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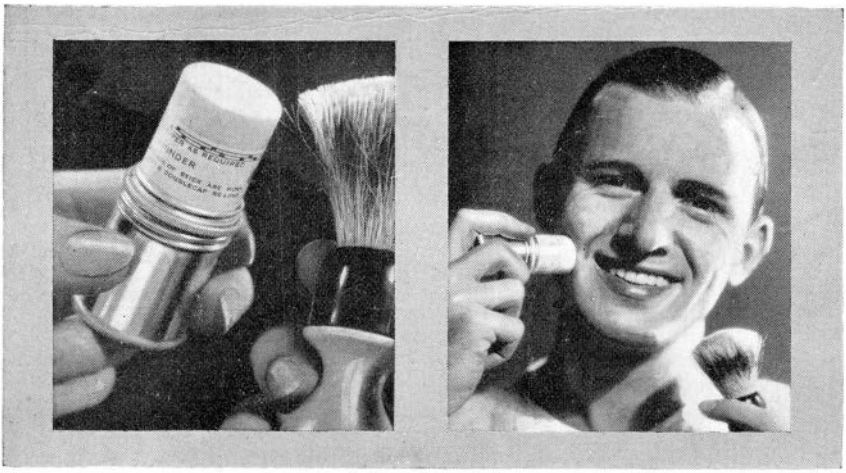

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Contents for October 10th, 1924, Issue

**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

(Continued on next page)

(*Continued from preceding page*)

One Novel, Two Novelettes Complete

WHEN "*Hashknife*" *Hartley* and "*Sleepy*" *Stevens* rode into Lo Lo Valley, they found the sheepmen facing the cattle-kings in battle. "THE DEAD-LINE," a novel of the West, by W. C. Tuttle, complete, in the next issue.

HE LIVED on the edge of the desert, far from neighbors; he ringed his house with high-tension wires and posted guards at the gate. But no precautions could keep out the unforgiving *Serochi*. "THE VALLEY OF REMORSE," a complete novelette by Bruce Johns in the next issue.

"*BLACKIE*" owned a luxurious motor launch, and he knew all there was to know about the new radio compass installed at Fog Rock. Thus equipped, he gave chase to the tramp steamer. "SALT ON A BIRD'S TAIL," a complete novelette by Charles Victor Fischer in the next issue.

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

***Adventure* is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**

Author of "The Making of the Morning Star," "The Witch of Aleppo," etc.

MY BROTHERS, it was a bad night when the order first came to me. True, in the North all nights are bad, with the mists from the swamps and the breath of the sea that is not warm but cold—cold as the wounds of a dead man.

But that night the bells were ringing all over St. Petersburg. They clashed and muttered as if imps were dancing on the bell-ropes, and a fog came up the river and rolled across the bridges.

I had a lantern tied to my sash—such a fog it was—when I made the rounds of the sentry boxes by the great cathedral. Although Easter was at hand snow still lay along the fronts of the stone houses.

Ekh, you, my brothers, turn loose your horses in the tall grass at such a season. You have not visited the cities of the Muscovites, the Moskyas we Cossacks call them, where the houses are built up out of stones, and the roads between the houses are called streets—streets covered with hewn logs. So it was that night of the year 1788 after the Christ. And so it is now, for all I know.

The order came in this fashion. I was standing at one of the sentry posts listening to the bells, thinking that all this ringing was like a summons, when the little bells of a *troika* drew nearer in the fog, and a three-span sleigh came to a halt beside me.

"Is that the *sotnik*, Ivak? —— burn you! You are hard to find as a pig's bristle."

Lifting the lantern, I made out an under-ensign of the Preobrazhensky regiment, with his dark-green coat and red facings and brass buttons. He had few hairs in his beard.

"Are you Ivak, the *sotnik*, senior under-officer of the squadron of Don Cossacks quartered at the palace?" he asked again.

"Forward," copyright, 1924, by Harold Lamb.

It was true that I was next in command to our *ataman*, our colonel who left matters pretty much to me, as he was always riding escort to the Empress. Her majesty liked fine, tall fellows who filled their uniforms and could sit a horse. She sent for us, out of the steppe fifteen hundred versts away, to see what we were like. We Cossacks of the Don are not bad looking chaps, and we can ride better than any one else in the world. Until my father's time we had always been our own masters, and we came to St. Petersburg to see what the Empress was like.

"At command!" I replied.

"Well then, listen." He looked at me keenly. "An order has been issued by her Majesty. Some minister or other—I forget his name—sent me out after you at this hour. How would you like, Ivak, to go back to your steppe? To the Black Sea?"

Now God could have sent nothing to warm my heart more than this. We Don Cossacks were all homesick, really sick. Now and then it had been permitted that we go out after wolves. But what are wolves? A stag is better. Aye, we had no hunting for a whole Winter; all we did was to stand in the wooden boxes they made for their sentries, instead of riding a cordon as a man should.

The ensign must have seen how much this pleased me, because he went on less cautiously:

"You are detached from service with the squadron, and you alone will go of the Don ruffians. After sunrise report to one of the English officers, Lieutenant Edwards, quartered in the Admiralty street. He is going with you."

"Am I under his orders?"

At this the ensign was silent a moment. Some men never talk openly, and only a fool will share his blanket with that kind.

"Nay," he said after a while, "you are on a mission for the Empress herself. Accompany Lieutenant Edwards and act with him so far as your orders permit. You are to escort a foreigner to the Black Sea. Arrange for supplies, for post horses and choose a route. You know the country down there, of course, and her Majesty is pleased to remember your services against the Kuban Tatars."

"Good! Who is this foreigner?" I asked. "The Englishman?"

"What a dolt you are! Don't you know a soldier never asks questions! A lashing would teach you Cossacks a thing or two."

He pulled at his clipped mustache and told me that the man who would be in my charge was a high officer.

"Pardon," I said again, "but in our service a man is a dolt if he doesn't get his orders clear in his head. Who is the high officer?"

The Preobrazhensky manling screwed up his eyes and spat. Well for him he did not spit on my boots! My rank was equal to his, but then the Muscovites held themselves above us Cossacks.

"You were hatched out of the same egg as Satan! Call him Pavel. That's enough. And don't blab about your mission to the tavern wenches, either, Ivak."

Evidently he thought, my brothers, that we men of the steppe talked about military affairs to womenfolk, every night, like the Muscovite officers at court. When we talk to the girls our words are otherwise.

He leaned over the side of the sleigh to whisper:

"Report to the Englishman, Edwards. But come to me—I am the ensign Strelsky of the Guards—for a final word before setting out. Don't fail!"

"I hear."

Wrapping his furs around him, he shouted an oath at the driver and whirled away. But my ears have listened for quail moving in thickets and wild pigs rooting by the rivers at night. I heard him mutter something that sounded like:

"Pavel—Edwards—Ivak—good riddance all three."

I wondered what final word he was saving for our setting forth—what word he could not speak to me now. And I wondered who Pavel might be, and why the order had come to me direct from the officers of the Empress, who was now monarch of all the Cossacks, instead of through our colonel, in the ordinary way.

AS MATTERS turned out, I did not see the *ataman* again, because my officer was having a fine carouse in the Winter Palace that night, and I said farewell to my brothers of the squadron a little before cock-crow. The *essaul* who assumed my duties, because he was envious of the order from the Empress and my departure for our steppe, said dark things:

"As God lives, Ivak, evil will come of

this. It is a secret mission and when you dismount at the end you will step into a dungeon, like as not."

"Or they will tie your scalp-lock with a riband like a Prussian pigtail," said another.

"It may chance that Pavel will be a woman," put in the other *essaul*, "and then, Ivak, you will be in worse trouble than a calf tied to a cart-tail."

I buckled my bag and saddled the Kabarda stallion that I had brought up into Muscovy. Then I took my lance from the rack, for we had been equipped with lances having long streamers, like the Polish hussars, and said farewell to the *kunaks*, my brothers.

"At least," I told them, "I will not be standing in an open coffin—" for that is how we called the sentry boxes—"saluting Moskya officers and picking my teeth. Nay, in another month I will be dancing with your girls in the Dnieper villages."

They were sorry to see old Ivak go, and so they cursed my beard until I was in saddle, then all came forward to press my hand and bid me go with God, as is our custom. Truly, though we had jested, their words and mine came close to the mark. For the journey that began that day was a race and not a journey at all. We raced with Death.

Aye, it followed close upon the heels of one of our company. And the end of the road was a strange place—where not even an order of the Empress bids a Don *sotnik* go. And here, my brothers, is the tale of the journey and the man who made it.

THE quarters of the Englishman, Lieutenant Edwards, were in a fine brick house with a courtyard near the river. Even at sunrise many officers were being carried home from the festivities in sedan chairs and sleighs by their servants, *heydukes* dressed like Turks or Poles or Tatars, in turbans and pelisses with silver frogs, though why the high commanders of St. Petersburg should dress their servants like their enemies I do not know. Nor why the most trusted officers of the Empress Catherine the Great should be chosen from among Prussians, who were as stiff as lance-poles, or French, who wore white wigs. But that is how it was.

I found the Englishman in the courtyard, in high boots and a fine blue coat. He had been at the festivity, but he was not drunk, because he was looking to the saddling of a big roan. The horse was dancing and quivering, and the grooms kept their distance from its heels.

Lieutenant Edwards took the reins, gaining the saddle in the same instant. As I live, there was a fiend in that roan. It circled and reared, and the officer's three-cornered hat flew off into the mud. Then he lost his whip, and the roan started to bolt.

The Englishman could ride a bit, and he pulled the beast up short. But the roan knew what to do next; it wheeled against the fence and the man had to slip a foot from stirrup to save his leg from being crushed against a post. At once the fiend with four legs reared, and Lieutenant Edwards followed his hat, rolling over in the muck almost under the nose of my Kabarda.

Now few things are as pleasing to a Cossack as a bit of tricky riding. I was smiling, and the officer thought I was laughing at him, which was not so. But a man does not feel proud when he has tumbled out of a saddle.

"Climb down, you pig of a Moskya," he said in good Russian, "and my men will give you a whipping."

"Health to your Honor," said I, and dismounted, for his rank was higher than mine and it would have been insolence to address the officer from saddle. I, also, could speak the language of the Muscovites well—the speech of the Moskyas, which is not quite the same as our Cossack tongue. "The *sotnik*, Ivak, reports to you by order."

He looked me over, frowning. Perhaps he had never before seen a Cossack. His cheeks were clean shaven and his eyes were clear. Probably he was not more than half my age, and certainly he lacked half a head of my height.

Perhaps my *svitza*, my long coat, was ragged at the bottom; but if the Englishman had eyes for such things, he would have seen that my sash was a fine Turkish shawl and the red morocco in my boots was good stuff. He called to his servants to bring him his hat and whip and they did so, keeping out of the way of the roan, which was ranging the courtyard, snorting.

The Englishman's chin was set and his nostrils quivered and it seemed to me that he meant to use the whip on me himself, which would have been an evil thing for

both of us. Evidently he had a quick temper and was not exactly a coward.

"If your Honor permits," I spoke up, "I will ride the roan for a bit and bring him to hand."

"Five rix-dollars that you don't!"

"Agreed!"

The Englishman laughed as if he thought I were jesting, but he watched while I walked over to the roan. The horse tossed its head and wheeled off. A second time and a third I approached him, talking under my breath.

Presently I had the rein, and the roan laid back its ears, but as I kept on talking without trying to gain the saddle, it fell to watching the grooms. Then I jumped into the saddle without laying hand on the horse. It reared and then kicked out, feeling the grip of my knees. Once I lashed it with the heavy Cossack whip, and all the infernal in it was loosed.

The grooms scattered as we plunged here and there. Beyond keeping it away from the wall, there was little about the task to trouble a Cossack, since the muddy footing soon tired the roan. Many a time have my folk lassoed the wild horse on the steppe and ridden them into the villages.

"Bravo!" cried the Englishman, after I had made the circuit of the place three times. "Well done!"

He himself held the rein while I dismounted, which was needless. And he had forgotten all about the whipping. The English are a strange folk, not unlike us, with a black temper and the stubbornness of an ox and a way of laughing readily. He ordered one of his men to fetch the rix-dollars for me—a thing I had not expected. A Muscovite officer would have forgotten the bet but not the punishment.

When he ordered brandy he did not forget a stoop for me. He asked who had sent me. and then who had issued the order. I drew myself up and said—

"The Empress." This announcement made the Englishman thoughtful and, after he had seen that the roan was rubbed down, he looked around.

"Where are your men, *sotnik?*"

"Your Honor sees that I am alone."

At this his quick temper struck spark again, and he demanded with many oaths how he could journey to the Black Sea with Pavel, with an escort of only one man.

"True," I assured him, nodding, for it was unwonted. "Yet that man is Ivak, the galliard, the *jighit*, the outrider. I can lead you across the whole of the steppe by starlight; or you can bind up my eyes and arms, and I will race you to the camp on the Dnieper."

This was a good boast, because my Kabarda stallion would have picked its way unguided to the Cossack villages. But the Englishman was not in the mood for more wagers.

"You can't lead the way for Pavel," he growled.

And I wondered all the more who Pavel might be, and why he was not to be led. It was clear to me that many things had not been explained. My people have a saying that where there is much smoke in the air a fire is sure to be. I began to think about the fire that made all this smoke.

"Pavel will never reach St. Petersburg." The Englishman laughed as if that were a jest. "He is beyond the sea and the ice is in the Gulf still. Pavel wrote that he would be here, but no vessel has put in to the harbor. By the time the ice is gone many things will have happened, and Pavel will be wiser. Better for him if he never comes!"

Ekh! My head sank lower when I heard this. My spirit was burning to be astir and flying toward the warm sun of the steppe.

"Pardon, your Honor," I said. "But this Pavel is a high officer and among these Muscovites the imperial one himself can not do more things than a high officer."

"But Pavel is not a Russian. He is—" the Englishman frowned and tossed away a glove that was a little soiled with mud—"a pirate."

NOW on our great rivers, the Volga and the Dnieper, we had many pirates, who took a toll from the merchants. They tossed the merchants overboard and made themselves gifts of the merchants' money boxes and goods. That is how they took toll. So I knew what the Englishman meant, since I had happened in among the pirate bands a few times when they were off on a frolic. *Ai-a*, things warmed up then! Heads were bashed in, and boxes broken open.

"On your faces, dogs!"

And the hedgehogs, the boatmen, threw themselves down.

"Kindle up on all sides, brothers! *Sarin na kitchka!* Let the mechants drink river water."

And, *splash*, a pot-bellied fox-fur would go and drink himself to death!

So, if Pavel were a pirate, I thought that we would escort him to be hanged on a steel hook. For that is how the pirates are dealt with. Surely, then, he would not come to St. Petersburg.

I waited in the courtyard of the Englishman's house until restlessness came on me, and he let me exercise the roan. Every day then I rode out to speak a word to the Don Cossacks and let them see what a fine horse was in my charge. And everywhere I asked for news of Pavel, the great pirate and found that no one had heard of him; until one day, when, in spite of the mists, I had taken the river-road, down among the tribesmen of the sea who wore little caps and huge boots and had their red jerkins spotted with tar.

They laughed at me and pointed at another rider, who had stopped to watch them cutting at timbers. I asked him about Pavel and he smiled.

"*Stuppai!*" he cried. "Forward!"

When he said this he spurred his horse and we raced along the bank of the Nevski, scattering the dogs and the peasants who floundered in the mud. The yellow mist rolled along with us, driven by a giant of a wind from off the sea. The cloak of the rider who had cried "Forward" whipped out like a loose shroud. I saw two long pistols in his belt and they were good ones.

In the time it takes to kindle a fire I could no longer see him, but the hoofs of his horse smacked in the mud behind the roan. At the first cross street where log houses showed up in the fog, I pulled in the Kabarda and, sure enough, the hoofs of the other nag sounded close behind.

"Evil will come out of the sea," I thought, shivering in the damp breath of the swamps and the harbor. "That is how it is—evil."

And the other rider swept up, slowing to a trot as he neared me. I put one hand on my belt, near the hilt of the saber, and he smiled. He said nothing, and the skin of his face was white—drawn tight over the bones. His plain blue coat was weather-worn and his buff boots caked with mud.

But his eyes—they were black as river stones—spoke to me as he passed, dripping water like a man who has forded a deep stream.

"*Sau bull!*" I cried, seeing that he meant no harm. "Health to you!"

He waved his hand without speaking and the mist swallowed him up.

After he had gone I took off my *kalpack* and crossed myself, muttering the names of the Father and Son. For this man had the look of the dead who rise up from the sea. And surely the bells of Petersburg had been tolling miraculously.

That night Lieutenant Edwards said to me:

"Pavel has come. He sailed across the gulf in an open boat, and when the ice was upon them he held a pistol to the head of the chief boatman. For two days they had no food, but he changed his priming and kept it dry and said, '*Stuppai!*'"

The thought came to me that I had met Pavel, the pirate, on the river-road, and surely he looked like a man who had drifted on the sea for a long time. I would rather have crossed the border on a bad horse; but the sea was his home and the steppe was mine.

Edwards was not pleased, and he said that Pavel knew only that one word of Russian. He said that Pavel was a rear-admiral.

"What is that?" I asked.

"A field marshal of ships—a ***hetman***, you would call him. But all the same he is a pirate and a lawless fighter. The —— take him! Not long ago he rebelled against his king and became an American."

I had not heard of that country and wondered where it was, in Russia or Poland. The officer laughed and said that it was a country of vagabonds, without money to pay for a ship-of-war or powder for soldiers. Instead of a king, it had a merchant for ***hetman***, a merchant who grew tobacco.

I did not wonder then that Pavel had come to seek service in Russia where the officers wear diamonds and silver cording, and have fine women in their houses, yet it was strange that he should have a Russian name, and I asked the Englishman why this was so.

"Pavel means Paul. His name is John Paul Jones, and he was hatched out of the same egg as Satan."

AS THE days passed I understood that they would not hang John Paul Jones in Petersburg. Instead he went every day to the court, and carriages drove up to his door sometimes two or three

at a time. Always high officers were with him, and I grew very weary of saluting, for I was stationed at the door of his house. Every morning there was a *heyduke* with a letter from the empress and because *heydukes* like to lick up mead I learned many things.

The man from the sea was high in favor at court because he was to be sent down through the steppe to the far-off Black Sea, to take command of the Russian fleet and pound to pieces the fleet of the sultan who was at war with the empress.

John Paul had pounded the English ships, and burnt them; afterward he had been given a gold sword for bravery for other deeds by the *hetman* of the French; so the empress had called him and he had come. Time pressed, for he was needed by the Muscovites, who were expecting an attack by the ships of the Turks, down where Father Dneiper loses himself in the Black Sea.

This pleased me because it meant that we would soon show our heels to the accursed city of fogs and snow. Edwards gave orders to get together a half-dozen horses, with two Tatars to act as followers, and the necessary highway passes and order for post horses. He was to be John Paul's aide-de-camp, and he told me to go to Strelsky for the passes.

I found the ensign of the Guards sitting in his quarters by a tile stove, with his fur greatcoat thrown open and a glass of brandy near his hand. When he saw me he told me to close the door; then he took a pinch of snuff and dusted it off his silk neck-cloth.

"You start at dawn to-morrow, Ivak. This order is for *yamshiks*—the pick of the post horses."

He sharpened a quill pen and cleaned his teeth with it, while I drew a wooden splinter from the stove and lighted my pipe.

"You're a golden fellow, Ivak. I warrant you've stolen Tatar horses from across the border. They tell me you can use a sword, too. Well, you're lucky."

"*Allah birdui*," I responded. "God gives."

"Well, you're no skirted choir singer, blast me if you are. I like your sort, Ivak. You have a head on you as well as a sword hand. *Tch—tch!*" He shook his head admiringly. "Have you got together enough men and horses for the journey? Sometimes your Father Dnieper—that cursedly treacherous river—is a stepfather? Eh? Pirates and roving Tatars swarm like bees around a clover patch."

"We have a change of mounts and two Talmak Tatars for dragomen," I answered. "How large will the escort of soldiers be?"

Strelsky looked over at a high lacquer screen that stood in one corner of the chamber, and wiped the brown dust again from his chin.

"No other escort goes with you, Ivak. Haste is imperative, and you must not spare the horses. A great number of followers would delay the march."

I bent my head as if that were most true. Instead, I was wondering why not even a vedette of hussars accompanied us. John Paul was high in favor with her Majesty, and surely the empress would not let him ride forth without a retinue. But so it was.

Strelsky pushed the flagon of brandy toward me, and we looked at the bottom of the glasses several times, each busied with his own thoughts.

"You Cossack chaps like to go it, and warm up in the taverns on the road," he said after a while. "How would you like a hundred rix-dollars to weight down your wallet—eh?"

"*Allah birdui!*"

Without getting up he opened the lid of a box on the table and motioned for me to take what was inside. It was a sack of silver coins of the kind Edwards had used to pay his bet. I put it in my belt and the ensign nodded.

"Harken, Ivak," he went on in a lower voice, "we understand each other, I think. There is more to the order, about your journey, and it is secret. You serve the Empress?"

"We have taken her bread and salt."

"And silver. Good! Well, John Paul must not reach the Black Sea."

"How—not reach the Black Sea?"

For a long moment he stared at the painting on the screen, and I noticed the toes of a pair of boots showing underneath the screen.

"Do not our ships there wait for him to take command, aye, to show the gunners how to point the cannon, and the sailors how to guide the ships without running aground?" I asked.

"We have Muscovite commanders—better ones."

Strelsky scowled, because more than once

the Moskyas had lost their vessels because they could not manage the sails and because the rigging was stiff. On the other hand the Turks were good seamen, and they were helped by the corsairs from the Barbary Coast.

"John Paul is a hireling; he would betray us. Why do you bother your head about such things, Ivak? When you have spent the rix-dollars and come back to the Winter Palace, I swear that you will have the rank of colonel and be at the head of the Don regiment. Your *ataman*, your colonel is a bad one, a wine swiller. He will lose his baton."

"Is the order about Paul Jones written and signed?" I asked, pretending to be pleased with all he said.

"Nay—deuce take you, Ivak! Are such things to be written on paper?"

I scratched my head, the way my children, the warriors, do when they are puzzled. Now we Cossacks weigh down a horse a bit, but because a buffalo is fat it does not mean he is a fool. Nay, the weasel is the greatest of all fools because blood lust crazes him and he thinks only of killing, and the weasel is thin and sharp enough. Strelsky made me think of a weasel. I began to smell so much smoke that the fire could not be far away.

Strelsky was a fool. He thought to please me by promising me the promotion to colonel in place of our *ataman*. As God lives I would have liked to be colonel and hold an ivory baton on my hip, but our officer was our little father. Why should he not drink when there was nothing else to do in this city that smelled of the sea?

"True," I nodded again. "An order is an order. God keep and reward you, Ensign—I must look to the horses."

Hs stared and said farewell doubtfully, and I went out, taking pains not to close the door tight. I walked down the hall, thumping my boots, and came back again, moving gently, like a cat.

Without asking permission I pushed open the door. The screen had been moved and a man in a very fine silver coat was standing by the table, yawning. On his breast was the badge of the Order of St. Anne, and some others. He had very tight pantaloons and polished Hessian boots, the kind that Edwards wore.

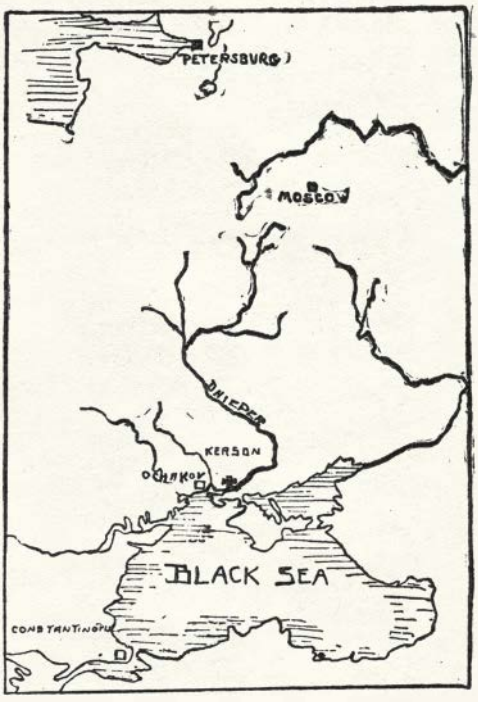
Strelsky was speaking, and once he called the other "*mon prince*." When they saw me they looked angry, and the pock-marked face of the prince grew dark.

When I took my *kalpack* in hand and bowed several times to the girdle as if greatly confused by sight of such a great noble, he swore in a language I did not know.

"Pardon, Excellencies," I muttered, "but I came back to ask again about the order. Is it the command of the Empress that Pavel—Paul Jones—is to be slain on the road to the Black Sea?"

Neither answered, and the full red lips of the prince—lips like a woman's they were—drew together as if he were biting them. Strelsky began to curse, then he laughed.

"Can't you see beyond your horse's ears, *sotnik?* Haven't you silver in your wallet? See to it that the river brigands or a band of Tatars seize the American and rub him out of the world. If this happens you will



be colonel of the Don regiment; if not, you would better flee to the Turks, to keep from being flayed. Do you understand now, you dolt?"

But the prince seemed thoughtful, and it was clear that he was not a fool like Strelsky. Taking out a lace kerchief, scented like a woman's hair, he waved it in the air and held it to his nose as if my sheepskins

annoyed him. So it was difficult to get a good sight of his face again.

"If a word of this order passes beyond your lips, Ivak," he warned in broken Russian, "you will wake up with a pistol ball in your brain."

"*Ekh!*" I lifted the bag of silver and tossed it on the table. "Then I beg your Excellency to keep the money for me. A dead man can't spend anything, even a copeck."

The smoke had cleared away enough for me to know that the Empress had not issued the order, or the Moskyas would have been bolder with their words. Some one else had a quarrel with Paul Jones, and I thought of the English officers who loved him only as dogs love wolves, and whose ships he had burned, besides taking from their grasp a high command in the Russian service. Before his coming the Empress had listened to the advice of the English colonels of the sea when she wanted to make war with her ships.

Why did I return the money? Well, it weighed on my spirit. Better if I had kept it—much better. I saw the watery eyes of the prince blink as if something had come up out of the ground under his nose. And when I went out into the hall I heard the door close, tight this time.

AT John Paul's lodging all was quiet; the two Tatars were snoring in the stable, the boxes of luggage were packed in the courtyard, and John Paul was writing a letter in his room upstairs. He was always writing letters, though none were ever delivered to him. He had no body servant in Russia, and so, the door being open and unguarded, I sat down on the sill to smoke my pipe and regret that the rix-dollars were no longer mine.

Presently to the door came two women, one old and bundled up and the other straight and young. She had a thin face, pale under the paint that the Moskya women use, and her hood was thrown back to show coils of black hair.

They wanted to ask the American for work to do—sewing. I told them to go to another door in the street because we had no need of sewing.

Then they began to argue and the younger one said they had had nothing to eat that day. Overhead, the American stirred and came down to see what was happening. The old one drew back, but the girl addressed him boldly in some kind of French, I think, and he shook his head.

The girl took his hand and put back her cloak and smiled, trying to slip past him into the house. But he would not permit it, giving her some money instead—I do not know how much. Then she jumped up on her toes and kissed him, and went away to where the crone was waiting. John Paul returned to his writing because I heard the scrape of his pen.

I was glad the women had gone because every minister of Petersburg had a regiment of spies and the foreign nobles had nearly as many, and it is an ill place where a man can be watched without knowing it. The great clocks of the towers had struck many times when wheels creaked up to the house and an equerry of the palace reported that a *tarantass* belonging to her Majesty had been brought for the American to use on his journey.

As Paul Jones was asleep by then, I went out to look at the *tarantass*, which was a long, narrow wagon with big wheels, leather bound. In front and rear were places for footmen to stand, holding on by straps. A sloping roof covered it like a house and within was room enough for two to sit or recline but not to stand. The windows were small and heavy shutters closed them.

Two pairs of matched bays were hitched up, one pair to the shaft, the other to the traces. I was very sleepy by then, and dozed a bit until John Paul woke me up.

"*Stuppai*, Ivak," he cried with a smile. "Forward!"

I was angry that he should have found me asleep, when dawn was streaking the sky, and I cursed the Tatars a bit when I found that he had been to the stables and had the horses fed before waking me. We were ready by the time Edwards rode up, yawning, with his body servant and a led horse with double packs. All the servants of the palace had gone except the equerry and the two postilions. For a while we delayed while the two officers talked, and John Paul went up to the *tarantass* and glanced inside carelessly though he could have seen little in the faint light.

"Ivak," Edwards called to me, "here's a —— of a mess. The American will not ride in the carriage of the Empress. He wants to make the journey in a saddle. We can not send back her Majesty's gift."

"Health to your Honor," I pointed out, "In that case we can throw the luggage in the wagon and use the pack aninals as spare mounts for the servant and Tatars. Then, perhaps Pavel—Paul Jones can sleep in it when we halt."

In this way our progress would be swifter and I was glad when the American ordered the packs thrown into the *tarantass*, and we set out with three extra mounts, leaving the equerry standing at salute. *Ekh*, I was glad to ride for the last time through the muddy streets in the pale dawn and hear for the last time that clamoring, invisible ringing of the bells.

II

When the net is invisible the fish thinks the water is clear. That is how the fish is caught.

FOR a time that day I watched John Paul, to see how he would bear himself. *Ekh*, he was at home in the saddle, that chap, and he forced the pace faster than the Englishman, Edwards, wanted to press on. Because it was the season of the *rasputitsa*, the flood during the spring thaw, the roads were no better than fords across the treacherous swamps. The carriage would slip from the crown of the road and sink into the mire up to the hubs.

After John Paul had dismounted once and put logs under the wheels, to force the carriage back to the road, I made the postilions change places with the Tatars. I was angry because we had to drag along the *tarantass*, but if I had known what evil was stored up for us within it, I would have unhitched the horses and left it like a stranded ship in the great pools of the flooded country.

If it had not been for John Paul we should not have reached the first of the *zamoras* —the post stations along the highroad to Moscow—that night. The sun had gone down behind a cloud bank when we drew up at the inn and a score of slouching rogues came out to stare at us. They showed their teeth but nothing more when I elbowed them aside and shouted to the pig of a tavern keeper to make ready a leg of mutton and brandy spirits and bread for their excellencies, the officers, who had chosen to quarter themselves in the carriage after looking once at the inn.

They sat on the shaft and ate the dinner when it was brought, but I went to the stables before eating to make certain that the Tatars had watered the horses and given them oats. I found all as it should be, the beasts bedded down and the Tatars not yet drunk on *chirkhir*, and I was turning away to seek out my dinner when one of them touched my knee.

"Horses!" he said, and after a moment, "Nine riders on the road, Ivak Khan."

Now Tatars have ears like weasels, and it was quite a while before I heard the hoof beats coming nearer. The Tatar who had spoken peered up at me and pulled his forefinger across his throat, then touched the hilt of my saber. He meant that men were around who would cut my throat and warned me to be on guard.

Just as he did so a screaming began in front of the inn, a shrill screaming that was horrible to hear. I took off my *kalpack* and crossed myself, for it sounded like a woman vampire calling from the forest, but the cries were coming from the wagon.

"Aid—aid! Who will hear the prayer of a Christian maid?"

John Paul and the Englishman were on their feet, staring at the *tarantass* in astonishment, because all the day that wagon had given out no cries and now there was either a woman or a vampire inside it.

A body of horsemen came clattering up to the fire, and the leader dismounted and strode over to the wagon. He was an ensign of the Guards with a long mustache and a long saber and a red face. The six troopers with him kept to their saddles and worked their horses around so as to hem us in.

"Let us see what is boiling in this pot!" growled the ensign, jerking open the doors.

He began to haul at something and presently pulled out—for he was a strong man—a girl who was bound with belts at the wrists and ankles. She was slender, with tangled dark hair, and she wore a silk cloak lined with hare's fur.

All the time the ensign was unbuckling the straps she leaned on his shoulder and wept, chattering like a squirrel. Servants of the American, she said, had overtaken her in the street of Petersburg and had gagged her. Then she had been carried to John Paul's house and placed in the wagon. She said—and this was quite true—that she had had nothing to eat all day, and had been shaken up and down like wheat at threshing.

The ensign, whose name was Borol, asked her if she was not Anna Mikhalovna, and she assented eagerly. Then he frowned and turned to Edwards, explaining how complaint had been made that morning at the quarters of the Guard by this girl's mother. An order had been issued that he should follow the American, find the girl and request John Paul to return to Petersburg.

When Borol pointed at the American, John Paul spoke one word to Edwards who turned to the ensign—

"Salute the rear-admiral."

Borol chewed his mustache and clicked his lips; then drew his heels together and saluted sullenly. It was plainly to be seen that John Paul was not in such high favor now. He took Edwards arm and the two paced up and down while the aide-de-camp explained about the accusation and the order to return.

Meanwhile Borol made a great show of warming Anna Mikhalovna at the fire and ordering brandy for her to drink, and I went closer to stare at her. She was the girl who had called at John Paul's door the evening before with the old crone.

Ekh, the whole thing was clear in my mind, all at once. The girl had not been in the *tarantass* when it was first driven up from the palace. Some time before dawn she had been placed in it, bound, most likely. Then his enemies in Petersburg had spread a story that the American had carried off the girl, and now he would be recalled to explain the matter to a court of men who hated him. It meant that he would be kept waiting at the Muscovite palace instead of joining his command, even if nothing worse happened.

In my mind was the picture of the foreign prince with the Hessian boots, and I wondered how much the English had to do with the plot. They had no love for John Paul, and made no secret of it.

The story of Anna Mikhalovna could not be true. Why had she kept quiet in the wagon all day, only to cry out like a bugle when the troopers came up? And as for John Paul's servants carrying her off—he had no servants. Besides, she had tried to enter his house last evening, and when she had been turned away this new plot had been made against him.

Probably his enemies had counted on a scene in his courtyard when we started off; but he had chosen a horse instead of the carriage and the girl had not been seen, because no one had looked inside when the packs were thrust through the door.

It was a plot that men who spend their lives at court would hatch—a small and skilful plot, the kind that ties up a man as with silk cords. What could John Paul do but go back? He belonged to the world of the court, and according to his code it would be necessary to clear his name before he could accept his new mission.

Edwards looked like a man who has come to a fork in the road, puzzled, yet a little pleased. But John Paul had grown pale and his eyes were dark as coals.

Just a few words he said to the ensign, Borol—Edwards interpreting—but they were like sword pricks. The American had seen through the plot, and the wish of his enemies to disgrace him.

"I came to Russia in an open shallop, through ice on the sea, because the Empress summoned me, and when I offered my sword to her, Count Besborodko, the minister of state, was instructed to do everything possible to make the situation of the Chevalier Paul Jones pleasant and to furnish him with all possible occasions on which he might display his skill and valor. Besborodko—"the American handed back the order which was signed by the minister—"has misunderstood his instructions. He has taken pains to afford me the chance of displaying the talents of a lawyer, not a soldier."

Edwards smiled as he translated, and I thought that John Paul was a man who would not be led by others. But his pride was hurt and his muscular face was drawn. He had a hard path to follow in Russia, because he did not know the ways of the great Russian lords who looked on all soldiers as slaves.

Borol shrugged and said it was none of his affair—such a disgraceful matter it was, carrying off a young girl. He was a *graf* of Hessia—whatever that might be—and the mission touched upon his honor—whatever that was. And he pushed up the ends of his mustache, clanking his scabbard as he did so.

NOW I had been seeking for some word to say, because I would rather have lost my scalp lock than return to Petersburg. Something about the *graf* reminded me of the prince in the silver

coat: They were like as two cups, and if neither was an Englishman, then the English at the palace might not have hatched the plot. I smacked my thigh and whispered in Edward's ear.

"Your Honor's pardon, but that girl is the one who tried to get into John Paul's lodging last evening. An old crone was with her, and the American gave them money to go away. Somebody must have given them more money—the pretty sparrows!"

This surprized the Englishman, and he looked as if he did not know which fork of the road to take.

"The deuce!" He took snuff and added carelessly to Borol. "This Anna Mikhalovna—I think I've seen her. A friend of Besborodko's perhaps?"

"Not at all, Lieutenant. She's a farmer's daughter—lodged with a priest near the cathedral last night."

"Ah." Edwards glanced at the silk cloak. "Then she couldn't have come begging at the rear-admiral's quarters late in the evening."

"Impossible."

I stepped forward.

"She was there, only dressed differently."

Borol shook his head impatiently and ordered some of his men to escort Anna to the inn. Edwards needed no more words to show whether I had told the truth.

"Ensign," he remarked, "this is not a flash in the pan—it is —— serious. The American entered the Russian service on the Empress' pledge that he would have a free hand and sole command of the Black Sea Fleet. He is a Chevalier of France and a friend of Lafayette. Who stirred up this hornets' nest at his heels?"

Now those who had sent Borol had picked a man with a good sword arm but a sluggish brain. He chewed his mustache and barked out:

"—— take it! You English have cooked up the whole thing."

Edwards started as if he had been touched with a whip.

"What a knowing fellow, egad!" he drawled. "Upon my word, Count Borol, you must know us better than we know ourselves. Deuced quaint, I swear, to fancy that because we do not count Admiral Jones among our friends we would think up a foul plot and bait it with a farmer's daughter. Unfortunate, very—that it should be necessary to prove to you by example that the English strike in the open."

And his eyes glittered, just like the time when he had caught me smiling at him. Quite happy, he was, because the ensign had given him offense. A strange folk!

"I thought—" Borol was beginning to be sorry he had talked so much, but he was in for it now.

"Indeed! It may be necessary for you to think twice. A man of your high intuition, Count Borol, must realize that by accusing the English officers of Petersburg of a blackguardly intrigue, you cast some slight aspersion upon me." He bowed, very elegant. "Of course you will give satisfaction at once, and as the challenged party, the choice of weapons is yours. Do you prefer swords or shall we say pistols? Necessity compels us to dispense with seconds."

It was clear to me that the Englishman's temper would brew trouble for us. If there was a duel, and some one was sliced, the enemies of Paul Jones would have good reason for calling him to account, since dueling was forbidden. To make matters worse, the American, when he learned what Edwards was about, insisted on meeting Borol himself. And, knowing of the plot against John Paul, I could see that Borol was well content; if he wounded the admiral, high influences in Petersburg would free him from blame; if John Paul cut him up the American would be made to suffer for it. A plan came into my head and I stepped forward.

"Borol," I said, "God has given you a long arm but a short wit. A while ago you would not believe my word that the girl had come begging of the admiral. Now I say that you lie."

And I added other plain words for the soldiers to hear, so that their leader's ears began to burn.

"Dog of a Cossack!" Borol was beside himself with rage. "I'll have you strung up by the thumbs and your hide cut up for whips."

"Oho," I thought, "when the cock crows loud he is in his own barnyard."

Carefully this time I counted over the troopers and found there were seven with the ensign included. But my Tatars had heard nine horses, and if two others had come with the company they must be in hiding in the trees beyond the firelight—

spies, without a doubt, or perhaps Strelsky, or even the prince of the silver coat.

"First," I told Borol, "I will teach you a lesson if you are not afraid to challenge a man whose arm is as long as yours."

"Draw your steel, you hedgehog!"

"Ivak!" Edwards turned on me angrily. "My affair with the ensign does not require the aid of a clown. Back to your place!"

"Pardon," I pointed out, "but my quarrel with Borol takes precedence of your Honor's affair. He made light of my word in the first place."

The American and Edwards stood about as high as my chin, but they were bent on crossing steel with the ensign who was a giant. Edwards began to explain impatiently that, although Borol's military rank was equal with mine, the man was a count, or some such thing.

"You do not know, Excellency," I assured him, "that in my country the Cossacks hold me to a prince. Aye, my grandsire was *hetman*, having to his order ten thousand sabers. Is not that rank enough?"

Borol, who was foaming at the mouth, tossed his cloak to a trooper and began to roll up his right sleeve, crying that I might be emperor of a million pigs, but he would have satisfaction all the same.

"One moment," I said. "You have challenged me and so I have choice of weapons. Is it not so, Lieutenant Edwards?"

He nodded, staring at me curiously. Borol grinned, knowing that a Cossack would chose sabers, which suited him very well.

"We will fight with pitchforks," I said.

So amazed were they that the crackling of the fire could be heard in the silence, when I walked to the manure heap by the inn door and picked up two forks with iron prongs. My ears were pricked and I heard the stamp of a horse close by in the darkness, where some one watched, unseen. *Eh*, the trap was set and ready to be sprung if the American or those with him showed fight. I yearned to take on Borol with sabers and teach him a thing or two, for among the Don Cossacks few were a match for me with the blades.

But it was not to be. I cleaned the iron prongs in the earth and held out the two forks to Borol, offering him choice of weapons. How his eyes stuck out!

"With those things!" he sneered. "A gentlemen is not a dog of a farmer."

"True, my little Count," I nodded. "A Cossack would think it disgraceful to draw steel on such a man as you. Choose!"

He glared at the prongs, at me and at Edwards, who was beginning to be amused. Then he stepped back with an oath, and felt in his saddle holster for a firearm.

"Take them!" he shouted to his men. "Draw pistols!"

