing what he requested.

Clint was silent as he turned back toward the county seat and Jim, riding beside him whenever the width of the trail permitted, waited for him to speak first. Their horses, apparently sensing the bond between their masters, nosed one another's necks with

comradely sniffs, nor lifted a hoof in protest when their flanks frequently touched and rubbed.

"Did you bring your .38 along?" the sheriff asked suddenly, glancing with sharp eyes at his companion.

"Naw," replied Jim. "I'll have to buy me a new gun, I reckon."

"Why, where's the one you've always had?"

Clint feigned surprized curiosity.

Jim hesitated.

"Now that's what I can't say," he drawled, and looked the other way. "The last time I seen it was jest afore I parted with Zach Lawson, the evenin' he was kilt."

The sheriff gasped.

"Good Lord, Jim!" he exclaimed in a whisper. "You ain't admitting it yourself that you were with him after he left town, are you?"

The lank mountaineer, his eyes still averted, nodded.

"I might as well," he answered. "Thar's plenty o' folks to say so if I don't. Me'n Zach passed several on the road and several more passed us. I 'low ye've axed around enough to larn that yerself afore this," he added bitterly.

"I didn't have to ask," blurted Clint. "When I went to Zach's house to investigate, some of his neighbors up and told me that they'd heard you were with him the evening before and that they could prove it. I ain't mentioned it to Lawyer Blodgett, but he'll find it out for himself. That feller beats a 'possum dawg when it comes to following a scent!"

The sheriff took a firmer grip on his reins and also on his self-control.

"Jim, I reckon you know you're under arrest, don't you?"

Jim laughed shortly.

"I ain't no fool. O' course I know hit by now."

"Wal, whatever you say I've got to use against you in court. That's the law—and I've made up my mind to obey it. But, old friend, I'm going to ask you a few more questions, hoping it's for your good, and I want you to answer 'em truthful. Will you?"

The prisoner nodded again, and, reaching a narrow point in the trail, took his proper place in front of his captor.

"Now, Jim, tell me what you and Zach fell out about that evening?" was the next demand.

"We didn't fall out," came back over the linsey shoulder.

Clint scowled.

"One sober man don't shoot another just for the fun of seeing him drop. You all must 'a' had some sort of fuss. Say, Jim," he asked with restrained eagerness, "can't you figger it that you killed him in self-defense? That's always a good plea. Didn't you really have to get him to keep him from getting you? Try to recollect!"

Jim's tone was low but positive—

"I tell ye, didn't a hard word pass atwixt us that hull day."

The sheriff meditated, puzzled; then—"Had you two *ever* had any trouble—ever in your lives?"

"Aw, yas," Jim readily admitted, straightening in his saddle. "Hit happened last Winter," he went on, "while me'n Zach was trappin' varments togither. He al'ays took the hides to town to sell—and oncet he didn't fetch back as much money as he ought. I taxed him with hit, and he 'lowed that he lost two 'coon hides somewhar along the way. That sorta made me mad, Clint, bein' quick tempered by nature. Without stoppin' to study, I called him a liar then and thar, and tole him that if he didn't find them hides or pay the worth of 'em, I'd put a hole through hissen with my .38——"

"Gosh!" interrupted the sheriff. "Then Lawyer Blodgett's right. When Zach dreamed of you plugging him, it wasn't more than you once threatened. Yes, the lawyer shore is right! After this I'll believe in signs and witches and such myself!"

"But, Clint—" Jim reined up his horse until the sheriff again was abreast of him—"I made hit up with Zach that same week. He'd al'ays had the name o' bein' pine-blank honest; and, when I cooled off and come to think hit over, I seen that I'd been too hasty with my words. The loss o' a few dollar didn't figger a-tall with me then. So I went to him and axed his pardon fer wrongin' him. He was mighty clever about hit, 'lowed that the trouble was all the fault o' his keerlessness, and we were good friends from that day on."

Clint Hawkins was no more assured by the story than if it hadn't been told. He glared angrily at the prisoner.

"Jim Fugate, you've got less sense than

any mountain man I know!" he exploded. "After seeing what you'd done, why in ——'s name didn't you leave these hills and quit the state? I held Lawyer Blodgett off as long as I could, partly hoping it'ud give you more time to get away. And then you played the fool and let yourself be caught. —— it, Jim, you're a plumb disgrace to the county!"

The prisoner met the glare with a look of frank wonder.

"Why, Clint, I ain't guilty," he declared; "that's why I didn't try to escape ye."

"Ain't guilty!" echoed the sheriff, and reached into his hip pocket. "Next thing I reckon you'll be denying that this is your gun."

At sight of the .38 Jim's eyebrows lifted, but he showed little surprize.

"That's something else Zach's neighbors are on to," Clint continued. "It was picked up by them who found his corpse and turned over to me that morning. You shore must 'a' been mighty scared or in an awful hurry to have dropped it where you did. I can't forgive you that, Jim, or nohow understand it. In spite of my not telling Lawyer Blodgett that I've got such evidence, he'll learn it from those neighbors when he gets the witnesses who can swear they saw you riding with Zach. All that's as good as done."

Jim licked his lips, for they were strangely hot and dry.

"Maybe ye'll think I'm a-lyin'," he began, "but I fell in with Zach after the trial as sort o' a joke. I heerd what he said about me in co't, that he dreamed I was goin' to kill him—ever'body heerd hit—and I wanted to show folks that hit wasn't to be took serious. Then when we got as fer as the short-cut, hit bein' late, I 'lowed that I'd take the quickest way home.

"But he was still skairt; the deputy who brung him to town hadn't let him tote his gun; and, bein' afeerd to keep on to his house unarmed, he axed to borry mine. I loaned hit to him, o' course, parted with him thar at the short-cut—and that was the last I seen o' him."

"Did you meet anybody after you left the main road?" Clint put the question hopefully.

"Narry a soul," Jim answered. "When I'd gone a piece I heerd the two shoots way off behind me, but I didn't pay 'em no mind. And, gittin' home, I found that my woman was off a-gassin' with the neighbors and I had to cook my own supper.

"If hit's a alibi ye're seekin' fer me," he added, reading Clint's thoughts, "ye won't find none. Thar ain't nobody who kin rightfully swear that I weren't with Zach clean to the end, except the feller that shot him."

The sheriff's brain throbbed in confusion. It was a good brain, developed beyond that of the average mountaineer, ever alert to match cunning with cunning and unmask lies in the telling. Yet he could not detect a single flaw in Jim's sincerity and his very frankness exceeded his expectations.

He crooked one leg over the pommel of his saddle and stared helplessly at the pistol in his hand.

"Your examining trial comes off before County Jedge Combs at 9:00 o'clock tomorrow morning," he began. "And here's the evidence against you: Zach Lawson dreamed you'd kill him on his way home from court; you once threatened his life, and you were the last man seen with him before he was discovered laying a corpse. This gun—your gun—with one ca'tridge fired, was right beside the corpse up there on the road, and you ain't got a witness to say that you were where you 'low you were at the time it was used.

"Jim—" his friend's eyes searched his face sorrowfully—"I'm afeerd you're in for a prison sentence or worse. I wish now I hadn't asked you all them questions; but, as it is, I'm bound to give in your answers against you. And, when I do, I'll feel that it's me, not the court, that's convicted you. Do you reckon you can ever forgive me for doing such a thing, Jim?" the big man's voice trembled.

Jim's own eyes moistened, but not from self-pity or fear. He reached across the few inches that separated their horses and awkwardly touched the sheriff's bent knee.

"Ye jest keep yer oath o' office, Clint, and do yer duty," he said. "I'll understand. But—but if I am sent down below to prison er the 'lectric cheer, sorta look out fer my woman and see that she's took keer of. That's all I'm axin' o' ye, ole feller."

The touch and the words aroused something within the sheriff. A fighter by instinct and training, he battled hardest when battling for a friend. He put both feet in the stirrups, pulled himself erect and uttered a low exclamation. The two horses stopped, side by side, without check or order.

"Jim—Jim, it's me that's a fool and a plumb disgrace to the county!" he ejaculated. "I've been so busy studying about you being guilty and trying to prove you ain't, that I haven't thought of nothing else!"

He pocketed the pistol.

"Now I tell you what I'm going to do. I'm trusting you to take yourself to town and be your own guard until you get there. The best way is to turn off right here and strike the short-cut. Then, when you reach town, go to the jailer and ask him to lock you up. He's expecting you—and you say to him that if he don't give you the cleanest cell and the finest bed and victuals he's got, Clint Hawkins will break his neck. Will you promise me to do that, Jim?"

A sudden light brightened the prisoner's unshaven features.

"Yas, I promise ye," he said.

"Good enough; I've got your word. It'll be late when I get home, but I'll see you at the trial in the morning. And—I'm believing, Jim, that you're right and the evidence is wrong."

JIM slapped his horse on the flank, and Sheriff Hawkins watched him until he disappeared through the woods. Alone, he thoughtfully chewed his mustache for some moments; then spurred his own animal straight in the direction of the main road and the scene of the murder.

This road, running from east to west along a plateau, formed as it were the upper bar of an irregular T, from which the Red River trail dipped southward, forming the perpendicular bar. Zach, going westward toward his home, was killed a short distance east of where the trail abutted on the road, and there was no house within a considerable radius of that point.

Therefore, the sheriff reasoned, his assassin was either riding with him or had laid for him beforehand, knowing that he would soon pass. And because he was shot in the right breast, the bullet plowing through the left just above his heart, it could have been fired by his fellow horseman, riding on that side, or from the northern edge of the road.

If Jim had committed the crime, it was logical that he should have waited to do it the minute before he turned off at the Red River trail; but if he really had taken the short-cut, farther back, no other man could have joined Zach under the circumstances without that frightened individual being very much on his guard. Thus, eliminating Jim, it was most probable that the victim was shot in the favorite mountain manner, from ambush.

Clint Hawkins, reaching the spot and dismounting, pondered these facts for the first time. He had begun his official investigation at Zach's house, where the body had been taken; and, after being given the telltale pistol and hearing what the neighbors had to say, he was so convinced of Jim's guilt that he hadn't examined the murder site, sure that if he found clews there they would only strengthen the evidence against his friend. Now, however, his attitude was changed.

"Jim said he heard *two* shots," he murmured to himself, standing in the middle of the road and thoughtfully rubbing his chin. "Wal, one of 'em got Zach all right, but the other—? Taking it that he did have Jim's gun and was riding alone, he didn't die so quick that he couldn't have fired once. And, as I knowed him, whenever that Lawson pulled a trigger on even a squint of a varment, he brought down his meat."

The sheriff went over to the northern edge of the road and set about examining the post-and-rail fence, that bordered it, and the surrounding ground. There was little shrubbery, and it was barely knee-high, for there were numerous pine trees that discouraged rank weed-growth.

"Why, there ain't enough cover here to hide a chipmunk," he exclaimed, "unless he got behind the fence. But maybe that feller knowed that Zach was supposed to be unarmed and 'lowed he wasn't taking much risk. I hope he got fooled."

Clint carefully inspected every square inch of the fence for a hundred yards, but there was no sign of a bullet mark on either rails or posts. He next scrutinized the nearby tree trunks, in vain; then searched the ground for footprints and blood-stains. But such clews had never been or else the wind-shifted pine needles had obliterated them; and, for all his efforts, nowhere could he find a bit of proof to support his ambush theory.

"I reckon Zach's bullet went wild," he concluded. "Or—" he hated the very thought—"maybe there wasn't any second shot and Jim was aiming to put me off the trail by saying casual that he heard two. I've seen many a man lie when they were

facing prison, and I didn't much blame 'em; but he shorely wouldn't——"

A noise from the opposite side of the road made him wheel around, reaching quickly under his arm to his holster. A gaunt black-bearded man, with a jug, was crawling over a broken rail in the fence.

"Hello, Nat!" called the sheriff, withdrawing his hand and forcing a grin. "Trying to dodge me by taking the long way home, were you?" He chuckled. "You've swapped your white jug for a brown one since I saw you last. Must have several more dollars in your pocket, too. What are you 'shiners getting for liquor now days?"

Nat Oaks, surprized, stood up and blinked doubtfully across at Clint.

"I've done quit traffickin' in licker fer profit," he drawled after a moment, "but oncet in a while I do still a leetle fer my friends. Thar ain't no harm in that, is thar, Clint?"

The grin left Sheriff Hawkins' face and he took a step nearer the moonshiner.

"Nat," he said, eying him keenly, "you've been named to me as one of those who saw Zach Lawson and Jim Fugate coming this way together after the trial the other day. Did you?"

The moonshiner seemed embarrassed.

"Y-yas," he stammered, "since ye make me own up, me'n Tobe Renick and Ike Bowen passed 'em two mile back—" he pointed eastward—"about fifteen minutes afore Tobe turned off to his home. Even he spoke to 'em friendly-like, not bein' a man to hold a grudge, but Jim and Zach were so busy quarrelin' atween themselves that they hardly seen us. I recollected that atterward, when I heerd that Zach was kilt, and tole his folks."

He added with a leer:

"O' course, Clint, ever'body in these parts knows that hit was Jim who done hit. Thar ain't no denyin' that. What we're wonderin' is, air ye goin' to let him git away er 'lectrocute him accordin' to law?"

The sheriff gulped down an angry oath and his expression was threatening, but he made no reply. He turned his back on Nat, strode over to his horse and, lifting himself into the saddle, started the animal toward town.

"Wal, there's just one thing more I can do before the trial tomorrow," he reflected, disheartened, "and that's stop by and see Doc Hardin, at McCausey. He tends all the sick folks in this part of the county and he'll know if any of 'em are suffering a bullet wound. That's my last chance to learn where that second shot went—if there was a second shot."

Darkness had shrouded the hill country when he arrived at McCausey. He found Dr. Hardin at home, but that grizzled physician answered his question in the negative. Not since before the late tragedy had he treated a bullet wound and he knew of nobody in that region, except Zach Lawson, who had been shot since then.

His last hope shattered, Clint Hawkins was in no hurry to reach the county seat and he allowed his tired horse to walk the remainder of the way. He wanted to call at the jail and see Jim; but, as it was near midnight and his only news was bad news, he went home and to bed.

DAWN was silvering the mountain sky before his troubled thoughts permitted him to sleep; and, drugged by exhaustion, he did not rouse until the unbucolic hour of eight-thirty. Fifteen minutes later, however, without waiting to eat breakfast, he was at the court-house, entering the big room which was used by both the circuit and county tribunals.

The room already was filled with inquisitive mountain-folk; women in sunbonnets and aprons, whimpering children, men chewing tobacco and talking together in undertones. Behind the bar railing white-haired Judge Combs, on the bench, and Attorney Blodgett were in anxious consultation. Near by stood the jailer and a deputy sheriff, watching them.

Clint stopped half-way down the aisle, his hat off, analyzing the scene with sickening foreboding. Judge Combs, glancing up, saw him.

"There, didn't I tell you they'd be here on time!" he exclaimed. "Mister Blodgett, I never yet knowed the high sheriff to fail to bring in his man one way or another. It ain't exactly regular to try the accused so soon," he added judicially; "but if he's ready, we are. Then, if there's enough evidence to hold him, I'll call a special grand jury tomorrow. We'll give him quick justice, this court will. Where's your prisoner, Clint?"

Clint looked blankly from the old judge to the jailer.

"My prisoner?" he repeated, startled. "Ain't he already here?"

"Of course he ain't," replied Judge Combs, peering at him over his spectacles. "Fetch him along; the court's waiting."

"Why—why—" stuttered the sheriff, with rising alarm, "I haven't seen him since I sent him to town yesterday evening. He was headed this way then. Didn't he come on like he promised?"

His brother officials, also startled as they caught his meaning, stared at him, none answering. Clint Hawkins suddenly realized the truth. A flame of rage reddened his cheeks and brow, then receded, leaving them pale and clammy.

"Good Lord, jedge!" he cried, stumbling forward. "You ain't 'lowing that Jim broke his word to me? He didn't run off like a dawg, did he, after I put him on his honor? Jedge, say you're a-foolin' me!"

A listening hush settled over the whole room. Clint dropped into a chair behind the railing, his head bowed, twisting his hat brim feverishly.

"And here I spent half the night trying to get proof that he was innocent," he mumbled. "Yes, and I'd come to believe it myself. I trusted him, I worked for him, I even lied to save him—and then he goes back on me and plays the sneaking coward. ——, I—I never reckoned for a minute that Jim would treat *me* that way!"

Judge Combs, behind his desk, coughed sympathetically; but there was no softness in Attorney Blodgett's tone.

"Mr. Hawkins, it's you who have broken faith with the law," he accused. "You swore to uphold it when you took office; you were ordered by a superior authority to bring Jim Fugate here a prisoner; and, putting sentiment before duty, you disobeyed that order and turned a murderer loose to commit further crimes against this Commonwealth. The governor of Kentucky shall learn of this, sir, and very shortly this county will have a new sheriff!"

A murmur of resentment swept the audience, breathing the spirit of the clan, the loyalty of mountaineer to mountaineer. Judge Combs coughed again, warningly. The deputy sheriff started toward his dishonored chief; then, glancing at the main door at the rear of the room, which had swung open, stopped.

"Wal," began Judge Combs, using his fist as a gavel, "since we ain't got no prisoner to examine, we might as well——"

"Wait, jedge, look!" shouted the deputy. "Here comes the prisoner now!"

Weighted steps sounded along the uncarpeted aisle; the murmuring quieted and the hush settled again; the court officials turned and gaped.

"Naw, never mind helpin' me, boys. I kin tote him. My hoss brung him to the stile out yonder and I'll handle him to the witness cheer. He's my prisoner; don't tech him, Clint. Yas, I reckon ye 'lowed I'd gone back on ye, but ye see I ain't."

Jim Fugate, bearing on his shoulders an apparently lifeless human form, staggered through the railing gate to the witness chair. There, with all possible gentleness, he sat him down, straightening his arms and legs in the most comfortable position—and stepped back.

"Clint, ye say this here co't believes in dreams? Wal, me'n this feller dreamed togither last night with our eyes open—him seein' ——fire and damnation, me seein' prison bars er shore death if I didn't pull him through till mornin'.

"Whew!" Jim exclaimed. "Hit was a pow'ful hard fight, boys. I was passin' his house thar on the short-cut atter I left ye, Clint, and I heerd groanin' inside. Says I, 'Tobe Renick's in misery; he's a ornery rascal, but I'd best look in on him.' And I did. Thar he lay, sufferin' turrable; fer only Nat Oaks knowed the fix he was in and he'd jest gone, fearin' the sheriff might happen by thar ag'in. So I worked with him, hour atter hour, seekin' to keep him alive ontil I could git him here to testify. Now, Tobe Renick," he demanded, "ye 'low to this co't what ye confessed to me!"

Clint Hawkins, Attorney Blodgett, the judge, the deputy and jailer looked on, dumfounded. Not a man, woman or child on the other side of the railing moved an inch forward. Slouching in the witness chair, his hairy features emaciated and bloodless, his eyes half closed, Tobe seemed unconscious of any one but Jim, who stood accusingly before him.

"Tell 'em quick," commanded Jim. "Tell 'em what ye done that evenin' atter the trial."

Tobe's confession came in gasps, barely audible.

"I—I hated Zach Lawson," he said. "I hated him 'cause he testified ag'in' me and

got me that fine fer disturbin' public worship. Nobody had ever dared do that to me afore. And I swore to myself here then that some day I'd—git him fer hit."

His chin sank to his breast, a shudder shook him from head to foot, and crimson drops welled out upon his lips.

"Go on!" ordered Jim, impatiently bending over him. "Ye, Nat Oaks and Ike Bowen passed me'n' Zach ridin' home togither atter the trial, and then ye got a idee. Ye parted with Ike and Nat at the short-cut, turned off to yer home and hid, watchin' the trail. Purty soon, jest as ye thought, I come along—and by that ye knowed that Zach had gone on alone. Then ye took yer gun, hustled through the woods to the main road and laid fer him behind the fence, acrosst from whar thar's a busted rail. Ain't that what ye done?"

Tobe's head lifted and dropped again in a feeble nod. The judge leaned forward over the desk, and Attorney Blodgett and the others about him drew closer to catch his broken whispers.

"Yas—I 'lowed hit'ud be easy killin'. Zach—wasn't armed, I reckoned—and I didn't need—much kiver. When he come by—I shot him—offen his hoss. But he had a—a gun in his hand—ready—and, afore he fell—he plugged me—in the stomick. I crosst the road ag'in—all right—got into the woods—petered out, bleedin'—crawled on home—ruther die thar then—then risk the law——"

He clutched at his wound in a convulsion of agony which jerked him nearly erect, a stream of blood gushing from his lips; then crumpled up in the chair, arms and legs dangling, the death stare in his wide-open eyes.

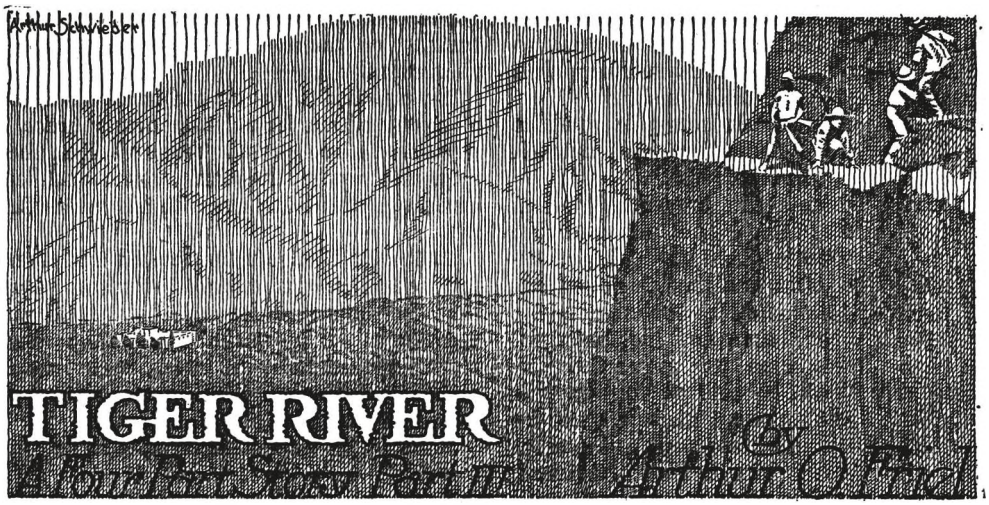
Attorney Blodgett, nauseated and shaking, reeled over to a raised window. Outside the mountains reared their stolid and unchangeable bulwarks about the little town; behind him, he knew, men just as stolid and unchangeable were taking in charge the remains of Tobe Renick.

Directly a respectful hand touched his shoulder.

"Lawyer, I reckon we don't need this warrant any longer."

A shower of tiny bits of torn paper fluttered before his eyes out the window toward the ground below.

"And, lawyer, since Zach Lawson's bullet got a little ahead of the 'lectric chair and you haven't no more cases this term, I'm going to take a rest and ride back home with Jim for a week's fishing. He says there's a heap of fish in Red River now; and I'm shore he's right—yes, sir—for that feller's just naturally got more sense than any mountain man I know!"



Author of "Black Hawk," "Tupahn—the Thunderstorm," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

DEEP in the South American jungle on the banks of the upper Amazon, José Martinez, outlaw, camped and meditated his troubles. Suddenly he was startled by a voice from across the water; and as he waited, a river-canoe, containing twelve native paddlers and four white men, approached. With a shout of recognition José welcomed the white travelers.

"It's the Señor Tim Ryan," he cried.

The other three were McKay, Knowlton and Rand—all his old friends from North America. They informed José that they were in search of gold and asked him to join them. He accepted and told them of the rich prospect in the little-known region of the Tigre Yacu, a branch of the Amazon—and immediately they were fired to go.

They set about procuring three small canoes at a native town a short way down the river, and got rid of their large boat. After a quarrel with a Moyamba trader there—an incident which promised to brew trouble later on—they started out anew and soon were well into the savage territory of the head-hunters.

Here they had the opportunity of rescuing a party of white Indians from the head-hunters. The white Indian chief wished to show his gratitude by not only adopting his rescuers into the tribe but by having them marry his daughters as well. This the North Americans refused to do; but José indicated that he was of a different mind.

CHAPTER XVI

THREE PASS OUT

"ALL right, old-timer," said Knowlton. "Sorry to lose you, but we wish you luck."

"I am not so easily lost, *señor*," José laughed. "Remember that I started up this Tigre Yacu before you did. And do not think that because I have paused I have stopped."

McKay's jaw set.

"Meaning that you don't intend to stick by what you've done?" he snapped. "If you only expect to amuse yourself a few days and then desert these girls, you've stopped for good, as far as we're concerned."

The outlaw jerked his arms from their soft resting-places and stepped forward.

"*Capitan*, have care!" he warned. "I am not without honor. I abide by what I have done. I do not desert my brides. But I do not desert my quest. Nor do I desert my friends—so long as they are my friends."

His eyes narrowed to slits, he watched McKay's grim face a moment. Then, getting no answer, he went on, his tone turning harsh.

"No man who calls me traitor—no man who even thinks me traitor—can be friend of mine. No man, friend or enemy, can tell me what I shall or shall not do. If you do not want me with you longer, go your way—and the devil go with you! But I have not stopped. Hah! No! And I have yet to see the man who can stop me!"

A red flush shot across McKay's face. Perhaps he had wronged José; but the outlaw's volcanic retort was too hot to pass

unchallenged. He stepped forward. José instantly stepped to meet him.

Rand's voice, cold as a knife-edge, came between them.

"Cut it out!" he drawled. "You're both wrong. Going to fight like a couple of fools? You make me sick."

Both slowed. Another step, and they paused. Behind José the Indians stirred and looked at their chief. Behind McKay the Americans let their hands sink to their holsters.

"Yeah," rumbled Tim. "What's the matter with ye? Hozy, lay off cap or ye'll git all that's comin' to ye. Cap, jump Hozy and ye jump the whole tribe—he belongs to 'em now. They're scrappers. Remember what they done to them last Jiveros. Want to start another war before our guns git cooled off?"

Common-sense gripped both the belligerents. They fronted each other, eye to eye, but each saw in the other's face realization that he had spoken too hastily and harshly.

"My fault, José," McKay coldly apologized. "I misunderstood."

"*Es culpa mia*," was the chill reply. "The fault is mine."

"Good enough. Now you're both right," came Rand's caustic comment. "Let it go at that."

But, though the sudden gulf yawning between the two men had closed, a split still existed—not only between the captain and the outlaw but between Indians and whites. Standing solidly behind their chief, ready to back him in anything he did, the men of the jungle now were also solidly behind the new son of Pachac. The Americans were as doggedly loyal to their own leader, right or wrong. What might have become a harmonious alliance, even despite the refusal of the Northerners to accept membership in the tribe, was now merely a mutual tolerance. Saxon pride and Spanish pride left the gap unbridged—with José on the other side.

Now the Peruvian, ignoring McKay, somberly eyed the three men in the hut. With resolute tread he strode forward, picked up his gun leaning against a corner-post, gathered his meager personal belongings under his left arm and stalked out.

"*Señores*," he stated with formal politeness, "it is a matter of regret to me that our companionship ends. It is not by my choice that it does end. But for the slur of your *capitan* it would not now be ended. My intention was—but *no tiene remedio*—it can not be helped. To you, Señor Knowlton—Señor Rand—my old friend Tim—I wish all success. If at any time José Martinez, the vile outlaw and deserter of women, can be of any aid to you three, do not hesitate to call. *Adios!*"

Turning his back squarely on McKay, he faced the men of Pachac and extended his gun-arm toward the back trail. Pachac himself led off. The line began to move.

Silently the white men watched them go: The barbaric chief, still gripping his crude blood-stained club, belted with his sinister black hair girdle, followed by men bearing the corpse of his dead half-son; the naked, muscular warriors, some carrying the other bodies of their slain; the fair-skinned daughters of the chief, looking wistfully back at the motionless José but asking no question; the other women, some young and robust, some carrying babes on their backs, some bent from age and work; the children, stoical as their elders. On into the dim shadows they filed, heading back toward the desolate clearing where the remnants of their plantation would yield them scant food. Then José moved.

Down the bank toward his little canoe he started without a backward look. McKay, cold and straight, still stood where he had stopped after the mutual apology which had not restored friendship. From the hut behind him came no sound. But he felt three pairs of eyes on his uncompromising back—eyes whose combined weight of disapproval hung heavy on him.

"José!" he called.

José went stonily on. He faded among the trees. He was gone.

"And there," said Tim morosely, "goes the feller that let us in on this trip. The feller that tipped us off to the gold when we didn't know there was any up here, and would fight for us till the last dog died, as long's we didn't kick him in that sore pride o' his."

McKay faced about. The three pairs of eyes were not on him now. They rested on the spot where the son of the Conquistadores had disappeared; and they were grave.

"My fault," he conceded again. "But he's gone. There's nothing we can do now but move camp as we intended. I'll scout around."

Rifle in hand, he went out alone into the bush. Knowlton hesitated, frowning at the forest; then grabbed his own gun and followed him.

"Always together, them two," said Tim. "Merry wants to give cap a swift kick, but he trails along jest the same. Dang it, Dave, cap's too sudden sometimes. No need to jump in Hozy's face with both feet like that. What's it to him what Hozy does? Me, I think Hozy's one wise guy."

Rand smiled slightly.

"Why didn't you take a couple of them yourself, then? You had your chance."

"Aw, that ain't what I mean. I can git girls enough up home if I want 'em, which I don't. But lookit the thing from Hozy's side. He's a lone wolf, man without a country, too much of a he-man to set down in a town and git fat and bald-headed even if he could go back. He belongs in these here wild woods. Now he gits a whole armful o' swell girlies handed to him, gits elected son of a chief and head of a bunch o' hard guys that he can train into one fierce fightin' machine— Why wouldn't he take it? Better be a king among pigs than a pig among kings, as the feller says. And them guys ain't no pigs, neither. He'd be a sufferin' idjut to turn it down—him, a man with a price on his head and no place to go. Ain't that right?"

The green-eyed man slowly nodded.

"Sure. And what's more, all that long conflab between him and ol' Patch-Ike wasn't about girls," Tim continued. "Hozy's got his eyes skinned all the time, and while he had the chief goin' he was gittin' a lot o' dope about somethin'. About what? About what's ahead of us, most likely—the gold and that wheel thing the young feller spoke about, and what makes fellers crazy up here, and so on. If he didn't git all o' that he got somethin', and he'd have shot the works to us if Scotch McKay hadn't turned Puritan so danged sudden. And now what do we know? Nothin'. And the only wise guy in the outfit's gone, sore clear through. And I don't blame him. Pfluh!"

He spat disgustedly. Rand said nothing. He knew Tim. He knew the grumbling veteran would carry on as loyally as ever behind the captain whom he now scored. He knew, too, that there was much of truth in what Tim said.

"And now here we are, without a guide or nothin', in the middle of a howlin' wilderness o' head-hunters. If we ever git to that gold we'll find li'l ol' Hozy and his new gang there ahead of us, I bet. And I bet ye somethin' else—one o' these days, if he don't git killed first, Hozy'll make himself the big noise round here. He ain't jest stoppin' to fool round a few girls like cap thought. He's lookin' way ahead, figgerin' on things about 'steen jumps beyond where he is now. You wait and see."

"Hope we live to see it."

'Yeah. Hope Hozy lives to see it, too. Wal, he's got our whole case o' forty-fours to start his clean-up with, and if he gits a Jivero with every shot he'll make head-hunters hard to find round here. And there won't be none o' them what-ye-call-'em Bambinos in Hozy's country, neither. Gee, I bet the first thing he does with his new gang is to start 'em after that greasy trader that was swipin' our stuff. Hope he gits him."

Wherein Tim erred on both counts—as he was to learn before dark. Neither the case of ammunition nor the trader who had attempted to appropriate it had gone as far as the Americans supposed. Nor was José thinking of matters so trivial as a pursuit of the pair whom he had scared away that day.

DOWN at the river he had expertly concealed his canoe and joined the column fording the stream; and now, first in the line, heading even the chief, he was stealing along like the jungle creature he was, his gun ready to clear from the path any menace to the people who had taken him to themselves. In his dark eyes burned a flame lit by thoughts known only to himself—thoughts not of the Americans, not of the Moyobambino, not even of his own present position, but of the mysterious land to the north. Truly, he had not stopped. But even he did not realize that he had only just started.

Meanwhile, McKay and Knowlton were threading the tangle in their silent scout. No word had been spoken between them concerning José, nor would anything further on that subject be said for some time. In his heart the stiff-backed captain was rebuking himself for his abruptness and realizing to the full what a serious loss he had brought on the expedition; but, even if it had been possible, he would not have recalled the Peruvian now.

Neither would he give up his purpose to go on into the sinister cordillera toward which he had set his face. Not if all his comrades turned back—not if he lost food and gun and clothing and had to attack the jungle bare-handed—not so long as one inch of progress and one ounce of will remained in him, would he quit forcing his way onward. When he could go no farther he would go down, face still to the front and dead fingers clutching the ground ahead. That was McKay.

At length, some distance farther along the lake and well back, he paused and scanned the ground around a small timbered knoll. Past the rise flowed a tiny but clear brooklet. Primeval solitude, unmarked by the feet of men, surrounded it. Game tracks were plentiful, and monkeys flitted along the high branches. Meat, water, secrecy, all were there for the taking. Glancing at his compass, he turned back into the labyrinth, working toward the lake bank. The present camp would be easier to find by following the top of that slope than by worming back along the devious way he had come.

A little later he and Knowlton emerged into a fresh path, showing marks of many human feet. It was the trail left by the people of Pachac and the pursuing Jiveros; the point where the fugitives had doubled back and where the head-hunters had later plunged straight out on the bare sand. The ex-officers paused, stepped nearer to the edge, and looked out.

The sand again was empty of life: the vultures had finished their work and risen. Out there now lay only stripped bones, fleshless skulls, scattered shields and spears and bows and clubs, surrounded by sinister red patches. The eyes of the men at the top of the bank ranged out to the water where they had crouched and shot. They returned, noting the positions of the bones along that red trail. They glanced carelessly at the path left on the slope itself. Then the pair turned away.

But they wheeled back. There, under a tree on that slope, they had seen something—something hastily set down beside the path by Jiveros just before charging out to kill and be killed. Their eyes widened. Then they went down, picked up what they had found, and, walking with hands well away from their sides, resumed their way to camp.

As they stopped beside the hut, up from the direction of the canoes came Tim, puffing under the weight of a tin case.

"Say!" he panted. "Know what that proud fool of a Hozy done? Throwed his can o' forty-fours back into our canoe. Took a few boxes, that's all. The danged ol'— Huh! What ye got there? Cr-r-ripes!"

The officers set down their finds. Tim's mouth worked. Then the case of cartridges slipped from his nerveless hands.

He was staring at the severed heads of the Moyobamba trader, Torribio Maldonado, and his Indian satellite.

CHAPTER XVII

NORTH

A FIRE, carefully masked, glowed faintly at the top of the little knoll back in the jungle. Dimly outlined by its vague glimmer, the columns of near-by trees, large and small, rose into the upper dark and vanished amid grotesque lianas and great drooping leaves. Among them, a scant half-rod from the smoldering blaze, stood two straight young trunks between which stretched a horizontal pole. Under the pole squatted four men, smoking.

That pole was the front rafter of a carefully concealed hut—a hut against whose other three sides leaned newly cut bushes and ferns and whose roof-line was softened and distorted by cunningly spaced bumps and slants and juts of palm-leaf; a covert which even a jungle Indian might have passed without seeing it, unless warned by the odor of smoke which permeated the air even when no fire burned. The smoke-tang clung both to the soil and to close-hung strips of meat under the palm roof.

No Indian was near at present. But other jungle prowlers, as savage and nearly as deadly, were restlessly moving round the camp. At times their fierce eyes shone beyond the fire, and at other moments their snarls and growls told of their baffled hunger for the meat they smelled beyond the men. Yet they held their distance, partly because of the dreaded fire-demon glowering at them and partly because even their ferocious hearts had learned that here it was well to step warily.

They had learned, those *tigres*, that the man-creatures now living here, though clawless and gifted with no such fangs as

theirs, possessed a deadly power—that they could suddenly spit out a sharp crack which struck their brothers dead. They had met men before, and more than one of those men had fallen before their rending attack and gone down their ravenous gullets. But those had not been such men as these; they had been bare of body, beardless of face, able only to stab with spear or arrow and then die. These new two-legged creatures not only would not be eaten—they killed and ate the *tigres* themselves!

Yes, they were tiger-eaters. They preferred other meat, such as monkeys and birds and *agoutis;* but after they spat that flashing report at a jungle king they stripped his flesh from his bones, ate what they wanted, and salted and smoked the rest to add to the monkey-haunches dangling from their roof. And so, though the big cats nightly slavered at the tantalizing tang which drew them there, they kept moving. And, come when they might, they never could find that meat unguarded or all the men asleep. Always one was there, alert and formidable.

For days now the camp had stood there. For days three of its men had hunted in the surrounding tangle, killing as quietly as possible and bringing back their prey to the hut where the fourth, who was lame, sat with a gun close at hand. When their butcher-work was done they had gone with the fresh meat-strips to the lake shore, where, on frames constructed at the edge of the bush, they salted and dried their provender and then brought it back to camp for a light smoking. And now, thanks to skilful hunting, straight shooting, good luck and steady work, they had tough meat enough to carry them many a hard mile onward toward the cordillera.

Now, also, Rand's leg was again in condition for use. Careful dressing and faithful though tedious resting had healed the wounds to such an extent that now he not only could walk about but could even squat beside his comrades in the nightly smoke-talk—though he squatted on only one heel instead of both. He was not yet in shape to buck a hard trail, but by favoring the injured leg a bit he could do his full share of paddle-work. Moreover, he had no intention of lolling here longer. Already he had demanded that the dugouts, which now were sunk in shallow water for concealment, be raised and loaded and the journey resumed.

"Aw, don't git so hasty," complained Tim. "Ye've had it pretty soft lately, but we ain't. We been pluggin' all day, every day, gittin' this here grub ready. Me, I'm willin' to loaf a couple days meself now. How 'bout it, cap?"

"Wouldn't hurt to lie up one day, anyhow," McKay agreed, mindful of the fact that the delay would heal Rand's injured leg just so much more. "All hands rest until day after tomorrow."

Rand frowned, but gave no further sign of impatience. He puffed again on his cigaret and glanced at the vanishing gleams of a tiger's eye in the black bush beyond. The others also had caught the gleam, but made no move. So accustomed to the cordon of cats had they become that they paid little more attention to it than to the ever-present mosquitoes—unless the animals grew too aggressive. They smoked on in silence for a time.

"D'ye know, I can't git that Bambino feller's head out o' me mind," Tim declared presently. "Keeps comin' back to me. I seen all kinds o' dead men over in France, and plenty here in South Ameriky too, and some of 'em was tough to look at, but they didn't spoil me sleep none. But some way a feller's head without no body on it gives me the jimmies. I didn't like them Jiveros much before, but I got no use at all for 'em now."

"So say we all," concurred Knowlton. "Still, there's no reason why Maldonado should haunt you. You gave him a good deep burial—what there was of him. Wonder where the rest of him is."

"Somewheres between the river bank and the white-Injun clearin', most likely. If he'd kep' on burnin' the water down-stream the head-hunters wouldn't never have got him. If he didn't try to do us dirt with the white Injuns before they caught us he tried it afterwards, I bet."

THE red man's random guess was right. His terror diminishing after he lost sight of the men whom he had sought to despoil, Maldonado had reflected that their fierceness and their jeering mirth were hardly in keeping with their apparently diseased condition. Tricky himself, he speedily suspected that he had been tricked. Whereupon, in a burst of vicious fury, he had plunged into the jungle to see if he could find the white Indian settlement

and goad them into pursuing the men who mocked him. What might have happened to him if he had reached that clearing and its raging people may be surmised. But he never arrived there. The head-shrinkers spied him first.

"Dang funny how things have been happenin'," Tim went on. "Take them white Injuns, now. With the whole jungle to run into, they couldn't hit no other place but our camp—the last place on earth they'd expect help, and the only place on earth they could git it. Seems like a miracle."

"Odd, but not miraculous," disagreed Rand. "They dodged the Jiveros somehow and started running up the path. Then they quit the path—maybe waded the river a little way—to lose their trail. They undoubtedly know of this sandy lake on account of its turtle eggs and good hunting. Young leader thought they'd have a chance to escape in here, so took the chance; intended to hide the women and children farther in and then tackle the head-hunters bare-handed. They hit our camp because it was near shore and they were following the lake line. Simple enough."

"Yeah, to hear you tell it. Now tell me somethin' else, Mister Wise Guy—where's that swaggerin' rascal Hozy, and what's he doin' right now?"

Rand shook his head.

"Don't ask me. I'm no oracle. But there's a simple way to find out."

"What?"

"Go find José and ask him."

"Huh! Gittin' brighter every day, ain't ye? But say, I dunno, at that."

Tim glanced sidewise at McKay, who stared expressionless into the fire. Then he turned to Knowlton.

"Might do that li'l thing, too. Mebbe Hozy's been over here lookin' for us before now, but couldn't find this new camp—we covered up our trail dang careful. Anyways, 'twouldn't do no harm to walk over and see how he's makin' out before we pull our freight north. What d'ye think, looey?"

The lieutenant met the appeal in Tim's eye, looked at McKay's stiff neck, smiled slightly.

"I'm game if the rest are. I'd like to know if the old fire-eater's still alive."

"Same here," Rand added his vote.

A long pause followed. McKay said never a word.

At length Rand arose, stepped to the fire, put on more wood, yawned at another eye-flash beyond, and suggested:

"I'm on first-trick guard duty tonight. Better hit the hay, Merry."

The blond man, whose night it was to keep vigil from midnight to dawn, agreed and promptly turned in. McKay, still silent, followed. Tim grinned slyly at Rand, jerked his head toward the obdurate captain's back and retired to his own hammock.

"Wants to go jest as much as we do, but he's too set to own up," was his thought. "If I ever git rich and go back home I'm goin' to hire one o' them sculptor guys to carve me a li'l mule out o' the hardest rock there is, and then I'll name it McKay."

Wherewith he curled up and slept.

Rand returned to his former place and disposed himself comfortably, facing the fire, cocked rifle now resting across his knees. Several times during his watch he lifted the gun part way, then let it sink as a menacing form swiftly dissolved in the darkness. After Knowlton relieved him he slept tranquilly, undisturbed by any shot.

The day of rest followed, and another night unbroken by gunfire. Then McKay, ending the second watch at dawn, roused his companions to a day of action.

In the cool daybreak hour, when the sandy stretch between water and shore was as devoid of heat as the forested soil behind, the four passed back and forth through the mist with meat and cans and guns and hammocks and paddles. They waded into the lake, scooped from the sunken canoes the sand ballast holding them down, rocked them in the water until clean, loaded them up, and got aboard. Before the sands beside them were even warm they were gliding away, leaving behind only a vacant hut where the *tigres* now might enter and sniff and snarl in chagrin.

Out to the river they swung. And there, though no word of José had been spoken for many hours, McKay turned his boat down-stream.

Down to the rocks where they had been captured by the men of Pachac they paddled. There they slid the canoes under cover and worked through the bush-fringe to the path leading toward the clearing where José might or might not be. But the visit to that clearing ended before it could begin.

The path was beaten smooth by the passage of many feet. The feet had passed within forty-eight hours at most. The Americans moved along it a little way, Rand studying the toe-prints along the edges, the spots where some foot had swung a little wide. Then they stopped, looked at one another, and turned back toward the canoes.

They knew that a journey southward to the clearing of Pachac's people would be only a loss of time; that there they would find neither José nor his adopted brethren. They visioned the scene at that place as truly as if they now were standing at the end of the trail and gazing across the opening—an empty, desolate space of stumps, where a few ancient mud huts gaped vacantly at a charred ruin which had been a tribal house, and where the plantation at the rear was only an uprooted waste, despoiled of everything edible. The nomads who had tarried there a few months were there no more, and unless other wanderers came and settled on the abandoned site the ever-encroaching jungle would steadily creep inward upon it until it was engulfed in a tangle of upshooting green.

"Too late," Rand laconically summarized. "All gone—north."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TOELESS MAN

AT THE top of a steep ravine a half-squad of men paused, breathing hard, to mop their streaming faces and renew the oxygen in their laboring lungs.

Below them, clear and cold, a little stream trickled along the gully out of which they had just climbed. Behind, a stiff slope dropped from a ridge topped by tropical timber. Ahead, a short rise pitched upward at a grade, betokening another ridge and ravine beyond. And off to the right, only a few rods away but concealed from the sight of the quartet by intervening trees, the Tigre Yacu squirmed its way along a deep boulder-choked bed.

The four men knew it was there, but its only use to them now was as a guiding line. So low was its water-level, and so choked its course with rocks, that it was no longer a feasible roadway into the hinterland. After days of paddling, poling, wading, shoving and dragging their canoes over and through one bad pass after another, the indomitable adventurers had at last been compelled to abandon the sturdy craft and take to their legs.

Yet they had not left the dugouts lying carelessly among the boulders, nor even secreted them under the cover of low-drooping bush or up a cleft in the bank. The boats now were high and dry, yet ready for quick use. They lay at the top of a stiff incline, high above the present water-level, higher even than the old stains marking the topmost reach of the rainy-season floods.

It had taken nearly a whole day of strenuous labor to get them there, for they were stout craft hollowed out from solid logs, and astoundingly heavy. But there they were, lying on crude trestles, with bows somewhat lower than the sterns and dipping downward. In them lay the paddles and a number of tin cases which once had held oil, later had served as sealed receptacles for food and ammunition, and now contained nothing at all. Only one of the containers still was heavy—the one in which remained the "trade" .44 bullets which the party could not use here but would not throw away.

The positions and equipment of those canoes were significant of three things: That their owners might be gone for some time, but intended to come back; that when they did come they might bring something with which to refill the tins; and that they might wish to depart in a hurry. With the banks only moderately full of water, it would require only a quick shove of the boats down the natural chute to get under way with utmost speed. And the season for the setting-in of the heavy rains was not many weeks away. In fact, even now the daily showers seemed to last a trifle longer than had been the case a fortnight ago.

Now the contents of the vacant tins, together with smoked meat and hammocks and other wilderness necessities, were dragging at the shoulders of the four dogged marchers. The men stood leaning far forward, hands on braced knees, distributing the weight of their packs and easing their shoulders as they breathed. Hardened though they were by paddling, iron-muscled from their strenuous toil among the rocks of the upper Tigre, they were not yet accustomed to the unceasing strain and the gruelling down-pull of their back-burdens.

And all knew that stiffer work must await them.

"Cripes!" wheezed Tim. "I know now what 'tis that drives fellers crazy up this here river. It's climbin' up these blasted gullies and then tumblin' down into another one a li'l further on. Up and down, up and down, and never gittin' nowheres. If I ever git out o' here and back to N' Yawk I won't be able to travel natural on the sidewalks—I'll have to climb up the sides o' the buildin's and then fall off the other side. Pflooey!"

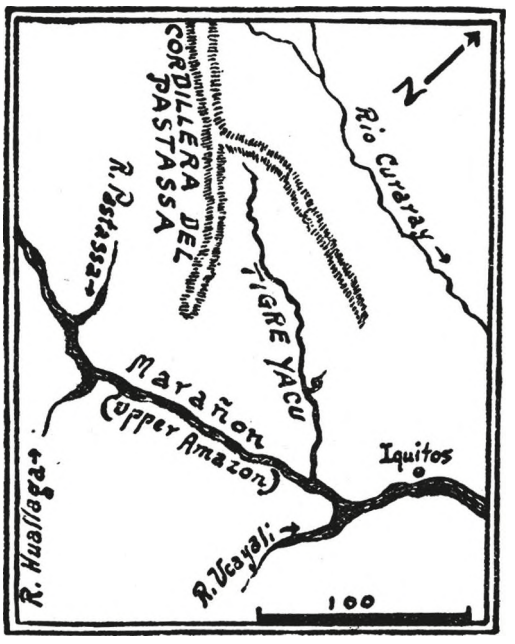
He blew a sweat-drop from the end of his nose and again breathed hoarsely.

His humorous arraignment of the country now surrounding them was well merited. It truly was an up-and-down region, gashed athwart by water-clefts of varying degrees of steepness, and steadily growing higher.

Had he or any of his companions taken the time and trouble to pick out the tallest tree thereabouts and climb into its lofty crown, he would have seen, to east and north and west, a maze of jungled hill-tops shouldering upward behind one another; and beyond, on all three sides, a mountain wall looming mistily against the sky some thirty miles away. That wall, curving around like the rim of a great lopsided bowl from which the southeastern quarter had been knocked away, was the mother of the hills, the mother of the Tigre boulders—the Cordillera del Pastassa, with its claw-like eastern spur, the golden mountains of their dreams.

But, though so near the unknown range toward which they had toiled and fought, not one of those pack-burdened men had yet seen it. Theirs was not the free outlook of the creatures of the tree-tops; they were earth-fettered, swallowed in the labyrinth, able to see only a few rods at most in any direction, and then seeing only the eternal tangle in which they seemed doomed to labor for all time. They were here only because they were stubbornly following the course of the shrunken river, their compasses, and a dim track pressed into the mold by bare human feet—the up-stream trail which, starting somewhere below the abandoned white-Indian settlement, still ran on and on into the north and seemed, as Tim said, to get nowhere.

Where they were now they could not tell; all sense of distance, even of time, was distorted by their surroundings. They only knew that if they fought onward long enough they must inevitably reach the mountains and there find—perhaps treasure, perhaps utter barrenness.



THE LAND OF THE HEADHUNTERS

"If we could only pick up a li'l gold to kid ourselves along, 'twouldn't be quite so bad," Tim added. "Jest a li'l nugget, or enough color in the pan to keep us goin'. But there ain't nothin'. Seems like Hozy's yarn about the crazy guy without no toes must be a dream. Yeah, ol' Hozy himself seems like a dream now, and his Injuns and all. Nothin' but jungle and work and bugs and sweat—that's all the real things there is."

Again he spoke the gaunt truth. In all their tortuous way up the river they had found no gold worth keeping since that day when Tim had captured the forty-dollar chunk. Though their gold-pans and other mining tools had all been lost in their capture and escape from the men of Pachac, they had made shift to wash a little dirt from time to time since then. They had found color, but in such infinitesimal quantities as to prove a discouragement rather than a lure. But for three things they might before now have decided their quest to be hopeless—though they still would have pushed onward.

Those three things were the nugget itself, still jealously prized by Tim; the tale of the mad Gonzales, which they implicitly

believed—though told by an outlaw who now was no longer a comrade of theirs; and the fact that the narrator of that tale still was pressing on toward the cordillera.

How far ahead of them José and his band now were they did not know, but they knew they were ahead, and that they had gained much distance over the far slower canoes of the following whites. Traveling at the tireless pace of the jungle nomad, unburdened by packs, snatching their sustenance from the forest where civilized beings would have starved, they had pressed steadily onward while the Americans wrestled their canoes up through the boulders.

Now their trail was old—washed dim by the daily rains, trampled under by the fresher tracks of animals. But it was there, and at long intervals the men following it found unmistakable signs that the new son of Pachac still led them.

THE signs were few and so small that only the jungle-trained eye of Rand spied them—a few threads caught on a thorn, which were recognized as torn from the Peruvian's raveled shirt-sleeve or ragged breeches; an exploded .44 cartridge-shell glinting dully at one side of the path; the marks of a machete-blade on some severed sapling or vine. The three former soldiers, though by no means blind to trail-signs, would not have spotted these things as they labored on. But to Rand they spoke as plainly as if they had been printed placards announcing—

"I, José Martinez, have passed here."

And soon they were to find larger and grimmer signs of the progress of the deadly-handed outcast.

Having caught their wind, the four straightened up.

"Feel better, Tim, now that the hourly growl is out of your system?" Knowlton quizzed, in the low tone habitually used.

"Oh, yeah. Le's go, feller-idjuts."

They fell into route-step and plodded away.

Over the ridge they filed, Rand's eyes ceaselessly scouting ahead and aside. Down into another gully, up another slope. On again, down again, up again. And so on, as it seemed always to have been and destined always to be.

Then, on an upland somewhat longer and more level than usual, the scout slowed. His head slipped forward and he sniffed the air like a hunting animal. But he did not stop. His nose told him that whatever was ahead was dead.