For the second time Borol had made a mistake. His men obeyed, it is true, but when they had their weapons resting on their hips, with muzzles in the air, Edwards had caught up a double-barreled horse pistol from his saddle bags and the American had in hand the two light, silver mounted French pistols that he carried in his belt.

It was clear even to Borol that we would not be taken alive, by force; but before he could give an order to the troopers to fire, a voice came out of the darkness behind the fire—

"Withdraw!"

And they did so, taking with them the woman, lest we question her, but leaving the *tarantass*—which I regretted. The trap had been sprung, but the panthers were not caught. Aye, from that hour we were hunted like beasts, we who were men.

Then the American showed that he had had men to his command before now. I had seen that he could ride and face an adversary; now it was clear he thought of those under him. Through Edwards he reminded me that I had had no dinner and bade me to the inn to seek what I could find and to return to talk with them.

WHEN I wiped my hands on the tavern dog and came forth again, the two officers were casting dice on a saddle cloth, laughing like boys, though there was gray in the hair of John Paul. After I saluted, Edwards asked me to sit with them and light my pipe, and they put away the dice.

"Old raven," said he, "there is more in your noodle than comes out your mouth. The rear-admiral would like to ride back to Tsarkoe-seloe and clear his name before the Empress. Knowing a little of the Russian court, I advise him to ride as far from it as his horse will carry him; a victory or two will do more for his cause than a dozen petitions, which might get no farther than the servants of the minister of state. What is your word?"

They were quick of wit, those two, and they saw how old Ivak had uncovered a fine snare, all the more deadly because it was sprung by a silken cord.

"If your Honor pleases," I responded after thought, "what is in your heart toward the American? Good or ill?"

"The deuce!" Edwards frowned. "Would I have come as his aide if not honestly? Pirate he may have been, but that chapter is written. Take care what you say, Cossack!"

"Lieutenant," I made answer, "we be three men, and the road before us is fifteen hundred versts. Wolves track us, and they be two-legged wolves. If we do not speak openly together now, how shall we make a plan? Without a plan, how shall we arrive at the end of the road?"

He glanced at me, and the flush left his keen young face.

"As bad as that? I wondered why an escort was denied us, on one pretext or another." He stooped to draw a coal from the fire, for his long clay pipe. "Hhm. Would these two-legged wolves shed the blood of our officer?"

"Aye."

"Ha! The stakes are high, then. But I do not think the Empress would stoop to plotting."

"Nay."

"Who then?"

That was a knotty question, and I shook my head. Later I had reason to curse my stupidity, that I did not tell them about the prince of the silver coat. Yet it did not come into my mind that Edwards might know him. Besides, I was not sure of John Paul's loyalty. My orders were only to guide him to Kherson, our headquarters on the Black Sea.

Edwards explained to the American what I had said and when he had finished I made bold to offer advice.

"By your Honor's leave, what authorization has the admiral to take command when he arrives at Kherson?"

They told me there was a letter signed by Catherine herself, that he should take over the fleet at Kherson. That was good though it might have been better.

"Then," I said slowly, "if I were John Paul I should ride to the utmost, not sparing the horses, until he sets foot on his flagship."

It surprized them that a Cossack should know what a flagship was, but we fellows of the borderland have taken oars in hand and gone out in skiffs against the fleet of the Turks and we have smelled powder mixed with salt water.

"But this plot with the wretched girl has failed," Edwards pointed out. "His enemies are behind him, and the road is clear ahead."

"His enemies, Lieutenant, are powerful, and Muscovite spies are whelped even in the forests of Muscovy. Avoid the cities, and use spur and whip. If you will trust me I can lead you safe to Kherson."

Edwards laughed.

"Even odds, for a hundred rubles, I beat you into Kherson."

"Done!" I nodded.

They gave me leave to depart and I went to the stables where the straw was cleaner than the inn beds. I was not asleep when one of the Tatars touched me, and I began to listen, for he did nothing more than to hiss warningly. The hoof beats of a horse sounded faintly from the highway, and soon disappeared to the south without pausing at the inn.

The only Russian who would pass a tavern after dark would be carrying an urgent dispatch. Moreover, he had not halted for a change of mounts at this post station, and surely there was a reason for that. I swore at my oversight in not placing sentries on the high road, and then I remembered that we had no men to post as sentries.

III

A raft upon the river is made of many logs fastened together; so long as the logs hold together the raft is safe. If they drift apart there is no longer a raft.

HAVE you, my brothers, ever slain a bear with a dirk? If you know how to go about it, the task is easy. In winter, go to a *berlog*—a winter sleeping place of a bear, down under the snow, where a round air hole shows, rimmed with yellow. Thrust a long stick into the hollow under the breathing hole until the bear springs up, *whuff*—throwing the snow all about him. Then step in and stab with the knife before his eyes grow fully accustomed to the light.

If you are a little slow, the bear will go back to sleep again with a full belly.

So it was with us. Before we had grown suspicious our enemies had their way with

us; but now that we had our eyes open it was otherwise. Before long we left the swamps and the mud, and passed by the last of the Muscovite water-towns, Novgorod, on the bank of a small river in flood.

Like a flash the oaks and the pine forest closed around us as we pounded south toward Moscow. Probably when Strelsky made out our permit for post horses he never thought we would go far enough to claim the *yamshiks*, the picked horses that his paper allowed us.

But at each *zamora* I combed over the nags for the best ones, keeping only the Kabarda of mine that ran loose beside us for three days until I gave it into the keeping of an honest Armenian who would bring the horse to Kherson by slow stages. For we were covering then nearly a hundred versts, which Edwards said was eighty English miles, a day.

The postilions of the carriage complained, and finally became useless. So we were not sorry to leave them at one of the huts. The two Tatars did their work more to my liking and the postilions may have been in the plot against us. Even the *tarantass* proved itself a friend now, because John Paul and Edwards took turn about sleeping in it, as well as they could for the jolts. *Hai*, they could not sleep as well as I in the saddle, but they made no protest and we made no stop.

Several times we heard the wolf packs howling and once the wolves were at our heels for ten verst posts. We had to burn much powder and my horse was slashed by their teeth when we pulled up at the next post station. Still, we saw nothing of the two-legged wolf that had passed us in the first night. I scanned each rider we turned out of the narrow way between the trees, without coming upon one who might have been a Muscovite spy.

The officers cared little for the rider that was ahead of us, and looked on our ride as a new game.

"*Stuppai*, Ivak!" Paul Jones would shout.

And forward we went, Edwards jesting with me that I would taste his dust into Kherson and lose a half-year's pay thereby. Only when we sighted the domes and spires of Moscow in its great plain did we halt, for six hours, so that the American might dine with the governor of the city.

On the sixth day out we had to halt for three hours to repair a wheel of the carriage. In the stables of the post station I asked for news of a rider from Petersburg, who was bearing dispatches a few hours ahead of us, knowing that any man who wished to make the utmost speed along the highway would claim that he carried dispatches. The men of the *zamora* told me that an officer had passed south at sunrise, which was twelve hours before. Dried mud was still on his boots and his permit had read from Petersburg to Kherson. Thinking of Borol, I asked if he spoke with a German accent and looked to be about my size.

They said it was not so. The officer had cursed them in good Russian for delaying him. So, after all, we had no real reason to suspect that a spy had gone ahead.

But when a man hunts wolves he does not lie down under a tree to doze because no wolves are in sight. I pushed the horses that night, keeping awake to do so, and promising the Tatars half a flask of corn brandy to stir them up a bit. We put a hundred and twenty versts behind us, from sunset to sunset, and changed horses six times, and it was my two officers who were stirred up finally.

Edwards, who was suffering from saddle sores, cursed my beard and my soul and my father's grave and other things, yet I took no offense, knowing that weariness had gripped him and there was no meaning in the curses.

"—— take you, Ivak," he promised, "I will give orders to slow down to a hand pace. You are rubbing the bones out of my buttocks."

"I hope your Honor is well," I replied, knowing how to handle him. "Because if not, I will have to wait for you in Kherson, to spend the hundred rubles."

"Blast you, Ivak—sink you for a lying rogue!"

And he leaped from the *tarantass* and ran to a horse, jumping into saddle and plying whip and spur until I was tasting his dust—as his beast was fresher.

"I'll lead you into Kherson even if your Tatars have to carry me on a door."

And his words were near to the truth, as will be seen presently. Meanwhile, however much we pressed the horses we did not gain sight of the officer who was ahead of us. If we rode like the wind, he went like a witch on a broomstick on All-Hallow's Eve—or like a man with his neck in a noose.

We came out on the vast level that lies

south of Moscow, where the sun was warm on the dense foliage of the trees. In the black soil the wheat stood high and rippled under the breath of the wind like a great pool of water. Dust hung behind us like a giant's plume, and the *moujiks* we met stood aside and doffed their wool caps, bowing as low as their sashes, astonished at the pace of our horses. *Eh*, it was good to be under a clear sky again!

Before long we knew that the rider ahead of us had sighted us, although we had not set eye on him.

At a *zamora* we were told that all the horses were out. Never before this had such a thing happened! Not a nag in the stables!

Edwards was for waiting until fresh beasts could be rounded up, but John Paul said we would press forward on the best animals to the next station. We did so, but here also the keepers of the station bowed and prayed forgiveness because all the horses were out.

I said nothing, riding instead in a circle about the hut and stables, while the two officers made use of the delay in eating dinner. Aye, there were few tracks leading away from the *zamora* along the highway, but a round dozen traces went from the stable yard into the fields, and they were fresh tracks.

Calling my Tatars, I sent them off to follow the tracks for a few versts and bring back what they found. Then I spurred my tired nag into the group of Moskyas who were watching with covert interest. I pulled out a pistol and cocked it, then primed the pan.

"What are you doing, Uncle?" asked the one who had said there were no horses. "And why did you send the Tatars away?"

"God keep you, brother," I made answer, "or the devil will get you. I sent the Tatars for a priest."

"Why a priest?" He made shift to laugh and invite me down for a nuggin of mead. "*Eh*, what would a Cossack do with a priest?"

"Several things. Nay, I would have the last rites administered to you by the *batko*, the little father, so when your soul stands in the company of the holy angels you will not smell rank of a bribe."

This I said, knowing that his palm had been crossed with silver by the rider who raced us to Kherson, and that was why the horses were missing.

"But, worthy *sotnik*—noble, handsome Captain—there is no priest in the village."

There were half a dozen of the Moskyas, with knives and clubs, but when they looked at the pistol they all began to praise me and say that they were my slaves.

"Then tell me where you have hidden the horses, if there is no priest."

They exchanged glances uneasily, and I added a word, for I did not know if the Tatars were on the right trail and time pressed.

"You will have a gift—" I looked at the first speaker—"worth many times the ruble the officer gave you, if the horses are brought back."

His eyes began to glisten with greed and he made great show of bravado and after a moment another spoke up, saying that the horses had been put out to pasture only half a verst away. I waited, keeping them under the muzzle of the pistol, until the Tatars galloped back with a score of horses, many of them good and not all, judging by the looks of them, from the post station.

Then the Moskyas jumped to harness a team to the *tarantass* and I picked out five ponies with Arab blood just as my officers came out. When I was changing my saddle the chief keeper came up and asked for his gift.

"Your life," I said. "I give it you."

Before we were out of hearing that keeper shouted after us that the ensign who had come before us had said we were chiefs of the pirates from the Dnieper, and that we would steal all the horses.

I told this to Edwards and he looked thoughtful.

"Why are you so eager to reach Kherson in haste, Uncle Ivak?" he asked after a while.

"I had an order to take John Paul there, alive."

"True, but you press on like a horse that scents water."

So, seeing there was a new doubt in his mind, I sat back in the saddle and told him the truth.

For ages the Cossacks had fought the Turks and all the Moslems who came over the black water. Only a generation ago had the Russians built a fleet strong enough to meet the armada of the Turks and to navigate these new men-of-war they had to engage foreign officers. Many great ships with masts as tall as pines were in this fleet,

which was stationed near Kherson, in the narrow gulf called the Liman, or Port, at the mouth of Father Dnieper. This Liman was near to the great river Danube also and the Crimea.

But as yet our fleet had not fired a shot at the Turks, who were mustering up their vessels-of-war and blocking it in, as dogs circle around the lair of a tiger.

Aye, the Russian ships had been built hastily of green timber, which was rotting so fast there was danger of the heavy guns falling through the bottoms. And in all the crews were barely one full company—two hundred men—that knew how to work the sails and make the ships go forward against the wind. They did not go forward at all, but sat in one place with anchors down, except the smaller craft, the galleys and double shallops, that ranged the coast and far back up the Dnieper.

These were commanded mainly by Greeks and Genoese and made prizes of many merchant craft, honest Armenians, and some French and English. These prizes were taken back to the Liman for examination, and they never sailed forth again. Perhaps they were kept to help the fleet, perhaps they were burned. Who knows?

The galleys of the flotilla, as the lighter squadron was called, even raided Cossack villages for supplies and carried off girls.

To all these misdeeds the commander of the Black Sea fleet could have put an end, if he willed. But he gave no orders, and his chief aide, a Greek by the name of Alexiano, plundered and snatched where he willed.

That was bad for my people, but worse was in store for us. The Turks were growing bolder and very soon they would strike at our fleet. How could our ships, that were unable to sail, beat off the Turks? Nay, the battle would be a disaster.

And that would cripple the army which was acting in concert with the fleet. Protected by the Turkish ships-of-war, the Moslem army could advance on Kherson and the Crimea and march up the Dnieper, rolling over the villages of my people.

That was why I was eager to bring John Paul to Kherson to take command. If he were a leader of men—which remained to be seen—he might make an end of chaos and win the battle upon the sea.

"How do you know so much, old raven?" Edwards asked.

I told him that many Cossacks had volunteered to serve with the fleet and some had returned in anger to their people.

"A pretty mess, if you have told the truth." Edwards shook his head. "Egad, Ivak, surely there are skilled officers in the fleet—Grèvé and Ten Broek."

"True, Lieutenant, but they are navigating officers upon the ships with three rows of guns. The Russians and Greeks command, and the crews are a hard lot—fishermen, criminals and soldiers, not at all easy to lead."

"Then Paul Jones is the chap to take them in hand, I warrant."

Edwards laughed and explained that once, I suppose when the American was still a pirate, he had commanded a great ship that was manned by the refuse of the French coast and a few Yankees. I did not know what Yankees were, but Edwards said they were people without a king, who chewed tobacco and fought like fiends.

Paul Jones had commanded the *Bon Homme Richard*—so the lieutenant named his ship—and had fought, with such a crew, until he overmastered an English ship, although his own vessel sank.

I do not know how true this was, but in the next days John Paul, who had discovered that I knew much of affairs in the Black Sea, questioned me through Edwards very patiently and by the way he returned to the same things again, I knew that he remembered all that was said, and it warmed my spirit like corn brandy, because he seemed to know much about ships and the ways of the sea.

Aye, we went forward joyfully. Were we not in the steppe at last, only two days' ride from Kherson? The tall grass was all around us, high as our horses' shoulders, with the yellow broom and the blue corn flowers making it gleam like a banner. Quail ran before us, and the scent of clover and hay made the air sweet.

We sang and lashed at our horses, being perhaps intoxicated by long lack of sleep, a thing that makes the blood burn in the brain. We had come nine hundred miles in nine days, and we no longer thought of the plotters at Petersburg:—Aye, we were like blind fools.

One of the Tatars wakened me from a doze by thrusting his stirrup against my foot.

"Ivak Khan! Ivak Khan! Vultures have gathered together in a flock."

He did not mean that vultures were in the air. I saw at once what he had seen, and cried out to halt the *tarantass* and turn back.

We had come to the summit of a high knoll and less than a verst ahead of us, down under the knoll, men were sitting with horses picketed near at hand. I counted twenty and seven and the Tatar—who had eyes like a goshawk—said that they were armed, some having muskets. Their coats were of different colors.

They did not look like a detachment of Russian soldiers nor Cossacks, who would have chosen the knoll for a halting place. Even as the *tarantass* was being turned a man stepped out of a growth of tall hemp, a pistol shot away, between us and the waiting band. He shouted and the men by the horses stood up.

I took time to study the lay of the land before riding back after the carriage. It was ill luck that I had been asleep when we breasted the knoll or I should have gone ahead to look over before the carriage and the officers came upon the skyline. But it was good luck that the knoll should be where it was.

The highway here followed the left bank of the wide Dnieper, which was about two versts away. To reach the knoll we had passed through a network of gullies, where an arm of the river had stretched across the trail into the steppe. We had forded this water and pushed through great patches of rushes as high as the head of a mounted man.

From the summit of the hill where I was the ford and the rushes could not be seen, because clumps of willows hid them. Where the estuary joined Father Dnieper a great raft of logs was floating lazily down the river.

My Tatars were already galloping the *tarantass* down toward the inlet and I soon saw that they would be hidden by the trees before the riders, who had been waiting by the highway, could come up to the summit of the hill. The man who had been on watch was standing still, because I had kept to my place. If I had rushed away with the carriage he would have run up, no doubt. Skulkers are bold when backs are turned.

After observing all these things I wheeled my horse and clapped in the spurs, overtaking the carriage at the river and bidding it halt.

"What the —— are you about, Ivak? What has happened?"

Edwards who was dozing in the carriage had been wakened by the jolting.

"Bandits or foemen have happened," I explained quickly. "We can not gain the last *zamora* ahead of them. Our beasts are tired and theirs are fresh. What is your will?"

"That we make a stand, Ivak. *Tsob-tsob, Tsoboe!* Hustle! Better to make a stand and greet them with bullets than rush into these infernal gullies that lead nowhere but out into your cursed steppe."

"And what does the admiral say?"

Edwards spoke to John Paul quickly and the American cast a glance around, apparently not in the least disturbed.

"He says to go down this inlet to the river. We might slip past the stand-and-deliver chaps along the river."

Now there was truth in Edwards' choice, to stand and face our pursuers, and there was more wisdom in John Paul's advice to take to the riverbank, but I had a better plan. Pulling Edwards out of the *tarantass* and calling to the Tatars who were riding the horses attached to it, I jerked the heads of the leaders to the right and lashed the beasts until they started off, dragging the carriage into the rushes toward the steppe. Meanwhile Edwards had climbed into my saddle and the Tatars and I each took a stirrup—the servant being the third rider. Then we waded into the water and began to trot off, around a bend toward the river. The bottom was hard here and we raised little mud, while the track of the carriage going in the other direction was clear as a cattle path.

All this had taken not two minutes and we were well out of sight when we heard the horses of the band splash into the ford. Although the two officers had left behind valuable baggage and clothing they had not bickered for a second. For a moment I wondered if my suspicions were false—the band might have been vagabonds or deserters who would have left us alone for a little silver.

I thought to myself:

"When a plan is made and a path chosen, only a fool loiters to think of other paths. The outlaws will divide at the ford, some going after the wagon, some coming this way. It is better to deal with a dozen than with them all."

We pushed on around many turns, and finally went up to the edge of the rushes where the cover was still good and the footing firmer. Here we made better speed, the mounted men bending low, so their hats could not be seen. As we crossed the bare spaces, or climbed over rocks, our ears were pricked for musket shots, but none came.

Soon we began to splash through water again, even where trees stood, because Father Dnieper was in flood. Aye, we should not have known where the land ended, except that the raft came into view drifting past, just at the edge of the trees and brush where the current was not as swift as in midstream.

The *burlaks*, the watermen on the raft, were singing, sitting in the sun and smoking. The raft itself was made of fine long oak trunks bound together with ropes, about twenty logs in width and four tiers in length.

"To the left," I whispered, and the officers swung off through the trees, finding there a dry ridge of earth down which we ran, coming out again a little in advance of the raft.

"If we could get our hands on that raft," I explained to Edwards, "we could cross the Dneiper, at need, and land on the other side. See, it has three sweep oars. Our pursuers could not swim their horses across and boats are few along here."

"But the rogues would see us on the raft."

"Aye, if God wills. But they would hit upon us before long on the shore, and they have muskets."

Edwards spoke to the American who glanced at me keenly and nodded. He was no waster of time. The Englishman rode out a bit from the trees to where he could speak with the *burlaks* without shouting. They stopped their song and took their pipes out of their lips to stare the better.

"Hola, little brothers! How much will you take for the raft?"

They stared all the more, until one with a beard shaded his eyes and, after looking over the officers, made answer:

"Health to you, serene great lords. This is fine oak, and we are taking it to the shipyard at Kherson to sell the timber to the shipwrights."

"Sell it to us."

The stupid Moskya took several puffs at his pipe and shook his head.

"Pardon noble lord, but it is for the shipyard. Such fine oak——"

The skin prickled up my back with impatience, for any second we might be sighted by the riders behind. Edwards was growing red with rage when John Paul exchanged a word with him, and he sang another tune.

"How much are the logs worth, little brother?"

"We will be paid two hundred and forty copecks for them, Excellency."

"We will see that it is made into ships," Edwards promised, "and give you five hundred."

The *burlaks* looked at one another. They had broad, sunburned faces and moved clumsily, like cattle.

"That is too much," said the one with the yellow beard after a while. "God knows, Excellency, no one would pay more than two hundred and forty——"

"Plague take ye! Then two hundred and forty it is. Draw in closer and we'll come aboard."

AFTER many delays and much laboring at the raft which was unwieldy in the slow current we climbed upon it and pushed off from shore far enough to be out of good musket shot but still hidden somewhat by the trees. There was a log lean-to on the raft and into this I made the officers go with the servant and ordered the Tatars to off-saddle the horses, while I slid out of my long Cossack coat and placed it with my cap out of sight, the *burlaks* grunting like cows at our antics.

By degrees I had them steer and row the raft out into midstream, where we were in full sight from the bank but so distant that a watcher would not notice anything unusual about the raft. Although I scanned the shore and the Tatars watched the reeds and the flight of birds for suspicious movements, nothing more was seen of the bandits. And it was clear that they might have contented themselves with the plunder of the *tarantass*, yet I was uneasy, for a hidden foeman is like a snake unseen in the path.

AT NIGHTFALL we ate what food was in the saddle bags, the *burlaks* sharing their fish and barley cakes with us, being only too pleased to have real coins in their belts instead of kicks and

promises which they would probably have been given at Kherson. They kept at the sweeps because the current was powerful here and other craft were about. One raft, smaller than ours, kept us company, the men on it sitting by bright fires and licking up vodka until my throttle ached.

One of them was a giant with a hawk's beak of a nose who sang like an angel out of paradise. They hitched their raft up to ours, to let our *burlaks* do the steering for them, and prepared to make a white night of it. *Ekh*, but it was a night, with the moon rising into a clear sky and the smell of the scorched steppe grass heavy in the wind!

The two officers listened to the singing, and once John Paul struck up a chant and all the *burlaks* kept silence until he had finished. I leaned my back against the hut and thought that presently we could land and take to horse again. But Edwards and his servants were very weary, sleeping like dogs, and we had only three horses, which were also weary.

So I listened to the wailing of an owl on shore, and the wash of the waves against the logs. We were in my country at last, and within a few hours I could round up a fine company of galliards, real fellows, and first rate horses and escort my admiral into Kherson.

I was musing so when one of our *burlaks* gave a cry. A splash sounded, and I saw that the other one, at the sweeps, had fallen into the water. While I looked the one who had cried out turned around on his feet and sat down. He grunted softly and all at once bumped down on the logs.

The moon was behind the clouds just then and the flickering fires on the raft behind us made the blackness over the water as if a veil had been drawn around us. When the flames rose, the two rafts were visible and the three men who sang and danced about the fire, but the surface of Father Dnieper was all the darker.

My ears strained to catch the sounds of the night. Once more the owl wailed, and my Tatars snored, and the big *burlak* chanted with a full throat:

"Over little Father Dnieper the cocks will crow;
"Row down little Father Dnieper in the dawn."

Ekh ma! A moment ago the two rivermen had been standing at the steering sweeps; now they were gone. Every one else was asleep on our raft. Were they fools to sleep so? Nay, when one has climbed out of the saddle the first time in ten days for more than an hour or so, drowsiness is like a plague.

I started to crawl toward the *burlak* who lay still on the logs and just then—*thuckk*—came a long knife, burying its point deep into the timbers of the lean-to where my head had been. I dropped prone and grunted as the riverman had done. And out of the water a lance length from my eyes a head reared up.

A man swam silently to the raft, looked around and thrust an arm over the logs to pull himself up. For the third time the owl hooted softly, yet it was this man who uttered the call. The next moment one of my pistols roared in his beard and he fell back like a stricken water fowl.

Now the night teemed with sound, although the song of the big *burlak* had ceased. Oars rattled in rowlocks and a long skiff entered the circle of firelight. My two Tatars and the last of the rivermen scrambled to their feet. The oars were weighed in the skiff and musket barrels gleamed. I had drawn my saber, and when another swimmer came to the edge of the raft, I cut down at his head and needed not to look at him again, knowing well by the feel of the impact when a man's skull has been opened up.

Red fire flashed from the skiff, and a half-dozen muskets roared. One of the horses reared and screamed, and one of the Tatars leaped up and staggered to the edge of the raft, to throw himself into the water, having his death wound. The last *burlak* began to feel of his belly and presently groaned and fell on his knees.

Smoke eddied over the raft as John Paul and the Englishman ran out with drawn weapons. The servant must have skulked in the hut, and this did him no good. Because, led by the singer, the three rivermen on the raft that was tied to ours leaped over the gap and pressed on us with cutlasses that must have been hidden somewhere between the logs of their raft. And the skiff, bumping against our logs, disgorged a dozen foemen.

"Sarin na kitchka!"

The cry of the Dneiper pirates went up, and my last Tatar began to howl his death song, drawing a knife as he did so. One of the men from the skiff thrust a pistol close to his head and ended his life.

So we stood in the eddying smoke, three against fifteen.

THE surprize had been cleverly planned. Men who knew that we were upon the raft had put out from shore in the great skiff, and two or three had taken to the water, swimming with throwing knives in their girdles. Probably they were Greeks, who are skilful at casting dirks. They had accounted for our two chaps at the sweeps, and the noise made by the oars of the skiff had been drowned by the loud song of the *burlak* with the hawk's nose.

Our foes had uttered the cry of the river pirates, yet I knew that no Dnieper pirates would think it worth while to tackle a timber raft. They sought us out and struck without thought of giving quarter. And they paid a heavy price for their boldness.

The big *burlak* from the other raft made straight toward John Paul with his great, curly head lowered and the muscles standing out on his bare right arm. But he found me in his path. His cutlas banged against my saber, and I saw that he held a dirk in his left hand.

At the third pass I twisted his blade aside and chopped short at his skull. He dodged like a Tatar and came at me with the dirk, his teeth gleaming. *T-phew*—what a fellow! He dropped to the logs with his throat sliced half through. The American's rapier had made a pass over my shoulder, when my guard was down, and well for me that John Paul was quick of hand.

I think they were Greeks, but the fellow who rushed at me with a pike from the skiff wore a regimental coat of some kind. Backing away, to take stand against the lean-to, I glimpsed Edwards standing alone on the raft, his rapier flashing in and out, one arm in the air behind his head. The Moskya with the pike swerved toward the Englishman, and so gave me a chance to cut him down.

"Bless you for that, Uncle Ivak! The deuce! How things are warming up!"

Edwards was smiling, when a musket barked from the skiff and his left hand gripped his chest. Then I heard the roar of John Paul's pistol and saw him draw back from the smoke cloud. He tossed the pistol at two men who rushed at him, and plucked out his rapier, they giving back before its point.

He took a step toward Edwards, and we both saw the Englishman fall prone. Then John Paul glanced up and down the raft, stepping aside from a ruffian and slashing the man across the cheek as he did so.

"*Stuppai*, Ivak!" he cried.

How was I to know what he meant by that word? He slashed the tether of a horse and caught up the rein, swinging himself up to the beast's bare back as the horse obeyed the rein and sprang into the water.

I could not follow him. Men rushed at me from all sides, and caught my arms, after I had cut one open. Then something whistled in the air and all before my eyes was red. Nay, a chap does not know when he has been hit over the back of the skull. As if from far over the water, I heard Edwards shout:

"With the admiral, Ivak! To Kherson—or I'll win—wager!"

Then a faint popping sounded, that must have been men shooting at John Paul. But the red before my eyes had turned to black and I heard nothing more for a space.

IV

A Greek to his dagger, a Turk to his gold and a Cossack to his horse.

A LITTLE is my life owing to my heavy sheepskin *kalpack* and a little to the desire of the murderers to loot before casting the bodies overboard, but much to the escape of John Paul. The raft had drifted close to the left bank of the Dnieper just before the fight, and the American had only a distance of a musket shot to swim his horse.

When the shooting failed to bring him down, the skiff was manned in haste, too late to overtake him. The few men left on the raft began to strip the coats, boots and small gear from the fallen; after this they thrust knives into the bodies of our three rivermen, and the Tatars, and I saw them slay the servant because at that moment I began to see and hear again.

Knowing that presently they might remember me, and seek among the horses, I made shift to crawl a little, then a little more, and I crawled up the incline of logs that made the roof of the lean-to. The bandits were examining the garments they had plundered, by the glow of the fire on the other raft, and finding them poor enough, so that there was much grumbling

and they did not think of me at the time. They had even snatched the clothing off their dead comrades, and were staring enviously at the Englishman's fine coat and buff boots.

Edwards seemed to be breathing, and his eyes moved. I heard them say that since one of the travelers had escaped it would be best to refrain from killing the Englishman. If the American should cause pursuit to be made, Edwards could be held as a hostage. In the end they waited for the return of the skiff and I waited for strength to come back into my limbs.

Meanwhile the raft drifted idly, nearing the shore. The moon came out and the half-light forced me to keep my head down, relying on my ears to tell me what was happening below. From the talk of the robbers several things became clear.

They had a leader, who had gone off in the skiff. And they had attacked the raft with the purpose of wiping us out. The fight we had made angered them, and I heard debate of how much more money they should ask of the leader when he came back; a strange thing, which made me suspect that he was unknown to them, and had hired their services.

"We could have done better at one of the Cossack *slobodas*," one remarked.

"Nay, we'll lighten the purse of the officer before we let him go. The Cossacks have patrols out, along the river, —— take me if they haven't. They bite, now, those dogs."

I wondered what officer they meant, and I would have given a dozen horses to hear the name of the man who was paying them for this night's work. By their talk, they were fugitive Moskya serfs, deserters from the army, Cherkessians and one or two Greeks. Edwards' fix was a bad one, but I could do nothing to help, and he had bade me follow the admiral, if possible.

"Where is that coat of that ox of a *sotnik?*" demanded one suddenly, and my ears pricked up, I assure you.

Another said that I must have crawled into the water, like the Tatar, and they began to argue again until some one found my saber and they cursed me for the evil I had worked among them.

"Search the raft for the dog," a voice suggested.

I heard boots cluttering over the logs and my skin began to itch as if a thousand ants were crawling over it. Then the sound of oars came over the water, followed by a low pitched hail.

The skiff had come near again, and the men on the raft were ordered to head in to shore and land everything from the raft. After that they were to hack loose the fastenings and set the logs adrift, loose in the current.

As the raft was worked in closer to the shore and the skiff, talk between the men of the band made it clear that John Paul had not been caught. He had reached the highway and headed south, with several in pursuit of him, one of the four being the leader of the band.

BY THE time the raft grounded, in a shallow cove, the moon was low. Most of the men busied themselves in carrying Edwards ashore and he cursed them heartily when they jerked him, so I knew that he could not be very badly hurt. One or two of them had poked about a bit for me, but had not thought to look on the top of the hut.

The nearest searcher went to untie the remaining horse—one had been slain by a bullet—and I heard him say:

"His Excellency will be well content with this affair of ours if we bag the American. If our officer fails to run him down, bless us, we'll be flayed alive."

The threat sounded somewhat familiar to me, but just then I was sliding down the incline of the log roof. My boots struck squarely on the back of the man who was edging the horse past the lean-to and he shot into the water so swiftly that I failed to grasp his saber. The horse reared, but being uncertain of the footing did not run.

"What are you about, Pietr?" voices demanded from the shore.

"It was the dog of a *sotnik*," I responded, growling, and waiting for the flood of pain caused by the shock to ebb out of my skull, while I gripped the rein of the horse.

"Have you his coat—had he any money? Hola, Pietr! What——"

The one called Pietr began to bellow from the water into which he had fallen and I climbed to the back of the horse, then reined it around the hut. It jumped to the shore quickly enough, and by the time the robbers, who were scattered all around, had gripped their weapons we were trotting away through the trees. They ran after

for a space and several pistols barked. The balls whistled wide through the branches overhead and stirred up the pony to a smart gallop.

No one gave chase because there was no other horse on the raft.

In this fashion did I win free of the Dneiper outlaws, though Edwards remained a prisoner in their hands.

IN THE black murk that comes before dawn I drew up at the first post station on the highway, not far to the south of where the raft had landed. Here I changed horses and wet my gullet with some vodka, taking likewise a saber from the keeper, who swore that no other riders had stopped at the *zamora* during the last half of the night. He said he thought horses had passed by, not far away, but had fancied them wild horses, out on the steppe.

This surprized me, until, as the nag settled down to a steady gallop, I remembered that John Paul was in a strange country, knowing no word of the language. How was he to explain matters to a clown of a *zamora* keeper, even if he had not been closely pressed?

Likewise the outlaws had not cared to delay to try to steal fresh mounts from the station. True, John Paul might have headed out into the steppe and avoided pursuit in the dark. I should have done so. But he did not know friend from foe, and doubtless chose to take his chances in a straightaway race along the road, aware that he was within a day's ride of the Russian lines.

Behind me a line of red light spread along the horizon and a wind began to breathe over the plain. Birds chirped and the sea of grass changed from gray to red-and-gold, then to brown. It glittered with the dew as if decked out in jewels. My head pained me, but such a dawn warmed my veins more than the vodka. —— take it all, there's no country like the steppe!

My head began to buzz all of a sudden and weakness came upon me so that I, Ivak the *jighit*, the outrider, the Tatar-chaser, the *sotnik*, gripped the saddle horn to keep from falling. Such a shame!

By and by the buzzing stopped and I looked around, seeing the sun peering over the horizon, and a black browed Cossack lass staring at me from the back of a cow. She was taking cattle to pasture and by a line of great stones shaped like skulls along the highway I knew that one of the villages of my people lay half a verst away. My horse, a big black Turani that knew a thing or two, had slowed to a walk and its ears were pricked back as if asking why in the fiend's name I was rocking the saddle like a cradle.

The maid was round-eyed as if I were a ghost, out of one of the old burial mounds that lie on the steppe under those great stones. God knows what people sleep in those mounds, but it is quite true that of nights they rise up and slip about—ghosts sure enough. To mend my dignity I called to her smartly and bade her be off to the village to round up a band of the galliards, the bravest fellows and the *jighits*, and send them after my tracks.

"Aye, Uncle," she responded, "but your scalp-lock is running blood——"

"Little sparrow," I grunted, "what are a few drops of blood to a chap who rode from Petersburg in ten days? Nothing at all! I'll fetch you a bag of candy from Kherson if you stir your legs. Hold! Did an officer ride past in a blue coat on a roan with one white foreleg?"

"Aye, Uncle. Two gentlemen, they were, riding a musket shot apart. One was a foreigner, the other a Russian with a wig and a red face, no taller than I am."

She sped away toward the village, her white legs flashing under her tunic and I spurred up the Turani, cursing my broken head. By the girl's words I recognized the officer who had been riding before us all the way. Now he was behind John Paul, and we knew what sort of cock he was. The leader of the outlaws, the officer who had bribed the *zamora* keeper and hired the pirates. That's what!

We sped over the level trail like a hawk and presently two riders showed up, above the grass ahead. They pulled in when they heard the Turani and faced about.

Drawing their blades they took stand, stirrup to stirrup, closing the narrow way, and their horses were nearly blown. By their bearing they were outlaws of the band, and their jaws dropped when they saw my face. Afterward I remembered that they must have thought me dead, and when the big black rushed on them in the eye of the rising sun they believed a bloody specter had come up out of Father Dnieper to settle their hash.

I spurred on the Turani instead of pulling him in, and stood up in the saddle just as we came upon the two. By feinting a slash at one I made him throw up his saber to guard his head. Then, leaning down as the three ponies came together, I cut at the other's neck, getting home over his blade. His mount reared and shelled him out of the saddle like a pea out of a pod.

His mate had raked my shoulder blades with a slash that was too late to cut deep. Twisting the big black around, I crowded the outlaw as he was turning. He warded desperately with his sticker, leaning back to do so when he should have spurred his nag clear.

The shoulder of the Turani struck his pony and the man lost his stirrups, falling to earth like a clown. Such riders! I had not a moment to lose, and so kept the black dancing around the outlaw.

"Speak up, you dog!" I cried at him. "Where is your officer and the American?"

"Only a little span ahead, noble sir! Truly, it is all our officer's doing! He came to us with papers from the government, promising many things if we would rub out—*Ai-a*, spare a poor chap, noble lord!"

I hastened on, wasting no more time on the outlaw. And in no time at all I heard the music of steel kissing steel. *Eh*, a great fear came upon me that John Paul was being sliced by the leader of the dog company.

But when I rode up to them, only two men were to be seen where the trail dipped through a hollow. Two ponies were standing riderless, with heaving flanks and spraddled legs, foundered. And in a spot where the grass was short John Paul made play with his rapier, and his antagonist was Strelsky the ensign.

Swift hope flashed into Strelsky's red face as I trotted up, until he saw out of the corner of his eye that Ivak had come instead of his two murderers. John Paul motioned me away with his free hand and I drew rein to watch.

Strelsky was the prettier sword of the two by odds. But the American had an arm like a wrestler and an eye like a wolf. He did not seem tired in the least. His brow was placid though his black eyes darted fire. Until I looked him over I had felt that it was folly to let him risk a stab when the Turani could have ridden Strelsky down.

By then the Russian knew that his men would not come up, and his face showed strain; moreover he kept trying to watch me, trusting in his greater skill to keep John Paul's blade in play. So it happened that the point of the American's rapier picked his cheek and drew blood. It angered the ensign and he began to attack, making many feints that pulled John Paul's guard aside, but failing to get home. A second time his cheek was raked, a piece of flesh falling out.

Then Strelsky lunged fiercely at the throat and John Paul parried just in time, making a swift ripost that caught the Russian's blade under his. The American stiffened his wrist and Strelsky tried desperately to disengage, but suffered a deep cut over the eyes. Blood ran down into his eyes and he stood helpless.

John Paul stepped back and lowered his point, while the Russian cursed and gripped his sword, expecting to be spitted at once. His face was scarred for life, if he lived. This pleased me because Strelsky was not a fellow to love. He wore the uniform of the Empress, but he had given me an order that held treachery in it.

The American was a foreigner, yet, after the fight on the raft, my heart warmed to him. He could stand his ground and take blows, and he kept his hand up even though the Russians for some reason had schemed to take his life on the journey, though this he did not know as yet.

Some words he spoke to Strelsky, and the ensign answered slowly, clearing the blood out of his eyes as he did so. I caught the name Edwards and the words "the prince." Whatever passed between them, it enlightened John Paul, because he sheathed his rapier and looked at Strelsky as if a snake had come up out of the ground. I think the ensign told much truth, being fearful of his life. Then Paul Jones pointed out over the steppe and said in French—

"*Va-t-en!*"

And Strelsky turned away, after dropping his sword. At the edge of the hollow he began to run and though I called a barbed word after him he did not halt again. It angered me to see him go free even in such a state. But from this time forward John Paul took advice from no man. Indeed, how was I to consult with him?

Why did I stand aside, to remain with him when Strelsky went off? An order had

been given me and the order was to conduct John Paul safe into Kherson.

He looked me over and smiled approval, then said—

"Edwards?"

By signs I tried to make clear that the lieutenant was slightly wounded and in the hands of the outlaws. He seemed to understand, and thought for a while until there was a great pounding of hoofs and a dozen Cossack lads came up, reining in on top of us and staring at the admiral who looked them over with interest.

Eh, I was glad to see them. The sight of several kites hovering over the tall grass where Strelsky had disappeared did not displease me, either. He was something like a vulture himself.

V

On land a coward can show you his heels, but on a ship even Satan himself can not run away.

MY BROTHERS, have you ever called to you a *borzoi*, a wolfhound, keeping one hand behind your back the while? If the dog does not know you, he will not come. Not until he sees that the hand behind your back does not hold a stick.

Men are greater fools than dogs. They will go forward even when they see the stick that is going to beat their brains out. So it was with John Paul and so it was with me.

For days after the duel I lay on my back in a hut of my village, while my head mended, the American having gone on to Kherson with my mates. Soon they came straggling back, very angry, some drunk and others bloody. Most of them did not return at all, having been impressed by the Russians, John Paul knowing nothing of it.

They talked with me, and other fellows came who had served in the fleet, bringing with them a Tatar *hakim* from over the border who brewed herbs that made a new man of me. The Russian surgeons are good for nothing but to cut off limbs, and of what use to a man is a leg that has been cut off?

The men who returned from Kherson said that John Paul had been given a banquet by the field marshal in command of the army, but did not appear content. He had asked after old Ivak, which gratified me. My Cossacks said in the taverns of Kherson it was rumored that the admiral would never hoist his flag on the big ship-of-war that was called the flagship. This vessel was commanded by a Greek, Alexiano, who held the rank of brigadier.