Just beyond the top of the hill he found it. It lay scattered along on both sides of the trail, which here led among sizable trees and comparatively thin undergrowth. It now was nothing but bones. But a few days ago it had been a body of perhaps twenty men, who had lurked behind the trees and attacked from ambush. Broken weapons, red-stained shields, splintered arrows jutting from tree-trunks, remnants of maroon loin-clouts, and trampled ground bore mute testimony to the fierceness of the fight.

"Tidy little scrap here," said McKay, speaking for the first time in hours.

"Pachac's gang must be armed again—with clubs, anyway," added Knowlton, indicating a crushed skull.

"Yeah. And ol' Hozy was right on the job as usual," Tim chimed in. "Lookit this feller. And there's another one. And a whole handful o' forty-four shells scattered round."

The two skulls to which he pointed bore the gaping holes of heavy bullets.

"Good swift action, all right," agreed the lieutenant. "Must have been a grand old free-for-all for a few minutes. Jiveros, these fellows. Same equipment as the ones we sent west. Some must have gotten away. Remember the drums we've been hearing lately?"

The question was hardly necessary. The mutter of those drums off to the west had caused even sharper vigilance by day and more careful concealment of the nightly camps. Because of it, no fires had been built for days. Its menacing note had throbbed in the mind of every man long after it had died out of the air. Now each glanced searchingly about. But nothing showed itself.

"Uh-huh. Wal, if more of 'em are out they're prob'ly after Hozy's gang, not watchin' us," was Tim's comforting suggestion. "And they'll git plenty o' trouble if they catch up with 'em. Lookit here, there ain't no hair anywheres around. Ol' Patch-Ike must have most enough scalps in that belt o' his to make a whole shirt by now. If he cleans up another bunch o' Jiveros he can start makin' a pair o' pants."

Grim smiles answered him. But the same thought was in each man's mind—Pachac's band must be smaller now than before

this fight. Was José leading the tribe to victory over all raiders, or to ultimate destruction? Or was he still alive and leading?

Rand hitched his pack and resumed his vigilant advance. The short column filed onward past the other relics of jungle warfare, dipped down into another valley, and left the battlefield behind. There was no further talk.

For some time they kept on before halting again. Then their pause was caused not by men nor beasts but by weather. The light faded, a murmur of approaching rain came to them, big drops spattered, and a spanking downpour set in—the daily shower. Picking a spreading tree, they squatted against the trunk, glad enough to slip their packs and rest.

Suddenly, some distance ahead, a faint yell broke through the slash of falling water. It came but once.

At its own good time the rain swept onward and the light brightened. The four arose and advanced, keenly alert. No sound but the steady drip of moisture came to their ears, and for a while no new sight met their eyes. Then Rand stopped short—looked—listened—and advanced upon something at a bend in the trail.

There, face down, lay a man. He was naked, black-haired, but apparently a white. His hands were dug into the dirt as if he had tried to raise himself after falling. His back was a welter of spear-wounds.

Some one had run him down and stabbed him repeatedly in savage ferocity; stabbed him again and again after the death-thrust. Then the killer had vanished into the rain-swept jungle, carrying with him the spear. Nowhere around the body now was sign of any man but the newcomers.

Rand stooped, looking closer. On the skin above and below the death-wounds were scars, not old, left by a whip.

Turning him over, the four looked down into a gaunt face overgrown by black beard—a face of Spanish cast, coupled with certain Indian features; the face of a mestizo, Peruvian or Ecuadorian. Their eyes ran down his frame. Then every one started.

Back into their minds flashed the words of José, describing the crazed Rafael Gonzales who had reeled into Iquitos with his bag of gold:

"His skin was seamed with scars like those of a whip. His toes were gone—every one cut off!"

This murdered man on the ground, as they had just seen, also bore whip-scars. And his feet were mutilated. Not one toe remained.

CHAPTER XIX

THE GOLDEN MOUNTAINS

STARING down at that maltreated man, the four muttered in growling undertones. When they lifted their gaze and peered again into the misty depths ahead their faces were hard-set.

"We'll halt here," said McKay. "Unsling packs."

The burdens dropped. Tim, his blue eyes glittering, slipped the safety-catch off his breech-bolt and lunged ahead, seeking the man or men who had speared the scarred victim.

"Dave! Stop him!" added McKay, without raising his voice.

Rand, also ready for action, loped away after the mad Irishman. Even when cool, there was nothing subtle or stealthy about Tim; and when enraged he charged like an infuriated bull, seeing red and oblivious of the disturbance he made. Now he was slapping down his feet and knocking aside drooping bush noisily enough to warn his quarry long before he could catch him. Hearing the pursuit, the man—or men—ahead would undoubtedly slip into cover and spear him in the back after he passed.

But Rand did not attempt to fulfil the command literally and stop him short. He only sprinted up to him and hoarsely whispered:

"Less noise! They'll dodge you!"

The fear of alarming and losing his prey slowed Tim down at once, whereas an appeal to "go easy" or to "watch yourself" would have resulted only in a contemptuous snort and an increase in speed. Before long he stopped of his own accord, breathing hard and glaring around.

"We must have passed him," he panted. "He ain't had time to git this far. Skulkin' in the bush back of us, most likely."

His companion thought otherwise, but he did not say so. The Indian probably had turned back immediately after killing his man and loped away on his back trail, moving without haste but eating up space at every stride. By this time he undoubtedly

was well ahead, unconscious of the fact that white men were behind him. Further pursuit now would mean a long chase and probable ambush. Moreover, the rain had washed out any sign of fresh footmarks. Common-sense demanded a return to their companions.

"Probably," Rand feigned to agree. "No sign up ahead, anyway. Let's look along back."

They looked, and, as the veteran of other jungles expected, found nothing. Returning to the body, they found Knowlton arranging a rough cairn of down-blown branches, while McKay watched in all directions.

"Best we can do," explained the blond man. "He's part white, anyway, and I'm going to give him what cover there is. Some thorn-branches on top and around will keep off the animals."

"What do you make of it, Rod?" asked Rand. "Jiveros didn't do this. They'd have taken his head."

"Can't make it out," admitted the captain. "Looks to me like pure savagery. There may be some tribe in here that nobody's heard about. Certainly there's something around here that maims men. This fellow had no gold like that Gonzales chap. Why he should be killed I can't figure."

"Personal enmity, perhaps," hazarded Knowlton. "Whoever downed him gave him enough stabbing to kill him a dozen times. A prisoner, possibly, who got gay with an Indian woman or two and then tried to escape."

"Prisoner of whom?"

"Don't ask me. I'm only guessing."

"Mebbe if we keep on pluggin' we'll learn a lot," Tim morosely suggested. "And here's hopin' I git the guy that done this! I'm sore, I am. Killin''s bad enough, but this cuttin' off toes and stabbin' in the back—grrrumph!"

For a moment all stood squinting again along the empty track which led into the north. The same thought came to all at once.

"José's up ahead somewhere—or his gang is, or ought to be," Knowlton voiced it.

"Hozy wouldn't have no hand in nothin' like this," Tim remonstrated. "Mebbe his gang would; but how would this guy git past 'em all? Whoever got him was chasin' him."

"And these feet have been toeless a long time," added Rand.

"Looks as if the Pachac crowd were sidetracked," said McKay. "Or else this chap came in from some other trail. Come. Let's move."

Tim and Knowlton bore the dead man to the cairn and covered him. Then they shouldered their packs. The file got under way.

Once more in the lead, Rand studied the damp trail more closely even than usual. It gave no sign for a time, the rain having blurred all marks except the fresh boot-heel tracks left by Tim's feet and his own. Not until they had labored up and down and onward for some distance did he find what he watched for. Then, reaching a spot where thick interlacing of branches overhead had formed a gigantic umbrella and thrown the downpour aside, he slowed, squinted, and nodded.

New footmarks receded ahead—the tracks of bare feet bound northward. And they had been made by more than one man.

Rand said nothing until an extra steep climb made all pause at the crest of another bank to recover their breath. When his lungs were pumping normally again he stated his deduction.

"Small gang of killers trailed that fellow purposely to get him. When they ran him down they finished him quick and started straight back. Looks as if they were working under orders and hurried back to report success. Otherwise they'd have hung around until the rain let up."

"Mebbe they did."

"No. They went at once, regardless. Rain has been washing their trail. Good thing they did, too."

"Why?"

"Otherwise we'd be minus one crazy Irishman."

"Huh? Say, feller, d'ye think I can't handle meself——"

"With a bunch of spears in your back?"

Tim blinked.

"Oh. Yeah. I git ye. Lemme charge past and then heave their harpoons. Uh-huh. Wal, that's the only way they could git away with it, I'll tell the world!"

Nevertheless the belligerent ex-sergeant twitched his shoulders and sneaked a look at the forest behind him. He had been shot once in the back—in France, by a German infantryman who had pretended surrender and then used a short-barreled pistol—and

now the old wound seemed to burn. Maybe he surmised why Rand had followed him in his recent reckless run and inveigled him back. At any rate, his next words seemingly had little connection with his last utterance.

"Ye're a good skate, Davey, old sock."

Davey, the good skate, smiled a little and then plodded away.

As before, he kept watch of the retreating footprints ahead of him, though not so carefully now, since he had learned that what he suspected was true. They were visible only at intervals, in spots where the ground was soft, wet, and protected from the bygone rain. At length the rainfall ceased to have any influence on the marks, and the scout knew that hereabouts the killers had emerged from the westward-speeding shower. The tracks faded out, reappeared farther on, vanished, showed again at another place; always spaced the same, showing a steady pace, and always following the mysterious trail toward the mountains.

He noticed, too, as automatically as he breathed, the creeping slant of the shadows cast by the westering sun. For many weeks —ever since descending from the Andes into the lowlands, in fact—this had been their only means of gaging the passage of the hours; for every watch in the party had stopped after a few days in the heavy moisture charging the air east of the colossal cordilleras, and thus they had been reduced to the most primitive means of time measurement. Now he knew that in little more than an hour the grueling advance must end for that day, if a safe and snug camp for the night was to be made.

THE hour dragged past, filled with nothing but Tim's summary of their previous marching—"jungle and work and bugs and sweat." The feet of the men behind, and his own as well, were slipping now on roots and in wet spots, which, earlier in the day, they would have cleared without effort; the legs had lost resiliency, and the hungry overworn bodies were becoming like engines whose fuel was burning out. But the present spot was unsuitable for camping—an upland, devoid of live water. So Rand tramped on, seeking a night haven.

The ground still rose. It held no more of those heart-breaking gullies, however, and progress was not too difficult, even for nearly exhausted men. Doggedly they kept putting one foot before the other until half an hour more had passed. Then the light ahead grew brighter. The trees seemed to thin out.

Studying the forest around him, the scout presently spied something and paused. The column stood hunched over, the three behind looking the questions they had not the breath to ask.

"Dry camp," puffed Rand. "Getting late. Got to stop. Water-trees here. We can make out."

He jerked his head aside. Scanning the timber, the others recognized a tree which they knew but had never yet had to rely on—the *huadhuas*, or water-tree, a bamboo from whose joints could be obtained quarts of clear water. They nodded, dropped packs, staggered, adjusted their balances to the sudden loss of weight, and looked about for a good place to make camp away from the trail.

"Over there," directed McKay, picking a place well bushed but not too thick, and near a couple of widely spaced *huadhuas*. Heaving up their packs on one shoulder, they threaded their way into the covert, cast about for snakes, found none, and sank down for a brief rest.

Presently Rand arose and, with no explanation, returned to the trail. Along it he journeyed toward that thinning of the trees. He was gone for some little time. When he returned his eyes glowed.

"Didn't mean to slack on camp work," he said, glancing around at the results of the labors of his mates. "Been scouting. Come on. Want to show you something."

They followed him. Along the path they went, feeling almost fresh again without their back-burdens. The forest grew thinner and thinner. All at once they stopped, subdued ejaculations breaking from them.

They stood at the brink of a sharp declivity where, years ago, a land-slip had occurred. Under them yawned a sizable gulf, partly filled with water dammed by the fallen earth. But, after one glance, they gave no attention to it. Their gaze darted off to the northwest.

For the first time in many a weary day they saw mountains. For the first time they looked on the end of their long trail.

There in the north, blue-black at the base and gleaming golden at the summits rose

the tumbled upheavals of a bygone age—the looping range of the Pastassa, sprawling outrider of the tremendous column of the Andes. The misty atmosphere of the lower lands, which usually blurred the vista from this point, was swept clean for once by a stiff north wind now hurling itself at the faces of the four invaders; and in the fast-lifting light of the dropping sun the glowing peaks seemed looming over them, aglitter with unminted treasure—a promise, a lure, which might prove false or true.

Somewhere beyond that range, draining its northern slopes, the Curaray flowed down its golden bed to the Napo. Somewhere beyond its western segment stretched the river valley of the Pastassa, homeland of the head-shrinkers whose roving outposts twice had come into the trail of the four. Somewhere ahead in that great packet of the mountains that trail must end at—what? The grim place where maimed men went mad? The final port of all the missing men of the Tigre Yacu?

Whatever might wait in the few remaining traverses between here and the cordillera, it now was masked by the rolling jungle and the long shadows thrown from the western wall. Below the sunlit summits stretched a twilight land wherein showed no sign of man; an expanse which, for all the eye could discern, might have lain untrodden by human foot since first it rose out of the waters of the vast inland sea. Only the vague path still leading onward, only the bodies of the mutilated man and of the head-hunters who had come down it, proved that men moved somewhere under that baffling jungle cover girt by the mountain rim.

McKay, first to move, drew out his compass. The quivering needle verified the sun-slant; they were gazing north-northwest. Returning it to his pocket, he remarked in a matter-of-fact tone:

"Better move. It'll be dark soon."

Rand, who had looked out at the scene once before, faced about promptly. Knowlton, his blue eyes shining with the light of the dreamer who sees his vision at last coming true, stood a moment longer before reluctantly turning away. Tim pivoted lazily on one heel, yawned, and agreed:

"Yeah. I'm hungry."

Through the thickening shadows they filed back to their covert. There Knowlton spoke.

"Well, by thunder, we've something to look forward to now. We're almost there. The golden mountains!"

"Mebbe," said Tim.

"Maybe what?"

"Golden. If they's gold there, it keeps settin' tight and don't go down the river. Say, where's that river, anyways? We lost it."

"Over east somewhere," said Rand. "It's no good to us any more. This trail is the thing to follow."

"If there's no gold, Tim," challenged Knowlton, "where did Gonzales get his? He came out of here—scarred and crippled like the fellow we met today."

"Uh-huh. Wal, here's hopin'. We've had a run for our money—now I want to see the money for the run."

"If it isn't there we'll keep on going until we find some," smiled McKay. "It's only two or three hundred miles farther to the Llanganati. There's gold there—if you can find it."

"Yeah? Only two-three hundred miles, huh? Totin' a pack all the way, o' course?"

"Of course. But when you get there all you have to do is to find the Incas' lake and get out the gold."

"Uh-huh. And all I got to do to git from here to there tomorrer mornin' is to tune up me airyplane and let her rip. Talk to me about it after breakfast, cap. I'm tired now."

"What's this yarn about the Incas' lake, Rod?" asked Rand. "Same old stuff you hear in Peru?"

"Same stuff. Incas threw billions of gold into an artificial lake on the side of the Llanganati during the Conquest. Good many men have lost their lives trying to find it. Still, it seems to ring truer than most of those Inca-lake stories.

"They tell about one fellow named Valverde—Spaniard, of course—who was poor as dirt and went native. A while after he took his Indian wife he became enormously rich. Girl's father showed him how to get at the Inca gold and helped him raise a lot of it. He went back to Spain, and when he died he told the king of Spain how to get at the rest of the treasure. But it's still there."

Tim's eyes began to glisten. This was a new tale—a tale of lost treasure hundreds of miles away—far more alluring than the possibility of equal treasure within a few leagues. Inca gold! The dream of every

Andes adventurer for more than three centuries!

"And nobody's got it?" he demanded.

"No. Expeditions don't come back. Even one led by a priest—Padre Longo—didn't come back. After that, nobody had the nerve to try for it."

"Gee! Say, if we don't find nothin' here le's keep on goin'! We can git there sometime—if our cartridges hold out—and it'll take somethin' gosh-awful to lick this gang after we land there. What d'ye say, fellers?"

The others laughed. Pessimistic a few minutes ago, croaking over the lack of gold in the Tigre—and now all afire to dare hundreds of miles of cordillera in chasing a new rainbow; that was Tim Ryan all over.

"We'll see what's here first," chuckled McKay. "Let's eat."

Silence fell on the darkening camp, broken only by masticatory noises and gulping of water previously drained from the *huadhuas*. Then across the jungle roof swept the sunset noise of birds and animals, announcing night. Gloom enveloped them. They ate on, wordless.

All at once they stopped chewing and leaned forward. On the wings of the wind still pouring out of the north came a new sound. It was not the roar of a *tigre*, the death-scream of stricken animal or man, the snarl of jungle battle, the report of a gun. Any of these would have held them alert for a time; but the thing they did hear made them squat motionless as frozen men until it ceased. Even after it died they held that same rigid pose, staring dumbly into the dark.

Deep, slow, doleful as a requiem for the lost men who had never returned from their quest into this fastness—a bell had tolled.

CHAPTER XX

DEAD MAN'S LAND

NOONDAY sun stabbed down through the branches stretching over the curved crest of a long, rambling ridge. In scattered splotches it lighted up sections of a faintly marked path leading along the upland. Filtering through tall ferns beside the path, it sprayed over bearded men in torn, jungle-stained clothing who sat on their packs and smoked.

Another fireless meal had just been finished, and the usual cigarets were aglow. But the four were not lounging in the careless attitudes customary to men relaxing in the languor induced by food and tobacco. Each leaned a little forward, his feet under him ready for a sudden upward jump. Each faced inward toward his companions, but his eyes kept swinging back and forth in vigilant watch of the forest beyond the man opposite.

Between his knees, butt on the ground and left hand curled around the barrel, each held an upright rifle. And every man's pistol hung ready for a swift draw.

"If the cusses would only show themselves!" complained Tim. "If we could only get a look at 'em oncet! They been trailin' along with us the last two days, and we dang well know it. But never a hair will they show. Me, I'm ready for a scrap any ol' time, and the sooner the quicker. But this thing of expectin' a spear or a poison arrer in me ribs any minute and never seein' me man—I don't like it."

The tense attitudes of the others showed that they felt exactly the same way. For two days, as Tim said, they had been under that strain—the knowledge that they were escorted by flitting Things which they could always feel, could sometimes hear, but could never see—an unceasing harassment which wore on their nerves more than half a dozen deadly fights. For two nights, standing guard in two-hour shifts, they had felt the invisible Something close by, ready to strike yet never striking. Even now they were positive that the stealthy movements which they heard from time to time were not those of animals; that the slight waving of a bush here and there was not caused by a breeze.

"Next time I see those ferns over yonder move, I'm going to shoot into them," breathed Knowlton, eyes fixed on something beyond Rand.

"Hold in, Merry!" warned McKay. "That's a rookie trick."

"I don't give a whoop! They're there, and if they won't start it I'm willing to."

"Take a brace, man! You'll hit nothing. You'll start more than you can finish. Don't be an old woman!"

"I've got a theory about this thing," stated Rand, as calmly as if he did not feel Death lurking at his shoulder-blades. "These fellows, whoever they are, are willing to keep us coming along. They have a use for us—up ahead somewhere; up where that

bell rings. If you really want to start something, start back along the trail instead of ahead. I'll bet you wouldn't get ten feet away."

McKay nodded.

"Remember what that toeless chap's back looked like," he added.

At the memory of that red welter the lieutenant twitched his shoulders.

"While ye're springin' theories, I got one o' me own," Tim hinted darkly.

"Well?"

"Wal, I ain't much of a hand to believe in things that ain't. Jest the same, they's some missin' men up here. They'll keep on bein' missin'—they're dead! And they're the guys that's round us now!"

"Ghosts? Nonsense!"

"Mebbe. But why can't we see 'em? Why don't they cough or spit or breathe loud like live men? Who pulls that there funeral bell at night? How come a bell up here, anyways? I tell ye, it ain't a real bell! These things ain't real men! And it's that bell, them dead men snoopin' round, that drives live men crazy up here! If I was alone here long I'd be ravin' meself."

There was no levity in his voice. And, though the others tried to laugh, their mirth was forced. Despite himself, every man had fallen under the uncanny spell of the deep jungle during the weeks on the weird Tigre Yacu. And it is a fact, as experienced jungle-rovers know, that in the vast tropic wilderness are things which none can explain.

Sounds like the clang of an iron bar, where there is no bar nor iron; the ringing of a bell where no bell could possibly be; a penetrating, nerve-destroying hiss like that of a huge steam-pipe, hundreds of miles from steam; these and other sounds, which the Indians ascribe to demons, coupled with the sudden and absolute disappearance of men who leave no trace of their fate—these are a few of the unearthly occurrences in the great green abyss beyond the Andes which confound logic, reason, and sense. And these four were overworn by hardship.

But none except straightforward Tim would admit, even to himself, that the weird espionage of those invisible Things was undermining his scorn of the supernatural.

"If there were such a thing as a Dead Man's Land, and if this were it," the lieutenant doggedly combated, "you'd never catch Pachac and his people going up there. They're still ahead."

"Yeah? How d'ye know they are? We ain't seen a sign of 'em lately. Ask ol' Eagle-Eye Rand. They ain't nothin' to show they ever got this far."

Rand shook his head half an inch. Tim spoke truth.

"Then where did they go, if not up here?" Knowlton persisted. "There's been no sign that they turned off."

"Where'd the other guys go that come up here? How do we know what got 'em?"

There was a silence. Now and then a fern nodded, a slight creeping sound floated to them, but no life showed.

"Theories are no good," bluntly declared McKay. "But I've got one too. That bell belongs to some old Spanish mission; those old Jesuits would go anywhere—the more forsaken the place, the better. The descendants of their converts are still here. Maybe they're fanatics and practise a few fancy torments on fellows who don't come up to their requirements. Remember what was said about the wheel awaiting us."

Another silence. Then Knowlton said:

"Sounds more reasonable than Tim's nightmare. That might explain the toe-cutting and the whip-scars, too. If that's it, I'm out of luck. My folks were Baptists."

"Mine were Episcopalians," from Rand.

"Presbyterians," from McKay.

"Me, I'm s'posed to be Catholic, but I'm a danged poor one," finished Tim. " 'Twouldn't do me no good, anyways, if I got caught by a bunch that tried to ram religion into me with a hot poker. I'd git mad and tell 'em I was a Turk or somethin'. But what's the odds? They ain't religion enough in this hard-boiled crowd to hurt none of us, or help us either. Wait a minute, though. Mebbe I can git a rise out o' these guys. Watch."

He rose, facing a spot where he had detected several unexplainable dips of a bush. Slowly he made the sign of the cross.

After a minute he made it again. No sound or movement answered him.

"Nope. Yer dope's no good, cap. The cross don't mean nothin' here. Now le's see if a li'l Irish nerve will git us anything."

WITH steady tramp he advanced at the spot he had watched. Ever so slightly, the bush dipped again. A faint rustle, hardly audible, came from beyond it. Eyes narrowed, jaw out, the

ex-sergeant plowed into it and stopped. After peering around he backed out again. His broad face was not so florid as before.

"They ain't no sign here! No footmarks —no busted leaves—nothin'! By cripes, it's like I tell ye—these guys ain't human!"

The others, who also had risen and stood ready for action, glanced around and at one another. Knowlton shrugged.

"You fellows have all sprung your theories. Now here's mine," he announced. "We'll get to the bottom of things if we keep going. And we'll get nowhere stopping here. Let's go."

With this pronouncement every one agreed.

One by one they slung their packs—one by one, so that three always could maintain their readiness for anything. The donning of their burdens now was not so difficult as it had been a few days ago, for the men were hardened to them and the packs were lighter—too light, in fact, so far as their food content was concerned. But Tim, though anxious to be moving away from the masking ferns, could not forbear his customary half-serious growl.

"Dead guys don't have to git humpbacked luggin' these blasted packs, anyways. If these fellers are goin' to knock me in the head I hope it'll come quick, so's I can make a li'l profit on it. I'd hate to git killed jest as I git to a place where I can git rid o' this thing for good."

With a final heave of the shoulders to swing the weight into the right place, he fell into his position in file and took up the step. The column plodded away, heads moving from side to side in constant watch. Around a huge tree it wound, and into the northward trail it vanished.

As it disappeared, a louder rustle sounded among the ferns and bushes, which swayed more abruptly than before. Then they stood motionless again, and the sound died. The encompassing Things also had moved on.

Foot by foot, stride by stride, the four forged onward along the curving ridge-top. Inch by inch the sun-shadows crept eastward. Hour by hour the hot afternoon grew old. And as steadily as the little file swung ahead, as smoothly as the sun rolled in its course, the escort of silent Dead Men kept pace on either flank of the advancing force.

The ridge seemed to have no end. It rose in long grades, sloped away again, lifted and ran level, dipped at another easy slant, but still remained a ridge. At times, as the forest growth thinned, the marchers glimpsed the sky on either side. But they saw nothing of what lay out beyond those occasional side-openings, nothing of what waited ahead at the end of the upland—and nothing of the Things trooping along in the cover at the sides of the path.

As the hours passed, no halt was made. None was needed on this ungullied upland, where no sharp declivities had to be scaled and the lungs functioned as rhythmically as the feet swung. Mile after mile crept away behind until Tim's unspoken thought was reflected in the minds of his comrades:

"We're really travelin' now! We'd ought to git somewheres by night!"

And get somewhere they did. At length, with an abruptness that halted them short, they emerged into open air. They dug in their heels and gave back, smitten with sudden qualms at the pit of the stomach. Almost under their feet yawned a gulf.

A sheer drop of hundreds of feet—a wooded country below—a tremendous mountain wall confronting them a half-mile away; these were the things their startled minds registered in the first flashing instant of instinctive recoil. So long had their vision been confined by the dense tropic growth that the sudden burst into emptiness shocked their brains and sickened their bodies. Dizzily they wavered backward.

For many seconds they hung there in a close-drawn knot, while eyes and nerves and equilibrium readjusted themselves. At length, they cautiously edged forward. A little back from the brink they peered downward, studying the green carpet far under them.

It seemed a solid mass of jungle, unbroken by any clearing, unlined by river or road—a somber abyss wherein might live weird monsters spawned in the hideous Mesozoic age, but where the foot of man never had trodden. It curved away at both ends, its continuation cut off from the eye by jutting outcrops of the wall on which they stood. A yawning pit—nothing more.

Out of it, on the farther side, towered the mountain—a huge bulk, densely overgrown in its lower reaches, clad more thinly up above, nearly bald at the top. Along its side showed no indication of life except an occasional pair of parrots winging their way

from point to point. Grim, forbidding, it brooded over the chasm as if guarding its fastness from invasion.

Up and down the four studied it, and back and forth along the gulf they swung their gaze. At the first appalled glance the drop had seemed to be at least a thousand feet, but now that they had steadied themselves they estimated it at not more than six hundred. The mountain shooting up beyond might be three thousand feet high; possibly several hundred more. How long the curving valley might be they could not tell. But there seemed to be no reason for exploring it, nor any way——

Tim drew in his breath sharply. The others glanced at him and found him looking over one shoulder, ashen-faced.

"Oh cripes, I knowed it!" he breathed. "Here they are, and they're dead as ——!"

They whirled. At last they saw the Things.

A bare spear's-throw away, blocking the trail, stood men. But such men! Their ribs projected. Their arms seemed bones. Their eyes gleamed hollowly under matted black hair. And their skins were green.

Green as the jungle around them, they were. Had they moved and slipped into the bush, they would have vanished like specters. But they did not move. At least a dozen strong, they stood there in a solid body, holding javelins poised at their shoulders. The points of those spears were long, saw-edged, and dark with the stain of poison. One cast, one scratch from those venomed edges, and the whites would be doomed.

Fronted by death, backed by death, the four stood like statues. Then one of the ghastly figures slowly lifted its left arm. Its green forefinger pointed beyond the trapped men. With dread significance, that finger turned down. In the soulless eyes of the creature was a command.

"Oh ——!" groaned Tim. "We got to jump off!"

CHAPTER XXI

INTO THE ABYSS

MOTIONLESS, wordless, breathless, the other three stood facing the gruesome things blocking the only avenue of retreat from the brink.

The green arm pointing to death hung rigid; the cavernous eyes remained fixed in a snaky stare. The poisoned points neither lifted nor lowered, poising as if truly held in dead hands. Only the regular rise and fall of the breathing lungs under the gaunt ribs proved that the Things were living men.

Rand, without moving his lips, spoke nasally from a corner of his mouth.

"Drop flat and shoot from the ground. Spears may go over us. Give the word, Rod."

But McKay did not speak that word. Instead, he took his eyes from the green menace and glanced behind. Then he coolly turned his back, stepped to the extreme edge, and moved along it, looking down.

"Not necessary," he said after a moment. "Trail goes down here. We'll follow it."

"Trail?" Knowlton echoed in amazement. "Where?"

"Rock stairs drop to a shelf. Pretty risky, but possible. Not much worse than some places we struck in the Andes. Come and look."

Gingerly the blond man backed. Tim and Rand maintained their wary watch of the Things.

McKay pointed a little to the left of a segment of the ragged edge. There, as he had said, a flight of crude steps jutted from the sheer face of the precipice—perhaps a dozen of them, widening as they descended to a narrow shelf leading away to the westward. The top stair was hardly two feet wide, the shelf not more than four—a precarious passage flanked on one side by the upstanding wall and on the other by nothing at all.

"Ugh!" muttered the lieutenant. "Dangerous even for an Indian. Impossible for us. The slightest bump of a pack against that rough rock throws you out and down. And our boots will slip on those slanting stones. Can't be done."

"Got to do it, or end our trail here."

It was stark truth. This was the trail. To quit it here meant, at best, only a long, sour retreat to the canoes and back down the Tigre. At worst, it meant death from the poisoned spears still closing their path. And there was little chance that all those spears would miss their marks.

"Once we're on that shelf, we can travel," Knowlton conceded. "But getting there is the job."

"Take off packs. Take off boots. Go down backward, easing the pack after you with your hands, step by step. If the pack

slips let it go overboard. I'll try it out first."

Stepping back a little from the edge, he nodded to the green men and pointed to the perilous stairs. The spear-heads wavered slightly, sinking a little lower. McKay unslung his pack, sat down, and began unlacing his boots.

"Tim—Dave—get ready," he urged. "Never mind those fellows. They won't do anything just now."

His calm voice expressed more confidence than he felt. Yet he was reasonably sure that no attack would be made unless precipitated by his own party. These green men, he reflected, could have attacked at any time during the past two days, and with greater safety to themselves. Their object, as Rand had said, seemed to be to herd the invaders onward, not to kill unless they attempted retreat. What fate waited beyond those stairs he could not even surmise. But they could hardly be trapped in a more hopeless position than the present one; and they still retained their weapons.

"Ooch! Sufferin' goats!" blurted Tim, when he saw what must be done. "Go down that? I'll fight this gang bare-handed first!"

"Then you'll fight alone," retorted the captain, tugging at the first boot. "The rest of us are going down."

Rand said nothing. He studied the hazardous path, clamped his jaws tighter, and began preparations for descent. Tim looked at him, at the others, at the green men; opened and shut his mouth; mumbled dolefully, and took off his pack.

As McKay arose, with boots slung around his neck and rifle looped across his shoulders, a sound from the southwest throbbed across the silence. It was the far-off boom of drums.

"Huh! They're at it again," commented Tim. "Same ol' message stuff we been hearin'— Hullo! What ails these dead guys?"

At the rumble of the drums the green men had started. Now they had turned their heads and were looking back into the jungle. They stirred, lifted their spears higher in an involuntary gesture of defense, drew a little closer together as if threatened with attack. For the moment they seemed to have forgotten the whites.

If the adventurers had snatched the opportunity quickly enough they might have poured a devastating fire into those momentarily unready foes; might even, by fast work, have wiped them out completely. But none moved. All watched the weird creatures in wonder. Soon some of the green faces turned back. In them now was a trace of human emotion: Fear.

"Guess those drums don't belong to these greenies," said Knowlton. "They're Jivero drums, undoubtedly, and they seem to spell trouble for our genial hosts. We're not going into Jivero country down below, then. That's something."

"We're goin' into Dead Man's country, I'm thinkin'," croaked Tim. "This here hole is where all the rest of 'em are waitin' for us. I wonder if we'll look like these guys in a li'l while."

"They're a good Irish color, Tim," the captain grimly joked. "Maybe old Saint Pat is waiting for you down below. Here goes to find out."

"Saint Pete, ye mean. Waitin' to gimme a li'l harp the minute I fall offen them crazy rock steps. But I don't want no harp yet—Hang tight, cap, and go slow, for the love o' Mike!"

McKay was dragging his pack to the edge. Cautiously but coolly he laid it at the top step, turned backward, let himself down on hands and knees, straightened a leg and felt for the second stair. Finding it, he slid over and worked down until he had his knees firmly braced below. Then, very carefully, he drew the pack toward him and tested its balance on the rock above.

"Too heavy," he decided. "And too wide. Haul it back, will you, Dave?"

Rand dragged it back, and the captain rose. Once more on the top, he began unstrapping the roll.

"You were right, Merry—we can't handle these things," he granted. "Every man take what he can carry in his clothes. Get all the cartridges and matches, and whatever else you can tote without making yourself clumsy. Leave the rest."

"How about grub?" queried Tim.

"One meat-strip apiece. Down below we'll have to shoot our grub or starve. Don't overload, or you'll be twanging that harp in a few minutes."

Faced by that alternative, the four picked from the opened packs what they could safely stow in pockets, shirts, and empty boots, plus their hammocks, the two short

axes, and the light table-gun, which could be stuffed under belts or taken down by hand. The remaining duffle was ruefully cast into the edge of the bush. The green men watched wolfishly, but made no move toward the abandoned equipment.

AGAIN McKay essayed the perilous slant, going backward as before, keeping his eyes on the rock stairs as he passed downward, feeling his way below with sockless feet. Once his rifle-butt hit a projection on the wall, jolting him suddenly. His mouth twisted, and for a second his eyes swerved outward. But he gripped the stair above, raised himself a bit, swung his hips somewhat away from the wall, lowered himself again inch by inch—and the gun scraped past. A few more careful moves, and he stood on the shelf.

"One down," he announced, his voice a little husky. "Who comes next?"

"I," volunteered Rand. And, grimly steady, he made the descent without mishap.

"Lemme go now," begged Tim. "Me feet are gittin' colder all the time. If I wait any longer me legs will be stiff to me hips."

Knowlton, who stood ready to go, drew back and made room for the red man—who now was not red, but distinctly pale—to pass. Tim got on all fours, fumbled to a footing on the first step, and drew a long breath.

"Here goes nothin'!" he quavered, trying to grin. "And may God have mercy on me soul!"

His last utterance came from the bottom of his heart.

"Slow and easy does it, old top," the lieutenant warned. "Take all the time in the world. Don't look down. Just ease yourself down slow—slow—that's the way! Get a good foot-hold every time. Slow—easy—it widens out at every step, you know."

Set-jawed, glassy-eyed, Tim inched down. For him the passage really was harder than for any of the others—he was too broad and stocky. His whole left side hung out over the abyss, and his muscular but short legs lacked the reach of McKay's, or even of Rand's. The pair below watched every movement, coached him at every downward reach, warned him of every projection. And at last, shaky, gasping like a fish out of water, dripping with cold sweat, he found himself beside them.

"Wal, I—huh—come through without no—huh—harp in me hand," he panted, grasping at the wall. "But I wouldn't do it again for a—huh—million dollars. I'm sick to me stummick!"

"Stand still a minute," counseled Rand. "Watch Merry come down."

Knowlton already was backing over the edge. He threw a final glance at the green men, who showed no sign of intending to follow.

"So long, you fragrant hunks of green cheese!" he mocked.

The menacing figures spoke no word. Their lusterless eyes showed no glint of anger at his taunting grin. Only their spear-heads, now almost resting on the ground, lifted a little and pointed at his face.

Knowlton dropped his eyes to the rocks and concentrated his attention on the deadly serious work of getting down. And now the hand of Death, hovering close over the head of each man traversing that treacherous spot, showed itself.

Perhaps it was because he was last in line and anxious to join his waiting comrades and move on; perhaps it was a touch of recklessness; or perhaps the sloping stones were slightly slippery from the passage of three perspiring men. At any rate, the lieutenant descended just a trifle too fast. Reaching for the fourth step, he slipped.

His unbooted feet caught the stair and clung. But the butt of the rifle on his back hit solidly against the same ugly projection which had caught McKay's. The barrel slapped sidewise and struck the blond head a vicious blow.

He lurched out toward the chasm, dazedly clutching at the step above. Then, balanced on the utter edge of the abyss, he lay limp.

Another movement, a slip of the gun, a shifting of something in pockets or belt, would turn him over and slide him into the green maw gaping below.

With a hoarse croak Tim jumped upward. Tim, who had confessed cold feet; Tim, still actually ill from dread; Tim, who would not touch those stairs again for a fortune, sprang up them like a mountain goat. His body slithered against the face of the precipice. His big hands clutched, one at the edge of a step, the other at his lieutenant's slack shirt. In one smooth, steady

haul he slid the stunned man in toward the cliff.

And while the two below stood frozen, unable to help, he worked his own way backward and slipped the reviving man down stair after stair. He did not look to see where he stepped. He planted his feet with unerring surety, grasped tiny projections without seeing them, balanced himself as lightly as a fly. In hoarse tones he muttered over and over:

"Jest lay still, looey. Lay limp and we'll make it. We're most down and goin' strong. That's the boy! Lay still, ol' feller, la-a-ay still!"

And he reached the shelf, laid his man out straight beside the wall, and grinned gray-faced at him. Then he wavered, clutched at the crag beside him, and sank down. And for the next few minutes he was absolutely and utterly sick.

"By ——!" breathed McKay, who seldom swore. "I've seen men awarded the D. S. C. for deeds not half as brave as that!"

But when Tim sat up again and weakly mopped his face, he had a reward worth far more to him than government medals—a silent grip of the hand and a straight look in the eyes from his "looey," alive and once more ready to carry on. No words were said. No words could have said what eye spoke to eye in that long quiet minute there on the face of the wall.

"Let's go," said Rand.

Carefully they turned about, and slowly they filed along the trail, hugging the rock. Up at the top of the stair the green men stood watching them go. Presently they drew back, and for the first time sounds broke from them. With animal grunts, they fell upon the stale food left behind by the white men.

On along the narrow shelf the four adventurers trudged, looking down into the dizzy depths no more than they had to. It led on and on, widening at times, narrowing again, now roofed by overhangs of stone, again open to the high blue sky. Under a jutting outcrop it burrowed, and there it turned abruptly to the left. The marchers had rounded a shoulder of the hill which had cut off their view to the west and south.

There, on a natural platform beyond the corner, they halted with sudden murmurs. The jungle below was no longer without signs of man.

Perhaps a half-mile farther on, in a wide waterless bay among steep green mountain-slopes, the trees were thinned out at the top of a curving knoll. In that opening, dingy gray, showed the lines of stone walls and a house—masked by intervening tree-tops, but unmistakable. Whether men now dwelt there, what they did and why, were questions which only closer approach could answer; but men had been there—men who built with stone—and not so long ago. Otherwise the jungle would have swallowed up the place.

Down toward it the high trail now dipped at a stiff grade for perhaps three hundred yards. Then it vanished into trees, and at that point the precipice also ended; the tree-clad slope was a slope only, not a drop. The path must wind on down that green slant and then swing out to the house-capped knoll. Was that knoll the end of the trail, the end of the adventure, the lair of the dread ogre who swallowed missing men?

Suddenly the watchers started. A sullen, low, awful murmur was shooting toward them from the farther mountains. Instantly the solid rock under them quivered and swayed.

"Quake! Down!" barked McKay, falling prone.

The others dropped flat, hugging the stone. It moved sickeningly, became still. A few seconds passed. It shuddered again, was quiet.

Up from the depths rolled several clangs of a deep-toned bell. From somewhere below, seeming very near, broke a grinding roar followed by a great thumping crash. The rock quivered once more, but this time as if from a blow.

After a few minutes of waiting for another tremor, the prostrate men sat up and looked around. Nothing seemed changed.

"Pretty easy," remarked Rand. "I'd hate to be caught up here in a hard one."

"Something dropped, and mighty close," said Knowlton. He crept to the edge and peered down. "Not along this side," he went on. "Maybe around the corner."

Rising, he stepped to the other side.

"Did ye hear the bell ring? 'Twas down there by that house," said Tim. "That same dead-man's-bell we been hearin'——"

"Great guns!" Knowlton's voice broke in. "Look here!"

As they joined him he pointed downward, then out along the shelf where they had just

passed. Below, a great chunk of the wall grinned up from among crushed trees. Beyond, a long gap yawned in the face of the cliff.

"This trail's closed forever," declared McKay. "Unless we can find some new way out, we're in for life."

CHAPTER XXII

THE END OF THE TRAIL

SUNSET, blood-red, burned behind the mountains.

Against its fiery flare the great misshapen bulks loomed dusky green above the sinister gulf in which stood the stone-crowned knoll. In that chasm the shadows were welling rapidly upward toward the top of the eastern heights. Moving along the bottom of the bowl, the four invaders found everything around them growing dim under the jungle canopy.

They had swung down the remainder of the steep trail without mishap, and without meeting any living thing. Soon after entering the trees the path had begun to zigzag back and forth along the steep, but no longer precipitous, side of the towering hill; and now it had become merely a succession of easy curves rambling on toward the walls guarding the house hidden beyond the trees. Along it the file was passing at good speed, each man still carrying his boots around his neck. As always, Rand led, scanning all ahead and aside.

Abruptly he halted, jumped back, collided hard with McKay, who now was second in line. Before him in the dimness a sinuous form moved slowly out of the trail.

"Snake," he said. "Nearly stepped on him. Guess I'll put on my boots."

With more alacrity than caution, the others followed his example. The odds and ends of equipment which had been carried in the battered footgear were shaken tumbling on the dirt, and every man hastily jammed his feet into the leather legs. By the time the lacing was completed and they were once more protected to the knee, the swiftly deepening shadows had grown so dense that it was difficult to find the articles they had dropped. And the path was swallowed in gloom.

"Better halt here and eat," said McKay. "There'll be a good big moon in a little while. Can't see our way now."

"Aw, we ain't got far to go," objected Tim. "And mebbe they's some water ahead—I'm bone dry. And that low-lived snake's right round here somewheres yet. Le's go a li'l ways."

His only answer was the sound of three pairs of jaws biting into the last of the smoked-meat supply. The others had accepted McKay's dictum. With no further protest, he straightway clamped his jaws in a meat-strip of his own.

The meal was brief, both because of the meagerness of the provender and the speed with which it was bolted. No man squatted or sat, for no man knew how many reptiles might be within striking distance. In lieu of water, each finished with a cigaret.

"No need of going without a smoke," said Knowlton. "We're in, we can't get out, and anybody who spies my cigaret is welcome to come a-running."

"Me, I'd like to see somethin' comin'—somethin' alive, I mean," declared Tim. "This place is too dang spooky. Ain't seen nothin' here but one snake, ain't heard nothin'——"

Like a blow, the boom of a bell struck his words and knocked them into nothing.

It came from the right. Solemnly it tolled a dozen times. Then it was still.

No other sound followed, save the usual night noises from the gloomy depths around. No human voice spoke. No dog barked. No cat or cow or other domestic animal called. No squeak or rattle or bump or footfall betokened the presence of men in that house somewhere near by. Even the jungle noises here seemed weird, ghostly, echoing hollowly among the surrounding heights. Tim shivered.

After a prolonged silence Rand spoke.

"A queer hole. Good thing we stopped here. We were heading into the woods. Path curves back, no doubt, but we'd have blundered straight on."

Nobody replied. All stood waiting for the moonlight.

At length it came. The obscurity grew less dense. Silvery patches of light appeared here and there on the earth. The eyes of the waiting men, already dilated wide by the darkness, made out clearly the shapes of the near-by trees, but not the path. Vague even in daylight, that trail now would not again be visible before sunrise.

But McKay moved over into a little spot

of light, studied his compass, and laid a course for Rand.

"West-northwest," he said. "That'll fetch us out near that bell."

Rand, after contemplating his compass and the trees, nodded and dropped the instrument back into his pocket. Now that he had the direction firmly fixed in mind, his old jungle instinct would carry him straight, despite necessary windings, without another consultation of the magnetized needle. He turned and stepped away.

Slowly the party followed his lead, traveling in slants and detours, but ever swinging back to the prescribed course as surely as if Rand's eyes were glued to his compass instead of roving all about. They slumped into muddy spots, turned sharp to dodge boulders, straddled over down trees, and in places chopped their way with the machetes. Nowhere did they find flowing water. Their thirst, already keen, became acute discomfort as the meat they had swallowed demanded liquid. But none spoke of it, or of anything else.

All at once the trees opened. They halted at the edge of the forest, looking up at the cleared knoll.

They saw only stumps, low shrubs, scattered trees of great girth, and, at the top, a high stone wall, above which protruded the outline of a long low roof. For a time they studied the wall, seeking some moving figure, but seeing none. Under the cold moon the hard gray pile fronted the wilderness like a forgotten sepulcher guarding its dead.

Toward it the hard-bitten little column advanced, instinctively changing formation to a line of skirmishers. Each man picked his own way around tree or bush-clump, but none fell behind or went far ahead of his comrades. Several times they paused, listening and watching; then moved on.

Soon they stood under the old wall itself, looking along its length. Nowhere could they see an opening. For a hundred feet or more it ran straight north and south, then ended. Beyond rose the black mountains, looking down in insensate savagery at the line of stones taken from them by hands now moldering and piled up to bar out whatever foes might come, and at the four lost men who, all chance of return destroyed, stood under them and looked about.

To the men themselves came a queer feeling that they were back in some former life, outside the walls of some medieval robber baron's castle, likely at any moment to be spied by mail-clad sentries above and riddled with long shafts or dragged in and thrown to rot in some noisome dungeon. Knowlton caught himself listening for the grind of steel-shod feet above, the clink of armor, the rattle of a sword. Then he smiled at his own folly. But the smile faded and his eyes widened. No martial sound came to him; but another sound did.

SOMEWHERE farther down, beyond the wall, a vaguely confused murmur arose—a noise which might have been caused by shuffling feet combined with low voices—a sound as if men, or pigs, or both, were moving sluggishly about.

"Cripes! The dead guys are gittin' up out o' their graves!" breathed Tim.

In truth, it seemed so. If living men moved on the other side of those stones they had little energy. There was no calling out, no song or laugh—only a dead, brutish sound which neither increased nor died out of the air.

McKay motioned along the wall and stole away. The others followed. Down almost to the end they passed, and there they paused again. From across the barrier that gruesome sound still came, more clearly now—grunting voices, bestial snores, the faint slither of feet passing about as if dragging in utter weariness. Something else came over, too—a rank odor as of an unclean pen.

The captain gaged the wall—a good twelve feet high—as if meditating an attempt to look over by climbing on the shoulders of some one of his companions. But he decided otherwise and once more moved on, stopping again at the end, or what had seemed the end, of the rock line. It proved to be a corner.

Around that corner the wall receded for perhaps forty feet, then turned again and ran back to a sharp uplift of the ground. There it merged with the shadows and the rising earth. It looked like a passageway leading into some tunnel, which in turn might run back for many yards into the steep slopes beyond. The spies had little doubt that such was the case.

The captain shook his head, signifying that further progress in this direction now would lead them nowhere. They retraced their steps. To the other end of the wall

they passed, and around the corner they turned without reconnoitering. Then they stopped in their tracks.

Drawn up in a close-ranked body, stolid and silent as if they had been patiently awaiting the whites, stood ten men. Each held a rifle. Each rifle was aimed at a white man's breast. And each eye behind the gun-sights glinted as coldly as that of a snake.

They were Indians all. But they were not green men; not Jiveros; not men of the vanished Pachac. They were brutes; coppery brutes in human form. Though the lower parts of their faces were half-hidden by the leveled rifles, their low foreheads, beady eyes, and bestial expressions were clear enough in the moonlight. They were more merciless than animals. And they held the lives of the intruders in the crooks of their trigger fingers.

Yet, after the first shock of surprize, the four looked them over coolly. One thing was very obvious—these were no dead men. They were alive, well fed, armed with repeating rifles of the universal .44 bore. The sight of those prosaic guns, threatening though they were, exerted a steadying rather than an alarming influence. Tim even grinned, though in a disgusted way.

"Faith, gittin' caught seems to be the best li'l thing we do," he remarked. "Outside o' them Jiveros we caught on a fryin'-pan, we ain't licked nobody since we come in here. If I ever git back home I ain't goin' to brag much about this trip. What's the word, cap? Drop and shoot, or stick up our hands?"

"Stand fast."

Then, in Spanish, McKay addressed the Indians.

"Do not fear. We are not enemies. Put down your guns."

The guns remained leveled. One of the Indians replied in a harsh growl—

"Go within."

"Within what? Where?"

"The gate."

The captain glanced along the wall.

"I see no gate."

"Go. You will find it."

He moved aside as he spoke, still covering McKay. The others likewise slipped aside.

"We go."

And, with unhurried tread, they went. Flanked on one side by the wall, on the other by the ready guns, they filed along toward the invisible gate. As they passed, the Indians swung in behind, muzzles pointing at the white men's spines.

Some distance beyond, a tree cast a deep, wide shadow on the wall. In that shadow the Americans found a stout gate of rough timbers, standing ajar. Three more of the brute-faced aborigines, also armed with guns, stood there. These stepped in, swinging the gate wide enough to admit two abreast. When red men and white were all inside, the big barrier was bumped shut. Heavy bars thumped into place.

The whites, looking rapidly about them, saw the front wall of the big house; a bell suspended from a stout tripod near at hand; and a sort of scaffolding running along the inside of the stockade walls, about four feet below the top. The house-front was pierced by a few high and extremely narrow windows—scarcely more than loop-holes—and a wide doorway in which solid double doors stood slightly open. From the peak of the low-pitched roof jutted jagged stones which at one time probably had been a belfry, now ruined by some long-forgotten earth-shock.

The bell, hanging within the triangle formed by logs solidly braced in the hard-packed earth of the yard, was black with age. The scaffolding along the walls formed a narrow runway where men could pass in patrol or fight against enemies outside. If well manned, the place was virtually an impregnable fortress against any jungle foe.

This much the four absorbed in their first survey of their surroundings. Then their gaze riveted on the big door.

Slowly that door swung farther open. Beyond it a face showed dimly in the shadow cast by the big tree outside. The Indians looked toward that vague figure, and one of them spoke.

"They are here," he said.

The figure stood motionless a moment. The peering Americans saw that it was not tall, and that against the gloomy background its face seemed white. Then they nearly dropped. The figure replied; and its voice, though clear, was soft and low—the voice of a woman.

"It is well. They shall come in."

As if the words were a cue, light shone in the darkness. The doors swung wide. Prodded by the Indians, the amazed soldiers of fortune moved forward, staring at a slim, fair, graceful woman, bare-armed,

black-haired and red-lipped, gowned in clinging purple, who stood with head saucily tilted and smiled at the shaggy men who had forced their way to the end of the long trail of the Tigre Yacu. Around her stood light-skinned Indian damsels, nearly nude, holding bare-flamed lights.

Across the threshold passed the four, and down a bare corridor the bevy of girls and their mistress retreated before them. The Indian men remained outside, and one of them reached and swung the door shut. The lights passed into a side-wall, and the white men followed. They found themselves in a big room hung about with the same purplish cloth worn by the woman, in the middle of which stood a massive table from whose top flashed yellow gleams as the lights moved.

"*Bien venido!* Welcome!" smiled the woman. "You have traveled far. Have you hunger and thirst?"

The eyes of the four searched the room. No men lurked there. They relaxed, smiled in reply, and doffed their battered hats.

"Thirst we have, *señorita*," answered Knowlton. "A thirst that gnaws. But no hunger."

"It shall be quenched."

She made a sign, and the girls, who now had set their yellow lamps on little wall-brackets, went out by another doorway.

"Sit, *señores*," added the mistress of the house, nodding toward a long padded couch. "Water shall be brought for bathing, and I myself shall prepare that which will banish weariness."

With another smile she disappeared through the other doorway. Still almost dumb with amazement, the men sat down on the couch, unconsciously gripping their guns and staring all about.

"Gee cripes!" breathed Tim. "Whaddye know about this! We come lookin' for dead men, and we tumble into a harem!"

CHAPTER XXIII

CIRCE

FOUR girls, bearing wide yellow basins, entered and crossed the room. Each stooped before one of the men, holding the bowl at the level of his knees. Restraining an impulse to snatch the vessels and drink the cool water in them, the travel-stained men laid their guns aside and immersed their hands. As they did so, each narrowly scanned the containers.