Alexiano, they said, was a loud talker and a quiet doer. He held great feasts and many served him, lording it up and down the mouth of the Dnieper and carrying off whatever merchandise struck their fancy. So the Cossacks had formed patrols, to check the raids of the seamen under Alexiano, and the Greek hung some of our boys for taking up arms against the Empress as he said.

The Turks, seeing the plundering and the lack of order in the fleet, were growing both covetous and bold. They had moved up the gulf to within two cannon shot of our fleet, which was unfit for battle. And rumors in the taverns said that John Paul meant to go out to the *Vladimir*, the flagship, and take command the next day, Alexiano notwithstanding.

The Greek would not kiss him on both cheeks you may be sure, because the coming of the American would mean the end of the secret pillaging and piracy of the men under Alexiano, in which pillaging he shared. My Cossacks said that John Paul had insisted on the punishment of the pirates who had attacked us, but no guard ship had gone up the Dnieper and no news of Edwards had come down.

"My children," I boasted, "when this American hoists his flag on the *Vladimir* he will make Alexiano pull at a rope, and the whole fleet will be whipped into shape. He is well fitted to command."

"Impossible, Uncle Ivak!" they said, several at once.

"How, impossible?"

"Because the man at the head of the fleet has sworn that he will not yield place to the American."

"Do you mean Alexiano, the pirate?"

"Not at all, Uncle. We mean the present commander, who is a Prussian prince and a very high officer."

I pricked up my ears as they explained how the Empress had appointed one of her favorites, the Prince of Nassau-Siegen to command, not two years ago. Alexiano served only as chief of the *Vladimir*, but had charge of the fleet during the winter, while Nassau-Siegen was in Petersburg.

"Tell me," I demanded, "has this princeling a pock-marked face and full lips and eyes like a fish?"

"It is he! You have seen him, Uncle Ivak."

"Then saddle the best horse in the village."

I rose up and pulled on my boots and coat, taking tobacco and a pipe from the nearest man and a sword from him who had the likeliest weapon. They protested, saying that they had never done me any ill.

"Would you have your *kunak*, your comrade, the first *jighit* of the village ride to the fleet dressed like a Jew?"

Then they protested all the more, saying that Alexiano had heard of my deeds when I rubbed out half a dozen of the pirates, who were his men, on the Dnieper. He would string me up, they said, and they would not see their things again.

"Is this Prince Nassau-Siegen friendly with Alexiano?" I asked.

"As God lives, they are like two brothers! They share gold together, and they have not been parted since the Prussian rejoined the fleet, two days ago."

"Is Nassau-Siegen a good leader, liked by all the men?"

"Nay, Ivak. You have been away too long, wooing the Russian maids! Nassau-Siegen is a courtier, and, save for Alexiano's bands, the men of the fleet would not follow him if he had gold pieces sewn on his breeches. It is said that he pays gold to the Turks, to let the fleet sit in peace where it is. Meanwhile he crows like a cock, claiming honor for holding off the Turks."

By the time I had mounted and left the village behind, the last of the smoke that had hidden the fire I smelled in Petersburg had cleared away. I saw all things as they were. I saw a fleet that was only timber and cloth, unfit for battle; I saw two renegades at the head of it, enriching themselves by plunder and paying a part of the plunder to the accursed Moslems, while the Empress thought they were playing the part of valiant men in the face of the foe.

And I thought that such men would never let the American take over the command from them.

I meant to reach him and warn him, and perhaps take him back to the Cossack villages. Who knows?

JUST a little I went out of my way to pass through the streets of Kherson, so winning my wager from Edwards, poor fellow. The horse was a good one and we left the shipyards behind us swiftly enough coming at last to the salt streaked shores of the gulf and the forest of masts that stood out on the gray water.

Among the soldiers and caravaneers of the alleys I asked for news of the American admiral, learning then that I was almost too late.

John Paul was on one of the jetties with another cavalier, making ready to put off in a barge to the *Vladimir*. I hurried along the waterfront, catching sight of the barge presently, and, giving my horse to the care of a Cossack who was fishing on the jetty, went out to greet my friend.

When he saw me his face lighted up and he said something to the other officer who stared at me curiously. There we stood, with so much that should be said between us, and only one word that we both understood! I bowed several times, trying to think of some way to warn him. He ordered a valise to be carried into the barge and took farewell of the other officer, who was most polite.

My tongue burned in my throat, and I nearly tore my hair to think up some scheme. He stood with one foot on the log at the edge of the jetty and glanced at me inquiringly. How could I take an admiral by the arm and lead him to a tavern to talk? How could I make signs before the throng that his life was in danger?

John Paul spoke to the cavalier who turned to me indifferently.

"Cossack," he said in bad Russian, "his Excellency is pleased to praise you and ask if you have a request to make. He says that he will grant it."

"I would go with him on the ship." I bowed to the girdle. "If it pleases your Honor."

THE barge went out to a high ship with two rows of cannon and we climbed up the ladder to the deck, I carrying John Paul's valise, and swaggering a bit, for the deck was cluttered with groups of men who stared at us and whispered. An under officer who wore a rapier stood by the ladder with a squad of sailors, also armed, and saluted. After that he went away quickly with his men and left the American alone. John Paul glanced up at a mast where Alexiano's flag hung idly, there being no wind. Then he gave an order to the bargemen and they made fast to the

foot of the ladder a light *saick*, a skiff having one pair of oars, that we had towed behind us from the jetty. After this they rowed away in the barge and John Paul walked slowly to the after deck.

It needed no sailor to tell me that his reception was lacking in respect; Alexiano who stood on the after deck, should have greeted him and his flag should have been hoisted instead of the Greek's. As John Paul climbed the steps at the rump of the ship, Alexiano turned his back and said something amusing to a man who leaned on a small cannon. This man, in gray and gold was the prince, Nassau, and he had promised to flay me alive if John Paul reached Kherson.

Nassau picked up in his fingers a little round piece of glass and looked at me, then at the American, and laughed softly at the jest Alexiano had made. John Paul halted a few paces from the pair, his shoulders squared.

Calling to him the under officer with the rapier, he drew a letter from his coat and passed it to the Russian, who bowed and gave it to Nassau. The prince bowed and handed it back without reading it. Alexiano, a bull of a man with a fine curly beard, watched Nassau as a dog watches its master. And every man of the crew watched the three on the after deck. Still John Paul made pretense that nothing out of the usual was happening. He talked with Nassau in French and the prince, who had tried to buy the American's death, was most polite. That is the way of the Muscovites and the Prussian nobles.

But Nassau found time to speak aside with the under officer who presently whispered to a Greek with a handkerchief bound over his hair. This chap, who had some rank on the ship, called to him two others who advanced on me with scowls.

"*Hai*, dog of a Cossack," one grunted, "your *saick* waits for you. Get off the deck or we will pitch you overside!"

I grinned at him, seeing that he meant to provoke a fight, and his mate jostled me. When I reached for my sword the two drew knives and opened their mouths to shout. Instead, the under officer on the after-deck shouted—

"Form in ranks for inspection!"

John Paul had been watching us and he it was who gave the order in the first place. Nassau shrugged indifferently, though Alexiano grew red with rage and kept muttering under his breath. He grew angrier when it became clear that the men did not know how to form ranks. Like cows, they trampled here and there, looking all around, until the officers who came on deck began to curse.

Finally they were drawn up in strange fashion: The Greeks crowded in with the Greeks, and the Syrians and —— knows what else, besides scores of Moskya fishermen. On the other side of the ship under a Russian officer about a hundred of the true faith drew up, among them quite a few Cossacks, and I took stand behind them, up against the rampart of the ship. John Paul, accompanied by the under officer, who translated his orders and answered his questions, went down the front of each rank, looking every man in the face. Nor did he show any disapproval.

From the men he turned to the deck, where cannon balls were in heaps and ropes in a fine tangle. Everything he pulled toward him looking at it closely, the sails and the cannon especially. The mob on the deck saw that he knew what he was about, and fell to watching him instead of the officers on the rump of the ship, who had their heads together around Alexiano.

It was nearly dark when he ended the formation. Without taking any more notice of Nassau or Alexiano he nodded to me, and the interpreter bade me haul the skiff on deck, and select some Cossack carpenters for work. A half-dozen chaps stepped forward at once and hoisted the *saick* over the rampart of the *Vladimir*.

Then Paul Jones had some rags brought and these we wrapped around the middle of the oars as he bade us. A board was cut for a rudder, and a broken pike staff fitted to it for a tiller, the rudder being rigged to the back end of the *saick*.

When this was done he ordered us to go and get supper, which was being brought up, the men crowding around the pots without order. One of the Cossacks nudged me while I was dipping out the gruel.

"*Eh*, Ivak, better slip over the side before dark, if you don't want Greek steel between your ribs."

I laughed at him and began to eat.

"It's true," he went on under his breath. "They have marked you down, Uncle."

"And the admiral?" I asked. "What of him?"

"They say he is a foreigner who can not

speak our tongue, and a pirate who would sell us as slaves to the Turks."

"They say lies, little brother. Nassau would glean gold out of you and leave you for the Moslems to slit up."

He looked around fearfully and began to scratch his head, saying that such words would earn me a lashing. Was not Nassau a great officer who kept the Turks away because they feared him? Rumors had been heard that the officers of the *Vladimir* were in league with Alexiano to refuse to serve under the American. Nassau had said that he was a coward who would not make war, save on merchantmen, and Alexiano said that Nassau had a commission to share the command of the fleet with John Paul.

Now John Paul had been promised sole command, I knew, and it is an evil thing when an army has two leaders. Two oxen hauling a cart go forward swifter than one, but two leaders can not make plans like one, and the end is disaster.

"Of the two, Nassau is the coward," I made response, judging that a man who would pay to have another slain does not love danger himself, however boldly he may bear himself.

"Then let the American prove himself," the Cossack grunted. "Each is in command at present and how do we know which to obey?"

"Before midnight, little brother," I promised, "one or the other will take the leadership! Watch!"

It was safe to prophesy, knowing how little the two loved each other. But I feared for John Paul, who did not know what Nassau had conspired against him, and who could not summon up Alexiano and the Greeks to his aid. Every word he spoke must be translated, and how was he to be sure that his words were not twisted? As long as I was alive Nassau would try by every means to do away with John Paul for fear that the plot against the American would be known.

Why did I not speak out? Nay, who would listen? And it is not by threats and tale bearing that a leader's nature is made clear to all men. The crew of the *Vladimir* were restless because the Turkish fleet had drawn up to within striking distance, and no orders to make ready for battle had been issued. They grumbled at John Paul because he had made them stand long in ranks, but they became curious when the American, instead of going to the officers' table, ate dinner with the men on deck. Then he ordered a double allowance of spirits issued, when the ship's lanthorns were lighted.

While he sat among us a Cossack began one of our songs, and the American bade us all sing. It was sad, that song of our steppe, and he sat silent, chin on hand, seemingly thinking of nothing at all. Once I thought I saw his eyes glitter with tears, which was no shame in a man far from his own country.

But the men of the *Vladimir* all saw that John Paul cared nothing for what Alexiano and Nassau might be doing; and we soon perceived that the high officers had come on deck to see what John Paul was doing. Night had fallen and a thin mist hung over the water of the narrow gulf. Out at the mouth of the gulf gleamed the small lights of the Moslem fleet, off one of their forts, where they hemmed us in, since the mouth of the gulf, which was the only way to the sea, was narrow as a cannon shot.

Eh, it was a sad thing that happened on the *Vladimir:* Scores of men ranged against one, who did not understand them. Two plotters against a hero of other wars who did not know how to plot. And yet, no other man was like John Paul. The proof of it was that all eyes on the ship watched him, even when Nassau took to striding up and down the deck near us.

Meanwhile the under officer—he of the rapier—came and whispered in my ear.

"When you are challenged, pretend to be bringing supplies to the enemy. Ask for the countersign. The admiral wishes to learn it. And Christ receive your spirit!" he added under his breath.

"At command," I replied promptly, not wishing him to see that the American's instructions were a perfect riddle to me.

John Paul drew out his watch, looked at it, then at the sky, and the lights of the Turkish frigates. Then he spoke to Nassau, who turned as if a bee had stung him. Long afterward I learned that John Paul had said that they would set out on a reconnoiter of the enemy's fleet!

Nassau, too surprized to be cautious, refused point blank when he learned that John Paul planned to go in among the enemy, but the American responded that neither Nassau nor Alexiano had any knowledge of the enemy's vessels at close

hand, and this was necessary if a battle was to be fought.

"What a notion!" exclaimed the prince in Russian. "We can send an officer."

"I am going," said John Paul quietly to the interpreter, "and if Nassau is not afraid he will come, too."

By the light of the yellow lanthorn, Nassau's pocked face grew sallow, and he bit his lips. He was trapped, and there was no way out because the American shared the risk he ran. Then his face changed and he said he would go.

In that moment I knew Nassau was a coward, and all the more dangerous because of that. Some plan had come into his head, when he agreed to go. John Paul turned to me.

"*Stuppai*, Ivak," he said. "Forward!"

How did he know that I would understand his meaning? Nay, he could not have known. But God gave me eyes of the mind to see the truth, and I lowered the *saick* with the help of my comrades, climbing down the ladder and taking the oars as soon as it was in the water.

Nassau swore—I could hear him—when he realized what sort of craft was waiting for him. But John Paul stood at the ladder top, and smiled, mockingly. An hour ago the American had been a man of honey; now he was a man of stone. The prince came down the ladder, and plumped down into the stern of the little skiff. John Paul made him climb over me to the prow where the Prussian sat, wedged like a fish between the sides of the boat. Then the admiral took the tiller and I the oars, so that the lights of the *Vladimir* began to grow smaller. We steered toward the fleet of the Turks which could not be seen because the light mist hung over the surface of the water—enough to obscure the stars.

The oars made no sound except a little drip, being wrapped with rags where they rubbed on the gunwale. I rowed on, watching the outline of John Paul's head and the glitter of his eyes, until he held up one hand and I raised the oars. He stretched his head to one side and shut his eyes, listening like a horse in the steppe when a wild beast is rustling the grass near at hand.

Presently I, too, heard the rasping of oars, coming up behind us from where the *Vladimir* lay. The oars were being moved swiftly and, by the catch in his breath, I knew that Nassau had become aware of this other boat that was following us. Perhaps he had been listening for it, so quiet he was.

Motioning to me to row on, John Paul turned the tiller, sending the skiff to one side, out toward the main channel. The men in the boat behind could not hear us and we would have slipped away if Nassau had not called out clearly—

"To the left!"

As he spoke the words, John Paul swung the tiller sharp to the other side. The little skiff dodged like a flying-fish, and made a circle until we were speeding in the other direction. Several long strokes I took, then lifted the oars and we glided silently. Aye, we could hear the oars of the other boat pulling like mad for the place we had left.

John Paul leaned forward and whispered across my shoulder in French. I do not know what he said, but Nassau did not cry out again. We sat still until the boat from the *Vladimir* could be heard no longer. *T-phew!* We were trapped! Because now we heard other oars, coming from the Turkish side—some patrol boat making its rounds. If we went on we would run into the accursed Moslems; if we turned back, there was the *Vladimir's* barge in waiting like a tiger.

Nassau must have ordered it to follow us. Perhaps he planned to go from the skiff into the barge and fire a volley at us, claiming afterward that a mistake had been made in the dark; perhaps he would start up a quarrel and throw us out for the fish or the Turks to find. I do not know.

But John Paul sat still, and I crossed myself, breathing a prayer to the Father and the Son. It happened that the boat from the Moslem fleet passed us by, the wash from it rocking our skiff, and went elsewhere, though for a long time I listened to the creak of its twelve pairs of oars and the American did likewise, for he often turned his head and bent down toward the water where the sound was clearest.

We rowed again and now Nassau began to protest in a low voice, without receiving an answer. By and by he stopped because the lights of the enemy's craft showed ahead of us. Still we went on, John Paul turning the tiller this way and that, making the skiff wind in and out among the vessels. They were galleys and gun-boats for the most part and there were many of them.

Their masts stood up like a forest and by

the time we had reached the last one inshore, the night had grown a little brighter. The mist had cleared and the stars shone down on us. I heard Tatars talking together in the waist of the last galley, and some one playing upon a fiddle. They had good eyes those Tatars because presently they hailed us, asking for vodka. Nassau repeated the words to John Paul, who went closer, until the sheer of the stern was nearly over us.

He tossed up a flask that he carried and some one caught it.

"Allah reward the giver! Are you going to the captain-pasha with an order?"

I could hear Nassau breathing heavily, but John Paul made not a sound. He waited patiently and God put into my head the words of his command spoken on the *Vladimir:*

"*Ask for the countersign—the admiral wishes to learn it.*"

"Nay," I made response boldly in their tongue, "we are taking salt to the ship of the captain-pasha."

"But do you know the countersign?"

So far I was following the right path; if I had said we were carrying dispatches they would have expected us to know the password. I began to grunt like a *burlak.*

"How could we know it? We came from the island."

If I had asked for it they would have felt suspicion. It had not come into their heads that any but friends of the Turks would be here; yet a small stone may make a man stumble.

"The Turks might send bullets through you," they said.

"The ——! Then tell us the countersign, so we will not have the bullets."

They talked among themselves, and the vodka gurgled. My throat was beginning to dry up when one flung out careless—

"*Stamboul!*"

"*Stamboul!*" I repeated, to make certain, and Paul Jones said one word, the one he always spoke—

"Forward."

I thought he meant to go back, but he steered forward and we went on, passing close under the ramparts of the great Turkish fort, so that we could see the dark patches which were embrasures for cannon. For the last time doubt of John Paul assailed me, and I thought:

"May the dogs eat me! Does he mean to turn over Nassau to the Turks? Is this American playing a double game, after all?"

Nassau's teeth were clicking together, but he dared not say a word for fear of being overheard by the sentries who were visible, when they moved, against the stars.

A great mass towered up, over us. This was the Turkish flagship, the one of seventy guns, and as we rounded its prow we saw many lights in the rump of it, and small craft clustered around the ladder. Officers were passing about on the deck, and all was stir and bustle.

"What boat is that? Give the countersign!" A voice hailed us at once.

"*Stamboul!*" responded John Paul without hesitation.

"What are you about?"

"We are Tatars from the galley," I said, not daring to take time to think. "We came to look at the flagship and the officers."

"May dogs litter on your graves! Don't you skulkers know that all men who stray from their ships are to be shot? The dawn of the day after the morrow the whole fleet advances against the unbelievers."

The sentries on the ship cursed us again, and perhaps they would have loosed muskets at us but refrained for fear of bringing out the officers who were shut up in the after cabins, debating together. We rowed away then and John Paul steered the skiff for quite a while to one side until the oars caught in seaweed and the gleam of phosphorescent salt was to be seen, flickering along the shore. That is what the Russians call it, but we Cossacks know that it is the spirits of the drowned running along the edge of the waves seeking a resting place.

No fort or house was near, and after John Paul has listened a little he made me change places with him. Then he began to speak to Nassau in a low voice.

The prince sprang to his feet and answered vehemently, laughing without any merriment at all. Then he peered at the American, who begun to take off his coat.

"*Sotnik!*" Nassau cried, at me. "This foreigner is mad—no doubt of it. After leading me through all the Turkish fleet he threatens me with a duel in a boat. Help me disarm him—seize him from behind."

I caught my breath and stared at the two officers.

"Why should his Excellency, the admiral,

wish to fight with your Honor?" I asked. "Nay, it is some jest."

This I said to dig out the truth behind Nassau's words, for the man was a skilled liar. Yet the natures of men appear unmasked in a moment of danger, and the prince was no longer the same officer who sat in Strelsky's room not long ago. His nerves were quivering after the ride through the fleet of the enemy.

"The admiral swears that I have plotted against his honor; he accuses me of hiring men to waylay him. As God is holy, *sotnik*——"

Nassau stopped, all of a sudden remembering who I was, and what he had wanted me to do. Strelsky must have confessed the whole affair to John Paul, to shield himself a little; but Nassau believed of course that I had told John Paul of the plot.

"This mad American," he went on while John Paul rolled up his right sleeve, "accuses me of holding Lieutenant Edwards prisoner. What do I know about that? He demands that the Englishman be given back to him. Aid me, Cossack, and a purse of a thousand rubles is yours—nay, ask what you will!"

When he heard me laugh he knew that I would not aid him. Once he glanced at the shore, as if thinking of flight; but the Turks were all around. The soft gleam of the shining salt crust looked like the teeth of a great mouth, open to swallow a man. *Ekh*, the skin crawled up and down my back!

A LITTLE breeze made the boat rock in the scum of seaweed, as if the hands of the dead were reaching up at us. John Paul kept his balance easily, his feet wide apart, the rapier poised in his hand. As I live, not a lance length separated the two, although Nassau had drawn back far into the prow. All at once the prince cursed fiercely and whipped out his blade, thrusting up from the hip like a flash.

He gave no word and no salute, and such was a coward's stroke. Yet John Paul had good eyes and parried. The glow of the stars and the shimmering of the salt made the rapiers visible as they clashed and twisted and ground together, while Nassau panted.

Ekh! That was sword play! Steel in the dark; blade feeling blade; eye peering into eye; arm straining against arm! The blood boiled in my veins and I was young again. For Nassau was no mean swordsman; nay, a fine hand with the weapon had he, quick and wary and merciless. Neither could draw back. Twice the hilts clashed together, as if the rapiers had been sabers.

Once John Paul staggered and the skiff swayed. Nassau laughed grimly in triumph, until John Paul caught himself and warded a thrust at the throat, forcing the prince's blade up—up, as if it had been an eagle's feather. Eye glared into eye, while the blades were locked, and, suddenly, the American took a step forward.

A great cry came out of Nassau's strained throat and he tumbled out of the skiff into the floating seaweed. I stood up in readiness to leap after him or not—judging him badly wounded—as John Paul should command. He gave no command, but after a moment reached down and caught at something beneath the tangle of seaweed. It was the arm of the prince that he hauled into the skiff and after it the body.

He let Nassau lie in the bottom of the boat and presently the injured man began to choke, writhing as if a hundred fiends were in him. He belched out salt water and soon—though it was hard to believe—I heard him whimpering and snuffling like a girl.

I have said that John Paul could be a man of stone. He made no move to staunch Nassau's wound, but sat down in the stern and took the tiller, motioning for me to row back. He steered through the ships of the Turks and found the lights of the *Vladimir* again. Still he paid no heed to Nassau who lay between my legs, often bumped, of necessity, by the oar ends, and shivering, as I could feel.

Flares were lighted as we pulled up to the ladder. John Paul having donned his coat again, walked up to the deck and was greeted by many officers who stared at him curiously. But they stared more at Nassau who came up on my arm. His gray-and-gold coat was green with slime; his sword and hat were missing and his wig was somewhere back on the beach for the Turks to wonder at.

He was able to stand, and I saw no blood flowing at any place. Nay, it was long before I understood the truth. *Nassau was not hurt.* Not in the flesh, not by steel. But his spirit had suffered; something within him had given way that night. He

walked to his cabin, speaking to no man.

So it happened that John Paul gave order to hoist his admiral's flag, and though Alexiano grumbled, it was done as he commanded. Then he stood before the officers and spoke, and afterward I asked one of the Russians what he had said. He had told them that the Turkish fleet would advance within thirty hours, and that he would hold a council of the ships' officers in the fleet.

Still Nassau issued no word and after a while it was clear even to Alexiano that John Paul was in command. He was given a large cabin, and, their nature being such, the Russians thronged into it with many compliments and questions on their tongues. Nay, John Paul sent out all except old Ivak. When we were alone and the door shut he sat down in a chair, his cheeks pallid and his eyes burning. With one arm he tried to draw off his coat, until I sprang to his aid and saw for the first time that he was wounded in the upper chest near the arm-pit. The blood had run down under the coat where it was hidden and had not yet soaked through his breeches.

Together we bound it up, after washing out the hole where Nassau's weapon had entered. The bleeding was all outward and I saw that the American meant to conceal it, because when the bandage was in place he grinned at me and closed one eye—so!

AND that, my brothers, is how old Ivak brought an admiral to the Russian fleet. Aye, he was a man, that Pavel, as I like to name him. Deuce take it, he was my *kunak*, my comrade, a galliard.

What of the battle? Nay, that tale is told by others; how John Paul scattered the Turks and burned their ships and how ill the Russians rewarded him. Am I one to read what men have written in books? I brought a leader to men who lacked a leader and what honor had I thereby?

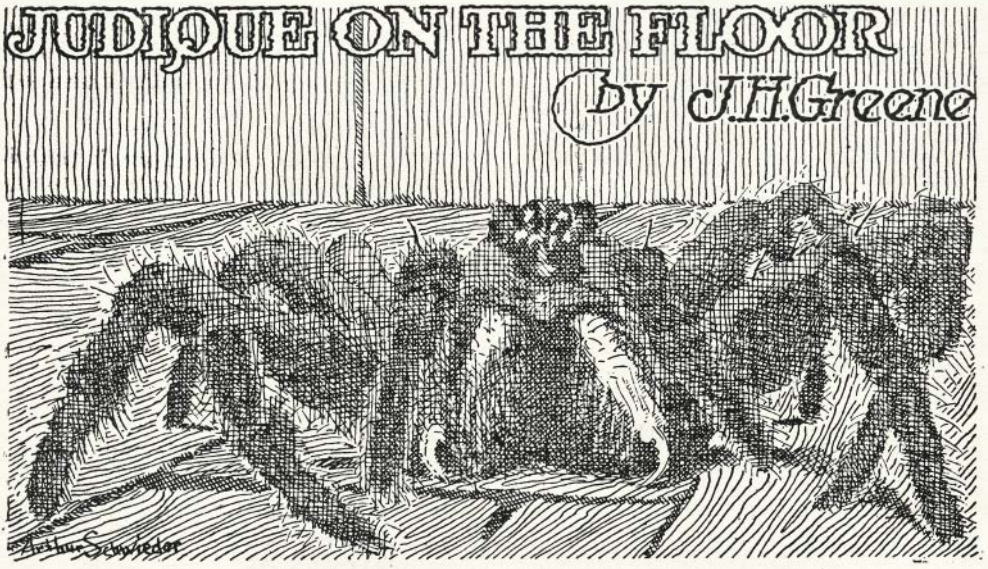
One gift was given me. Behold, my brothers, this Damascus dagger, with the gold inlay in the hilt and the writing in jewels. I have been told what that writing says:

Pavel to his friend, the Cossack Ivak.

Who would not be content with such a gift?

JUDIQUE ON THE FLOOR

by J. H. Greene



Author of "At Dead Horse Gully," "The Spirit Availeth," etc.

NOBODY could use a fiddler who played with his fiddle against his stomach; no one wanted to buy safety razors; so after trying all the big hotels and theater orchestras north of Canal Street and all the cafés and *pensions* in the Vieux Carré, Donald Stewart decided to call it a day.

He had no pedler's license to sell his razors on sidewalks; fiddling in Carondelet Street merely brought an audience of penniless quadroons, a voice from a jalousie, a thrown dime which the quadroons attached themselves to before he could, and a sleepy voice bidding him, "*Cessez, cessez.*" So naturally—as he would have at home—he drifted "down shore" to the wharfs to rest and commune with running water, to gaze at the muddy but majestic Mississippi on her last lap to the sea.

His northern speed faded under the low, hot verandas of Canal Street; when he left these for the cobbles to the wharfs Louisiana had steeped him in her languors; when he had propped himself in the shadow of a freight shed he concluded that New Orleans was a stony-broke's Paradise.

People worked here of course; his fat little landlord, Louis Brigard, never left his desk; François never stopped opening oysters; here steamers were unloading, pulling out, coming in—ocean liners, coasters, wet-tail steamers thrashing their paddles aft—factories smoked across the river in Algiers. But the tropic tempo of the place was andante, not the Chicago furioso of the North; the diners at Brigard's took an hour sipping the black, treacly coffee as if it were a liqueur. Where palm trees grew between trolley lines, where back yards were gardens with fountains and statues, where the dead were buried above ground in old tombs that Donald thought like circus floats, where the laziest lot of water he had seen since the big lakes and the harbors back home ran its oily five miles an hour, this Blue Nose grandson of an Argyle Highlander yielded to the latitude and slowed down.

Back home you had to be busy; in summer you had to fish; in winter it was too cold to keep still; in the cities you were hounded by police, high prices and the iron law of being well dressed; small towns were closer corporations to break into than a profession, for you had to pass the examinations of the neighbors; so Donald sat with his back to the whole exacting, exasperating north watching the river drift south.

His arms rested on his fiddle case; some day and soon he would follow that river to where the palms grew fruits, to a farther and even freer south.

He watched a fat rat trying to get past the guard on the hawser of a steamer. Turned back from its piracy by the circle

of tin, it came ashore, scampered up the cable of a small fruiter whose bows Donald could just see round the shed and got aboard through the hawse hole. Once Donald would have chased that rat, but now he had not raised a hand to frighten it; that rat had a perfect right to deck and hold pickings; a large charity possessed Donald.

Behind him he could hear the intermittent whir of a windlass, the creaking of a derrick, a voice giving orders, the pad of bare feet, the dumping of burdens in the shed. He looked back, not very curious. The small fruiter—the *Luiza*—was unloading bananas in bunches and oranges in crates. The colored stevedores were getting in each other's way, stopping to look down river and up to the town. The driving voice grew louder. Something in the tone of that voice made Donald look round again; it was not Scotch, nor Irish, but a brogue between.

"Blue Nose," murmured Donald as he spied the mate wearing only pants and a shirt and lolling on the rail.

The man was cursing, not fluently but in a sodden indifferent manner as if it was a routine that was useless. He seemed to be soliloquizing rather than swearing; the words oozed from him like molasses; the negroes would have paid more heed to molasses.

"Loaded," was Donald's further comment.

He turned back to his shadow, cuddled once more to his fiddle and gave himself up to the lotus-laden afternoon.

He was aroused by singing; the negroes were crooning some queer chant of their own, a melody Donald had never heard; and, obeying his demon—the spirit in his fiddle that had carried him away from the hard harbors of the North—he opened the case.

Covering the fiddle were a shirt and some socks, for a Wisconsin landlord held his trunk; he removed these; then came samples of the razors he peddled as his side line, a packet of E strings, a copy of the *Billboard* open at "Medicine Shows." These he replaced after he felt for his tuning fork.

He did not use it; his fiddle was near enough in tune for him to pick out the negroes' chorus in a low pizzicato. When he learned it he took out his bow, screwed it up and swung into the chorus fortissimo. The negroes responded; the volume of voices rose with spirit and in willing unison after some black faces had peeped out to see the tramp who with half-shut eyes was supplying the accompaniment.

But Donald was not satisfied to go on repeating that melody. His inventive Nordic blood began weaving in variations, alien motives, little kick-up-your-heels flourishes, echoes of the reels and strathspeys, even the skirl of the pibroch—the mad battle music that is deep in the blood of every Highlander.

Donald was a fine fiddler, the kind raised on the lonely, ice-locked farms, in the frozen harbors, on the decks of the sealers and fishers of the North. The dance tunes of St. Anthony, the madelines, "Damnation Harbor," "Pinch-Belly Tickle" were jerking the feet and driving the arms of these languid sun-steeped natives of the Antilles.

A big bulk came between Donald and the river; he stopped playing; the mate was glowering on him; the man was gloomy enough to silence a seraph.

"Go on, man; ye're after getting more out o' my soldierers than a lash. ——! don't stop!"

He barked thickly. He was of the same thin-jawed, tight-lipped race as Donald, but rather too full-bodied, too puffy and flushed beneath the eyes. Donald put his fiddle back in the case. This man was giving him orders as if Donald were under him. Besides, the music had played Donald back to his beginnings; those fighting tunes would not let him take water of any man.

"I've played all I want."

"Then get to —— off this wharf."

Donald arose and took his stand, far from the wall so that he could not be driven back upon it.

"Judique's on the floor, and who'll put him off?" he said, his hands ready for the tussle.

But the mate's domineering was only the burned-out habit of the man; there was no fire behind it; a feeble grin relaxed his sour visage.

"It's a long time since I heard that word," he said. "So you're a red head from Judique? I'm from Margaree. You might lend a hand with my niggers. Britishers and French they are, and first time in this port. Play that tune, will yer, till we clean out this hold? It'll mean a meal to yer and maybe a drap o' something good."

Being asked, not ordered, Donald sank

to the complaisance of the Vieux Carré. He picked up his fiddle and, seated on a box inside the shed, started on his first job in New Orleans, speeding up West Indian negroes with the tramping measures of Nova Scotia.

The sun dropped into the haze across the river; the water was woven with streaks of burning copper; the sultry day was giving way to the night, a night of stars with an air of gardens, the breathings of bayous, the musty odors of old palaces, old churches, ghostly evocations of a romantic past.

But in that shed Donald had to endure the reek of the stacked bananas and the sweating, shuffling negroes. They trotted in and out of the sunset, shouting, singing to his music, with the big crates of fruit pouring from their shoulders till they reminded him of some primeval, aboriginal rite performed in the dark forests their forebears had come from. He remembered the slave mart under the old Hotel St. Louis, the square that used to be given over to the slaves for their unhallowed rites—Congo Square.

He grew hot, tired, and his arm sagged a little; his tempo grew slower; his interpolated breakdowns gradually gave way to long-drawn notes and languid intervals. He scooped his passages to a drawl; he glissaded his scales; his fiddle no longer stormed, screamed, laughed and lifted; it was sleepily droning the opiate music of muddy rivers, long, hot noons and degenerating men.

"Ye're a fiddler, me lad," remarked the mate, "but the Judiques I knew could keep it up till daylight with fights outside between the tunes. But we're unloaded, thanks to ye."

"Shore leave, men, for one hour," he shouted to his crew. "The old man will be down any moment. And remember you're in a town where you ain't British or French or Dane, just nigs. Don't hog the sidewalk; don't look at white women."

Suddenly a scream, shriller than a harmonic from Donald's fiddle, arose out of that mass of wet ebony faces. The mob parted; one of them was lifting a bare foot, his face the color of old ashes. In the center of the circle of their evading feet squatted an enormous, hairy, black spider.

"Did he bite yer?" demanded the mate, examining the man's foot. "Not a sign. Stow yer squealing. Tarantulas often come among the fruit. Nasty things."

Donald was bending over the spider; the mate lifted his boot to crush it.

"Wait a bit," said Donald. "Let me look at him. I never saw such a big fellow. You see, the music brought him out of the bananas."

"What's that?" asked the mate, and some of the crew paused in the door, awaiting the death of what had so frightened them.

"Yes," said Donald. "I've often seen money spinners drop from the ceiling when I've been playing. A fellow in the orchestra of our show used to take his tuning fork into the woods and get the spiders out of the bark by striking it and holding it against the trees. Vibration brings them out. They like music same as we do."

"Maybe. But these ain't money spinners. These are pizen."

The mate's heel crushed down on the horror, and he then led Donald out of the shed to go on board. The crew, hurrying for their shore clothes, parted to let them go by. They seemed to be shrinking from the man who had been so friendly to tarantulas. The man who thought he had been bitten almost fell from the gang plank.

"What's eating them?" asked the mate, as they passed forward to the forecastle, not men happy with shore leave, but silent, almost clinging to each other, jamming each other in the rush to the door.

A low chuckle came out of the dusk from a man standing by the gangway to the engine room. It was the engineer, blacker than most of the crew, grimed with oil, coal and rust.

"This gentleman should not have admitted his instrument attracted that spidah," he said.

The negro spoke with a Bond Street accent and a grandiloquence and poise that could patronize Bond Street.

"Those chaps are —— superstitious, Mr. Tavish. They conclude this gentleman is a witch doctor. You are probably aware of voodoo, Mr. Tavish."

"Rot," said the mate.

"You have been long enough in the Islands, Mr. Tavish, to know that my conclusion is sound. It was not particularly bally good judgment, Mr. Tavish, to bring this gentleman on board. Especially with his violin. It may hoodoo this ship. The men may desert."

"I say rot, Parkes. Surely you don't believe in that humbug?"

"Me believe it, sir? Why, of course not, of course not. Why, I'se been eddicated, sir."

In his fear lest this should be doubted Parkes dropped his white man's manner of speech.

TAVISH led the way to his cabin. He walked unsteadily, tripping over the step. He continued talking as he fumbled for his light.

"Parkes half believes in that voodoo," he murmured in the dark. " 'Tain't all humbug neither. I've seen things in them Islands, varmints coming out of the woods to the tomtoms. Same as you'd whistle a dog——"

The light came on, and Donald started a little, for his head was close to the skin of a large snake tacked around the mirror. The cabin was decorated with other souvenirs of the Caribbean—native knives, Belize finger-pinchers, shell necklaces. On the desk where the mate kept his books was a woman's satin slipper full of burned and unused matches, beside it a bottle of medicine. Donald's interest returned to the scaly festoons of the snake.

"I shot that feller in Martinique," continued the mate. "Laying for me in the grass, he was. Frenchy was laying for me too, 'cos of Louise, —— little witch."

The mate had opened a little cupboard hidden behind the life belt and was extracting a bottle and two glasses. He did this with the slow carefulness of a man accustomed to allowing for his condition.

"Louise says, 'Behold, a snake!' I see it, but think it is gin swizzles. Been hitting them for a week and doing no work. Bad, that. Worst of drinking ashore. Man can't stand it. I said, 'There's no snake.'

"Frenchy dares me to take it by the tail. I gets up. Ain't afraid of nothin' I can see, snakes in or out of the bottle. Then Louise draws me gun and shoots it. Then the little cutie wants to shoot Frenchy. Snake was this real fer-de-lance, and Frenchy was trying to get me to walk into his jaws."

"Is that Louise?" asked Donald, pointing to the photograph of a pretty Creole tacked to the door of the mate's cellar.

Tavish bleared at the picture, painfully trying to arouse his muddy memory.

"No; that's Suzanne—I think."

"What happened to the Frenchman?"

The mate sobered somewhat; he looked hunted, as if those memories were baying bloodhounds.

"Don't ask questions. But never mind him. He got his. Let's be happy. Fill up."

"Thanks, but I don't feel like drinking," said Donald.

He wanted to get out of that cabin, away from this sodden brute. The mate glared at him with suspicion.

"You ain't a prohibition officer, are ye? Ye were spying round all afternoon. What for? What's your game?"

"I am late second violin and barker for Ripley's Roysterers, a medicine show, now bust in the sticks. I beat it down here to get warm. I peddle razors between the acts. Going to hang round here till the fairs open. I can play any instrument in a week good enough to kick the dust in a parade——"

"And ye're a Judique man, ye say?" said the mate, interrupting Donald's display advertisement of himself. "Then pilot me into George's Bay running east out of Coomberland Strait. Tide making. Wind nor'east. Ye've a full ship. What's yer chance o' hitting MacIsaac Rock? Con me into Antigonish. In the dark; in a fog; ice about; no lights; con me—con me!"

"I con ye to lay down and sober up. We don't ask men to sup in Judique and then bark at them. Good day to ye."

Donald was leaving in indignation and disgust, but Tavish caught hold of him. The little flash of the man he had been, the man that could navigate tickles in snowstorms, who could chance reefs with a foot of free water, the man with cats' eyes in the dark for harbor entrances, died out of him.

"Don't go. What's the use of us fighting? I have a proposition to make ye. Sit down. I had to try ye out, 'cos, ye see, it's like this——"

The mate sagged back into his bunk and resumed his rambling speech. As he sailed around in his mental fog it was some time before Donald understood he was being offered a job on a rum-runner. There was a yacht somewhere which the mate was to command. Donald was a Judique man—the mate took that for granted now—therefore Donald was a sailor. Also he was not an American citizen, and the more aliens aboard the more plausible the false registry, the faked destinations.

"But I have no papers," urged Donald. "I can't ship as mate."

"Ye can ship as anything in this business.

Captain, engineer or chief steward. Do ye think the loblolly office boy over me ever passed a board? No, I'm Old Man of this hooker, though he wears the gold lace. I want ye because ye're a Judique. Ye can handle men. Ye can keep a watch. Ye can hold a course.

"Papers! Our outfit prints its own—certificates, bills of lading, manifests. We got brains behind us; and money, millions of grands. Ye ship on this as deck hand and come with me on my new berth. Ye won't have to peddle no more razors. No more fiddling with yer hat out for pennies. 'Tain't like sailing in the north; no more ice, no more scraping yer sides on the tickles; warm open summer sailing with lots of sea room.

"You come south with me and get in the trade. Ye won't never want to see Judique in winter again. Come south, lad, south——"

The mate had almost fallen asleep; the pipe dropped from his mouth; Donald picked it up, put it on the stool and went on deck to consider the mate's proposition.

Donald had seen whisky flowing free at Judique dances; but there it always meant Judique on the floor, the challenge, the men stepping outside to the clean battle in the frosted air; then all friends again and back once more to the dancing. But this sodden mate, drugged beyond fighting, this dead shell of a seaman and fisherman, was not the man Donald wanted to sail under.

He stood by the cabin door, looking along the docks. In the distance hummed the night voices of New Orleans. Somewhere a band throbbed faintly, save for the bass drum, which beat like a tom-tom in the depths of a jungle. The river gurgled below in tune with the mate's thick snore. The hulls beyond creaked the cables.