"Gold!" was their conviction.

The yellow metal could hardly be anything else. It certainly was not brass. The yellow lamps, too, and the gleaming things on the table—all must be gold.

"Cripes!" Tim whispered again. "This place is a reg'lar mint!"

"Looks like it," agreed Knowlton. "First time I ever washed my face in gold, anyhow."

Running a hand down his face to squeeze the water from his beard, he reached with the other for a small towel hanging over an arm of the girl serving him. As he did so she bent nearer and whispered something.

The sibilant words meant nothing to him. Puzzled, he stared into her face. Then he blinked, rubbed his watery eyes, and stared again.

He was looking into the brown eyes of one of the wives of José.

A glance at the other girlish faces told him that they also were of the winsome daughters of Pachac. Not only that, but they were of the five whom the son of the Conquistadores had taken as his brides. Only one of the five was missing, and she must be among those now beyond the doorway.

In the wavering lights, which did not fully illumine the room, the Americans had not previously recognized the girls. For that matter, they had paid scant attention to them in their amazement at finding themselves amid such unexpected surroundings. But now a startled grunt from Tim, whose eye for feminine charms never remained blind long, showed that he too had realized who these girls were. McKay and Rand, after a glance at him, also looked more carefully at the faces so near theirs. Their lifted brows revealed their recognition.

Knowlton's girl whispered again. Again he could not understand. Her face fell, but she moved her head a little backward, toward the door where the purple woman had gone out. In her eyes was a plain warning against something.

The blond man nodded to show he comprehended her effort to caution him, though unaware of just what that effort signified. Then he toweled his face rapidly and gave her the wet cloth. She turned away.

"Keep an eye peeled, fellows," he muttered. "Something slippery around here. Can't tell what's in that next room, for instance."

"Wear your poker face," advised McKay. "Don't show that we know the girls. Maybe we're not supposed to."

Then through that farther doorway came the fair-skinned woman in purple.

Behind her advanced girls bearing a large steaming pot and several cups of the same lustrous golden hue. Eyeing them keenly, the men saw that among them was the fifth bride of José. And, remembering that the chief of the white Indians had had nine daughters, and noting features of resemblance among all these girls, they concluded that every one of them was of the blood of Pachac. But each man kept out of his face any sign of recognition, or even of interest.

They arose, as if in honor to their returning hostess. But in doing so they unobtrusively picked up their rifles and glanced beyond her to spy any furtive movement in the room beyond. No menace showed itself. The purple woman looked at their guns with an expression of amused contempt.

"Have no fear, my friends," she said. "Within these walls no guns are needed. Here are only rest and welcome after a long journey."

"Your men gave us a strange welcome, *senorita*," McKay asserted.

"Ah, but you then were outside the walls! In this wild land one must be on guard against all who come, until we know them for friends. Of what country are you, Señor Gold-Hair?"

Her long-lashed eyes had turned to Knowlton, whose tumbled hair shone under the light of a near-by lamp.

"Of the United States of North America, *senorita*. We all are of the same land."

"So? I have never seen one like you," she naively confessed. "Nor one like this one whose hair is so red. These two," nodding at McKay and Rand, "might be men of Spain. But come, let us quench the thirst at the table with *guayusa*."

She turned toward the stout board on which the great golden pot now had been placed. With another quick look toward the door beyond her, the men laid their rifles back on the couch and moved toward the steaming bowl. Deftly she dipped up cupfuls of the hot liquid and set them along the edge. After a bit of maneuvering, the four took positions along a bench beside the table, where they could watch doors and their hostess too. And, though consumed by thirst, none lifted his cup just yet.

They knew the *guayusa* tea well enough—an infusion from the leaves of a wild shrub found here and there in the upper Amazon country, which, like the *yerba matê* of Paraguay, exhilarates the drinker and banishes weariness. They were fatigued enough and thirsty enough to consume cup after cup of it. But they were also on their guard against anything and everything, and they waited for her to drink first.

"You do not like the *guayusa*, no?" she asked, dipping up a measure for herself.

"It is hot," Knowlton evaded. "And in my country it is the custom to await the pleasure of the hostess."

Her dark eyes smiled wisely at him. She lifted her cup, sipped at it, drank in little mouthfuls, set it down empty.

"Of what are you afraid, Señor Gold-Hair?" she mocked. "Should I let you pass my guards only to poison you?"

The lieutenant flushed and raised his drink.

"To you, *señorita*," he bowed. "The most beautiful woman I have seen in many a long day."

Which was not quite so florid a compliment as it sounded. For many days he had seen no white women whatever. But she took it at its face value, and as he smiled and quaffed the stimulating draft her eyes caressed him.

"Oh boy!" Tim gurgled into his cup. "Ain't he the bear-cat, though! Feed her a li'l more taffy, looey, and she'll be sittin' in yer lap."

McKay choked suddenly, spilling half his *guayusa*. Rand bit the edge of his cup to hold his face straight. Tim gurgled again and swallowed the tea in two gulps. Knowlton expressed a desire that he might speedily strangle.

The dark eyes watching them narrowed, and a glint of anger showed in them. Though the alien words meant nothing to her, the suppressed mirth among the men hinted at something uncomplimentary—else why should it be suppressed? But she said nothing. She signed to one of the girls, who refilled her cup.

For a minute or two all sat frankly looking

at her. They saw that she was indubitably Spanish, of blood pure or nearly pure; that she was not altogether beautiful—the features were a trifle coarse—but far from ill-favored; of Castilian countenance, shapely form, and mature years—mature, that is, for the tropics; perhaps twenty-five. Her red lips, thin but pouting a little; her eyes, with a hint of passion in their depths; her languorous movements and her sidelong glances—all were sensuous and sophisticated. Her dress, they now noticed, was only a sleeveless frock of *llanchama* bark-cloth dyed with *achote*, ending at the knee, drawn tight at the waist by a broad girdle of the same material. And from that girdle, slanting a little forward, jutted the hilt of an old-time poniard.

In his mind each man labeled her—

"Dangerous."

THERE was no hint of danger in her manner as she now studied each man's face in turn—and not only his face but the hardy frame beneath it. To three of those figures she gave fully as much attention as to eyes and jaws and expressions. Her gaze hovered a little curiously on Tim's red hair and beard, but she scanned his muscular body with more interest than his wide countenance. On McKay's stalwart frame and Rand's solid build she bestowed thoughtful looks. But on Knowlton's thick, uncut yellow hair, golden beard, and twinkling blue eyes her gaze lingered; and under her lashes burned a soft glow of approval and allure.

"Ye've started somethin', looey," murmured Tim, *sotto voce*. "Us three guys are jest hunks o' beef, but li'l Angel-Face Knowlton is the candy kid."

"Shut up, you poor fish," requested the badgered man.

Then he gulped his second cup of *guayusa*, noting as he did so that the woman now was eying the red-haired man in evident dislike. Tim was rapidly putting himself out of favor.

After another wordless minute or so of tea-drinking, the woman turned her gaze again to Knowlton.

"What do you seek here?" she asked abruptly.

Involuntarily each man's glance darted to the great gold pot on the table. She threw back her head and laughed in a scornful way.

"You come for gold, yes? I knew it must be so. For that yellow rock men dare all. And when they have it, what then?

"Where gold is, there death is also. So my fathers have learned. Many years ago they found gold here. They fought the wild men, they made their captives build these walls, they mined the gold—and what then?

"The earth shook and the mountains broke and slid. The way in and out of this gulf closed. There was no escape except the long way down the Tigre, through savages who let no man pass. So my fathers stayed here with their gold, which was worth nothing—what is gold in such a place as this?

"Still they mined and got more gold, against the day when another *temblor* should open a new way out. It came, the terrible earth-shaking—and did it open a way? No! It crushed the mines, destroyed the men in them, buried even the gold which my fathers had taken out and stored in a walled-up cave. And so they died, and I alone am left—Flora Almagro, last of the fighting family that would tear wealth from the savage mountains of the Pastassa.

"I, and Indians, and tumbling walls, and a few paltry utensils which my fathers made from their gold—that is all. But the gold is in these mountains round about. Dig, *señores*, dig! Ha, ha, ha! In twenty years of digging you may reach that which my fathers reached—and then be crushed like them!"

Again she laughed—a mocking laugh with a wild note in it.

"Four life-times of fighting man and beast and jungle and devil-rock—and this to show for it!" she shrilled, with a contemptuous wave toward golden cups and bowl and lamps. "If you would find gold and keep it, friends, bring in an army—bring in cannon—blow off the tops of these mountains until they can no longer fall— Then, perhaps, if the jungle men will let you, you can pick up your treasure in safety."

None answered. All thought of the slight earth-shock only a few hours past, of the fall of the cliff and the destruction of the trail. Her words rang true. And if they were true, Fate had tricked them into a barren trap indeed.

Thoughtfully they drained their cups a third time. The potent stimulant already

had routed their fatigue, and now their minds were leaping nimbly from one thing to another—the quake, the mysterious green men above, the obvious servitude of the Pachac girls, the sinister absence of the rest of the tribe and of José—a dozen other things in incoherent sequence, all of which perplexed and disturbed them. At length McKay bluntly asked—

"How did you know we were coming?"

The suddenness of the query did not disturb her. Widening her eyes in mock innocence, she returned:

"The approach of travelers always is known. The little parrots of the forest send the word."

"Ah. Green parrots, no doubt."

"All parrots here are green, Señor Black-Beard," was her laughing retort.

"So. And they drum with their wings to send their news."

At that her smile vanished in a flash. Involuntarily her hand darted to her dagger-hilt and she threw a look toward the outer door. The gesture, the look, were strikingly similar to the fearful attitudes of the green men on hearing the distant drums.

"*Valgame Dios!* Those drums!" she breathed. Then her head turned back and lifted again. "But no, you have it wrong. You have heard drums, yes? They are drums of the men who cut off the head and make it small—the hunters of the heads of men and the bodies of women—the old enemies of my fathers. Their land is beyond the mountains to the west, but they come at times—many of their bones lie in this gulf where they fell. We have lived only because they came in scattered raiding bands. If ever they come in an army——"

Her hand tightened on the hilt. With another swift change she laughed out, the same wild laugh as before.

"They may capture the head of me, but that is all!" she vowed. "Flora Almagro never goes a captive to the hut of an Indian —not while good steel can reach her heart! But—*carajo!* Let us forget them. Tomorrow death may come, but tonight let us live! Now that the *guayusa* has rested you, there is a stronger draft of friendship for strong men who have dared the Tigre and come to me here."

She signed again to the girls, who had been standing mute behind her. Three of them turned toward the rear room. Among those who stayed was the one who had attempted to convey a warning to Knowlton. Now she looked straight at him and again tried, by furtive nods at her mistress, to caution him. Puzzled, he stared back at her.

"Why do you look so at my maidens?" demanded Flora Almagro.

Her eyes were narrowed again, and she watched Knowlton as if trying to read his thoughts.

"I was wondering, Señorita Flora," he coolly replied, "how, in this wild place, you obtained such handsome slaves. For Indians, they are almost beautiful."

His tone implied that they were not to be compared in beauty with their mistress. The subtle flattery was not lost. She smiled again. But her eyes still searched his.

"You look as if you thought you knew them, *señor*."

"One of them resembles a girl I saw months ago far up the Marañon," he lied serenely. "But she can not be the same. That one was taller."

For a moment longer she studied him. He carefully preserved his "poker face." The suspicion faded from her eyes.

"But no, Señor Gold-Hair. All of these have been with me for years. They are of the people who served my fathers. Now they shall serve——"

A stumble and a slight confusion at the door halted her. The three girls were returning, bearing another great golden bowl. One of them had tripped, and all three were struggling to keep the heavy vessel from falling. From it splashed a reddish liquor.

A flash of anger twisted the face of Flora. Her dagger leaped out, and with a feline spring she darted at the trio.

"Pigs! Lizards! She-dogs!" she screamed. "Have care! If you drop the wine, clumsy beasts, you shall feel the point of this!"

The three caught their balance, steadied the bowl, and bore it dripping to the table. The purple-clad woman, her breast heaving with fury, looked down at what had been spilled, spun toward the table, still gripping her poniard—and caught the cool stare of four pairs of American eyes. After a silent minute she slipped the weapon back into her girdle and laughed in a forced way.

"I forget myself," she said. "But this wine, *señores*—it is old, precious! To see it cast on the floor by footless fools—it is too much. But now it is safe. Let us drink deep—of the wine of life—and love!"

With the last words her eyes burned deep into those of Señor Gold-Hair, whom she had plainly selected as recipient for further favors to come.

"Hm! This is getting a bit thick," thought the blond man. "But the evening's young yet, and if she drinks enough she may blab a lot of interesting things. On with the dance!"

Wherefore he smiled blandly at the *señorita*, accepted the cup tendered him, and gazed appreciatively at the fragrant contents. Red wine in a cup of gold, tendered by a seductive woman in a room hung with purple and lit by golden lamps, with nude maidens at hand to pour new drafts—here in a jungle chasm into which he and his comrades had been driven by green-skinned creatures at the points of poisoned spears! It seemed an impossible dream, from which he soon must awake to find himself again in a gloomy pole-and-palm camp surrounded by avid *tigres*. Glancing at McKay, he found the same feeling reflected in the gray eyes contemplating the scene.

"You have not yet told me your names, my friends," the last of the Almagros reminded them. "Now let us drink to each of my guests in turn, and then you shall tell me of your travels, yes? Tomorrow, if my poor hospitality has pleased you, we shall talk more seriously—of those things which are to come. But now——"

She nodded and lifted her cup to Señor Gold-Hair, who promptly arose.

"My name, Señorita Flora, is Meredith Knowlton, an humble member of this party commanded by——"

He paused. Behind their mistress' back two of the Pachac girls were frantically signaling at him. This time there was no chance of misunderstanding. They were pointing at his cup and shaking their heads—warning him not to drink of it.

"—commanded by El Capitan Roderick McKay," the lieutenant went on, "the *caballero* seated at my right——"

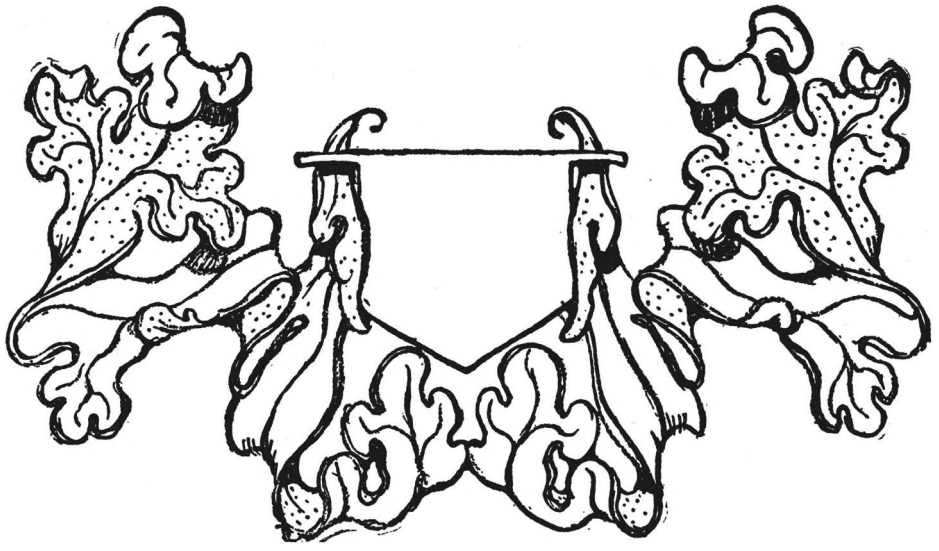
There he let the cup slip from his fingers and drop.

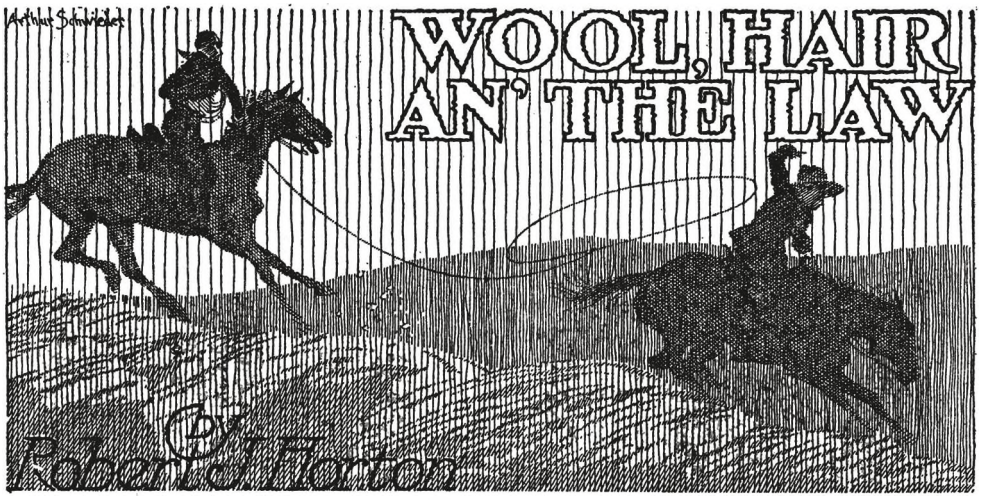
"Don't drink, fellows!" he snapped in English. "It's doped!"

"By cripes, and they's a row outside!" yelped Tim. "Hear it?"

A low muttering sound beyond the walls flared into a snarling roar of hatred. Sharp yells—a bumping, splintering sound—a sudden roar of gunshots. With a bound the men threw themselves on their rifles.

TO BE CONTINUED





Author of "The Tail-Ender," "The Lure," Etc.

"SWIFT" MORTON rose slowly to his feet. Although the movement carried no semblance of haste it became at once sinister because of the significant look in the big man's narrowed eyes as he kicked his chair behind him.

The others at the gaming table, and at the other gaming tables in Big Dan's place, stared apprehensively. The men at the long bar swung about. Big Dan stopped his mechanical polishing of a glass.

"——, I've had enough trouble in this place lately——"

He bit off his words as if he realized their impotence in the present crisis.

"You was remarking something about whether they played kyards in Deer Lodge," purred Swift, addressing a small man who sat directly opposite him at the table.

The small man's face had lost a shade of its high tone of tan. But his blue eyes were steady, his hands motionless, and the wrists, encased in the silver-trapped leather affected by cowpunchers, rested quietly on the edge of the table.

"I didn't know you was makin' any bones about it, Swift," he said in a low, clear voice.

"About the kyards, Griswold?" asked Morton easily.

"No, about the—the other."

Swift Morton's eyes blazed and his face darkened.

"There's such a thing as knowing too much, you little rat," he cried in rising anger. "It's better to know when to keep your mouth shet."

"You ain't been none too complimentary in yore talk this afternoon, Swift," said the little puncher, Griswold. "You've been choosing me ever since I sat in this game. I wouldn't call that friendly nor——"

"Friendly!" sneered Swift Morton. "Why, you little wart, some of you guys has a notion that a wool shirt an' a pair of hair chaps can make a man out of anything. I didn't learn to play kyards at Deer Lodge like you was intimating, an' I ain't never punched cows. But I know how to treat them that has."

A large, black-bearded man at a near-by table laughed. The sound, instead of relieving the tension, made the situation all the more ominous. Dark looks were cast at the man with the black beard, unmistakably a sheep-herder.

Griswold paid no attention to the interruption, although his face turned a shade paler and his eyes gleamed aggressively.

"I'm sitting down, Swift," he said softly; "an' my hands are on the table. You're standing an' in a tolerable fair position to beat me to the draw if it's real trouble you're lookin' for."

"Then get up or shet up!" snarled big Swift Morton.

For what seemed minutes but was really only a period of a few seconds every breath was held. Swift Morton stood leering at

Griswold, whose lips were pressed tight until they showed as a white scar above his square chin.

Slowly and silently the smaller man gathered his leg muscles tense, slipped his feet back of the forelegs of his chair, tipped on the toes of his snug-fitting riding-boots——

As Griswold shot backward, flame streaked from Morton's right hip. The little cowpuncher, still fumbling to get his gun, dropped to his knees then tipped forward upon his face.

A swift intaking of many breaths, then confusion as Morton leaped among the men behind him, overturned a table, plunged through the crowd in the rear and darted through the back door.

The pungent odor of pistol smoke speedily brought the spectators of this prairie drama to their senses. Some hurried to succor the fallen man; others dashed out the back door in pursuit.

"They'll never get him," said Big Dan, idly twisting a bar towel in his hands. "Swift Morton'll drop 'em as fast as they come within range. It was shootin' that put him in the penitentiary at Deer Lodge an' ex-convicts like him are bad *hombres*. He's as bad as they make 'em. How's Griswold?"

"He's dead," some one told him as he came hurrying from behind the bar.

BIG DAN'S prediction that Swift Morton would not be captured seemed truthful enough when nightfall came without a trace of the outlaw having been found.

True, Rollins was not a big town; it did not contain enough men to send posses in all directions and all its male inhabitants were not capable of taking part in a man-hunt. And Swift Morton's reputation would hardly serve as a lure.

Situated on Snake Creek, half way between Rangeland, the county seat, and Muddy Bend, the next town to eastward, it was on the telephone line and word of the killing was speedily received by Fred Burke, sheriff of Long Grass county.

Sheriff Burke at once sent for Buck Wright, erstwhile cowpuncher and still a cowpuncher at heart, who had won a place as deputy through the capture of a notorious outlaw in the extreme eastern end of the county and thus had assisted in bringing about Burke's election.

"Suppose the fact that a puncher's been killed by an ex-convict from Deer Lodge will tickle you a-plenty," said the sheriff eying the tall form of his assistant speculatively.

"It shore does tickle me," drawled Buck Wright. "Tickles me hard in my trigger-finger, sheriff."

Then the cowpuncher-deputy employed the finger he had mentioned in smoothing tobacco in a brown paper.

"I dunno, I'm sure," said the sheriff.

"Dunno what, chief? Ask me an' maybe I can help you out. I have an ideer every once in a while."

Sheriff Burke frowned.

"That's the trouble with you, Wright. You don't take this business serious enough. And this is a serious business. It was Swift Morton that shot down Burt Griswold in Big Dan's place in Rollins. Swift Morton's a hard customer—an' this is a trailing job."

Buck nodded.

"I've got a horse," he said cheerfully.

"An' I've worked with Burt Griswold," he added in a hard tone.

The sheriff looked at him with more interest.

"All right, Buck, go down there an' see what you can do. But, listen; if you haven't got a line on where your man is in twenty-four hours get word to this office an' I'll send you another man or two. I want Morton."

In Rollins, Big Dan leaned over his bar and addressed a group of customers in an undertone.

"That's a danged queer way for a deputy sheriff to be acting, now ain't it? Comes down here, takes a brace of drinks, asks some questions an' then sets himself down in a game. Gamblin'! An' him an officer. Why, I was goin' to shut down the games when I saw him come in!"

Buck Wright, participating in a stud poker game, looked toward the whispering group at the bar with a grin.

"Friend Dan figurin' on closing us down?" he asked the man in the slot, who visibly was nervous.

"Don't see no need of it now," was the reply. "You've got us if you want us."

Buck grinned again.

"I didn't come down here to stop any gamblin'. I'm after a man named Swift Morton."

"Well, this is a good place to catch him."

This was said in a deep, bass voice and Buck raised his eyes from his cards to regard the man who owned it—a large man who wore a heavy, black beard.

"Ain't much use tryin' to ferret Swift out in the dark, don't you figger?"

The large man snickered when he heard the question.

"Swift's probably quarter way to the Canadian line," he blurted. "Of course, a feller might catch him if he rode hard enough. You a rider?"

"Well now, I *have* rode," replied Buck, knitting his brows as if trying to recall having done some such thing. "Let's see; I'm about thirty now an' I started getting acquainted with hosses when I was five or six. An' I punched cows on the Circle D so many years I was getting to be a fixture like the main gate."

"Punching cows an' trailin' men like Swift Morton is two different things," remarked the other.

"Shut up, you —— sheep-herder!" cried another man at the table. "You've throwed enough dirt at cowpunchers today. Keep it up an' you'll find it onhealthy."

"Me? Throwin' dirt?"

"Yes, you, throwin' dirt along with Morton! You're lucky you didn't get it from some of us. An' what's more you laughed when Morton made that crack about some guys thinkin' that a wool shirt an' a pair of hair chaps would make a man out of anything. You ain't ridin' safe range."

"There ain't so much difference between wool an' hair," said the sheep-herder.

The man who had admonished him kicked back his chair and rose with his hand flashing to his hip.

But Buck Wright, who had been listening quietly, suddenly became a marvelous machine of action and his gun leaped to his hand resting on the table.

"There'll be no shootin' while I'm aroun'," he said; "onless I do part of it."

The man who had risen confronted him angrily.

"You stickin' up for a sheep-herder?" he sneered.

"Ain't you sort of overlookin' the fact that I'm a deputy?" Buck inquired mildly.

"Playin' cards, an' drinkin' an' sticking up for sheep-herders," charged the other. "I'd never thought it of you, Wright. Circle D, too!"

"Well," drawled Buck, as the other took his hand away from his gun, "there's such a thing as winkin' at some laws an' lookin' straight an' steady at others. Murder's one thing you've got to look square in the face. I've got my hands full lookin' for one murderer now."

"Maybe you'll find him in the next hand," was the answer. "I'm quittin' the game."

The cowpuncher cashed in his checks and left.

Others in the place looked anywhere except at Buck Wright.

This, however, did not appear to ruffle the former cow-hand. He seemed positively cheerful as he turned to the sheep-herder.

"You made a little mistake a while back," he said. "You said there wasn't much difference between wool an' hair. Now I reckon there's some little difference. A rattlesnake'll go to sleep in wool, but he won't cross a hair-line rope!"

There was no answer to this and once more the men of the ranges who were present looked at Buck. Even Big Dan, who had been plainly skeptical, pondered as he went about his tasks.

"Must be waitin' for daylight after all," he muttered to himself.

In an hour the sheep-herder cashed in his stack and quit the game and the place.

"What's his name?" Buck inquired casually.

"Name's Ling," answered the man in the slot. "Has a bunch of sheep south of here on the west bank of Snake Creek."

"Wonder he could leave 'em for so long," Buck remarked.

"He got a man to look after 'em for a day," was the answer.

Buck absent-mindedly shoved his checks across the table to be cashed, stuffed the bills into a pocket, yawned and rose from his seat at the table.

He approached the bar, spoke to Big Dan.

"Swift must have got a good start."

"Not so long," Big Dan replied. "Five minutes, maybe. Guess he had his horse tied out back. It took time to get started after him. Nobody wanted to go after him alone."

"He might 'a' had ten minutes," drawled Buck; "or fifteen."

"Enough to get out of sight in the rolling country north," averred Big Dan, putting out a bottle.

"Most likely would hit for Canada as that herder Ling opined," Buck observed.

His apparent lack of interest irritated the saloon-keeper.

"If I was a deputy on his trail I wouldn't be losing any time gettin' after him," he snapped. "You're two hours behind him now. Morton wouldn't be lettin' any grass grow under him with a charge of murder on his head."

"Yes, I guess that's so," agreed Buck. "Maybe I better get busy."

He walked slowly out of the place.

"Now that's the result of puttin' in a cowpuncher for a deputy sheriff," said Big Dan after Buck's departure. "A man's got to have experience to hold a job like that!"

Buck walked silently in the shadows of the little street to the hotel and around to the kitchen. He induced the oriental cook to put him up some sandwiches. He waited outside, staring at the dark line of gaunt cottonwoods and willows along the creek banks.

A chill wind was bearing down from the north, harbinger of the first cold snap of early Winter.

When he had secured the sandwiches he went to the hotel stables. From behind his saddle he took a heavy mackinaw. Then he tied the package of sandwiches in the slicker which had been secured on the saddle with the mackinaw. He saddled his pinto, Freckles, donned the coat, and rode away into the black shadows.

AT NIGHT, on prairie lands that reach to dim horizons, vague animal fears ride the scented winds, and cattle become restless. It is then that men on night herd lift their voices in songs strung to tunes as weirdly beautiful as the night itself, and the cattle listen, with noses to the wind, and forget their torment.

Buck Wright felt the old surge of his cowpunching days within him as he rode slowly around the little town and struck due *south* on the open swell of prairie close to Snake Creek.

The night wind brought its memories of uneasy herds beneath the stars, and he sang softly as he pushed his fast pinto harder and harder.

Nor were the words which issued musically from his lips confined to those range songs with which men of the open country are familiar. Buck had the knack possessed by many followers of the lone trails—a poetical turn which is not uncommon—and he improvised as he sang.

"I'm only a wandering cowboy,
An' maybe I'm off the track,
But I'm goin' to know something, by golly,
By the time that I get back."

Despite his apparent nonchalance in Big Dan's place in Rollins, Buck really was riled. He had heard how Swift Morton had got Griswold, of course; had learned that the big man had not given the little cowpuncher a fair chance. Morton had practically secured the drop on Griswold when he had risen from the table, thus putting himself in a most advantageous position. He had not, as Buck inferred, given Griswold reason to suspect the nature of his move in time for the little man to protect himself. Griswold had virtually been murdered.

Moreover, Buck had known Griswold, worked with him. He knew, therefore, that the little man had been a formidable card player. Because of this he might have incurred the enmity of Morton, of Ling—of others. Even of Big Dan himself! For Big Dan was not above planting his games with "boosters" who played for the house.

Buck himself had avoided Big Dan's place on the occasions when he had been in Rollins.

Yes, Buck Wright, was riled. And when he was riled—dangerously riled—he smiled and sometimes sang.

As he drew away from town and out of hearing—for the pound of a horse's hoofs echo for some distance when there are no other sounds—he spurred Freckles into a mad gallop. The cold wind whistled past him, carrying the notes of his song, while his eyes searched the shadowy expanse of plain before him, fringed on the left by the deeper shadow of the tree growth along the creek.

The pinto was large for his breed, rangy, with long legs that tapered gracefully. He was fast, faster than most horses in that country.

In less than half an hour Buck saw a small, bobbing shadow ahead—a moving shadow, deeper than the shadows of the plain.

Immediately he swung in close to the trees along the creek. Screened in the event that the rider ahead should look behind, he kept his pace. He was riding against the

wind, fortunately, so that the sounds of pursuit could not reach the pursued.

When he was about a quarter of a mile behind the first rider he slacked his pace and merely kept the rider in sight until he saw, about half a mile ahead, a blur of light. Then he raced to overtake the first rider.

Soon a white blotch became discernible near the soft glow of light. It was like a splash of silver upon the darkened prairie. A band of sheep bedded down for the night.

Buck rode furiously, swung out from the shelter of the gaunt trees, raced toward the sheep wagon even as the first rider increased his speed and made for it.

They met a hundred yards or so from the wagon and Buck's gun swung down as he called—

"Oh, it's you, eh?"

The sheep-herder Ling also lowered his gun, although a look of doubt remained on his face which showed dimly in the light of the cold stars.

"Who'd you think it was?" he snapped, recognizing the deputy.

"Thought it might be a man about yore size I'd like to see," grinned Buck as they halted their mounts.

"You —— fool!" exclaimed Ling. "Are you lookin' for Swift Morton down in *this* country?"

"I shore am."

"Well, you're a —— of a sheriff! I don't suppose a man mixed up in a shooting with a lot of witnesses ready to frame him wouldn't beat it for Canada!"

"Don't know anything about the frame you speak of," said Buck cheerfully; "but I remember Swift Morton didn't hit for Canada when he fired the bullet that put him in the pen some seven or eight years ago. I figger to look in all directions! Seems to be somebody up in yore wagon."

A man was looking out the divided doors of the canvas-topped wagon in which the sheep-herder made his home while out on the range tending his band.

Buck rode toward the wagon with Ling following him. Buck threw himself from his horse near the two steps below the divided door, stumbled up them and into the wagon, the man who had been looking out the door retreating before him, and Ling bringing up the rear.

"Chilly night," said Buck cheerily, addressing the man before him.

This was a slender man with pale blue eyes and a drooping mustache of faded blond. A weak type, as Buck knew the moment he laid eyes on him.

The deputy swung toward Ling with the familiarity of long and close acquaintanceship.

"Good thing I took a hand when that cowpuncher got sore at you in Big Dan's tonight," he laughed.

Ling scowled and eyed Buck warily.

"Maybe so," he said noncommittally.

"See anybody down this way lately?"

Buck flashed the question at the third man in the wagon and immediately turned again to Ling thus claiming the herder's attention and preventing any signal to be passed.

"Feller dropped in here an' borrowed your other sheepskin coat," said the man, evidently to Ling.

Ling's face darkened and his eyes blazed at the man for an instant. Then he smiled.

"Yes," he said in an off-hand way. "Sam Parker on his way to the home ranch. Cold wave caught him unawares up in Rollins. Came up for the mail. Had it, didn't he?"

"Yep. Said you'd got yours up in town."

"It's shore a good night for a coat—ridin' thataway," Buck remarked. Then turning to the blond man—

"Didn't see anybody else?"

"Nope. Nary man, horse or coyote."

Buck's brows wrinkled while a trace of a sneer appeared on Ling's lips.

Suddenly Buck slapped his knee.

"Jumpin' jack-rabbits, I've got an ideer!" He motioned to Ling. "Come outside with me a minute."

Ling hesitated, but finally followed him.

"You're wastin' your time down here," he said when they were out by their horses.

Buck whirled on him, his gun leaping to aim from his hip.

"Put 'em up!" he commanded.

"What—" Ling's words died on his lips as he saw the grim look on Buck Wright's face and caught the menacing flash of his eyes.

In a twinkling Ling was disarmed.

"Turn around," snapped Buck, as he reached into the left side pocket of his mackinaw. "Now hold your hands close behind you. Don't think I'd hesitate to drill you, Ling— That's better."

There was a jingle of metal, a click as the handcuffs closed about Ling's wrists.

"You can't arrest me," Ling blurted. "I

ain't done nothin'. You ain't got no right to put any handcuffs on me an' you know it."

"Maybe not," said Buck grimly. "But I'm doin' it. Now march for the wagon. Yore man in there didn't look harmful, but I wasn't takin' no chances of accidents. I don't want to shoot anybody if I can help it."

"You're takin' the law into your own hands," Ling accused. "You ain't got no right to bother me. You're goin' further than your authority."

Buck pushed him up the steps into the wagon. His gun menaced the man inside, who stared with bulging eyes.

"Sit down on that bunk, Ling," instructed Buck. Then turning to the other man—

"What's yore name?"

"Smith," replied the man with a paling countenance.

"Well, Smith, you've been settin' in a bad lay here."

"That's a lie!" screamed Ling. "He ain't got no right to arrest me. There ain't no charge—nothin'."

Buck examined the man Smith for weapons and found none. He motioned him to sit down at one of the two chairs at the little table. He removed his mackinaw and from the inside pocket of his coat he took paper, envelope and pencil. He seated himself in the other chair and wrote rapidly, sealed the letter in the envelope, addressed the latter.

Then he looked up at Smith with narrowed eyes.

"I said you was in with a bad lay. If you don't believe it, there's a man with handcuffs on. An' there's this."

He opened his coat to display his star.

Smith was so nervous he trembled. There was wonder, too, in his eyes—and apprehension.

"Smith, I've got another pair of handcuffs for you."

Buck toyed with his forty-five in one hand and the letter in the other.

"But I don't think," he added, "you're in on this."

"He just hired me to tend camp while he was gone," Smith hastened to say.

Ling was remaining silent, possibly through curiosity.

"All right, Smith, I'm goin' to give you a chance to prove it. Take Ling's hoss—I give you the authority—an' carry this note to Mack Weed who runs the hotel in Rollins. Get up there as soon as you can. You can forget I'm here with a prisoner—forget all about this business except to give that note to Weed. Afterwards you can stay in Rollins or not. If you stay maybe you'll get a piece of the rewards that are hangin' on a certain man. Think you can do this as I've told you?"

Smith reached for the letter eagerly, nodding his head energetically in the affirmative.

Buck tossed him a five-dollar gold piece.

" 'Spect that's as much as Ling would have paid you—maybe more. If I was you I'd stay in Rollins an' keep my mouth shut an' see what turns up. What kind of a lookin' man was this Sam Parker?"

"About the same's me, you fool," Ling roared starting up from the bunk.

He sat down again when Buck's gun swung in his direction.

Two minutes later the echo of ringing hoofs announced Smith's departure.

"Kind of wanted him to think I was goin' to stay here with you so he wouldn't take a notion to come back," Buck explained to his prisoner. "That's why I couldn't do what I'm goin' to do now while he was here."

And then, despite Ling's protests that he was exceeding his authority, Buck bound the ankles of the man whose wrists were shackled behind his back and tied him securely to the bunk. He used rope he found in the wagon for this purpose. Buck's own rope never left his saddle, although deputy sheriffs as a rule did not carry ropes.

He covered Ling with a blanket against the cold which would creep into the wagon when the fire died out.

"Maybe I'm takin' a chance," he said to his prisoner during a lull in the latter's imprecations, "but I've been takin' 'em all my life. Anyway this finishes the wool end of it. I've got you an' I'm goin' to cinch my bets as I go along whether I win or not. I seem to sort 'ave got a double meanin' in that wool an' hair talk. There's a lot of difference, Ling, between sheep an' hosses, an' I've rode hosses all my life. So long."

Ling's curses streamed after him as he left the wagon, mounted Freckles and started southward under the stars.

On his way he passed the band of sheep

DAWN found Buck Wright many miles down Snake Creek at a point where there was an isolated ranch, the meager property of a one-time nester, who enjoyed a little nook in the tumbled country thereabout through courtesy of the stockmen. In return for peace he kept his eye out for strays, thus really earning the title to his land.

It was the only habitation between Rollins and the Missouri River—and beyond toward the Musselshell.

Buck dismounted at the ranch at sun-up.

A woman met him at the door.

She was a slight body, with streaks of gray in her hair, all too visibly nervous.

Buck swung his broad-brimmed hat low with a splendid gesture.

"Ma'am I'm sorry to bother you, an' wouldn't 'ave come to the door first if I'd seen any men on the place. I wonder if I could put my horse up for a spell an' maybe get a cup of coffee?"

The woman's nervousness increased and then gradually subsided as she looked into Buck's clear, gray eyes and boyish face. His smile was reassuring.

"I—guess—it'll be all right," she faltered. "My husband isn't here—" She caught herself suddenly as if she hadn't meant to say that. "But put your horse up—there's hay and oats in the barn behind the house—and I'll get you some breakfast."

"Thanks, ma'am," smiled Buck. "I don't want you to think I'm ridin' the grubline. I'll pay you."

When he entered the kitchen, after having attended to his horse, he found a hot breakfast of bacon, eggs, hot cakes, corn sirup and coffee awaiting him.

His attention was attracted by a hair bridle hanging on the back of a chair. It was one which evidently never had been used.

"Pretty bridle, that," he remarked by way of making conversation.

The woman started, turned hurriedly to look at it.

"Why—why, yes. A gift to my husband," she added quickly. "From a cowpuncher from the Musselshell."

She stared at him fearfully; hastened to refill his cup with coffee; brought him another supply of hot cakes.

Instantly Buck sensed there was something connected with this bridle which the woman wished to conceal.

"Nice workmanship," he observed, without looking at her. "Few cowpunchers can do work like that. They haven't the patience or the time—'cept in Winter. Most of 'em are made by prisoners in the penitentiary at Deer Lodge."

A side glance showed that his words had brought a look of stark fear to the woman's face. She stood silently, wetting her dry lips; then turned back to the stove.

Buck smiled inwardly.

Truly succor was worth a hair bridle to Swift Morton in this lone habitation on his race to cross the river and lose himself in the breaks and fastnesses far downstream.

But Buck forbore questioning the woman. He saw that she was very much agitated, frightened, and that anything more from him would but increase her torture. That sense of chivalry, inherited by men who live under the open skies, silenced him—turned the words of interrogation which trembled upon his lips into praises for the woman's cooking.

After eating he laid two silver dollars on the table.

"It was worth it," he said, waving aside her objections that it was too much. "Besides, there's the feed for my hoss."

He paused at the doorway and smiled again.

"I'd like to thank yore husband, too, but if he ain't aroun'——"

"He went up to look after Ling's sheep for a day or two," she said. "Maybe you'll see him on the way up, if you're going that way."

"I hope so. Thank you again, ma'am, for the trouble you've taken for me."

So that was who Smith was.

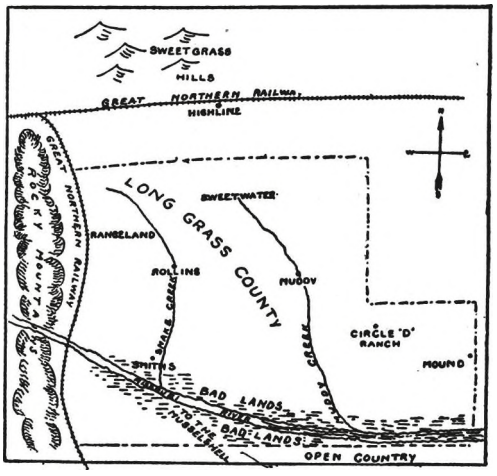
Buck's brows gathered into a frown as he went around to the barn. Since Smith had something at stake here it would seem certain that he would carry the message to the hotel-keeper at Rollins. On the other hand he might think his best interests lay with the nearest stockman and in such event might veer off for the home ranch of the Short Brothers, owners of the band in charge of Ling.

However there was nothing to do about it and Buck climbed into the hay loft and speedily fell asleep.

In an hour he was up. He hadn't needed the nap but had wished to rest his horse. He saddled and rode once again southward, a bit southeastward this time.

He now had no doubt but that the man who had stopped at Ling's sheep wagon the previous night was Swift Morton. He knew, too, that Morton had stopped at the Smith place that morning for breakfast—probably well before daylight—had left the bridle—carried in the pack behind his saddle, doubtless—had intimidated the woman, and was making for the nearest ford of the Missouri.

Indeed, this was the only thing which the outlaw could do under the circumstances. To the north, east, west he would run into ranches and towns. It was in the wild country about the river that he could find countless hiding places, and gradually drift down into that vast, scant-populated country toward the Musselshell—a country which had no railroads, no telephones.



Buck knew something of this district, having visited it in search of stray cattle when working for the Circle D. He knew the only safe ford within miles was just above where Snake Creek emptied into the river.

He headed for this point. The ground became rougher, was tumbled into miniature ridges and rolling rises. There was a trail, a trail made by roving bands of cattle and horses, unmarked by man. He began to skirt the edge of the breaks searching for the trail.

He could not believe that Morton had reached the ford by this time. Surely an experienced man like the outlaw would stop to rest his horse. It was very probable that Morton thought he had shaken off all pursuit by going south; he might have sacrificed speed because of this—might have stopped to sleep. And maybe Morton hadn't come that way at all!

"Well, an outlaw takes chances, so why shouldn't a deputy sheriff take 'em?" Buck asked himself in extenuation. "If I'm wrong I expect this'll finish me in the sheriff business; but——"

With a sigh of relief he turned his horse into the trail leading to the ford. He scanned the path but could see no imprints of hoofs made recently.

"He's travelin' accordin' to what somebody's told him," Buck decided aloud. "He didn't know where this trail was."

Buck urged his horse to the greatest speed possible on the trail, a speed far in excess of that which a man could make if he were threading his way through the gullies and ravines and around the ridges of the breaks.

At noon Buck caught sight of the brown, sluggish waters of the Missouri. And almost at the same instant he glimpsed a rider cutting across a high ridge to westward, somewhat ahead of him, bearing downstream toward the ford.

IN THE race for the ford Buck spurred the pinto to a gallop which sent them plunging along the uneven trail at a pace which would have spelled disaster for the rider of a horse less surefooted.

Again, on a high swell of ground, he saw the rider ahead. Every nerve in his body thrilled; his eyes gleamed with the excitement of the chase; his heart bounded with gladness and relief. For the other rider was a big man, answering in every detail to the description of Swift Morton. That occult intuition which is possessed by men who live close to nature told Buck that his man was almost within his grasp. Morton had lost his way to westward and was now following the river down to the ford.

The trail suddenly veered to the right—to westward—and brought Buck within an eighth of a mile of his quarry. Then it swung sharply to the left to avoid the high ridge upon which the other rider was traveling.

They were nearing the ford Buck knew. The pinto seemed to sense that the water he smelled was their objective and extended himself in a final, glorious burst of speed. Another minute and they dashed out upon a sloping shelf of land leading down to the river.

Surprized at the sudden change in the lay of the land, Buck checked the pinto and looked up the sharp incline to the top of the ridge. A blur of twisting color, the crack of a gun, and a bullet whistled its death-shriek in his ears.

Freckles, nervous after the hard ride, shied as the man on the crest of the ridge overlooking the incline fired again. Two more bullets screamed past Buck as he drove the spurs into his horse and deliberately charged up the steep aclivity, his own gun spurting flame and lead toward the retreating figure above.

Nearing the top Buck swerved sharply to the left toward a clump of stunted pines. His three shots had missed Morton—for he was certain it was Morton—just as the luck had sent the outlaw's four bullets wild.

He plunged into the timber on the crest of the ridge just as another bullet cut through his hat, knocking it awry.

In the instant that he saw his assailant's face distinctly for the first time, Buck recognized Swift Morton. There could be no mistake—the cruel, narrowed eyes; the fat face, dark and looking as though bloated; the stubble of reddish beard; the powerful jaw; the wide, flat nose faithfully bore out the description which had been given Buck.

And as Buck gained that fleeting survey of the man he sought his gun blazed again. The bandit's horse leaped into the air and plunged ahead, scratched or hit by the deputy's bullet. Buck cursed the intervening branch which had spoiled his aim.

The bandit's horse was running madly as Buck dashed out of the timber-screen and galloped on the rock-ribbed crest of the ridge in hot pursuit.

Swift Morton, checking his mount, twisted in the saddle and whipped his gun over his left shoulder. The two shots, one from the bandit, the other from Buck, cracked on the air as one, just as Freckles stumbled on a rock outcropping.

Buck pitched forward, but held his seat, rearing back in the stirrups as the pinto regained his footing with a lurch.

But the mishap had had three results. It had spoiled Morton's last shot, sent Buck's bullet wild, and in the forward dip Buck's gun had been knocked from his hand against the horn of the saddle.

Buck was disarmed, and the bandit's gun was empty!

Both Buck's horse and the bandit's were running like mad on the dangerous footing of the ridge, sliding, stumbling, leaping over the obstructions which strewed the path.

It was hard and dangerous riding. Buck believed the outlaw would try to reload his gun—*knew* he would. Even if he didn't succeed in doing this while plunging along the ridge, he would be able to do so when he reached the western end of the ridge where it dipped down in the breaks. And once in the breaks the murderer's chances of escape would be favorable.

Raking the pinto until the blood spurted from its flanks, Buck succeeded in getting his rope from the horn of the saddle. He was a better rider than Morton. Also he had other weapons than his pistol.

The rope whirled in a wide noose over his head, darted from his hand, whistled through the air straight for the bobbing form ahead.

There was a sudden tension, a jerk as Buck hauled up the pinto; then the rope came free!

The cast for Morton's shoulders, or even his horse's head had failed. But its purpose had been accomplished. Morton had been whipped from his saddle, caught by an arm or shoulder, and was sprawling in the hard dirt between the rock outcroppings.

As Buck's horse came to a rearing stop near the fallen outlaw the man-hunter flung himself upon his quarry.

Swift Morton gathered his muscles and rose with Buck's weight upon him. Buck loosed his hold and side-stepped for a swing at the outlaw's jaw. Morton ducked in time to receive only a glancing blow on the cheek and leaped backward over a low ledge of rock with Buck following.

They now were on comparatively smooth ground. At this point the ridge had been cut away by the spring floods and there was a sheer drop to the river below. The river was wide and shallow here, with great patches of blue-gray mud edging up to either bank. This mud gave way to a solid bottom of rock and hard sand some distance below where was the ford. It was perhaps fifty feet from the edge of the bluff to the river-bed below.

The level strip of ground which bordered on the bluff was narrow, scarcely twenty feet in width, and extended for about thirty yards. It was bare of vegetation except for one jack pine, midway the length of the strip, close to the edge of the bluff.

It was on this small piece of ground that Buck Wright and Swift Morton fought—each for his life.

Morton knew if he were captured he would have to face a murder charge. And in that country where fair-play was an unwritten law, where men of the range were respected above those of other occupations, and where his past record would weigh mightily against him, he could expect but one verdict.

And Buck saw the raging lust to kill in his adversary's eyes. Morton would not hesitate if opportunity offered.

Swift Morton was not a mean antagonist. He had the adventage of weight, and possibly of strength. Although no taller than Buck he was considerably heavier. To offset this handicap Buck was possessed of greater speed, and his muscles were hardened into veritable strips of steel by months and years of healthy, outdoor toil.

In the fight above the bluff, Swift Morton strove constantly to get Buck into a clinch so he could use his superior weight. His was wrestling ability rather than boxing competency. And Buck consistently drove him back with clean blows. But Morton blocked enough of the blows to hold up under the punishment. In turn he swung viciously, terrific hooks any one of which might have put the deputy out had it landed on the jaw. Buck took advantage of the openings left by these futile swings, but the big outlaw's capacity for taking punishment seemed unlimited.

In silence, save for the hiss of hot breaths and the dull sounding impact of blows, the men fought. Sometimes close to the edge of the bluff, again stumbling on the border of the rock ribs on the opposite side of the ridge. And then, in dodging one of Morton's vicious lunges, Buck's right spur caught in a high piece of sod and sent him rolling toward the edge of the bluff.

Swift Morton was upon him instantly, pinning his arms to his side, pushing him toward the drop-off. Buck was nearly winded, first by his fall and again when Morton's weight was hurled upon him. He gathered his strength as his body slid along the ground.

Almost on the edge Buck saw the trunk of the lone jack pine a scant yard away from him. In one final, desperate wrench of his body—an almost super-human exhibition of strength born of the certain knowledge that Swift Morton meant to throw him over the precipice—Buck got his arms and shoulders free, and, kicking backward with all his might, succeeded in getting his arms about the tree trunk.

His body swung about, then a tremendous weight pulled at his left leg. It seemed to Buck as if this weight would tear him apart unless he released his hold. From behind and *below* came a hoarse cry. Buck felt the toe of his boot crunch into soft, yielding earth.

In a flash he knew the truth. Swift Morton was over the edge—over the edge of the bluff and holding to Buck's left ankle!

It was a despairing discovery. If Buck released his hold both would be plunged to the river bank below. The realization of his peril gave Buck added strength of nerve and brain and muscle. He clung to the tree trunk, pulled against it though the effort threatened to burst his very heart; then he felt the grasp on his ankle slip and suddenly the boot slipped from his foot. From below came a wild yell and Buck turned over on his back, panting with exertion and strain.

It was two minutes before Buck crept to the edge and looked over in response to the hoarse, terrifing cries which came up to him. He saw Swift Morton standing above his knees in the oozy, gray-black mud of the river-bed, struggling vainly to extricate himself. As the outlaw turned his horrified, agonized features up to Buck the latter instantly realized Morton's predicament.

Of all the thoughts of death that strike terror to the soul of man that of smothering in quicksand is possibly the worst. Buck knew quicksands existed in this part of the badlands. Swift Morton had fallen into a patch, and the death he had planned for Buck was now staring him in the face.

Buck ran to his horse and got his rope. Then standing perilously near to the edge of the bluff he threw one end of the rope down to the outlaw who was settling slowly but surely into the sucking sand. The rope fell short and Buck suddenly remembered that he carried a fifty-foot rope while the drop to the river-bed must have been all of that. The end of the rope dangled a foot or so above Morton's clutching hands.

"My saddle," Swift Morton called in a voice vibrant with entreaty. "My saddle—my horse—my saddle—my——"

But Buck already was racing across the ridge to where the outlaw's horse was

standing, recovered from its fright, waiting with dangling reins for its master. A trickle of blood showed where Buck's bullet had grazed its flanks.

Morton's rope was a picket-rope and only about twenty feet in length, but joined with Buck's lariat it gave the latter seventy feet of rope with which to rescue the outlaw.

This time the noose fell well within Swift Morton's grasp. He slipped it under his arms, his face beaming and gleaming with new hope. He was now up to his hips in the sand and Buck's efforts to pull him out of it were in vain. The outlaw struggled and again the agonized look of terror froze on his face; his eyes became blurred with mute appeal.

Buck moved swiftly, realizing the urgent need for haste. He secured the rope temporarily to the trunk of the jack pine and ran for his horse. Leading Freckles to the pine he tied the rope to the horn of his saddle and gave the pinto the command to pull away. The horse had had much experience in dragging calves and even steers on the roundup and set his sturdy body to the task.

Buck also pulled on the rope at the edge of the bluff and Swift Morton's form came slowly out of the sand. When he was almost free of the quicksand Buck had the pinto hold while he ran back along the ridge and retrieved his gun and loaded it. Returning, he saw Morton holding up the missing boot and yelling lustily to be pulled out.

Then the strong pinto hauled the outlaw up the bluff, over the edge, and Swift Morton sat looking into the black bore of his captor's gun.

"There's just one thing I'm curious about," drawled Buck Wright when they were in their saddles and Morton was getting his orders to ride ahead and be careful; "how'd you know it was me? You must 'ave knowed or you wouldn't have started shootin' so prompt an' furious."

"I'd heard you rode a pinto," snarled Morton, staring at his right wrist manacled to his saddle-horn.

AT NINE o'clock that night the two riders, Swift Morton in the lead, Buck Wright following him singing merrily, rode up to the sheep camp.

For some time the camp had been conspicuous on the black reach of plain because of the large fire burning near the wagon. As the deputy and his prisoner edged into the ring of firelight Sheriff Burke came striding toward them. His eyes glistened as he recognized Swift Morton.

But Morton didn't look at the sheriff. His eyes were glued to a burly man who had hastily risen from the ground.

"You skunk!" he called, and there was venom in his tone and the scornful flash of his eyes.

Buck Wright pointed toward Ling.

"Better put the bracelets back on that fellow," he told the sheriff.

An instinctive move toward flight by Ling was frustrated by another man whom Buck made out to be the cowpuncher who had quit the game in Rollins.

Three other men now came forward, two deputies from the county-seat and the man Smith, who still wore a worried look.

"Here's the prisoner, chief," said Buck cheerfully.

The sheriff was regarding him quizzically.

"We'll talk to him in the wagon," said Burke.

"All right, you talk to him, chief," returned Buck, "I've got to look after my horse first."

Three quarters of an hour later Sheriff Burke confronted his cowpuncher-deputy in the light of the fire outside the wagon.

"I ought to give you an all-fired good talking to, Wright," he frowned.

"Go ahead, chief, I'm a-listenin'—what's wrong? We got our man, didn't we?"

"Yes, an' if you hadn't got him you'd have gotten us into a whole big bunch of trouble," said the sheriff severely. "That was a bold play to arrest Ling without good proof that he'd helped Morton get away."

"Well, as I told you in that note I sent up to Weed to be telephoned in to you, I wasn't positive so you'd better get down here an' sort of stick aroun' till I got back. But I aimed to keep Ling from followin' me, so——"

"An' six of us have been busy all afternoon rounding up the sheep," fumed Sheriff Burke.

"The sheep!" cried Buck. "I plumb forgot about the darn woolies!"

"Yes, and it's a grave offense—puttin' a herder out of business without good reason and letting the flock shift for itself," said the sheriff. "You've got to be careful in this business, Wright, the law's —— strict. I had to take the bracelets off Ling—I

didn't have anything to hold him for, then."

"Say, chief," scowled Buck, "I found out from the hotel man Weed that Griswold an' Morton an' Ling had had trouble before. I knowed Morton wouldn't be fool enough to go north when every man that went after him would naturally take that direction. An' I found out that Ling was about the only man to take a look in the timber south along the creek. An' the missing sheepskin coat from his wagon, an' the story about Sam Parker an' the mail pretty near cinched it, an'—well the coat's tied behind Swift Morton's saddle right this minute! An' there's a hair bridle down at Smith's place that can be traced to him easy enough."

"I know," said the sheriff, "and it's lucky everything turned out so well. Of course you had a pretty good clew, and your reasoning was all right; but I'm tryin' to impress on you that you've got to be careful the way you go at things in this law business."

"Fact is," continued Buck, paying scant heed to his superior's words, "I wouldn't be surprized if it was a frame-up from the start—a frame-up to get Griswold. He's been winning quite a bit lately. An' Griswold brought things to a head sooner than intended by making that crack to Swift about Deer Lodge. Any ex-con. is touchy thataway about his past."

"Nevertheless you didn't know these things, an' as I say you've got to be careful," Sheriff Burke repeated.

"Say, chief, listen," said Buck frowning. "You know an' I know there's more things said in this country without words than with 'em. You was a cattleman—are yet under that badge. Now what'd you think if you heard about an all-'round bad-man an' a sheep herder runnin' down a puncher, an' one of 'em killed that puncher?"

It was the sheriff's turn to frown.

"That's all right, but I don't want you to forget what I said about being careful. You didn't know all these things for sure. Did you *know* Ling saw Morton in the timber after he'd killed Griswold an' gave him directions? Oh, I know all about it now. Morton thought Ling had double-crossed him and tried to brain him with his handcuffs when he got in the wagon. Then they both talked. Also that cowpuncher who thought you was sticking up for Ling wants to apologize——"

"Tried to kill off my star witness!" Buck complained.

"Yes, but you didn't know all this beforehand," the sheriff said sternly.

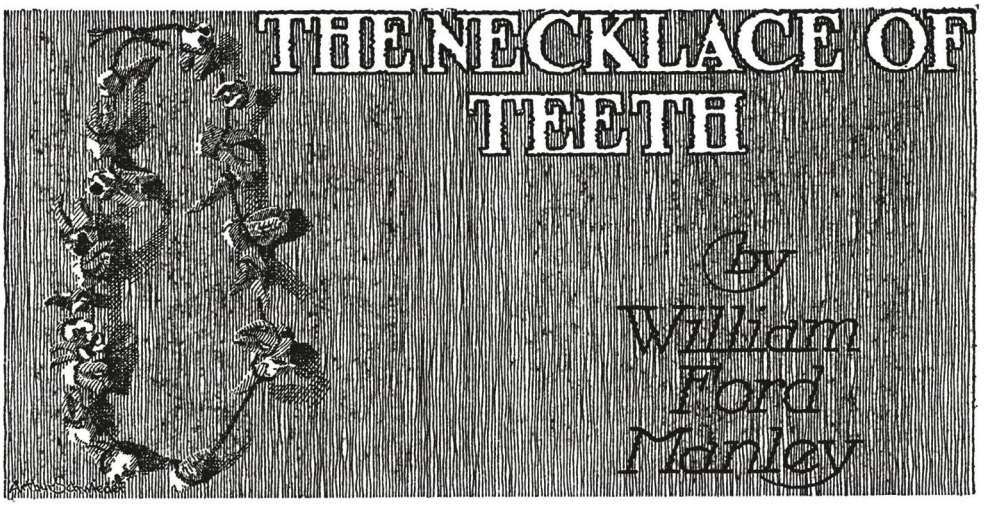
"I didn't know it for sure," Buck drawled; "but I sur—I sur— Dog-gone it, what's that word? I sur——"

"Surmised it?" snapped the sheriff sarcastically.

"That's it," sang Buck. "By golly I ought to have more ed-u-cation for this job, chief, I sure need——"

"—— fire!" exploded Sheriff Burke. "Get some sleep and we'll take in the prissoners in the morning."

But the scowl he directed at Buck was hard-fetched, and the sparkling twinkle in his eye implied that it might really be an alibi for an approving grin.



HIS father had owned a general store somewhere near Calais, Maine; but too many bottles of Jamaica ginger were passed over its counter, so one day the elder McMahon left town, cursing the reformers who had driven him out, and wondering where to go and what to do. Both questions were quickly settled and with little effort on his own part. He died.

The funeral would have delighted the frugal soul of the elder McMahon. No empty sentiment here; no money wasted on what he always called "drivelin' nonsense." The city authorities of Bangor did the honors, and rather handsomely, for there was an undertaker on the board of aldermen, a generous man who could not let a deserving Democrat go to his free grave without so much as a pine-board coffin.

And this left Billy McMahon alone, and like his sire, rather puzzled as to what to do and where to go. Being eighteen years of age and uncommonly healthy he did not die and stood in no way of dying. But he had a stomach that clamored for food and so he did a thing that no McMahon stooped to unless the need was great. He went to work.

He stumped into my store on a blue May morning and scowled at me across the counter until I laid down my pen and asked him his business. There was no malice in the scowl. It was protective coloration, like the inscrutable face of Jones the lawyer, or the benign smile of the Reverend Smith. His business? The absurdity of the question. What business could Billy McMahon have in a book-store, except to rob the till or carry books into the basement?

"You wish me to show you something?"

"Naw. I want a job."

It was a threat, a command. No shifting from foot to foot; no nervous fumbling with his cap. He poked his fist toward the door.

"There's a job here. I seen it in the window."

"But it's for a boy—just to run errands."

"I'll take it."

That was his creed. Things were never given to him; he took them.

He worked for me for a fortnight. I found him lazy, slovenly and given to drinking. No wonder, therefore, that I was glad when he stood before me at the end of his first week and demanded his pay. I asked him where he was going.

"I'm going ter see the world," he said, and stumped out of the store with his cap on the back of his bullet-head, bound for God-knows-where.

Then twenty years and no more of Billy McMahon.

CHRISTMAS time always finds me rushed and consequently tired and irritable. I had held my store open until past nine o'clock—it was Saturday night—and when the last customer had departed with his bundle I sat down on the

counter, pulled out my pipe, and prepared for a good smoke. Then the door opened and a man came across the store and planted himself in front of me, scowling at me under a battered felt hat. Mechanically I rose.

"You wish me to show you something?"

"Naw. I want five dollars."

And that was as far as Billy McMahon had gone in twenty years.

It was a shock to see him scowling there in the flesh, his bullet-head thrown back and his tired eyes trying to hold on to their old look of defiance.

"You're tired, McMahon. Sit down."

"Yes, tired."

He leaned against the counter and closed his eyes. He was thin and I could see his hands twitch pitifully against the rags of his coat. He was trying to be McMahon, trying to be defiant, careless—but it was hard work. He was so tired; that was it—tired.

"You're still here," he said. "Well, I thought you would be."

He held out his hand.

"You'd better give me five dollars. I won't come again."

No wonder that his knees crumpled under him and that he went forward on to his face as he turned to go. I learned later that he hadn't eaten for three days and the effort of being McMahon was too much for him. I rolled him over and doused his gray face with water. The veins on his forehead stood out blue and distended. He didn't wear a collar, but there was a greasy blue handkerchief tied round his neck.

I untied the knot and pulled open his shirt, and there on his hairy chest was the strangest necklace that ever was carried into a Bangor book-shop. The string was of yellow grasses, tighter than silk and strong as moose-wood; and on it were the jewels that twenty years had brought to him—two dozen human teeth that rattled together as I lifted them.

It was like Billy McMahon to come back after twenty years with a necklace of human teeth—and not a cent in his pocket. It was a gesture that went well with the scowl and the thrown-back head and the tired eyes trying so pitifully hard to stare defiance. He lay on the floor so white and still that I wondered if the bluff wasn't over; whether Billy McMahon hadn't come back from God-knows-where to die in Bangor Town like his father before him, and be buried with as much ceremony.

His face was marred by sagging lines and there was a wicked scar that ran down from his right temple and cut across his lips in a bulging furrow. When I forced his mouth open and poured in a precious teaspoonful of whisky, I saw his teeth, dull yellow and blunt, like the teeth of some old, old tiger. Then I knew that the jewels on his necklace had never belonged to Billy McMahon.

He came to and asked for a glass of water.

"The first time I ever flopped," he said sheepishly, his hand shaking so that the water trickled down from his lips through the red stubble of his beard.

"I'll get you something to eat," I told him.

"Add it to my bill," he said. "I haven't fed for three days."

I fetched sandwiches and coffee and he gnawed in silence.

"When your money's gone come back and I'll try to get you a job," I told him.

He grinned and thrust his paw into his coat.

"Work? I finished working fifteen years ago."

He repeated it over and over again, the light coming back into his eyes. I wondered how long the food and whisky would hold the strength in him.

"And you're still working—you —— old fool!"

Now I'm not used to being reviled on my own whisky and I was about to say something sharp and as stinging as I could make it when I caught sight of his eyes. They were not the eyes of a sane man. The fire had gone out of them and there was nothing there but a sort of wild despair, inarticulate and terrible.

He lunged forward and caught my arm, leaning against me so heavily that I had to brace myself against the counter.

"Gimme a book," he whispered hoarsely, "a book about funerals. One that tells yer all about 'em."

I patted him on the shoulder and tried to make him sit down.

"Don't you think you'd better sit down quietly for a minute?"

"Gimme a book," he persisted, "a book about funerals."

I went to the shelf and took down the Book of Common Prayer and handed it to him and watched him while he turned over the leaves feverishly.

" 'I am the Resurrection'—that's what

he said. That's the way he told me to say it when I buried him. I'd forgot it; but I remember it all now, jest like he telled it to me."

He shook his head solemnly, put the book in his pocket and went out the door.

Poor devil! Burial—he'd need it himself soon enough or I was mistaken.

I took down my coat, locked the safe and attended to the routine of closing the store that had not changed in twenty years. Yes, I was still working, —— old fool, and in just the same way as on that May morning when a red-haired boy had left my store to "see the world."

"To see the world!"

Suppose I'd gone, too, that morning—left my rows of books and cash register, chucked the whole thing, dropped my anchor wherever I'd pleased; been twenty years from Bangor town. Well, I didn't.

Some one pounded on the door. It was Googins the policeman. He was shouting something, but I couldn't make out the words. I turned the handle, and Billy McMahon came into my store for the second time that evening, limp as a dead rabbit, carried in the arms of Googins and a stranger.

"He dropped outside," said Googins, laying him on the counter. "He came to fer a minute an' ses he must see you. I hope I haven't made a mistake, sir?"

"No, it's all right, Googins," I answered, giving him a cigar and indicating that I wished to be left alone.

The two men left the store and I went to the safe. There was only one thing to do—use my last pint of whisky to whip back the life into the body that lay so quietly. He had something to tell me and even an insane man's wishes should be respected, particularly if he is on the verge of stepping over the line.

He opened his eyes and tried to raise himself on his elbow, but the effort was too much.

"One more drink," he said. "A long one—it'll be my last," and he drained the bottle.

He propped himself where the counter joined the wall.

"I'll never do it," he said weakly; "I'll never do what I come back to do."

He undid his shirt and with shaking hands loosened the necklace and held it limply in his lap, staring at it the while.

"I'll never do it," he groaned, swaying back and forth. "I'll never do it, and now I'll be —— like he said I would. An' I tried like —— ter keep my promise, Frisky!"

This last he screamed at me and sat with mouth gaping open, the sweat standing out on his white forehead, as if waiting for me to grant him absolution from some sin for which he was already beginning to feel the agony of damnation.

"Brace up, man."

Easy to say to a dying wretch, his brain on fire with whisky!

"Yes, I'll brace up."

He pulled the Book of Common Prayer from his pocket and forced it into my hand.

"First swear yer'll do as I tells yer. On the book so help yer God an' may yer be damned if yer don't."

I nodded, with the mental reservation, "if possible." An oath forced on one by a dying man should not be taken too seriously. Whatever I swore it brought peace to the face of Billy McMahon. He slumped back against the wall and the look of terror faded from his face.

"Take this," he said, holding out the necklace. "I've carried it half-way across the world an' now I've got ter quit. Take them teeth ter Calais an' give 'em Christian burial. Yer swore yer would."

He saw the look of suspicion on my face.

"Yer think I'm a nut, eh? Well, maybe I am. Maybe I got a right ter be."

"Bury 'em good an' deep an' put up a slab an' mark it *'Frisky, died'*—well, *'died sudden-like;'* never mind when or where; that's a good enough line fer a tomb."

"But I can't bury a handful of teeth in a church graveyard," I told him.

"Listen," he said, poking his finger at me. "Them teeth belonged ter Frisky Quint o' Calais. He was like me, one o' them restless guys. But he wasn't like me, cause he come from churchy people, his father bein' a deacon an' Frisky havin' a big deep voice an' always was singin' hymns.

"I come across him in Vancouver, an' we shipped together ter stoke on a big freighter bound fer Melbourne, loaded with Canadian booze an' American dynamite. It was a good lively cargo.

"Frisky was a big feller, not squatty like me, but handsome-like. But an awful boozer. He used ter ship fer a long cruise whenever the stuff begun ter get him. That's

how he could keep lickin' it up year after year.

"They worked us two on a shift, an' me an' Frisky was on together. When we was out ten days he telled me a plan ter make us both rich ez kings, like he said. It was easy, the way he telled it. Any one would 'a' fell fer it. You would. It was like this: Frisky knowed them parts of the world like you know the books on the shelf up there—jest where every little island was an' every coral reef 'tween Melbourne an' the Carolines. He'd run a little tradin' schooner once't, a forty-footer, with two niggers fer a crew.

" 'We'd be ez rich ez kings,' he used ter say, smackin' his lips, an' showin' them —— white teeth of his'n. 'Ez rich ez kings—if yer wasn't afraid.' Well, I couldn't stand that, could I? So I says I'd do it. Frisky made all the plans, an' it all worked out ez nice ez pie.

"When we was a couple a hundred miles south of the Carolines I stole a couple a sticks a dynamite, an' Frisky an' me we put 'em for'ard an' another stick at the bulkhead. Yer see, we was goin' ter shoot a hole in the side o' that old boat an' when everybody left her take a chance on beachin' her on one o' them little islands Frisky said he knew. Then if we was lucky we'd get the booze ashore an' sell it ter the natives an' be ez rich ez kings, like Frisky said."

McMahon stopped as if he expected comment. I held my peace.

"Yer see, all the chances was against us, cause she might go down like a rock, an' if we didn't blow a big hole the crew wouldn't leave, an' if she did stay afloat a couple a hours Frisky might 'a' guessed wrong and there wouldn't be no island ter run her on or no reef or nothin'.

"That night we stoked till we was most dead, an' put on so much steam that the boilers squealed, an' the engineer come runnin' down ter ask us if we was crazy. You see, we knew we wouldn't get a chance ter put on the coal later on, an' we wanted all the steam she'd carry.

"About two o'clock Frisky shook hands with me solemn-like an' says: 'This is the place. We're rich men, Billy—or dead 'uns.' And he starts for'ard with a two-foot slow fuse an' a box o' matches.

"When she blew we knew we hadn't used too little, 'cause another stick would 'a' lifted the *Port Melbourne* out er water. Frisky went a yellin' on deck: 'There's a fire in the hold. She's goin' ter blow, boys!' Then the crew came runnin' up on deck, crazy scared, an' a couple of 'em jumped over the rail—they couldn't wait fer the boat ter be launched. Frisky an' me we ducks below an' sits tight an' listened to 'em swing the boats clear. Then we heared the ropes squeak an' we knowed that we was alone on board.

"It was blowin' hard, the kind a wind thet hits yer four ways at once. 'She's goin' down,' I says. 'She is not,' ses Frisky. 'I never shot that bulkhead. I was jest a holdin' that in reserve in case they didn't git scared.'

"But she was takin' on an awful lot a water an' rollin' loggy-like an' I thought I felt her settlin' kinda slow at the nose. Frisky run ter the bridge an' pulls a couple a levers an' grinned. 'We'll drift,' he says. 'We're in the hands o' the Lord.'

"So we drifted. We drifted all night, an' her nose went down an' down, an' God knows what kept her afloat. An' Frisky stamped round the deck like he was a king already, singin' hymns, an' the old tub went deeper an' deeper an' I felt her shake like a puppy what's got the fits.

" 'She's gone,' I says. 'Me fer the raft.' Frisky lets out a couple a verses more an' says, 'We're in the hands o' the Lord.' He was awful drunk by that time.

"Then it started to get light, quick, like it does out there. An' so help me ——, mister, we was lodged fast on a reef an' there was ten canoes paddlin' round the ship an' just over the port bow a dinky little island with a yellow beach an' palm-trees.

" 'That's what comes a prayin', says Frisky. 'Now I'll address me subjects.'

"An' he stands at the rail an' lets out a couple a drunken whoops an' then a line a heathen talk—like a conductor rattlin' off stations on the B. & A.

"The canoes was full a light-colored niggers, dozens of 'em. They yells back and Frisky yells an' lets down a ladder an' the whole push climbs aboard, men, women an' kids. Then there was the most awful lot o' chatter an' Frisky turns ter me an' says, 'Billy, it ain't no cinch bein' a king.'

"He gives everybody one free drink an' then tells 'em there was fifty cases fer everybody if they paid up, an' jest ter show 'em he meant business he lets off a couple a shots

from a gun that he carried, an' they climbs down the ladder an' we was alone.

" 'She'll last ez long ez it stays calm,' he says, lookin' over the side where the reef showed up pretty an' white all round the ship.

" 'Let's get out o' this,' I says. 'I don't like them niggers.'

" 'They're goin' ter make us rich,' he says. 'Rich an' happy,' an' I sees what he was thinkin' about.

'No women,' I says.

'What's the use o' bein' a king if yer can't have a queen,' he says. Then I knowed we was done fer.

"That night they all come aboard again, an' Frisky passes out free drinks an' gives one old feller a case o' the best Scotch. I didn't know why he did it, but when the crowd leaves the ship, all drunk, one o' the girls stays behind, an' I begins ter understand.

" 'She's mine,' says Frisky. 'You can have one too, if yer says so, Billy.'

"Then he goes below with her, arm in arm. Next mornin' they begun ter bring things ter the ship—beads an' fans an such-like truck.

" 'Where's the gold yer telled me about,' I asks him. He grins.

" 'Never mind gold. Ain't these jewels enough fer yer?' An' he pinches one o' the girls on the cheek. She was pretty an' slim, with red lips an' nice teeth.

" 'I'll take that one,' I says.

" 'Yer will like ——,' says Frisky. 'She's the best o' the bunch.'

"I got mad an' took her by the arm an' tried ter pull her toward me, but Frisky hauled off an' belted me with the butt of his gun an' I went down in a heap, an' the niggers laughed an' the girl laughed an' kissed him. I come at him ag'in an' the nigger girl pulled a knife an' slashes me across the face.

"I guess that sent me crazy, 'cause I don't remember what happened till I found myself in the hold, up ter the waist in water, with the blood runnin' into my mouth faster'n I could spit it out.

" 'I'll get yer, yer——,' I says, an' I ripped off the cover from one o' them boxes o' dynamite. Then I gets a cap an' a fuse an' lights it an' went over the side into one o' them canoes. They was all yellin' drunk on board, an' I could see Frisky with his queen, both drunk, an' carryin' on like I couldn't tell yer."

It was the old McMahon that was talking now, Billy McMahon with the scowl and the lifted chin.

"Well, wasn't it all right?" he glowered at me.

"Quite all right," I said, wondering when the light would go out of his sullen eyes and he would slump forward on his evil face.

And then the break came. He began first to shiver, like a man in the grip of fever, and his mouth opened and shut while no sound came forth. Through the bulging scar on his lips I could see his stumps of yellow teeth. It was the face of a dying animal; and yet it was the incarnate will of the man that kept him alive.

"Listen," he stammered. "Listen!—I'm goin'— Buried; Christian burial, like I promised him— It was on the beach after the ship went down. First she went up an' then she went down. Ha, ha!"

"Don't laugh, man!" I cried.

"Twenty tons a dynamite. Noise? Yer could hear it in China, I guess. An' the air was so heavy with the smell o' booze—like there was a thousand saloons openin' their doors on yer face on Saturday night— An' then they begun ter come ashore. Piece by piece. Nothin' bigger'n an' arm or a leg. All niggers, an' I begun ter think that I'd blown Frisky inter mince-meat."

"Horrible!"

I couldn't help it. I had to blurt out something. Yes, that was it—horrible!

"Then I was all alone—every nigger in the village was on the ship—an' I begun ter walk up an' down the beach, lookin' fer Frisky. An' then he come!"

McMahon's face lighted up with a terrible animation—the hectic red of a disordered mind.

"He come up the beach, slow an' easy, an' singin' all the time. I could hear his feet *plop, plop* on the beach an' see the wet sand squirtin' between his toes as he walked. He was dressed all in white an' he wore a gold crown an' the closer he got the bigger he looked and the louder he sung—all hymns, about damnation. God!"

And sane as I was I could hear the terrible *plop, plop* of Frisky's feet sounding on that beach of madness as he came toward me singing in a loud voice.

"He come an' stood over me, an' I was afraid ter move. I wanted ter run, but I couldn't. He pointed out ter the reef an says quiet-like, 'Go an' get my body, Billy,

an' give me Christian burial, or I'll haunt yer an' damn yer fer Eternity.'

" 'Where?' I says.

'In Calais, Maine, —— yer! An' bury me deep.'

"His hand was pointin' out ter the reef an' I sees a white thing bobbin' there, with the sharks pullin' at it so that it jumped round like it was alive. Then he says, 'Go an' get me, Billy.'

"I found a spear in one o' the canoes an' pushed off. The water was full o' boxes—an' other things—so I had ter steer careful. Then I reached the reef an' pulled him aboard; part of him, from the waist up.

"When I had him laid on the beach I felt easy an' comfortable. If I could 'a' buried him then! It was awful, livin' there with that Thing on the beach, an' me fightin' ter keep the gulls away.

"Then Frisky begun ter come every night. He'd sneak up ter me when I was asleep an' wake me with recitin' the burial service, an' then I'd look up an' see him standin' there pointin' ter the Thing on the beach.

"Well, it got me. Every day ter look at that Thing! I used ter cover it up with a piece o' mattin', but I always knew it was there. Then I started ter scheme ter get rid of it, an' one mornin' I threw it into the sea. But it washed ashore, an' I was glad it did. Then I knowed it was no use.

"Soon there wasn't nothin' left but bones, an' I says ter myself, 'Frisky don't care *what* I bury or how *much* I bury so long ez I bury somethin'. So I knocked out them teeth with a rock an' I sinks the bones out beyond the reef where it was good an' deep, an' Frisky didn't come no more."

His head lurched forward and his body slumped sidewise against the wall as in sleep. I lifted the face, and there Billy McMahon scowled at me, the defiant scowl and uplifted chin that he carried even to the grave.

THEY buried him in the public lot, a hundred yards from his father. I paid for the pine coffin and was the only mourner.

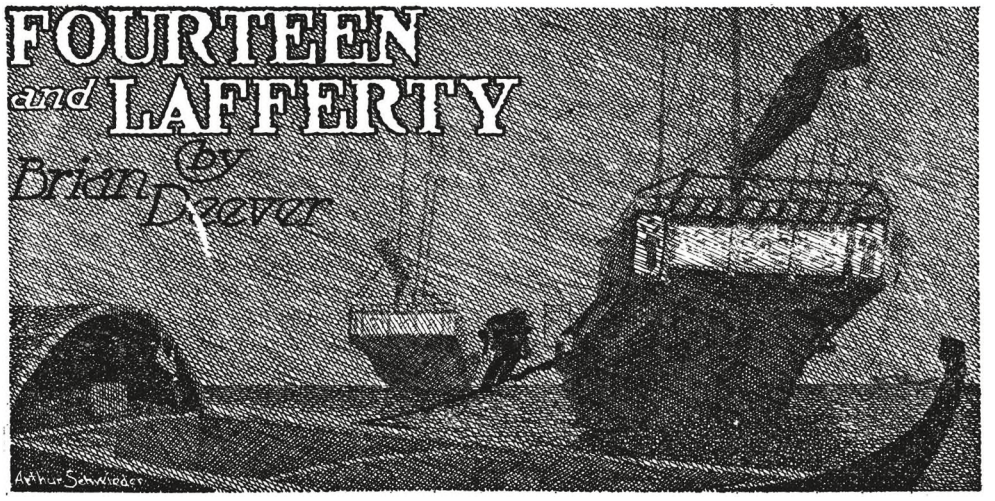
The next Spring I had occasion to go to Calais on a fishing-trip. When I returned, my clerk asked me what luck I had.

"Not very good," I said. "They're not biting any more where I was, but they used to bite pretty well, I guess."

And my clerk, being an old-timer like myself, remarked that the automobile had ruined fishing, and I agreed with him.

FOURTEEN and LAFFERTY

by Brian Deever



IN SIBERIA, in the Primorsk district — and especially in the vicinity of that seven-hilled city, mystic, strange, uncouth yet weirdly fascinating Vladivostok—in the Fall of 1919, there was much to be seen of soldiery; much to be heard of revolution and of counter-revolution. There was also much to be feared of factional activities among the Russians, whether or not they were Bolshevists, and of the resultant actions of the lesser military forces, given blood-thirstily to freeing the souls of hundreds by machine-gun bullets in reprisal for God knows what pitiably human vanities that would provoke their wrath. Aloof, watching, wise, the British Empire had her soldiers there.

Danger—the threats of unfriendly neighbors; the threats of disease—there was smallpox at Second River—the ominousness of the weather that was daily beginning to send down from the Arctic over the Stanavoi Mountains a cold, cold wind that smelled of the desperateness of a Siberian Winter and grew steadily colder—danger was everywhere.

Double sentries were being posted nights, by orders emanating mysteriously from military headquarters. At Gournastai the sub-staff scouts were off over the hills and far away almost daily, returning tired and dusty and weary-faced long after Retreat was sounded at night. The Mongol coolies had begun wearing again their unkempt and carelessly donned fur headgear, and seemed to tie more filthy rags around their emaciated and toil-worn bodies.

With the twilight, the clear, fair blue of the sky over Ussuri Bay grew daily overcast with snowclouds that a swift and chill breeze tore hectically away—clear from the top of Hill 300 even to the horizon far beyond Askold Island.

And there was work to be done—work with thrills that were rather too exacting and required more of a man sometimes than he could give.

But in all the danger, and with Winter coming—there, where there was a well-known joke about building thermometers upside down—and with sniping going on, and officers being waylaid and having their throats cut and brush fires that were suspiciously like incendiarism—they had resulted in the total destruction of more than one barrack building—in all the work, in all the risk, Tim Lafferty went on about his duties and his recreations without a show of fear or worry. And when every one else, save the old-timers, were enthused, he gave out signs only of boredom.

Of course Tim—or any old soldier who had been in the Punjab in India and on the velds of Africa, and who had see-sawed nauseatingly on the back of a camel doing a swing-toddle over the sands of the Sphinxes; who had been in action more times than there are drummers in a column-of-route a mile long—would not find any new emotions in the happenings of a punctilious campaign in Siberia in the wake of

the war. After one is hit there is not the same excitement in being shot at. Singularly, being sun-burned through and through, athirst, in desert dust, seems to bring about the same sensations as does being half-starved and subjected to a minus temperature without adequate clothing.

Tim was a batman. Ten years ago, at Bombay, when Hugh Alan Smith-McKay, with the coming of gray to his clean, close-cropped head, had unfastened from his shoulder-straps the three medallions of a captain and had put up the neat crown of his majority, it was white-haired Tim Lafferty he picked out of the ranks to be his man.

Every ribbon that the major wore, Tim wore too by reason of things that were written of him in black and white at the War Office.

But there is a restraint with regard to—to drink; a knack of taking so much—there was an obvious necessity of taking some, and what came pretty near a necessity of taking more than enough, year in and year out, in various parts of the world—that Tim never had achieved, and never would; and the coat of arms of a regimental sergeant-major that he kept in a cigaret tin in the bottom of one of his kit-bags was the last token of promotion he would ever know, and the last memento of being "broke" for something he had done through lack of that restraint. The hard part of it was that he wanted to be—could hardly bear it sometimes that he was not—a commissioned officer, too; and in the privacy of the staff's own billet—McKay wore the scarlet tabs and hat-band, being staff captain of intelligence—he was once seen to don the brigadier's Sam Browne belt and the brass-embroidered cap and survey himself proudly, sadly.

"It's old, but it's beautiful—
The hat me father wore,"

he used to sing.

II

A BATMAN is of little or no consequence among fighting men, or among men who think they are fighting men. But "Tim Lafferty" was a familiar name in the brigade, rather through just one thing.

Tim Lafferty had *his own* batman; a coolie, and a low one, who lived on the scraps and leavings of the substaff mess and betook himself to some unknown hole, like an animal, every night, but who faultlessly and faithfully shined Tim's buttons with "Goldo" from the canteen, a button stick and a bit of soft cloth, and ceremoniously polished his boots.

A respectful and curious attachment there was between the old-time khaki-clad and his Buriat henchman. It was one of gratitude.

For one night in mid-Winter, under the broad shadow of Hill General Suvorov, a coolie porter had fallen in a ditch, unconscious beneath his heavy burden, beside the Vladivostok road; and Tim Lafferty—getting a breath of air and a look at the stars before turning in, standing in the yellow light of the doorway of substaff barracks—had seen the huddled figure there; and, donning sheepskins, shoepacks and fur bonnet, he had gone out into the night and brought back, senseless, over his shoulder—which was old but sinewy—the devil-worshiping dog that had seen fit henceforth to be at his bidding.

The nearest that Tim could get to the English of what the Buriat indicated his name to be was "Fourteen." He was called that by everybody who learned to recognize him at his self-imposed chores near the cook-house and the substaff billet. Inspecting officers winked at his presence, out of deference to the major, perhaps—or maybe appreciative of the humor of the situation.

Fourteen became Tim's shadow.

Gratitude. That is a rare virtue in a coolie. But it is also a rare thing for any one at all to be kind to or show any solicitude for one of the vile, infested, rag-wrapped hordes of men, like animals, who do most of the rugged labor and a great deal of the most menial toil in the dives and yards and cobbled streets of Vladivostok, and in the Russian by-towns of the Trans-Siberian Railway in what was old Manchuria—the Korean fishing-villages along Ussuri Bay and Amur Bay. To a coolie porter—who is trained mercilessly from his bitter boyhood to walk crouching and making a third leg of a crooked stick, under a weight of stuff that to a European is astounding—life is a dull, aching sensation.

The porter uses an easel-like structure strapped to his back, on which bags and

boxes and merchandise of all sorts are piled geometrically, sometimes to twice his height; and he carries it stoically, heroically.

But if he falls—and he does sometimes in lonely passes—and lies there, no one will stop and help him rise. If he is one of a queue of bearers, the others can not risk the loss of the handful of kopecks they will get, by stealing time to succor him; and they are too worn and stunted and dumb and hopeless themselves to feel for him. He must die where he falls. Perhaps—no, surely—death to a porter must be rest and relief and welcome.

Buriat coolies are the outcasts of their own people, who tolerate them only on the outskirts of the crowd at their odd rites and horse-sacrifices in honor of the Shamans; and throw them putrid *arsa* out of their sour milk-barrels, to eat. They are among the most wretched, the least human, of all men who are in touch with civilization.

And Tim Lafferty used to see that Fourteen, his batman, got plenty to eat, and used to take him bundled up in a khaki greatcoat to the cinema at the canteen.

Gratitude. That was Fourteen.

Fourteen's kind seemed to grow up in the rags they are first dressed in, with an overcoating of rent and patched garments that they accumulate. A coolie in a white man's clothes is an unusual and an interesting sight. Now Fourteen——

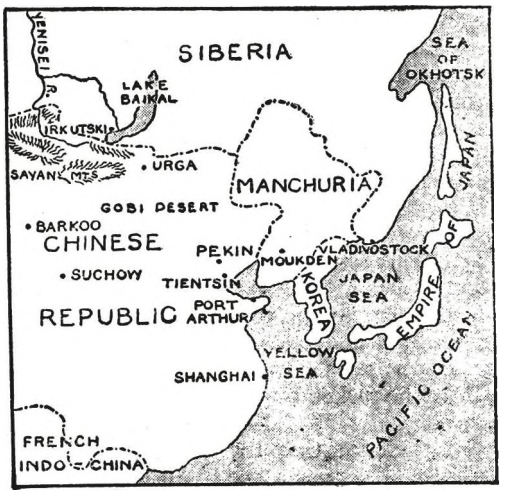
But it began this way:

III

THE major's room, bare though its walls were of the many little luxurious things that most men have, was hung with trophies.

It was his recreation, hobby, mania, to accumulate objects of interest wherever he went on his campaigns—especially when they had real scientific or archeological value—for the consolation and hearth-fire conversations of the time when he should have found out the peaceful hermitage of home and the "comfortable" income of a retired officer of his Majesty's Army. Here there wasn't much time for that sort of thing.

At Gournastai, Hugh Alan Smith-McKay was everything, and the results of the entire expedition were to be those he was striving hard to get. He was working



while it was light, and after, save when he flung himself on to his billet-cot and slept, or breaking unceremoniously into his mess, took a motley meal haphazardly and was away. He and his twelve men, broken non-commissioned officers, company undesirables and eccentrics thought to have unusual qualities of daring, whom he had trained into taut, tried men—were everlastingly in council or on the roads and the trails, or patrolling the bounds of the camp, or on observation posts here or there.

This night Major McKay stamped into his room—tattoo was being sounded—poured himself a drink—it was chill outside—and threw himself full-length upon his bed.

Tim was there.

"Hello, sir," he said.

"Hello, Tim."

There is a kind of chattiness that comes with a condition of being worn out physically and over-alert intellectually. . . .

"I say, I'm tired. . . . Pour me out another drink, will you, if you please, and have one yourself——"

"Tired, sir," bowing, handing, pouring again, and drinking. "May I venture to say, sir——"

"Very."

"May I venture to say, sir, that I know very well you are, sir, wid the way you go traipsin' all over the peninsula wid thim scouts ivery day. 'Tis no wonder you are. And may I venture to suggest, sir, what wid the red pennant himself findin' the time, himself, to go gallivantin' into town and standing picturesque-like back of the lines

most of the day while the boys on manouvers blow a few thousand rounds of ammunition to ——, and the artillery pulls their guns to the top of a great hill and down again, and the rest of the staff findin' time to toast their toes in their own diggin's no sooner has retreat blown—" here he took a long breath; he never lost the thread of his talk—"suggest, sir, that you take a bit of a rest ivery now and again. You need one; I do meself, sir."

Old Mac was attentive. He shook his head. There was a twitching at the corners of his firm-lipped mouth. He said not a word.

"And the hills are covered wid shell fragments from that war wid the Japs that the Russkies had in 1905; and there are old ikons hung in the corners of deserted peasant huts near here, and there are queer things to be seen along the bay, sir, where them yella men live——"

By the look on the major's face Tim saw it was time for Old Mac's answer.

"Tim, you might find time, yourself——"

"Thrue enough, sir, I might——"

"I say you might find time, Tim Lafferty, you garrulous old——"

Tim's heels clicked.

"—to put a little extra gloss on my accouterments for tomorrow morn; and I've enough of your blather for the night's night. Get out and let me go to sleep, will you, please?"

Garrulous—old— The only thing to do was to make a hasty exit when the major dealt in personality, though he was veiling his deeper feelings. But if the price of getting the idea into his head that he needed recreation—after you had known him for ten years intimately and as many more as a man in the ranks knows his "o. c.," you would think about such a thing, and that you yourself would appreciate a bit of leave—was the loss of the few minutes of bedtime talk you had been having for so many years in so many climes, it was well paid, thought Tim.

He made a hurried visit to the canteen ere "Last Post" had sounded, and came back by an inner road that wound down from ghastly Hill 80 and its dark concrete caverns that were part of the great fortress, past the dead tree where the ram-gods of some itinerant tribesmen had been left to rot, and came on past the first tier of the breastworks overlooking Ussuri Bay.

Where he should have turned at the rear of his billet—a one-story building made of gray stone, with double windows packed between with sand, and sets of double doors and a stove like a fire-engine in each room—he did not turn.

He should have cut down a path that led down across a picket fence, prone over a ditch, into his billet. But he kept on, under the moon, alone.

IV

IT WAS after "lights out" now. It was very dark. Tim pulled down the folds of his fur bonnet and fastened it under his chin. He turned up the collar of his mackinaw.

On either side of the road, now, strangely lonesome and deserted, were the little room-and-a-half houses with their doll's porches where the officers of the Russian regiment in Summer camp had had to live. There was the little blue doll's house of a one-room church, big enough for four or five men—there are hundreds of them in the Russian countryside; a *molitvenny dom*, a queer, pagan kind of a religious edifice.

Here, at the edge of the high cliff over the beach of Ussuri Bay, was what had been the officers' casino—seeming strangely now the never-to-be-rebuilt relic of a day of white-tunicked, pink-faced, mustached men who had been commissioned by the Czar to be officers in his Imperial Army, a kind of tomb erected in the memory of happy hours in the sun in Aprils of long ago—gazing out over the beautiful blue of the bay and dreaming; dreaming of Olga or Tania, or Vera the peasant maid; of prancing horses and glittering dress uniforms; of success, of happiness. There was no *balalaika* music now, where the moon-mad Irishman walked. There was nothing but desertedness, quiet, and the ghosts of memories.

Tim, too, dreamed. The old lust was upon him. The desire for newer, thrilling experiences, the mad want of personal jeopardy, the old, human passion to wander and to seek new things, was filling him, making him forget all, grow young, and weaken to its urge. But in the dreams that came to him there was a consciousness of the presence of an idea that he had taken with him to the canteen.

It was an idea that was growing into a

plan, building upon the memory of what he had seen one day upon the beach, something that had seemed to him to be the hectic service of some fetish-god. In the poetry of his thoughts—and the dreams of such a man are poetry—there was a rational, definite thing being created. Lost apparently in the enchantment of the night, Tim Lafferty knew just where he was, and why.

In the dark of the camp, back up the road, a lurking coolie crawled to a familiar window and peered in. Peered again. And was gone.

All unconscious that some one was thinking of him, Tim and his lowly soul communed upon the cliff at the point where the road cut—hewn out through centuries by the trickling brook they called Gournastai Creek—reached the bay. Directly below him were the narrow beach, breakers, and the calm beyond where a few stay-out hell-divers tipped and paddled on the surface; then calm, that stretched out to the Bay of Peter the Great and even to the Sea of Japan.

To his right, drawn back into the shadow of the cliff and huddled together in the cut of the river in a kind of architectural gregariousness, were a few small Korean huts, made of mud, laths and crude stucco. They were tawny, under the moon. Their thatched roofs looked a dirty Naples yellow.

And along the strand, their naked masts blackly set against the sky, teetering like compass needles to the swell and roll of the surf, were a row of fishing-sampans—wooden, square-ended, with two little decks forward and two aft, and a big, yawning hull in the middle—moored simply by being dragged a few feet up "out of the hole" so that one end grounded, each with a long, bending plank flung ashore as a gang.

Tim's motion-hunting eyes caught.

Right below him there was something in action. His interests fused into one. His vision became fixed.

At his feet, almost, down a sheer drop, Tim saw a Mongol woman who, seemingly without any reason, was bending down over a pile of stones at the base of the cliff, making obeisances in the half-dark and fussing with various small objects on the surface of the stones. She was the village priestess, or *pansu*.

Tim watched her closely. There was a yellow light in the window of one of the huts. To this she betook herself after a while, and as the latch of the hut door fell into its place he was half-climbing, half-sliding down the side of the cliff, making the least possible noise.

A pile of stones—that was all it looked like. The moon was behind a mass of clouds. There was a dog howling—or was it a dog?—quite close by. Something was moving—like a sentry, who, left alone at some distant post, with no danger of an orderly officer's unexpected visit, slings his rifle, lights a cigaret and saunters to and fro along his front.

But the quiet that came was of an odd sort. Tim backed up against the wall of the cliff and listened. He had no side-arms, nothing but his fists and his faculties. The dog, or whatever it was, gave a few dog-like yaps and a snort. A light was struck in a near-by hut. Tim saw it and decided they were still about in the village—mending nets, he thought, or playing at some game with their fantastic little cards.

He kept still.

V

THE moon swept out grandly now, from behind her snow-cloud screen; and it was like day, nearly, where Tim stood. He bent in the prayerful attitude of the *pansu*, and looked.

The stones were gray, flinty, broken by tools, not by erosion. They but partly covered a sheet of old galvanized iron, corrugated, that was held four or five inches above the ground by two square-hewn logs. Earth and loose stones and débris were so placed about the open space that it would pass very close inspection without being noticed.

Tim's groping hand struck something wet, warm and sticky. On his palm he saw fresh, red blood, newly congealed; pig's blood or that of a chicken or some similar creature of sacrifice. Beside it on the sheath of iron were three very small piles of grains of rice.

Tim knew then that he had stumbled upon the shrine of the Buriat fishermen, who worship the *shamans*—dead and gone personages of merely legendary existence who have been multiplied into hundreds in the imaginations and traditions of these

wretched people, and who have taken on the aspect and potentialities of devils, having for their exacting powers mesmerism, spirit-mediums and all the confusing and palsying subdivisions of Fear and Superstition.

The priestess of the *shamans* locally is a woman debased and cast out from the pale of the normal and producing; a sort of a witch whose messages—given in a trance, real or false, depending a great 'deal upon the amount of traditional magic that the woman has been able to learn—govern utterly her devotees in all their actions.

Tim Lafferty got down on all fours and reached into the shrine. The moon went dark again. He was deaf, dumb, blind, for the moment, having only his sense of touch.

He had need of his ears. Three paces behind him there now was standing an ugly, stunted Buriat, his tousled, black hair fastened back with a strip of green cloth. He had a knife ready, bare, in his hand.

High up on the cliff, crouching in the tall, dried weed stalks; was another man, watching.

Out came Tim's hand with a roll of red and yellow papers. These he stuffed into his bosom.

There were noises like a man breathing; but the night was full of queer sounds, and quick action was the thing.

Now in this little hole, all unknown to the major's treasure-hunting batman, dwelt two great devils, *shamans* who had in their power the giving and the taking-away of Life and Food and Good-Luck-Fishing—Ugin Xiebun Himself and his wife, who was always with him. Fastened prone on a wheel, above black hair taken from the belly of a male goat—as far as a man could reach into the shrine—lay the Two, inseparable; little, flat, century-old tin figures, hand in hand, like twin paper dolls.

The eyes of the young Buriat behind Tim were ablaze with fear, apprehension, anger, fanaticism. Even to show irreverence toward the Eternal Pair was to get for oneself great sorrow.

Out came Tim's hand, holding Ugin Xiebun and his wife by the napes of their similar necks. Down came the butt of a Buriat pistol on his head, and he fell in a heap, half-gone.

Then something leaped like a stone from a catapult clear from the top of a crag above and landed in the semblance of a man on the very shoulders of the Buriat. The pistol went one way, the knife another. The two clawing devils fought. The one on top got a rock from the pile and let the other have it on the skull. One was out of it.

Tim's head was splitting with pain. There were sparks in front of his eyes.

With a motion that must have been subconscious he thrust Ugin Xiebun and his spouse into his tunic with the red and yellow papers. The daze was awful. The lower half of his face felt as if it had been covered with cold vaseline. His legs and arms were all pins and needles.

He was flung over the back of a man; and while with a great uproar and shouts and screams lights were multiplying in the huts, and doorways were being filled with wide-eyed men and women, not knowing what sort of divine manifestation had come upon them—expecting perhaps to be swallowed up by terrifying dragons that had been part of their dreams since first their ancestors saw sand-spouts on the desert of Gobi—Tim felt himself rise and fall with a springing motion as he was carried up over a bouncing gangway on to a sampan.

He had been dumped off on the little after deck. Everything was rushing. Swiftly a coolie figure hoisted an oblong sail with its bamboo ribs. Expertly it was turned into the breeze. It filled, bellied out, became tense, began to pull.

A high-tide roller lifted the sampan, and she eased free of the beach. Another came, and there was twenty feet between her and the strand. The gang fell off with a soft splash.

Tim, dizzy with an ache in his eyes and half-sick with excitement, pulled himself up on one elbow and looked over the stern. The tiller handle swung at him. He took hold of it, struggled to his feet and sat on it. The sampan steadied and sped ahead like a running deer.

A score of men were grouped around the cairn-shrine. Not yet was there any effort at pursuit. The loss and outrage of their deity was an occurrence that for the Mongols would make conversation in hushed and reverent whispers for years to come.

The wild, gibbering yells of the *pansu*, who by this time had become the center of the mob on the beach, came out over the water, clear and horrifying.

Snow began to fall. The moon again

was overcast. Now the sampan had got around the cliffs to the south of the village and out of view. It was moving fast for the open waters.

The coolie tied the sail and came aft.

"Hullo, Teem" said a familiar voice.

"Fourteen, bedad," said Tim.

VI

THE usual yellow face, blank as the back of a domino, peered into his. A claw-like thumb and index finger grasped a button of his tunic and turned it up to catch the light. Just the ghost of a laugh-gurgle came from Fourteen's throat.

"Put up the other sail," commanded Tim coldly, and made signs.

Fourteen did so; and when it too was pulling and fastened properly he came aft again and broke into a jargon, rapid, noisy, unintelligible. Tim understood not a word, but he got it that Fourteen was using Mongol, Russian and Kalmuck to explain to him that when he had gone to see whether or not Tim, his master, was safe in his blankets—a traditional duty of personal attendants among the Buriats—he had noticed his absence; and, having tracked him in his illicit walk, for reasons of his own, and rescued him from his attacker, he had seized upon the sampan as the quickest and safest means of escape from the fanatical devil-worshipers, his brethren.

Besides, he was not unmindful of having been saved in like manner from a lingering and more cruel passing; and he also, knew that the English food of the foreigners was good food, fatting to the bones; moreover—most wonderful—their beautiful ghosts, so like to life, that flitted dazzlingly on the wall in the canteen were more powerful religion than that of his brethren who believed in the *shamans*. He did not believe in the *shamans* any more. He would not cease to be Tim's man if he might be suffered to keep on——

"Ochone," said Tim softly. "Not a word of your speech can I understand, Fourteen. But I think that I grasp your meaning. And be virtue of these tin gods I have in me shirt, I'm thinking I'll be giving meself a day or two in town. If nought goes wrong.

"Head her for Vladivostok."

"Vladivostok?" repeated Fourteen, and bowed and scraped, the gleam of understanding in his eyes. "*Da.* Yes. *Da-da-da-da.*"

Fourteen went forward. In the forward deck, a kind of a fo'csle, he came upon a Korean boy, asleep on watch beside a charcoal brazier on a deck littered with empty cartridge brasses—salvaged from the maneuver area at some secret time by the fishermen, who planned to sell them in town. He woke up the Korean and with argument both verbal and physical obtained his allegiance.

Fourteen came aft at Tim's call and took the tiller. The Korean, with a bewildered and excited look in his eyes, closely scrutinized Tim, groped for the gunwale, and sat.

Tim weakly stretched himself out on the little second deck near the fire, and, half-turned over with his head on his bent right arm, assumed an attitude of slumber. This was uncomfortable, so he sat up and removed Ugin Xiebun and his wife, fastened to the wheel with the goat's hair; and, having wrapped the red and yellow papers around them, he folded them all up in his tunic, which he placed under his head as a pillow.

THE motion of a sampan on the sea is like that of a chip on a puddle. Without a ton or so of fish to ballast it, it is light, and rides high, making headway amazingly in a good breeze, and swinging constantly crabwise, starboard and port, until it is often broadside on, but never still.

Save when a stacked and superstructured Government boat comes up to inspect the nets and paraphernalia and kind of fish being caught by the Koreans—whose leaders are often smart Japs in European clothes who are careful to evade the ire of the law—Ussuri Bay is deserted by all shipping familiar to European or American eyes. In the Winter it is frozen hard and deep from shore to shore; and hilly Askold Island—geologically rather a part of the Japanese islands, like Sakhalin, than of Siberia—wears during all the cold months a robe of snows that is sometimes blown away in places, leaving big patches of earthy brown that can be seen for miles against the universal background of white.

Early in the Spring, at the end of March, the breakers are strewing the beach with foam, and the ice retreats shoreward from the deep blue of the free water. Then the

little coves along its shores become populated with the Korean fishermen, who build their huts or reoccupy old ones and establish their colonies of coolie underlings. They bring in their boats from Korea, or the yards of the Golden Horn at Vladivostok.

Just as for centuries the ribbed oblong sails have floated day-long over the blue, serene, they do today.

VII

WHEN Tim's mind—all the night filled with an unrest in which his rescue was repeated again and again like the rehearsals of a scene to be taken for a motion picture, to no one of which his sub-conscious self would cry "camera," recognizing it to be the real and unalterable truth—at last became unclouded with the rising of the sun, he sat up and looked around him for stimulation.

The sampan was anchored. The water was calm and smooth. Both sails were reefed. There was no breeze blowing.

But lo and behold——

Fourteen, the same unkempt, tousled animal of the camp, was busy in the sampan's bottom among a half a ton of herring that lay there in a live, shimmering mass, surfaced with flopping, wiggling and jumping blue-silver fish with red gills that were yawning and contracting in hundreds of places on the pile at infinitesimally different times.