A banjo twanged in a forecastle head to low laughter. Some one called angrily; the voices and the banjo were silent. Donald saw figures helped over the side; women passed giggling; in the dim light of the stars Donald could not tell whether they were white or colored. He had found it hard to do that by daylight in these parts.

Donald smelled something burning; thick, strange-smelling smoke was pouring out from behind him. He entered the cabin, certain that the mate had set fire to the bedding; but the fire was below the bunk.

He pulled out what appeared to be a roll of blankets smoldering at the edges from the ashes of the mate's pipe. He beat out the burning with his bare hands, and the roll opened on the floor. He saw the outline of a black schooner, riding on a green sea between the brown rocks of a tickle—all fantastically woven in colored rags.

"Hooked rugs," he shouted.

He easily stamped out the fire now the rugs were spread. His trampling boots, his cry and the smoke had somewhat aroused the mate.

"How did you come by these rugs?" demanded Donald.

He was turning back more with quaint floral designs—wonderful bears on ice floes, flowers and fruits the weavers had never seen but had only dreamed of in the lone, lean winters of Cape Breton.

"Got 'em home," said the mate. "Trying to sell 'em for a girl I'm going to marry some day. She said there was money in 'em. Somebody has started a fad in 'em——"

Donald spread more of the rugs. Some were old and worn to a velvet surface from the tramping of generations of sea boots; others were new and fresh from the weaving; all were magic carpets carrying him back home, taking him north to the life he had fled from.

He opened one with a conventionalized border; in its center was a white, high-gabled house with a red flag; the house stood on long piles; rippling blue water flowed by the piles; a boat was on the water.

"Why this is— Tell me where you got this, man."

Donald shook the mate, who tried to brush him away as if he were a fly.

"That rug was made by Jessie McAlpin," continued Donald. "I saw her start and finish it. I gave her a bit of father's old plaid to work in the flag."

Donald turned the rug over to the rough side. He pulled at ends that had been hooked into the pattern. He hauled out a wee bit of the scarlet tartan of the Stewarts.

"I gave it to her for luck. Is she the lass ye're thinking o' marrying? Ye sha'n't; by ——, ye sha'n't. Come outside and I'll fight yer for—for thinking of her."

The mate lifted himself on his elbow and slowly took in Donald's meaning.

"So you're the man she's been dreaming about? The man that went off to make his

fortune for her. A busted theatrical fiddler. A hobo. A notion pedler. That's good!"

The hiccuping laugh of the mate brought Donald to his knees so that he could be eye to eye with him.

"But white, Tavish. A failure as a fiddler, as a man; but white. I ain't touched tar. But you—you thinking of her; you asking her to marry! Come out and let me kill yer, Tavish!"

He shook the mate savagely. The effort was like trying to animate pig lead. The mate's head lolled on his red neck; he chuckled triumphantly at Donald.

"Fight yer; for why should I? Ye're licked. Ye're off the floor. When I get north wi' a pocket o' grands where'll ye be wi' Jessie?"

Donald let him go for fear he should strangle him; Tavish fell back on the pillow with a smile and closed his eyes.

"I'm taking this rug. I'll give you all I've got for it."

A snore was Donald's only answer as he emptied his pockets of the change left from his last bill. Then, snatching the rug and his fiddle, he went on deck and jumped ashore.

His languor was gone; he raced up Canal Street, crowded with evening saunterers; he turned into the narrower sidewalks of the quarter, where his rug and his fiddle case interfered with his swift navigation, till he came to Brigard's on Bourbon Street.

"M'sieur," said fat old Brigard as he handed Donald a paper along with his key.

Donald took the key; he did not see the paper; he strode across the sanded floor past the domino players, past François and his heap of oyster shells, to the back stairs. These he took at a run, till he came to the gallery overlooking the little patio with its palm. He entered his room and turned on his light.

The room was very high; the faded gilt cornice was dim with dust; close by the glazed door was a tall rosewood mirror beautifully ancient and not veneered; the water pitcher stood on a tabouret covered with faded silk rep; the rest of the furnishings were cheap and glaring Grand Rapids. On the floor of this mortuary of old splendors Donald flung his rug.

He tried to hook back into its place the bit of tartan, to start flying once more the flag of the old farmhouse. He remembered how Jessie used to do this; he did not have the proper hook; he used the can opener on his knife, and it seemed to him that Jessie's fingers were touching and guiding his.

"M'sieur."

Brigard stood in the room. He had entered without knocking and was presenting his bill.

"M'sieur have no trunk. I mus'—'ave eet *en avance*."

Donald began to feel in his pockets when he remembered he had given all he had for this rug. His face told his plight before he could think up the fluent excuses of the show business.

"I mus' 'ave zis *chambre*, m'sieur."

Deftly Brigard took the key from the door and held it open for Donald to vacate. The contemptuous swiftness of the Frenchman was galling. New Orleans could bounce a man quicker than Fond du Lac.

"Go slow a bit," said Donald. "I'll connect with money in a day or two. Meantime how about holding this rug as security?"

Donald indicated that worn, weather-beaten textile as if it were a Bayeux tapestry. Brigard made a mouth, spread his hands, shrugged his shoulders.

"Your violin, m'sieur, might be *suffisant*, but zis old door mat—*pfui!*"

Brigard seemed as if he were about to expectorate on the magic carpet; he gave it a contemptuous kick.

"Don't do that," flared Donald, pushing him back not at all gently.

The Frenchman tried to eject him; the little epicurean would put Judique off the floor; easily Donald sent him reeling backwards.

"I'll go when I'm ready."

The Frenchman, who had landed sitting on the rug, drew from his pocket a whistle, which he began blowing shrilly.

A clamor arose from the restaurant below. Donald decided he was ready now, for you can hold up landlords; you can not knock them down. He picked up his violin and started to grab the rug from under Brigard. Brigard did not budge. He was very fat, his face purple and bulging with his effort to make that whistle shriek. Donald could not get the rug from under him.

Below were running footsteps, agitated voices, a woman's scream; Donald had barely time to leave the room, drop by the ironwork of the gallery to the patio and hide behind the palm. An army of diners headed

by François brandishing his oyster knife, appeared on the gallery to locate the whistle. The whistle ceased; from a babble of exclamatory French and English Donald learned that Brigard was dead.

A bitterer cold than any Cape Breton winter struck Donald till he heard Brigard's voice. Relieved, Donald dived for the archway before François and his brigade began their search. He had not killed the apoplectic little Frenchman; Brigard had simply puffed all the breath he had for living into the whistle. Brigard had his wind again now; he was gasping, wheezing orders for Donald's arrest.

Donald lifted the heavy Spanish lock of the gate, slipped out into the street, dived hither and thither in the maze of the quarter; but not too fast, for speed would be suspicious. He came among the cotton warehouses, the fruit shippers where the owners printed themselves as Factors. Between the walls and over the roofs appeared ships' lights; a few yards more, and he was on the wharfs.

He would have to leave this town and before daylight, that was certain. A man carrying a fiddle was easily trailed. But the freight depots were far away; he would have to cross lighted streets, to go among crowds, to pass policemen to reach them.

He walked along the wharf, hugging the shadows, holding his fiddle case as if it were a parcel, trying to appear a mere stroller in the starlight. He passed ship after ship, reading their names. The river glittered between linked bows and sterns, a river that is a sea; it rippled between the piles with the same tune that had rippled past the rocks of the tickles at home. It was carrying him home.

He wanted to know the port of the ship he was going to stow away in. He wanted one bound north. He might beat it up the river on a tail paddler; Brigard could hardly get him across the State line. But river boats can throw you ashore; ocean skippers could not. He walked along anxiously scanning the still decks, the home-port names on the sterns, not daring to question ship keepers, vainly wishing that he would come on a northern windjammer. He passed the end of Canal Street and reached the shed where he had fiddled for the negroes. The *Luiza* was still tied up, her decks deserted.

Quick steps sounded along the planks of the wharf. Fearing he was pursued, Donald hid behind some barrels. A man passed in white ducks with much gold braid on his sleeves and cap. He stopped at the gang plank of the *Luiza* and went on board as if at home.

"Mr. Tavish—Mr. Tavish! —— it—Tavish!"

Donald heard the sleepy answer of the mate.

"Get her away as soon as crew's aboard. I've got our clearance. All O. K. We meet Simon off the Keys. Transship. And take it to Savannah."

"Savannah—north," thought Donald.

The master had gone to his cabin; it was useless asking him or the mate for a job now. Donald examined the deck. He could slip into the forecastle, but that crew would not harbor him and his fiddle. If he tried the engine room or the coal bunkers the stokers too would blab; even the educated engineer might not want him on board. He hesitated over hiding in one of the boats.

If he could remain undiscovered till the steamer was out at sea he would be safe. But New Orleans is far from the river mouth; for many hours he would be exposed to all the chances of an up-the-river boat; liable to be marooned on a mud bank or given up to the Louisiana police.

He saw that the fore hatch was not properly covered; a black corner of the partially open hold yawned invitingly. Stealthily he slipped on to the deck; he slid his legs into the hold, feeling for the ladder, carefully lifting his violin case so that it did not bump sonorously; he then dropped down the iron rungs to the bottom of the hold.

The only light he had came from the small, star-filled triangle he had entered by, for he did not dare strike a match. He groped his way to the narrowing bows and then aft to the engine-room bulkhead, searching for the best corner to hide in should a lantern be flashed into the hold.

He heard the voices of the crew coming on board; the mate was barking orders; beyond the bulkhead shovels scraped into coal and furnace doors clanged. The planks below him began to twist under his feet; they shook with the screw; the *Luiza* was steaming down the river.

Donald scraped with his fingers to find a clean place to lie on. He looked up; the

stars were no longer visible; he could see clouds dragging across the sky.

He heard voices wrangling on deck; he stole up the ladder and listened. The mate and the master were on the bridge. The voices came from just above him. The mate was piloting the steamer. Donald could feel that the wind was rising; the air had got suddenly colder.

The *Luiza* shot past a river light. The bridge, the funnel, the faces of the two men on the bridge flashed for a moment out of the dark. The *Luiza* tooted her whistle; another whistle tooted ahead; presently the *Luiza* rocked with the wash of a steamer passing upstream.

Donald saw that the mate was at the wheel. No one else was on the bridge. No watch was on deck, not even a lookout forward. The noise of dice came from the forecastle.

"I didn't sign on this," he heard the mate grumble, "to be master, mate, crew and river pilot. Yes, I know money's big, but ——, I never saw a white rat before. See him, Mr. Cope? A white rat just gone down the hold. Why in thunder ain't those hatches on? Hey, there, forward! Leave that crap game and put on those hatches, you swine."

Donald knew what had startled the mate. He had let his hand rest too long on the outside of the coaming. The mate had seen it disappear and had taken it for a rat.

Donald dropped down the ladder, hearing Mr. Cope abuse Tavish for his drunken visions. Then the planks were thumped on the hatches, and Donald was battened down in that hold.

It was safe for him to strike a match now; the light fell on the refuse left by that shiftless crew. A great heap of it was in the bows.

Lighting more matches, Donald found some bunches of bananas and some loose oranges. The bananas were not too green to eat; those bitter oranges of Martinique were refreshing; so Donald had food and drink for his passage. The hold was warmer than the freight car he had come south in, and in addition this dining-car service was thrown in.

Using his last match, he made a bed near the bulkhead, with bits of crates, a piece of sacking and his violin case for a pillow de luxe. That hold was an ocean hobo's Pullman.

HE WAS awakened out of a dream of falling into a roaring, clamorous abyss, by a weight on his chest, a bump on his head, a hundred blunt points stabbing his ribs. Close to his ears were the scrapings of shovels, the gasps of cylinders, the ring of thrown-back furnace doors, the roar of furnace drafts. He had been flung against the bulkhead, for the *Luiza* was pitching.

She rolled again, and the bananas that had been flung on top of him fell away. He began to slip with them till he clawed at the planks for a holdfast.

The empty steamer was tossing in a heavy sea. Donald tried to anchor himself by holding to rivet heads, bolts, splinters, anything for a grip in this bumping topsyturvying berth of the hold. Every time her stern sank the refuse poured over him; hard green bananas stabbed him; fragments of crates speared him; oranges rolled over him; a swill of stalks, skins and juice rose to his waist.

His first thought was for his fiddle. He pawed about; he felt with his feet every time that surf of slush poured aft.

His fingers closed on something recognizable, something made. It was one of his razor boxes, he thought. He felt round the side for the opening button. He pressed it; the lid came back; he could feel the neatly nested razor and the rows of blades.

The steamer gave one of her capricious jolts. She was tossing in a more erratic sea than Donald had ever experienced. It seemed impossible to time her rolls. If he was on a sailing ship Donald would have judged she was adrift with no one at the wheel, abandoned or all hands drunk.

He spread-eagled himself on the bulkhead to get a grip; the razor box slipped from his hand; he felt the blades spilling between his fingers. He slipped till he was on his back; for the banana skins, the crushed oranges afforded a slippery foothold. The sea of muck poured over him; a cataract with naked razor blades in it.

He struggled to his feet holding to the bulkhead. His violin case must have burst open; the violin was probably in bits; his whole stock was spilled and flying about the hold; he was battened down in a heavy sea with a loose cargo of razor blades.

He shouted and beat at the bulkhead. The thumping of his knuckles was lost in the ramshackle clamor of that ill-kept engine. At every impact of the recurring

wave of refuse he shivered; he died in anticipation the death of the Thousand Slices.

He continued screaming, banging, kicking, wondering whether he could risk making for the ladder, whether it would be better to bang on the hatches. To reach the ladder he would have to chance being flung headlong.

Suddenly his knees closed on some long, light object; he dropped a hand and caught up his fiddle case. It was open, sliding to and fro in the hold, empty of everything save the fiddle and the bow. Backed against the bulkhead, he ran his two hands over the fiddle, slipping the bow between his teeth. Both seemed undamaged, except that the E string was snapped. With an inspiration he flung his bow on the other strings, playing anything—strathspeys, jigs, reels, fragments of jazz, in one wild appeal to be heard.

He did not know how long he played. To hold his fiddle steady he had to play it under his chin, not Judique fashion against his waist. He was not playing music; he was flinging horse-hair against cat-gut, scraping for volume, for noise, double-stopping, arpeggioing three strings at once trying to make that fiddle a siren of his distress.

The loose ends of the E string got in his way; one was tickling his neck; he stopped to tear it clear when he thought he heard voices. He knocked and kicked at the bulkhead again and then started playing his loudest when once more something tickled his neck. Something got between his fingers on the finger board.

He remembered the rat he had seen run up the hawser; that hold was full of rats and mice. The *Luiza* carried no guard on her cables. He flung the bow on the strings; they screamed under his ears. Things were climbing up his legs, creeping through his hair, soft, fluffy, tickly things that brushed his ears—he roared to be delivered from that hold.

A voice answered; the hatches were being opened. Donald saw the rusty steps of the ladder reeling under the light of a lantern from aloft. Dropping his fiddle, he made a leap for them. Above him was gray daylight, a crowding mass of black faces and rolling whites of eyes, and behind them the gold cap of Cope, the master.

"Stowaway!" shouted Cope. "Thought so. Now, you crazy niggers, get sense. Back to that wheel."

The steamer took a terrific roll; Donald had to cling to that ladder like a fly on a ceiling; water came inboard, and a splash came down the hold.

"On deck, you!" shouted the master to him. "Can't keep the hatches off in this sea. Back to the tiller, one of you. Can't you see it's a man, not a spook? Say something, you below; tell these fools you're not a ha'nt."

"Take the wheel and keep her head on," cried Donald as he climbed like a man on a lee ratline in a capsizing ship.

As Donald came closer to the light held by a trembling negro the man give a scream; the others howled with him; he dropped the lantern, and the whole gang ran forward squealing.

"Come on deck and show yourself; they're loco!" cried Cope.

"Can't leave that lantern burning in the hold," shouted back Donald, who had looked below and seen the lantern flickering dangerously among that loose rubbish. He recovered it in a minute, easily keeping his footing now he had light. He climbed on deck, and Cope shrank from him with an exclamation of horror, pointing to his clothes. Donald saw he was covered with crawling tarantulas.

"Brush them off and take charge of this bucking tub," said Cope. "Thank —— you're a sailor and a white man."

Donald looked for something with which to brush off the spiders.

"Take my cap," said Cope.

Donald took the cap and flicked the hairy horrors into the scuppers.

"Keep it and wear it," said Cope. "You be master. I can't handle these niggers. The mate's drunk. He hit his berth as soon as we got in open sea and left all to me. All I know is fancy yachting; this job needs a sailor man."

Donald ran up the bridge to curb the impotent rolling of that undirected hull; the bareheaded yachtsman followed him.

"Gimme a course," demanded Donald.

"Mate said sou'west by south was safest till this hurricane blew out."

Donald brought round the bows that were prodding the sky on a different course every second.

"This ain't no hurricane," he said; "just a breeze. Funny kind of sea, though.

What makes it so white? And it's fresh water."

A lashing of muddy spray had hit Donald in the mouth.

"We're off the Missisippi. Just off Southwest Pass. That's her mud. It runs fresh for miles."

"Lordy," laughed Donald, "I'm a freshwater Jack. My advice to you is head back to that river. Here, you hold the wheel while I turn out Mr. Mate and Mr. Cook. I need coffee. Is the engineer on his job?"

"Didn't I tell you the whole gang went crazy? The engineer's the worst. He heard you first; he stole the mate's whisky; he's hiding forward in a bunk praying to a rabbit's foot. There's no one sane or sober on board but you and me."

Donald left the bridge. He thought it best to tackle the mate first, and angrily he threw back the door of his cabin.

"On deck, Tavish," he cried, "or 'tween decks and shovel coal. Out, man, out, or Judique will lick the tar out of yer."

He shook Tavish, who did not even open his eyes.

"Tavish, ship's sinking. Tavish, we're taking to the boats."

The cabin had been wrecked by those negroes in their frenzied search for liquor. The cellar door flapped open, and the little Creole girl tacked on it bobbed out in the face of Donald.

"Tavish, I'll give you one chance to be a man. Come out of that hell you're wallowing in. Will nothing wake him? Tavish, Jessie McAlpin has run away with Donald Stewart. Judique has got her. Judique's the man. Ye're licked, Tavish; ye're licked!"

Not a flicker of intelligence came from the torpid mate, though Donald shouted the taunts in his ears. He tapped the cheek of the mate with the back of his hand. Tavish opened his eyes at the faint blow, but his brain was still asleep.

"Tavish, will you get up and help me knock some sense into your crew?"

The mate was trying to take in the gold-lace cap on the head of the man from Judique. It did not fit Donald well; he lifted it to adjust it more comfortably when out of its interior fell a tarantula that lighted on the face of the mate, scuttled south and began burrowing among the hairs on his chest.

The mate leaped from the bunk. For one second he was fit to fight a Judique. He put Donald off the floor, out of his way to the door of the cabin. A wave of muddy water was rising to the level of the rail. Screaming and clawing at his shirt, Tavish dived and disappeared into the sea.

ONCE more Donald Stewart walked up Canal Street. His violin, not beyond repair, was under one arm, the roll of rugs under the other; the master had given him these as well as bills big enough to be "grands" to Donald. He had also offered Donald the job of mate of the *Luiza*. Donald refused when he learned he would have to sail under Tavish's papers and be called Mr. Tavish.

"I want to go north, as near the north pole and as quick as I can," he said.

Arriving at Bourbon Street, he stepped down on to the sanded floor of Brigard's.

"I want that rug I left here and to pay you for any hard feelings."

Beaming with delight, Brigard stepped from behind the counter to shake hands with Donald.

"M'sieur—pardon—that rug is chef-d'œuvre. The dealer ees *enchanté*. He offer price *énorme*. He ask for more."

"There's twenty. You hold them till I hit a telegraph office."

The dark, yellow-faced clerk was very slow in finding the telegraph rates to the McAlpin farm, Judique North, Cape Breton.

"Can I pay extra for her to get it right away?" asked Donald. "I hear they've got a hard winter, and the farm is ten miles out by a wee river."

"The rate is seventy cents to Sidney, twenty cents by Government wire from there— Have they a telephone?"

"Telephone? No. I mean to rush it from this end. Jessie hasn't a telephone. Won't need it. The boys'll know she sold her rugs. If the roads are ten feet in snow and all the winds in the sea are blowing, they'll make the farm to tell her. She'll get it if you get it to Judique. Shoot it man, right away. Lord, but you've got lead in yer boots down here!"

REFUGE

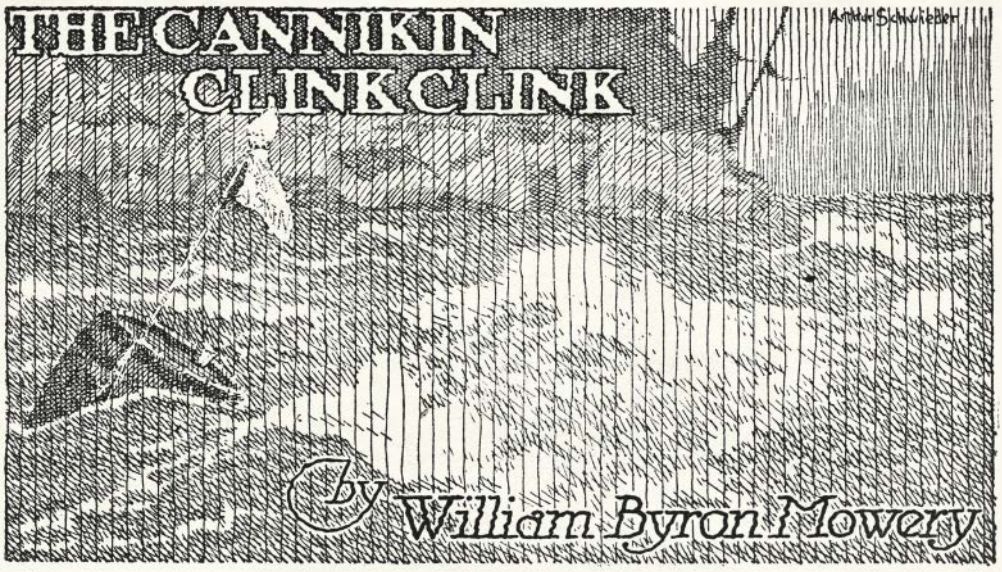
by Harold Willard Gleason

AND what's to cure an aching heart
Beneath a jacket blue
For a lass's lips and a lass's vows,
And all the while untrue?
Why, the whistle of the wind, lad,
The sting of salty spray,
And the blood-red moon arising
From the harbor of Bombay.

And what's to dry the tears that well
And smart wi'in the eyes
For fond old hands now folded,
Fond hearts beyond the skies?
Why, following the whale's path
Afar from carking land,
With a chanty drowning the capstan's creak—
"Bound for Rio Grande."

And what's to bring forgetfulness
Of sodden days ashore,
And nights—black, burning memories
Of liquor, lust and gore?
Why, tight ships and taut sheets
And surges white-and-blue,
For, race or roll, sail safe or wreck,
There's mastery for you!

And what's to end it all, lad,
When heads are old and gray,
For him who dreads the willows' wo,
The churchyard's mold and clay?
Why, let him slip to leeward—
One plunge—green water's roar—
And sleep among the coral caves
With shipmates gone before.



Author of "Fair Weather Friends," "Driftwood Fire," etc.

"CANNIKINS up! Ho!"

The order worked a magic. It rippled down the line of *voyageurs* lying on their backs beside their long canoes. It raised them, like a row of mannikins, to a sitting posture on the mossy rocks. Like an electric thrill it tingled along the whole brigade, touching to life fourscore of men aweary from low-water tracking and moiling portages. Pipes were knocked out and carved drinking horns snatched hastily from sash belts even before the brigade master's call was flounced back from the thick, virgin spruce across the silvered lake. So loud and clear that a flock of *outardes* at the lower end of the river-widening rose wild in alarm, the deep-throated answer chorused from eighty *Bois Brûlés:**

"Cannikins are up. Ho!"

McIllivray, master of the Northwest Company brigade, a Boston loyalist who had escaped north from the rebelling colonies, started from canoe to canoe, doling out two quarts of sweet brandy and a half-carrot of tobacco to each crew of ten men—a portion more generous than ordinary, for the portage just made reached a thousand weary paces long, the afternoon was wearing fast, and the fort was yet fifteen miles away. The great seventy-foot birches, strung out within a shove of the water, were each cluttered about with their thirty heavy *paquetons*—supplies of high wine and tobacco, powder and ball for the up-country factories, for the lonely, strong woods stations among the Crees, for the far-roving traders who were feeling out the Rocky Mountain foot-hill tribes and penetrating even to the Mandans on the upper Missouri.

The *Brûlés* had drunk their double dram; at each canoe a man with gum-pot had replastered seams and stoppered gashes—from rocks in the white water traversed that day; pipes, sweeter after the *régal*, were lighted afresh; the brigade was waiting for McIllivray's "*Levé, levé*, come alive!" when up the portage trail, like a woods apparition, came a solitary figure, stepping with easy stride under a heavy rucksack.

He was a youth of nineteen, tall, slender but muscular. Despite his beaded buckskin a hint of the Highlander was evident in his dress. As he came close, eyes turned toward him in surprize and stared curiously into his face. His features were patrician and regular almost to delicacy; they seemed carved out of marble, so white was his hue. A plumed hat was pushed back far enough to show a wavy crop of chestnut hair. His eyes were deep and sparkling brown. Though he was young in years as

*Literally, "burned woods"—s antily timbered or burned-over lan s, as opposed to *bois forts* or "strong woods," meaning heavily timbered water systems. *Bois Brûlés*, however, very early changed its meaning to: the des endants of French traders and native women. *Métis*, or half-breed, is another almost synonymous term.

the youngest *Brûlé* there, yet in deliberate manner, in the caution and reserve of his glance, he was a mature man of forty.

A *voyageur*, marveling at the youth's uncommon hue and features, instinctively found a name and spoke it aloud as the newcomer strode past toward the lead canoe—

"Lady-Face!"

The youth heard it going from lip to lip and smiled—a good-humored, rare and sunny smile. The name, running up the brigade line, reached McIllivray before the stranger did; so that the grizzly-haired Scot thought one of the *Brûlés* knew the youth.

"If you have canoe-room for me to the fort," said the latter in a mellow voice, "I will pay with my only means—paddle-strength. My birch-bark is a sorry wreck at the end of this portage."

McIllivray looked at him searchingly; at his pack, his rifle, his dress. When he spoke his harsh voice was a loon's in comparison.

"Pedler?" he demanded, loading the word with his contempt for the traveling, unattached traders.

The youth shook his head.

"What company then?"

"None. I am a freeman."

"You are farther from Montreal than freemen wander," McIllivray said curtly, as if in disbelief.

"I am going farther," the youth rejoined, waving a hand toward the west.

"Your business?"

"To see places not seen before."

McIllivray grunted. His keen eyes, quick to detect sturdy qualities, appraised the youth favorably. But, wizened in the incessant, bickering warfare of hostile fur companies, McIllivray was a man of cautious kidney; to him a stranger was a potential enemy—either an agent of the Boston merchants or a pedler or a spy of the H. B. or X. Y. He was framing a refusal of the youth's request when a stout man of fifty, dressed richly in laced suit and cocked hat, arose from a rock and interrupted.

"Let him join us, McIllivray," he commanded; and added almost to himself: "The English* scour the Orkneys and Sussex for new blood like him, while we employ to our disadvantage the French who were here before us. Unless his looks belie his nature, we will turn a freeman into a rare and sorely needed clerk."

McIllivray, hiding his displeasure at this thwarting of his judgment, nodded with quick deference. He motioned the youth to the third canoe and ordered the brigade into the water.

"DAT man? He ess *de gran' Macl*" The *Brûlé*, answering Lady-Face's soft question, pointed with awed respect at the lead canoe and at the stocky man, reposing at his ease therein, who had commanded McIllivray to take the young man along with the brigade.

"De Ojibways," he added, "call him 'de Sail' for dat he ess bellied out."

"The grand Mac?" Lady-Face queried so softly that the eight men ahead of him in the canoe heard not a word. "One of the Montreal partners?"

The *Brûlé*, a smoke-faced Algonquin *métis*, nodded.

"He ess come de whole way dis spring. He ess joined dis voyage at Le Grand Portage. McIllivray say, before de snows fly de gran' Mac go back to Le Grand Portage—to Montreal."

"He is not a wintering partner then?"

The *Brûlé* shook his head.

"Why is he making this trip?" Lady-Face further asked in a voice softer than before.

The *Brûlé* opened his lips to answer. But, checking himself in mid-utterance, he bent a quick look at his interrogator, who casually was watching a swan winging high over the river.

"I know nudding," he replied, shutting his lips to a straight line.

Lady-Face asked no more questions just then. The brigade in short space swung around a curve in the river. The *voyageurs* in the two first canoes, and the eight in the third, were eyes ahead; those behind were shut from view by the jutting headland. Lady-Face passed a hand into his leather jacket and brought out an ample, silver-embossed flask. He took a nip, for sake of ceremony, and handed the flask to his companion.

"It will shorten the miles."

The *Brûlé* tasted eagerly.

*The Hudson's Bay Company and its personnel were called "the English" because their headquarters were in London. The Northwest Company, its great rival, had headquarters in Montreal, where the partners had an organization called "the Beaver Club."

"*S'pristi!*" he ejaculated. "Dis fight-water ess——"

His commendation of the liquor was drowned in a prolonged gurgle. As he drank, his eyes rested upon the other's face for a sign of when to stop. He got no sign save an encouraging nod. The flask came back empty.

Around the curve the river reached straight west for three miles. The brigade dipped paddles in rhythm to a chantey. Lady-Face leaned toward the *Brûlé*, who was wonderfully voluble from the good brandy.

"Where does this voyage end?"

"At de fort. In a month part go nord to de strong woods; part go wes'—to de gran' *hauteur des Pais*."[1]

"But why? This is not the season to take supplies to the factories."

"I know nudding cer*tain*," the *Brûlé* volunteered. "But I have de eyes an' ears. Dese pieces—" he tapped a pack—"dey some hold ironwork for big wood houses, an' I hearit McIllivray talk wit de gran' Mac abou' new *vedettes*."[2]

Lady-Face nodded. In a few minutes he tried another question.

"Do you know anything about the Loon River *derouine*[3] last month when the N. W. men jockied the English out of thirty fur packs?"

The *Brûlé's* eyes sparkled.

"*Gar, oui!* It was gran'. Dey laugh, ever'-body, from de Saskatchewan to Le Grand Portage. You hearit?"

Lady-Face shook his head and leaned forward to listen.

"De English out of Fort X had been all spring visit de Belly-Fat Crees an' get dere furs—thirty packs. Dey were comin' back down de Loon River when dey met wit de N. W. couriers *en derouine*. Dey talk. Bineby dey unhitch teams an' build big fire an' talk more.

"Bineby de N. W. *voyageurs* untie keg an' start *boisson*[4]. Dey ever'body up cannikins, only de N. W. spill dere liquor on de snow. Bineby English get sleepy drunk; N. W. play drunk. Bineby N. W. tie sleepin' English on dere *tabanasks* an' start de dogs down river for de fort. N. W. get thirty pack of castor, fox, marten, musquash."

[1] Watershed, height of land.
[2] Advanced outposts.
[3] Party sent out from fort to drum up Indian trade; i.e., to spur the Indians to take furs and bring them in to the fort.
[4] Drinking fest.

"What else to the story?" Lady-Face prompted.

Warmed inwardly by the brandy that was better than any he had tasted in many a day, and overly zealous to repeat the story which reflected all credit upon his own company, the *Brûlé* jargoned on—to an attentive listener.

"English had map of Belly-Fat Cree country. N. W. got dat. English had books full of de debt dey gave to de Crees.[5] N. W. got dat. English had pencil plans for new *vedette* among Belly-Fats. N. W. got dat."

"So when this brigade splits at the fort, the party going north will build a station where the English had planned?"

"I know nudding certain, *ami*," said the *Brûlé* with the sincerity of a man slightly drunk. "But I hearit McIllivray an' de gran' Mac talk. I t'ink zo."

"The English packs are still at the fort?"

"Dey go out, pro'bly, wit de next voyage to Le Grand Portage."

A few more deft questions, and Lady-Face struck bilge water in his pumping. The *Brûlé* had unbosomed himself of all he knew "certain," and much he had a mere inkling of. They ceased their talk; Lady-Face thinking deeply as he bent to paddle; the *Brûlé* chorusing the "Three Fairy Ducks" with a zest both spirited and spirit-engendered.

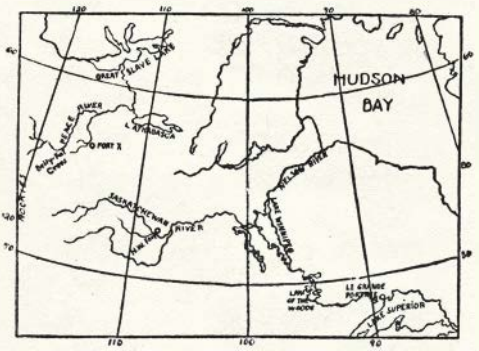
A QUIVER of excitement ran down the brigade. Lady-Face sensed it, though darkness hid all but the two neighboring canoes from sight. Through a clump of river-bank white woods he caught glimpses of leaping fires half a mile ahead.

The brigade paddled around the last curve; the canoes swung into a straight front across the river; the *Brûlés* loosed a cheer and a salvo of musketry. An answering salute from the fort howitzers, an instantaneous uproar from the fires—and the *voyageurs* broke into a chantey, bent their paddles blade-deep in the river and swept on toward the canoe landing.

An arrow-flight from the shore Lady-Face, who sat in the rear of the third canoe and a little behind the talkative *Brûlé*, quietly shipped his paddle and slipped overboard without a splash or ripple. He drifted

[5] To give debt means to give credit in expectation of furs to be taken.

downstream a hundred paces before swimming to the bank. By that time the canoes had touched; Indians, *Brûlés* and fort



company were mixed pellmell at the landing. He clambered out, shook himself, and, keeping to the white-wood shadows, approached unobserved.

Against a lingering red glow in the west the fort palisades of pointed, eighteen-foot spruce poles loomed up in dim silhouette. To the left, in a thicket of birch saplings, was a clutter of Indian tents, thirty or forty, of buffalo skins painted with red and black devices. From their shape and from the warrior trappings visible beside the big fires Lady-Face knew they were the traveling summer-time lodges of Bloods.

Planked on a cedar slab by one fire, a huge sturgeon roasted entire; over another, *placottes* of buffalo cow sizzled and spluttered. Pots of sagamity and beans, cooking in buffalo tallow, willow baskets full of the native delicacy of young birds in shell, stood in front of the teepees. At top of pliant saplings meat and other provisions hung out of reach of the legion of snarling dogs, which had so much wolf in them that they never barked. There were no children outside the skin lodges nor Blood women, save a few old squaws, wrinkled, sexless.

At right of the fort, on a sandy stretch, was another camp, smaller, noisier, more luridly lit up than the Bloods'. Women, clothed in little beyond body-paint and elaborate coiffures done up with red and white clay, wove in and out among the fires, singing and dancing. They were drunk already, but only as a preliminary to the real *boisson* of the night.

A scattering of warriors, too full of "fight-water" to flock to the landing, tottered about the camp or sprawled at the flap doors of their teepees. Piegans, Lady-Face judged them to be. His lips curved in disgust at the debauchery—wrought by trade wine in a few short years upon a tribe once spirited and noble.

He crept nearer the landing. A brush fire had been kindled to aid the *décharge*. By its light he searched the mingled crowd with quick, keen eyes. Half the *Brûlés* were guarding the pieces against thievery; the others plied swiftly between bastion gate and cargo. Nearest him stood the leather-robed Bloods, tall, slightly stout, manly warriors, all of them. On the other side were the Piegans. In the cleared center McIllivray and the partner talked with a third Scot, Iran McDonald, factor of the fort, a "wintering wolf" of the N. W., a clean-shaven, lithe man of restless energy.

Lady-Face guessed easily that their conversation was about him, for they glanced here and there as if trying to locate him in the fire-lighted confusion.

With a last quick searching of swarthy faces, the youth stepped forward, shouldered his tall way through the Bloods and confronted the three.

"Hollo, there!" the partner exclaimed at sight of him. "We were wondering——"

"I was pushed aside," Lady-Face interrupted.

"Into the water, too," McDonald observed.

Lady-Face returned the factor's piercing glance.

"I rescued my paddle in midriver a biscuit toss downstream."

"A clerkly trick—to lose a paddle," the partner jested.

"And to be pushed aside by this lot," McDonald commented.

The factor and McIllivray exchanged looks askance.

Lady-Face saw without seeming to see. He smiled his rare smile and spoke shamefacedly.

"Truth, this is a new sight to me, best seen from the edge of the gathering. The king himself, God bless him, is less a marvel than noble red men in these numbers."

The partner burst out laughing. He pointed to the Piegans.

"Noble red men! Ha, ha, ho, ho, ho! What a new-come, McDonald, with his

ears full of the nonsense that the English Company has mouthed in London!"

McIllivray laughed. Even the factor's face cracked. The youth seemed abashed at their merriment over his words. At his dour expression the partner broke out laughing again.

"Come, lad," he chuckled. "You will learn better—if you but give over your notion of seeing places not seen before, and will stay with us. This very night you will see things not seen before; and thereafter will use 'noble' more sparingly."

So died in a timely laugh the suspicions of the wintering wolf and of the wizened hawk, McIllivray.

The four passed through the stockade entrance, followed by the rout clamoring for liquor. Just within, at right of the broad, graveled path, was Indian Hall, a low, spacious structure used to house natives in winter when they came, in safe numbers, with peltry. The Bloods had put their young women in the hall, what time the tribe should remain at the fort.

To the left were the rambling, hewn-log quarters of the *métis* canoe men and French employees. One hundred steps from the entrance, in center of the stockade, stood the massive, square and heavily armed factory, wherein were the warehouse, trading room, fur presses, living quarters for factor and clerks, the dining room and the "butter-tub."

Visibly taken with the good parts of the youth and determined he should enter the service, the partner kept him close, naming the buildings, coloring up the seasonal work of the post, lauding the N. W. and damning all rivals. Lady-Face was noncommittal; seemed averse to the service. The partner tried another tack to win him around.

"You crossed lately from Scotland?"

"Less than a year, by a month. I came as a St. Lawrence colonist."

"Then you know the Scotty poet, and newer songs of his than those we have been singing at the Beaver Club in Montreal?"

"Aye. I know some. But lately, it is said, he is too much with his cups to write as he once did."

"I have heard. A great pity, lad, that he can not drink soberly and seldom; for he is our only pride against the English rimers. They have no drinking songs to compare with his. You will sing us his newest tonight?"

"Aye, I shall. But in truth the English too, have rare ale songs. Especially is there one master—one song——"

"There is none to compare with our own Scotty poet!" the partner interposed so strongly that the youth did not dispute him.

Their talk was cut short. The beggarly Piegans, pressing forward as the party was about to enter the factory, were getting between them and the door. At McDonald's sharp order and click of his brass-barreled pistol they fell back.

But one middle-aged Indian, whom Lady-Face had not seen when he searched the crowd, jostled close to him, thrust a clay-smeared face within a foot of the youth, ogled him, and cried a name in surprize. The partner and McIllivray heard, but McDonald was several steps in advance.

Lady-Face hesitated for a second, astonished, dismayed. Then, stiffening, he reached out a blow, a slight swing that seemed no more than the straightening of an arm. The Piegan, caught pointedly on his chin as he opened his mouth to cry something else, dropped limply, knocked completely out of his senses.

"The dog!" Lady-Face said hotly, meeting the question in the partner's eye. "I met him down the river when I was camped alone. He would have robbed me had I not awakened in time."

"With the wine he holds and the blow you gave him, he will sleep a good long while," the partner replied.

Lady-Face breathed deeply as he entered the building.

IN THE clerk's room where McDonald had given him temporary quarters Lady-Face waited for his pack, which had been lost among the other pieces at the *décharge*. It was half an hour in coming. He unlashed it carefully, to examine.

A glance told him the pack had been searched thoroughly before it was brought. He laughed silently at this evidence of McIllivray's suspicions and at the wasted pains; for the rucksack contained only his spare clothes, his provisions, his camping outfit, his powder and lead.

But McIllivray's suspicions and especially the factor's had to be allayed. With the two watching hawkishly, plans would come to naught. Lady-Face cursed the Piegan softly as he stepped down the tunnel-like hall to McDonald's quarters.

"Have I time before the feast," he asked, "to look at the Indian camps and the fort yard?"

"It will not be for an hour yet," the factor replied. "But are you not overeager to examine the camps and the fort?"

It was a shrewd question. Through the smoke of his pipe—so large that it might properly be said McDonald kindled it—the factor looked sharply at the youth. But Lady-Face's answer, itself a question, was shrewder still. Instead of attempting an explanation of his wish he feigned belief that McDonald was thinking only of his safety.

"You think it dangerous for me?" he queried.

The factor's eyes softened. Lady-Face could almost see suspicion fading out of them.

"A bit perhaps," the factor said. "The Indians are drunk and fighting, and shortly the *métis* will be likewise and unable to offer help. But go. If McIllivray tells me truth of that incident at the factory door, you are able to care for yourself."

Instead of seizing the permission too eagerly, Lady-Face showed hesitancy.