Tim Lafferty was delighted at the immediate prospect of an unusual breakfast with savory delights unexperienced by him for a long time, and at the future possibilities of realizing some spending-money for his stay in town.

"Hey," shouted Tim. "Catchum breakfast, Fourteen?"

The process of his morning ablutions had its imperfections. He ducked his head over the side and brought it up with his face red and dripping, his hair plastered in his eyes. There was a sensitive bump the Buriat's pistol-butt had left.

When Tim had donned his tunic, he put back Ugin Xiebun and his wife in between that and his shirt, where they bulged a little, but by virtue of that, kept themselves from being lost. This Tim did with his back turned to his crew.

A coolie and the Fates may have understandings between them—there is no thought of fatalism as far as being practical in daily life is concerned. A coolie left with certain objects in his environment wherewith he may better his lot is sure to take advantage of them. No European, except perhaps a German, would have thought of salvaging the brass cordite-containers of ordinary rifle ammunition that men had thrown away when these were ejected from their magazines in the maneuver area.

He who wraps dirty rags around his miserable body for clothes can see in even less desirable things qualities of commodity.

The Fates knew there would be a definite outcome when they left Fourteen and the Korean boy in the night on Ussuri Bay in a fishing-sampan with nets ready for use. Fourteen had not thought of the *thought* of sleep. And there had been a reward.

Tim Lafferty gripped a slimy two-pounder from the top of the pile, slit it from mouth to vent with his jack-knife and removed its viscera. Broiled over the red charcoal fire, that same fish to Tim Lafferty tasted mighty good.

Fourteen brought him fresh water and mouthed at him an abundance of understandable jargon, bowing and scraping in his accustomed manner.

The Korean boy wore a smile this morning, but bore about him now the look of a child expecting punishment.

The volubility of his henchman Tim passed off with good grace, throwing in a "Yes" now and then and a nod of his head whenever he thought he should.

When the day was older the sails went aloft again. A long process began of tacking back to land. Fourteen made Tim think the coolie had, in some past season, served an apprenticeship with the fishermen.

Toward noon they were inside of the Golden Horn at Vladivostok, stretching pond-like from the Bay of Peter the Great to Rotten Corner—a crescent of docks where tramp-*marus* * were docked but here and there, and masts were rare; with its beach of many-colored pebbles, littered with purple star-fish and fragile, vile-smelling sea-urchins and the flotsam and jetsam of an Asiatic sea.

The south wind was behind them as they rode into port; Tim at the tiller, and Fourteen and the boy on their bellies forward, gazing big-eyed at the town.

*Steamer (Japanese word).

VIII

THERE, half-way up the hill, beyond the beach and its Bund, was the railroad station, a big, green-drab building like an Orthodox church; now the home of a hundred or more refugees from the interior, who lived in extreme privation and daily grew less from typhus and were supplemented when the trains came in; the scene also of several revolutionary clashes, some of which were important and serious.

A platoon of Japanese soldiers went down the Bund, every man wearing as part of his equipment a scarlet cap-band and a short coat padded with what looked like poodle-fur.

Farther over to the north lay the town proper beyond a long and monotonous conglomeration of houses rudely built without any thought of exterior beauty—set at the feet of a camel's back of tawny, black and purple sand and gravel hills that are the farthest-east foothills of the Stanavoi ranges. There was the cathedral with its bulbous spires, the most attractive object against the skyline. And here on the water-front were three war-ships, gray, hostile, forbidding, bristling with guns; one from the United States, one from Great Britain and one from the Japanese Empire.

Beyond the last of these Tim swung the sampan shoreward. Around her gray stern, higher than a house above their heads, the sampan went, straight into a forest of Korean masts that Tim could not have seen. He made no panicky effort to 'bout ship, but kept on and let her strike the dock.

The business of tying fast took but a while. This was witnessed by a crowd of Koreans and Bund loafers, who showed interest and stared at Tim. On the bund, where the fish-market was being conducted with noise and argumentation and haggling, Tim, doing his own staring, saw a short, thick-set Buriat with a green band around his forehead—and others like him.

Safe in Tim Lafferty's tunic, far from their sanctuary, were Ugin Xiebun and his mate. To Tim they were security for a few days' absence. To their pensioners they were holy, fearful things that were to be got back even at the cost of lives. Tim knew clearly that his prize jeoparded his person, but he had no idea of the howling hell that might break loose because of him.

Fourteen came aft again with an oration in his peculiar, singsong and variously nasal and guttural *patois*. Tim was brought to understand that it was now time to realize on the night's catch.

Fourteen went among the buyers. After a while he returned with several, who peered over the gunwales and chattered to one another excitedly. A low price is a suspicion-breeder. A handful of paper rubles was about to pass; but a man with a green headband shouted volubly; heads turned in his direction; the chattering grew into low-voiced discussion. The buyers left suddenly and resumed their business with their less doubtful associates. Tim's face muscles tensed when he saw the boycott start.

The disappearance of the Korean boy, too, made him feel serious.

Not a kopeck for the boatload of fresh herring could be obtained from the yellow men who bought on the Bund.

Disconsolate, Tim sat upon the gunwale, watching the reflections of the sampan's masts wriggling below him while she swung lazily in the tide, jostling now her starboard, now her port against her sampan neighbors. But Tim Lafferty was not missing anything.

Just as often as the disorderly and grimy Chinese and Japanese and Koreans and Buriats, all in the weird and tatter-tag-tail robes and rags of the Far East, thinned out a little and there was a possibility of a cessation of business, Tim, with his convalescent head, his guilty conscience and the confusion that was with him from last night and the dogged determination to hold fast to Ugin Xiebun, even as Ugin Xiebun held fast to his own better half, saw—at first he only thought he saw, but he did see—glares and scowls and looks of anger which took in him, Fourteen and the sampan.

At this time back in Gournastai there was sorrow.

Major McKay had learned that his old friend had been unsuccessful in trying to fight off the moon-madness that seized him now and again; that same soul-disease the major thought would one day eventually result in Tim's death.

IX

TIM LAFFERTY felt all alone in the world. Depression and melancholy were creeping over, encroaching upon and trying to overwhelm that self-confidence that lives in every man of his race.

Then down the Bund came walking with the crowd a man with a mild face and a timid manner. He was in the uniform of a service organization. On the outskirts of the fish-market he came to a halt and began to look about him in an uncertain and embarrassed way, as if he dreaded an encounter with the half-savage Mongolians there.

Melancholy to an Irishman is the forerunner of ideas and of quick and energetic action. To Tim Lafferty, dangling his legs disinterestedly over the stern of the sampan, the sight of an Englishman looking for an opportunity to purchase provender without exerting an effort to prevail upon a bunch of muscle-smiling, more than acute barbarian salesmen to conduct an honest sale with him—that was a stimulus that caused his emotions to run riot.

He was absent without leave, hemmed in by a lot of Asiatics whom he had grossly and almost hopelessly offended—and penniless. He felt in his mackinaw pockets. He found nothing but tobacco dust, a few dirty matches, a bit of string and a pack of dry, charity-issued fags. Slapping the pockets of his tunic, he came upon nothing but his paybook, a few letters, two photographs of himself posing like a bartender between a potted palm and a *papier-mâché* rock, thirty copecks in stamps and a tattered one-ruble note.

There were some cigar-store coupons, but Tim knew well the dangers of trying to pass these as American money. That *had* been done. The dynamo of his mind was buzzing now.

Money and a way out with the *shamans*. Money and a disguise. Could he make himself look like a coolie?

Tim Lafferty called Fourteen. He seized Fourteen by both arms and pulled him forcibly below deck. There was the noise of a scuffle and an outcry and then quiet. Quiet.

Fifteen minutes later two figures were on deck, one in the mackinaw, tunic and slacks of a batman, the other in a coolie's ragged clothes. The latter one climbed over the gunwale and dropped ashore. This same one in a short time found out the mild-mannered man, whom it touched on the shoulder, bowing in a servile way and smirking.

"You wantee fish, mister, sir?" it asked. "Me speakum Engleez, workum long time C. P. R. boat. You wantee fish?"

The prospective customer started, drew back, as if loathing the too-near presence of a Buriat laborer—whose people throw him putrid *arsa* out of their sour-milk barrels and spit upon him—but he was prevailed upon to allow himself to be conducted to the sampan's side. He looked at the flopping herring. It was easy to see that they were fresh-caught.

"How much?" he asked.

"One hundred flifty rubles if please, mister," came the answer, with the same bowings and servile scrapings and hypocritical grimaces.

This was unbelievable to the mild-faced man. He had to be told more than once. At length the money changed hands.

Five men in fatigue clothes came later with baskets and emptied the sampan's hold.

When they went away with their last load, the last two of them having empty baskets, they were startled by what they heard.

It was a wild Irish laugh, the same one that had been laughed by an ancestor of Tim Lafferty in the face of the enemy with Brian Boru on the plains of Clontarf—a weird, soulful, mirthful roar, startling because it came from the throat of a man in the clothes of a wretched coolie sitting on the gunwale of a Korean sampan.

In Vladivostok there is an old Tatar arch of strange design, made of dark-brown stone, built long centuries ago, supposedly during some Tatar prince's reign over the seven hills; for the descendants of Genghis Khan are known once to have held dominion there. There is a distinct contrast between this massive structure with its involved traceries in carved rock and its grotesques, and the log-cabin-like, outwardly unfinished houses of the Russians that are stacked in irregular rows on the hillside to its right and left. In the warm weather sandy mud, permeated disagreeably with refuse and trash and a few patches of crude, old cobblestones, forms the street pavement there.

It was under this arch that a man clad as a coolie and another in the slacks, tunic and mackinaw of a soldier stopped while Tim Lafferty without any examination of conscience or query at all to his higher self counted out from a stack of much worn paper money seventy-five rubles, which he handed over to his comrade without a word. A coolie's heart leaped at the possession of

so much money. It was getting dark now, and the shadows were thick under the arch. On the bund a deserted sampan banged lazily at her moorings.

The man in the slacks and mackinaw, whose carriage now was not military and whose arms had a tendency to hang akimbo, took leave of the man in the coolie bonnet and jacket inscribed with a Buriat character and turned out of the shadows at a half dog-trot, headed for the coolie quarter. The man in the coolie rags went out from the arch's secrecy in the other direction.

As he turned out of the shadows with his money in his hand—he seemed not to know where to stow it in his oddly matched and poorly put-together clothes—three figures stepped up to him.

He saw the glint of beady eyes beneath a shock of black hair tied with a green cincture. His eyes dimmed as he fell in a heap in the mud and muck.

Three Russian sailors, a boy in the uniform of the industrial school, a Russian Orthodox priest in a long flowing caftan, and an Italian *carabiniere* went by under the arch. Without ado they simply stepped out of the way of the Buriats bending over Tim's helpless and unconscious form, which had been dragged to a half-sitting-up posture, sagging, while yellow hands clawed within his bosom. Such a thing was not to be questioned on the streets of Vladivostok, where it is true that dead bodies lie often neglected in the streets while the process for their removal works as slowly and deliberately as that of a Western city for the removal of dead cats, dogs, and horses.

That was how Ugin Xiebun and his inseparable wife were got back by their disciples, who had been careless enough to allow them to be stolen by a trophy-hunter's body-servant.

That was how a coolie came to wear a white man's clothes.

X

A STREET-CAR like the kind one may find on the nursery floor of almost any home in America or Europe—with one truck, a coat of paint that had once been gaudy, knocked and worn and discolored around the points of friction, having a little headlight that glowed fitfully and letters showily painted on its sides—crammed with a cosmopolitan complement of Russians, Japs, Korean tribesmen, Indo-Chinese, Chinese, Filipinos, and with an overflow of coolies on its platform steps, started from Rotten Corner and in the twilight, came fitfully along Swetlanskaya Street, past the cathedral, the American embassy, so called, the heavily barred banks of the little business section, blank fences, droshkies, waiting; armored cars, photographers' shops, *torglobas*—the *estaminets* of the Russias—Czecho-Slovack headquarters with its red and white flag, the Polinskaya Theater, a block off the thoroughfare, and all the numberless foreign Asiatic and mysterious things of the Far East one can see on Vladivostok's streets.

The fresh smell of the night wind off Amur Bay was in the air; the odor of strange things cooking; the smell of soft-coal smoke. Orange and flame color were all awash in the western sky.

It is three miles from Rotten Corner to the railroad station—that pompous but fearful temple erected to the reverence of the Trans-Siberian's eastern terminus.

By the time the little trolley car had reached here and the whiskered conductor had contrived to collect his fare of thirty copecks from his inside passengers—it was hopeless to try to reach the coolies who hung on behind—the night was come.

The motorman was hungry, so he left his car and sought out a *stolobia*. There was vodka to be had. The night trolley service in Vladivostok was abandoned. After that it was necessary to take a droshky or walk.

Tim Lafferty found he was able to walk. A few minutes of sitting weakly back against the masonry of the arch, and he had determined to try. He smiled a wistful, one-sided smile to himself as he felt of a big bump over his right eye and brought down before his eyes fingers that were wet and red.

In the sick limbo of coming-to he had found still clenched in his right hand under him the seventy-five rubles he had kept as his share of what he had got for the herring. But his chest was bare and dreadfully cold where Ugin Xiebun and his little partner had nestled. The scrolls and the wheels with the goat's hair were gone too. He had nothing at all with which he might appease the ire of Major McKay. But that glorious lack of balance between the effects of the

emotions and the intellect which an Irishman has was not lacking in Tim Lafferty.

"Gone, is it?" said this man to himself as he sat in a coolie's nondescript costume beneath the arch, thinking rather of what he was going to do than of what had happened to him, and referring to Ugin Xiebun.

"Then, bedad, I'll not go back to my own people, nor will I wear the garb of a white man again until I *get it back* from the yellow devils themselves, by the skull of St. Bride and the holy turf of Kildare."

There was a red light in his eyes.

"And I'll bring back another one like it to make up," he vowed.

XI

TIM walked. His emotions seethed within his brain. They thrust each other out of place, one by one. He crossed Swetlanskaya Street, lighted in a glare of opaque electric blues and greens from old and badly cared-for arc-lights.

Up the side of the camel-back sand hill to the west he walked, along a walk of boards with wooden hand-railings. Now there was a gas lamp here and there. The ditches by the road gave off a stench. The smell of soft-coal smoke hung about the cross-streets.

Trumpets were being sounded at the railroad crossings, and an engine like one thought wonderful in America in 1887, with a ballooning stack, went by lumberingly—one could almost count the slidings of its pistons—dragging a train of toy-like passenger-cars. Tim had to wait for the gates to go up.

A young Russian stumbled against him. Tim saw the gilt buttons and starred epaulets of the old Imperial Army, and caught from the nearness of the man a whiff of synthetic ethers that made the backs of his hands feel leaden.

The stumbling pedestrian, a mere boy with the first hair upon his upper lip, turned away from the boards and went into a doorway at the foot of a flight of broken steps. At the bottom he stopped drunkenly and made the sign of the cross. A light burned at the head of the stairs.

Tim walked to the top of Copeck Hill, and stood where the devil's dominion's highest eminence stood opposite a Russian Orthodox church on a neighboring hill, with its gilded, bulging, attenuated domes. There was a crowd on Copeck Hill; the personnel of crime, curiosity, accidence and debauchery. A few women and some old men passed by the lonely church.

The seething emotions were more orderly now.

Memory of a man's alcoholic breath and instinctive hunger and thirst were uppermost in Tim's mind.

Not knowing where to go to obtain food and drink, he wandered aimlessly.

The sound of the music of stringed instruments came to him.

He saw through the windows of a place that looked like an American small town general store three men and a woman sitting at odd, fiddle-like contrivances, playing for a half-dozen men who sat at tables. He went in.

A disturbance arose at his entrance. He had forgotten. A pretty peasant girl, buxom and red-cheeked enough but with crossed eyes, came up to him and jabbered at him, making wry faces. He was ready to break into English to explain himself; but he caught the armband of an "M. P." in the corner. This person was looking at him curiously, and commenting to himself on the remarkable Celtic cast of countenance "that coolie had." So Tim got out.

But through the window he showed her the wad of paper money—notes emblazoned with the eagle of a fallen empire—and pointed out bread and liverwurst and other things. He sat on the doorstep in the cold like a tramp and ate.

Warmth. That was what he wanted—to feel the gentle, healing light of a glowing fire and to feel the soothing fulness of after-supper and to accede a bit to an old man's digestive drowsiness.

In the guise of the want of warmth the old urge had come back, armed with the memory of the breath of a man that had been wine-bibbing.

Tim found out a vodka-shop. He bought two tin cans full of Japanese vodka. He became lost to the world and to himself. He was asleep in the arms of the Great Oblivion.

Kamen Ribolov is a town on Lake Khanka, one hundred and thirteen miles from Vladivostok.

It is a long way out. And there is no way to get to Kamen Ribolov save by the difficult over-the-hills trails of the tribesmen, through the roughest of unfriendly country, and by railway. Nikolsk is the half-way point.

Kamen Ribolov has its main street, a kind of lesser Swetlanskaya Street; its cathedral, its Mongol quarter and its station still with traces of the Tatar architecture that is the blood-brother of Byzantine. Omsk, Tomsk, Tobolsk, Irkutsk, Ekaterinburg and Tcheliabinsk are all generally alike, and Kamen Ribolov is just another little one of them.

This is where, days later, a man that looked like a coolie with an Irish face lay sleeping in a watchman's hut.

Kamen Ribolov. Tim Lafferty had never heard of the place.

XII

"FOR ——'s sake, look what's coming!"

That was what one of the scouts called to his brother across the road one twilight. The other put down his field-glasses and looked.

"Well, I'll be ——," he said. "The old dog is coming back alive."

The rest of them, eating mulligan and toast liberally buttered with melted cheese by "Scotty" the cook, and drinking bitter tea with vodka in it, were oblivious to the news until one of them looked out of the mullioned window of the substaff barracks, a thousand yards across the bed of Gournastai Creek to the Vladivostok Road. He let a yell out of him that made everybody else jump and a shell-shocked man turn pale.

"What the —— is it?" somebody asked in the general overturning of benches and stamping of heavy shoes to the windows.

"Look, look!"

"Our Little Sunshine is with us again."

"See him coming down the road? Old Tim Lafferty."

"Gosh, what a hangover!"

"He doesn't look like the same man."

"Lord, how we've missed him!"

"The —— old fool!"

"A. w. l.!"

"Hope the O. C. is easy with him."

"He'll have a story to tell."

Here was a news occurrence in the monotony of the post that was without precedent.

They saw the two scouts accost the figure in mackinaw and slacks and muskrat bonnet. They saw the scouts come down the road fifty feet or more, one on each side of him, in an animated conversation.

They went back to their places at the roughly made table and board-benches and went on with their meal. There wasn't a man among them who did not want to tear down the road like a schoolboy to great the "life of the mess" and hear his tale. But no one moved. Ethics demanded the concealment of enthusiasm after such an unrestrained outburst.

Ten minutes, fifteen minutes, and no Tim. The lance corporal of the scouts went out in front to look for him.

There he found a yellow man in Tim Lafferty's clothes, sleek and well fed, but mystified and lost-looking.

"Where Teem?" the Buriat asked. "Me look-see Teem. No can."

"Fourteen!" gasped the corporal.

He was astonished. There was a note of disappointment in his voice, and curiosity and amusement. The first thing he did was to bring the coolie into the vestibule of the mess. Knives and forks ceased clattering when he went back in.

Said the corporal:

"Gentlemen, we have with us this evening—" there was a perfect silence and a full quota of attention— "not according to your expectations, the Hon. Timothy Lafferty, batman to his lordship, Major Sir Hugh Alan Smith-McKay, baronet, but in his clothes the batman to the aforementioned Lafferty. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you—Fourteen."

Here he pulled into the room the unwilling and cringing coolie and thrust him alone in front of the batmen, scouts, signalers and runners who made up the substaff.

There was a tremendous guffaw of surprize, astonishment, wonder—and a succession of guttural and bass noises, the strangled wrecks of things half-said and the instinctive exclamations of men taken utterly off their guard; the consummation of which was the expression, "Well, I'll be ——."

Fourteen did not look like a soldier; but the long lip he had, and the prominent cheekbones and the beady subtleness in his

eyes, made him look uncannily like Tim. His apologetic, servile and fawning celestial self came out and obliterated the memory of all that when they began to question him.

"Where's Tim?"

"How did you get his clothes?"

"Do you know where he is?"

"What's this anyway; a trick of his?"

"Did he come back to camp with you?"

Finally the lance-corporal's inserted admonition stopped them short.

"Aw, listen, this bird can't understand you blokes at all. —— blimey, you might just as well be talking to a dead man, right."

There was a lull. Interest in Fourteen died away. And then, "Get the —— out of here, you lousy yap," said someone, who unceremoniously bade the hangdog Buriat good night by shoving him out into the cold. Fourteen was murmuring a thousand explanations in his own tongue, and wailing—

"No spik—no spik."

Drearily thereafter he hung around the cookhouse daily, and nightly after clandestinely peering into the windows of the substaff billet went away to his accustomed hole without consolation.

A long and intense council of war followed Fourteen's being ejected after his failure as an informant. Lights burned in the little stone building long after the cold and tired-out bugler of the general's guard had sounded the two long-drawn notes of "Lights Out," which reechoed wistfully and wearily away to nothing in the hills and dales and fortress caverns.

It developed during the council that one of Tim's buddies had heard that the military police had picked up a coolie in khaki and had let him go again, when questioning through an incompetent interpreter had been unsuccessful.

The talk drifted to Tim's virtues. The forgetfulness of his faults seemed to betoken the eulogy of a dead man that knows no adverse criticism.

XIII

DAYS later, just before "Last Post," a patrol was going down the Vladivostok Road. Just at the turn to the south of Hill General Suvorov the number-one man, hearing the thump of a half-shod Siberian pony and the rumble of a coolie cart, signaled the occurrence to three, four and five and the sergeant. They all waited together, determined to halt the cart and inspect it thoroughly before allowing it to go within bounds.

Even now, far over Cavalry Trail, there was the red light of a brush fire burning, and the fire picket, with shovels and burlap, were marching to it "on the double."

They and their young subaltern had hoped to spend the night reading and smoking and in their blankets until reveille.

A coolie cart is a primitive, sledge-like wagon, about seven feet long and four feet high, concave, with squared ends resting on four wheels. It has no springs, no dash or tail board, nor any of the characteristics of a modern horse-drawn vehicle.

It is pulled by a stunted pony, never currycombed; tousled, like its driver, and fastened between two shafts with rope and tag-tail harness. Sometimes the pony has a mate, which is fastened to the shaft on his off side by a collar-and-chain arrangement that would make a Humane Society's suburban representative throw up his or her hands with anguish.

When merchandise or supplies in abundance are needed in out-of-town localities in Siberia, trains of fifty or more coolie carts deliver them, convoyed by police or soldiery of some description. A coolie convoy coming into Gournastai could often be seen from the substaff barracks, and the snap of a coolie driver's whip and his hoarse cry were familiar noises. But one coolie cart at night is a rarity and a cause of suspicion.

It was at the southern extremity of Hill General Suvorov where the coolie cart that the patrol was waiting for turned out into the moonlight.

Along it came, swinging lazily a little from side to side, its pony trotting along with its shaggy head down as if it were tired, and the familiar lolling, cross-legged coolie figure bent as if with fatigue. The coolie's ear-flaps were apart and his bonnet was unfastened.

As he passed the first man of the patrol his face turned tiredly up into the moonlight. It was very pale. Over one eye was an ugly lump. The cheeks were drawn.

"Halt," cried the sergeant.

"Whoa," said an Aryan voice.

The pony did not stop. The corporal of the patrol stepped out, and, seizing it by the bridle, flung it back upon its haunches.

"Take a good look at him, sergeant."

There was nothing in the cart but an empty vodka-tin. The sergeant peered into his face—the strangest Oriental face he had ever seen; one with only the traces of slant eyes and protruding teeth. Could he have been one of the coolies that worked around the billet? Wasn't it some one who—Why, that same intricate figure on this man's back was like the one Fourteen, Tim Lafferty's batman, used to wear.

"It's me, sarge," said Tim drunkenly. "Let me go. I'll report myself. When I was in the Pun—when I was in the *Punjab* in *India*— Let me go."

It was a worn, weak Tim Lafferty who could get no further than the beginning of one of his favorite anecdotes.

"When I was in the Pun—Punjab in India the sergeant let me go."

"Welcome back, Tim," said the sergeant, acting out the complacency he did not feel, and added:

"See that you do. You'll be in *my* report."

His attention was little on his work for the rest of his shift.

Up through Officers' Row rode Tim Lafferty in the disguise of a coolie, and in a cloud of dust Tim Lafferty drew up his coolie cart before the staff's holy diggings.

In the rags of a coolie, still obviously drunk, Tim Lafferty dashed into the room of Hugh Alan Smith-McKay, staff captain of intelligence. A long, graceful figure in immaculate khaki with red lapel tabs leaped from a window-seat to catch Tim's tottering form.

"Why, Tim, old friend—it's all right——"

Obviously drunk, Tim Lafferty stabilized himself by placing his left arm on the spotless shoulder of Major McKay, and began digging with his right hand in the bosom of his tattered shirt.

"I'm back, old Mac—I'm back. And look what I got. Just look what I got."

One and two at a time he pulled out of his bosom and presented to Major McKay seven complete sets of shrine documents of the *shaman*-worshipers, a row of sister and brother *shamans* of tin, three inches high, all hand in hand like paper dolls; and last, still fastened on a wheel to which hung a festoon of black goat's hair—*Ugin Xiebun and his never-to-be-eluded wife.*

"I knew I'd get them. I got them."

The major was amazed. Tim Lafferty smiled; the pallor of his sickness gave way a little to the old simple blush, and:

"Where the ——'s Fourteen?" he asked. "Did he come back? I got his clothes—I want mine."

His laugh was a broken one, not at all like the one an old-time Tim Lafferty had laughed on the plains of Clontarf long ago.

"He came back, too, Tim. I wondered how in —— he got your clothes. Thought perhaps he'd murdered you. My ——, man, these things are invaluable to me! How can I ever thank you? There is something——"

He went to his desk and came back with a little white square of paper.

"I intended to give this to you before you went away. Take it. And hadn't you better report sick and get the stuff out of you? Corporal," he called.

There was a click of the heels.

ON HIS unsteady way to the hospital Tim Lafferty of a sudden found himself tackled about the knees by a man who was crying like an animal.

"Git out o' there, Fourteen; I'm no 'eathen idol to be kow-towed to. Are you glad I'm back?"

"Teem, Teem," the coolie kept saying in a distracted manner.

Real joy comes rarely to a Buriat of the laboring class, whose own people throw him putrid *arsa* to eat out of their sour-milk barrels. The man who fed him and took him to the movies and treated him almost like a lesser brother was a god to him.

"Come along; I'll be needing the clothing you've got on your manly shoulders, and you can have this back with all its inhabitants for that, when I get out of hospital blues," said Tim.

He confided to the sergeant of the medical corps later that he hoped to recuperate soon, and that he had a recollection of having been convivial with a Russian sailor from Brooklyn and a Czecho-Slovack soldier from Schenectady in the course of his fall from grace; but no recollection had he at all of where he had been, or how, according to the vow that he had made, he had managed to get the shrine-spoils that were so precious to his old friend.

When the same sergeant was signing him in he took a look at the square of paper that the major had given him. It was a signed pass, with the period of leave left blank.

Tim chuckled. This now was the mirth that had disheartened the enemies of Brian Boru.

They brought him his cap. He took a look at its battered remains and began to sing in a quavering voice, sitting up in his cot—

"It's old, but it's beautiful—
The hat me father wore."

EASTERN SIOUX AND CHEYENNE CALENDAR

by **Frank H. Huston**

AS THE Cheyenne and Arapaho—or Ara-pi-hu—were distinguished by division into Northern and Southern branches, so the Sioux will be found divided into the Eastern and Western or Teton Sioux. The latter were buffalo-hunters purely and approximated the Sha-e-la in customs and mode of life, but the former, living under different geographic and other conditions, reckoned their time by different signs from their Western kin, as comparison will show, though many "moons" have identical names.

Eastern Sioux Calendar

MOON
1st . . . . Hard to Bear.
2d . . . . Coons Come.
3d . . . . Sore-Eyed Moon (being the 6th in Cheyenne chronology).
4th . . . . Geese Lay Eggs.
5th . . . . Planting Month (being the 9th in Cheyenne chronology).
6th . . . . Strawberries Ripe.
7th . . . . Harvest.
8th . . . . Wild Rice Ripe.
9th . . . . (No name.)
10th . . . . (No name.)
11th . . . . Deer Rutting.
12th . . . . Deer Shed Horns.

It is noticeable that they account for only ten months though admitting there are frequently twelve moons, but say they have no names for them.

The Eastern Sioux men were not dependent upon the buffalo alone, agriculture being largely practised—note reference in chronology to planting and harvest. Wild fowl and fish were utilized for food, the latter article being anathema to the "meat eaters" farther "toward the sun goes to sleep," although berries and roots formed part of the diet among all tribes.

Cheyenne Calendar

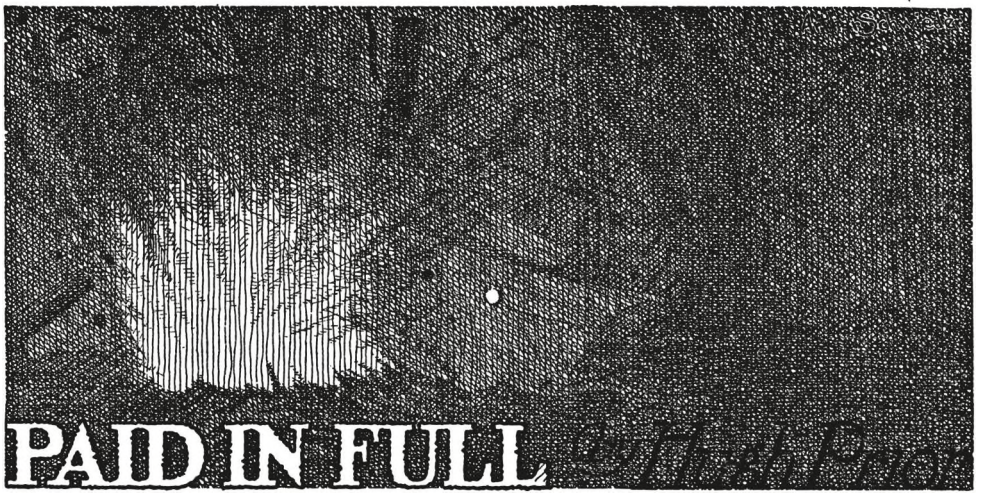
Among the Cheyennes or "Sha-e-la," or "So-sis-e-tas" as they called themselves, the passage of time was reckoned by Summers and Winters, more minutely by days and months or "moons." This was more or less customary among all American Indians.

Occasionally, after some thought, an old man would state that he had at times observed thirteen moons in the course of a year, but could give no name for the thirteenth.

Their new year began about October or November, as is evidenced by the names given. The following is the Cheyenne calendar only:

MOON
1st . . . Leaves Fall Off.
2d . . . . Buffalo Cow Fetus Getting Big.
3d . . . . Wolves Run Together.
4th . . . . Buffalo Fetus Begins to Color.
5th . . . . Buffalo Fetus Gets Thick Hair.
6th . . . . Sore-Eyed Moon (Buffalo drops calf).
7th . . . . Ducks Come.
8th . . . . Grass Green, and Eat Some Roots.
9th . . . . Corn Planted.
10th . . . . Buffalo Bulls Fat.
11th . . . . Buffalo Cows in Season.
12th . . . . Plums Get Red.

Note the frequent reference to the bison. Like the Tetonwan Sioux, the Sha-e-la were purely buffalo-hunters, their whole existence, food, clothes, houses, etc., being dependent upon these animals, absolutely nothing of the carcass being wasted.



FROM his perch on the edge of the lofty table-land Sergeant Reeve, of the Fifth King's African Rifles, slowly swept his glasses over the country at its base. The inquisitive little disks overlooked nothing. Yard by yard they searched the edge of the dark, impenetrable jungle below, which rolled away like a dense, black fog into the distant blue haze. They lingered over the narrow stretch of veld, sparsely dotted with scrub bush, that lay between the jungle's edge and the creek beyond, the only remaining channel of communication between the fierce Kavirondo rebels and the villainous gun-runner, Pedro Lorizo.

But the sergeant's anxious eyes encountered no signs of life. Not even the black dots that indicated the ubiquitous zebra and kongoni were visible, for the climbing sun had not yet touched their lairs.

For three days those vigilant glasses had sentineled the dangerous pass. They were the eyes of the little section of regulars that was laboring to roll up its mountain battery and plant it on the table-land's crest. The broad creek formed the southern boundary of the disaffected territory, while all the passes to the north were held by small forces with their dreaded eighteen-pounders.

Once this last pass was secure, the insurgent tribe, cut off from further supplies of rifles or ammunition, would soon cease to be a menace to helpless women and children.

The creek, if creek it could be called, stretched like the reeking tentacle of some foul, disease-breathing monster from Victoria Nyanza deep into the heart of East Africa. From time immemorial it had been tabu to the Kavirondo, in whom no nomadic instincts survived. Fearless as the rebels were, none of them, for any threat or reward, would essay its dead waters. Countless giant crocodiles, with a sprinkling of hippopotami, were its undisputed lords and masters.

Lorizo, the Portuguese half-breed, was known to have sneaked northward on Victoria Nyanza with a boatload of rifles and ammunition. His little craft, aptly named the *Mosquito*, had eluded the two fast gunboats that were scouring the lake for him; and where he had landed his cargo, and in what uncanny way his little steamer had slipped southward again, were complete mysteries.

The sergeant shut his glasses and turned back toward the two tents that made up the little sheltered camp. His face wore a troubled expression, which deepened as he neared the tents. To the waiting boys he gave a curt word of command. A moment later blue curls of smoke rose lazily on the still morning air. At the entrance to his tent the sergeant was halted by a gruff voice.

"Sargint!"

There was no mistaking the menace in the tone.

Reeve turned and faced the man who had emerged from the second tent. He was a rough-looking giant, with the shoulders of an ox. His powerful arms, bare to the elbow, hung at his sides as if itching for action, and the open neck of his khaki shirt

displayed ridges of a great, hairy chest. He was glaring at the sergeant with a pair of bloodshot blue eyes.

"Well, O'Moore," said Reeve quietly, "what do you want?"

The sergeant's calm tones, or the question, or both, stirred up the smoldering rage in the other.

"Ye know well what I want, an' I mane to have it," he snarled, taking a step forward and thrusting out a pugnacious jaw.

"If it's whisky you mean, you've had enough," Reeve answered. "You've been half-drunk for the last two days, and we don't know the minute the Kavirondo or the gun-runners may appear out there in the pass. Besides, our section with the guns must be——"

"Cut out yer preachin'. What have ye done with the dhrink?" roared the Irishman, advancing with clenched fists.

Reeve did not flinch. His duty was clear, and he had made up his mind to do it. O'Moore and he were the only whites in the advanced outpost and, come what might, O'Moore would get no more liquor.

By some means he had smuggled a supply into the camp and, though not going so far as to get drunk, for two days had been nibbling steadily at it. O'Moore, though the best of soldiers and comrades when sober, was a very devil in his cups. That, and the fact that the Irishman's besetting sin had lately caused his reduction from the rank of sergeant to that of corporal, made Reeve reluctant to exercise his authority.

To avoid a collision with his comrade while he was at all under the influence of liquor, Reeve had resorted to strategy. He waited, the night before, until O'Moore was safely asleep, then crept into his tent, carried off what remained of the fire water and hid it. A sober O'Moore, he reflected, would listen to reason.

But O'Moore, though sober enough now, was in the grip of the reaction that follows tippling. His craving for more whisky and the discovery of his loss, which he knew was Reeve's work, thoroughly maddened him.

He stopped within two feet of the sergeant, towering over him, though Reeve was by no means a small man. All the swift anger of his race, augmented and fed by the two days' drinking, blazed in the Irishman's eyes.

"I tell you, O'Moore, you will get no more liquor," said Reeve doggedly.

O'Moore's right hand shot out and gripped the sergeant's shoulder. His powerful fingers dug into the flesh like pincers.

"Will ye give it up?"

"I will not."

O'Moore's body curved, his right arm stiffened, and the sergeant was hurled sprawling to the ground.

There could be only one outcome to such a challenge. As the sergeant sprang to his feet O'Moore expected a rush, and his big body braced itself to meet it. But Reeve, though his blood was also up now, kept his head. He could box much better than O'Moore, and he meant to make the most of his advantage. Keeping warily beyond reach, he tried to draw the big fellow out.

"Come on, ye sprat," O'Moore yelled, boring in with lowered head and driving fists.

He was met with a stinging blow on the cheek bone. It surprized him and, if possible, added a little to his unreasoning rage. Again he rushed his more agile opponent, totally disregarding the scientific punches Reeve was showering on the upper parts of his face. His lowered head saved his chin, which the sergeant was making vigorous efforts to reach.

His heavy paws were flailing and whirling in all directions. There was little skill behind them, but each carried the kick of a mule. In less serious circumstances Reeve would have laughed at the elephantine efforts of the Irishman. He had no fear of being knocked out and counted on bringing O'Moore back to his senses as soon as he was winded.

But suddenly one of the flying fists connected. Reeve's head went back as if set on a neck of rubber, and for the second time he measured his length on the ground.

A murmur arose from the astonished *askaris*, who thought the white *bwanas* had suddenly gone mad. One of them made an involuntary move toward the fallen sergeant, but backed hastily as O'Moore's sparking eyes fell on him.

Reeve, a bit shaken but unhurt, was quickly on his feet again. With a savage growl O'Moore rushed in, like an animal that had tasted blood. The sergeant gave way before the avalanche of swings and punches. He was able to avoid them without much difficulty, but he could not get in a reply.

Soon, however, O'Moore had to pull up.

He was breathing in heavy gasps, his big chest rising and falling like the side of a spent horse. His fling was beginning to exact its penalty.

The sergeant saw his chance and took it. Springing in with rights and lefts to the face he drove the Irishman back step by step by the sheer rapidity of his blows. O'Moore was staggered, but not yet hurt. His ability to take punishment would have made him a ring favorite.

Snorting like a bulldog, he lunged out blindly with great swishing swings. Most of them went wild, and some the sergeant helped over his shoulder. O'Moore was visibly becoming winded. His punches were as powerful as ever, but they began to come in spurts. Every time they slackened Reeve danced in. He was confident now, and began to carry the fight to O'Moore. He bored in, and in his anxiety to land on the point, stayed in.

But he risked too much for a speedy victory. A terrible right swing caught him full on the jaw and stretched him, still and white, on the brown veld.

With the back of his hand O'Moore wiped away a thin stream of blood that was trickling down his face, and stood staring stupidly at the motionless form of the sergeant. For a time he appeared dazed; a puzzled look was on his face.

Two of the boys approached the unconscious man, but with hesitating steps and eyes watchfully on O'Moore. It was their action that aroused the Irishman from the stupor of his blind rage. It pulled him together like an electric shock. He gave a gasp, and then a hoarse whimper of remorse.

"Och, lad, have I murdhered ye entirely?" he cried, springing forward and brushing the *askaris* aside.

Panting as much from newly awakened fear as from the exertions of the fight, he picked up the limp form and carried it into the sergeant's tent. He laid it tenderly on the canvas bed and turned to the silent, open-mouthed boys crowding round the entrance.

"*Maji baridi*, quick!" he shouted to the nearest.

The boy vanished and returned in a minute with a pannikin of cool water.

O'Moore had to dash the water repeatedly on Reeve's face before it produced an effect. Then, at the first signs of returning consciousness, he hastily left the tent and sent in Reeve's own boy.

The big fellow, a savage a moment before from the combined effects of drink and a fancied injury, now felt like a shamefaced boy. He could not face the sergeant yet.

He went straight to his own tent, picked up his rifle and field-glasses and stole quietly out of the camp.

O'MOORE seated himself on the smooth rock, screened by wild, luxuriant tropical foliage, which Reeve had selected as a look-out post. More from force of habit than from a sense of duty he raised his glasses and scanned the pass for possible signs of the Kavirondo. There were none. The only traces of life were the dark, quivering forms of awakened animals, shaking the dew from their bodies.

He lowered the glasses. A wet, dark smear on the eye-piece rubbed itself off on his hand. He looked at it and lifted a finger to the cut the sergeant's fist had opened above his eye. From it the finger slipped down to a lump on his cheek. A half-grin of grim satisfaction stole over his rugged features. He was glad of the marks; they made him feel a little less guilty.

O'Moore was too good a soldier not to realize the gravity of what he had done. Not only had he struck a superior officer, but when on special, indeed vital, duty, he had all but put himself out of business for two whole days. But he neither expected nor wanted forgiveness from his battered comrade.

His was no unusual story in the army. The switch-back course he was running was crowded with men of his happy-go-lucky type—quick promotion, more money and more freedom; drink, the inevitable fall. Twice he had mounted sergeant's stripes for distinguished conduct in India, and twice he had been reduced to the ranks for wild deeds done on one or other of his periodical bouts. And then, promoted again and transferred to the African regiment, another outburst had cost him one of his stripes.

"He'll get no booze out there," his O. C. had said, when ordering him forward with Reeve on account of his special ability as a signaler.

But he had reckoned without O'Moore's resourcefulness.

The bottle had proved his downfall again.

He admitted somewhat bitterly to himself that Reeve had been right in hiding what remained of the liquor. But he would never have admitted it to the sergeant, or for that matter to any one else.

Still fearful of meeting Reeve, who might come out for a look at the pass, he picked up his rifle and sauntered along the sloping face of the table-land. He had no particular objective in view, other than a shot at any desirable game that might show itself. For the sake of cover he had to keep well up the slope, and his course held him parallel with the creek.

From time to time he swept the pass with his glasses. He knew that, unwholesome as the creek was, rhino, buffalo, even lion, came there to drink, and he kept a close watch on the tangled growths that fringed its edge.

While engaged in one of these leisurely surveys he suddenly stiffened and brought his glasses to an abrupt stop, focused on a spot a couple of miles from where he stood,

"Be the powers!" he muttered excitedly, watching a puff of blackish smoke slowly vanish above the tree-tops. "If anybody's campin' beside that sewer, 'tis shure he has good raison to hide."

Leaning against a tree, he studied the spot with a long and steady gaze. Satisfied at last that his eyes were not tricking him, he wheeled briskly, all his careless attitude gone, to return to camp. Then he remembered and halted abruptly.

"No," he said, "I'll have to invistigate this meself. If annything comes of it, I'll see that Reeve gits the credit. 'Twill make up a bit for the lambastin' I gave the lad. An' if I'm wrong, thin no wan'll be the wiser."

All morning he hung about the slope of the table-land, keeping a close watch on the bush. Toward midday, driven by the urge of a clamorous appetite, he returned to the camp. He went reluctantly enough, for the memory of that last smashing blow he had landed on the sergeant's jaw lingered with him, and it was not a pleasant memory. To his relief Reeve kept to his tent.

"Divil a doubt but he's makin' out me crime-sheet," he said to himself ruefully. "'Tis a dhrum-head I'll be gettin', as shure's me name is O'Moore, an' 'tis no more than I deserve."

Back on the slope he waited, with restless impatience, for the sun to sink and give him the necessary cover of darkness for his solitary venture.

It dipped at last. Bit by bit the heavy shadows swept down the slope and across the pass, finally swallowing up the sinister black breadth of the creek.

Armed only with his heavy service revolver, O'Moore slipped out of the camp in the gloom of the space that comes between sunset and moonrise. He had not seen Reeve when he went back for his second solitary meal, and he said nothing to any of the *askaris* as to his destination or purpose.

THE faintest of breezes moved soundlessly and sluggishly across the pass, bearing with it the foul breath of the creek. A muffled chorus of toads mingled with the intermittent plashings of other slimy inhabitants of the stagnant waters. No other sounds reached O'Moore's ears as he struggled through the dense undergrowth that choked up the narrow spaces between the trees. It was like going through a disused tunnel, for the locked and interwoven branches shut out what faint starlight there was. Occasional fireflies, winging their mazes of threaded light, only emphasised the blackness.

It was hard going. Vicious needle-pointed thorns bit at his flesh like the teeth of living animals. Broad, soft leaves with velvety surfaces swept his face. They were almost worse than the thorns, for their touch was like that of clammy flesh. Snakey vines wound themselves about his arms and legs, calling for the constant use of his knife. Worst of all, swarms of mosquitoes pinged about his head and bit unmercifully.

O'Moore helped his difficult progress with a stream of subdued but pungent criticism of Africa and all its works.

Moving, in spite of the difficulties, with the noiseless caution he had learned on the hills of India, he crept closer and closer to the water's edge. But he came across no signs of human life. He was about to alter his course when a few tiny points of light, gleaming through the bushes, caught his eye. But they were only the reflections of stars on the tar-black water.

To take his bearings he pulled up beside a huge squat tree-trunk, whose thick branches flung their crooked length in every direction Slowly, as his eyes regained their power, the creek, outlined by the

reflected stars, took definite shape for a distance.

His eyes, roaming casually over its surface, were arrested by a dark, bush-clad bulk close to the bank on his left. It looked like a small floating island or a detached lump of the bank. Cautiously moving closer, he peered curiously at it.

For a moment its vaguely familiar lines puzzled him. Then, suddenly, with a sharp intake of breath, he backed again into the dense shadow of the trees.

The black lump was a lake-boat, her side from stem to stern completely hidden behind a cleverly arranged screen of bushes!

Her masts were gone, and her squat funnel might have been just a clump of bushes. Not a glimmer of light was showing anywhere; not a sound broke the death-like stillness on her. But O'Moore had not forgotten the spurts of smoke which had drawn his attention to the spot in the morning.

"Now what divilish thrick is this?" he muttered softly, staring at the silent hull.

What could possibly send a lake-boat into that dead, swampy cesspool? No legitimate business, surely, disguised like that. And what white men would risk the deadly fever-breath of the creek?

At the last thought light came to him in a flash. It was the *Mosquito;* the boat that had vanished so mysteriously from the face of Victoria Nyanza.

This was how Lorizo had tricked the gunboats. Traveling at night, lurking like the reptile he was in the muddy creek by day, he would reach the very heart of the Kavirondo country while bush and Lake coast were being searched for him.

O'Moore's gorge rose as he stared at the silent boat, and thought of the horrible death it was carrying to helpless settlers and their families on their lonely plantations in the highlands.

All his soldier's instincts fully aroused, a few minutes' rapid thinking decided his course of action. To return to camp and report back the boat's presence would be useless. Before his section, with their couple of 18-pounders, could arrive, she would have passed on and scattered her cargo far and wide.

The alternative that presented itself thrilled him. He looked about for means of getting aboard. He found that there would be no difficulty about that, for several trees flung their branches across the few feet that separated the boat from the bank.

Slipping off his heavy boots, he selected a stout branch that overhung the boat near the stern. After carefully testing its strength he swung clear. There was some rustling of leaves, but no creaking, and in a few seconds he dropped softly on the deck beside the deserted wheel. There was sufficient light for him to read the word *Mosquito* painted on it in white letters.

He stared in astonishment at the litter the faint starlight disclosed. It was more like the floor of a junk shop than the deck of a boat. The whole cargo, apparently, was on deck, ready for instant unloading. Everywhere wooden cases were scattered in disorder.

Pausing for a moment to get his bearings, he tip-toed forward, praying that his luck would hold for another ten minutes. If he could get below and get a blaze started, Lorizo's fine piece of strategy would be very suddenly and effectively wrecked.

More than ever now it was vital to avoid detection, for he could scarcely doubt that the man in charge of such a cargo would keep some sort of watch. With redoubled caution he continued to steal forward, eagerly searching for the nearest means of getting below.

At last the dark mouth of a companionway yawned at his feet. After a moment's intent listening he descended, gingerly feeling each step, and found himself, at the end of a dozen steps, in utter blackness. He judged it best to go no farther, for fear of knocking over something, and took out the box of safety matches he had brought. Then he groped about for some material that would burn quickly.

A few minutes fruitless pawing over smooth woodwork exhausted his patience, never a plentiful commodity with O'Moore. Not a sound had yet reached his ears. He began to think that, after all, no watch had been set. Lorizo might be relying on his lonely hiding place for safety.

He determined to risk lighting a match. A flash of light for a second or two might show him just what he wanted. Bending down, he cupped his big hands and rubbed a match gently on the side of the box.

It flared up with a faint hiss, reflecting the painted panels of the woodwork. Nothing there. Still keeping the tiny flame screened he turned to creep farther

along the passage. As he moved the blackness in front seemed to become alive. Instinctively he threw the light ahead and caught a glimpse of a number of figures leaping at him. The next instant he was borne down with a resounding crash.

Mad with disapointment, he struggled like a demon, kicking wildly and lunging out with his powerful fists. Twice he felt his knuckles smash against some part of a face. Then something swished through the air; his head seemed to split in pieces and instant oblivion descended on him.

SLOWLY returning consciousness made O'Moore aware of a terrific pain in his head. It was accompanied by an intense throbbing, a throbbing that seemed to shake his whole body and even the bare wooden floor on which he was lying.

With a great effort he pulled his scattered wits together. He remembered prowling about the deck of the seemingly deserted boat. He recalled the descent of the dark companionway and the search for material to start a fire. And then the shadowy figures and the murderous smash on his head.

A sudden spasm of rage shot through him, clearing away the fog from his brain. He opened his eyes and found total darkness. But he knew he was on the boat, for the floor under his throbbing head actually was throbbing too.

The boat was under weigh.

He sat up with a jerk that caused him to sway drunkenly from side so side. Fear he felt none, but as he realized what had happened a hot fury possessed him. He had failed, bungled the grandest opportunity his whole misspent career had offered. And he had done so by deliberately and stupidly walking into a trap.

Scrambling painfuly to his feet, he felt around his prison. It was a small cabin, empty apparently except for a couple of wooden cases on one side. The door was securely fastened.

The port-hole was filled with a rolled-up bundle of canvas. He removed that and peered out. It was still as dark as when he went on board. The big silver moon that would later throw a twilight glow over the earth had not yet risen. Clearly they had not steamed very far.

Directly opposite he was able to make out a dim tracery of heights, faintly outlined against the starlit sky. He tried to pick out the plateau where the camp was, but below the outline all was black as ink, enveloped in the gloom of the night-wrapped slope. The camp might be there or ten miles away.

Out of the blackness into which his eyes were straining a tiny point of light suddenly winked. It was almost in a direct line with the port-hole. O'Moore's heart bounded; his splitting head lost its pain. They had not yet passed the camp. There was still a possibility of signaling Reeve and making known the presence of the boat.

Frantically he searched for his matches. The piece of canvas in his hand would make a small blaze at least. But the matches were gone, along with his revolver and everything else he had had in his pockets. He was helpless. Doubly now he felt the bitterness of defeat.

Again the minute point of light flashed. It seemed to be turning in different directions. Then it became fixed, and a series of flashes were tapped out. Reeve was signaling.

"C-o-m-e i-n s-e-c-t-i-o-n h-e-r-e," O'Moore read, before the light was switched to repeat the call in another direction.

His section had arrived at last with their little mountain battery.

A groan that was half a sob burst from his lips. At that moment he would not have cared that he was the target if he could have retrieved his blunder by drawing the fire of those guns on the boat.

He stumbled across the cabin and tugged again at the door. It resisted all his efforts. When he had groped his way back to the port-hole the light had vanished. The little beacon of hope was speaking to the empty jungle.

At that moment heavy steps thudded along the alleyway outside. Hastily cramming the canvas back into the port-hole O'Moore flung himself again on the floor, propping his back against the cabin wall and letting his head hang weakly on his chest. The door was flung open and a man entered, a lamp in one hand, a revolver in the other.

After a keen glance at his prisoner the man hung the lamp on a hook in the ceiling and seated himself leisurely on one of the cases, which the light showed to be rifle-cases. O'Moore looked up into as evil a face as it had ever been his ill-luck to see. Lank

black hair overhung a low forehead, from beneath which jutted a hawklike nose. The eyes were black and glittering and the skin about the same color as the old brown service boots O'Moore had discarded. O'Moore had no doubt that he was looking on the notorious half-breed, Lorizo.

His visitor surveyed him with a slow, irritating smile.

"So den, you put your foolish head into de lion's mouth, heh," he said in a deep, rasping voice, "and it nearly was crushed." He smiled again. "Pedro Lorizo is never napping."

"Into the hyena's mouth, ye mane," retorted O'Moore, glaring up at Lorizo.

The smile did not leave Lorizo's face, but the mockery that was in it changed swiftly to ferocity.

"No matter," he said. "De hyena's jaw too is strong."

"An' foul wi' the offal it eats," snapped back O'Moore.

"Well, it nourishes," the half-breed said, and if O'Moore's brain had not been so busy he might have noticed the menacing restraint in the voice. "De stuff on deck, now; you say it is offal, heh?"

"What d'ye expect to git for it?" asked O'Moore.

Lorizo smiled again.

"Oh, dere's plenty room for ivory in de hold," he replied.

"Ivory!" O'Moore laughed. "Man, don't ye know there's not enough ivory in the whole Kavirondo counthry to make a toothpick?"

"So think you pig-headed British," sneered Lorizo. "Have you heard of Nisumu Valley?"

"Shure, iverybody has," replied O'Moore, with another laugh, "an' nobody has iver found a tusk in it."

"Ah, but I have seen," Lorizo said, rubbing his hands. "Buried there, I tell you, is ivory to make a king rich; and for my little boxes—" and he tapped the case he was sitting on—"I take as much as my boat holds. But now, what I came for," he added abruptly changing his tone. "De force you come from, where is it?"

O'Moore looked at him in genuine surprize.

"D'ye expect me to tell ye that?" he asked.

"Better for you," Lorizo answered, grimly.

"I'll see ye —— first," was O'Moore's decisive answer.

"But I will make you," snarled Lorizo, fiercely, thrusting out his vulture-like face.

O'Moore laughed contemptuously.

"You laugh, heh?" shouted the half-breed.

With a swift, catlike motion he sprang off the rifle-case and kicked his prostrate prisoner savagely in the ribs. Then he hopped back, his revolver pointing at O'Moore's head.

"Now laugh, you ——," he said.

But O'Moore was gasping back the breath that had been knocked out of his body. He could not speak, but in his upturned eyes was an expression that caused Lorizo to back another step and grip his revolver more firmly.

O'Moore was still gasping when Lorizo stumbled as if struck and lurched violently against the wall of the cabin. The *Mosquito* had stopped with the suddenness of a collision. The throbbing of the engines paused for an instant, resumed with a few spasmodic jerks, then ceased entirely.

"De weeds again, by ——" Lorizo burst out, with an oath of dismay.

The half-breed's words threw a light on what had been puzzling O'Moore—why the gun-runner had stopped his boat at the narrow pass, the real danger spot of his journey up the creek. Now her propeller was fouled again in its ropey growths, either there or in the tree-roots that shot out from the bank. Some of the latter would have held a battleship.

In the sudden silence that succeeded the throbbing of the engines O'Moore heard the quick thud of booted feet on the deck overhead. Three pairs of them passed in succession—three other desperadoes of Lorizo's kidney to be reckoned with. He made a mental note of the fact.

Still cursing volubly, Lorizo seized the lamp and tore out of the cabin, slamming to and bolting the door.

ALONE in the darkness again, O'Moore lay still until he fully regained his breath. The almost suffocating gust of passion that had shot through him after the half-breed's brutal attack was succeeded by a deadly calm, a calm that left his brain unnaturally clear. For about a quarter of an hour he lay still, thinking harder than he had ever done in his

life. The result was an iron resolution; one that he meant to fulfil at all hazards, if only Lorizo came back in time.

At the sound of the heavy footsteps again approaching he sprang up and crossed to the gun-cases.

Lorizo was still alone. He entered more cautiously this time, holding the lamp above his head and the revolver ready. At sight of his prisoner he lowered it and laughed. O'Moore was sitting on the edge of one of the cases, clinging weakly to it and groaning.

"Now you speak," Lorizo said at once, in a threatening tone, "or by ——, in five minutes de creek get you—with tied hands."

O'Moore half-turned a drawn and twisted face. He looked like a man suffering intense pain.

"Give me a dhrink," he gasped, "an' I'll tell ye annything. I—I'm dyin', I think."

Lorizo hesitated, and took a closer look at the swaying body of the Irishman. Then, apparently satisfied, he stuck his head out of the doorway and called for a boy.

"*Lete tembo*," he ordered when the boy silently materialized out of the shadows.

The boy vanished and returned in a minute with a black bottle, and pattered off again.

With a shaking hand O'Moore took the bottle from Lorizo and conveyed it in a wabbling manner to his mouth. He took a deep gulp, lowered the bottle slowly and held it out toward the half-breed. Lorizo's hand went out, but before he could grasp the bottle O'Moore's fingers relaxed and it dropped to the floor.

Lorizo, cursing the Irishman's clumsiness, stooped hastily to pick it up. O'Moore's eyes, wide open now and glittering with alertness, fixed themselves on the top of the black head. As Lorizo's body straightened and his face rose above the level of the rifle-case O'Moore's right fist shot out like lightning, all the force of his mighty shoulder behind it. It caught the half-breed squarely on the jaw, crumpling him to the floor like a felled ox. With a low growl of triumph O'Moore picked up the revolver and stuck it in his belt.

"Be the shinin' powers, I didn't hope to have it so aisy," he muttered, stepping over the prostrate body to the door.

As there was no fastening on the inside he dragged the two heavy cases up and propped them securely against it.

Then, with feverish haste he tore up the piece of canvas that had plugged up the port-hole, and quickly had the limp form of Lorizo securely trussed hand and foot.

Next he unhooked the lamp, trimmed it with fingers that shook slightly, and placed it before the open port-hole. His only fear now was that the puny rays would not carry to the camp. It glowed steadily for a moment, and then, as O'Moore's practised hand moved up and down, its SOS flashed out.

Again and again, with short pauses between, he repeated it, praying with his mind, if not with his lips, for a reply. But no answering spark winked from the darkness that enveloped the plateau.

Persistently he kept the signal going, but now with sinking hopes, for he began to fear that the boat had steamed to a point where his lamp was invisible from the camp. Minute after minute, interminably lengthened by his impatience and growing apprehension, slid by. Still his calls went out to unresponsive darkness.

A gurgling noise behind reminded O'Moore of his prisoner, whom for the moment he had forgotten. Lorizo, inarticulate with rage, was writhing in his bonds like an ungainly snake. And like a snake's, his small black eyes were fixed on the Irishman with a look of appalling hatred. Leaving the lamp before the port-hole, O'Moore crossed the cabin and looked down on him. Something comical in the twisted, baffled figure appealed to him, and he grinned.

"Lorizo, me lad," he said, "the tables is thurned with a vingeance, eh! That kick ye gave me did more than ye iver imagined—or I meself, for that matther. But I made ye a promise, I belave. I always keep me promises—whin it doesn't inconvaynience me, that is. Ye wanted to know where our throops is. Well, they're up there on the hill, an'——"

The half-breed spat out a stream of abuse that offended even O'Moore's seasoned ears, and roused his temper again.

"Stop that, ye carrion," he roared, pulling the revolver, "or I'll still yer filthy tongue with a lump o' yer own lead."

Lorizo subsided, but his eyes finished what his tongue began; eloquently, too.

"Now listen," O'Moore went on sharply, turning to the door, "if ye want to presarve intact that carcase o' yours, spake as I tell ye whin yer men come."

As he spoke he delivered a few resounding blows on the door with the butt of the revolver.

"Tell thim," he said, between assaults on the door, "the game's up. Tell thim I have signaled the camp an' their only chance is to surrendher at wanst and come in here, hands up, wan at a time. Whin I open the door I'll be safe behind thim cases. Make it sthrong," he added, "for time's short, an' as hivin's high, your life'll pay for anny dhirty work that's thried."

Lorizo read determination in the Irishman's voice and eyes. He agreed by a nod and a grunt that might have been a smothered oath.

"How manny cutthroats have ye?" O'Moore asked.

"Tree; tree Portuguese."

"Three," O'Moore muttered; "well, that's not too manny."

His hammering soon produced results. A rush of feet along the alleyway was followed by the heave of shoulders on the door. But the rifle-cases, propped against cross panels, held firmly.

Two or three voices, speaking together, called out excitedly in a language that O'Moore took to be Portuguese.

Lorizo answered, and a rapid cross fire of words began. As it progressed Lorizo's tone, peremptory at first, began to rise in exasperation, his rolling *carramba's* punctuating every sentence.

Finally, after a slight pause one of the men said something that sounded like a question. Lorizo looked up at O'Moore and answered shortly. Then he turned his eyes again on his captor.

"Speak yourself," he said. "He speak Engleesh."

"Ye heard what yer—" O'Moore began.

But the crack of a revolver cut him short, and a bullet through the door zipped past him, within an inch of his throat.

He replied instantly and jumped back as far as the side of the boat would let him. Following his shot, there was a hasty shuffling of feet outside, which quickly died away in the distance.

O'Moore's eyes, sparking savagely, glared at the mean face of his huddled up prisoner, and his fingers itched on the trigger of the revolver. Had Lorizo been crooked? Had he asked him to speak only to make himself a target for a revolver bullet? He opened his lips, but wisely shut them again. It was more than likely that one of the half-castes was waiting outside for the sound of his voice to guide another bullet.

O'Moore's backward jump had brought him again to the port-hole. While he stood, puzzled as to his next move, sounds from outside caught his ear—splashing and the subdued voices of the crew.

The port-hole was too small to allow the passage of his head, but pressing his face as close to it as possible he saw gleams of light on the water.

They were hard at work clearing the propeller. That would probably be only a matter of minutes, he reflected, for had the foul been a serious one Lorizo would not have returned to the cabin as soon as he did.

 AS HE stood with his mind groping frantically for some means of turning his partial advantage to account, he glanced at the plateau again. His heart gave a sudden jump; the star-like point of light was again flashing its message to him.

It kindled to a sudden full resolve a wild idea that had been at the back of his mind since he read Reeve's first signals. He emitted a hoarse bellow of delight.

Immediately two shots from the alleyway rang out. But this time they were low, and the bullets buried themselves in the rifle-cases. His guess was right.

Flinging away all caution, he stepped close to the door and emptied the revolver through it. Then he turned to Lorizo, who had not opened his mouth since the first shot.

"So they won't obey yer ordhers?" he said.

"No," the half-breed answered, eying him with curiosity and apprehension. "Dey say dey take de boat on. De jungle stop your men from following queek enough to catch, if dey see dey lamp."

O'Moore's short, grim laugh as he turned away puzzled Lorizo. But he smiled cunningly as O'Moore dropped the now empty revolver and picked up the lamp.

Rapidly but clearly he signaled:

"F-i-r-e o-n t-h-i-s l-i-g-h-t b-o-a-t g-u-n r-u-n-n-e-r s-t-e-a-m u-p."

A pause followed, after which the light on the plateau asked whether he was safe.

"Y-e-s h-u-r-r-y h-u-r-r-y," he answered.

He turned from the port-hole, perspiration streaming down his face and trickling

from his chin. Already in imagination he could hear the shells screaming through the night, as he had often heard them before.

Instinctively he moved from before the open port-hole and then smiled grimly at the futile movement. But his work was done. He had now wiped out his morning's disgrace by a splendid come-back. A spurt of exultation surged through him as he thought of the fame that would hang round his name in his old regiment in far-off India. His was to be a soldier's end, and he had made it for himself.

Glancing at him he caught the tail-end of a smile vanishing from Lorizo's face.

" 'Tis amused ye are," he said, smiling himself.

"I tell you, your solchiers cannot take de boat," Lorizo answered, shaking his head. "De bush is a wall."

"Thrue; it is," O'Moore said, "but they'll get us all right. They're sendin' down some purty speedy messengers."

"Messenchers?"

"Ay, shells; eighteen-pounder shells," O'Moore said. "Did ye not see me signalin' the guns? In two or three minutes they'll be plunkin' into us."

When the meaning of O'Moore's words sank in the real man came to the top in Lorizo. Fear for his own wretched life drove out rage, hatred and even lust for gain.

"Stop de guns," he screamed, writhing with fear now. "We will blow to pieces; barrels of gunpowder is below."

He jerked his head in the general direction of the stern.

"Stop de guns and we let you out free, I swear."

O'Moore's only answer was a hoarse, half-hysterical laugh.

"Stop dem; stop dem," Lorizo wailed again. "Let me out and I save you." Then, as if realizing it for the first time, "You too will be killed," he cried, raising himself and straining his neck as far toward O'Moore as his bonds would permit.

"Some suspicion o' that was in me mind whin I signaled," O'Moore replied. "We're in the same boat, me lad, an' bedad, that's twice thrue. I'm thinkin' the crocodiles is in for a feast this night; though, on me sowl, 'twill be unlucky for the wan that ates you. Ye'll poison the poor baste."

The half-breed sank into stupefied silence, while O'Moore's mind returned to the guns on the plateau. He was mentally calculating the number of minutes it would take the gunners to train their guns on the light when footsteps again thudded overhead.

The work was done. The gun-runners had more than an even chance now, if they only got the engines going quickly enough. Lorizo suddenly opened his mouth and emitted a shrill scream of warning.

With one bound O'Moore was across the cabin and had him by the throat.

"Another word an' I'll choke the life out o' ye," he cried savagely.

Lorizo shrunk back and subsided.

Second after second, each filled with the strain of an hour, dragged past. And gradually, in] spite of the reckless courage that had prompted his desperate signal, a sense of physical fear crept through O'Moore's drawn nerves. The forced inaction added to it, and the restricted space in the little cabin made the coming end seem more cruel, more inexorable.

The very silence seemed intensified. Even the usual sounds of the creek, and the mysterious, stealthy noises of the tropical fastnesses appeared to be stilled, as if Nature herself held her breath to await the coming destruction.

But O'Moore was dreading another sound, one that would be more terrible to him than the hiss and crash of the expected shells. It was the champing of the engines. At any moment now the boat might glide off into the night. His lamp would then be useless, for, as he had observed from the plateau, farther on the bush on the creek's edge was thick enough to obscure a searchlight.

A hissing roar rent the oppressive silence, passed overhead and was lost. A fraction of a second later a dull crash, from the other side of the creek, thundered out, echoing and re-echoing through the silent night.

As the shell screamed overhead O'Moore jumped to his feet. With his whole body tense as an iron bar he waited for some seconds. Then he jumped to the lamp.

"Too high!" he shouted, as if he expected the gunners on the distant hill to hear him.

His hand moved rapidly before the lamp and the correction was flashed to the plateau.

The last recoil of the explosion had scarcely rolled along the pass when the

jangle of the engine-room bell rang out. Almost simultaneously a tearing crash shook the vessel. She was hit somewhere forward. Again the bell clanged, and after a brief delay the engines jerked into action.

A low moaning from the floor drew O'Moore's attention. The half-breed, in the grip of mortal terror, lay shivering as if with cold. O'Moore crossed the cabin and freed him.

"There, git up," he said. "Ye may as well meet it on yer feet."

But Lorizo never moved. He seemed paralyzed with terror. Either unwilling or unable to get up he lay where he was. With a shrug of contempt O'Moore turned away from him.

The engines were now pounding at full speed. The vessel quivered before the furious threshing of the screw. Slowly, as the power overcame the inertia of the sluggish hulk, O'Moore became aware of the sensation of motion.

Would the boat forge her length ahead before the next shells came? If she did, all was lost; the gunners would not have one chance in a thousand of hitting her when in motion.

Foot after foot was added to the space the boat was covering. It was now a curiously tangled race between the passing seconds, the laboring engines and the shells the O'Moore thought were never coming. He scarcely breathed as he awaited the outcome of the fateful contest.

Unable to bear the inaction any longer, he turned again to the port-hole to speed the gunners. As he stretched his hand to the lamp he was stopped by a roar and a deafening crash.

The wall of the cabin leaped at him. He thudded against something very hard, which seemed to stab into every inch of his body. He was aware of a fast-creeping numbness, then a dull thud, as if the vessel had hit a rock, and a final darkness and peace.

"HE'LL carry a few marks that won't add to his beauty, but he'll grow together again in a couple of weeks. No, there's not a bone broken; the man must be as tough as a rhinoceros," said the doctor, patting the last of the bandages that made O'Moore look like a huge rag doll.

Corporal O'Moore opened the eye that was still in commission. He was in his tent. Slowly he made out the figures about the cot. The doctor, with his twinkling eyes, beside him the O. C., and behind him Sergeant Reeve, tenderly stroking a swollen jaw and smiling a crooked smile.

Abruptly the O. C. and the doctor turned and walked out. Reeve approached the cot. He fumbled for a minute until his fingers found O'Moore's hand and closed on it.

"Well done, lad," he said heartily, the twisted smile broadening on his good-natured face.

"But what——"

"Wait," said Reeve; "I'll tell you. Two of our shells got her amidships, not far from the cabin you were in. They were low and made no end of a mess inside, besides blowing in your prison. If you hadn't been close to the side we wouldn't have found enough of you to pick up with a pin."

"An' Lorizo?"

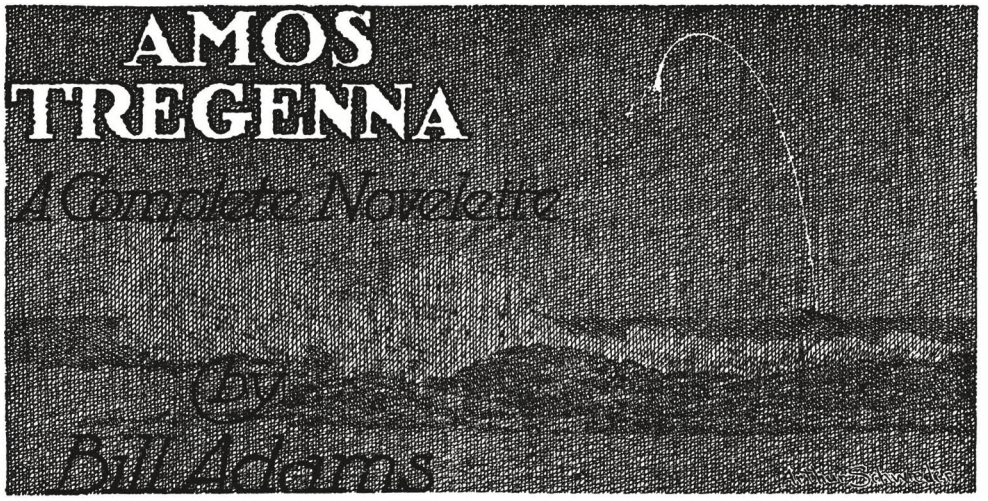
"Bits of him," said Reeve with an expressive gesture. "The last shell tore away the steering-gear, and the old tub butted into the bank. We've got all the stuff that was undamaged and two of the half-breeds. They were both wounded. But you can tell us about it all later on."

"This mornin'——" began O'Moore.

"Shut up!" interrupted Reeve. "The Old Man's gone to make out a report that'll put a splash of color on that chest of yours, when you can get it into a tunic again. That's all. Now go to sleep."

O'Moore's eye closed for a moment. It opened again and rested on the lower part of the sergeant's face.

"I'm sorry about that jaw o' yours, Reeve," he said, and his eye closed again.



Author of "The Fenceless Meadows," "Time Comes," etc.

IT WAS a Sunday afternoon of mid-April, and the sea off the little town of Bude Haven was flecked with white horses. People walked to and from the town along the cliff-tops, watching the coasting-vessels come and go; for it was high water and the canal locks were thrown wide open that the little craft might pass. Amongst the people were some who turned to watch two young men, who, upon the green grass at the foot of a small knoll, seemed about to come to blows.

"I'll bet ye Amos loses that there temper o' hisn an' makes a fight of it," laughed a man of middle age to his neighbor.

"Aye, I'll bet as he does too," replied the other. "He's a hot-head. He'd ought to go to Bristolward and get him a ship; joinin' the fo'csle crowd. That'd tame him!"

On the grass the two men wrangled, growing momentarily more heated; their fists clenched, their faces almost touching.

"You lie!" cried one of them. "She's mine!"

"All right! She's yours, is she? Well, that wins her from you then!" retorted the other; stepping backward to give a long arm room to drive, and bringing a clenched fist swiftly to his opponent's jaw.

The second lad, his face scarlet, but a smile on his lips, leaped at the striker, who, throwing an arm up to guard the blows that rained upon him, cried:

"It's more you want then, is it? All right, how's—" his words cut short by a man who, pushing his way between them, thrust them apart.

"Amos, you fool," he said, "don't you know your father's preaching a sermon on the cliffs not half a mile from here?"

"Let him preach! I've different ways of preaching, and they suit me fine," replied the one addressed; and taking the intruder's arm drew him aside.

"Old Dame Trewarne there, getting more o' dad's salvation?" he asked, a wide grin upon his face.

The second lad, staring resentfully at the intruder, watched his late adversary.

"Aye, she's there right enough—and Judy with her," replied the older man.

"Joe Trefusis, you were always an old fool of a meddler! Why didn't you let well be well? I wanted to lick this curly cub from Poughill once for all," said Amos.

Amos Tregenna was a young man of two inches over six feet, straight and strong as a topsail schooner's lower-mast. His hair was red, as treasure shining through the stove hatches of sunken treasure-ships, catching the sun and glinting in it; his eyes large and openly blue-bright, as deep waters under suns of Summer are openly blue-bright. His chest was deep, his arms immense and muscular, each muscle playing now as he ran fingers roughly up and down the sleeve of the man with whom he talked.

"I'm going to listen to the old man gassing to the multitudes. Come on, Trefusis!

Maybe his stuff will give you good appetite for Bude beer too—it's dry enough!" he said.

"Not for me! If you were not going, then I might; but today I'll mix with no more fighting red-heads," the other answered, walking away, nodding as he passed the other lad, and saying to him—

"Isn't there in all of Cornwall but just one gal to suit you two fools?"

"Why, yes! Maybe there is. But Amos has such a pleasant fighting way I like to fight him when he wills it—that's all," laughed the other.

Amos Tregenna, stepping up to them, laughing in both their faces, his hat in one hand, his red hair blown by the sea-wind, throwing an arm about the neck of each, cried—

"Come on, let's all go listen to the dad preaching; eh?"

They strolled away together, arm in arm, their voices intermingled, and their laughter high.

"Amos," said Trefusis, "I tell you what you do! You come with me to Bristol!"

"To Bristol? Trefusis, what's wrong with you today? Why should I come with you to Bristol?"

"I'm sailing in a week with the big clipper that passed up-channel in ballast a week or two back, bound for her lading-berth at Bristol; the finest, fastest clipper that ever sailed past Lundy, lad—the flying *Maharanee!*" Trefusis answered. "Come on and see the world a bit, with me for mate."

"Why, no! Cornwall suits me," Tregenna laughed.

"I think you'd better quit your fancies, lad. Young Judy's one of your old dad's latest converts; and you know that she's just her mother over, don't you? And, knowing that, you know that she's not to be easy turned?" Trefusis said.

"One of dad's converts? When?" cried Amos, staying his walk.

"Oh, I don't know since when! And I don't care. The *Maharanee* needs a few good hands in her fo'csle, and good hands are scarce at sea today. You come to Bristol."

"I'm going to see Judy," said Amos Tregenna, striding away over the downs, turning to wave an arm to Trefusis and his late adversary, saying—

"Fight you any time you say, Tom. Yeo—lick you, too!"

IT WAS high water, and a couple of miles from Bude a young woman making her way below the cliffs of Maer, sought a place to climb them; for her way around was cut off by the tide. She walked swiftly, springing from rock to rock; the tide aswirl about her feet, the spray from the rollers blowing now and again over her head.

"Hello, Judy! Got fooled by the tide, eh? When did you think you could outclimb the goats?" cried a laughing voice behind her.

Turning, she found herself face to face with Amos Tregenna; and, flushing, made no reply.

"Judy, see here! Can't you and I be friends? I'm not as black as you think me. It's dad who's been poisoning your mother's tea against me; ain't it, gal?" he asked, stepping to her side, standing quite unconsciously knee deep in the cold water.

"Amos, look what you're doing! Come out o' that cold water, quick!" cried the girl, finding a sudden flood of speech.

"That's all right, Judy. I'm not afeared of the old sea; and the sea'll never harm you as long as Amos stands between," he said, looking up into her dark eyes, half-seriously, half-laughing.

"Amos, was it you as set the dry gorse afire and let they poor Gipsies go to jail for doing what 'twas you as done?" she asked, looking down at him.

"Oh, drat them Gipsies! Jail's too good for 'em! Let's talk o' summat else," he answered.

"I knowed it was! An' 'twas you as pulled the clappers out o' Bude church bells an' made all folks late for church and Sunday dinner, too."

Tregenna broke into a peal of laughter, and, slipping upon a weed-grown rock, would have fallen but for the girl's extended hand grasping his wrist.

"Thank you, Judy. I think maybe I'm good for naught but drowning, and pounding to pieces on these big black rocks," he said, climbing to her side. . . .

"Judy, we'd best quit making love here, and find a way up the cliffs—we'll not get up if we don't soon start," he added.

Her face crimson, the girl stepped back, almost losing her footing.

"This way," he said, and, taking her arm in his great hand, guided her along the rocks. "Don't you be minding any thing that

Amos says—you know Amos is yours, eh?"

Her eyes downcast, she made no answer; letting him guide her from the lower cliffs to a ridge above. Coming presently to a huge flat-topped rock, he left her there to rest a while; going himself to stand at the rock's edge, gazing down into the waters that swirled in a deep pool below.

"Judy," he said, turning suddenly toward her, "I'm going to sea."

The girl made no reply.

"Joe Trefusis is mate of the fast *Maharanee*. I'm going in her fo'csle."

The girl still made no reply.

"When I come back I'm coming back for you. I've quit drinking, and I've quit fighting and setting dry gorse afire—and taking clappers out of church bells too," he said, and again broke into a peal of laughter.

The girl looked up at him.

"You couldn't quit—not if you tried," she said.

"What? *I* couldn't quit? You don't know what you're saying, gal! You think you know Amos. You don't."

IT WAS starshine over Bude, and the light was lovely on the cliffs of Maer. Up a narrow pathway along the cliffs a woman walked, bent forward to the steep ascent. Behind her climbed a man, his arms outstretched toward her as she struggled up the steeper places. Reaching the cliff-top, they stopped, looking below them at the star-trails on the sea and at the dark ascent by which they had climbed.

"It's settled then, Judy? When I come back, you know why I come—because I want you," said the man.

"It's for you to settle, Amos Tregenna. Keep your part of the bargain. No wifing to the devil for love of you or any other, for Judy Trewarne."

"All right! We'll meet upon our rock when the fast *Maharanee* brings me to port again; and I'll have proved that I'm the man you'd have me be."

"Good night. Don't forget to let the church bells ring when church time comes herefrom," she said.

"So-long, Judy. I'll let your bells ring loud and long as you can wish them to. Ship bells for me from now for many a day," he answered her; taking her hand in his great paw.

"How strong you are!" she exclaimed; shuddering for a moment at the feel of his grip upon her fingers; and then unconsciously coming closer to him, as though to seek shelter from a storm-wind in his high protection; stepping back again as he reached to take her other hand.

"Good-by! Good luck to ship bells on the sea, and you!"

"Good-by, Judy! Good luck to church bells on the shore, and you!"

Struck by his serious tones, the girl started, searching his face in the star-gloom.

"Good-by."

"So-long, Judy. I don't like 'good-by'."

"So-long then, Amos; and remember—our rock is firm, *and so am I*."

THE skipper of the clipper *Maharanee*, lifting to the stiff south trades, walked to and fro upon his ship's white poop, his hands behind his back; his eyes searching the long horizon-line astern.

Stopping suddenly, he blew his whistle, calling to the mate—

"Haul the weather braces tight."

In a moment the hands were hauling in upon the weather braces; pulling to the outcry of a small man with a wizened face, who though the smallest of the sailors was yet the noisiest. The braces sweated up; and the men, returning to their various occupations, this man leaped into the rigging, scanning the horizon as he did so.

"Th' owl ——! 'E's seed some ship," he said, and swung himself quickly aloft.

In a few moments he was seated astride the topgallant yard; a man face to face with him helping him to serve a new foot-rope.

"Murray, 'ow'd you like a good swaller o' rum?" he asked his companion.

"You little swab, you, Jim! You're looking for trouble, ain't you?" replied the other.

"I'm lookin' fer to wet me whistle wi' a shot o' rum—an' I'm a-goin' to get it, too," said the little sailor, his legs dangling from the yard-arm, clothed in baggy dungarees many sizes too large for them.

"I ain't goin' to be left out o' no drinkin'-match, Jim Carey," replied the other.

"Come on—there's eight bells a-strikin', an' it's our watch below," said Carey; and, seizing a backstay, he slid to the deck.

IT WAS the second dog-watch; and, the day's work over, all hands were gathered about the main hatch to pass the time away till the beginning of the night watches.

Some of them stood by the railing, watching a strange-faced fellow throwing his sheath knife deftly at a wooden deck-bucket, the blade sticking time after time unerringly in the hard wood, and quivering from the force of the throw.

" 'E is a artist, ain't 'e?" said Jim Carey, watching the foreign sailor fling his knife.

The thrower laughed at the men about him; himself an elfish fellow with long, curly hair uncombed and tangled, with wild eyes and thick lips; a ragged shirt and trousers on his limbs, his feet and head bare, his face unshaven.

"I show you do dot, see? I show you, fallers," he laughed, throwing the knife time and again.

"Ain't 'e the loony fish? Tregenna, can you throw a knife that way? You big red-'ead, you!" asked Jim Carey.

"I don't use knives. White men use fists," replied Tregenna.

"Aye! You looks like you could knock a bullick down wi' they big fists o' yours," said Carey. " 'Ow 'ard can you 'it a man?"

"Hard enough to keep him quiet a while, my boy," replied Tregenna; "but I'm picking no fights with any one."

"Hall right, old son! Maybe some day you'll get 'ung too! Same as crazy Johnson 'ere's a-goin' ter be," answered Carey; and, laughing at his own wit, he walked toward the fo'csle.

IT WAS the first watch of the night, and Jim Carey walked to and fro upon the fo'csle head, keeping the lookout. The starshine, dim upon his little figure, clothed in its baggy trousers and tight-fitting undershirt, a wide sun-downer upon his head, gave him the appearance of some peculiar amphibian—a creature half-fish, half-human, altogether grotesque—that had ascended from the sea to the ship's deck to look about the world. Clouds were gathering from the southward, and the wind was coming in short, stiff squalls. Stopping in his walk, Carey leaned over the fo'csle rail, addressing a man upon the deck below.

"Bill, you hordinary lubber! You give me a lot o' damp matches. Me pipe ain't drawin'. Bring us up a light, will 'ee?"

They stood together, their backs against the rail, watching the boom end swing above the sea.

"All right, Bill! W'en four bells goes an' that there big red-'ead relieves me up 'ere you an' me'll go explorin' down that there ventilator shaft, eh? Is it a go?" said Carey.

"It's a go, Jim; an' you look here! You keeps it mum. Don't you go say nothing to no one; an' least of all to Red Tregenna—'e's one o' they 'oly beggars what don't use good liquor. 'E don't know nothing," said Bill Murray.

"Wothever is a 'oly beggar, Bill? I ain't never 'eard of it."

Behind them, upon the forward bell, four bells rang out; and Carey, whispering, "There she goes now," shouted aft to the officer upon the bridge—

"A-l-l-l-l's well, sir."

"All's well, Mister Red-'ead," he said as Tregenna took the lookout over.

"What's all the hurry?" asked Tregenna as with Murray the little fellow hurried down the ladder to the gloom of the main deck.

" 'Urry nothin'! Bill an' me's goin' to sit on the main 'atch an' talk about 'ow to make chafin'-mats an' such. 'Urry yerself!" said Carey.

A cloud swept over the *Maharanee*, the wind burying her rails deep in the sea, the ropes complaining as she strained at her gear.

"It's jest the wery evenin' I've been waitin' for," said Carey as the two men walked to the midship house.

"You'll need lots o' matches, Jim," said Murray.

"Aye, an' not damp ones neither," replied Carey.

Climbing to the top of the deck-house they listened to the outcry of the night.

"Bill, if anything should 'appen while I'm down in the 'old you jest stick yer 'ead down the ventilator an' 'oller at the top of yer voice—'Light on the port beam, sir.' "

"There won't be no light; but you kin make out as you thought you seen one, and I'll be up like a jumpin' fish; see?" said Carey.

"Are you sure you can squeeze through them grating-bars at the bottom of the ventilator?" asked Murray.

"I got a belayin'-pin in me belt. I can pry 'em open," answered Carey.

LEAVING the bridge, the mate of the *Maharanee* walked to the fo'csle head.

"Good sailing weather, Tregenna. She's knocking off her fifteen knots right along. We'll be home in quick time if we get much of this, eh?" he said to the lookout man.

"Can't be too soon for me, sir," replied Tregenna.

"Amos, do you suppose the spell your old dad worked on the Trewarne girl will stay all her life?" asked the mate.

"Hard to say, sir. Dad's got a queer way with him."

"How long's he been an itinerant preacher, Amos?"

"About as far back as I recall, sir."

"I wonder what sort of a duck you'd have turned out if it hadn't fallen through when he and old mother Trewarne were sweethearts, eh?"

Amos Tregenna laughed.

"Glad they fell out, sir. Dad's given me all the crazy streak I need, without my having had Dame Trewarne for my mother. She's a real old fanatic."

Returning to the bridge, the mate watched the compass swing.

IN THE 'tween-decks hold Jim Carey crawled over the cargo; peering, by the light of matches, at crates and bales of merchandise that groaned and creaked all around him.

"Hif all 'ands was to 'oller down that there ventilator I'd not 'ear nothin' down 'ere in all this racket," he said.

"Ah!" he exclaimed presently. "Look at *that!* That's the stuff as old Ginger Kit laps up at Patsy Warson's saloon on Scotland road!"

By the next match-flare he saw before him a row of small wooden kegs.

"I wants you in bottles, my pretty," he cried, striking another light.

" 'Ome, sweet 'ome; an' all 'ome's comforts, Jimmy," he muttered, dragging a case of rum from abaft the mizzen mast.

LEANING over the ventilator Bill Murray whispered:

" 'Ow is it, Jim? Is it all sir-garney-oh?"

"Feel o' *that,*" said Carey, taking Murray's hand and rubbing it along his belt.

UPON the flying-boom of the *Maharanee* Jim Carey was bending a new jib topsail, talking, to a sailor who tucked a long splice in the flying-jib downhaul.

Finishing their jobs at the same time and starting to the deck together, the other man laid a hand on Carey's arm.

"Jim, where'd ye get it?" he asked.

"Git wot, you 'ard-tack maggot? Wot ye talkin' about?" answered Carey.

"Ye can't fool me thataway, Carey. Ye've got liquor. I smells it on yer," replied the other.

"Shut up, ye fool! D'ye want all 'ands to 'ear?" said Carey, scowling up at the large man beside him, the green seas tumbling below them, and the bow-wash slapping sprays about their legs.

"Where'd ye get it? Me innards is cold," growled the other.

"Keep yer mouth shut. Maybe we'll 'ave a pleasant little time in the dog watch tonight. Maybe not. Keep mum."

They went to the deck, parting company and going to different jobs.

AT NOON of the following day when the sailor bringing the soup forward from the galley put it upon the fo'csle table he uttered a great oath; he was the man who had been with Carey upon the flying boom.

"What t' —— d'ye think o' that? It's burned soup ag'in, by ——!" he shouted, staring from one to another of the hands, sitting awaiting their dinner.

He was a large man with a bony and prominent hooked nose, his mouth loose-lipped and his watery blue eyes shifty; the air of a bully about him; his manner alternately subservient and aggressive.

" 'Tain't no use to go ——raisin' over little things," said Carey, reaching for the soup kid.

"Is it old red-'ead, eh?" he added, turning to Tregenna, seated at his side.

"Bean soup's poor living when it's burned that way," replied Tregenna, "but maybe 'twas done accidental. Let's see how it tastes anyway."

"You louse, you," shouted the man who had fetched the dinner forward. "It's the likes o' you as makes 'ell ships where sailors gits starved an' driven by the blasted mates!"

"Maybe you'd do well to go a bit easy,

Mason. Who d'you think you're talking to?" said Tregenna, looking up at him.

"By ——, I ain't said nothin' against none o' you boys! It's them blasted mates an' skippers as I'm speakin' of. You're all right, Tregenna; but just acos you've growed a red beard since she left Bristol that ain't sayin' as you're aught but young yet. You wait till you've seen some o' the —— at sea as Tom Mason 'as—then talk!" replied Mason.

The men, frowning and spitting, tasted the soup.

"Come on, boys—let's go aft. Let's go tell that old devil Barracout w'at we thinks o' him," cried Mason; and, picking up the soup-kid, he stepped to the deck.

The others followed; for the taste of sweet brown rum was strong in Bill Murray's mouth, and Jim Carey was in a carefree mood. One after another they piled out of the fo'csle, the watch on deck looking at them inquisitively as they started aft; Mason in the lead, Carey and Murray in the rear, a big Scandinavian sailor beside Mason, and the elf-faced fellow behind him.

"Come on, Tregenna—come an' give old Barracout ——," said Murray, turning back as he left the fo'csle.

"You'd best go a bit slow, boys. You're looking for trouble, and Barracout'll meet you more than half-way," replied Tregenna, sitting at the table.

Seeing Tregenna there, the elf-faced man returned to the fo'csle, taking his seat and bending over his plate, eating the burned soup with the avidity, and almost with the gesture, of a hungry dog; helping himself from the half-filled plate of one of the others when his own was gone.

"Bill," said Jim Carey as they walked aft, there's trouble afoot. W'y did you let that fool Mason in on our party?"

"Kick yourself. Don't kick me. 'Twas you as much as 'twas me," replied Murray.

"Where's Tregenna?" asked Mason, turning about.

"Tregenna's one o' they 'oly beggars; 'e's afraid," said Murray.

"That's wot Bill keeps a-sayin'," said Jim Carey. "I ain't never 'eard of it."

"Come on. Quit talkin' an' let's go tell old Barracout wot we thinks o' 'im," said Mason as they approached the quarter-deck.

Coming to the cabin door, they hesitated.

"Who's a-goin' to do the talkin'?" asked Mason.

"You, —— you! You brung us 'ere, didn't yer?" said Carey, looking up at the big bully, whose courage was ebbing—a fo'csle hand at the cabin door with so small a thing as burned soup for complaint.

They stood there a moment, each waiting for another to do the talking.

"You louses, you're afraid," said Carey, and, stepping forward, rapped upon the cabin door.

"Stooard," he said when the steward came in answer to his knock, "tell the capt'in as we wants ter see 'im, will yer?"

"You tell 'im, Jim, too, as they's weevils in the 'ard-tack," whispered Mason, a hand to his mouth.

"You louse! You ain't but a maggot yourself," said Carey, aloud.

In a moment the captain stood before them; a tall figure, slightly stooped in the low doorway, in his shirt sleeves, his thin arms bare, his eyes hard slits looking straight at the men of the fo'csle; looking at and through and beyond them, almost as though unaware of their presence.

"Well—what is it?"

"Sir," said Jim Carey, touching his cap, his face uplifted, the suspicion of a friendly smile in his eyes, "we's come aft, sir, to arst if we can't 'ave a bit better grub, sir? The soup's 'most always burned, an' th' 'ard-tack's maggoty."

Mason, holding the soup-kid, watching the skipper's face, his hand unsteadied by the rum within him, tilted the soup-kid without noticing that he did so; a few drops of the thick yellow liquid spilling upon the clipper's spotless quarter-deck.

"Get forrard! You dogs! Get forrard!" snapped the skipper; his thin eyes blazing, his chin outstretched; his fingers clenched—his gaze upon the spilled soup on his quarter-deck.

The fo'csle hands went forward, speechless, silent, their eyes dull, their faces expressionless; the watch on deck staring at them as they passed by.

"What did he say?" asked a man of the other watch.

" 'E called us a lot o' ruddy dogs!" said Carey. "That's wot we is—dogs! Jest a lot o' dogs! My ——!"

"Jim," whispered Murray in Carey's ear, "it'll be blacker'n —— tonight. I'm a-goin' for some more liquor. To —— wi' Barracout!"

Returning to the fo'csle, they ate what

cold soup was left them; crumbling the moldering hard-tack into it; knocking the weevils from it, and sourly jesting of the sea.

In his bunk, full-bellied and content, lay the elf-faced man, dozing; while, leaning in the doorway, looking across the running seas, stood Amos Tregenna.

THE second mate stood on the bridge, watching the sails draw. He was a small, dark man, of most unpleasant expression; a man whose outlook had long ago been soured by his constant failures to rise higher than a second mate's berth. He had given up trying long ago; and sailed now, voyage by voyage, in the full knowledge that younger men who were better men constantly passed him by. Soured and friendless, he had come to hate the sea and ships and all to do with them; looking forward eagerly to each port, and dreading equally each new ship he sailed with.

ARISING from his supper, the skipper went to the quarter-deck door, thinking to walk the deck a while, out of the cool trade-wind, in the shelter of the break of the poop; and, stepping out to the quarter-deck, slipped, and fell heavily to the deck. In an instant he was up, his face white with rage, his lips set tight, his fists clenched; and in a couple of strides was at the foot of, and ascending, the poop accommodation ladder.

"You!" he bellowed. "You there, by ——! What are you here for, sir? Why don't you get this ship's decks cleared up at night?"

His breath failing him, he stood glaring at the second mate; the second mate, his lips parted, his eyes cold, his face white, could make no reply; and left the poop to call men aft to clear up the quarter-deck.

IT WAS soon after eight bells of the midnight watch when upon the top of the midship house there crouched a man, who, with his head bent over the ventilator coaming, listened.

On the deck below walked Amos Tregenna, dreaming that he helped a girl up a steep cliff pathway as the tide flowed in; Jim Carey at his side talking of ships in which he had sailed, unconscious that Tregenna was not listening to him—both men well contented with their own thoughts.

Suddenly, men dropping from the midship house to the deck in front of him; Carey, striking a match to light his pipe held it up, peering under the flame.

"Ye think ye're mighty smart, Murray, don't ye?" he said, staring at Murray, who stood before him, his arms full of bottles; Mason, similarly laden, directly behind him.

"Come on, boys! T' —— wi' Barracout an' his ship! Let's go to the fo'csle an' get liquored up," said Mason; his large hands clasping the bottles.

"I ain't never goin' to turn down no sociable invitation," said Carey; "but see 'ere! Who's a-goin' to pay the piper for 'is tune? Pipers 'as to be paid."

"Never you mind no pipers. You come along o' we! There's good liquor for all on us, an' more below," said Mason, leading the way forward.

"Come on, Tregenna," said Murray; "come an' get liquored up while it's good goin'."

"Carey's right," said Tregenna; "pipers have to be paid. I'm going to pay no piper for any fool tune you lads are going to pipe. You'd best chuck that rum overboard and get a touch of sense."

Murray followed the others to the fo'csle, saying as he entered—

"Red's a big fool—'e's scared!"

TREGENNA, watching the phosphorus on the sea, walked the decks alone; seeing the stars reel overhead, and the flare of the side light on the bow; dreaming again that it was starshine on the rocks of Maer; hearing a voice say, "You couldn't quit—not if you tried!" and laughing to himself.

In the fo'csle sat the sailors of the watch, all save the helmsman, the lookout and Amos Tregenna.

"Here's how, bullies!" said Tom Mason, lifting a bottle high, and answered by—

"Here's how, Tom—short runs, says I, an' good ships."

Mason's lips sipped and sucked at the bottle, his watery eyes glimmered by the light of the turned-down lamp.

There was the sound of some one entering the fo'csle, the soft pad of bare feet on the deck; and, looking up, they saw the elf-faced fellow enter, his wide eyes shining, his curly, tangled hair blown by the wind, his hands outstretched toward the table where the bottles lay.

"I show you do dot, fallers!" he said, cackling in his hairy throat, reaching a bottle and knocking the head off against the bulkhead; taking long swallows from it.

"The loony fish! 'E's gone an' left the lookout! 'E must 'ave 'eard us talkin', eh?" said Carey.

"Aye—or else must have smelt the stuff; they's got noses on 'em like dogs, crazy flitters such as 'e be 'as," said Murray, watching the crazy man drink from the bottle-neck.

Mason, who had stepped to the deck for a moment, reentered the fo'csle.

"It's all right," he said; "old red-'ead's gone to the lookout."

At eight bells the watches came aft; the mate wondering why they should be so noisy; their voices drifting back as they went forward again; their laughter loud on the night, despite the outcry of wind and sea.

Both watches gathered in the starboard fo'csle, laughing and joking, finishing the last drops from rum bottles; crazy Johnson, in the center of them, standing upon a sea-chest, his tangled hair brushing the deck above him, his eyes aglow with delight; rum spilled down his ragged shirt and upon his hairy chest.

"I show you do dot, fallers," he said continually.

MORNING broke upon a windy sea, the ship racing through gray smothers, the sky cloud-hidden. At daybreak Tregenna, relieved at the wheel by the Scandinavian sailor, reporting the course to the mate, stopped to say:

"Let her go, sir! Soon make the voyage if she keeps this up!"

"Aye, let her go! She can't fly too fast for me," replied Trefusis.

The ship was, as she had been for many days, under topgallantsails; the trade strong and steady from southeast.

At seven bells the skipper came on deck, looking at the fresh weather and at his driving ship.

"Take the fore and mizzen topgallants off at eight bells. She's losing way by pitching so heavily," he said.

On deck the watch waited for eight bells; waiting to go below for breakfast; the watch below waiting to come on duty.

The second came to the bridge to take the day's work from the mate.

"We'll take the fore and mizzen t'gallants in," said the mate.

As eight bells struck the second went forward, shouting—

"Clew up fore and mizzen topgallantsails; all hands to the gear."

The men of the watch below lingered in the fo'csle, for Mason had entered with three bottles under his oilskin coat; and, the watch on deck gathering around the door, all hands were talking and laughing at once.

On deck the big Scandinavian sailor, relieved at the wheel by a starboard watch man, spoke to Tregenna.

"Soon now mates vill see vot iss—den vill drouble be," he said.

"Aye, some one's going to foot a piper's bill," replied Tregenna.

The two men stood at the mizzen topgallant gear, on the port quarter-deck; the ship, on the port tack, lying deep in the sea.

The second mate, making toward the fore topgallant halyards, passed behind them, shouting to the dallying crew to get to the gear. The disgrace of the uncleared decks of the previous evening was fresh in his mind; the sting of the skipper's angry words still lashed him; and, hating the sea and ships and sailors, he cried as he passed Tregenna:

"You, —— you! Quit dreamin' of your west country, an' lay old o' that gear."

Tregenna, standing at the weather railing, waiting, watching the seas roar past the clipper, seeing mirrored in them the face of a girl who seemed to smile to him, whose lips appeared to move, heard the words—the words crashing suddenly upon his brain and for an instant stunning him, robbing him of breath, numbing his limbs—the dream-face still smiling to him from the curling sea-crests.

Suddenly, as it had whelmed him, the numbness left him; leaving a scald of hot blood surging to his temples, a flame before his eyes, through which he saw the face of the girl of the cliff pathways.

He swung upon his heel, fury in all his being, and met the eyes of the second mate, who, seeing the madness in his face, quailed.

Amos Tregenna's fist flew out in the full flood of raging anger.

Without motion of resistance, without time to raise an arm, the second mate fell back; the deck swept with white water as, a squall taking her high canvas, the

Maharanee dipped deeper in the sea. His head struck heavily upon an iron ring-bolt; and, motionless, he lay amidst the running water, a crimson trickle flowing from the corner of his lips.

The skipper, on his bridge, hearing no words in the uproar of wind and sea, saw the blow.

"Hold those 'gallants, sir," he shouted to the mate, and, to the helmsman, "Up one point—steady your helm!" and to the mate again: "Get the irons on that man. Lock him up!"

Without a word or gesture Tregenna suffered the irons to be placed upon his great wrists; gazing down upon a face than which his own was far more dreadful—a face o'er which there stole an expression of contentment; as though its owner has found at last bright beauty on the sea.

Locking Tregenna in an after-cabin, Trefusis spoke:

"I'm sorry, Amos. I saw it all."

Tregenna did not hear, or see, Trefusis.

THE hands gathered around the body of the second mate, the water gently lifting his limp limbs to and fro.

Amongst them, his eyes cold, his face stern, stepped the skipper of the *Maharanee.*

The sailors looked upon the dead man's face; some with white faces, others with smiles upon their lips. An officer was killed; a man who had been a driver of poor sailors on the sea.

The ship staggered heavily as another squall took her, driving her deep, her rails awash, the sprays flashing to her high topsail leeches; and, looking aloft, Jim Carey muttered—

" 'Er masts is a-goin' to rip out."

Mason was there, more than half-drunk, his watery eyes wide and filled with a crazy light.

"Sarve 'im right! Sarve 'im right for drivin' pore sailors," said he, leering at the skipper.

The skipper, the sprays driving upon him as upon the sailors gathered there, strode toward the man, his fists clenched and an arm upraised.

"You dog! Get forrard—get forrard!"

Mason, expecting a blow, threw up an arm; his other fist doubled as though to strike back.

A man of elfish face and half-human appearance, his breath strong of rum, his hair tousled about his unshaven face, and his feet bare in the cold water, stepped forward.

"I show you do dot, fallers!" he cried; and with a motion magically swift drew a shining knife from his sheath.

There was a flash of sudden light upon the murky air of that gray morning, and the skipper, a hand to his throat, blood spurting to the deck, staggered and fell.

A gasp ran among the gathered sailors.

The clipper, a great sea boarding her forward, buried her bows deep in the ridges; quivering from stem to stern, her sheets and halyards cracking and her long white decks awash.

Joe Trefusis, coming from the cabin, saw his skipper wounded to the death and sensed his ship trembling to the onslaught of an approaching squall yet stiffer than the last.

Shouting: "You louse! You ruddy louse!" Jim Carey leaped at the elf sailor's face, beating him with clenched fists, bearing him down; the water swirling about them; the men of the watches cheering and laughing.

"Let 'im 'ave it Jimmie; give it to 'im!" cried one.

"Don't you stand fer it, Dutchie—git up an' fight 'im," cried another.

The mate ran forward,

"Clew up the fore and mizzen t'gallants," he shouted; and, grasping Carey by the arm, said—

"Carey, lower that fore t'gallant—let her go easy."

Carey arose and ran to the halyards, ready to lower; the ship plunging as the angry sea roared around her.

The men, half-sobered by the ship's behavior, clewed up the two topgallant sails; and, the ship steadying her gait at once, gathered about. Mason, the sails clewed up, had taken a bottle from his coat.

"Drink 'earty, lads! There's plenty more of it below," he said.

The elf man seized the bottle from Mason's lips, shouting, "I show you," and, taking a long swallow, walked to the lee of the fo'csle, where, falling to the deck, he curled up as though he were part human and part dog.

"Gi' us a drop, Mason," said one.

"Take the bottle. I'm a-goin' for more," said Mason.

The mate stepped amongst them.

"Get to those yards—furl the 'gallants,'

he said, Mason moving toward the fo'csle as he spoke.

They looked at the mate, and one or two started to the rigging; others standing with sneers on their faces—the second mate killed, the skipper killed; their bodies warmed by the rum and their brains in a maze.

"'Ere's 'ow, mister," said the man with the bottle, laughing at the mate and raising the bottle to his lips.

The mate grasped the bottle; the sailors shouting:

"'Old on to it! Don't you let 'im 'ave it, Dicky."

The man wrestled, trying to keep the bottle.

From a fo'csle port Mason shouted—

"'Ere y'are, sons—a whole ruddy shipload of it!"

The man dropped the bottle.

"Come on, mister! You come on' 'ave one along o' us," he said, turning toward the fo'csle.

Far aloft the two topgallant sails were threshing at their gear—beating themselves to ruin upon the yards.

"By ——!" said Joe Trefusis. "I'll settle this thing," and, stepping to the rail, he took from it a teak belaying-pin.

He stepped over the sill into the fo'csle, his eyes as steel spear-points; the belaying-pin in his hand.

"Out of here! Get to those 'gallant yards."

The men stared at him, his words ringing in their ears.

Mason, his watery eyes upon the mate's face, stepped forward.

"To —— wi' you!" he shouted. "You're a louse wot ought to be a-crawlin' on a monkey-perch. You ain't no one. You're a louse!"

"See how that suits you then," said Trefusis quietly; and brought the belaying-pin squarely upon Mason's jaw, his left fist at the next instant striking where the belaying-pin had struck. Mason dropped screaming to the deck.

"There ain't no call for that, by ——!" shouted a sailor of the starboard watch, a huge man named Barlow; a fellow of monstrous limbs and a gorilla-like face; his shirt, wide open, showing a great chest covered with black hair; his huge arms similarly covered; his small eyes full of a devilish, drunken light.