"Then will not McIllivray or a clerk go with me?"

"No, no, lad," the factor said hastily. "I stretched the danger a trifle. Go by yourself, but be here again in an hour for the feast."

With a bow of thanks Lady-Face turned and left.

The *boisson* beyond the bastion had quickened in the last hour, since a new and large supply of high wine had been given out. Three gallons of raw, tobacco-tinctured alcohol mixed with seven of river water was a drink sufficiently powerful to break all restraint and loose every passion of the natives.

The Bloods yet retained signs of decency; but the Piegans already were completely abandoned to a carnival of debauchery, and were drinking themselves into a winter's debt to the company. Liquor-inflamed lust bred jealousy; jealousy, hot quarreling that now and then ended in promiscuous fighting.

Lady-Face watched a minute or two before he stepped forward into the light and spoke in the dialect to a Piegan less besotten than his fellows.

"Where is Lone Dog? I see him not in the dance?"

The Piegan pointed to a teepee.

"Lone Dog is there, where two men carried and laid him."

Lady-Face crossed and entered. On a buffalo robe lay the senseless Lone Dog, his features livid beneath their smoke-copper. The youth bent and saw that he was stirring into consciousness. A moment later the skin flap rustled and a Piegan woman entered, a dark, slim beauty in her early twenties. She was clothed in moccasins of puppy fur and scarlet breast-bands of woven *slowi** and in a doeskin shift ornamented with dyed porcupine quills that rustled with her movements.

At sight of Lady-Face she stood in wild-eyed astonishment. With a gesture he stopped her from crying out.

"Your husband is a fool, Kinik-olama. Be sensible and listen. Leave this dance and drinking with the young men. Get ready this teepee and your trappings to go back where you belong. When Lone Dog wakes, tell him this: If he will keep his tongue from wagging like an old squaw's, if he will instantly do as I have ordered you, he will be given a winter's debt of powder and ball, a new rifle to shoot buffalo, traps for beaver cabins, and cloth for your dress."

Tip-of-the-Willow promised with a word. Lady-Face paid scant attention to the outspoken advances of her eyes, but turned and left the teepee.

Leaving the camps and the stockade, he hurried four hundred yards up the river bank to another clump of white woods. In their shadows he stopped and uttered the night call of a red-throated loon. From a dense thicket near at hand came quick answer, and five silent figures. With the first of these Lady-Face spoke in stabbing whispers.

"When that star gets where this one is—" he pointed to the black-velvet sky— "be hiding behind the stockade. where the trees march close. In a *prairion* up the creek are the N. W. horses. Bring twenty and scatter the others. Make a ladder of vine or rope to fling over the stockade."

The Cree wildwood runner grunted. They separated as softly as moon shadows.

Wha first shall rise to gang awa',
A cuckold, coward loon is he!
Wha first beside his chair shall fa',
He is the king amang us three!

*Inner bark of spruce, beaten, shredded and braided.

FOR two hours the partner, McDonald, McIllivray, Lady-Face and three clerks had been "browsing at the nappy." Fort servants had cleared away the splendid feast and hurried off to their own. A marshaling of good liquor, amazingly varied for this wilderness table, held down the board. As the *boisson* had progressed Lady-Face had drawn away from Scottish import, and kept to sherry and still white wine.

Half-risen in his chair at the long table, he sang the verse twice, that they might catch the words; sang it slowly, improvising the tune. As he started over it the third time, the company bore with him so loudly and with such stamping of feet that the log rafters threatened to tumble. Yet the mellow tenor of the youth rose above the noise, swinging the others with him and launching them into the full-lunged chorus:

"We are na fou, we're nae that fou,
But just a drapple in our ee;
The cock may craw, the day may daw,
And aye we'll taste the barley bree."

Outside, in the *Brûlé* quarters, the songs were in French; inside, where Highland *esprit de corps* obtained and the élite company of six "carried on," the songs were all in Scotch.

If the first to drink himself under the table was king of them all, then the partner could fairly lay claim to royalty; for, as old punk takes fire most easily, he was drunk before the *boisson* reached its height. Lest he impede the free swing of what was to come, Lady-Face and a clerk gathered him up tenderly and carried him out to the factor's quarters. The clerk tarried not, but pirouetted back to the dining room.

Lady-Face stayed, under pretense of dashing water into the partner's florid face. But first he went swiftly through the partner's pockets. Finding nothing, he slammed the door and searched McDonald's cabinet. Papers, reports, maps, letters and Indian debt sheets he drew out, glanced at and restored. Disappointed and puzzled, he gave up the search.

The water opened the partner's eyes, and a liberal drink of French brandy had him sitting up, happy and maudlin friendly with the youth, whom he vowed the brawest laddie that ever flung kiltie to hornpipes.

"But they're not friends of mine," Lady-Face interrupted sorrowfuly. "They want to throw me out."

"Wha'?" the partner demanded heatedly.

"The factor and McIllivray. They've been saying about me—what have they been saying about me?"

"Lies, laddie, lies!" the partner swore vehemently, lapsing into Lowland. "That ye maught be, for a' they ken, the young Harry Havice whom the English ha'e fetched over frae Sussex las' year and stationed at Fort X to apprentice the fur trade. McIllivray gaed out to question the Piegan that halloed the name at ye, but by my life the Piegan cudna talk yet frae the wap ye gi'ed 'im."

"Is this Harry Havice the same person that the English were going to make *hivernant** at their Belly-Fat Cree station?"

"The same, lad. Ye shall ha'e the place yoursel'; for we ha'e the Opposition's maps and plans, and will start a brigade there before the month is out. Ye shall ha'e the place, laddie—na, by the lang miles frae Scotty, ye shall ha'e the ither place!"

"What other?" queried Lady-Face, shaking the partner gently out of an encroaching snore.

"Wha' ither? Aye, yes, the ither. The ae we're going to bi'g—the grand factory on the watersheds— As' M'Donald for the maps—ye shall ha't, laddie, by the lang—miles frae——"

Lady-Face shook himself free from the sleeping partner and returned to the *boisson*.

McDonald, the nearest sober of the company, was directing affairs in Lady-Face's absence, and enlivening his drowsy companions with game and mimicry. A "voyage" was organized—six men rolling along on empty kegs; and with flourish of brooms, snowshoes and cooper-staves for paddles, they swept swiftly down the broad bosom of the river that flowed around the dining room walls.

At cry of "Portage, ho!" each seized his keg, hoisted it on his shoulders, and stumbled after McDonald—up the back-breaking hill and down the portage trail to the next lake. "*Sauté*" for the rapids! The table was cleared by the simple expedient of tipping it sidewise; the legs at one end were broken off; and down the incline of white water the factor steered, followed in a rout by the other kegs of the brigade.

Lady-Face took charge. He propped up the table again; sent two clerks out buffalo-hunting to all corners of the room; made a

*Untitled factor wintering at a small or temporary post.

grizzly out of the third and sent McIllivray after him; and filled the factor's cannikin with brandy.

But McDonald's lips held aloof from the cup. Perhaps his reeling brain gave him feeble warning that he alone had an atom of sobriety left. Lady-Face urged him; trolled again the chorus which always before had been good for a cup. McDonald crooked not an elbow. Desperate, Lady-Face rose, clinked cannister against his partner's, and started the drinking song whose echoes had died away in the Mermaid Tavern two centuries before:

"Oh let me the cannikin clink, clink;
And let me the cannikin clink;
A trader's a man,
A life's but a span;
Why, then, let a trader drink."

The doughty McDonald drained his cup.

Atop the rough exercise he had taken and the potions he already had downed, this last cannikin toppled him. Leaving the others to snore where they had fallen, Lady-Face picked up the factor, carried him to his quarters—and there passed a hand into his jacket pocket.

He brought out a detailed map of the water systems to the west. It had a red circle at a point where, with a day's portage in any direction, a canoe could reach waterheads leading to the McKenzie, to the Pacific rivers, to the Mississippi system, to the Great Lakes, and to the Athabasca flowing north and eastward*. He brought out the debt sheet of the English. He brought out the keys to the wareroom. And lastly he brought out the English map of the Cree *vedette*.

*A position, near the Rockies, approximately midway between the end of the north Saskatchewan and the end of Peace River to the north.

As he left the room, left the factory and stepped hastily across the dark bastion yard, Lady-Face with tongue in check hummed to himself:

"Oh! Let me the cannikin clink, clink!"

THREE days later a full hundred and fifty miles up the river, Lady-Face and his four men stopped at noon to rest their tired pack horses and mounts. While two of the hunters went forward to cut out a cow buffalo from a herd, Lady-Face found paper and wrote briefly:

To Iran McDonald:

Concerning the horses, which I found necessary to transport the fur pieces back where they belong, full compensation will be made by the English company as shortly as you report the circumstances of my theft and explain how you came to have the packs in your keeping.

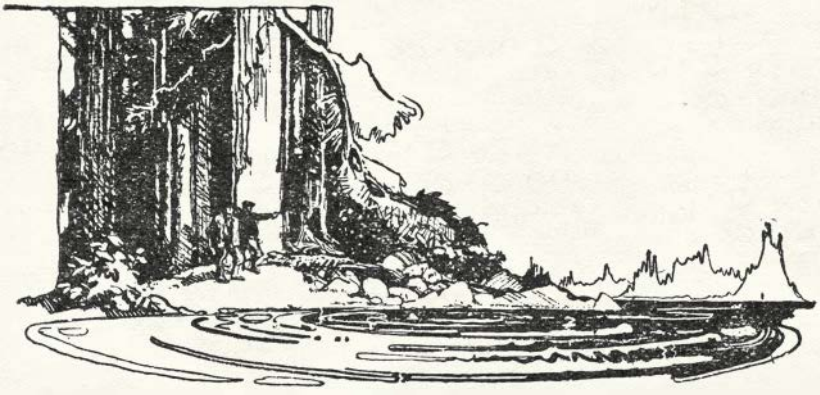
Concerning the grand Mac's offer to make me *hivernant* at his new *vedette* among the Belly-Fat Crees, I must refuse. When you lift this note from your sturgeon nets at the landing, I shall have almost a week's start toward the valuable watershed location, as shown by your map. I shall tarry at Fort X only long enough to deposit the fur pieces and advise the factor to use all diligence in establishing the Cree post.

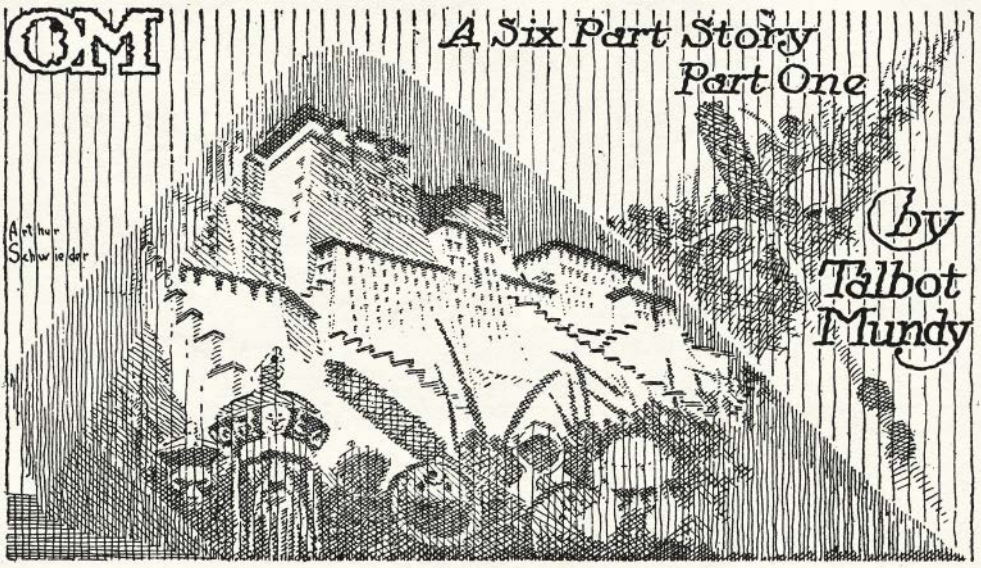
Concerning our recent pleasant *feu-de-joie*, a Scotty's song started you to drinking; but it took an Englishman's to put you under the table.

Yours, etc.,
Harry Havice.

This note he put in an empty, ten quart keg, sealed the latter and lashed to it a Cree arrow which bore a small flag with the motto, "A skin for a skin."

He placed the keg tenderly on the water and laughed softly as it danced away down the Saskatchewan, the Swift-Flowing.





Author of "The Marriage of Meldrum Strange," "Mohamed's Tooth," etc.

EVOLUTION

TIDES in the ocean of stars and the infinite rhythm of space;
Cycles on cycles of eons adrone on an infinite beach;
Pause and recession and flow, and each atom of dust in its place
In the pulse of eternal becoming; no error, no breach,
But the calm and the sweep and the swing of the leisurely, measureless roll
Of the absolute cause, the unthwarted effect—and no haste,
And no discord, and nothing untimed in a calculus ruling the whole;
Unfolding, evolving; accretion, attrition; no waste.

Planet on planet a course that it keeps, and each swallow its flight;
Comet's ellipse and grace-note of the sudden firefly glow;
Jewels of Perseid splendor sprayed on summer's purple night;
Blossom adrift on the breath of spring; the whirl of snow;
Grit on the grinding beaches; spume of the storm-ridden wave
Hurled on the blast of the north wind to blend with the tropic rain;
Hail and the hissing of torrents; song where sapphire ripples lave
Long lullabies to coral reefs unguessed in a landless main.

Silt of the ceaseless rivers from the mountain summits worn,
Rolled amid league-long meadows till the salt, inflowing tide
Heaps it in shoals at harbor-mouth for continents unborn;
Earth where the naked hocks were reared; pine where the birches died;
Season on season proceeding, and birth in the shadow of death;
Dawning of luminous day in the dying of night; and a Plan
In no whit, in no particle changing; each phase of becoming, a breath
Of the infinite karma of all things; its goal, evolution of Man.

CHAPTER I

"COTTSWOLD OMMONY IS NO MAN'S FOOL."

IF YOU want views about the world's news, read what Cottswold Ommony calls the newspapers; there is plenty in them that thoroughly zealous people believe. But remember the wise old ambassador's word of caution to his new subordinate: "And above all, no zeal!" If you want raw fact devoid of any zeal whatever try the cafés and the clubs; but you must sort the facts and correlate them for yourself; and whether or not that process shall leave you capable of thought of any kind must depend entirely on your own ability. Thereafter, though you may never again believe a newspaper, you will understand them and—if you are reasonably human—sympathize.

There used to be a café in Vienna where a man might learn enough in fifty minutes to convince him that Europe was riding carelessly to ruin; but that was before 1914, when the riders, using rein and spur at last, rode straight for it.

There still is a club in Delhi where you may pick up odds and ends of misinformation from over the Pamirs, from Nepaul, from Samarkand, Turkestan, Arabia and the Caucasus, all mixed up with fragments from the *olla podrida* of races known collectively as India. And, having pieced them all together you may go mad there as comfortably as in Colney Hatch, but with this advantage: That nobody will interfere with you, provided you pay your bills on the first of the month and refrain from sitting on two newspapers while you read a third.

It is a good club, of the die-hard kind; fairly comfortable; famous for its curry. It has done more to establish empire, and to breed ill-will, than any other dozen institutions. Its members do not boast, but are proud of the fact that no Indian, not even a maharaja, has ever set foot over its threshold; yet they are hospitable if a man knows how to procure the proper introduction—no women are admitted on any pretense—and by keeping quiet in a long-armed chair you may receive an education.

You may learn, for instance, who is and who is not important, and precisely why. You may come to understand how the old guard, everywhere, inevitably must die in the last ditch. And, if you have it in you, you will admire the old guard without trying to pretend that you agree with them.

But above all, you may study the naked shape of modern history as she is never written—history in the bathroom, so to speak. And once in a while you may piece together a dozen assorted facts into a true story that is worth more than all the printed histories and all the guide-books added together. Not that the club members realize it. They are usually bored, and almost always, thinking about income-tax and indigestion, coupled with why in thunder So-and-So was fool enough to bid no trumps and trust to his partner to hold the necessary ace.

And all the news, of course, has a personal, local significance, no matter whence it comes. As, for instance, if Bruce McLeod comes back from having settled a border quarrel between the Amazai-Afridis and the Orakzai Pathans, with a dumdum bullet in his shoulder, intermittent malaria, an overdraft at the bank and a typewritten reprimand for having exceeded his instructions, the point is that by absence from Delhi he missed promotion, and consequently Mrs. Bruce McLeod will not take precedence of Mrs. Collins. And *that* is how the course of empire takes its way. The indigestion, snubs, revokes and bets make history. Battles and revolution are appalling, but only incidental after-effects.

When Ommony turned up at the club after three years in a forest he produced a refreshing ripple on a calm that had grown monotonous. For a week there had been nothing to discuss but politics, in which there is no news nowadays, but only repetition of complaint. But Cottswold Ommony, the last of the old-time foresters—and one of the few remaining men in India whom the new democracy has not reduced to a sort of scapegoat rubber-stamp—stirred memories and conjecture.

"*His* turn for the guillotine! He has done too —— well for twenty years not to have his head cut off. I'll bet you some babu politician gets his job!"

"You'll have to make that bet with Ommony, if he's mad enough. Didn't you hear poor Willoughby was killed? That leaves Jenkins at the head of Ommony's department, and they've hated each other since Jenkins turned down Ommony's younger sister and Ommony told him what he thought about it. Not that the girl wasn't fortunate in a way. She married Terry later on—and died. Who'd not rather die than have to live with Jenkins? Willoughby always considered Ommony to be a reincarnation of Solon or Socrates, plus Aristides crossed on Hypatia. Willoughby——"

But everybody knew the ins and outs of that news. A fat babu in a dirty pink turban that would have scared any self-respecting horse, driving a second-hand Ford, with one eye on the Punjabi "constabeel" at the street crossing, bumped into and broke the wheel of Willoughby's dog-cart, setting any number of sequences in motion. The horse bolted, tipped out Willoughby, who was killed under a tramcar, and crashed into Amramchudder Son and Company's open store-front, where blood from the horse's shoulder spoiled two bales

of imported silk. A lawsuit to recover ten times the value of the silk was commenced against Willoughby's estate that afternoon; Mrs. Willoughby had to borrow money from friends to carry on with.

The babu put on full speed, naturally, and tried to escape down a side street, of which there are as many, and as narrow ones, in Delhi as in any city of its size. He ran over a Bengali—which nobody except the Bengali minded very much—knocked down two Sikhs—which was important, because they were on their way to a religious ceremony; righteous indignation is very bad stuff when spilled in the street—and finally jammed the Ford between a bullock cart and a lamppost, where the pride of Detroit collapsed into scrap.

The owner of the bullock cart, a Jat with a wart on his nose, which his mother-in-law had always insisted would bring bad luck—she said so at the trial later on, and brought three witnesses to prove it—was carrying, for an extortionate price, a native of a far northern State, who had recently arrived by train without a ticket, and who knew how to be prompt and violent. The man from Spiti—which is the name of the northern State—decended from his perch at the rear of the cart, picked up a spoke that the collision had broken away, and hit the babu with it exactly once between the eyes. The babu died neatly without saying anything; and a hot crowd of nine nationalities, that was glad to see anybody die with politics the way they had been for a year or two, applauded.

The man from Spiti vanished. The "constabeel" arrested the owner of the bullock cart, who turned his face skyward and screamed, "Ayee-ee-ee!" once, which was duly noted in a memorandum book for use as evidence against him. Seventeen onlookers, being questioned, all gave false names and addresses, but swore that the Jat with the wart had attacked the babu; and a *wakil*—which is a person entitled to practise law—who knew all about the Jat's recent inheritance from his uncle, offered legal services that were accepted on the spot.

Presently, in the jail, a *jemadar* and two "constabeels" put the Jat through a hideously painful third degree, which left no marks on him but did induce him to part with money, most of which was spent on a debauch that ended in the *jemadar* being reduced to the ranks, since the *wakil* objected on principle to sharing the loot of the Jat with any one and therefore righteously exposed the *jemadar's* abominable drunkenness.

Meanwhile the native papers took the matter up and proved to nine points of decimals that the incident was wholly due to British arrogance and the neglect of public duty by an "overpaid alien hegemony," demonstrating among other things that the British are a race "whose crass materialism is an insult to the spiritual soul of India, and whose playing fields of Eton are an ashbed from which arise swarms of Phenixes to suck the life-blood of conquered peoples." Excellent journalese, conceived on the historic principle that if you made sufficient smell you are sure to annoy somebody; and he who is annoyed will make mistakes, which you may gleefully expose.

The Sikhs who had been knocked down by the Ford accused the "obsequious servants of alien tyranny"—meaning the police—of having tried to prevent them from attending their religious ceremony; the fact being that the police had taken them to the hospital in an ambulance. The entire Sikh community in consequence refused to pay taxes, which set up another sequence of cause and effect, culminating in a yell of "*Bande Materam!*" as three or four thousand second-year students, who were not Sikhs, rushed foaming at the mouth into the Chandni Chowk—which is a business thoroughfare—with the intention of looting the silversmiths and putting the whole city to the torch. A fire engine dispersed them; but the stream of water from the hose ruined the contents of Chanda Pal's drug store.

Chanda Pal called in an actuary, who possessed a compound geometrical imagination, and sent in a bill to the Government that is still unpaid; and, having failed to collect immediately, he wrote to a friend who was an undergraduate at Oxford, with the result that a member of Parliament for one of the Welsh constituencies asked at Question Time whether it was true that the Viceroy of India in person had highhandedly confiscated without compensation all the drugs in the Punjab; and if so, why?

The answer from the Treasury Bench was "No, sir;" but the foreign correspondents omitted to mention that, so the French,

Scandinavian and United States newspapers had it in headlines that—

British in India
Start New Terror.
Confiscate Goods.
Uprising Brewing.

A bishop in South Africa preached a sermon on the subject; thirty-seven members of the I. W. W., who were serving a term in San Quentin, went on a sympathetic hunger strike and were locked up in the dungeon; and a Congressman from somewhere in the Middle West wrote a speech that filled five pages of the *Record.* Stocks fell several points. Jenkins stepped into Willoughby's official shoes.

However, clocks continued ticking. Roosters crowed. The sun appeared on schedule time. And Willoughby's funeral was marked by dignified simplicity.

EXCEPT that he hugely regretted his friend Willoughby, Cottswold Ommony cared for none of these things. He sat near the electric fan in a corner of the club smoking room, aware that he was being discussed, but also quite sure that he did not mind it. He had been discussed, on and off, ever since he came to India. He looked quite unlike Hypatia, whatever Willoughby may have thought of his character.

"Willoughby overrated him," said somebody. "You can't tell me Ommony or any other man is such a mixture of marvels as Willoughby made out. Besides, he's a bachelor. Socrates wasn't."

"Oh, Ommony's human. But—well—you know what he's done in that forest. It was raw, red wilderness when he was sent there. Now you can stand on a rock and see ninety miles of trees whichever way you care to look. Besides, dogs love him. Did you see that great dog of his outside? You can't fool that kind of dog, you know. They say he knows the tigers personally and can talk the jungle *bat;* there was only one other man who ever learned that language, and *he* committed suicide!"

"All the same he's not the only man who's done good work—and I've heard stories. Do any of you remember Terry—Jack Terry, the M.D. who married Ommony's young sister? One of those delightful madmen who are really so sane that the rest of us can't understand 'em. Had weird theories about obstetrics. Nearly got foul of his profession by preaching that music was an absolute necessity at child-birth. Wanted the Government to train symphony orchestras to play the Overture to Leonori while the birth takes place. Perfectly mad; but a corking good surgeon. Always dead broke from handing out his pay to beggars—broke, that is, until he met Marmaduke. Remember Marmaduke?"

"Dead too, isn't he? Wasn't he the American who endowed a mission somewhere in the Hills?"

"Yes, at Tilgaun. Marmaduke was another madman—ab-so-lutely mad—and as gentle as sunrise. Quiet man, who swore like a trooper at the mention of religion. Made his money in Chicago, slaughtering hogs—or so I heard. Wrote a book on astrology that only ran to one edition—I sold my copy for ten times what I paid for it. I tell you, Marmaduke was madder than Gandhi.

"They say he left America to keep the elders of the church he belonged to from having him locked up in an asylum. The mission he founded at Tilgaun caused no end of a stir at the time. Surely you remember that? There were letters to the *Times,* and an archbishop raised a shindy in the House of Lords.

"Marmaduke's theory was that, as *he* couldn't understand Christianity, it was safe to premise that people whose religion was a mixture of degraded Buddhism and devil worship couldn't understand it either. So he founded a Buddhist mission to teach 'em their own religion. No, *he* wasn't a Buddhist. I don't know what his religion was. I only know he was a decent fellow, fabulously rich, and ab-so-lutely mad.

"He persuaded Jack Terry to chuck the service and become the mission medico—teach hygiene to men from Spiti and Bhutan—like teaching drought to the Atlantic! Jack Terry married Ommony's sister about a week before leaving for Tilgaun, and none of us ever saw them alive again."

"*Now* I remember. There was a nine days' scandal, or a mystery, or something."

"You bet there was! Terry and his wife vanished. Marmaduke was carpeted, but couldn't or wouldn't explain; and he died before they could make things hot for him. Then they gave Ommony long leave and sent him up to Tilgaun to investigate.

That was—by gad! That was twenty years ago! Good Lord! How time flies!

"Ommony discovered nothing; or, if he did discover anything, he *said* nothing—he's a great hand at doing that, by all accounts. *But* it leaked out that Marmaduke had appointed Ommony a trustee under his will.

"There was another trustee—a red-headed American woman—at least, I heard she's red-headed, maybe she isn't—named Hannah Sanburn, who has been running the mission ever since. She was not much more than a girl at the time, I remember.

"And the third trustee was a Tibetan. Nobody had ever heard of him, and I've never met a man who saw him; but I'm told he's a Ringding Gelong Lama; and I've also heard that *Ommony* has never seen him. The whole thing's a mystery."

"It doesn't seem particularly discreditable to Ommony. What are you hinting at?"

"Nothing. Only Ommony has influence. You've noticed, I dare say, he always gets what he goes after. If you asked me, there's an even chance he may 'get' Jenkins, if he cares to."

"That's notorious. Whoever goes after Ommony's scalp gets left at the post. What's the secret?"

"I don't know. Nobody seems to. There's Marmaduke's money, of course. Ommony handles some of it. I don't suggest fraud, or any rot like that; but money's strange stuff; control of it gives a man power. Ommony's influence is out of all proportion to his job.

"And I've heard—mind you, I don't know how true it is—that he's hand-and-glove with every political fugitive from the north who has sneaked down south to let the clouds roll by during the last twenty years. They even said Ommony was on the inside of the Moplah business. You know the Moplahs didn't burn his bungalow—they say he simply asked them not to; can you beat that?—and it's a fact that he stayed in his forest all through that rebellion."

OMMONY was restless over in his corner, but not because tongues were wagging. His rather portly figure filled the chair he sat in, and no man seeing him for the first time could have failed to recognize the air of habitual authority that imposes itself on autocrats. In a district as big as three broad English counties his word had been better than law for twenty-three years—because most governed people regard the law as an enemy, whereas Ommony had been a friend beyond doubt or question.

The line of his obstinate jaw was only half concealed by a close-clipped, graying beard, and there was humor on his lips, though he was angry—obviously angry. He did not look that morning like a man to be approached offhandedly; all the club servants kept out of his reach, and the members preferred to discuss him from a safe distance. However, one man claimed casual acquaintance and dropped into the next chair.

"Saw your great Irish wolf-hound waiting for you at the front door. My word, what a beauty! She's the only one of her breed in India, isn't she?"

"Yes," said Ommony.

"Don't you find it difficult to keep her alive in this climate?"

"No," said Ommony.

"Is she savage?"

"On occasion. She bites fools."

But nothing less than violence will silence some people.

"Expecting to stay long in Delhi?"

"I don't know. I hope not."

"I suppose you get the newspapers down in that forest of yours. What do you think of the political situation?"

"I don't think of it."

"That's counsel of perfection! How do you contrive to keep your mind a blank?"

"I don't. I keep it busy."

The inquisitor shifted his attack; there is a line of least resistance, which you can usually find if you stick to questioning and wear a man down.

"Care to sell me that wolf-hound?"

Ommony's reserve broke down; he had to talk to somebody:

"That dog? Sell her? She's the sum total of twenty years' effort. She's all I've done."

The inquisitor leaned back, partly to hide his own face, partly to see Ommony's in a more distinct light; he suspected sunstroke or the after effects of malaria. But Ommony, having emerged from his reserve, continued:

"I don't suppose I'm different from anybody else—at least not from any other reasonably decent fellow—made a lot of

mistakes, of course—done a lot of things I wish I hadn't—been a bally ass on suitable occasion—but I've worked —— hard. India has had all the best of me and—— her!—I haven't grudged it. Don't regret it, either. I'd do it again. But there's nothing to show for it all——"

"Except a forest. They tell me——"

"A forest, half-grown, that corrupt politicians will play ducks and drakes with; a couple of thousand villagers who are now being taught by those same politicians that everything they've learned from me is no good; a ruined constitution—and that dog. That's all I can show for twenty years' work—and like some others, I've had my heart in it. I think I know how a missionary feels when his flock walks out on him. I'm a failure—we're all failures. The world is going to pieces under our hands. What I have taught that dog is all I can really claim by way of accomplishment."

That particular inquisitor lost enthusiasm. He did not like madmen. He withdrew and considered Ommony in a corner, behind a newspaper. Another not so casual acquaintance dropped into the vacant chair, and was greeted with a nod.

"You're been absent so long you ought to see things with a fresh eye, Ommony. D'you think India's breaking up?"

"I've thought so for twenty years."

"How long before we have to clear out?"

"The sooner the better."

"For us?"

"I mean for India!"

"I should have thought you would be the last man to say that. You've done your bit. They tell me you've changed a desert into a splendid forest. D'you want to see it all cut down, the lumber wasted and——"

Ommony pulled out his watch and tapped his finger on the dial.

"I had it cleaned and repaired recently," he remarked. "The man charged me a fair price, but after I had paid the bill he didn't have the impudence to keep the watch, for fear I might ruin it again.

"India has a perfect right to go to —— her own way. Surgery and hygiene are good, but I don't believe in being governed by the medical profession. Cleaning up corrupted countries is good; but to stay on after we've been asked to quit is bad manners. And *they*'re worse than breaking all ten commandments. Besides, we don't know much—or we'd have done much better."

"You think India is ripe for self-government?"

"When things are ripe, they fall or decay on the tree," said Ommony. "There's a time to stand aside and let 'em grow. There's such a thing as too much nursing."

"Then you're willing to chuck your forest job?"

"I *have* chucked it."

"Oh! Resigned? Going to draw your pension?"

"No. Pension wouldn't be due for two years yet, and I don't need it. India has had the use of me for twenty-three years at a fair price. I'd be satisfied, if she was. But she isn't. And I'm proud, so I'll be —— if I'll accept a pension."

Ommony was left alone again. That news of his resignation was too good to be kept, even for a minute. Within five minutes it was all over the club, and men were speculating as to the real reason, since nobody ever gives any one credit—and wisely perhaps—for the motives that he makes public.

"Jenkins has succeeded Willoughby. Ommony knows jolly well that Jenkins has it in for him. He's pulling out ahead of the landslide—that's what."

"I don't believe it. Ommony has guts and influence enough to bu'st ten Jenkinses. There's more than that in it. There never *was* a man like Ommony for keeping secrets up his sleeve. You know he's in the Secret Service?"

"That's easy to say, but who said so?"

"Believe it or not—I'll bet. I'll bet he stays in India. I'll bet he dies in harness. I'll bet any money in reason he goes straight from here to McGregor's office. More than that—I'll bet McGregor sent for him, and that he didn't resign from the Forestry without talking it over with McGregor first. He's deep, is Cottswold Ommony—deep. He's no man's fool. There's no man alive but McGregor who knows what Ommony will do next. Anybody want to bet about it?"

The remainder of the conversation at the club that noon rippled off into widening rings of reminiscence, all set up by Ommony's arrival on the scene, and mostly interesting; but to stay and listen would have been to be sidetracked, which is the inevitable fate of gossips. There was a story in the wind that, if the club had known it, would have set all Delhi by the ears.

CHAPTER II

NUMBER ONE OF THE SECRET SERVICE

He who would understand the Plains must ascend the Eternal Hills, where a man's eyes scan Infinity. But he who would make use of understanding must descend on to the Plains, where Past and Future meet and men have need of him.—From the Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

OMMONY did go straight to McGregor; but he and Diana, his enormous wolf-hound, walked and club bets had to be called off because there was no cab-driver from whom the *chuprassi** could bludgeon information.

Neither his nor Diana's temper was improved by the behavior of the crowd. The dog's size and apparent ferocity cleared a course, but that convenience was not so pleasant as the manners of twenty years ago, when men made way for an Englishman without hesitation—without dreaming of doing anything else.

The thrice breathed air of Delhi gave him melancholia. It was not agreeable to see men spit with calculated insolence. The heat made the sweat drip from his beard on to the bosom of a new silk shirt. The smell of overcivilized, unnaturally clothed human beings was nauseating. By the time he reached an ugly, rawly new administration building he felt about as sweetly reasonable as a dog with hydrophobia, and was tired, with feet accustomed to the softness, and ears used to the silence, of long jungle lanes.

However, his spirits rose as he approached the steps. He may have made a signal, because the moment the *chuprassi* saw him he straightened himself suddenly and ran before him, up-stairs and along a corridor. By the time Ommony reached a door with no name on it, at the far end of the building, the *chuprassi* was waiting to open it—had already done the announcing—had already seen a said-to-be important personage shown out with scant excuses through another door. The *chuprassi's* salaam was that of a worshiper of secrets, to a man who knows secrets and can keep them; there is no more marrow-deep obeisance in the world than that.

And now no ceremony. The office door clicked softly with a spring lock and shut out the world that bows and scrapes to hide its enmity and spits to disguise self-conscious meanness. A man sat at a desk and grinned.

"Sit. Smoke. Take your coat off. Sun in your eyes? Try the other chair. Dog need water? Give her some out of the filter. Now——"

John McGregor passed cigars and turned his back toward a laden desk. He was a middle-sized, middle-aged man with snow-white air in a crisp mass that would have been curly if he had let it grow long enough. His white mustache made him look older than his years, but his skin was young and reddish, although that again was offset by crow's feet at the corners of noticeably dark-gray eyes. His hands looked like a conjurer's; he could do anything with them, even to keeping them perfectly still.

"So you've actually turned in your resignation? We grow!" he remarked, laughing. "Everything grows—except me; I'm in the same old rut. I'll get the ax—get pensioned some day—dreadful fate! Did you have your interview with Jenkins? What happened? I can see you had the best of it—but how?"

Ommony laid three letters on the desk—purple ink on faded paper in a woman's handwriting. McGregor laughed aloud—one bark, like the cry of a fox that scents its quarry on the fluke of a changing wind.

"Perfect!" he remarked, picking up the letters and beginning to read the top one. "Did you blackmail him?"

"I did."

"I could have saved you that trouble, you know. I could have 'broke' him. He deserves it," said McGregor, knitting his brows over the letter in his hand. "Man, man, he certainly deserves it!"

"If we all got our deserts the world 'ud stand still." Ommony chose a cigar and bit the end off. "He's a more than half-efficient bureaucrat. Let India suck him dry and spew him forth presently to end his days at Surbiton or Cheltenham."

McGregor went on reading, holding his breath.

"Have you read these?" he asked suddenly.

Ommony nodded. McGregor chewed at his mustache and made noises with his teeth that brought Diana's ears up, cocked alertly.

"Man, they're pitiful! Imagine a brute like Jenkins having such a hold on any one—and he—good God! He ought to have been hanged—no, that's too good for him! I suppose there's no human law that covers such a case."

* Uniformed doorkeeper

"None," Ommony answered grimly. "But I'm pious. I *think* there's a Higher Law that adjusts that sort of thing eventually. If not, I'd have killed the brute myself."

"Listen to this."

"Don't read 'em aloud, Mac. It's sacrilege. And I'm raw. It was at least partly my fault."

"Don't be an idiot!"

"It was, Mac. Elsa wasn't so many years younger than me, but even when we were kids we were more like father and child than brother and sister. She was always a mystic, even as a child. She had the spirituality and the brains; I had the brute strength and was presumed to have the common sense; it made a rather happy combination. As soon as I got settled in the forest I wrote home to her to come out and keep house for me. I used to trust Jenkins in those days. It was I who introduced them. Jenkins introduced her to Kananda Pal."

"That swine!"

"No, he wasn't such a swine as Jenkins," said Ommony. "Kananda Pal was a poor —— who was born into a black-art family. He didn't know any better. His father used to make him stare into ink-pools and all that devilment before he was knee-high to a duck. He used to do stunts with spooks and things.

"Jenkins on the other hand had a decent heritage and ditched it. It was he who invited Kananda Pal to hypnotize Elsa. Between the two of them they did a devil's job of it. She almost lost her mind, and Jenkins had the filthy gall to use that as excuse for breaking the engagement."

"My ——! But think if he had married her! Man, man!"

"True. But think of the indecency of making that excuse! I called in Jack Terry——"

"Top-hole — generous — gallant — gay! Man, what a delightful fellow Terry was!" said McGregor. "Did he really fall in love with her? You know, he was recklessly generous enough to——"

"Yes," said Ommony. "He almost cured her; and he fell in love. She loved him—don't see how any real woman could have helped it. But Jenkins and Kananda Pal—oh, curse them both!"

"Amen!" remarked McGregor. "Well—we've got what *we* want. How did you hear of these letters? Just think of it! That poor girl writing to a brute like Jenkins to give her back her mind so that she may— Oh, my God!"

"I saw Kananda Pal before he died. That was recently. He was quite sorry about his share in the business. He tried to put all the blame on Jenkins—you know how rotters always accuse each other when the cat's out of the bag. He told me of the letters, so I went to Jenkins yesterday, and, having resigned, I was in position to be rather blunt. In fact, I was —— blunt. He denied their existence at first, but he handed 'em over when I explained what I intended to do if he didn't."

"I wonder why he'd kept them," said McGregor.

"The pig had kept them to prove she was mad, if any one should ever accuse him of having wronged her," Ommony answered. "Do they read like a madwoman's letters?"

"Man, man! They're pitiful! They read like the letters of a drug addict, struggling to throw off the cursed stuff, and all the while crying for it. Lord save us, what a time Jack Terry must have had!"

"Increasingly rarely," said Ommony. "He had almost cured her. The attacks were intermittent. Terry heard of a sacred place in the Hills—a sort of Himalayan Lourdes, I take it—and they set off together, twenty years ago, to find the place. I never found a trace of them; but I heard rumors, and I've always believed they disappeared into the Abor country."

"Where they probably were crucified!" McGregor added grimly.

"I don't know," said Ommony. "I'm not so sure. I've heard tales about a mysterious stone in the Abor country that's supposed to have magic qualities. Terry probably heard about it too, and he was just the man to go in search of it. I've also heard it said that the 'Masters' live in the Abor Valley."

McGregor shook his head and smiled.

"Still harping on that string?"

"One hundred million people, at a very conservative estimate, of whom at least a million are thinkers, believe that the Masters exist," Ommony retorted. "Who are you and I to say they don't? If they do, and if they're in the Abor Valley, I propose to prove it."

McGregor's smile widened to a grin.

"Men who are as wise as they are said to

be, would know how to keep out of sight. The Masters are a mare's nest, Ommony, old top. However, there may be something in the other rumor. By the way, who's this adopted daughter of Miss Sanburn's?"

"Never heard of her."

"You're a trustee of the Marmaduke Mission, aren't you? Know Miss Sanburn intimately? When did you last see her?"

"A year ago. She comes to Delhi once a year to meet me on the mission business. About once in three years I go to Tilgaun. I'm due there now."

"And you never heard of an adopted daughter? Then listen to this."

McGregor opened a file and produced a letter written in English on cheap, ruled paper.

"This is from Number 888—Sirdar Sirohe Singh of Tilgaun, who has been on the secret roster since before my time. His home is somewhere near the mission.

" 'Number 888 to Number I. Important. Miss Sanburn of mission near here did procure fragment of crystal jade by unknown means, same having been broken from antiquity of unknown whereabouts and being reputed to possess mysterious qualities. '*Miss Sanburn's adopted daughter*'—get that?—'intending to return same, was prevented by theft of fragment, female thief being subsequently murdered by being thrown from precipice, after which, fragment disappeared totally. Search for fragment being now conducted by anonymous individuals. Should say much trouble will ensue unless recovery is prompt and secret. *Miss Sanburn's adopted daughter*'—get that again?—'has vanished. Should advise much precaution not to arouse public curiosity. 888.'

"What do you make of it?" asked McGregor.

"Nothing. Never heard of an adopted daughter."

"Then what do you make of this?"

McGREGOR'S left hand went into a desk drawer, and something the color of deep sea-water over a sandy bottom flashed in the sunlight as Ommony caught it. He held it to the light. It was stone, not more than two inches thick at the thickest part, and rather larger than the palm of his hand. It was so transparent he could see his fingers through it; yet it was almost fabulously green. One side was curved, and polished so perfectly that it felt like wet soap to the touch; the other side was nearly a plane surface, only slightly uneven, as if it had been split off from another piece.