"Out of here! Aloft, you dogs!" said Trefusis, making toward Barlow; pushing smaller men aside that he might get to the fellow.

"Take 'im, by ——! Take 'im, boys! We'll show the —— who 'e is!" shouted the gorilla sailor, making for Trefusis; his nostrils drawn upward, his lips apart, his broken yellow teeth showing—as though he were indeed a gorilla.

"Back!" said Joe Trefusis, his eyes upon the eyes of the sailor; his voice cold and steady; and, a hand slipping within his coat, pointing a pistol at the fellow's chest.

"Back, ——! There ain't no back, by ——!" yelled the other, throwing a man out of his way and rushing upon the mate.

The gorilla sailor lay writhing upon the fo'csle deck.

"Aloft!" said the mate of the *Maharanee*, his right fist, the belaying-pin held fast in it, swinging right and left; beating upon the crowded men, herding them through the door as though they were so many cattle—the men crowding each other to escape his blows, yelling, "Aye, aye, sir—aloft it is, sir," and: "'Old on, sir. I ain't done nothin'."

"You'll do something now. Get aloft!" said Trefusis.

The men swarmed to the rigging; Mason, his face bloody, his eyes filled with terror, whimpering—

"Aloft, sir; aye, aye, sir."

Trefusis followed them to the deck, seeing as he did so three men who, laden with bottles, came from the top of the midship house; one of them saying:

"'Ere you are! Pass 'em down. Ain't she the dandy packet though?"

One of them passed bottles from the house-top to another on the deck below; the third man, his arms full of bottles, crying, "I show you do dot, fallers!" and as he spoke jumping lightly to the deck.

Trefusis stepped up to them.

"Throw that stuff overboard."

The two of them, seeing the light in his eyes and the rest of the hands in the rigging, sensing that he held the upper hand, started to obey, but from the lips of the elf sailor a cry rang out—

"I show you do dot, fallers!"

He hurled a bottle straight at the head of Joe Trefusis; followed by another and another in swift succession.

The mate had ducked upon one knee, the

first bottle grazing his forehead; bringing the blood down his cheek.

"You'll show *me* nothing," he said, and fired at the breast of the mad sailor.

His shot went wild, and a cry rang from the deck behind the fellow. Another bottle struck him, knocking his hat off and for an instant stunning him. He fired again.

"Aloft, you dogs!" said the mate of the *Maharanee* to two men who stared at a quivering form upon the deck before them; a form dressed in ragged shirt and dungarees; a face from which glazing eyes looked skyward.

The two men went aloft.

"You'll show no one any more, I think," said Trefusis, watching the pallor stealing over Johnson's face; death coming into the poor mad man's eyes.

"Carey, I'm sorry, lad. Where did I hit you?" he asked, bending over a little man, who writhed moaning upon the deck abaft the dying sailor.

"Hi don't know, mister. Gawd, 'ow it 'urts!"

Bending down, Trefusis lifted him from the deck and bore him aft; laying him in the second mate's bunk. Then, going to a locked door, he opened it and stepped within.

"Amos," he said, "we've got our hands full."

Amos Tregenna, sitting listless upon the deck, made no reply; and the mate, taking the irons from his wrists, said:

"Go take the wheel. That fellow's been there long enough."

UNDER main topgallant sail the *Maharanee* was making easy weather.

Trefusis returned to Jim Carey; cutting away his trouser and baring a wound in his leg, behind the keee.

"Mister mate, you'd best be a-fixin' that there ventilator atop o' the midship 'ouse," said Carey.

The mate, when he had bound the wound to his satisfaction, went to the deck; and, calling the big Scandinavian sailor, bade him fetch tools and cut the jackstay from a spare spar that lay lashed under the forward railing. With the jackstay cut into lengths and the ventilator securely barred, he called the hands to where the bodies of the second mate and skipper lay.

"Murray," he said, "you're handy with a needle? Very well! You men go fetch from the sail-locker that storm canvas that lies along the port side. Bring it here. Murray, you'll get your palm and needle and sew these men up for burial. You'll handle them respectful."

It was close to noon.

At four bells, while Murray sat stitching under the mizzen rigging, Trefusis set the topgallants again in a falling wind; and by the end of the first dog watch had the ship under all sail.

The hands set sail in silence; singing no chanteys on the halyards, silenced by the presence of still forms upon the deck; by the upturned face of Johnson, lying white beneath the main rigging; and the dark shadow that slept, face downward, in the fo'csle. Afraid of the latter, the watch below had not ventured to go to their bunks; sleeping by preference upon the cold planks below the fo'csle head, in the clipper's bow, where the bow wash was noisy about them as she dipped to the swell.

When eight bells was struck the mate blew his whistle for all hands to muster; Bill Murray standing, a lantern in his hand, beneath the bridge-head, saying:

"All ready, sir. The job's done, sir."

"Carry your captain to the after hatch. Lay the second mate beside him. You'll handle them respectful, " said Joe Trefusis.

The hands bore the skipper of the fast *Maharanee* to rest till daybreak upon the after hatch, beneath the bridge of his tall ship, where no peering star might see the pallor on a sleeping sailor's face. Beside him they laid the form of the second mate, to rest a while, near to his skipper—poor seamanship forgotten between them; waiting for dawn to come from out the eastern sky.

When they had borne these dead to their resting-place, the hands stood as though expectant, below the bridge-head; seeming to wait an order from the mate. The mate appeared to be unaware of their presence. A sailor, touching his hat in salute, came to the head of the poop accommodation-ladder, a figure dark against the sky-line, distinct in the starlight.

"What is it?" asked Joe Trefusis.

"Mister, them that's layin' on the deck, sir, wot will we do wi' *them*, sir?"

"You'll leave them lie."

The man, abashed, returned to his comrades; his comrades whispering amongst

themselves, and to him; seeming to urge him to do, or to say, something. Again the figure appeared at the head of the poop-ladder.

"Mister, we're feared they'll fetch us evil luck, sir, two corpses, sir,—wot ought to be decent buried in the sea. We're feared o' them."

"They hired the piper. Leave them lie. No one touches them till morning comes," said the mate.

The sailors walked forward, going slowly; gathering about the main hatch, not daring to enter the fo'csle; or to walk the deck where Johnson lay, his arms outstretched upon the deck. All through the night-watches the *Maharanee* sped onward, the stars bright above her, the wind-song in her dainty rigging; no lights along her deck; no voices; no footfalls—the sleepers on her after hatch, the sleeper in the fo'csle, face down on the hard planks, the elf man in the main rigging, face toward the sky, seeming to cry for silence on their last night upon the water's face; their last night beneath the spread wings of a speeding clipper; sleepers lying unutterably still—the elf sailor, as though listening to a voice above the stars, his face expectant, eager. . . . "You show me do dot?"

The *Maharanee* sped on.

Tregenna, while the mate lay down to sleep a while, walked the poop, his head erect; his eyes upon the weather; his senses keen—hearing a voice that spoke across the sea to him—

"Our rock is firm, Amos; and so am I."

He heard the tones of ship-bells as the watchers struck the hours till day should come; and heard the sea surge shoreward by the rocks of Maer.

Day broke above a racing clipper, her rails dipping to the green sea; sprays flashing about her; low-hovering sea-fowl following her fast feet.

The mate blew his whistle.

"Lower away the royals. Clew up."

They lowered the royals to the mast-heads, easing the wind-strain upon the masts; easing her swift pace through the sea, as, far to the east, a grayness overspread the sky.

"Square the main yards," said the mate.

They hauled in upon the port braces, throwing the sails aback in the wind—stopping the clipper; holding her halted in her eastward race, lifting idly on the swells.

The ship hove-to, for the burial of her captain and her second mate. A sailor stepped from amongst his comrades, approaching the mate as upon the evening before, saluting, and expectant.

"Well? What is it?"

"Mister, we ain't no dogs, sir."

"Well? What of it?"

"There's Barlow, sir; an' Johnson, sir,"

"Well?"

"Can't they be decent buried in the sea, sir? Same as them others?"

"Murray, get your needle. Sew those men up. All right, men. Give Murray a hand, any of you who are handy with a palm and needle."

A breath of satisfaction ran amongst the gathered sailors, all of them hurrying forward; several fetching palms and needles to help Bill Murray with the shrouding of their comrades.

No longer afraid of the sailor face-down upon the deck, they entered the fo'csle; standing above him; one of them saying—

"'E couldn't be just buried like a dog."

Another saying—

"That's wot the mate called 'im—a dawg."

Another saying:

"Did you ever see 'im dance? At Dad's place on Pacific Street?"

Another making answer:

"Aye! An' to old Christine Zonino's too, at Genoa? D'ye mind old Christine's daughters? Them two dago gals? Did y'ever see 'im dancin' wi' the littlest one?"

"Aye! 'E was a one to dance! Mind 'ow 'e'd sing 'Roll the Cotton'?"

"'E won't never lap up no more ale, pore chap, will 'e? Nor no more rum!"

"'E's got to be decent buried. 'Is corpse 'd fetch us bad luck."

Murray coming, they helped him measure the gorilla sailor for his sail-cloth shroud; whispering and nodding their heads; speaking softly in that gloomy fo'csle.

Below the main rigging three men knelt beside the elf sailor.

" 'E was crazy, wasn't 'e? Crazier than ——!"

"Aye, 'e was crazy sure enough. What turned his mind, I wonder?"

"Maybe the cold sea. Maybe he was with some ship as got hove down off Stiff. Maybe he was once weeks in an open boat. There ain't no telling on the sea, is there?"

"That's right, there ain't! It might ha'

been old Stiff—ice-floes off Stiff, eh? It might ha' been some woman, too!"

They sat together, sewing on the sail-cloth shroud.

The sewing done, the twine cut, the needles stuck through their jumpers, the palms yet on their hands, they arose, looking from one to another.

"Will we carry them aft? Will we lay them alongside the skipper and the second mate?"

"Aye, let's carry 'em aft, lads. They've all to be decent buried in the sea.

They bore the two forms aft, carrying them slowly, easily; while above them, in the rigging, the wind moaned by—the surge of the waiting sea lapping alongside the stilled clipper.

THE ship's cook stared from his galley door, a small Malay watching white sailors at their curious rites; decent burial for the sea's dead in the bosom of the sea.

From the mate's room Bill Murray, come to see how his pal was faring, watched, through a port, the company upon the quarter-deck.

"What's goin' on on deck, now, Bill?" asked Carey.

"They're a-buryin' the corpuses—all on 'em together," answered Murray.

Rising on one elbow, Carey peered through the port.

"'Ark to Red Tregenna!" said Bill Murray.

The hands were gathered by the quarter-rail, where the bodies of the dead lay side by side; their feet resting on the railing, their heads upheld by old comrades.

"Amos," the mate had said, "do you call to mind the words for burying a man?"

"No, sir; none but a very few—a few that I have heard my father use at funerals by Poughill churchyard, and sometimes at Bude too, sir."

"You'll have to say what words you know above them, Amos; for I know none. Will you say such as you can call to mind?"

Amos Tregenna stood, bareheaded, on the topgallant railing then, looking into the deep green sea beside the clipper; trying to recall words that he had heard his father use at burials of folk who, dying in his stern beliefs, had willed that he should bury them. He could recall but very few.

"Are you ready?" asked Joe Trefusis, standing on the deck below the great red-bearded sailor.

Tregenna nodded his head, his eyes upon the waters of the restless sea; as though he looked into a calling face that hovered there.

"Ashes to ashes—dust to dust," said Amos Tregenna.

The still forms were lowered, one by one.

THE funeral was over; the mate looking at what was left of the crew of the *Maharanee*.

"There'll be new watches picked," he said. "Tregenna will take one and I the other. If there's any more trouble aboard, *I* will start it."

"Mister," said the Scandinavian sailor, stepping forward, pointing to leeward, "der iss a steamer."

"All hands keep handy. Tregenna come to the poop," said the mate.

In another moment the old international code signal N C was running aloft upon the signal halyards of the *Maharanee*—the signal of a ship in distress, or in need of assistance.

Aboard the steamer the captain and his officers stood upon their bridge; watching a sailing-clipper hove-to beneath the cold dawn-sky, apparently with something wrong aboard her.

"Queer! She doesn't see our pennant," said the captain. "There must be something pretty much the matter over there."

And to the quartermaster in the wheel-house he said:

"Helm up. Head for her weather quarter. . . .

"Ah, there she goes!" he added. "N C—I thought so! Steady your helm, there," he said, watching the flags upon the halyards of the *Maharanee*.

A few minutes later a boat lay under the quarter of the clipper; and her second officer, meeting Trefusis, was taken to the cabin; there to hear in few words the story of the mutiny.

"All right, sir. I'll take your wounded man off. We've a first-rate doctor, and he'll soon be fixed up. My skipper will spare you one of our junior officers and what men you need to take you in," said the steamer man when Trefusis was done.

The steamer man returned to his vessel; Jim Carey lying upon a donkey breakfast in the boat's stern-sheets; and the boat,

speedily returning, brought off the steamer's sixth mate and three hands to replace Barlow, Johnson and Carey.

Trefusis sent a letter to the owners of the clipper with briefly told tidings of the happenings aboard their ship; sending also the papers and effects of the skipper and the second mate, together with the sea-chests of the dead men. Before Carey was taken to the steamer's boat he handed him a letter.

"That's for my wife, in Bude, Carey. I want you to be sure to send it to her, will you?" he said.

Jim Carey grinned up into the mate's face.

"Mister, I ain't never been nothin' but a dawg till you says to me, 'Lower away them t'gallant 'alyards.' I'm a-goin' to give that there letter to yer missus wiv me own 'ands."

IN THE barroom of the Haven Inn, in the seaport of Bude, there was gathered a company of men, standing about a fellow who sat cross-legged upon the bar; eagerly listening to what he was saying. He was a queer little fellow who limped heavily on one leg; a man who in indefinable ways seemed to whisper of the open roads of the oceans.

"Yus," he said, "I give the lydy the letter this arternoon, jest as quick as I 'opped offen the coach. An' she says to me, 'Ere, sailor, 'old me byby w'ile I reads my Joe's letter—jest like that."

Cross-legged, a mug of ale in one hand, a pipe in the other, he looked from one to another of the company before him.

"'Ow did it 'appen? 'Ow does things 'appen? W'y, it 'appened along o' a sailor's wantin' to wet 'is w'istle wi' rum. That's 'ow it 'appened, mateys."

They plied him with questions; for the tidings of the mutiny aboard the *Maharanee* had been the talk of the town for a day before this little limping sailor had appeared upon the hilly streets of Bude, questioning the passers-by—

"Matey, w'ere does Mr. Trefusis' missis 'ang 'er 'at?"

"Well," he continued, "the second mate 'e goes an' gets gay wiv a big chap called Tregenna, an' Tregenna 'e lands 'im one blink on th' bloomin' jaw—fixes 'im for keeps. 'E jest lay there wi' the blood a-ooging out on 'is mouth an' the scupper-water flowin' all about 'im. Tregenna's got a fist on 'im like when a spanker boom swings over."

The men about him looked from one to another, talking of Amos Tregenna and recalling old pranks of his of by-gone days.

"Mind the time he swam on the up-current to Maer Reef? And back again, too?" asked one.

"Aye, and mind the time he swum off to that Fleetwood tramp that piled ashore at Boscastle? An' took a line aboard an' saved her crew?"

"I mind that well. Too bad his old dad was such a crazed fool! That's where Amos got the wild streak in him."

"Fill up the gentleman's mug, will ee, Mr. Pentire?"

Pentire, the tavernkeeper, filled up Jim Carey's mug.

"'Ere's luck to the old *Maharanee*—a fine, dandy clipper as ever went sailin'! Drink 'er down," said Jim Carey, cross-legged upon the bar.

They plied him with questions, gathering at first hand tales of a home-come sailor; tales growing ever more fanciful with good ale in his stomach, and the delight of simple men in telling old tales over.

"'Hashes to hashes, dust to dust,'" says Tregenna, solemn as a bloomin' devil-dodger from the missions to seamen; an' they let 'em all go over the quarter rail to Davy Jones an' old Mother Carey."

"Fill his mug, Mr. Pentire. His mug's empty. Yes, mister, and what did they do when Tregenna killed the second mate?"

"W'y, they did jest wot they'd do fer you an' me if we was to go killin' a lot o' 'armless little ossifers—they put 'im in irons an' locked 'im up."

Pentire, calling to them that closing time was come, the company departed; the little sailor, with Pentire's permission, curling up upon the bare boards in a corner of the room, snug from the weather.

When morning came a man entered the Haven Inn.

"Where's that sailor fellow?" he asked.

Pentire called to Jim Carey, who was across the road watching the ducks swim in the tiny river that flows through the town of Bude.

"Fellow, I'm skipper o' the ketch *Twin Brothers*, an' bound for London River. I want a hand. What d'ye say to signing on wi' me?"

Jim Carey went to sea with the ketch *Twin Brothers*, staying with her voyage by voyage; enjoying the novelty of the coasting-trips.

Each time she made her moorings in the Bude Canal, men at the bar of the Haven Inn gave him ready hearing and good ale; listening to the story of the mutiny aboard the clipper *Maharanee*.

IN A little house at the end of Morwenna Terrace Judy Trewarne hid her face on the hard bosom of her fanatical mother, crying; her mother saying,

"Judy, no gal o' mine could love such a son o' Belial as that Amos Tregenna has shown himself to be. Thank God, gal, that he went to sea to show you what he was. Cease your wicked tears an' be righteous."

IT WAS an overcast day of January when the *Maharanee* came winging homeward to the Bristol Channel; the channel waters smooth and cold; the Winter air crystal clear; each field and house and hedgerow of the land distinct from far at sea. Beside her wheel stood Joe Trefusis, skipper of the white-winged clipper now, and, at his side, his big hands upon the wheel-spokes, Amos Tregenna. Putting his telescope down, Trefusis spoke to the helmsman.

"It all looks as it used to look, Tregenna. I can see the houses on the hill, and the masts of coasters at the canal moorings. I hope a wind comes soon. There's smoke from my chimney, lad."

Tregenna looked shoreward.

"I'll not see home, sir—a murderer they'll call me. There is no smoke by any chimney for Amos Tregenna now. I'd like to see Judy once, and tell her how it was, before they take me."

Trefusis, at the helmsman's side, looked to the town upon the hill; thinking of his wife, and of his child; wondering how it would feel could he not see them when the ship came to her port.

Night, calm, with no wind, with no ripple on the water, fell upon the channel; a bright night, filled with many stars; cloudless and serene; far away the shore-lights blinking, as though nodding to the side lights of the home-bound clipper.

At midnight, when eight bells was struck and the watch changed, the mate called the muster of the hands beneath the bridge-head.

"Murray?"

"Here, sir."

"Johanssen?"

"Here, sir."

"Heubert?"

"Here, sir."

"Tregenna? Tregenna? Where's Tregenna? See where Tregenna is, one of you."

Finishing the roll of the two watches, he asked again—

"Tregenna?"

The skipper came upon the bridge, listening to the roll of the sailors; the last roll ere home should be reached.

"That's queer, sir," said the mate. "I guess he's glad to be so close to home again, and grown careless; and lies asleep."

Joe Trefusis made no reply; starting unconsciously as, far away, he saw the blinking lighthouse on the breakwater at Bude—blinking as though to welcome home across dark waters a home-faring sailor; blinking as though it knew of secrets guarded in that night upon the sea—tales written in men's lives under the watching stars.

"Tregenna? Where's Tregenna?" called the skipper of the *Maharanee;* looking as he spoke toward the shores of Bude; as though to read a secret in that blinking light upon the breakwater. There was no reply.

" 'E's drowned 'isself to save the 'angman a job—that's wot!" muttered one sailor to another, down in the gloom upon the clipper's deck.

"Look for Tregenna, some of you," said the mate, while, below the bridge, all hands waited for the relieving of the wheel.

The hands returned from looking for Tregenna.

"Gone overside to Davy! Gone overside when he was close to home. Why not have waited?" said a sailor.

"Aye, waited for the bloomin' 'angman! Would *you* 'ave waited for the bloomin' 'angman?" murmured another.

"Men," said the skipper of the *Maharanee* "is there anything you want me to do? Shall I put a boat over and look for him?"

"I ain't seed 'im since I don't know when, hours past maybe—hours an' hours," said a sailor of the port watch.

"Anything you want me to do? I'll do anything you wish me to," said Joe Trefusis.

"'E's gone to fool the bloomin' 'angman," muttered a man from the shadow of the mizzen shrouds.

"What do you think, sir?" asked the

skipper, turning to his mate, the steamer man. "Is there anything that we can do?"

"I think you're a most unlucky ship, sir!" said the steamer man, adding: "I see nothing you can do. The weather begins to look dirty. I'd make for port. She can be at moorings by the drawbridge in the forenoon watch."

The wind, in light airs, was coming from sou'west; the *Maharanee*, her skysails set, gliding from the coast; making to round Hartland Point; her course fair for Avonmouth, and home to Bristol.

"Relieve the wheel and lookout," said the mate; Joe Trefusis, at his side, looking long at the breakwater light, now growing farther and farther away; blinking sleepily over the sea; as though, its secret kept, it did not longer care to remain alight.

The wind freshened as the night wore on, and by dawn a fine breeze was blowing; the *Maharanee* sweeping up-channel, graceful as a swan, swift as a fleeting gull, the cold dawn upon her trucks, her skysails, her wet hull; the dull brown waters of the channel rushing by her; her crew gazing gladly shoreward—scenting the fields, the sweetness of the ridges of the landward hills; contentedly sniffing the scents of the west country.

" 'E fooled the bloomin' 'angman—an' it's a-goin' to blow above 'is grave if I ain't much mistook," said a sailor on the fo'csle head of the home-coming clipper.

IT WAS a gray dawn, the wind coming in fresh from the Atlantic. Toward the shore by Morwinstow a man swam through the sea; his arm swinging in rhythm regular, unbroken and tirelessly strong. He seemed to come from the open channel, as though thrown from some ship and left to swim ashore; if swim he could. Reaching the shore, climbing upon a ridge of rock, he turned to survey the sea behind him; drawing long breaths, scanning the horizon, and looking long toward the channel between Lundy and the main land. Turning his back upon the sea, he strode inland, walking fast, as though in haste for the accomplishment of some hardset purpose.

All the morning he walked onward, keeping inland, following no road; but staying close to hedges along the coast-line; and toward evening, came to the neighborhood of Poughill, where, climbing deep into the side of a time-blackened straw stack, he lay down to rest, sleeping in snatches, and awakening to peer at the fields about him, and at the sky above, across which, from sou'west, clouds were flying; bringing from seaward a chill drizzle, and misty weather in which he could see but a little distance.

Toward nightfall, leaving the shelter of the straw stack and keeping to the cliffs, he walked swiftly through the mists toward Bude; the sea wind sobbing about him, the sound of the Atlantic surges borne past him far inshore.

IN THE Haven Inn sat the skipper of the ketch *Twin Brothers*, sipping at a mug of ale. Beside him the town policeman, Will Pengelly, a large fat man important in blue uniform, also sipped a mug of ale. Nodding above his mug, the skipper of the coaster spoke.

" 'E left me at Bristol; the best man I ever 'ad wi' me aboard the *Twin Brothers!* There was a big Indieman with blue Peter at her fore, and he got itching feet at sight of her.

" 'I wants ter see wot it looks like outside,' 'e said. 'I'm tired o' these 'ere coast-in'trips wot gets a man no place.'

" 'I 'ad to pay 'im off an' let 'im go. He came aboard to say 'So-long' just afore the Indieman, the *Bencoolen* she was, hauled Peter down and went out to the river. I saw her anchored off Barry Roads as I came down-channel; waiting for something, I suppose. A queer little chap, 'e was."

The wind was crying mournfully without; and men, entering from the night, rubbing their hands and shaking the wet from their jackets, joined in the conversation at the bar; sipping brown ale, licking their lips, blowing the foam from their beer.

THE door opening, the men gathered there looked up to welcome a newcomer; to bid a neighbor take a drink with them—and fell suddenly silent; as though a cold blast from the open door had chilled their bones.

Will Pengelly, his face flushed with good ale, stepped forward.

"Amos Tregenna, where be you come from, lad?" he asked of the man, who, opening the door, had allowed the chill wind to blow upon the gathered company.

Tregenna, weak from a long swim in cold salt water, from a long day in the open without food, his face white, his eyes full of

a light that none there could fathom, or attempt to fathom, walked to the table; seating himself beside it, his hands quivering a little, his head bowed.

Stepping forward, Pentire placed before him a mug of steaming liquor.

Amos Tregenna, looking up into Pentire's face, pushed away the liquor.

"Have ye a bite o' bread and cheese?"

Old lady Pentire ran to her pantry, returning with a plate piled high with bread and cheese, cold beef in big slices, and fresh-baked saffron cakes. Nodding his thanks to her, Tregenna fell to upon the food, eating ravenously; the others watching him, wide-eyed and silent; waiting for what might come next. Will Pengelly stood above him, an old playfellow in from sea; a lad with whom he had fought, and swum, and pulled an oar of Summer evenings on the Bude Canal.

"Amos, where be you from?"

Tregenna, looking up at him, replied:

"Let me see Judy. I'll tell ye when I'm done wi' that." He spoke low, so that none save Pengelly heard the words.

"Will ee surely and for certain come back again, Amos? There's trouble afoot over ye, ain't there?"

"I'll be back—soon back," said Tregenna, and, rising, looked for a moment about the gathered company; searching the faces of old playfellows.

Leaving the inn, the wind blowing noisily about him, he went swiftly up the hill toward Morwenna Terrace.

AT A house at the far end of Morwenna Terrace a little maid opened the door to the night, and looked up at the face of a big, red-bearded man above her.

"Where's Judy?"

The little maid let him in, opening a door from the narrow hall way, saying:

"I'll tell Judy. She's up-stairs."

Tregenna, standing at the window, peered out to the night's darkness. He did not hear the door when it opened, and a girl with dark eyes and long black hair stepped into the middle of the room. They stood so for a while, Tregenna staring at the night without, seeing only a void; the girl standing behind him, gazing at him, silent, her eyes frightened, her lips half-parted; as though she sought deep breaths that would not come.

Suddenly, turning, Amos faced her, his eyes upon hers; his lips fast closed; his hands at his sides, and his head a little bowed.

"Is it true Amos?" she whispered.

"What true?"

"Are you a murderer? You didn't want me?"

His head drooped lower; his eyes upon her face; her eyes moist, her face wet.

"I wanted you."

"Your word?"

"I want you yet."

The outer house-door opened; the sea-wind, crying by, shaking the chimneys and driving the mists inshore.

The door of the room opening, a woman entered, staring at them; her eyes growing suddenly hard, her face stern, her hands clenched.

"Tell him to go, Judy."

"I want you yet," he murmured; his face as the ridges of the moonlit sea.

The woman, her eyes aflame, stepped between them; her fingers driving the nails into her palms.

"Go."

Tregenna turned, and, stepping from the room, opening the outer door to the wild sea-weather, was lost in the night.

"Pray to the Lord. Thank Him for your deliverance," said the woman, her eyes scorning the tears upon her daughter's face; the girl hearing only the outcry of the night wind wailing by, shaking the chimneys.

THE door of the Haven Inn opening, the same man entered.

"I'm come."

The company gathered there leaned forward, looking at him, his clothing soaked with the weather; his face as the sea-tops.

Stepping forward, Will Pengelly spoke.

"Amos—" his words cut short by the distant rumble of a rocket, the men about them leaping from their seats, springing from their places at the bar, shouting—

"The lifeboat—run lads—the lifeboat!"

The houses on the hills of Bude became suddenly bright with many lights; the voices of people shouting to one another; forms running through the mists, hurrying across the little bridge toward the lifeboat house.

Lifeboatmen were at their places, garbed for the battle, their faces as rocks seen by starlight—set, expressionless; the roar of

distress rockets continuous now; men's eyes filled with strange light—light unfathomable; children of the sea come to the struggle with her insatiable hunger.

The sound of horse-hoofs was heard; Tom Porcot, the driver of the Holsworthy coach, lashing his horses to a gallop; galloping up the hill, to the downs by the cliffs. Voices crying!

"Where is she?"

"Maer reef."

Voices whispering low, women's voices, and hard voices of age-bowed men.

"She's lost!"

"She's gone."

"No rocket can reach her there."

The life-saving crew were gone, the life-boat gone—lost in the night; the life-saving crew, with the rocket apparatus, to the cliffs above Maer Reef—the life-boat to the face of the sea, the outer darkness.

"No use! It's all no use. The lifeboat can't come to her. The rockets can't reach her. She's gone—gone wi' all hands! God!"

UPON the top of a huge flat rock a woman stood, her figure hidden in the dark. Above her, high upon the cliffs to the northward, the life-saving crew sent useless rockets seaward.

Aware suddenly of a presence near her, she peered at a great man who stepped to the face of the rock; hearing his voice, distinct in a lull; the rock sheltered from the wind's full fury by a ledge beyond it.

" 'Our rock,' she called it. It was here I give her my word. It's here I'll show her."

She crouched, terrified, sensing some dreadful thing that was to be unseen by the man who stood so close beside her, she watched while he unwound a coil of line from his great shoulders; watching while he made the line's end fast about the rock ledge; watching while he tossed his clothing from him; his skin white as marble, ghostly white, terrible as death—his arms, huge arms, upraised a moment above his head, as though he spoke to some being invisible beyond the clouds.

In a moment he was gone; the woman feeling the rope pay out, slowly, from that long coil upon the rock's flat face. Falling upon her knees, she hid her face from the night's dread darkness, her hair a cloud about her shoulders, her body shaking.

UPON the cliffs a lad arrived, breathless from swift running.

"The coastguardmen—give it 'em quick!"

A coastguardsman took from his hand a piece of paper, holding it to a lantern's light; suddenly shouting—

"Tregenna's gone to her from the flat rock."

Men ran, shouting, hurrying, breathless, climbing down the face of the cliffs by a narrow pathway; coming to the surface of the flat rock, beneath which, in a little bay, a tiny sheltered haven, the water was deep without great rollers running shoreward.

"Can he make it?" asked one.

"Many's the time he's made it in fine weather," answered another.

"Tide's right. If he can get out to the up current it'll carry him right to her," said Pengelly. "I've swam it with him in fair weather."

"Amos was the best swimmer on the Cornish coast," said another.

Hidden against the ledges, a woman crouched; her hair wind blown; her ears wide to a calling voice, low through the night wind's fury—

"I want you yet."

"HE'S made it!"

From the ship upon the reef of Maer new signals flashed; and, seizing the rope, men ran with it to the cliff-top; making fast to it a stouter line, and signaling to the crew of the wreck to haul in.

Soon the breeches-buoy was traveling to and fro above the rollers; fetching ashore men who stumbled as they landed, beaten by the wind and sea. They brought them all ashore, sailors, mates, and master last of all—a man whose head was bowed, whose feet were unsteady as from great horror.

"What ship?" they asked the rescued sailors.

"*Bencoolen*, Bristol for the Indies," said a little fellow, who, looking at faces about him, cried—

"Well, you don't say?"

"The *Maharanee* went in as we come out," he said. "I seed 'er. They lost old Red-'Ead comin' up the channel. 'E went overboard."

A man, drawing him aside, spoke in his ear; the little fellow looking up into his face, incredulous.

"I never arst," he said. "I seed 'im

come aboard an' never arst wot come of 'im —my Gawd!"

Men gathered about the skipper of the lost *Bencoolen*, listening to slow words he spoke.

"He came aboard with a big sea, and must have been smashed upon the hatch coamings; for he was carried outboard by the next, the rope trailing all across the deck. We tried to haul him in. We couldn't. We had to cut the line. My good God!"

A man, unnoticed, a new arrival with nothing to distinguish him from other men there, passed amongst the people on the cliff, hearing what they said, but himself silent.

The little fellow saw him.

"Mr. Trefusis, 'e's gone, sir. Tregenna's gone."

The other turned away, walking from amidst the people on the cliff, now starting townward with the rescued crew. As though at home upon the windy cliffs of Maer, he went swiftly through the gloom, and, coming soon to a narrow pathway, descended it; the little fellow at his heels.

A woman, unseen, her hair loose about her face, crouched beside them.

"Mr. Trefusis, my pal Bill Murray says to me, 'You watch that there Tregenna— 'e's one o' they 'oly beggars.' Wot is a 'oly beggar, Mr. Mate?"

The sea-wind bore his words away, softening with its own strange music the harshness of the little sailor's voice; mingling his words with other words, that seemed to drift across the dark night sea—

"I want you yet."

THE DERELICT

by John A. Wass, M. M.

I LEFT her headed for Lord-Knows-Where, in latitude forty-nine,
With a cargo of deals from Puget Sound and her bows blown off by a mine;
I saw her just as the sun went down; I saw her—floating still,
And "I hope them deals will let her sink afore so long," said Bill.

It warn't no use to stand by her; she could neither sail nor steer,
With the better part of a thousand miles between her and Cape Clear.
The sea was up to her water ways, and gaining fast below,
But I'd like to know that she went to her rest as a ship has a right to go.

For it's bitter hard on a decent ship, look at it how you may,
When she's worked her traverse and done her trick and sailed with the best in her day,
To be floatin' around like a nine-day drowned on the Western Ocean swell,
With never a one to hand and reef or steer and strike the bell:

No one to tend her binnacle lamps, or light her mast-head light,
Or scour her planking, or scrape her seams when the days are sunny and bright;
No one to sit on her hatch and smoke and yarn when the day was done,
And say, "That gear wants reevin' new some fine dog watch, my son!"

No one to stand by the halyard pin when it's comin' on to blow;
Never the roar of "Rio Grande" to the watch's stamp and go;
Just the sea-birds sittin' along the rail and callin' the long day through
Like the souls of old dead sailormen that used to be her crew.

Never a port of all her ports for her to fetch again;
Nothing; only the sea and the sky, the sun and the wind and the rain.
It's cruel hard on a decent ship, and so I tell you true
That I wish I knew she had gone to her rest as a good ship ought to do.

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

SOMETHING from Bill Adams as to how his complete novelette in this issue came to be written:

Lindsay, California.

I thought it might amuse some one to know the true history of old Amos.

IT WAS some fifteen years ago working like a galley slave in the frantic and seemingly hopeless endeavor to make an honest living; I had at that time the sum of $35; one wife, and one small child; a few old clothes and no dog. When a man hasn't got a dog I consider that he is about as hard up as a man can get. Well, anyway, I was trying to get together enough money to lay by a penny toward a package of dog-biscuit. For three years at that period of my life the largest amount of money I ever had at one time was $35.

I was working for $35 a month. The sum of $35 is frequently before my eyes to-day. Whenever I pass a bank and hear money clinking I murmur "35 bucks." Some day, when I get good and rich I am going to slip every old bum upon the road $35.

Curiously enough I received a notice yesterday from a frightful criminal of a banker who seems to think that I have overdrawn my account—and by a queer coincidence it is for $35. Can you beat it?

WELL—one night I awoke, and lying upon my bed, which was a few quilts upon the bare floor, I got to thinking of the sea, and, so thinking, saw great topsails flaunting past my little window, all fair against the stars. Sea water slapped, and a low wind cried moaning down the night.

Rising I went to the tiny table, taking my baby's copy-book which she used to draw cats and dogs and cows within. I found a pencil and until morning wrote the tale of Amos Tregenna. I don't remember how long the tale took me to write. It filled a copy-book or two when it was done.

Then the world closed in around me again and I forgot all else but the insistent call of pick and shovel, hoe and hay-fork.

The years went along with Amos Tregenna lying in an old box.

Many a day I've gone to a back door saying,

"Missus—I begs yer parding; but would there be a show to get a cup o' cawfee fer a pore man as is out of a job?"

I've gone down the road without the coffee, often: Amos biding his time.

Last Fall I took him out and rewrote him; changed his name to "The Helmsman of the *Maharanee*," and sent it to you folks. You sent it back and told me to give it the "once over." I did so, and then you sent me a check which was so much in excess of $35 that I and the ghost of Amos sat opposite each other and held our sides for laughter.

That's the tale of Tregenna. He was a good shipmate. He never kicked.

He went sailing with a simple minded mariner for all those years and never once complained when he was hungry.

I remain, yours affectionately,

BILL.

If you think it is effeminate for a six-foot man to sign himself "yours affectionately" go to ——.

Lovingly yours—BILL ADAMS.

P. S.—Life's a rummy jig, isn't it? A man never knows what will turn up, does he?

Last night again, lying awake, I fell to thinking of the sea—my sea; and so thinking saw a stately great top gallant sail slow drifting down the dazy night; hearing a song ring out upon the silence of the orange groves. Men shouted, and the groan of that ship's gear made music on the air.

A sailor sang,

"Rolling home—rolling home—rolling home across the sea—"

And rising on my bed, losing sight of her fast fluttering canvas, I felt that all of us were as deep water voyagers, and rolling home.—B.

THE following from the New York *Times* of May 19 is worth thinking over, isn't it? Its headlines mention 8,000,000 hunters.

If, a few years ago, some one had found an island in tropic or temperate seas where the native women not only sported nose-rings, tattooed their faces, filed their teeth to points and painted them black, but also wore furs during the hot season, that last item would have been reported as a very amusing bit of news—what won't those poor, crazy savages do next? But now our own highly civilized women wear furs in Summer—as well as all kinds of things hanging from pierced ears. Why do we call those others "poor crazy savages" and look down upon them as benighted in their ideas of adornment and common sense?

And just because some one has decided to make Summer furs the "rage," our women, like nice little sheep, make themselves uncomfortable and ridiculous. Even a pole-cat has sense enough to shed all the fur it can in Summer. Of course, if the women want to be uncomfortable and ridiculous, that's more or less their own business, but this fur-in-Summer thing is not just their own business. It means death. Wholesale death where there was too much death before. Death and extinction.

Think it over. I can't ask a man making his living by trapping to stop and of course he wouldn't stop if I did ask him. But—think it over.

I wonder who the person is who decided to set Summer furs as the fashion. Or the small group of people who mapped them out as the next fad for women to fall for. That person or small group has killed millions of living creatures. I hope the animals come back as ghosts to haunt at night. And maybe, if there's a hell, when that person or that group goes there he, she or they will be turned over to these millions of maimed animals for a couple of eternities just as a reminder to think a bit when mapping out new ways of filling the pocketbook.

In the following the words "little effort and no risk" refer to the dealer rather than the trapper.

The belief that the age of mammals is speedily drawing to a close, through activities of sportsmen, furriers and natives, was expressed by noted scientists yesterday at a meeting of the American Society of Mammalogists, at the American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West and Seventy-seventh Street.

THIS opinion, which they based upon statistics at their disposal, was voiced by Henry Fairfield Osborn, President of the museum; William T. Hornaday, Director of the New York Zoological Park; Harold E. Anthony, assistant curator of mammals at the museum, and Professor C. C. Adams of the State University of Forestry, an eminent zoologist. All blamed the progressive tendencies of modern civilization: the use of fire-arms, which knowledge has spread to the natives of India and Africa, progress in locomotion, and women's demand for fur in Summer and Winter, were leading to animal extinction, speakers said. It will be only a matter of years, they predicted, when wild game will be seen only in museums and picture books.

"We are now witnessing the close of the Age of Mammals," said Dr. Osborn at the end of his address, repeating the sentence for emphasis. Mammal elimination by man, he said, commenced about 400,000 years ago, but became more acute in recent years. In 1877, when he first went West, Dr. Osborn said wild game was still everywhere, while even as late as 1890 elk, deer and antelope were abundant in the uplands of Colorado.

"NOTHING in the history of creation," he went on, "has paralleled the ravages of the fur and hide trade, which now, with the bone fertilizer trade, threatens the entire vertebrate kingdom. The legitimate use of furs for protection in cold weather has long since passed. Furs are now a fashion just as

feathers were thirty years ago. Furs are worn in midsummer purely for ornamentation and personal adornment or to make a show of wealth.

"This cause of the close of the Age of Mammals can be arrested through the creation of sound sentiment and the education of women and children in the same manner as the National Association of Audubon Society has arrested destruction of birds. But such a movement will be extremely difficult because the fur trade all over the world offers opportunities for money-making, with very little effort and no risk."

In New York State, according to Dr. Hornaday's figures, there are 500 destructionists to every conservationist. In the West, there are 1,000 to one; in Alaska the ratio is 2,000 to one. In Africa are 100,000 persons destroying wild life to every one preserving it.

HERE is something from Talbot Mundy in connection with his complete novel in this issue:

In the very nature of things no government that owns a censorship permits information about illegal secret societies to filter out, if it can help it. And it is the very nature of all censorship that it breeds and fosters secret societies. Add to that the Levantine's natural delight in illegality, Egypt's unique political atmosphere, and the growing impotence of empires—plus politics, and you have the setting for this story.

EGYPT is full of secret societies, some preying on others, but all arrayed against the foreigner. The foreigner is any man, whether born in Egypt or otherwise, who plays games straight and likes to keep his word. It is a matter of opinion, and open to argument, whether or not one nation has the moral right to rule another nation. But not even the Egyptian, who will dispute all things just for the joy of differing, will deny that the government "would be much more profitable for the governing classes, if only those interfering English would go away." That is how an Egyptian official stated it to me in a rather candid moment. So the English passion for exactness in accounts has led to the formation of still other secret societies—all mischievous, and some internationally so.

Meldrum Strange is an attempt to draw the composite portrait of three men, two of whom I know personally, one of whom gave me permission to use him in a story if I liked, and one of whom I only saw, heard speak and admired across the dinner-table. All three men are multi-millionaires, and, as it happens, all three of them are devoted to the thankless task of "doing some good in the world." I believe they succeed, but I can't say I envy them, for, like the man referred to in the Book of Job, they are full of trouble.

NARAYAN SINGH, as I have said before, is a friend of mine. I received a letter from him from India this morning, in which he says he "prays daily that full madness may descend on all the politicians, so that their inflictions and abominations may increase to the point where men rebel at last, and act like men, and slay the devils!" *Narayan Singh* rather believes in slaying as an antidote for most things. He is a magnificent swordsman, and his feat of killing in the story is no more remarkable than the stunt he really did during the war in Palestine, for which he was called out from the ranks by a full general to be complimented and cited for decoration. He was decorated by the French as well as by the British, but thinks more of the notches on his saber than of the medals. A truculent, incredulous, amazing man, of peculiar tact at times, and of cast-iron friendship always.

IT'S just possible that some one will object to the idea of an American millionaire interfering in Egypt in any such way as *Meldrum Strange* is made to in the story. To which the answer is that there is no limit to what Americans will do. The richer they are, the more they override the boundaries. The poorer they are, the less they care for restraint and conventions although bound by many of their own. Either way you like, the American in foreign parts is a problem hardly understood.

But the best way to find out whether "A Secret Society" is probable or not, and whether the chicanery of Egypt is overdrawn, would be to go to Egypt, as I did, and buck the Egyptian's game. Whoever wants my piece of Egypt may have it for the taking, and may keep it if he has the wit, resource and patience.

AT THIS writing the date for the first meeting of the committee of nine for our exploring expedition is set for the evening of May 24th at the Winchester Sportsman's Headquarters, 469 Fifth Avenue. They are, you will remember, to elect from their own number a permanent executive committee of three and to block out roughly the general plans for our expedition.

The readers' vote for members of the committee follows. The number of votes cast may look small to some of you, but in nearly a dozen years we've found that only a small part of those interested send in actual votes. Compared to most votes the number cast is extremely encouraging. A vote of that size means—if the past is any criterion—a general interest that will carry the expedition through with flying colors.

The names are given in order of number of votes:

Edgar Young; Arthur O. Friel and Talbot Mundy (tied, only 2 votes behind); Harold Lamb; Marshall Hall; J. Allan Dunn; A. D. H. Smith; John Held, Jr., and Frederick Moore (tied); L. B. Barretto; John L. Binda; L. Patrick Greene; J. E. Cox; William Patterson White; Henry Collins Walsh. The others followed closely with scattering votes.

MUNDY, Friel and Lamb are at present far too far from New York to meet with the committee. Mundy has wired that he accepts with pleasure but, as he can't

attend now, places himself in the hands of the committee. Previous letters from Lamb make it plain that he'll not be near New York for some time to come. Friel's case is uncertain as to the future. This, temporarily at least, adds numbers 10, 11 and 12 to the committee. Two of these are of the staff and we in the office feel that one representative is all that the staff should have. Eliminating, therefore, one of these two of the staff, brings us to number 13, but he also is of the staff. Number 14, William Patterson White, lives out of New York and can not attend evening meetings, while most of the others are not free in the daytime. This brings us to number 15. So the committee of nine will probably consist, at this first meeting, of Edgar Young, Hall, Dunn, Smith, Held, Moore, Binda, Walsh and one member of the staff—Barretto, Greene or Cox. If it can be arranged with the Winchester people there will be a card displayed in the windows of all their New York City stores announcing the meeting and inviting any Camp-Fire readers who wish to attend. That seems the only really practical method of informing you in time of date and place. I'll be there to turn over votes, records, all your letters, and any other data and to get the meeting started. After that everything is in the committee's hands.

THE vote for destination is: Amazon 233; Central America 138, Yucatan 129; Peru 88; China 43; South America 36; Central Africa 31; New Guinea 21; others scattering.

The vote was unanimous to leave all matters in the committee's hands to the extent stated in ballot.

Of those who voted on whether the expedition should be under scientific auspices and command, 144 voted yes, 18 no.

Of those voting on par value of shares 116 voted $1, 45 voted $5, 8 voted $10. There is to be no limit to number of shares that can be taken by one person; names will be published, but not the amounts.

Marshall R. Hall's plan is endorsed, in general, by 150, only 4 voting against it.

No one voted against a permanent organization. In favor of making its purpose the sending out of future expeditions were 143; for general Camp-Fire purposes 41.

Disposition of surplus or profits: paid pro rata to contributors 17; held for permanent expedition fund 100; for permanent general Camp-Fire purposes 45.

Name of expedition: Adventure Expedition 134; Camp-Fire Expedition 39.

As soon as it can be got into the magazine I'll give you the report of what the committee of nine does at its meeting. In the next issue, I hope.

AN INTERESTING plan is to be put before the committee at this meeting. As I've told you, John L. Binda of "A. A." is Research Director of the National Foreign Trade Council, of India House, this city. The other day he put me in touch with H. M. Curran, Lecturer on South American Forests of the Yale School of Forestry. Mr. Curran came to him through Professor Whitford, dean of that well known forestry school. Mr. Curran and I had lunch together and he outlined a plan which, it seemed to me, ought to be laid before your committee direct by him. With their consent he will be present at their meeting.

He has spent years in practical scientific exploration, much of it in South America, knows the game from the inside and, since the purposes of forestry are commercial, is keenly alive to the practical side of things, knows the market for specimens, etc.

To me his plan seems to offer us the opportunity to do something of very particular value that has not been done before and that should be done. As to our expedition he is a disinterested party—his duties prevent his joining it, he wants nothing out of it for himself. What he wants is to see his plan put into operation and he believes we can give it its start, provide the nucleus, set the example and start the ball rolling. Briefly, his idea is coordination of scientific interests in exploration. For years his sense of efficiency has been worried by seeing money and time spent on expeditions sent out for work along only one scientific line, or at best, several. This is waste and inefficiency not only from a business point of view but from the scientific point of view.

FOR example, one expedition goes out for botanical specimens; later another goes out over the same general ground for zoological specimens; later another for entomological research; another for commercial forestry research; others for topography, minerals, archeology, motion-pictures, water power, climatic conditions, etc. Sometimes one or two of these combine,

but for the most part there is no coordination. Naturally it would be much cheaper and more efficient to combine these efforts. Also better for scientific results. Botanical, zoological, etc., specimens are generally secured with only a limited knowledge of their habitat. Topographical survey, forestry survey, meteorological and mineralogical, etc., data would give far wider knowledge of habitat. And so on down the list. Nearly every line could be made more complete and valuable in results if reinforced and broadened by accompanying research along other lines.

Over and over again Mr. Curran has brought back specimens and data in lines other than his own, turning them over to specialists in these other lines, simply because he couldn't stand the waste involved in not gathering them when on the ground. What he wants is to build up a coordinated expedition that will cover all or most of the scientific and commercial lines at one effort—to demonstrate the solid, practical value of such coordination. By proper cooperation all or many lines can take part in one movement or expedition, under one general control but allowing independent effort to the large extent compatible with the general plan. The less one line contributed to the general expense, the less would it share in the general profits. If it paid practically all its own way, sharing only in transportation, general equipment, etc., it would have a corresponding degree of independence in the field.

The above is a very crude sketch of Mr. Curran's plan, but that plan seems well worth while presenting to your committee. Decision on it is of course up to them. It looks like a chance to inaugurate a practically new method in scientific exploration.

WE'RE on the way at last. It's been slow work, these preliminary stages, but now, with your committee about to meet and get down to business, things will begin to happen. Here's to the Adventure Expedition, Camp-Fire's first joint enterprise, our first adventure all together!

"BRIAN DEEVER" follows Camp-Fire custom and rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

I, Brian Deever, stand among you, brethren of the Camp-Fire, humbly, as one who tries to be a man, a man in all things earthly. Whatever excessive humility I may seem to have, you will pardon, when I explain that I feel a little awed by my sudden presence in this Circle of Invisible Friends, by my being one of you, among whom I know there are better, braver, older, stronger, nobler men than I.

I AM tall and thin, and slightly bald. I like to keep my mouth shut and think. I have a wild habit of pacing up and down that annoys other people greatly, but gives me positive pleasure. My gun, my fishing-rod, my books, my pipe, my dog—the old, unforgettable series—these things are dear to me. I can not name my preferences of the first three although on handling a Mannlicher carbine the other day I felt my fingers tingle. The "Rubaiyat" of Omar I call the finest English verse. Of spiritual things, at least those spiritual things for which the queer world of which I am not one has ministers, I do not dare to write. Out of this hemisphere's religious jargon, there are things that I keep close to me. An Airedale is a good dog.

I have been a British soldier. I was a corporal once, but, in the words of *Mulvaney*, "I was reduced afterward." I have carried haversack and water-bottle in strange lands, one of them Siberia, of course. I have some bright bits of ribbon that I can wear upon my chest; a physique drained upon of strength severely by the hardships of an empty campaign; a longing to hear again a bugler boy blowing "retreat" on the parade grounds at Valcartier.

Like me. I am real.—BRIAN DEEVER.

NOW comes the other side of the Sand Creek battle or massacre. Also a word on the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel and another on the first horses in this country:

Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Have been a silent reader of the Camp-Fire stories for some time, and have received some good information, some quiet amusement, and a small bunch of indignation; however the treatment seems to agree with me.

I NOTICED "Uncle Frank" Huston's letter in the issue of March 30th, in reply to "M. W. G."; if "Uncle Frank" will get a copy of Irving Howbert's book, "The Indians of the Pikes' Peak Region," he will get the other side of the story about the battle of Sand Creek. Mr. Howbert was a participant in that historic and much cussed and discussed affair, and he says the settlers, of which this army was largely composed, were entirely justified; I have talked with a good many men who took part in that battle and, one and all, they claim they found enough loot in the Indians' camp, taken from wagon-trains and settlers, to warrant them in doing as they did. This loot included very personal property such as scalps, and O. H. P. Baxter says they found more than 40 of these. The Indians were undoubtedly peaceful at the time of the fight, as it was their habit to raid in the Summer and make peace in the Fall.

WAS also interested in the ingenious theory of Talbot Mundy in regard to the ten lost tribes; however he is all wrong; Lord Kingsborough settled that matter. To the American Indians

belongs the honor of bringing the ten down to date. Their features show that, and as the ten left Canaan before they were branded by the Hittites in as full measure as the two tribes left behind, this is straight.

Am also interested in the discussion as to the pre-historic horse in America, and thought that theory had been laid on the shelf; Cortez brought the first horses to North America.—E. B. B.

THIS comrade calls on the rest of you for a vote. As it happens, we've been considering and working on something of this kind for the better part of a year.

Toronto, Canada.

"Hello, everybody!" Let me sit in your charmed circle for a few minutes and I will be on my way again. Away back in 1911 I picked up a copy of *Adventure* at Colon, C. Z., and have read it ever since. Now the reason I stopped here at your Camp was to call a meeting of you old-timers to ask our editor for what I think would be an improvement, *viz*, that he should give us in every issue a few pages of information. The stories in *Adventure* do not contain any of that sloppy sob stuff, but why not give us some more of "Ask Adventure," only spread out? Tell us about tropical life, travel in foreign lands, wild animals, moths, fleas, beetles, curios, cannibalism, game-trapping and pearl-fishing. These subjects would contain real educational value and I am sure would be appreciated. How about it, Camp-Fire? Get together, boys, and give our editor your opinion. Next time I pass this way I hope to see you have done something, and now I will be on my way.—JOHN SUTTON.

Here's the case as we see it here in the office. Give us your opinion. What comrade Sutton suggests is good meat for our magazine, but there are some drawbacks.

Years ago the question of articles versus fiction was one of a number of points put to a vote by readers. The majority were for all fiction. I do not know, of course, what the sentiment may be now, but the above is at least an indication.

BUT suppose we decide to use articles regularly. At once difficulty arises. We can't afford to print articles that are not sound and authoritative. Suppose articles are sent in dealing with, say, an almost unexplored region of the upper Amazon, Tasmania, the country north of Hudson Bay, Liberia, Tibet, etc., etc. Some of the articles deal with native life, some with history, travel, trade, game, etc., etc. There is no end to the places nor to the subjects that can be written about in connection with each of these places. We in the office probably know at least a little among the seven of us, but sometimes it's very little and in comparatively very few cases can any one of us claim to be a real authority.

By a "real authority" I mean some one who knows a subject so blamed thoroughly that he can sit up and take to pieces anything anybody else says on that subject and be *sure* the other fellow also knows thoroughly all he is talking about. Among you are many real authorities on various regions or on certain phases of them—and a lot who believe they are real authorities until they venture something at Camp-Fire and are jumped upon by others of you who do really know about that subject. But how many of you are authorities on *all* phases of all regions of the earth? Can any seven of you set up as real authorities on everything everywhere? Anyhow, we in the office can't.

Well, you don't want articles unless they are by real authorities, do you? All right, how are we in the office going to check up on articles that come in? Probably in most cases they will come from men we do not know or know about. We can't accept what they say as facts unless we have more than their say-so to go on. We can't maintain a staff of hundreds and hundreds of experts as manuscript readers.

OF COURSE, in some cases we can check up, in some cases some friendly expert like Edgar Young will help out, and in some few cases we know the writer—that he is safe, sound, sure and honest and can be trusted without checking up. But suppose John X. Smith sends us a very interesting article we'd gladly print if we could be sure it were reliable. Only we never heard of John X. Smith before. He may be a liar, a plagiarist, a careless handler of what real knowledge he does possess. On the other hand he may be very much O K in every way. We can't say, "Mr. Smith, we'd buy this if we were sure you're not a liar, but we aren't." Some people bitterly resent even being asked for references.

I'll go into no more detail, for you see the general problem. That problem, acute enough in selecting our fiction, is far more acute when it comes to articles dealing solely with facts.

In a few cases where we've felt reasonably sure of our ground we've printed articles. And we always sweat when we do it, for each one lessens our reason and excuse for declining an article from some one on whom or on whose subject we haven't sufficient

information. Our general reason—that we print practically nothing but fiction—is badly weakened by every exception made.

But we know you like fact as well as fiction, so the problem keeps alive.

HAVE you noticed that we've already been trying out our solution? Remember certain articles by Edgar Young on Central America, one on Africa by William Ashley Anderson then of our staff, and one or two others? Well, we have some more in the safe and we're adding to them. The main line we're following is to take certain regions and cover them in a general way, sometimes by a short article of the regular way, sometimes by a little tabloid article that makes no attempt to tell things in an interesting way but is simply crammed with cold facts jammed tight together. In the latter case, not much space taken away from those who prefer fiction, yet a lot of information for those who are looking for it and don't care what kind of clothes it wears. Keep your eye on these as they appear and tell us how you feel about it.

Also, as comrade Sutton suggests, let us know how you feel about the general problem of fact articles and its difficulties.

ANY time I get too frequent with letters like the following that praise our magazine, for heaven's sake call out. One of them now and then seems all right, but oftener than now and then is too many.

Newark, New Jersey.

I noticed a little article by you on the early issues of the magazine. Eleven years—I can hardly realize it.

I CAN remember well the first time I ran across *Adventure*. I was in the Canal Zone at the time, one of the bunch working on the Big Ditch, living in Culebra. I was feeling pretty rocky that morning. It was a Sunday and, in company with most of the folks in town, I had camped at the post-office for a couple of hours waiting for the mail which had got in too late the night before to be sorted, but I as usual had drawn a blank, and feeling pretty disgusted was walking up the hill to the quarters thinking I sure will grab the next train for Panama City and hit the high spots. As I was passing Vibert & Dixon's newsstand I dropped in to get something to read to : ill the hour or so till train time and on looking over the magazines a new one caught my eye. Hello, what's this *Adventure?* The name sounds good, but what's in a name? I suppose it is filled with a lot of mush. So I passed it up, but I could not find anything on the stand to suit me, and that word "Adventure" kept jumping out at me. So I finally picked it up, thinking it sure will have to be rotten if it is worse than some of the others. Well, to make a long story short, I did not see Panama City that day; in fact I missed my lunch and almost missed my supper, but it was worth it. That was Vol. 1, No. 3 I had got hold of, and did not rest till I had got No. 1, and 2. Been a constant reader since then. I have stepped around a few myself, and have left my heel points in quite a few places. Put in eleven years in Central South America, four of them on the Canal Zone, so can call myself a T. T. T. or a S. A. B. At home in 'most any part of the West but like Colorado the best and expect to return there shortly. —J. McNevin.

A BRIEF word from one of our identification cards: They were not, however, issued quite so long ago as 1912.

San Francisco.

It was, I think, in 1912 that I got the emergency card from you. Since that time I have had it with me all the time and wherever I have been.

It was in my shirt pocket throughout my time in the Army. The card has to its credit four Major Offensives in the World War and also Service in Germany.—5343.

A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A Station bulletin board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin-board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

Keepers answer letters only if they wish. For local information write "Ask Adventure."

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club or resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

The ohly connection between a Station and this magazine is that stated above, and a Keeper is in no other way responsible to this magazine nor representative of it.

Alabama—50—Fairfield. Percy E. Coleman, 405 Forty-fifth St.
125—Mobile—W. G. M'Connell, S. S. *Lake Girth*, care of Munson Steamship Lines.
Arkansas—104—Pine Bluff. B. C. Jordan, 1215 E. Second St.
California—44—Oakland. Lewis F. Wilson, 836 Seventh Ave.
28—Lost Hills. Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Monson, care of Gen. Del. No. 2.
38—Los Angeles. Colonel Wm. Strover, Westlake Military School, Mount Washington.
60—San Bernardino. Charles A. Rouse, Hotel St. Augustine.
73—Galt. E. M. Cook, Box 256.

74—Eagle Rock. John R. Finney, 109 Eddy Ave.
80—Magalia, Butte Co., K. W. Mason.
108—Helendale. G. R. Wells, P. O. Box 17.
113—Vallejo. Edith G. Engesser, Golden Triangle Rabbitry, Highway Homes.
114—Mill Valley. Louis F. Guedet, Restawhyle Knoll.
115—Los Gatos. G. H. Johnson.
116—Sabastopol. Mrs. Lucy E. Hicks, 420 S. Main St.
126—Covelo. Whit. H. Ham, Box 388.

Colorado—105—Grand Junction. Bart Lynch, 236 Main St.

Connecticut—86—New Haven. C. S. Roberts, 457 Fayerwether Hall, Yale University, Elm Street and Blount Ave.
103—New Haven. Ralph Pierson, 3 Yale Station.

Florida—87—Miami. A. C. Smith, 1243 N. E. Miami Court.
117—Miami. Miami Canoe Club, 115 S. W. South River Drive.

Georgia—98—Hinesville. R. N. Martin, *The Liberty County Herald.*

Idaho—110—Pocatello. C. W. Craig, 223 S. Second Ave.

Indiana—18—Connersville. Norba Wm. Guerin, 112 East Eighteenth St.
90—Linton. Herschell Isom, 73 Tenth St., N. E.

Illinois—47—Peoria. B. H. Coffeen.
66—Mt. Carmel. W. C. Carter, 1122 Chestnut St.
67—Plainfield. J. P. Glass, The Linshield Co.
77—Chicago. John Bradford Main, H. Company, 1st Inf. Ill. N. G., 16th St. and Michigan Ave.

Maine—19—Bangor. Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main St.
56—Cape Cottage. E. Worth Benson, P. O. Box 135.
59—Augusta. Robie M. Liscomb, 73½ Bridge St.

Maryland—55—Baltimore. Henry W. L. Fricke. 1200 E. Madison St. at Asquith.
82—Baltimore. Joseph Patti, Jr., 4014 E. Lombard St.

Massachusetts—26—Malden. Arthur R. Lloyd, 16 Cross St.
49—Fitchburg. G. R. Wyatt, 66 Lunenburg St.
111—West Medford. Stanley Clarence Lary, 21 Jackson Road, 56.

Michigan—27—Marquette. T. Mitchell, Box 864, G. P. O.
69—Grand Rapids. Dr. A. B. Muir, 1133 Lincoln Ave., N. W.
79—Lansing. Geo. H. Allen, *Lansing Industrial News*, 109½ N. Washington Ave.
80—Detroit. R. A. Taylor, 5129 Maybury Grand.
106—Gaylord. Sidney M. Cook.
118—North Muskegon. J. F. Forsyth, *The Peninsular Clarion.*

Minnesota—112—St. Paul. St. Paul *Daily News*, 92 E. Fourth St.

Mississippi—88—Tunica. C. S. Swann, Box 244.

Missouri—51—St. Louis. W. R. Hoyt, 7921 Van Buren St., phone Riverside 250.
94—St. Louis. C. Carter Lee, M. D., 3819 Olive St.
127—Salem. Emmet C. Higgins, 100 N. Tenth St.

Montana—119—Butte. B. A. Tower, 1127 Waukesha St.

Nebraska—95—Omaha. C. Wulff, 119 No. 16th St.

New Mexico—96—Silver City. Edward S. Jackson, Box 435.

New Jersey—17—Caldwell. Chas. A. Gerlard, P. O. Box 13.
16—Bayonne. J. D. Gray, 92 West Sixth St.
91—Tenafly. Ed Stiles, care of Reed, P. O. Box 431.

New York—23—Jamestown. W. E. Jones, 906 Jefferson St.
42—Yonkers. A. F. Whegan, 173 Elm St.
34—New York City. St. Mary's Men's Club, 142 Alexander Ave., Bronx, N. Y. C.
93—Rochester. Thomas C. Murphy, 62 Swan St.
107—New York City. Bronx Division, U. S. Junior Naval Reserves, 3132 Webster Ave.
120—New York City. L. J. Walsh and S. K. Woods, Auto Sales & Service Co., 205 St. Nicholas Ave.

North Carolina—92—Asheville. B. Taylor and C. M. Gravatt, The Southern Spar and Mica Co., 322 Haywood Bldg.

North Dakota—109—Stanley. Dr. W. W. Coe, Box 301.

Ohio—13—Cleveland. Wayne Eberly, 602 National City Bldg.
58—Cleveland. J. F. Thompson Community Pharmacy, 9505 Denison Ave.
75—Columbus. Chas. W. Jenkins, 54 S. Burgess Ave.
113—Columbus. Geo. T. Watters, 679 N. Nelson Road.
52—Ulrichsville. Anthony Sciarra, E. Third St.
63—Ulrichsville. Chas. F. Burroway, 312 Water Street.

Oklahoma—57—Haskell. Roy Holt.

Oregon—4—Salem. D. Wiggins.

Pennsylvania—20—Philadelphia. Wm. A. Fulmer, 252 S. Ninth St.
24—Philadelphia. Alfred A. Krombach, 4159 N. Eighth Street, and Spring Mills Station, P. & R. Ry. Co., Montgomery County.
121—Philadelphia. Don L. Brown, 3444 D St.
100—Philadelphia. Veterans of Foreign Wars, 926 N. 41st St.
78—Pittsburg. Peter C. Szarmach, 320 Bareton St.
21—Braddock Clarence Jenkins, Union News Co.

South Carolina—8—Allendale. Ed. N. Clark, Editor-owner *The Tri-County Record* and Allendale *Advance.*
97—Charleston. Jack Mette, Navy Yard.

Texas—54—Houston. M. B. Couch, Route 2, Box 189.
99—Beaumont. D. E. Jonson, 784 Orleans St.
33—Houston. J. M. Shamblin, 2815 Austin St.
122—San Antonio. P. J. Clark, Room 11, Jowdy Bldg.
123—San Juan. D. L. Carter, Box 436.

Virginia—108—Cape Charles. Lynn Stevenson, Custom House Building.

Washington—3—Republic. A. E. Beaumont, Box 283.
1—Ione. A. S. Albert, Albert's Billiard Hall.
61—Burlington. Judge B. N. Albertson, Fairhaven, Ave.
83—Seattle. Chas. D. Raymer, Raymer's Old Book Store, 1330 First Ave.
7—Mount Vernon. Ed. L. Carson.
71—Charleton. Elmer E. McLean, Box 561.

West Virginia—48—Huntington. John Geiske, 1682 Sixth St.

Wisconsin—41—Madison. Frank Weston, Room 9, Tenny Bldg.
5—Milwaukee. Paul A. Buerger, Apt. 2, 150 Biddle St
72—Kenosha. Leland Birchard, 304 Marion Ave.

Australia—39—Melbourne. William H. Turner, 52 Emmaline St., Northcote: and Carters' and Drivers' Union, 46 William St.
76—Melbourne. Chas. M. Healy, "Oora," Abbott St., Sandringham.

Canada—31—Vancouver, B. C. C. Plowden, B. C. Drafting & Blue Print Co.
84—White Rock, B. C. Charles L. Thompson.
22—Burlington, Ontario. Thos. Jocelyn.
4—Dundedin, P. E. Island. J. N. Berrigan.
29—Deseronto, Harry M. Moore, *The Post Weekly.*
45—Norwood, Manitoba. Albert Whyte, 172½ De Meurons St.
10—Montreal, P. Q. Nelson J. Cook, 2037 St. Catharine St.
30—Winnipeg, Man. Walter Peterson, 143 Kennedy St.
62—Tweed, Ontario. George L. Catton.
53—Toronto. W. A. Bach, 206-208 Victoria St.
85—Ontario. J. Wonal, Simcoe St. S., Oshawa.
102—Amherst. Lloyd E. Mac Pherson, 5 Belmont St.
124—Hartshorn, Alberta. Leonard Brown, 33-34-17 W4M.

Canal Zone—37—Cristobal. F. E. Stevens.

Cuba—15—Havana. Ricardo N. Farres, Dominques, 9 Cerro.

Great Britain—65—North Wales. William J. Cooper, "Kia Ora," Plastirion Ave., Prestatyn.

Honduras, C. A.—32—Galeras, Olancho. Dr. Wm. C. Robertson.

Mexico—68—Guadalajara, Jal. W. C. Money, Hotel Fenix, Calle Lopez, Cotilla Nos. 269 a 281.

Porto Rico—46—San Juan. M. B. Couch, P. O. Box 944.

Spanish Honduras—70—Jos. Buckly Taylor, La Ceiba.

BE MARKING down your favorite stories as you go along for our annual vote by readers on the best fiction published during the year. We want to print the sort of stories you like, and this is the only way we can learn your preferences. By noting when you read each issue the stories in it that pleased you the most you will be able to compile a well-balanced vote at the end of the year and avoid slighting the good stories that were published in the earlier months.

Various Practical Services Free to Any Reader

In the last issue of each month are printed in full the friendly services of *Adventure* to readers: Free identification card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchange; Camp-Fire Buttons; Camp-Fire Stations, etc.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, 1624 Blegelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. ★ The Sea Part 2 British Waters
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*. Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

3. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*. Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1 Cook Islands, Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

5. South Sea Islands Part 2
CHARLES BROWN, JR., 213 E St., San Rafael, Calif. French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn). Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

6. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Sydney Press Club, 51 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

7. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

8. New Guinea
DR. ALBERT BUELL LEWIS, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

9. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, P. O. Box 202, Hollywood, Calif. History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

10. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 714 Marquette Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

11. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

12. Asia, Southern
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine St., New Orleans, La. Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, western China. Borneo. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

13. Africa Part 1 Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, Niger River to Jebba, Northern Nigeria
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora, tribal histories, witchcraft.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelop with 5 cents—in Mr. Beadle's case 12 cents—in stamps NOT attached)*

14. ★ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Postage* 12 *cents.*)

15. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, care Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

16. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East
R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. (*Postage* 3 *cents.*)

17. Africa Part 5 Morocco
GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure*. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

18. Africa Part 6 Tripoli
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine Street, New Orleans, La. Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

19. Africa Part 7 Egypt and Barbary States
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Egypt and Sudan, Tunis, Algeria. Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

20. Turkey and Asia Minor
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Travel, history, geography, races, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

21. Balkans, except Albania
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Greece, Jugo-Slavia, Bulgaria, Roumania. Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

22. Albania
ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St. N. W., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

23. Scandinavia
ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St. N. W., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

24. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
FRED F. FLEISCHER, care *Adventure*. History, politics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, outdoor life.

25. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

26. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentina
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

27. Central America
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, 90 So. Orchard St., San José, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

28. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

29. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, Topolobampo, Sinaloa, Mexico. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

30. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land and Northern Quebec
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Also Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage* 3 *cents.*)

31. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (*Postage* 3 *cents.*)

32. ✠ Canada Part 3 Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario
GEORGE L. CATTON, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. (*Postage* 3 *cents.*)

33. Canada Part 4 Hunters Island and English River District
T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

34. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta
ED. L. CARSON, Mount Vernon, Wash. Including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

35. ✠ Canada Part 6 Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage* 3 *cents.*)

36. ✠ Canada Part 7 New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Southeastern Quebec
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage* 3 *cents.*)

37. Alaska
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

38. Baffinland and Greenland
VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

39. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Parts of Utah and Ariz.
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Except portions mentioned below. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

40. Western U. S. Part 2 Parts of Utah and Ariz.
VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Cliff Dwellings, Two Grey Peaks, the Carrizo Mts., Cañon De Chelley, Chin Lee Wash, the Moonlight Country, the Blue Mts. (Utah), Navaho Indian Reservation in general. Pack trips, prospecting, hunting, camping, trapping and mining; habits, etc., of Navaho Indians.

41. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.
FRANK MIDDLETON, 168 North End St., Laramie, Wyo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

42. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains
CHESTER C. DAVIS, Helena, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

43. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country
OTTO M. JONES, Warden, Bureau of Fish and Game, Boise, Idaho. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, outdoor photography, history and inhabitants.

44. Western U. S. Part 6 Tex. and Okla.
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

45. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

46. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

47. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan
J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

48. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River
GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton, P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See next section.*)

49. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Miss., O., Tenn., Michigan and Hudson Valleys, Great Lakes, Adirondacks
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating,

river-tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs.

50. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers

HOWARD A. SHANNON, *Alexandria Gazette*, Alexandria, Va. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia, and Maryland.

51. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.

HAPSBURG LIEBE, Orlando, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

52. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Maine

DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

WEAPONS, PAST and PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

A.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

OLD SONGS THAT MEN HAVE SUNG

ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 745 Riverside Drive, New York City. A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads —songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.

MOUNTAINS and MOUNTAINEERING

Especially of New England. ARTHUR BENT, Appalachian Mountain Club, 1050 Tremont Bldg., Boston, Mass.

STANDING INFORMATION

For information on trade in any part of the world, address J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York.

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash, D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

United States Revolver Ass'n. W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

Notes from "A. A." Men

MR. TOM L. MILLS asks that inquirers do not send him coins, as it is illegal in the New Zealand postal laws and may get him fined. Why they should soak him for what somebody else does is a mystery to me, but Brother Mills says that they do get that way.

MR. CHARLES BELL EMERSON writes:

> Will you think up some utterance for the magazine columns which will make the "A. A."'s send an envelop big enough to get a reply into, and not the miserable little gilt-edged things that they often send me. Say, not smaller than a U. S. Post-Office No. 13 stamped envelop.

No need for me to think up anything to tell 'em, Brother Emerson. You done TOLD 'em!

A *Real* Canoe Trip

LET Mr. Catton enumerate your outfit:

Question:—"I want to make a *real* canoe trip this Summer over the following route: Hudson River, Lake Champlain, St. Lawrence, Ottawa River and into Georgian Bay.

Where can I get map? And what type of canoe would you advise? Together with outfit? Rod? Gun? Etc.?

I have done some canoeing, also sailing. Would you use a sail? I want to come back by the Great Lakes.

Have cruised the Great Lakes and Thunder Bay by motor-boat, and have planned this for a long time. It looks interesting from this angle.

Intend to travel light; and my time is my own.

Will you advise me at length, and rest assured that I'll take it."—E. G. FARMER, Jones Pt., N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Catton:—For maps of this section, the section of Ontario through which your route lies, write Mr. J. E. Chalifour, Department of Interior, Ottawa, Canada. Can't say what they would cost you. Also, local maps should be obtainable in the stationery stores in the larger towns along your routes.

A fourteen-foot canoe will be plenty large enough, if you are going alone and not trying to carry too much with you. The lighter your canoe will be in weight, the better, as long as it is stanch.

If you know how to handle a canoe with a sail use a sail; it will often save a lot of hard paddling. But be sure, first, that you know how to handle a canoe-sail! There is no craft in the world so cranky and dangerous as a canoe under sail.

And watch the storm signals in ports before you attempt to cross any long stretches on Georgian Bay and the lakes. I wash my hands—have to—on your safety, you know.

Your outfit depends on your intentions. If I were taking that trip with the intention of camping, instead of putting up at hotels, etc., in the towns and villages, I would take a sleep tent (only), long and wide and high enough to sleep in (shaped like a half-barrel, of water-proof canvas, with a rubber floor sheet); one pair of good wool blankets, and a water-proof pack-sheet. This pack-sheet can be used as a shelter, too, in case of a rainy day.

Don't take a gun at all, unless it be merely a small revolver or pistol in your pocket; shotguns and rifles are taboo out of hunting season, and would require taking out a license even in hunting season. Would be advisable, too, to get a license for your pistol when you enter Canada.

And don't bring with you anything but your bare outfit. Buy your supplies as you go along. Pack a small hand-ax, a grubstake (the best grubstake I ever saw is obtainable from Campfire Manufacturing Co., 1037 Boatman's Bank Bldg., St. Louis, Mo., cost $3.50). Pack a sheath-knife for scaling fish, etc; aluminum plate, cup, and small bowl, one table knife, fork and spoon; one skillet (fry-pan) one one-gallon sauce-pan with handle, one one-gallon pail, one three-pint coffee pot. Pack salt, pepper, epsom salts, sugar, matches, soap, towels, hair-brush, comb, tooth-brush, tobacco, shaving-outfit, needle and thread and a few patches, small mirror, and extra lenses for your glasses (if you wear them) a lead-pencil and a small writing-pad. Good plan, too, to carry a light, absolutely water-proof raincoat. That is what you will actually need; anything else will be extras and will increase the weight to be portaged and in your canoe.

Take an eight-foot steel fishing-rod, six hundred feet of good line and a good reel one Rush-Tango (wooden plug artificial bait) one Phantom minnow (two each of these will be better) three hundred feet of the best trolling-line, sinkers (split buckshot are best) leaders, hooks, flies, etc., depending on your own tastes.

Use always natural bait when available; have found by hard practical experience that there are but less than half a dozen of the thousands of artificial baits worth the paint on them, and two of that half-dozen are the Rush-Tango and the Phantom minnow. A Star Spinner, too, is good.

Natural baits are: dew-worms for trout, minnows for all game fish, crawfish (crabs) for bass, grasshoppers for bass, frogs for lunge, bass and pickerel. Should you want a longer and heavier pole for shore or rock fishing you can cut one (birch) anywhere along your route.

And when you cross the line declare everything dutiable and pay the duty. Duty on equipment that you will take back with you will be refunded you when you go back.

Any other information I can give you will be given gladly. And I wish I was going with you—if I had the time.

Hawaiian Islands

MAKE your questions specific. Herewith is a question which is printed as a model of how not to ask for information. Why Mr. Halton answered, I don't know. Just naturally good-hearted, I guess. Most A. A. men would have thrown the letter on the floor, as not complying with the simple rules; and quite right, too. *Make your questions specific:*

Question:—"Will you kindly give me some advice and information on Hawaiian Islands—customs, travel, hunting, fishing, health-resorts, natives, languages, natural history, agriculture, climate, resources, and opportunities for employment?"— —— ——, Artesia, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Halton:—Customs: Being now a part of the United States, much the same as here.

Travel: Have now modern autos and railroads.

Hunting and fishing: Wild goats, small game birds and splendid game fishing.

English is spoken all over the islands. Out of a population of 250,000 there are only 30,000 white people and 30,000 native Hawaiians, and the balance are mostly Asiatic.

Resources: Sugar and pineapples.

Employment: There is absolutely no chance for employment in Hawaii. The high schools and colleges there are turning out material that they can not absorb locally.

The full statement of the departments, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

A Simple Horse, or Burro, Pack Outfit

HERE'S a circular that Brother Middleton had us print for him. Must be enough general interest in the subjects discussed to warrant giving it to all of you. And say! Don't those camp recipes make your mouth water?

A SADDLE-HORSE and a pack animal for each two persons; a small tent (about 7 x 7); a canvas-covered bed-roll of at least two quilts; two pair of heavy blankets; a raincoat or slicker for each person; a Dutch oven, two frying-pans, coffee-pot, stew kettle, tin plates, cups, knives, forks, and spoons, and a canvas folding water-bucket.

With the above outfit, two persons can get by nicely. For four people simply double the outfit, with the exception of coffee-pot, Dutch oven, and water-bucket. For more than four persons add a stew-kettle and another frying-pan or two. Ditto with the water-bucket, and possibly with a party of eight or ten another Dutch oven, unless they are fixed out with a large one.

The essentials of grub supply are as follows, quantity depending upon the size of the party:

Flour, baking-powder, salt, pepper, lard, bacon, coffee, tea if desired, sugar, beans, dried fruit, jam, spuds and onions. To these other supplies (a few) can be added to suit individual tastes.

Would not advise butter, as it is hard to keep cool while moving, and becomes strong very quickly. Small jars of jam or peanut butter make an excellent substitute. Small cans of baked beans are O. K. for a short trip instead of dried beans, while for long trips rice makes a good substitute for potatoes, as it saves weight and space in packing—two very important considerations. A few cans of spaghetti,

ready cooked, make a nice change; but always go light on canned goods in making up a pack.

Receipts for a few camp dishes, under camp names.

Dutch-Oven Bread

Two cups of flour, pinch of salt, two tablespoons baking-powder, heaping tablespoon lard. Mix with cold water until thick enough to drop from a spoon. Grease Dutch oven well, turn dough in, and bake in one *thin* loaf.

Dutch-Oven Biscuits

Same as for bread, only mix stiff, and mold into biscuits by hand. Melt a little lard in oven, and swab the top of each biscuit in the grease. This gives them the proper crust.

Camp Coffee

A tablespoon for each cup desired. Start in cold water, and as soon as it starts to boil, move back to edge of the fire, where it will slowly simmer. This is the secret of good coffee; and by the way this receipt will apply at the home, as well as by the camp-fire.

Spotted Pup

Boil rice until about done, pour off water, add cup or cup and a half of raisins, half or two-thirds cup of condensed milk, sweeten, and set by edge of fire, where it will simmer, until rice is done. If one prefers dried raspberries or any dried fruit instead of raisins it should be partly cooked before adding to the rice.

Prospector Stew

Slice potatoes in Dutch oven or frying-pan. Salt and pepper, cover with water and stew (under lid) until about dry. Have several strips of bacon (about half-done) ready, and when the water is about gone on the spuds, turn in the bacon and grease and finish with a quick fry. They're fine.

To Roast Meat

In case one gets hold of a piece of meat (one often gets hold of a piece of mutton from a sheep-herder) put a chunk, along with some peeled spuds and a couple of onions, in the Dutch oven. Salt and pepper and partly cover with water. Good idea to do this before breakfast. Dig a hole, about eighteen inches to two feet deep, and burn down a good fire over this hole. Then get breakfast. When ready to leave camp, shovel the coals out of the hole, put the Dutch oven in the bottom (be sure the lid's on tight) and shovel the coals back in the hole over the oven, and put a few inches of soil over the top of all. When you come back to camp at noon, your roast is ready.

A Good Breakfast Food

Is made by browning rice in the frying-pan, shaking as you would pop-corn to prevent burning. Stir into boiling water, same as oatmeal, and cook.

To Fry Trout

Trout caught in the evening are about right to fry the next morning, as fresh fish curl up so badly that they don't fry well. Roll them in corn-meal or flour. Place them close together in the frying-pan, salt and pepper, and fry slowly. When done on one side turn whole panful at once, using two knives, one under and one over the fish. Cook until thoroughly done and rather dry. In this way one avoids breaking them up so badly.

To Keep Trout Three or Four Days

Keep the trout dry. Don't even wash, after cleaning, if you want to keep them several days. In cleaning, be sure to remove the gills as they spoil quickly and taint the whole fish. Spread on the grass, or on a board or canvas, in the shade to dry. Pack in dry grass through the day, and in the evening string on a wire or a string between two trees. Do not let them touch each other. In the morning, repack them in dry grass, and in the evening repeat the operation of the evening before, and so on each night and morning; and 'tis a cinch you'll get them home in good shape, and that's one of the joys of going fishing.

Last, and Very Important

Be sure to extinguish all fires when breaking up and moving camp. Also bury all tin cans and refuse, leaving your camping-ground in clean condition for the next comers.—Frank Middleton.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

Through the Caribbean by Dory

IT CAN be done, says Captain Dingle:

Question:—"Strongly figuring on a trip—New York, coast, Palm Beach, Bahamas, West Indies and through the Caribbean.

Understand you made a venture of your own, single hand. Kindly answer a few questions:

1. Will a twenty-seven foot dory, sail, centerboard, outboard motor, be about right?
2. Is there a channel all the way along the coast? Or where is the best route?
3. Traveling among the islands will passports be necessary? How about doctor and customs inspection? What is the cost?
4. Should like to take along a rifle and revolver. Would you advise it? Is there a chance of confiscation?
5. Is there any chance for trade?

Should not like to see my name in print, as I am considered a nut by some."— —— ——, Niagara Falls, N. Y.

Answer, by Capt. Dingle:—By dory I understand you mean a decked craft of dory type. I can scarcely imagine you wanting to make the trip in an open boat, though you could do it. Anyhow the boat is big enough, and with the equipment you mention should be quite able.

As for the centerboard, I strongly advise you to have both board and trunk sheathed in copper, and fairly heavy metal, too, or you'll find the worms get inside and suddenly, perhaps at sea in a breeze, after some months spent in warm seas, your board will develop a leak, or, worse, fall right off. One alternative to coppering is making board and trunk of red cedar, which resists worms as no bottom paint will do.

By channel along the coast, do you mean inside? Outside, of course, you have the best of all channels —the wide ocean. You can take a boat such as you suggest by the inside route nearly all the way to Florida. Charts for both inside and outside can be bought at any chart-seller's store.

When I sailed from New York it was war-time. I had to take out the same papers as the captain of the *Olympic*. If you ask at the nearest custom-house I think you'll find most restrictions have now been removed, however. They'll tell you about passports, too. None are needed between the U. S. A. and here at present.

As for firearms, each place you visit on such a trip may be under a different law. Take the arms along and keep them on the boat until you find out what particular law exists ashore. Nobody will touch them while kept in the boat for personal protection.

Trade opportunities depend largely on where you touch. I would suggest that you write to Charles Bell Emerson and ask him his opinion regarding trade chances in Central America, where I believe you will find more scope than among the islands.

With a larger boat you could pick up quite a decent income carrying freight and passengers to and from the Virgin Islands and Porto Rico. But as for trading, by which I suppose you mean bartering goods for native products, or even buying products for cash with the idea of realizing a profit on them in other markets, there are so many regular lines of steamers plying to the chief islands, and the other, remoter places are kept so frequently in touch with the bigger places by schooner or small steamer, that I believe you will find trade pretty slow. With such a boat as you have, however, you might easily pull in money by taking out fishing-parties among the more popular Winter-resort islands, if you can compete with the local boatmen in skill and price.

Good luck if you go.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose* full *return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

More Hints on Revolver Shooting

THIS letter supplements some advice by Mr. Wiggins that appeared in the issue of last October 10th. In describing the "trigger squeeze" which the correspondent refers to, Mr. Wiggins said:

In order to get the best results, the trigger should be squeezed off gradually, like closing the hand on an orange to squeeze the juice out of it. Hold the revolver lightly in the hand and gradually tighten up all over the grip, and in so doing the trigger will be pulled so easily and regularly that there will not be the jerking that destroys the aim.

Also, here's another kink that I just worked out on myself: pulling the trigger with the last joint of the finger—the end joint I mean, of course. Don't let any part of the finger touch the side of the revolver-frame.

The above advice has been found valuable enough by readers generally to bear repetition. And now for the correspondent's letter:

Headquarters Company, 32d Infantry, Presidio of San Francisco, Calif.

In a recent issue of "our magazine" I read with interest your answer to an inquiry as to a certain party's inability to do accurate shooting with a revolver. Being a soldier, the absolute necessity of the trigger squeeze is, of course, well known to me, but your pointer on keeping the trigger-finger free from contact with the weapon is new to me, and in my opinion is an excellent idea. It has improved my marksmanship. There are several other elements that affect accuracy with the pistol, and doubtless with the revolver, which I noticed that you did not bring out. These are as follows:

Position: Standing at an angle of about sixty degrees to the target; weight resting equally on both feet; right arm fully extended, or nearly so.

Grip: The hand should grasp the butt as high as possible, thumb extended toward the barrel; butt fitting evenly into the hollow between the thumb and forefinger; grip firm but not tense; axis of the bore continuous with the axis of the forearm.

Breathing: While aiming and squeezing the trigger the breath should be held.

I have noticed and corrected the following faults in my own pistol practise:

Facing the target at right angles, thereby necessitating bending my elbow and wrist in order to aline the sights with the target; gripping the pistol too tightly, causing a trembling of arm and hand; gripping the pistol butt too far on one side, causing the recoil to throw the bullet to the right of the mark; gripping the butt too low, increasing the upward kick of the recoil. For a long time I found it impossible to shoot anywhere near the mark and found that it was caused by holding the pistol at an angle to the forearm, which, of course, required bending the wrist. Correction of this fault brought me on the target. The above points are all emphasized in Army pistol practise.

In writing this I do not want you to think that I consider myself an authority on pistol shooting, for though qualified as an expert pistol shot I do not consider myself a good shot, being too erratic; nor is it my intention to attempt to give you advice, for I am certain that you know more about shooting than I will for a long time to come; but some things 'come natural' to some people and they do not know why they do things well and are quite unable to tell others how it is done. Then again a strong, wiry man, unaffected by nerves, may do things in a way that a frail, soft, nervous man could not, but could educate himself to do, through a careful study of cause and effect, as applied to himself.

Personally, I am very small, light and in poor physical condition and handicapped by small hands and arms, making the recoil of a man's-sized 'gat' something to reckon with. It is my opinion that your questioner bends his wrist and is not strong enough in that important member to counteract the recoil. Could send you an Army manual on rifle and pistol marksmanship if you would care to look it over.

With many apologies for "butting in" and thanking you for the trigger-finger tip, I am

Yours for *Adventure*, C. J. POHLE.

When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.

A Motor Trip, Boston to Quebec

AND a jolly good trip it is, too:

Question:—"A party of four wish to obtain information relative to a fishing and motor trip to either Maine or Quebec. We would like to either camp on the road, or stop at hotels where convenient.

Please let us know just what supplies and equipment would be necessary for two weeks; if they should be purchased here and brought up, or if they can be purchased at the starting-point of the trip. Also please let us know what route will be covered, and how the roads would be for car. What licenses would be required?

We are enclosing three cents postage for a reply."
—C. S. WARD, Boston, Mass.

Answer, by Maj. Belford:—I take it the starting-point of your trip will be Boston. From there you will get excellent roads all the way to the city of Quebec, going *via* Portland, Maine, and Jackman, Maine. Fair fishing along the road. Leaving Quebec you can go down the north shore of the St. Lawrence to Montreal, cross the river there, and go south over a fine road to Rouse's Point, N. Y. State; from there cross Lake Champlain into Vermont, and you will find good roads leading you through a fine scenic country to Boston.

You will find stopping-places in plenty along the way, so that camping will not be necessary unless you wish. Supplies can be had anywhere.

If your fishing is incidental to your trip and not the main business, you will get some around Jackman and on the Quebec side of the border. But if fishing is the main business, go direct to Quebec; when there go to the Legislative Building and see Mr. E. D. T. Chambers, who is the best authority on game in Quebec You will need to get your licenses there. He will gladly give you the best fishing-grounds.

Before starting it would be a good idea to write Mr. Chambers, asking him to send you full information *re* fishing. This service is free.

You can shorten the trip a bit by coming from Montreal to Sherbrooke, and from Sherbrooke to Portland, Me., with good road the most of the way.

Coconut Growing in Tahiti

AS A rule, when an inquirer is disinclined to have his question, with the answer thereto, published, we try to oblige him. But when the "A. A." expert thinks that the information is of sufficient general interest to demand publication, he so marks the correspondence—as Mr. Brown did in this instance—and presto! It's in type. Naturally we never give away an inquirer's identity or address when asked not to:

Question:—"I am especially interested in the coconut industry. May I impose on your time to answer what you can of the following; first telling you something of what kind of an animal I am?

I am supposed to be a very good tropical planter. I am at present manager of an estate of 35,000 trees (coconuts) besides putting in about 40,000 more this year. I understand the business about as well as the ordinary dub.

I will not ask you about planting. Probably you could tell me a lot I don't know about that, but what I am most interested in is whether or not I might find employment in Tahiti, or other neighboring lands, managing a plantation for a large outfit.

I am an American, 40 years of age, twenty years in the tropics, most of the time as planter, speak several languages, have a good education, and have managed some pretty large affairs. I am especially successful in handling labor of nearly every kind, Spanish, Indian, Greek, Hindu, Chinese, Filipino, etc.

Now for the questions:

Is the planting done mostly by small individual planters, or are there any large planting-companies?

In case of large companies, can you give me names and addresses of them?

If I should 'head out' there on prospect, what would you consider my chances of getting on?

Approximately what would it cost me to reach Tahiti (from San Francisco)?

Supposing I hit Papeete on prospect, would it cost me a young fortune to "bat around" to different large plantations?

Are no nuts shipped as nuts, or are all made into copra?

What kind of labor is generally used?

What language is spoken by the natives? Polynesian, I suppose; but what is the dialect mostly used?

In case there are large companies operating, what positions are filled by whites, and what is considered an ordinary salary for a white man?

In case whites are so employed, what is furnished? House? Servants? Food?

What nationalities predominate among the whites?

What nationalities predominate among the planting-companies?

Is there competition between the planters, or are they formed into a trust, or embryo trust?

You will note that I do not ask about any certain part of your territory. I leave this vague purposely. I think I have made clear that, should it appear feasible, I may leave here for the South Seas. It would not make any difference to me what part I might hit. I want to hit something to do when I go. I have been broke in out-of-the-way places before, but I have no especial hankerin' for the life of a beach-comber.

In using this (if you should) kindly leave out name and where mailed from. I would prefer that you did not publish it, unless it may be of aid to you in answering others asking for the same 'dope'."

Answer, by Mr. Charles Brown, Jr.:—Perhaps you and I will meet up some day. If we do, we'll sit out on some cool veranda with a bottle between us and talk coconuts.

But I do not think that I'll run into you in Tahiti. You see, there isn't anything down there for a "very good tropical planter." That is, the plantations are so very small that you possibly could not be induced to quit what you are now doing. Tahiti boasts but two large plantations, and these can only show about 14,000 trees. This doesn't interest you, does it?

I can not give the exact number of small plantations, pieces of ground very badly planted. These are owned and worked individually.

Dr. W. Johnstone Williams, Papeete, Tahiti, Society Islands, owns a fairly large plantation on an island about one day's run from Tahiti. A lone white man and a few natives work this place.

I wouldn't "head out" to French Oceania on prospect. The risk is too great.

First-class passage from San Francisco to Tahiti is $150; second-class $100. It costs very little to "bat around" Tahiti and the adjacent islands.

One San Francisco concern ships out nuts as nuts.

Chinese and Tahitians are employed as labor. Both races speak Tahitian, one of the numerous dialects of Polynesia.

Tahiti salaries are about as small as a young nut. And nothing is "furnished."

Among the whites French, English and Americans predominate. The same holds true for the planters.

There are no trusts or embryo trusts in Tahiti. The islanders are wary of such things. Nor is there competition among the planters. But the trading-houses! They are the competitors, and wild ones at that.

Inasmuch as you "may leave" for the South Seas, I suggest that you read very carefully my Address and Reference Sheet. I do believe that there are many opportunities in the southwestern Pacific, especially with the Burns, Philip people of Sydney, Australia. They own a string of man-sized plantations out in the Solomons and the New Hebrides. Sounds encouraging, doesn't it?

I do not see how I could possibly tell you anything that you do not know about planting. Of course, different conditions and methods of planting prevail in every coconut belt of this old globe. Still, I'd be well satisfied just to sit in the deep shade of a veranda and listen to all that you must know.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

Lobsters

WHO is Fifi Howard?

Question:—"What is the outstanding difference between Atlantic and Pacific Ocean lobsters?"—BILL DOBBS, Chattanooga, Tenn.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—The outstanding difference between a Pacific Ocean and Atlantic lobster is a matter of whiskers and claws. The former has them that are hardly to be noticed and the latter real pincers. Furthermore, the Atlantic Ocean chap has more flavor and brings on faster and larger nightmares and is more of an erubescent coloring when boiled than those of the Pacific. But when in doubt try both; you can store away a heap sight more of the Pacific fellows, and when it comes to size they are whoppers and sell at half the price, as Fifi Howard once related.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

TIMMEL, ED. Shoe maker. Last heard from had a shop in San Francisco, Calif. Address wanted. News from his Native Land. Address.—HANS HANSEN, 3601 Telegraph Ave., Oakland, Calif.

SLAVEN, JOE. Formerly of Mt. Vernon, Ind. Please send me your present address.—Address N. D. DAVIS, Toms River, N. J.

MASON, ALBERT L. Five feet six inches, about 130 lbs., dark complexion, telegraph operator. Served with Headquarters Co., 102nd Infantry, 26th Division A. E. F. Last heard of at Base Hospital 89, Savenay. Wounded. Home somewhere in Connecticut. Any information will be appreciated.—Address E. W. BREWER, La Veta, Colo.

MILLER, EDWARD. Went to Sikeston, Mo., with E. M. Smith, Dec. 31, 1885. Any information will be appreciated.—Address SYLVESTER MILLER, 120 North E. St., Livingston, Montana.

KENNEY, JOE. The "Nancy" belongs to me. If you still want more adventure meet me in the Seamens Institute, San Francisco, Calif., before August 1, to go to the South Seas.—JOHN ADAMS.

DONISH, HENRY. Last seen in Butte, Montana, in 1918 leaving for Pittsburg, Pa. Any information will be appreciated.—Address B. A. TOWER, 1127 Waukesha St., Butte, Mont.

IRVING, JAMES D. Was Private in Co. A., 18th U. S. Infantry at Fort Clark, Texas, in 1890. Any information will be appreciated.—Address REUBEN M. WRIGHT, 437 Mallory Ave., Jersey City. N. J.

MASTERS, MARK B. Who enlisted in the 20th Inf., at Fort Bliss, Texas. Last heard of in Co. "D," 15th Inf., Tien Tsen, China. Anyone knowing his whereabouts please communicate with me. "Mutt" if you see this write.—Address H. L. MINTON, 3004 Texas Road, Shreveport, La.

MITCHELL, GEO. Last heard of in Oroville, Calif. Our bet is up. Write me here.—Address CHAS. HENDERSON, Oleum, Calif.

WOULD like to hear from any of the old bunch who served with me in either Co. E, or Hdqs., Co. 166 Infantry, 42nd Division during the War.—Address HOWARD E. SKILES, 540 Lee St., Lanesville, Ohio.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

WOULD like to hear from any of the fellows who were in Co. 93 Unit X, Naval Training Station, Hampton Roads, Va., between March 20 and April 15, 1920.—Address G. D. PARSONS, Box 150, Dunbar, W. Va.

MEMBERS of the family of MONTGOMERY whose ancestors lived in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, between 1750 and 1800, are requested to communicate with—W. V. MONTGOMERY, One Madison Ave., New York, N. Y.

HETZEL, CLAUDE LEROY. Left home Feb. 27, 1922. Age fifteen years. Blue eyes, light hair, very fair, tall and slim. Has two scars over his left eye about half an inch apart. Left eye is slightly crossed. Pleasant face. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. C. E. HETZEL, Room 14, over Rexall Store, Dodge City, Kansas.

WOULD like to hear from ALBERT DIAR or any other fellow who served in the Sec. Holding Co. under command of Major Brocas at La Suze, France.—Address L. M. KIRKPATRICK, Punxsutawney, Pa.

JACKSON, HOWARD. Left Baltimore, Md. about twenty-six years ago. Was heard of in Lorain, Ohio, about fourteen years ago and from last reports was believed to be in San Francisco, Calif., Shenandoah, Va., or Shenandoah, Pa. about one year ago. Medium built, black hair and black mustache. A rigger by trade. Has a married daughter twenty-eight years of age.—Please communicate with Chief Gunner W. W. EAGERS, care of Bureau Navigation, Navy Dept. Washington, D. C.

SMITH, BEN. Born in New York. Last seen in Missoula, Mont., in 1909. Father put up Gas Works there. Kindly write to me.—Address C. J. DONNELLY, 719½ Crocker St., Los Angeles, Calif.

GLENN, BOWDIN. Born in Spokane, Wash. Last seen in Butte, Montana, 1909. Kindly write to me.—Address C. J. DONNELLY, 719½ Crocker St., Los Angeles, Calif.

KEENAN, WM. Born in Fort Worth, Texas. Last seen in Elpaso, Texas, 1914. Kindly write to me.—Address C. J. DONNELLY, 719½ Crocker St., Los Angeles, Calif.

WILSON, JOHN P. Last heard of in Fort Sam Houston, Texas, in 1918. Was then known as Jack or J. P. Taylor. Johnny if you read this please write to me.—Address SGT. B. L. WILSON, 13, Signal Troop, Fort Bliss, Texas.

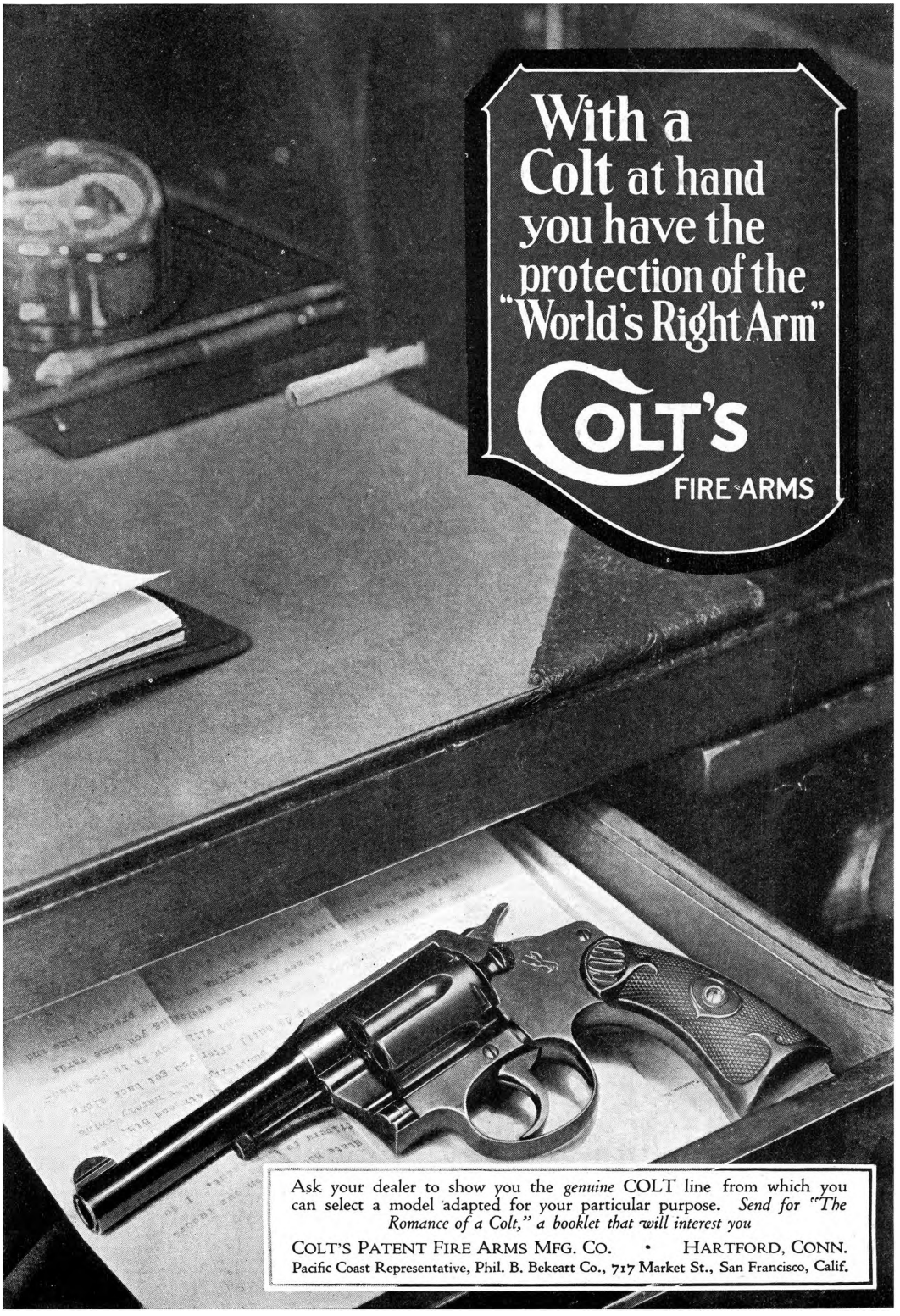
COLAM, FRANK HOWE. Engineer with Inland Waterways and Docks, at Victoria, B. C., in 1916. Sailed from Montreal Jan., 1917. Discharged in France, physically unfit summer 1919. Six feet tall, dark, linguist. About fifty-five years of age. Was at one time interpreter for N. W. M. P. at Regina. Please write.—Address L. T. 443, care of *Adventure*.

ANDY please write to your buddy Richie of the Old Misery.—Address HAROLD J. RICHIE, care of *Adventure*.

THE following have been inquired for in either the July 20th or July 30th issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirers from this magazine:

ALLEN, JOSEPH C.; Anderson, Charles; Brandon, W. E.; Clark, Edwin E.; Cleveland, Edward or Harry; Collins, Carter; Daneker, John Lee; Davis, F.; Denham, Walter E.; Dickard, Vernon; Fowler, M. R.; Humiston; Hunt, Tobert; Keenan, William; Keener, A. W.; Kimmis, Bruce; Meyer, Paul F.; Murphy, Thomas Joseph; Patterson, Frank; Rasmussen Holger; Schmidt, A.; Shatto, Powers; Spencer, Earl (Ki); Starke, James Elbert; Stevenson, Pvt. Fred; Thompson Clarence Lee; Thornton, Walter; Updegraff, Pvt. Frank.

MISCELLANEOUS—Cunningham heirs of Boston, Mass., can be located by writing to *J. C. Harriss*, 91 Fournier St., Ft. Worth, Texas.; "Happy" letters addressed to you at last address returned. Would like to hear from Martin Purcell and Thomas Quigley, last heard of at Tampico, Mexico in January, 1921; 9628.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Ask your dealer to show you the *genuine* COLT line from which you can select a model adapted for your particular purpose. *Send for "The Romance of a Colt," a booklet that will interest you*
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Pacific Coast Representative, Phil. B. Bekeart Co., 717 Market St., San Francisco, Calif.

That patch of light over the door !

TO NATALIE it became a canvas on which all the terrifying events of the day were painted.

The white coffin-shaped "thing" she'd stumbled over in the dark; that fearful man with the terrible temper, the mirthless grin; those hideous screams of the "princess-woman;" the face at the window; the queer puffy hand that reached out of the "empty room"—and then darkness!

This thrilling mystery story, "The Soul-Scar," by the mysterious author, Beldon Duff, will be one of the high spots in the

August

Everybody's Magazine

On Every News-stand
First in Fiction

Who is
BELDON DUFF?

Ever since his story, "Twenty-four Hours" appeared in EVERYBODY'S, people have asked us who he is—a man or a woman? What's his real name? As yet we don't know—but he has promised us some interesting information for the August number.