"It looks like jade," said Ommony.

"It is. But did you ever see jade like it? Hold it to the light again."

There was not a flaw. The sun shone through it as through glass, except that when the stone was moved there was a vague obscurity, as if the plane where the breakage had occurred in some way distorted the light.

"Keep on looking at it," said McGregor, watching.

"No, thanks." Ommony laid the stone on his knee and deliberately glanced around the room from one object to another. "I rebel against that stuff instinctively."

"You recognize the symptoms?"

"Yes. There's a polished black-granite sphere in the crypt of a ruined temple near Darjiling that produces the same sort of effect when you stare at it. I'm told the Ka'aba at Mecca does the same, but that's hearsay."

"Put the stone in your pocket," said McGregor. "Keep it there a day or two. It's the fragment that's missing from Tilgaun, and you'll discover it *has* got peculiar properties. Talk with Chutter Chand about it; he can tell you something interesting. He tried to explain to me, but it's over my head—Secret Service kills imagination—I live in a mess of statistics and card-indexes that 'ud mummify a Sybil. All the same, I suspect that piece of jade will help you to trace the Terrys; and if you dare to take a crack at the Abor country——"

"How did you come by the stone?" asked Ommony.

"I sent C99—that's Tin Lal—to Tilgaun to look into rumors of trouble up there. Tin Lal used to be a good man, although he was always a thorough-paced rascal.

"But the Service isn't what it used to be, Ommony; even our best men are taking sides nowadays, or playing for their own hand. Men who used to work for the love of the game are actually selling information to the politicians. I have proof of it. It's all politics—pay—pensions. India's going to the dogs.

"Tin Lal came back and reported everything quiet at Tilgaun—said the murders

were mere family feuds. But he took that piece of jade to Chutter Chand the jeweler and offered it for sale. Told a lame-duck story. Chutter Chand put him off—kept the stone for appraisal—and brought it to me. I provided Tin Lal—naturally—with a year behind the bars—no, not on account of the stone. He had committed plenty of other crimes to choose from. I chose a little one, just to discipline him.

"But here's the interesting part: Either Tin Lal talked in the jail—*or* some one followed him from Tilgaun. Anyway some one traced that piece of jade to this office. I have had an anonymous letter about it—worth attention—interesting. You'll notice it's signed with a glyph—I've never seen a glyph quite like it—and the handwriting is an educated woman's. Read it for yourself."

HE PASSED to Ommony an exquisitely fashioned silver tube with a cap at either end. The tube was completely covered with Buddhistic designs, that were either marvelously imitated or else had been done hundreds of years ago in the period of the highest and serenest Buddhist art.

Ommony removed one of the caps and shook out a long sheet of very good English writing-paper. It was ivory-colored, heavy, and scented with some kind of incense. There was no date—no address—no signature except a peculiar glyph, rather like an ancient, much simplified Chinese character. The writing was condensed into the middle of the page, leaving very wide margins, and had been done with a fine steel pen:

The stone that was brought from Tilgaun by Tin Lal and was offered for sale by him to Chutter Chand is one that no honorable man would care to keep from its real owners. There is merit in a good deed, and the reward of him who does justly without thought of reward is tenfold.

There are secrets not safe to be pried into. There is light too bright to look into. There is truth, more truth than can be told.

If you will change the color of the sash on the *chuprassi* at the front door, one shall present himself to you to whom you may return the stone with absolute assurance that it will reach its real owners. Honesty and happiness are one. The truth comes not to him who is inquisitive, but to him who does what is right and leaves the result to Destiny.

Ommony examined the writing minutely, sniffed the paper, held it to the light, then picked up the tube and examined that.

"Who brought it?" he asked.

"I don't know. It was handed to the *chuprassi* by a native he says he thinks was disguised."

"Did you try changing the *chuprassi's* sash?"

"Naturally. A deaf-and-dumb man came. He looked like a Tibetan. He approached the *chuprassi* and touched his sash, so the *chuprassi* brought him up to me. He was unquestionably deaf and dumb—stone-deaf; and half of his tongue was missing. The drums of his ears had been bored through—when he was a baby probably.

"I showed him the stone, and he tried to take it from me. I had to have him forcibly ejected from the office; and of course I had him followed, but he disappeared utterly after wandering aimlessly all over Delhi until nearly midnight. I have had a lookout kept for him, but he seems to have vanished without trace."

"Have you drawn any conclusions?"

McGregor smiled.

"I never draw them, Ommony. At my trade things have to snap together perfectly without a crack before it's safe to say they're proved. But one has to form working theories—temporary hypotheses—to be chucked overboard the minute they don't tally with new facts. A young woman almost certainly wrote that letter; Miss Sanburn's adopted daughter ——"

"Who I don't believe exists," said Ommony.

"— is reported by 888, who has hitherto *always* been reliable, to have disappeared. She disappeared, if she ever *did* exist, from Tilgaun; the stone unquestionably came from Tilgaun, and it seems to have been in Miss Sanburn's possession, in the mission. *Ergo*—just as a flying hypothesis—Miss Sanburn's adopted daughter *may* have written that letter. If so, she's in Delhi, because the ink on that paper had not been dry more than an hour or two when it reached me."

"Have you searched the hotels?"

"Of course. And I've tried to discover whether any one worth investigating came recently by train from Kalka, but that was hopeless. The trains are being watched now, and if she should try to leave for the north she'll be spotted."

"I'm curious to meet Hannah Sanburn's adopted daughter!" said Ommony drily. "I've known Hannah ever since she came to India more than twenty years ago. I've

been co-trustee ever since Marmaduke died, and I don't believe Hannah Sanburn has kept a single secret from me.

"In fact, it has been the other way; she has passed most of her difficult personal problems along to me for solution. I've a dozen files full of her letters, of which I dare say five per cent. are purely personal. I think I know all her private business. As recently as last year, when we met here in Delhi—well—never mind; but if she had an adopted daughter or an entanglement of any kind, I think I'd know it."

"Women are —— deep," McGregor answered. "Well— We've not much to go on. I'll entrust that stone to you; if you're still willing to try to get into the Abor country, I'll do everything I can to assist. You've a fair excuse for trying; and you're a bachelor. —— it, if I were, I'd go with you! Of course, you understand, if the State Department learns of it, you'll be rounded up and brought back.

"Do you realize the other difficulties? Sven Hedin is said to have made the last attempt to get through, from the north. He failed. In the last hundred years about a dozen Europeans have had a crack at it. Several died, and none got through—unless Terry and your sister did; and if so, they almost certainly died. When Younghusband went to Lhassa he considered sending one regiment back by way of the Abor Valley but countermanded the order when he realized that a force of fifty thousand men wouldn't stand a chance of getting through. From time to time the Government has sent six Gurkha spies into the country. None ever came back.

"It's almost a certainty that the River Tsangpo of Tibet flows through the valley and becomes the Brahmaputra lower down, but nobody has proved it; nor has any one explained why the Tsangpo contains more water than the Brahmaputra. Old Kinthup, the pundit on the Indian Survey Staff, traced the Tsangpo down as far as the waterfall where it plunges into the Abor Valley, and he threw a hundred marked logs into the river, which were watched for lower down; but none of the logs appeared at the lower end and not even Kinthup managed to get into the valley.

"The strangest part about it is, that the northern Abors come down frequently to the southern Abor country to trade, and they even intermarry with the southern Abors. But they never say a word about their valley. The Raja of Tilgaun—the uncle of the present man—caught two and put them to torture, but they died silent.

"And another strange thing is, that nobody knows how the northern Abors get into and out of their country. The river is a lot too swift for boats. The forest seems impenetrable. The cliffs are unclimbable. There was an attempt made last year to explore by airplane, but the attempt failed; there's a ninety-mile wind half the time, and some of the passes to the south are sixteen or seventeen thousand feet in the air to begin with. I'm told carbureters won't work, and they can't carry enough fuel.

"So if you're determined to make the attempt, old top, you must slip away secretly, and don't leave your courage behind! If it weren't that you've a right to visit Tilgaun I should say you'd have no chance; but you *might* make it if you're awfully discreet and start from the Tilgaun Mission. If it's ever found out that I encouraged you——"

"You've been reeling off *dis*couragement for fifteen minutes!"

"Yes, but if it's known I knew——"

"You needn't worry. What made you say you think this stone will help me to trace the Terrys?"

"Nothing definite except that it gives me an excuse for sending you to Tilgaun more or less officially. I employ you to investigate the mystery connected with that stone. As far as Tilgaun you're responsible to me. If you decide to go on from there, you'll have to throw me over—disobey orders.

"You understand, I order you to come straight back here from Tilgaun. If you disobey, you do it off your own bat without my official knowledge. And I'm afraid, old top, you'll have to pay your own expenses."

Ommony nodded. Times out of number he had run risks on his own responsibility, not caring whether or not Government should disown him afterward; that is part of the experience of every valuable public servant. Every advance the world has made has been attained by disobedience in some degree to some authority or other, but always at the personal risk of him who disobeys; and the graveyard of reputations is more full than the hall of fame. For one Nelson of the Nile, one Napier, there are a thousand disgraced and forgotten men.

"All right," said McGregor. "I'll give you a letter to 888. I think you'll find him helpful. Meanwhile see Chutter Chand—and dine with me tonight—not at the club—that 'ud start all sorts of rumors flying—say at Mrs. Cornock-Campbell's—her husband's away, but that don't matter. She's the only woman I ever dared tell secrets to. Leave it to me to contrive the invitation—how'll that do?"

"Mrs. Cornock-Campbell is a better man than you or me. Nine o'clock? I'll be there," said Ommony, noticing a certain slyness in McGregor's smile. He bridled at it.

"Still laughing about the Masters, Mac?"

"No, no. I'd forgotten them. Not that they exist—but never mind."

"What then?"

"I'll tell you after dinner—or rather, some one else will. I wonder whether you'll laugh too—or wince! Trot along and have your talk with Chutter Chand."

CHAPTER III

"WHAT *IS* FEAR?"

DECIPHERED FROM A PALM-LEAF MANUSCRIPT DISCOVERED IN A CAVE IN HINDUSTAN

Those who are acquainted with the day and night know that the Day of Brahma is a thousand revolutions of the Yugas, and that the Night extendeth for a thousand more. Now the Maha-yuga consisteth of four parts, of which the last, being called the Kali-Yuga, is the least, having but four hundred and thirty-two thousand years. The length of a Maha-yuga is four million and three hundred and twenty thousand years: that is, one thousandth part of a Day of Brahma.

And man was in the beginning, although not as he is now, nor as he will be . . . (Here the palm-leaf is broken and illegible.) . . . *There were races in the world, whose wise men knew all the seven principles, so that they understood matter in all its forms and were its masters. They were those to whom gold was as nothing, because they could make it, and for whom the elements brought forth . . .* (Here there is another break.) . . . *And there were giants on the earth in those days, and there were dwarfs, most evil. There was war, and they destroyed . . .* (Here the leaf is broken off, and all the rest is missing.)

CHUTTER CHAND'S shop in the Chandni Chowk is a place of chaos and a joy forever, if you like life musty and assorted. There are diamonds in the window, kodak cameras, theodolites, bric-à-brac, second-hand rifles, scientific magazines, and a living hamadryad cobra in a wire enclosure (into which rats and chickens are introduced at intervals). You enter through a door on either side of which hang curtains that were rather old when Clive was young; and you promptly see your reflection facing you in a mirror that came from Versailles when the French were bribing Indian potentates to keep the English out.

Every square foot of the walls within is covered with ancient curios. A glass counter-showcase runs the full length of the store and is stuffed with enough jewelry to furnish a pageant of Indian history; converted into cash it would finance a very fair-sized bank. Rising to the level of the counter at the rear is a long row of pigeonholed shelves crowded with ancient books and manuscripts that smell like recently unwound mummies.

Between shelf and counter lives—and reputedly sleeps by night—the most efficient jeweler's babu in India—a meek, alert, weariless man who is said to be able to estimate any one's bank balance by glancing at him as he enters through the front door. But Chutter Chand keeps himself out of sight, in a room at the rear of the store, whence he comes out only in emergency. On this particular occasion there were extra reasons for remaining in the background—reasons suggested by the presence of a special "constabeel" on duty outside the shop door, who eyed Ommony narrowly as he walked in.

Ommony went straight to the room at the rear and found Chutter Chand at his desk—a wizened, neat little man in a yellow silk turban and a brown alpaca suit of English cut. The suit and his brown skin were almost of the same shade; an amber pin in his yellow necktie corresponded with the color of his laced shoes; the gold of his heavy watch-chain matched the turban; his lemon silk handkerchief matched his socks; his dark-brown, kindly, intelligent eyes struck the keynote of the color harmony. Unlike so many Indians who adopt a modified European style of dress, he had an air of breeding, poise and distinction.

"There is always something interesting when *you* come, Ommonee!" he said, rising and shaking hands. "Wait while I remove the specimens from that chair. No, the snakes can not escape; they are all poisonous, but carefully imprisoned.

"There—be seated. You are full of news, or you would have asked me how I am. Thank you, I am very well. And you? Now let us get to business!"

Ommony grinned at the gibe at an Englishman's habit of stilted formula and blunt directness, but he had his own way of going about things. He preferred to soak in his surroundings and adjust his mind to the environment in silence before broaching business. He smiled, lighted a cigar, and stared about him at the snakes in cages and the odds and ends of rarities heaped everywhere in indescribable confusion.

There were an enormous brass Gautama Buddha resting on iron rollers, a silver Christian crucifix from a Goanese cathedral, and some enamel vases, that were new since his last visit; but the same old cobwebs were still in place in the corners of the teak beams, and the same cat came and rubbed herself against his shins—until she spied Diana in the outer shop and grew instantly blasphemous.

Still saying nothing, Ommony at last produced the lump of jade from his hip pocket.

"Yes," said Chutter Chand, "I have already seen it."

But he took off his gold-rimmed spectacles and wiped them as if he was eager to see it again.

"What do you know about it?" asked Ommony.

"Very little, *sahib*. To crystallize hypothesis into a mistake is all too easy. I prefer to distinguish between knowledge and conjecture."

"All right. Tell me what little you do know."

"It is jade undoubtedly, although I have never seen jade exactly like it—I, who have studied every known species of precious and semi-precious stone."

"Then why do you say it is jade?"

"Because I know that. I have analyzed it. It is chloromelanite, consisting of a silicate of aluminum and sodium, with peroxid of iron, peroxid of manganese and potash. It has been broken from a greater piece—perhaps from an enormous piece.

"The example I have previously seen that most resembled this was found in the Kara-Kash Valley of Turkestan; but that was not nearly so transparent. That piece you hold in your hand is more fusible than nephrite, which is the commoner form of jade; and it has a specific gravity of 3.3."

"What makes you believe it was broken from a larger piece?"

"I know by the arc of the curve of the one side, and by the shape of the fracture on the other, that it has been broken by external violence from a piece considerably larger than itself. I have worked out a law of vibration and fracture that is as interesting in its way as Einstein's law of relativity. Do you understand mathematics?"

"No. I'll take your word for it. What else do you know positively?"

"Positively is the only way to know!" the jeweler answered, screwing up his face until he looked almost like a Chinaman. "There was human blood on it—a smear on the fractured side, that looked as if a careless attempt had been made to wipe it off before the blood was quite dry. Also the print of a woman's thumb and forefinger, plainly visible under the microscope, with several other fingerprints that certainly were Tin Lal's.

"The stone had come in contact with some oily substance, probably butter, but there was too little of it to determine. Furthermore I know, Ommon*ee*, that you are afraid of the stone because to touch it makes you nervous, and to peer into it makes you see things you can not explain."

Ommony laughed. The stone did make him nervous.

"Did *you* see things?" he asked.

"That is how I know it makes *you* see them, Ommon*ee!* Compared to me you are a child in such respects. If I, who know more than you, nonetheless see things when I peer into that stone, it is logical to my mind that you also see things, although possibly not the same things. Knowing the inherent superstition of the human mind, I therefore know you are afraid—just as people were afraid when Galileo told them that the earth moves."

"Are *you* afraid of it?" asked Ommony, shifting his cigar and laying the stone on the desk.

"What *is* fear?" the jeweler answered. "Is it not recognition of something the senses can not understand and therefore can not master? I think the fact that we feel a sort of fear is proof that we stand on the threshold of new knowledge—or rather, of knowledge that is new to us as individuals."

"You mean then, if a policeman's afraid of a burglar, he's——"

"Certainly! He is in a position to learn something he never knew before. That doesn't mean that he *will* learn, but that he

may if he cares to. People used to be afraid of a total eclipse of the sun; some still are afraid of it. Imagine, if you can, what Julius Cæsar or Alexander the Great or Timour Ilang or Akbar would have thought of radio, or of a thirty-six-inch astronomical telescope, or of a kodak camera."

"All those things can be explained. This stone is a mystery."

"Ommonee, everything that we do not yet understand is a mystery. To a pig, it must be a mystery why a man flings turnips to him over the wall of his sty. To that dog of yours it must be a mystery why you took such care to train her. Look into the stone now, *sahib*, and tell me what you see."

"Not I," said Ommony. "I've done it twice. You look."

CHUTTER CHAND took up the stone in both hands and held it in the light from an overhead window. The thing glowed as if full of liquid-green fire, yet from ten feet away Ommony could see through it the lines on the palm of the jeweler's hand.

"Interesting! Interesting! Ommonee, the world is full of things we don't yet know!"

Chutter Chand's brows contracted, the right side more than the left, in the habit-fixed expression of a man whose business is to use a microscope. Two or three times he glanced away and blinked before looking again. Finally he put the stone back on the desk and wiped his spectacles from force of habit.

"Our senses," he said, "are much more reliable than the brain that interprets them. We probably all see and hear and smell alike, but no two brains interpret in the same way. Try to describe to me your sensations when you looked into the stone."

"Almost a brain-storm," said Ommony. "A rush of thoughts that seemed to have no connection with one another. Something like modern politics—or listening in on the radio when there's loads of interference, only more exasperating—more personal—more inside yourself, as it were."

Chutter Chand nodded confirmation.

"Can you describe the thoughts, Ommonee? Do they take the form of words?"

"No. Pictures. But pictures of a sort I've never seen, even in dreams. Rather horrible. They appear to mean something, but the mind can't grasp them. They're broken off suddenly—begin nowhere and end nowhere."

Chutter Chand nodded again. "Our experiences tally. You will notice that the *stone* is broken off; it also begins nowhere and ends nowhere. I have measured it carefully; from calculation of the curvature it is possible to surmise that it may have been broken off from an ellipsoid having a major axis of seventeen feet. That would be an immense mass of jade weighing very many tons; and if the whole were as perfect as this fragment, it would be a marvel such as we in our day have not seen.

"I suspect it to have qualities more remarkable than those of radium, and I *think*—although, mind you, this is now conjecture—that if we could find the original ellipsoid from which this piece was broken we would possess the open-sesame to—well—to laws and facts of nature, the mere contemplation of which would *fill* all the lunatic asylums! I have never been so thrilled by anything in all my life."

But Ommony was not thrilled. He had seen men go mad from exploring without landmarks into the unknown. He laughed cynically.

" 'We fools of nature,' he quoted, 'so horridly to shake our disposition with thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls!' I'd rather wipe out the asylums."

"Or live in one, *sahib*, and leave the lunatics outside! Shakespeare knew nothing of the atomic construction of the universe. We have advanced since his day—in some respects. You, who are physically strong, would not flinch from climbing a mountain, whereas I, who am physically weak, would decline the attempt, knowing that the higher I should try to climb, the heavier would be the pull of gravity against me.

"In the realm of thought our situation is reversed. I am willing to climb, for my brain is strong and used to it. You dread the downward pull of ignorance. Has it occurred to you to wonder *how* this stone acquired such remarkable qualities? No! You merely wonder *at* it. But observe:

"You have seen a pudding stirred? The stupidest cook in the world can pour ingredients into a basin and stir them with water until they become something compounded, that does not in the least resemble any one of the component parts. Is that not so?

"The same fool bakes what he has mixed. A chemical process takes place, and behold! The idiot has wrought a miracle.

"Again, there is almost no resemblance to what the mixture was before. It even tastes and smells quite differently. It looks different. Its specific gravity is changed. Its properties are altered. It is now digestible. It decomposes at a different speed. It has lost some of the original qualities that went into the mixture, and has taken on others that apparently were not there before the chemical process began.

"You can see the same thing in a foundry, where they mix zinc with copper and produce brass, and the brass has qualities that neither zinc nor copper appears to contain. A deaf-and-dumb man, knowing neither writing nor arithmetic, could produce brass from zinc and copper. A savage, who never saw an abstraction, can produce wine from grapes. Good. Now listen, *sahib:*

"Let us dive beneath the surface of these experiments. The capacity to become brass under certain conditions was inherent to begin with in the zinc and in the copper, was it not? But how so? It was inherent in the atoms, of which the zinc and the copper are composed; and, behind those again, in the electrons, of which the atoms are composed. Let us then consider the electrons.

"Suppose that we knew how to pour electrons into a receptacle and make, so to speak, a pudding of them! Could we not work what the world would think are miracles?

"I have made diamonds in my workshop. I believe I can make gold. What could I not do if I knew how to manage electrons in the raw—electrons, in every one of which is the capacity to become absolutely *anything!*

"It has possibly not occurred to you, Ommon*ee*, but the more I pursue my studies the more I am convinced, that there was once a race of people in the world, or possibly a school of scientists drawn from many then existent races, who knew how to manage electrons. I think they lived simultaneously with the cavemen. We find the bones of cavemen because those were ignorant people, such as the Bushmen of today, who buried their dead. We do not find the bones of the scientists of that period, because they were enlightened and disposed of corpses in the fire.

"The *art* of the cavemen is evidence that there *was* art of a very high order, which some one presumably taught. They painted pictures in caves into which no sunlight penetrated; therefore there must have been artificial light of a sort superior to torches or tallow candles, because otherwise the color work would have been impossible. That is proof that there was science in those days of which the cavemen could avail themselves just as today a lunatic may use electric light.

"And the fact that we find no traces at present of what we can recognize as a very high order of civilization then existent is no proof that there *was* none; it may have been totally different from anything with which we are familiar. Furthermore, the world had been only extremely superficially explored.

"Be patient, Ommon*ee*. I am coming to my point. I have studied that piece of jade. Three days and nights I studied it without sleep. To me its peculiar properties appear to confirm observations—micro-photographic observations that I have made and recorded during a period of ten years.

"In its essence, what is photography? It is the practise, by means of chemicals, of rendering visible to the human eye impressions of objects produced by light on a prepared surface. It is necessary to prepare the surface, which we call a dry plate or a film, because we do not yet know how else to render the light-made impression visible to the human eye. But it is there, whether we make it visible or not.

"And what I have discovered is this: That every particle of matter has a photographic quality, which varies only in degree. You stand against a rock—and not necessarily in sunlight, although sunlight helps; your impression is indelibly photographed on that rock, as I can prove, if you have time to witness some experiments. It is photographed on anything against which you stand. Other images may be superimposed on yours, but yours remains.

"In rare instances, in certain atmospheric conditions, these impressions become visible without any other chemical process, although it seems to require a certain nervous state of alertness before the human eye can perceive them.

"You remember the case of the Brahman who hanged himself in a cellar not far

from this shop of mine? His body hung there for a day before they found it. For weeks afterward what was supposed to be his ghost was seen—by scores of reputable witnesses—hanging from the beam.

"That was several years ago. There was a great stir made about it at the time, and there were letters to the newspapers stating instances of similar occurrences. There was an investigation by experts from a research society, who denounced the whole story as an imposture.

"However, I was one of those who saw the ghost, and I made notes and some experiments. Among other facts I ascertained that it was only at a certain hour of the day, at a certain temperature and at a certain state of humidity that the alleged ghost was seen. I ascertained that dogs could see the ghost, and that it could be seen only from a certain angle. Finally I photographed it!

"That satisfied me. I am sure that the alleged ghost was nothing but a photograph made on the wall, and that it was rendered visible by certain chemical conditions, not all of which I have been able to ascertain.

"Now then: If that is possible in one instance, it is possible in every instance. There is no such thing as an exception in Nature; we have discovered a law. So take this piece of jade: We see things when we look into it. I deduce that they are photographic. And because no other piece of stone that I know of has the same quality of receiving impressions that are instantaneously visible, it seems probable to me that it has been intelligently treated by some one who knew how to do that."

"It might be a natural chemical process," said Ommony.

"I think not. Have you noticed that the strange, moving images visible *within* the stone are not the reflections of *objects?* The stone is not a mirror in the ordinary sense. It does not seem to reflect at all the objects that surround it. I have never succeeded in seeing my face in it, for instance, although I have tried repeatedly, in all sorts of light and from every angle. It appears to me to reflect *thought!*"

OMMONY made the peculiar noise between tongue and teeth that suggests polite but unconditioned incredulity. Chutter Chand, deep in his theme, ignored the interruption.

"I believe it reflects *character!* I believe that every thought that every man thinks, from the day he is born until the day he dies, leaves an invisible impress on his mind as well as a visible impress on his body.

"You know how changing character affects the lines on the palm of a man's hand, on the soles of his feet, at the corners of his eyes, at his mouth, and so on? Well: Something of the same sort goes on in his mind, which is invisible and what we call intangible, but is nevertheless made up of electrons in motion. And those impressions are permanent.

"I believe that somebody who knew how to manipulate electrons has treated this stone in such a way that it reflects the whole of a man's thought since he was born—just as a stone wall, if it could be treated properly, could be shown to retain the photograph of every object that had passed before it since the wall was built.

"I believe this was done very anciently, and for this reason: That if any one possessed of such intelligence and skill were alive in the world today, his intelligence would burn itself into our consciousness, so that we could not help but know of him.

"I am of opinion that the process to which the jade was subjected rendered it at the same time transparent; because it is not in the nature of jade to be quite transparent normally. And in my mind there is connected with all this the knowledge, which is common property, that the Chinese—a *very* ancient race—regard jade as a sacred stone.

"Why? Is it not possible that jade peculiarly lends itself to this treatment, and that, though the science is forgotten, the dim memory of the peculiar property of the stone persists?"

"You've a fine imagination!" said Ommony.

"And what *is* imagination, Ommon*ee*, if not a bridge between the known and unknown? Between conventional so-called knowledge and the unexplored realm of truth? Have *you* no imagination?

"If you ask me what I *know*, I will confine myself to the weight of the stone, its color, composition and so on; but if you ask what hypotheses a study of this stone stirs in me, I give imagination rein, allowing it to link my meager knowledge with the inexhaustible realm of possibilities—as a musician, for instance, captures and brings a melody to

earth. The melody was possible, but it took imagination to discover it. Electricity was possible a thousand years ago; but until imagination hinted at the possibility, who had the use of it?"

Ommony returned the stone to his pocket. He was interested, and he liked Chutter Chand, but it occurred to him that he was wasting time.

"You're right, of course," he said, "that we have to imagine a thing before we can begin to understand it or produce or make it."

"Surely. You imagined your forest, Ommon*ee*, before you planted it. But between imagination and production there is labor. I think you will labor dreadfully!

"You see, what the West can't understand it scoffs at; whereas, what the East can't understand it calls sacred and guards against all comers! I think you will have to penetrate a secret that has been guarded for thousands of years.

"They say, you know, that there are 'Masters' who guard these secrets and let them out a little at a time! May the gods whom you happen to vote for be grateful for your loyalty and help you! I would like to go on the adventure with you—but I am a family man. I am afraid. I am not strong. That stone has thrilled me, Ommon*ee!*"

"If you like, I'll leave it with you for some more experiments," said Ommony.

"*Sahib*—my friend—I wouldn't keep it for a raja's ransom! It was traced to this place—how, I don't know. You noticed the policeman at the door? He is put there to keep out murderers!

"There has been a ruffian here—a Hillman—a cutthroat who said he came from Spiti—a great savage with a saw-edge tulwar! Ugh! He demanded the stone. He demanded to know where it was. If it had not been that I had a shop full of customers, and that I promised to try to get the stone back from the man who now had it, he would have cut me in halves! I am afraid all the time that he will return, or that some of his friends will come.

"Oh, I wish I had your lack of an imagination, Ommon*ee!* I could feel his saw-edged tulwar plunging into me! Listen!" Chutter Chand began to tremble visibly. "Who is that?"

Ommony glanced into the shop. There were two men, evidently unarmed or the "constabeel" would never have admitted them, standing talking to the clerk across the showcase-counter. One was apparently a very old man and the other very young.

Both were dressed in the Tibetan costume; but the older man was speaking English, which was of itself sufficiently remarkable, and he appeared to be slightly amused because the clerk insisted that Chutter Chand was "absent on a journey." Neither man paid the slightest attention to the jewelry in the showcase; they were evidently bent on seeing Chutter Chand, and nothing else.

"Admit 'em!" whispered Ommony. "I'll hide. No, never mind the dog; she'll follow them in and sniff them over. If they ask about the dog, say she belongs to one of your customers who left her in your charge for an hour or two. What's behind that brass Buddha?"

"Nothing, *sahib*. It is hollow. There is no back."

"That'll do then. Help me pull it out from the wall—quick!—quiet!"

They made rather a lot of noise, and Diana came in to investigate. Ommony gave her orders *sotto voce*, and she returned into the shop to watch the two curious visitors.

"Now don't let yourself get frightened out of your wits, Chutter Chand. Encourage 'em to talk. Ask any idiotic question that occurs to you. When they're ready to go, let 'em. And then whatever you do, don't say a word to the policeman."

Ommony stepped behind the image of the Buddha. Chutter Chand, leaning all his weight against it, shoved it back nearly into place, but left sufficient space between it and the wall for Ommony to see into an old, cracked mirror that reflected almost everything in the room.

Then, taking a visible hold on his emotions, Chutter Chand strode to the door and stood there for a moment looking—listening—trying to breathe normally. He forced a smile at last.

"Oh, let them in—I will talk to them," he said to the clerk in English with an air of almost perfect, patronizing nonchalance.

Only a very close observer might have known he was afraid—that fear perhaps in him was more than "recognition of something that the senses do not understand."

CHAPTER IV

"I AM ONE WHO STRIVES TO TREAD THE MIDDLE WAY."

We should ascend out of perversity, even as we ascend a mountain that we do not know, with the aid of guides who do know. None who sets forth on an unknown voyage stipulates that the pilot must agree with him as to the course, since manifestly that would be absurd; the pilot is presumed to know; the piloted does not know. None who climbs a mountain bargains that the guide shall keep to this or that direction; it is the business of the guide to lead.

And yet men hire guides for the Spiritual Journey, of which they know less than they know of land and sea, and stipulate that the guide shall lead them thus and so, according to their own imaginings; and instead of obeying him, they desert and denounce him should he lead them otherwise. I find this of the essence of perversity.—From the Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

THE two Tibetans entered, the older man leading, and squatted on a mat which the younger man spread on the floor. Their manner suggested that they had accepted an invitation instead of having gained admission by persistence; but Ommony, watching every movement in the mirror, noticed that the older man laid his hand on the seat of the chair Ommony himself had just occupied—which, being old, he *might* have done to help himself down on the mat, but which, being active, he almost certainly did for another reason.

Chutter Chand sat at his desk magisterially, wiping at the gold-rimmed spectacles again, waiting for the visitors to speak first. But they were not to be tempted into that indiscretion. They sat still and were bland, while Diana came and deliberately sniffed them over. The hound seemed interested; she lay down where she could watch them both, her jowl on her paws, one ear up, and her tail moving slightly from side to side, clearing a fan-shaped pattern in the dust.

The old man was a miracle of wrinkles. He resembled one of those Chinese statuettes in ivory, yellowed by time, that suggest that life is much too comical a business to be taken seriously—much too serious a business to be cumbered with pride and possessions. He was a living paradox in a long, snuff-colored robe, the ends of which he arranged over his lap, leaving the hairy, strong legs of a mountaineer uncovered.

He helped himself to an enormous quantity of snuff from an old Chinese silver box, which he presently stowed away in a fold of his garment. The pungent stuff appeared to have no effect on him, although Diana, catching a whiff of it, sneezed violently and Chutter Chand followed suit.

The young man was another ivory enigma, absolutely smooth in contrast to the elder's wrinkles, and much paler. He, too, wore snuff-colored clothes. His head was wrapped in a turban of gorgeously embroidered brown silk, in contrast to the other's monkish simplicity, and the cloth of which his cloak was made seemed to be of lighter and better material than the older man's.

He was remarkably good-looking—straight-featured and calm—placid, not apparently from self-contentment but from assurance that life holds a definite purpose and that he was being led along the narrow road. There was an air of good temper and wisdom about him, no apparent pride nor any mean humility. His eyes were blue-gray, his hands small, strong and artistic. His feet, too, were small but evidently used to walking.

He was in every dimension smaller than the older man, unless mind is a dimension; they appeared to be equals in mental aroma, and they exuded that in the mysterious way of a painting by Goya y Lucientes. The older man also exuded a smell of rather rancid butter; but that is a Tibetan characteristic, much less remarkable than that the young man did not smell of it.

"Well, what do you want?" Chutter Chand asked at last in English.

It was a ridiculous language, on the face of it, to use to a Tibetan; but the older man had been using English in the outer shop, and Chutter Chand knew no Prakrit dialects.

The answer, in English devoid of any noticeable accent, was given by the older man in a voice as full of humor as his wrinkled face.

"The piece of jade," he said, unblinking, ending on a rising note that suggested there was nothing to explain, nothing to argue about, nothing to do but be reasonable.

He snapped his fingers, and Diana, normally a most suspicious dog, came close to him. He ran his fingers through her hair, and she laid her huge jowl on his knee. Chutter Chand crossed and uncrossed his legs restlessly.

"I haven't it," said the jeweler. "Besides—er—ah—you would have to tell me your—that is—er—you would have to establish

first by what right you make such a demand. You understand me?"

"I have made no demand," the old man answered, smiling. His voice was sweetly reasonable; his bright old eyes twinkled. "You have asked what I want. I have told you."

"Tell me who you are," said Chutter Chand.

"My son, I am a lama. I am one who strives to tread the Middle Way."

"Where from?"

"From desire into peace!"

"I mean, what place do you come from?"

"From the same place that the piece of jade came from, my son. From the place to which he who desires merit will return it."

"Is the jade yours?" asked Chutter Chand.

"Is the air mine? Are the stars mine?" the lama answered, smiling as if the idea of possessing anything were a joke made by an inquiring child.

"Well; what right have you to the piece of jade?" Chutter Chand snapped back at him.

He let the irritation through without intending it and smiled directly afterward in an attempt to undo the impression. But if the lama had noticed the acerbity, he made no sign.

"None, any more than you have," came the answer in the same mild voice. "None has any right to it. I have a duty to return it to whence it came—and a duty to you, to preserve you from impertinence, if that may be.

"It is not good, Chutter Chand, to meddle with knowledge before the time appointed for its understanding. He who would tread the Middle Way is patient, keeping both feet on the ground and his head no higher than humility will let it reach. Be wise, O man of intellectual desires! Destruction is in rashness."

His fingers touched Diana's collar and twisted it around until the small brass plate, on which Ommony's name was engraved, came uppermost; but his eyes continued to look straight at Chutter Chand. It was the younger man, squatting in silence beside him, his head and body motionless, whose bright eyes took in every detail of the room, not omitting to notice the movement of the lama's hand. Except for the eyes, his face continued perfectly expressionless.

"Well—er—ah—before I answer definitely, I would like you to tell me about the jade," said Chutter Chand. "You will find me reasonable. I am not a sacrilegious person. Er—ah—can you not establish to my satisfaction that—ah—I would be doing rightly to—er—let us say, to entrust the piece of jade to you?"

"I think you know that already," said the lama in a voice of mild reproof, as if he were speaking to a child of whom he was rather fond. "What does your heart say, my son? It is the heart that answers wisely, if desire has been subdued. I have come a very long way——"

"*Desiring* the piece of jade!" sneered Chutter Chand—regretting the sneer instantly—driving fingernails into the palm of his hand with impatience of himself.

"True," said the lama. "Desire is not easy to destroy. Yet I do not desire it for myself. And for you I desire peace—and merit. May the Lord live in your heart and guide you in the Middle Way."

THE jeweler moved restlessly. The atmosphere was getting on his nerves. There was an indefinable feeling of being in the presence of superiority, which is irritating to a man of intellect.

"You mean, there will be no peace for me unless I give up the piece of jade to you?" he asked tartly.

"I think that is so," said the lama gently.

"Well; it is not in my possession."

"But you know who has it," said the lama, looking straight at him.

The jeweler did not answer, and the lama's eyes beamed with intelligence. The young Tibetan moved at last and whispered in his ear. The lama nodded almost imperceptibly, turning the dog's collar around again with leisurely fingers, whose touch seemed magically satisfying to Diana. He looked then once sharply at the big brass Buddha, let his eyes rest again on the jeweler's, and went on speaking.

"What a man can not do is no weight against him. It may be the hand of Destiny, preventing him from a mistake. The deeds a man does are the fruits that are weighed in the balance and from which the seeds of future lives are saved. Peace *be* with you. Peace refresh you. Peace give you peace that you may multiply it, Chutter Chand."

The lama arose, and the younger man rolled up the mat. Diana jumped to her

feet. Chutter Chand made an attempt to get out of his chair with dignity; but the lama seemed to have monopolized in his own person all the dignity there was in sight, which was embarrassing.

"Er — ah — I appreciate the blessing. Er—ah—are you going? But you haven't told me what I asked about the jade—ah—would you care to come again? Perhaps——"

The lama smiled, stroked Diana's head, bowed so that his long skirts swung like a bronze bell and one almost expected a resonant boom to follow, and led the way out, followed by the younger man, who smiled once so suddenly and brightly that Chutter Chand's nervous irritation vanished.

But it returned the moment they had gone. He jumped at the noise as Ommony pushed the brass Buddha away from the wall.

"—— them both!" he exploded. "*Sahib*, I hate to be mystified! I detest to be patronized! I feel I made myself contemptible! I could not think! I could not make my brain invent the questions that I should have asked!"

"You did pretty well," said Ommony. "See 'em home, girl!"

Diana's tail went between her legs, but she did not hesitate; she trotted out of the shop—stood still a moment on the sidewalk —sniffed—vanished.

"*Sahib*, they will send some one to loot this shop of mine! Ommon*ee*——"

"Tut-tut! Those two didn't overlook one detail. The young one read my name on Diana's collar and whispered it to the lama. The lama knew I was behind the Buddha. He suspected something when he felt the chair-seat and found it warm."

"Worse and worse!" said Chutter Chand despondently. "To incur the enmity of such people is more dangerous than to tamper with my snakes!"

There was a strange paradox. Chutter Chand, his brain full of Western and Eastern science, his suit from London and his turban from Lahore, yearned to the West for protection from Eastern mystery. Ommony, all English, steeped in the Orient for twenty years, had thrown his thought eastward and was reckoning like lightning in terms of Indian thought.

"They didn't suspect my presence until *after* they came in here. —Shut up, Chutter Chand! Behave yourself! Listen to me! —They'll have brought a man to watch outside the shop and follow any one who follows *them*. They can't have cautioned him about the dog, because they didn't know about the dog, and they would never suspect a dog of having enough intelligence. Their man will be still out there watching the shop door. Wait here!"

He ran into the outer shop, hid behind one of the curtains at the door and stood facing the mirror that gave him a view of the "constabeel's" back and of fifty yards of crowded street, including the sidewalk opposite. The "constabeel" appeared to be intently watching somebody, and in less than a minute Ommony picked out the individual—a tall, good-looking, boy-faced Hillman in a costume that suggested Bhutan or Sikkim—shapeless trousers and a long robe over them, with a sort of jacket on top of that.

He was trying to look innocent, which is the surest way of attracting attention; and he was so intent on watching the shop door that passers-by continually bunted into him—whereat he seemed to find it hard to keep his temper. Ommony watched him for a minute or two, and then spoke to the policeman through the curtain.

The policeman nearly gave the game away by turning his head to listen, but spat and scratched himself to cover the mistake. Ommony repeated his instructions carefully and the policeman strolled down-street. Ommony emerged and walked slowly in the opposite direction; over the way, the Hillman began at once to follow him, suiting his pace to Ommony's. Ommony crossed the street; so did the policeman. Ommony turned and walked toward the Hillman; the policeman followed suit, approaching from the rear.

Ommony came to a halt exactly in front of the Hillman, feeling dwarfed by the man's big-boned stature and aware of the handle of a long knife just emerging through a slit in a robe that reeked strongly of *ghee*. The policeman, nervously fingering his club, halted to the Hillman's rear, six feet away. Passers-by began to detect food for curiosity; there were searching glances and a palpable hesitation; there would have been a crowd in sixty seconds.

"Come with me," said Ommony in Prakrit.

"Why?" asked the Hillman, staring at him, wide-eyed with surprize at being spoken to in his own tongue.

"Because if you do, no harm will come to you; and if you don't you'll go to jail."

The Hillman's hand crept instinctively toward his knife, and the policeman made ready to swing for the back of his head with a hardwood club.

"Are you a fool, that you don't know a friend when you meet one?" asked Ommony.

"I have met enemies and women and one or two whom I called master and many whom I have mastered—but never a friend yet!" the Hillman answered. "Who art thou?"

"Come with me and learn," said Ommony.

The Hillman hesitated, but the crowd was distinctly beginning to gather now—a little way off, not sure yet, but alert for the first hint of happenings. It grew clear to the Hillman that escape might not be easy.

"I fear no man!" he said, turning his head and recognizing the policeman, who was hardly two-thirds his size.

He spat eloquently for the policeman's benefit, missing him neatly by about the thickness of a knife-blade.

"Whither?" he asked then, looking straight into Ommony's eyes.

OMMONY led the way across the street to Chutter Chand's shop, where he halted to let the Hillman go in first.

"Nay, lead on!" said the Hillman, stepping aside.

"No. For you have a weapon and I have none. Moreover, I have said I am a friend, and I prefer to be a living friend rather than a dead one! Go in first," laughed Ommony.

The Hillman laughed back. There was none of the solemnity about him that enshrouds the men from the northwest frontier. Eastward along the Himalayas, where the smell of sweat leaves off and the smell of rancid butter begins, laughter becomes part of life and not an insult or indignity. He swaggered into the shop with no more argument, and at a nod from Ommony walked straight through to the office at the rear.

"Krishna!" exclaimed Chutter Chand.

He jumped for a corner, seized a two-handed Samurai sword, drew it from the scabbard and laid it on the desk.

"I will let my snakes loose!" he almost screamed in Hindustani.

But the Hillman sat down on the floor, on the exact spot where the lama had been, and Ommony sat down in the chair facing him, motioning to Chutter Chand to resume the other chair and be sensible.

"But this is the ruffian who came and threatened me!" said Chutter Chand. "That knife of his is saw-edged! Take it from him, Ommon*ee!*"

The Hillman appeared to know no English, but seemed to have made up his mind about Ommony. Friendship he might not believe in, but he could recognize good faith. He watched Ommony's face as a child follows a motion picture.

"What is your name?" asked Ommony.

"Dawa Tsering."

"Where are you from?"

"Spiti."

"Oh, my ——!" exclaimed Chutter Chand. "Does he say he is from Spiti? They are all fiends who come from that country! It is there they practise polyandry, and their dead are eaten by dogs! He is unclean!"

"Who is that lama who was in here just now?" Ommony went on.

"Tsiang Samdup."

Chutter Chand did not catch that name or, if he did, the name meant nothing to him. Ommony, on the other hand, had to use all his power of will to suppress excitement, and even so he could not quite control himself. The Hillman noticed the change of expression.

"Aye," he said, "Tsiang Samdup is a great one."

"Who is the other who was with him—the young one?"

"His *chela*." *

"What name?"

"Samding. Some call him San-fun-ho."

"And what have you to do with them?"

Instead of answering, the Hillman retorted with a question.

"What is *thy* name? Say it again. Ommon*ee*. That sounds like a name with magic in it. *Om mani padne hum!* Who gave thee that name? Eh? Thy father had it? Who was he? How is it a man should take his father's name? Is the spirit of the father not offended? Thou art a strange one, Ommon*ee*."

"Why did you come in here some days ago and threaten Chutter Chand?" asked Ommony.

*Disciple.

"Why not!" said the Hillman. "Did I not ride under a te-rain, like a leech on the belly of a horse, more hours and miles than an eagle knows of? Did I not eat dust—and nothing else? Did I not follow that rat Tin Lal to this place? Did I not—pretending to admire the cobra in the window—*see* him with my own eyes *sell* the green stone to this little lover of snakes?

"I said too much. I did too little. I should have slain them both! But I feared, because I am a stranger in the city and there were many people.

"Moreover, I had already slain a man—a Hindu, who drove an iron car and broke the wheel of the cart I rode in. I slew him with a spoke from the broken wheel. And it seemed to me that if I should slay another man too soon thereafter, it might fare ill with me, since the gods grow weary of protecting a man too often.

"So I returned four days later, thinking the gods might have forgotten the previous affair. They owe me many favors. I have treated the gods handsomely.

"And when this little rat of a jeweler swore he no longer had the stone, I threatened him. I would have slain him if I thought he really had it, but it seemed to me he told the truth. And *he* promised to get the stone back from some one to whom he had entrusted it. And I, vowing I would sever him in halves unless he should keep faith, went and told Tsiang Samdup, who came here accordingly, I following to protect the old man. I suppose Tsiang Samdup now has the stone. Is that so?"

"He shall have it," said Ommony.

"I think thou art *not* a liar," said the Hillman, looking straight into Ommony's eyes. "Now, I *am* a liar. If I should have said that to thee, it would only be a fool who would believe me, and a fool is nothing to be patient with. But I am not a fool, and I believe thee—or I would plunge this knife into thy liver! Who taught thee to speak my language?"

Ommony saw fit not to answer that.

"Is it not enough for thee that I can speak it? Where can I find the holy Lama Tsiang Samdup?"

"Oh, as to that, he is not particularly holy—although others seem to think he is; but I am from Spiti, where we study devils and consider nonsense all this talk about purity and self-abnegation and Nirvana. Who wants to go to Nirvana? What a miserable place—just nothing!

"Besides, I know better. I have studied these things. It is very simple. Knife a man in the bowels, as the Gurkhas do with a kookerie, or as I do as a rule, and he goes to hell for a while; he has a chance; by and by he comes to life again. Cut his throat, however, and he dwells between earth and heaven; he will come and haunt thee, having nothing else to do, and that is very bad. Hit him here—"he laid a finger on his forehead, just above the nose—"and he is *dead.* That should only be done to men who are very bad indeed. And that is the whole secret of religion."

Ommony looked serious.

"I would like to talk to you about religion——"

"Oh, I could teach you the whole of it in a very short time."

"—but meanwhile I would like to know where the holy Lama Tsiang Samdup is staying."

"I don't know," said the Hillman.

"You are lying," said Ommony. "Is that not so?"

"Of course. Did you think I would tell you the truth?"

"No. That hardly occurred to me. Well——"

Diana came in, waving her long tail slowly. She flopped on the floor beside Ommony, and there was silence for about a minute while the Hillman stared at her and she returned the gaze with interest. Finally her lip curled, showing a prodigious yellow fang, and Ommony laid a hand on her head to silence a thunderous growl.

"That is an incarnation of a devil!" said the Hillman. "In my country we keep dogs as big as her to eat corpses. Devils, as a rule, are *very* evil, but I think that one—" he nodded at the dog—"is worse than others. Well—I go. Say to that fool at the door that he should not offend me with his little stick, for it may be he desires to live. I am glad I met thee, Ommon*ee*."

He waved his hand, smiled like a Chinese cherub and walked out, ignoring Chutter Chand as utterly as if he had never seen him; and at the door he smiled at the policeman as the sun smiles on manure. The policeman did his best, but could not keep himself from grinning back.

CHAPTER V

THE HOUSE AT THE END OF THE PASSAGE

He who puts his hand into the fire knows what he may expect. Nor may the fire be blamed.

He who intrudes on a neighbor may receive what he does not *expect. Nor may the neighbor be blamed.*

The fire will not be harmed; but the neighbor may be. And every deed, of every kind, bears corresponding consequences to the doer. You may spend a thousand lives repaying wrong done to a neighbor.

Therefore, of the two indiscretions prefer thrusting your own hand into the fire.

But there is a Middle Way, which avoids all trespassing.—From the Maxims of Tsiang Samdup.

CHUTTER CHAND'S usefulness had vanished. His brain did not function now that fear had the upper hand. He could think of nothing but the Hillman's knife and of the possibility that there might be more Hillmen, who would knock down the policeman at the door, storm the shop, loot everything and slay.

"I tell you, Ommonee, you have only lived in India twenty years. You do not know these people!"

He began hurriedly putting in order a mechanical system of wire and weights by which the snakes might be released in an emergency, and complaining bitterly against a Government whose laws forbade the keeping of firearms by responsible, reputable, law-abiding citizens.

Ommony laughed and walked out with both fists in his pockets, preceded by Diana, who was a lady of one idea at a time, and that one next door to an obsession. She had "seen 'em home." *Ergo*, she should now show Ommony where "home" was, and he was quite satisfied to follow her. To have tracked Dawa Tsering the Hillman would simply have been waste of time, for the man would soon see he was followed and would almost certainly play a great game of follow-my-leader all over town. Moreover, the very name of the lama—Tsiang Samdup—had excited him in the sort of way that news of an ancient tomb excites an archeologist.

It was well on toward evening—that quarter of an hour when the streets are most densely thronged and every one seems in a hurry to get home or to get something done before starting home. All cities are alike in that respect; there is a space before the slack of suppertime and temple services.

The hound threaded her way patiently through the crowd and turned down a narrow thoroughfare past fruit and vegetable shops, where chafferers were arguing to cheapen produce at the day's end and all the races of the Punjab seemed to be mixed in tired confusion—faded and ill-tempered because the evening breeze had not yet come and walls were giving off the oven-heat they had stored up during the day.

There was no especial need to take precautions. Sufficient time had elapsed since the lama and his young companion left the Chandni Chowk to convince them they had not been followed; and in any case, the most ill-advised thing Ommony could have done would be to act secretively. A man attracts the least attention if he goes straight forward.

Those who noticed him at all admired or feared the dog, and *she* paid no attention even to the mongrels of her own genus, who snarled from a respectful distance or fled down alleyways. A few small boys followed and asked questions about the dog, but even they desisted after a while. An occasional beggar demanded alms and received the tribute that a reasonably prosperous man should pay to those who bear more than their share of evil—the beggars giving no thanks, but a brief acknowledgment, since the giver benefits himself, as they all know East of Europe.

Diana turned at last down suffocating passages that led one into another between blind walls, where death might overtake a man without causing a stir a dozen yards away. But if you think of death in India, you die. To live, you must think of living, and be interested.

One of the passages opened at last into a square courtyard, whose walls were built of blocks that had been quarried from the ancient city; for cities surrender themselves to posterity, even as human mothers do. The paving was of the same material, still bearing traces of the ancient carving but rearranged at random so that the pattern was all gone.

At the end of the courtyard was a stone building of three stories, whose upper windows overlooked it. Those below had been bricked up. There was an open door in the wall, that led into a long, arched passage in which other doors to right and left were visible. Diana ran straight to the open door and stopped.

Ommony began to feel now like a sailor on a lee shore, with rocks ahead and pirates

to windward. It was growing dark, for one thing. At any moment the Hillman with the saw-edged knife and the haphazard notions about death might approach down the passage from the rear. Forward lay unknown territory, and a buttery smell that more than hinted at the presence of northerners, whose notions of hospitality might be less than none at all.

He could be seen through the window-shutters, but could not see in through them. And he had in his pocket the lump of jade, which had lured men all the way from beyond Tilgaun into the hot plains that they hate. He wished he had left the jade somewhere.

It was the sound of a footstep some distance behind, that might be the Hillman's, which decided him. He strode forward and entered the door, his footsteps echoing under the arch. Diana followed, growling; she seemed to have a feeling they were being watched.

The passage presently turned to right and left in darkness, and Ommony, as he paused to consider, became acutely conscious that his trespass was not only rash, but impudent. He had no vestige of right to intrude himself into the quarters of strangers, nor had he the excuse that he did not know what he was doing. A tourist might commit such an impertinence and be forgiven on the ground of ignorance, but if Ommony should be knifed for ill-manners he would not be entitled to the slightest sympathy. He decided at once to retrace his steps; and as he turned to face the dim light in the doorway a voice spoke to him in English.

He could not tell where the voice came from, but Diana barked savagely at a small iron grating in a door to one side of the passage, filling the arch with echoes. It took him several seconds to get the dog quiet again.

"Go away from here! Go away quickly!"

It sounded like a boy's voice—young—educated. It was not pitched high; there was no note of excitement—hardly any emphasis. Diana barked again furiously, and there was no time for hesitation; either he was in danger or he was not; the hound said, "Yes;" the boy's voice implied it; curiosity said, "Stay!" Common sense said, "Make for the open quickly!" Intuition said, "Jump!" and intuition is a despot whom it is not wise to disobey.

He reached the courtyard neck and neck with Diana, who nearly knocked him over as she faced about savagely with every hair bristling, fangs bared, eyes aglare. He seized her by collar and tail and threw his weight backward to stop her from springing at the throat of a man in dingy gray, who paused in midstride, one hand behind him, in the doorway. There was another man behind him, dimly outlined in the gloom.

Their faces, high-cheekboned and fanatical—almost Chinese—were fiercely confident, and why they paused was not self-evident; for the man who held a hand behind his back was armed, and with something heavy, as the angle of his shoulder proved.

Diana saved that second. Her animal instinct was quicker than Ommony's eye, that read anticipation in the faces in front of him. She nearly knocked Ommony over again as she reversed the direction of effort, broke the collar hold and sprang past him, burying her fangs in something—Ommony knew that gurgling, smothered growl.

She had knocked him sidewise, and he spun to regain his balance while a ten-pound tulwar split the whistling air where his back had been. He was just in time to seize the wrist that swung the weapon—seize it with both hands and wrench it forward in the direction of effort. The saw-edged tulwar clattered on the paving blocks; but the enemy did not fall, for Diana had him by the throat and was wrenching in the opposite direction. It was Dawa Tsering!

The Hillman's hands groped for the hound's forelegs; to wrench those apart was his only chance, unless Ommony could save him. A sprung-trap was more likely to let go than Diana with a throat hold.

Ommony took the only chance in sight; he yelled, "Guard!" to Diana and crashed his fist into the Hillman's jaw, knocking him flat on his back as Diana let up for a fraction of a second to see what the new danger might be. He seized her by the tail, then dragged her off before she could rush in to worry her fallen foe.

Her turn again! Struggling to free herself, she dragged Ommony in a half circle, nearly pulling him off his feet as the man in the doorway lunged with a long, old-fashioned sword. The third man seemed to prefer discretion, for he still lurked in the shadow; but the man with the sword came on, using both hands now and raising the

sword above his head for a swipe that should finish the business.

There was nothing for it but to let Diana go. Ommony yelled, "Guard!" again and jumped for the saw-edged tulwar, which had clattered away into the shadow. His foot struck it, and he stooped for it as the swordsman swung.

The blow missed. Diana seized the foe from behind and ripped away yards of his long cloak. Dawa Tsering struggled to his feet, more stunned by the blow on the back of his head when he fell than mangled by Diana's jaws; he staggered and seemed to have no sense of direction yet.

And now Ommony had the tulwar. He was no swordsman; but neither was his antagonist, who was furthermore worried by Diana from the rear.

"Guard, girl!" Ommony yelled at her, and discipline overcame instinct.

She began to keep her distance, rushing in to scare the man and scooting out of reach when he turned to use his weapon. The third man possibly had no sword, for he still lurked in the doorway. Ommony ran, calling Diana, who came bounding after him, turning at every third stride or so to bark thunderous defiance.

The strange thing was that no crowd had come. The walls had echoed Diana's barks and Ommony's sharp yells to her, that must have sounded like the din of battle in the stone-walled silence. It was almost pitch dark now, and there were no lights from the upper windows, although the glow of street lights was already visible like an aura against the sky. The whole affair began to seem like a dream, and Ommony felt his hip pocket to make sure the jade was still there.

He paused in the throat of the narrow passage by which he had come, sent the hound in ahead of him and turned to see if he was followed. He heard footsteps, and waited. In that narrow space, with Diana to guard his back, he felt he could protect himself with the tulwar against all comers.

But it was only one man—Dawa Tsering—holding a cloth to his throat and walking unsteadily.

"Give me back my weapon, Ommon*ee!*"

The words, spoken in Prakrit, were intelligible enough but gurgled, as if his throat was choked and hardly functioning. Diana tried to rush at him, but Ommony squeezed her to the wall and grabbed her collar.

"Down!" he ordered, and she crouched at his feet, growling.

"Aye, hold her! I have had enough of that reincarnated hag! Give me my knife, Ommon*ee!*"

"You call this butcher's ax a knife? You rascal, it's not a minute since you tried to kill me with it!"

"Aye, but that is nothing. I missed. If you were dead, you might complain. Give me the knife and be off with you!"

Ommony laughed.

"You propose to have another crack at me, eh?"

"Not I! Those lamas are a lousy gang! They told me I could come to no harm if I obeyed them and said my prayers! Their magic is useless. That she-devil of thine has torn my throat out. I doubt if I shall ever sing again. Give me the knife, and I will go back to the Hills. I wish I had never left Spiti!"

"I told you I am a friend," said Ommony, speering about in his mind for a clue to how to carry on.

"Aye. I wish I had believed you. Give me the knife."

"Do you know your way around Delhi?"

"No. May devils befoul the city! That is, I know a little. I can find my way to the te-rain."

Ommony felt in his pocket, found an envelope and penciled an address on it in bold, printed characters.

"Midway between ten and eleven o'clock tonight go out into the streets and get into the first *gharri* * you meet. Give that to the driver. If the driver can't read it, show it to passers-by until you find some one who can. Then drive straight to that address, and I will pay the *gharri-wallah.*† If your throat needs doctoring, it shall have it."

"And my knife?"

"I will return it to you tonight at that address."

"All right. I will come there."

"I suppose, if I had given you the knife back now, you would have killed me with it?"

"Maybe. But you are no fool, Ommon*ee!* You had better go quickly before those lamas find some way of making trouble for you."

Ommony accepted that advice, although

*Hired carriage. †Cab driver.

he did not believe that, if they really were lamas, they would go out of their way to make trouble for any one outside their own country. It is one thing to attack an intruder; quite another thing to follow a man through the streets and murder him. He was glad he had hurt nobody—Dawa Tsering's hurt was plainly not serious. There is no satisfaction whatever in violence—if it can possibly be avoided—to a man of Ommony's temperament.

He walked in a hurry along the narrow, winding passageways and found the street again, bought food for Diana, gave her the package to carry—for she was temperamentally dangerous in a crowd after having used her jaws in action, unless given something definite to do—and after fifteen minutes' search found a *gharri*, in which he drove to McGregor's office. McGregor was not there, so he pursued him to his bungalow, where he fed Diana and examined curios for fifteen minutes before deciding what to say.

McGregor understood that perfectly. He might not know Ommony as he knew files, the law of probabilities, and criminal statistics; he might, from deep experience, mistrust his own opinion; but he did know that when Ommony poked around in that way, picking up things and replacing them, it was wise to wait and not ask questions. He smoked and watched his servant putting studs into a clean dress shirt.

"Have you one man you can absolutely bet on, who could take a package to Tilgaun and could be trusted not to monkey with it on the way, or lose it, or let it get stolen?" he asked at last.

"Number 17—Aaron Macaulay, the Eurasian—is leaving for Simla on tonight's train. He would probably want to spend a day or two in Simla, but he could go on to Tilgaun after that. He's quite dependable."

"Yes. I'd trust Aaron Macaulay. I want a small box, stout paper, string and sealing-wax."

McGregor produced them and watched Ommony wrap up the piece of jade and seal it with his own old-fashioned signet ring. He addressed the package to Miss Hannah Sanburn at the Tilgaun Mission.

"Better tell Macaulay it contains bank notes," said Ommony. "That'll give him a sense of importance and keep him from being too curious. Tell him to ask Miss Sanburn to keep the package there for me until I come."

"All right. Now what's the theory?"

"Nothing much. I was attacked just now—not serious. The man who got the worst of it will join us after dinner. I'll give you all the grisly details then. Might possibly surprize you. See you again at Mrs. Cornock-Campbell's."

"Who is a fountain of surprizes," said McGregor, smiling. "Meanwhile, how about protection? Do you want a bodyguard?"

It was not exactly clear why he was smiling.

"No," said Ommony, looking contemplatively at Diana, who appeared to have fallen asleep on a Bokhara rug, "I've got a more than usually good one, thanks. Observe."

He started on tiptoe for the door. Diana reached it several strides ahead of him and slipped out first, to sniff the wind and make sure that the shadows held no lurking enemy.

"If men were as faithful as dogs—" he began.

But McGregor laughed.

"They're not!" he answered. "Faith, very largely, is absence of intelligence. Intelligence has to be trained to be honest; it has no morals otherwise. Without a good Scots grounding in religion, the greater the intelligence the worse the crook."

"Oh, rot!" said Ommony, and walked out, leaving McGregor chuckling.

CHAPTER VI

MRS. CORNOCK-CAMPBELL'S SECRET

A certain poet, who was no fool, bade men take the cash and let the credit go. I find this good advice, albeit difficult to follow. Nevertheless, it is easier than what most men attempt. They seek to take the cash and let the debit *go, and that is utterly impossible; for as we sow, we reap.*—From the Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

EVEN since the Armistice, when military glory topped the rise and started on the down grade of a cycle, there still are worse fates than being wealthy in your own right and the wife of a colonel commanding a lancer regiment—even if your children have to go to Europe to be schooled, and your husband is under canvas half the time. And there are much worse fates than dining with Mrs. Cornock-Campbell, anywhere, in any circumstances. To be in a position to invite yourself to dinner at her

Delhi bungalow means that, whatever your occupation, you may view life now and then from the summit, looking downward. Viceroys come and go. Mrs. Cornock-Campbell usually educates their wives.

They say she knows everything—even why the German Crown Prince once cut short a tour of India; and that, of course, means she is no longer in the bloom of youth, and never indiscreet, for you don't learn State secrets by being young and talkative.

Ommony is one of her pet cronies, though they rarely meet—which is the way things happen in India. He looks such a blunt, old-fashioned bachelor in a dinner jacket dating from away before the war; the contrast he creates with modern artificial cynicism is so satisfying; and he so utterly lacks pose or pretense, that he brings out all her vivacity which is apt to be chilled when imitation people assume manners for the sake of meals.

The talk, for the hour while dinner lasted, was of anything in the world but ringding lamas and the Abor country. Ommony was probed for epigrams, coined in the depths of his forest, that should make John McGregor wince and laugh—such statements as that "you can look for faults or virtue. Vultures prefer refuse. Suit yourself. A man sees his own vices and his own virtues reflected in his neighbor—nothing else. Another's crimes are what you yourself would do under equally strong pressure. His virtues are greater than your own, if only because they're less obvious. The most indecent exhibition in the world is virtue without her cloak on!"

Not polite exactly—particularly not to the chief of the Secret Service—but not tainted by circumlocution. And again:

"They say the fact that people work entitles them to vote. Horses work harder than men! Soap-box nonsense! The only excuse for work is that you like it, and the only honest objection to loafing is that it's bad for you."

John McGregor, in the rare hours when he is not feeling the pulse of India's restless underworld, is an addict of the Wee Free Kirk with convictions regarding the devil.

"A personal devil?" said Ommony. "I wish there was one! Hell breeds more dangerous stuff than that! If I thought there was a devil, I'd vote for him. He'd clean up politics."

John McGregor, ganglion of India's crime statistics and acquainted with all evil at first hand, was shocked, to Mrs. Cornock-Campbell's huge delight.

"Now, John! What have you to say to that?"

McGregor cracked a nut nervously and sipped at his Madeira.

"He could find a host of half-baked theorists to praise him for the blasphemy," he said deliberately, "but the ultimate appalling circumstance of being damned is a high price for applause."

Ommony laughed.

"I'd rather be thought damned by a man I respect than be praised by —— fools," he retorted. "We three will meet beyond the border, Mac. I'm looking forward to it. I can't see anything unpleasant in death, except the morbid business of dying.

"May there be no moaning at the bar when I put out to sea.

"It looks as if I might be the first of the three of us to take that trip."

So by a roundabout route the conversation drifted to its goal. Over her shoulder, at the piano, in the rose and ivory music room, Mrs. Cornock-Campbell tossed the question that brought secrets to the surface.

"John says you are going to the Abor country."

John McGregor's eyes glowed with anticipation, but he crossed his legs and lit a cigaret, throwing himself back into the shadow of an antique chair to hide the smile from Ommony.

"Going to try," said Ommony. "My sister and Jack Terry disappeared up there twenty years ago. They left no trace."

"Are you sure?"

She went on playing from Chopin, and Ommony did not notice the inflection of her voice; he was listening to the piano's overtones, vaguely displeased when she closed the piano without finishing the nocturne.

"I was at Tilgaun seven months ago," she said. "Colin—" that was her husband—"had to go to Burma, so I went to Darjiling. I heard of the Marmaduke Mission and grew curious. I wrote, and Miss Sanburn very kindly invited me to come and stay with her. The most delightful place. Please pass me a cigaret."

"Did Hannah mention me?" asked Ommony.

"Indeed she did. You seem to be her

beau ideal, and funnily enough she said you and the Lama Tsiang Samdup must have been twin brothers in a former incarnation! She told me you and he have never met each other, although you are co-trustees with her under Marmaduke's will. It sounds like Gilbert and Sullivan. I didn't see the lama, but I did meet some one else who is quite as interesting."

McGregor crossed his legs and blew smoke at the ceiling.

"How well do you know Miss Sanburn?" asked Mrs. Cornock-Campbell at the end of a minute's silence.

She was watching Diana, stretched out on the bearskin, hunting gloriously in a dream Valhalla. If she saw Ommony's face it was through the corner of one eye.

"Oh, as well as a man can ever hope to know a very unusual woman," said Ommony.

"That doesn't go deep, does it? I admit I suspected *you* at first. Then I remembered how long I have known you and—well—you're unorthodox, and you're a rebel, but—I couldn't imagine you leaving a child nameless."

"What on earth do you mean?" asked Ommony.

"So I suspected Marmaduke—naturally. But all sorts of dates and circumstances turned up quite casually, which eliminated *him*. I was at Tilgaun a whole month before I was *quite* sure that Miss Sanburn is not a mother. I was almost disappointed. She is such a dear—I admire her so much—that it would have given me a selfish satisfaction to know such an abysmal secret, and to keep it even on a death bed!

"However, the child is not hers. She calls her an adopted daughter, though I doubt that there are any legal papers. The girl is white. She's about twenty. The strangest part is this: That she appears and disappears at intervals."

"This is all news to me," said Ommony. "Mac said something, but——"

"It isn't news, you iconoclast! It's a most romantic mystery. The girl was there when I arrived. She wouldn't have been; but you know what a business it is to get to Tilgaun. I was supposed to wait for ponies and servants from the mission; they didn't come, and as there was a party of the raja's people going, I traveled with them.

"They were in a hurry, so I reached the mission quite a number of days before I was expected, and I met the girl on the far side of the rope bridge just before you reach Tilgaun—you remember the place? There's a low, steep cliff with only a narrow passage leading out of it. She was sitting there nursing a twisted ankle—nothing serious—but she couldn't get away without my seeing her; and of course it never entered my head to suspect that she would want to avoid me. She told me her name was Elsa."

"That was my sister's name," remarked Ommony, who had an old-fashioned way of growing sentimental when that name cropped up among intimates.

"I lent her a spare pony, and she rode up to the mission with me. Jolly—she was the jolliest girl I have ever seen, all laughter and intelligence—with strange, sudden fits of demureness—or perhaps that isn't the right word. Freeze isn't the right word either. She would suddenly lapse into silence, and her face would grow absolutely calm—not expressionless, but calm—like a Chinese girl's. It was as if she were two distinct and separate women. But she's white. I watched her fingernails."

"Might be Chinese," Ommony suggested. "They're given to laughter, and their fingernails don't show the dark lunula when they're pressed. Hannah Sanburn receives all comers at the mission."

"I am absolutely certain she is English," Mrs. Cornock-Campbell answered. "But as far as I could judge she speaks Tibetan and several dialects perfectly. Her English hasn't a trace of Chi-chi accent.

"She has been wonderfully educated. She has art in every fiber of her being—plays the piano *fairly* well—mostly her own compositions; and you may believe me or not, they're fit to be played by a master.

"And she draws perfectly from memory. That night at supper and afterwards she talked incessantly and kept on illustrating what she meant by drawing on sheets of paper—wonderful things—not caricatures—snapshots of people and things she had seen. Wait; I've kept some of them. Let me show you."

She found a portfolio and laid it on Ommony's lap. He turned over sheet after sheet of pencil drawings that seemed to have caught motion in the act—yaks, camels, oxen, Tibetan men and women taken in midsmile, old monastery doorways, flowers—done swiftly and with humor.

There was a sureness of touch that men work lifetimes to achieve; and there was a quality that almost nobody in this age *has* achieved—a sort of spirit of antiquity, as simple as it was indefinable in words. It was as if the artist knew that things are never what they seem, but was translating what *she* saw of things' origins into modern terms that could be understood. The drawings were of yesterday, clothed in the garments of today and looking forward to tomorrow.

"She seemed to see right through you," Mrs. Cornock-Campbell went on. "I don't believe the smartest man in the world could fool that girl. She has the something within that men instinctively recognize—and don't try to take liberties with.

"She seemed equally familiar with Tibetan and European thought, as well as life, and to know all the country to the northward. I gathered she had been to Lassa, which seems incredible; but she spoke of it as if she knew the very street stones, and you'll see there are sketches of bits of Lassa in that portfolio—notice the portrait of the Dalai Lama and the sketch of the southern gate.

"And all the while the girl talked Miss Sanburn seemed as proud and as uncomfortable as a martyr at the stake! When Elsa began to talk of Lassa I thought Miss Sanburn would burst with anxiety; you could see she was on the perpetual point of cautioning her not to be indiscreet, but she restrained herself with a forced smile that made me simply love her. I know Miss Sanburn was in agonies of terror all the time.

"When Elsa had gone to bed—that was long after midnight—I asked Miss Sanburn what the girl's surname was. She hesitated for about thirty seconds, looking at me——"

"I know how she looked," said Ommony. "Like a fighting man with a heartache. That look has often puzzled me. What did she say?"

"She said: 'Mrs. Cornock-Campbell, it was not intended you should meet Elsa. She is my adopted daughter. There are reasons——'

"And of course at that I interrupted. I assured her I don't pry into people's secrets. She asked me whether I would mind not discussing what little I already knew. She said, 'I'm sorry I can't explain, but it is important that Elsa's very existence should be known to as few people as possible, especially in India.'

"Of course, I promised, but she agreed to a reservation that I might mention having met the girl, if anything I could say should seem likely to quiet inquisitive people. And that was a good thing, because I had no sooner returned to Delhi than John McGregor came to dinner and asked me pointedly whether I had seen any mysterious young woman at Tilgaun. I think John intended to investigate her with his staff of experts in—what is the right word, John?"

"Worm's-eye views," said McGregor. "Not all the King's horses nor all the King's men could have called me off, as you did with a smile and a glass of Madeira. Thus are Governments corrupted."

"So you're the second individual to whom I have opened my lips about it," said Mrs. Cornock-Campbell, not exactly watching Ommony but missing none of his expression, which was of dawning comprehension.

"I'm beginning to understand about a hundred things," he said musingly. "You'd think, though, Hannah would have told *me*."

Mrs. Cornock-Campbell smiled at John McGregor.

"Didn't you *know* he'd say just that? Wake up, Cottswold! This isn't church! It's because you're her closest friend that you're the last person in the world she *would* tell. She's a *woman*"

Then there were noises in the garden, and Diana left off dreaming on the bearskin to growl like an earthquake

"An acquaintance of mine," said Ommony. "If you can endure the smell, please let him in. Or we might try the veranda."

Diana had to be forcibly suppressed. The butler, a Goanese—which means that he had oddly assorted fears, as well as a mixed ancestry and cross-bred notions of convention that were skin-deep and as hard as onyx—had to be rebuked for near rebellion.

And Dawa Tsering, with his neck swathed in wierdly smelling cloth, had to be given a mat to sit on, lest he spoil the carpet. It needed that setting to make plain how innocent of cleanliness his clothes were; and his reek was of underground donkey stables, with some sort of chemical added.

There were reasons, connected with possible eavesdroppers, why the deep veranda was unsuitable.

"And the knife, Ommon*ee?*" he asked, squatting crosslegged, admiring the room. "Is this thy house? Thou art a rich man! I think I will be thy servant for a while. Is the woman thy wife? It is not good to be a woman's servant. Besides, I am a poor hand at obedience. Nay, return me my knife and I will go."

"Not yet," said Ommony, studying by which roundabout route it might be easiest to elicit information. He decided on the sympathetic-personal. The man's neck had plainly received attention, but the subject served. "Shall I get a doctor for your neck?"

"Nay; Tsiang Samdup made magic and put leeches on it and some stuff that burned. Lo, I recover."

"You mean the holy Lama Tsiang Samdup? The Ringding Gelong Lama? He who was at Chutter Chand's this afternoon?"

Ommony knew quite well whom he meant, but he wanted to convey the information to the others without putting the Hillman on guard. By the look in the Hillman's eye his mood was talkative—boastful—a reaction from the failure of the afternoon.

"Aye, the same."

"I should have thought his *chela* would have attended to that."

"Samding? Nay, they say that fellow is too sacred altogether. Not that I believe it; I could cut his throat and show them he dies gurgling and whistling like any other man! But the lama looks after him like an old wife with a young husband, and the boy mayn't soil his fingers.

"Rebuke thy dog, Ommon*ee*—she eyes me like a demon in the dark. So; that is better. Oh—I wish I had never come southward! Yet I have seen this house of thine. It is a wonder. It will serve to speak of when I go back to Spiti and tell tales around the fire."

Ommony translated for the others' benefit and went on questioning.

"I suppose you will return to Tilgaun with the lama and his *chela?*"

"May the stars and my karma forbid! I go under the belly of a te-rain, as I came. To Kalka I go; and thence by foot on the old road to Simla, where I know a man who will pay me to carry goods to the Raja of Spiti. That is a long journey and a difficult. I shall be well paid."

Again Ommony translated.

"Ask him how and where he learned that trick of riding under trains," said McGregor.

"Oh, as to that," said Dawa Tsering, "there are few things simpler. In my youth—" he spoke as if he were already ancient, instead of perhaps two- or three-and-twenty—"I desired a woman of Spiti whose husband was unwise. He should have gone on a journey oftener. And he should not have returned in such haste. I wearied of his homecomings, so I lay in wait and slew him. And the Raja of Spiti, who is a jealous man—liking to attend to all the slaying in that country, which is nevertheless too much for one individual, even if he *does* have an army of fifty men—fined me three hundred rupees.*

"Where should I get such a fortune? Yet unless I paid it I should have to join his army and gather fuel, which is as scarce in Spiti as an honest woman. So I ran away.

"And after wandering about the Hills a month or two, enjoying this and that adventure, I reached Simla, where I met a man with whom I gambled, he offering to teach me a new game, not knowing we use dice in Spiti. And *his* dice were loaded. So I substituted mine. And when I had won from him more than he could pay he offered to teach me his profession."

"Gambling?" asked Ommony.

"Nay. I never gamble. I take no chances. I do the gods a favor now and then, since it seems from all accounts they need it, but I never trust them. That fellow told me of the te-rains that run from Kalka southward, to and fro, and of the many rupees that the passengers leave in their pockets while they sleep. He supposed I would undertake the dangerous part and thereafter share the loot with him, and he showed me how to hide under a te-rain until nightfall and then—but it was easy.

"And I found out after a while where he hid the half of our profits, which he claimed as *his* share after *I* had done all the climbing in and out of windows in the dark. So I took what he had hidden, and what with my own savings the total amounted to more than a thousand rupees.

"Then I returned to Spiti, and buried

* About one hundred dollars.

the money in a certain place and went to the raja and lied to him, saying I had earned the amount of the fine as a wood cutter but that a certain one—who was always my enemy—had stolen the money from me on the very first night that I returned. So the raja transferred my fine to that other man, who had to pay it, and then, of course, I had to leave Spiti again—swiftly. That other man has many friends. But I will find a way to deal with him."

"When did you first meet the holy Lama Tsiang Samdup?" Ommony asked.

"Hah! I returned to the te-rains, being minded to make a fortune, but the gods played a scurvy trick on me. I was doing nicely; but on a certain night a fool of a policeman pounced on me at an *istashun** just as I was crawling in under the wheels. He dragged me out by the leg, and it was not a proper time to kill him, since there were many witnesses. So I raised a lamentation, saying I would ride to Delhi to the bedside of a friend, and that I had no fare.

"And lo! The Lama Tsiang Samdup stepped out of the te-rain and paid my fare, praying that I would permit him thus to acquire merit. So I rode with him to Delhi, he questioning me all the night long and I at my wits' end to invent sufficient lies wherewith to answer him. And in Delhi, I being a stranger in the city, he set out with me to help me find my friend; and there being no friend, we naturally did not find him, whereat the lama wept. So it seemed to me he was a man who needed some one to look after him; moreover, he was certainly a very rich man. And I had not yet thought of a way of defeating my enemy in Spiti. Restrain thy she-dog, Ommon*ee;* I like not the look in her eye."

Ommony put Diana outside with orders to guard the front door, duty being the simplest way to keep her out of mischief.

"How long ago did this happen?" he asked, forcing himself to look only vaguely interested as he resumed his seat.

"Oh, may be a year ago—or longer. The time passes. I agreed to serve the lama for a while, although he wearied me with his everlasting lectures about merit, and the Wheel, and the gods know what else. Also he keeps low company—actors and singers and such folk. When he left me at Tilgaun on his way northward I was well content to rest from him a while. He gave me money, of which he has *plenty* although he is much too careful with it; and there were good-looking girls at the mission, which is a marvel of a place with a high wall. But I saw how to climb the wall. So it came about that there was trouble between me and Missish-Anbun—she who is abbess of the place—a bold woman, who was not afraid to stand up to me and speak her mind. Lo, I showed her my knife and she laughed at it! I speak truth.

"So by the time the lama came back from the North I was a by-word and a mockery among the people of Tilgaun, who are a despicable lot but prosperous, and full of a notion that Missish-Anbun is the cause of all good fortune. And *she,* of course, being a woman and unmarried—which is witchcraft—told tales to the lama about me when he returned; whereat he—the old fool!—was distressed, saving *he* was answerable, in that he had left me there during his absence.

"He spoke much about the Wheel and merit and responsibility. And I, who can not help liking the old fool, although I laugh at him—and at myself for eating rebuke from him—was ashamed. Aye, I was ashamed. He made me promise to perform acts of repentance—as *he* said, to offset my own sins, but as *I* think, because he had a use for me.

"And now he had Samding with him, the *chela,* whom all men in that part regard as a reincarnation of some ancient prodigy who has been dead so long that his bones must have dissolved into powder. But the priests tell just such tales, and who can say they are not true?

"And there was much excitement over a piece of green stone. It had disappeared from somewhere up north, although none mentioned the name of the place whence it had come; but I had heard *some*thing, and the rest I saw. There had come a man from Abor to the mission, dying of a belly wound, and if *my* advice had been asked he would have been left to die outside the wall, because those Abors are devils. *I* have heard they eat corpses, which is a dog's business, and I *know* none dares to enter their country. But Missish-Anbun is mad, and she took him into the mission, where they stitched up the belly wound and tried to make him live. But he died, and they found the stone in his clothing, and Missish-Anbun kept it.

* Station.

"There was much talk about the stone, for the most part nonsense; some said this and some that, but it was clear enough that whoever really owned the stone had set inquiries going, and a rumor had been spread that there was danger in possessing it.

"I had made up my mind to steal the stone from Missish-Anbun and discover how much it might be worth to a man of some skill in bargaining; for it seemed to me there could not be much danger to *me* as long as I had my knife— Where *is* my knife, Ommon*ee*? Presently? Well, don't forget to return it to me. That knife and my future are one.

"As I was saying, I was about to steal the stone. But a girl in the mission—one whose virtue I had satisfactory reason to suspect—forestalled me. She took the stone and ran with it toward the house of Sirdar Sirohe Singh, who is a prince of devils and a father of lice and no good. He had warned me to leave Tilgaun, and I had told him who his father was.

"And there had come a rat of a man named Tin Lal to Tilgaun, too much given to asking questions. Him I was minded to slay, because that girl, whose virtue I say was not such as others seemed to think, no longer smiled at me when I sat in the sun near the mission gate, but took more notice of Tin Lal than was seemly. Night after night I had waited for her, and it came to my ears too late that there was a reason, that concerned me, for the smile in Tin Lal's impudent eye. I whetted the edge of my knife on the image of the Lord Buddha that is set into a niche in the mission wall.

"But the girl stole the stone and ran off with it, and Tin Lal waited for her at a narrow place where the path to the sirdar's house runs between a cliff on the one hand and a deep ravine on the other—a place where the eagles nest and there is mist ascending from the waterfall below. He pushed her into the ravine and climbed down after her, taking the stone. And then *he* disappeared. And Sirdar Sirohe Singh, who is a dog—whose liver is crawling lice—whose heart is a dead fish—accused *me* of the deed. There was talk of bringing me before the raja, and there was other talk of driving me away.

"Nevertheless, I had promised the lama I would wait for him in Tilgaun. I was not minded that my time had come. Moreover, I am one who keeps promises. So I slew the loudest talkers—very secretly, by night; and after that there was not so much insolence toward me when I passed up and down the village.

"Ohé—but I was weary of Tilgaun! And when the lama came he at first believed I had slain the girl and stolen the stone. But he is not entirely a fool in all respects, and the *chela*, Samding, has more brains than a grown man with a beard down to his belly. It was the *chela* who said that if I had in truth stolen the stone I would certainly have run away with it and not have stayed in Tilgaun like an eagle hatching eggs.

"And the lama, having listened to a million lies and discovered the truth like a bird in the mist among them, told me I might earn much merit by following the trail of Tin Lal to the southward and recovering the stone. The Lama Tsiang Samdup said to me, 'Slay not, but steal the stone back from Tin Lal and I will pay thee more for it than any other dozen men would pay.' And he named a price—a very great price, which set me to dreaming of the girls in Spiti and of a valley where I am minded some day to build a house.

"So I, having furthermore a grudge of my own against Tin Lal, agreed, and I followed the rat Tin Lal to Delhi, where, as I have told you, I saw him through the shop-window where the snake is, sell the stone to Chutter Chand the jeweler.

"But the lama and Samding had come to Delhi likewise, and to them I told what I had seen, having lost sight of Tin Lal in the crowd. And now give me back the knife, Ommon*ee*, that I may hunt for Tin Lal. I have an extra grudge against him. Has he not robbed me of the price the lama would have paid me for the stone? Ohé—my honor and my anger and his end are one! Give me the knife, Ommon*ee*."

The Hillman smiled winningly, as one who has talked his way into a hard man's heart. He held his hand out, leaning forward as he squatted on the mat.

"Tin Lal is in the jail," said Ommony.

"Oh, is that so? That makes it easy. I will wait outside the jail. They will not keep him in there forever."

"What is that house where you tried to kill me this afternoon?" Ommony asked.

"Oh, a place kept by Tibetans, where the lama stays when he is in Delhi. That is where the actor people come to see him."

"Why did you attack me?"

"Why not? You had said, the lama shall have the stone. Therefore it was clear to me that *you* must have it. Therefore if I should take it from you I could sell it to the lama. I am no fool!"

Ommony with something like contentment in his eye began to translate for the benefit of the others as much as he could remember of Dawa Tsering's tale, tossing occasional questions to the Hillman to get him to repeat some detail. It was the company the lama kept that seemed to interest him most.

"If you like," said McGregor when the tale was finished, "I'll have the house of those Tibetans searched."

IT WAS plain enough by the expression on Ommony's face that he was about to refuse that offer, but his words were cut short by an uproar on the porch. Diana—on guard and therefore incapable of being tempted from her post—was barking like a battery of six-pounders, with an intermittent whine thrown in, to notify Ommony that she begged leave to pursue a fugitive. He strode into the hall and listened—heard retreating footsteps—some one in no hurry pad-pad-padding firmly on soft-soled shoes toward the garden gate.

He opened the door and Diana yelped for leave to launch herself in pursuit. She glanced angrily at a long, narrow, white envelope that lay on the porch floor under the electric light, and resumed her furious salvos at the gate.

"So-ho, old lady—some one you *knew* brought a letter, eh? You weren't indignant till he threw it down and retreated. You never said a word while he was coming up the path." He wetted his fingers and tested the hot night air. "Uh-huh—wind's toward you—recognized his smell—that's clear enough. All right—good dog—on guard again."

He picked up the envelope and walked into the house.

"Did you tell the lama where you were coming tonight?" he asked, standing over Dawa Tsering, looking down at him.

"Aye. I did. Why not? How should I know, Ommonee, that this was not a trap—and I with no knife to hack my way out of it! Suppose that you had thrown me in the jail—who should then have helped me unless the lama knew? I am no fool."

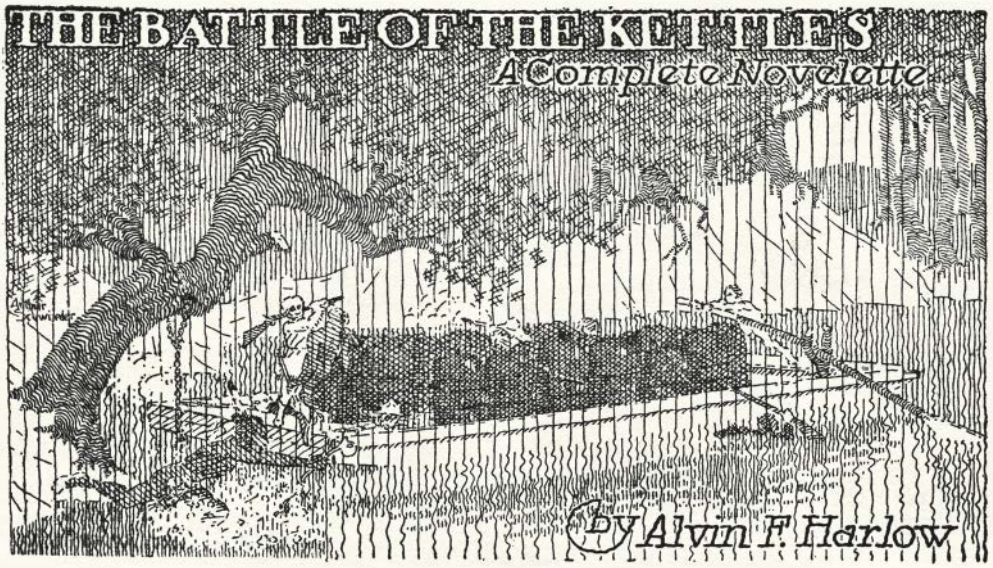
"Did you tell him that I said he shall have the green stone?"

"Nay! How often must I say I am no fool! Would he buy the stone from *me*, after I had told him *you* said he shall have it?"

"The letter! The letter!" exclaimed Mrs. Cornock-Campbell. "Are you made of iron, Cottswold? How can you hold a mysterious letter in your hand without dying to know what is in it! Give it to me! Let me open it, if you won't!"

Ommony passed it to her. John McGregor lighted another cigaret.

TO BE CONTINUED



"SHOVE her off, Solomon!"

A chain clanked and clattered as it was thrown aboard.

"Off she goes, Henery!" and with a powerful thrust of his pole Solomon spurned the bank, and the flatboat moved with slowly and dignifiedly accelerating speed out into the river.

It was a mild May evening in 1788. A magnificent full moon was pouring over the majestic Ohio—here more than a mile in width—a flood of cool, silvery light. The roar of the low falls, changed by a late spring flood into a series of rolling, boiling rapids, was audible upstream. On the bank which the boat had just quitted, the tiny frontier settlement of Campbelltown was just going to bed.

This little huddle of houses at the foot of the falls was for three-quarters of the year at the head of navigation on the lower Ohio, just as the slightly larger village of Louisville, at the head of the falls, about two miles distant, was at the foot of navigation on the upper river. Campbelltown has long since been engulfed in the city of Louisville.

The flatboat which was moving almost noiselessly out into the stream was loaded, beside its human cargo of thirteen persons, with one of the queerest cargoes imaginable —nothing but big, round, iron kettles. They were nested bottoms upward in stacks of half a dozen each, and these stacks were ranged in two long double rows, running the length of each gunwale, leaving a gangway through the center from stem to stern.

Kentucky contains a number of saline deposits and springs. With the advent of the first settlers this section quickly became noted for its salt licks, whither wild animals had resorted in great numbers to gratify their taste for the delicacy; and by the close of the eighteenth century Kentucky was one of the youthful nation's most prolific sources of salt. Salt-boiling furnaces were set up at the various licks, and large numbers of men were engaged in the industry.

One of the largest salt camps was that at Bullitt's Lick on the banks of Salt River, a few miles above the spot where the town of Shepherdsville now stands. Here more than a hundred furnaces were at work and from five to eight hundred men were employed, at a time when Louisville and Lexington were only tiny clusters of hovels.

It was to that point that Solomon Spears and Henry Crist, flatboat men and hardy pioneers of twenty-seven and twenty-four years respectively, were carrying their cargo of kettles in that spring of 1788. The kettles had been made in Pennsylvania, hauled across the mountains to the upper Ohio in wagons and thence freighted down the river to Louisville, many months elapsing before Spears and Crist, the brokers who had handled the order, were able to lay hands on their merchandise.

Getting commodities of any sort was a heart-breaking task in Kentucky in those days. The glass for the first brick house in Louisville, for example, was brought across the mountains from Virginia on horseback, the boxes being suspended from a pack-saddle.

"Seems queer, starting out on a journey like this after dark," said nineteen-year-old Tom Humphreys in a low tone to Jack Fossett as they sat near the stern of the flatboat, looking back at the one twinkling little light that still marked the location of Campbelltown.

" 'Tis a dodge of the 'Colonel's' and the 'Major's,' " replied the Irishman, who thus persistently brevetted Crist and Spears. "The Ohio bein' a broad river, and broader than usual be reason of the flood, 'tis perfectly safe to float down the middle of it be night widout much fear of an attack or promiscuous firin' from the shore. The moon is so bright that there'll be no throuble keepin' in the middle; and the night's thravel will put us nearly thirty miles on our way. But whin we start up that little narrow Salt River tomorrow, boy, we'll have to keep our eyes cocked for'ards, back'ards and sideways, f'r the woods is thick, and you know how hostyle the savages is in these parts."

"These kittles along the gunnels ought to make pretty good breastworks," remarked Tom a little nervously.

"That they will, boy; but the lads that man the sweeps and do the steerin' will have no protection; and the —— will pick those men off first if we don't watch carefully. Ho, me!—" yawning and stretching prodigiously—"I'm gittin' sleepy."

"Are you going to work at the salt camp, too?" asked Tom after a pause.

"Yes; and so's Evans Moore, there, and Dick Chinoweth and Heck McIlvaine and Murkett, the ould feller wid the pretty young wife. But iverybody's goin' to sleep, boy," and he tapped his clay pipe on his palm and tossed the ashes into the river. "Let's do likewise."

The two rolled themselves in their blankets in the gangway between the kettles and were soon wrapped in the sound slumber that comes so readily to those who follow the strenuous outdoor life. Even the pretty young wife of Silas Murkett, with the necessarily frank intimacy of the frontier, drew a blanket over her, looking about her a bit shyly, and lay down on the hard deck beside her husband, though it was long before she could go to sleep.

Only three men were left awake on the boat. Solomon Spears, one of the proprietors, kept watch at the stern and did what steering was necessary to keep the boat in the middle of the river, while at the bow Henry Crist, his partner, sat talking in low tones with Christian Crepps, one of the most skilful woodsmen and hardest fighters in the party.

Crepps had been engaged by Crist and Spears to go on this trip as guard, scout and rifleman. He was a tall, fair-haired, debonair, rather handsome man of thirty, of a lion-hearted courage and intense loyalty. It was his watch at the bow that night, and Crist still lingered with him, canvassing the interesting subject of the handsome young woman on board. They sat with their legs dangling over the gunwale, almost dragging in the water.

"Who is this man Murkett?" asked Crist.

"An old shab that's been workin' up at the Blue Licks and other furnaces for years. He's a good salt b'iler and straight enough, I reckon, but he drinks some and he has a temper."

"And why in the world did that comely young woman marry such a man? Why, he must be forty-five if he's a day, and powerful ill-favored."

"She had to marry somebody, I reckon," replied Crepps calmly, stuffing leaf tobacco into his pipe.

"Had to, Christian? What do you mean?"

"Didn't you hear nothin' about it up at the settlements yonder?" inquired Crepps, jerking his thumb over his shoulder.

"No, I didn't," confessed Crist, embarrassed by his ignorance of current events. "You see, I was so busy gettin' my cargo and loadin' it and all. Tell me about it, Christian."

"Waal," drawled Crepps, leaning back with his hands clasped about his knee, "her name was Susan Lehane. She come down the river a fortnight ago with her daddy on Jack Jimmison's boat. The old man had sorter failed back in Pennsylvany, it seems, and tuck the notion that he could get on his feet again by movin' to a new country and takin' up land. But comin' down the Ohio he fell into a sorter low fever; they kerried him ashore at Louisville, and he died at

Saul Brashears' house two days later.

"The Brashearses had tuck' em in out o' kindness, Miz Brashears bein' struck by the girl's beauty and her pitiful looks. When the old man had been buried, the girl had hardly a penny to rub ag'in' another and was all alone in the world. Her old man hadn't any nigh relatives, and what distant cousins he had back East was as poor as he was and was all at outs with him because of the war, him bein' pretty much of a patriot, whilst they was all Tories.

"Well, sir, the girl didn't know what to do. She'd no money to pay her way back East, and nothin' to go to there. She offered to work if she could find anythin' to do, but law! She orter known there wa'n't nobody at Louisville or Campbelltown rich enough to afford a sarvant, Henry.

"If it hadn't been that I've got all I can do to support my wife and little shaver—and another one comin', thank God!—I'd 'a' tried to give her a job myself. And yet I don't know what Jane'd do with a maid about the cabin. I'm afeard she wouldn't like it."

"Go on!" said Crist impatiently as he paused.

"Waal, right there was where Silas Murkett stepped in. Seems he'd come down on the boat a piece with her and her dad, and had sorter cocked his eye at her, but hadn't hardly exchanged a word with either of 'em. Now he offered to marry her and give her a home and a standin' in the community. He said he was goin' down to Bullitt's Lick, where he'd make good money. It looked like her only chance. And so she married him today."

Henry Crist blushed even in the darkness as it occurred to him that he might now have stood possessed of a fine-looking wife merely for the asking, if he had been on the alert. But what would he have done with her? Time enough yet to think about marrying! For the present he was too busy and enjoyed his freedom too much to consider it, though many a frontier girl, including Susan Murkett, had looked at him with wistful admiration.

He was well worth any woman's second look. Not quite as tall as Crepps, he was still close to six feet, of herculean build, muscled like a gladiator, had a fine, square head covered with waving, dark brown hair and a strong, honest, shapely face with soft brown eyes that could as quickly sparkle with merriment as glow with the ardor of battle.

He presently lay down in the stern with a coat under his head, and after staring at the slow-moving, dusky panorama of the shore for a few moments, he fell asleep.

The moon rose high in the heavens; the river swept in long curves this way and that. Now and then Crepps and Spears tossed a low-spoken word to each other across the sleeping company; but for the most part the only sounds were the plash and gurgle of the water against the boat, and the mournful cry of an owl or a night-heron from the shore.

II

AT DAWN the early risers were informed that they were not more than a mile above the mouth of Salt River. The boat gradually stood over toward the left or south bank. In little more than half an hour it was creeping into the mouth of the smaller stream, now enlarged to a considerable estuary by backwater from the flood in the Ohio. The big sweeps were now called into play and drove the boat at a fair speed in the almost currentless water.

It was necessary to proceed up Salt River about a mile before a good place for cooking breakfast was reached—a level glade beside a tiny stream which ran from a spring a hundred yards distant.

As the flat boat crept up to the bank some of the more inexperienced passengers, Susan included, were surprized to observe Joe Boyce, one of the crew, spring ashore with his gun and disappear in the forest.

With much clatter of cooking utensils and cheerful talk the party clambered ashore with their provision bags, collected wood and soon had a fire going. As Crist was going to and fro on commissary errands he discovered Mrs. Murkett close by his side.

"Mr. Crist," said she in a soft contralto voice, "would there be any danger if I should go down to the brook yonder to wash my face before we have breakfast?"

Henry was so flustered at being spoken to by the handsome young lady that he could hardly frame a logical reply.

"Why yes—no—I think it would be safe," he stuttered. "But wait! Boyce is searching the forest for Indian sign, and if he finds nothing— Ah, there he comes now!"—as

Boyce appeared at some distance, walking in leisurely fashion—"and from his face and manner there is evidently no danger. You may feel perfectly safe, madam."

This encounter nerved him to bring to her at breakfast a nicely broiled slice of meat from his own private stock.

"Mrs. Murkett," said he, "may I offer you a piece of this prime Kentucky ham? It's chestnut-fed and maple-sugar cured. You won't find anything tastier. We so seldom have ladies in our parties," he explained for the benefit of her crab-faced husband, who was looking on jealously, "that we like to give them the best we have."

She thanked him very graciously and divided the slice with Silas.

Sufficient food was cooked over the breakfast fire to furnish the noon meal also. Just before the company went aboard the boat again Crist raised his hand and said:

"Friends, we're in a mighty dangerous part of the country now. Everybody must be vigilant every minute. This river is so narrow that the redskins can pick us off from the bank if we let 'em steal up on us.

"Tom Floyd and I are going to scout ahead of you up both shores today, and maybe all night. Spears and Crepps know where to meet us this evening, and if they don't find us there, they'll know where to meet us in the morning. If we don't meet you then, it'll mean that the Indians have got us, and the boat'll push on to the Lick as fast as possbile. But it's unlikely they'll get more than one of us at the outside.

"Joe Boyce will keep watch on board today while Spears and Crepps get a little sleep; and he knows Indian sign as well as any of us, I reckon. But all of you should keep an eye on the woods and thickets, and give alarm the moment you see anything wrong. In case of an attack, Spears will be the commander."

Except for two or three of the passengers, most of this advice would have been superfluous; for the majority of the party—as was true of three-fourths of the inhabitants of Kentucky in that day—had heard the war-whoop ringing through the aisles of the forest and had faced possible death under an Indian tomahawk or at the end of an Indian's rifle barrel.

So hardened were they to such things that most of them, Crist and Floyd included, regarded the perilous scouting expedition quite casually as a part of the ordinary day's work. But Susan Murkett and young Tom Humphreys gazed with round eyes and worshipful admiration at the two lion-hearted adventurers who walked into the trackless forest as blithely and unhesitatingly as they would have strolled down the main street of Louisville.

Only one of the men even thought of shaking hands with them; and that was the effervescent Irishman, Jack Fossett, who was no tenderfoot—for he had ranged the wilderness and fought all comers, red and white, from Ireland to Kentucky—but who was overgiven to demonstration anyhow.

"Good-by, boys!" he bellowed, pump-handling their arms vigorously. "We'll see you tonight or the mornin' at the latest; for there's nary an Injun whelped that can outdo ayether one of ye! I'll lay a wager on that!"

CRIST looked very lonely as he stood leaning on his rifle while the boat pulled farther and farther away from the shore. Just before the boat reached the south bank, where Floyd was to be landed, Crist waved his hat in farewell and plunged into the undergrowth. Having dropped Floyd, the clumsy craft plodded slowly upstream with eight men manning the sweeps, the passengers taking their turn as per agreement; while the two scouts, unseen, trotted ahead of the boat through the woods.

These two were well fitted for this particular service. When he was little more than a child, Henry Crist was familiar with the upper Ohio from Fort Du Quesne to Maysville; at fifteen he had descended with a party of pioneers to the Falls. An early chronicler of Kentucky says of him that "a more dauntless man never contended with mortal foe." Floyd, too, was an experienced Indian tracker and fighter, and knew the Kentucky wilderness from the Big Sandy to the Mississippi.

Crist found no fresh sign on the north bank; but well along in the afternoon Floyd struck the trail of a party of fifteen or twenty Indians who had come up from the south, apparently hunted along the stream for a time and then turned southward again.

Floyd followed their trail for some distance; but, convinced that it led far away from the river, he left it and turned back to the stream, which he reached after dusk.

Toward evening Spears, having reached

the tentative rendezvous, slowed up the progress of the boat and lingered a while; but the scouts did not appear, so he forged ahead until after dark, when, having attained the point he desired, he caused the boat to be moored in a bend of the river where the current set away from the bank, thus holding the craft nearly in the middle of the stream.

Crist meanwhile, having been unable to get an answer from Floyd in response to his calls across the river, had pushed on to a point slightly above the boat. Here, sitting on the ground in total darkness, with the patience of the most stoical Indian, he looked and listened for two hours.

When the moon rose he lay down and went to sleep. At about three o'clock with the unerring instinct of the woodsman he awoke and noiselessly made his way to the riverbank a few yards distant. Here he sat waiting for another half hour.

Then there came from the opposite shore the cry of a whippoorwill, repeated three times. A pause of a few moments, and again the cry was repeated thrice. Crist now drew from his pocket a home-made "call" and sounded upon it a very fair imitation of the squawk of the night-heron.

Presently he was able to discern a queer sort of craft detaching itself from the shadows of the farther shore. Slowly it crept across the stream. As it came nearer, the moonlight showed it to be a portion of dead tree-trunk, with two or three naked limbs thrusting out this way and that. Floyd, his gun slung on his back, squatted on the trunk, paddling with a smaller piece of driftwood.

As the first streaks of dawn appeared in the east the flatboat's cable was cast off its mooring place on the bank and the old scow began her leisurely journey upstream. Three-quarters of an hour later, when the world was pink with the glow of the advancing dawn, Crist and Floyd showed themselves on the bank, and the boat pulled toward them. To obviate the necessity of a landing they walked out on the stem of a leaning sycamore which thrust itself over the water almost horizontally, and from there swung to the deck of the boat as it passed underneath them.

"There's a comely little grassy bench and a good spring about a mile above here," said Crist after the party had discussed the day's progress, "where we can land and cook our breakfast. I've camped there before."

"I was aimin' to make for that very place, Henery," remarked Spears.

The men bent to the sweeps again, and the boat moved up toward the desired spot.

The sun was rising in splendor over a picture divine in its beauty, of river and forest and rolling hills. It did not seem possible that there could be death or danger or hatred anywhere in such a smiling landscape.

As the camping place came into sight—a level, somewhat open spot about ten feet above the river, with the bank sloping thence steeply down to the water's edge—Crepps pointed out as a convenient mooring post a young sycamore that was dabbling its feet in the water at the margin. Thence the boat bent its course. It was only a few yards from the bank when Fossett threw up his hand and cried—

"Listen!"

The rowers paused in their swing, and the whole party were breathlessly silent for a moment. Then from the woods near the intended landing-place there came a familiar—

"Gobble-obble-obble-obble!"

"Turrkeys, boys!" cried Jack. "Turrkeys! Think of a nice, fat gobbler for breakfast! Who's wid me to get one or two of 'em?"

"I am!" promptly replied Dick Chinoweth, an enthusiastic hunter. "It'll be safe, won't it, Mr. Crepps?"

"Ain't anything safe in this country," replied the woodsman. "That may not even be turkeys you hear."

"Oh, the ——!" exclaimed Fossett. "I've heard 'em thousands of times, and I never heard anything more like."

"Well, don't go too far into the woods," cautioned Crist. "I'm not sure that you ought to leave the party at all."

"We'll be back in a few minutes wid a brace of fine birds," boasted Fossett.

He and Chinoweth had been slinging on their powder-horns and shot-pouches as they talked. They were like small boys—even a grudging consent was eagerly accepted. Seizing their guns, they ran to the bow and sprang ashore before the boat had touched the bank; hurried up the slope to the edge of the bench and disappeared over the brow.

The boat moved slowly up to the sycamore. Fastened to the bow was a long mooring chain with a hook at the end of it.

Boyce passed this chain around the trunk of the little tree in a loose loop, and caught the hook in a link. He was standing with one foot on the boat and the other on the bank while he did this. The others were picking up cooking utensils and bags of food to go ashore, when like a bolt of lightning from a clear sky the catastrophe burst upon them.

From the woods above them there came the rattling crash of a score or more of rifles, and that most blood-curdling of all human utterances, the Indian war-whoop—sounding as if it might have issued from a hundred savage throats!

III

NEVER was a battle opened more abruptly. There was no time on the boat to plan, give orders or assume a posture of defense. Boyce sprang on board and ran for his gun. At the same time Fossett and Chinoweth came running for their lives down the steep bank. Chinoweth's cheek had been scraped by a bullet, while Fossett's right arm hung helpless, and he carried his gun in his left hand.

Not twenty feet behind them came a horde of naked, yelling Indians. They counted on being able to rush the boat and capture it with all on board by the sheer weight of their numbers.

As they came down the slope, the boat's people fired a volley, and no less than six redskins pitched headlong, some of them turning grotesque triple somersaults before their bodies splashed into the water. The others never slackened their pace.

Chinoweth, being nearest the bow of the boat, was able to leap on board from the bank; but Fossett, who was several yards to his right, had to plunge into the water and swim around to the stern, which was slowly swinging out into the stream. He gripped his rifle under his crippled right arm and paddled with his left.

The Indians followed the two right to the water's edge and struck at them with clubbed guns; one even attempted to swim after Fossett. But the sturdy Irishman, seizing his gun in his left hand, turned and dealt the brave such a clout on the head that he sank and was seen no more. Jack was quickly dragged into the stern of the boat by Moore and McIlvaine.

Meanwhile others of the Indian tidal wave had tried to board the boat at the bow, while some seized the gunwale and tried to draw it to the bank. The mortality among these was heavy. Crepps, who had reserved his fire, shot one of them squarely through the top of the head and then, reversing his gun, split the skull of another.

One big buck made a long leap from the bank, but just as his foot touched the gunwale Crist, whirling his gun in a cyclonic circle, struck him full in the face with the stock, crushing in the skull as one would smash the shell of a gourd.

Repulsed by the desperate resistance of the white men, the remainder of the would-be boarders fled up the bank to join their companions, who had already taken stations behind trees and were pouring a regular and galling fire into the boat. The attacked party had now had time to reload the rifles, and the battle raged with deadly fury. The bullets of the enemy kept up a terrifying tattoo on the kettles:

"Clink! Clink-clank! Clunk! Clink-a-clunk!"

Crist remembered afterward that it had sounded almost amusing at the time. Now and then a ball would strike some kettle whose rim was partly in air, and it would vibrate to a deep, raucous, *"clang!"* The palefaces, as was usual in the early history of the frontier, displayed great superiority in their marksmanship, and made one bullet count for every half dozen of the Indians'.

Crist's first thought had been for Susan. After the opening volley he looked around and saw that her husband had stowed her in a crouching position in a nook between two stacks in the inner row of kettles, where she was almost immune from harm.

Sour old Silas fought like a Trojan that day. As cool as an old guardsman, he loaded, picked out his man and fired with never the change of a muscle in his hard, dry face. Young Tom Humphreys, too, with milk-white face and teeth tightly clenched on his lower lip, quitted himself like a man.

The men on the boat soon saw that they must change its position, if possible. Had they been able to present her side to the shore, the kettles would have formed a powerful breastwork; but she lay bow on to the bank, chained to the sycamore, and a heavy body of the savages had concentrated themselves directly in front of her so that their fire raked the whole length of the gang-

way from stem to stern, leaving little place for shelter.

Within ten minutes after the fight began McIlvaine dropped his gun, clutched his throat with both hands and pitched forward on the deck, dead. Several others had received slight flesh wounds, but fought on regardless of them.

"I can't shoot wid this broken arm," shouted Fossett in Crist's ear. "Let me get that chain loose."

He pushed forward; he and Crepps threw down one of the kettles; and, working it along before him as a shield, Jack crawled to the very gunwale at the bow.

He had brought with him a slender dogwood pole which happened to be on board; and, lying flat behind his kettle, he tried with this pole to poke the hook out of the link. But the point of the hook was of course turned toward the shore, and in spite of all his efforts he seemed only to drive it farther into the link. Meanwhile Crepps and Crist knelt by him, carefully picking off as best they could the foemen who appeared to be aiming at Fossett.

Meanwhile the guns of the red foemen were getting in their deadly work. Chinoweth was the second man killed. Then poor Tom Humphreys, who had been wounded twice and was bleeding profusely, received a ball in the stomach and fell right at Susan's feet, his blood splashing her dress. Murkett's turn came next; and when the deadly missile struck him, he sank down quite slowly, his face unmoved, into a sitting position with his back against the kettles, his gun still clutched in his hand, stubborn to the last.

He slowly lifted his glazing eyes to Susan and kept them upon her until his head fell forward in death; but she did not see him. The dreadful uproar and carnage of the battle, and especially the death of Humphreys, whose body fell right across her feet, had stricken her with such horror that she sat with her face buried in her hands, almost insensible to the turmoil about her.

Sweating, cursing with a fervency that might almost be called prayerful, Fossett had for several minutes been able to do nothing with the log-chain hook that was holding the boat. But presently he discovered that near the butt of his pole a small limb had been cut off, leaving a stub about an inch long. He placed this stub against the point of the hook and gently, carefully tried to pull it out of the link. Time and again it slipped off, but he succeeded in moving the point gradually toward him, and at perhaps the twentieth trial the hook dropped out of the link and the chain was free.

Crist then seized a sweep, and with two or three mighty strokes swung the boat around so that it lay broadside to the shore. But before this maneuver had been accomplished Spears had fallen, grievously wounded in the chest, and a little man named Jenkins, who had been fighting beside him with the fury of a Roland, received a bullet through the brain and yielded up his valiant spirit.

Surely no braver men than that boat's company ever fought to carry civilization into the wilderness; and that is a hardy statement to make, for the annals of the West are filled with such deeds of daring and sacrifice as make fiction seem weak and colorless.

Crepps and Crist agreed that the boat must be worked across to the opposite shore, where the survivors might succeed in escaping through the forest. There were only five men left who were able to raise a hand. Of these, Moore and Boyce, working a sweep at each end of the boat, drove it in a sort of diagonal course toward the south bank.

Crepps, Crist and Floyd kept up a rather desultory fire, though the last named, who had been wounded in the thigh, could not stand but lay flat on the deck and fired over the gunwale. Boyce, too, had been wounded in five places and was losing much blood. The battle had now lasted more than an hour.

Spears' wound was evidently serious.

"Don't bother with me, boys," he gasped as Crist knelt beside him. "Save yourselves when the boat lands, for I'm not going to last long anyhow."

"Never!" exclaimed Crist. "God helping us to be stanch, we'll never leave a living soul behind. We'll either save you or stay here and die with you."

Spears remonstrated; but Crist, dismissing the subject with a gesture, turned away to fire another shot at the Indians, who were now beginning to come boldly out of their coverts on the opposite shore. Just then Crepps seized his arm and pointed up the river.

About a hundred and fifty yards upstream five redskins were crossing the stream, evidently with the intention of preventing the escape of the survivors. Four of the bucks were nearly submerged in the water, each with one arm hooked over a long piece of driftwood, while he held his gun above his head with the other hand. The fifth, who carried no gun, was propelling the improvised craft, using a slab of dead wood as a paddle.

The flatboat was now approaching the southern shore. It was agreed that as soon as it landed, Boyce, Floyd and Fossett, all being badly wounded, should escape as best they could, leaving the three unwounded men to care for Spears and Susan.

"Moore and I can take Spears, Henry," said Crepps, "and you save the girl."

Crist bent over Susan, who still sat with her face hidden in her hands, and said:

"Come, Mrs. Murkett, the boat will touch in another minute. We must go. We shall have a hard run for it, I fear."

She sat motionless, not removing her hands from her face, as if she had not heard him. He put his hand on her shoulder and gave it a little shake. Still no sign from her.

"Mrs. Murkett! Susan!" he cried desperately. "Don't you hear? Don't you understand? We must hurry!"

Not a muscle of her moved. He seized her hands and pulled them away from her face. The countenance was rigid, drawn, frozen with horror; the eyes stared vacantly at the deck. The chaos through which she had passed had thrown her into some dreadful aphasia, and she seemed as oblivious of her companion's presence as if he had been voiceless and invisible.

Crist groaned and turned to Crepps.

"I'll have to carry her," said he. "You see how she is. I'm afraid she's lost her mind."

"We won't have to carry Solomon," said Crepps gravely.

"What?"

Crepps pointed to the prostrate man. Crist sprang to Spears's side, raised the drooping head, felt the pulseless wrist, placed a hand over the heart. But all was still; the brave spirit had fled. A sob for the loyal partner who had been almost as close as a brother choked Crist's utterance.

The boat had grounded by this time, and the three wounded men scrambled ashore, Boyce and Fossett on either side of and supporting, half-carrying, Floyd. They were a pathetic trio. Fossett had his sound arm around Floyd's waist. Boyce had been shot through the cheek, had a scalp wound and three other hurts, and was covered with blood from head to foot. They made their way haltingly into the covert.

"Henry," said Crepps, "we'll have to fight them five Injuns that swum the river before we can get away with the girl. They'll be comin' down along the bank now. Let's you and Moore and me jump ashore and ambush 'em at that gully—" he pointed—"and we can kill 'em all in a trice. That'll give us a chance to escape with the girl."

The three seized their rifles and sprang ashore. The gully or small ravine to which he referred had been cut by a tiny brook which entered the river not twenty yards above the spot where the boat had grounded. It was filled to the brim and above the brim with a matted mass of saplings, undergrowth and vines. Leaping up the bank, Crepps and Crist, crouching, wheeled to their left to face the party who were coming downstream. Crepps was nearest the river—Crist about ten yards distant from him.

As Crist glanced to his right to ascertain Moore's position, he discovered that Moore was not there! Standing erect and looking about behind him, he caught sight of the missing man, already well into the woods and running at top speed. Let others do as they would, he was saving himself!

There was no time to worry over his defection, so Crist turned to face the enemy. He and Crepps were crouching, trying to peer through the foliage, but had been unable to catch sight of a single dark body, when suddenly there began a ragged, scattering fire from the other side of the ravine, and random balls whistled through the verdure, cutting off leaves and twigs. There must have been twenty or thirty rifles firing; but the Indians, like the white men, could not see their adversaries and were merely shooting recklessly, hoping to hit some one in the act of escaping from the boat.

It was Fate's dreadful irony that after having passed unscathed through the main battle both Crist and Crepps should be the victims of these chance bullets. Crist saw his comrade stagger and clap a hand to his side. He started to run toward Crepps, and

at that moment received his own missile. It struck him in the right heel; threw him off his balance so that he staggered sidewise, lost his footing and fell through a mask of leafage into a ditch about ten feet deep which ran into the ravine.

Though shaken by the fall and in great pain from his wound, he immediately made a desperate effort to crawl out of the ditch. Too late he and Crepps had realized how sadly they had been deceived. Concealed by a slight bend in the river, not less than thirty Indians had crossed the stream farther above and borne down on the doomed expedition.

Crist's very soul curdled within him as he thought of the woman on the boat at the mercy of that horde of fiends, maddened by the terrible losses inflicted upon them by their white antagonists. He knew that his single arm would be of no more avail against a horde of bloodthirsty savages than a bellows blown in the face of the north wind; but he might at least send one or two of them to their reward before he died, for they would doubtless get him anyhow.

He tore aside the tall weeds and sprouts and scrambled up the slope. But just as he reached the rim of the ditch he heard a chorus of triumphant whoops from the river. The redskins, creeping along the bank, had pounced upon the boat in force.

Then there came a woman's shriek, a scream of mortal terror; then the yells of the Indians again. And now the sound of these began to recede, indicating that the boat was being rowed across the river. There was nothing that one crippled man could do; Susan Murkett's fate was evidently sealed.

IV

THE yells of the savages died down somewhat, and their guttural conversation grew fainter as they went downstream, some of them rowing the flatboat, the others walking on the bank. Crist crept to a point where he could look through the bushes, but he could see nothing of the girl or even of the boat. The burning pain that raged in his shattered heel was so great that he lay listlessly on his side for a while, caring little for aught else. But anxiety as to Crepps' fate presently overcame his pain. If dead, Christian should be lying not more than forty feet distant.

Crist raised himself on hands and knees and looked around, but saw nothing. Unable to stand, he crawled to and fro over the ground where he had last seen his brave comrade, but found no sign of him. Crepps could not have been so badly wounded after all—he must have been able to make his escape. Crist's own disappearance into the brushy gully probably saved his life, the Indians thinking that all the unwounded men on the boat had fled.

As Crist lay there, he became more hopeful regarding the fate of the unfortunate girl who had been captured. He knew that the Indians very frequently refrained from killing women whom they captured in their raids, particularly if the females were young and handsome or if they made no serious resistance.

Sometimes such captives were held for ransom; sometimes they became wives of the chiefs, sometimes they were sold or traded to red purchasers or white ones who were not over-particular where they got their women. Comely young white women were scarce and much desired articles of barter in the western wilderness.

In not a few cases decent white men bought women thus offered for sale by the Indians, merely from a humane desire to release these veritable slaves from their degradation and give them an opportunity to return to their own families or friends. If they preserved her thus as a desirable prize, it might be possible to organize a party of settlers, pursue them and rescue her.

There was another reason for hope, too. The Indians of those days seldom harmed a person who appeared to be insane or even mildly deranged. They regarded such persons with awe, as being under the domination of some peculiarly powerful spirit, and therefore immune to molestation by human beings. If the girl's aphasia continued after the savages had taken possession of the barge, they would undoubtedly have treated her with the superstitious respect common with them.

The scream of terror which she had uttered, however, when they boarded the boat might have indicated that their sudden appearance before her had shocked her back to normality; but even were this the case, Crist hoped that purely mercenary motives would induce them to preserve her unharmed in hope of future gain. In any case

he must reach the nearest settlers quickly and give the alarm.

But how and where to reach the nearest help? By the very lowest estimate he must be at least fifteen miles from Bullitt's Lick and on the wrong side of the river; and as he could not walk, but must go on hands and knees, his necessary meanderings might increase the distance to twenty miles. Yet he must make his toilsome way. An ordinary man might have quailed and sunk down hopeless as he contemplated the task; but Henry Crist was an American pioneer.

He began his task by making a detour around the deepest part of the ravine on the edge of which he had been wounded. He saw that it would be best to keep a few hundred yards back from the river in order to avoid those deepest erosions, which were decidedly difficult going for a man on all fours. He had not proceeded far when he found that his palms and knees were not intended for such work and must have protection if they were to save him.

With leathern thongs from his hunting shirt he bound one of his moccasins to each knee; then cut two squares from the leather shirt and bound one over the palm of each hand. He was now able to travel with slightly less discomfort, especially as to his hands; for stones, sticks and briers had been dreadfully wearing on them when they were bare. But he found that the thin leather shields wore out rapidly. He had to stop and cut two more sets of them by nightfall. They all gave him trouble, too, by slipping out of position.

As darkness fell he crawled into a thicket and lay down, hoping that he might refresh himself with a little sleep. But sleep was impossible; worry and pain and loss of blood had driven it from his eyes. After fretting a while and trying in vain to find an easy position he decided to continue his journey. Creeping out of the thicket, he was able to locate the north star, and, guided by this, he struggled on.

It was an hour or more later that he saw the glow of a camp-fire through the trees ahead of him. At first he thought that fever from his wound must have made him slightly delirious; but as he moved nearer he saw that the fire was a reality. No telling, however whether it was a camp of friend or foe. Slowly, cautiously, trying not to break a twig nor rustle a leaf, he inched nearer to the glow. Now he could discern the dark bulk of a watcher sitting against a tree.

Suddenly a little dog began to bark furiously. Evidently he had heard or scented the white man, although the latter was fifty yards distant. At that, half a dozen men rose up from the ground around the fire, and Crist saw to his horror that they were Indians! They stood talking and trying to peer into the darkness, while Crist stole away as rapidly as he could, and by the blessing of Providence managed to do so without making any noise. The Indians were probably some small, wandering band on a hunt, and could not have taken part in the fight of the previous morning.

They must have decided that the dog was barking at some prowling animal, for they presently lay down again around the fire, and Crist was able to get away undiscovered. But he was fearful that they might find his trail next morning, so he made his way down into the bed of an almost dry streamlet that ran toward the river, and crawled there for some distance over the stones which, though mostly worn smooth and round by the water, yet hurt his hands, knees and shins most cruelly. Again and again he slipped down between the stones in the darkness, jamming and twisting his fingers, bruising his face and legs and giving his wounded heel terrible pain.

He had decided to put the river between him and the Indians' camp. He would have to cross it before reaching the Lick anyhow, and it might as well be done immediately. The moon was just beginning to appear above the tree tops in the East as he came out on the riverbank and crawled to and fro in search of a piece of driftwood to serve him as a float. He finally found a small log and half rolled, half dragged it down to the water's edge. Then with a dead bough for a paddle he sat astride the larger piece and cautiously propelled himself across. The current was sluggish, and he lost but little ground in his passage. The cool water felt very refreshing to his wound and the inflamed leg.

On the opposite shore he had a hard time getting up the slippery bank, sliding back almost as fast as he advanced. But at length he won to the crest and lay down, breathless, to rest a while. His hand-shields were worn out again, and he must cut some new ones out of his shirt before he could go on. The light of the rising moon

aided him in doing this. His shirt was by this time reduced to a few strings, but he preserved these carefully, for they were very useful as binding-thongs.

After adjusting his new shields he crawled on again for another mile, when he came to the edge of a rather deep ravine. He decided to wait for daylight before crossing it. Struggling through those deep gulches in the dark was a hideous task. There were stones, mud and thickets of big weeds and sprouts and briers—veritable jungles sometimes, through which a strong man, walking erect, would have difficulty in penetrating; and when crawling you never knew when you were going to put your hand upon a snake.

HE HAD little more than an hour to wait for dawn, but the time seemed interminable. He had eaten nothing for over thirty hours, and fierce hunger was gnawing his vitals. He was very thirsty, too, and his wound was throbbing with pain that was indescribable. Several times he heard animals padding about in the brush, and for a time some wildcats screamed and yowled farther down the gulch; but nothing molested him.

At daybreak he crawled down the steep side of the ravine. He was pretty stiff from his hour of inactivity, and his right leg was so swollen and sore that he could bear hardly any weight on the knee. He gulped water ravenously when he crossed the little creek at the bottom of the glen. Climbing out on the other side was a nerve-racking job, and he had to take a long rest after doing it.

Sitting against a tree, he cut some new shields for his hands out of a deerskin vest which he had fondly cherished. He also cut his hat into two pieces and made therefrom pads for his knees, for his moccasins were worn out.

As he started again, he saw before him a knoll which had been ravaged by a fire during the previous year, leaving on it only a few stunted remnants of trees. He might have gone around it, but it looked as if it would furnish a good outlook over the surrounding country, and he decided that he must ascend it, for he was becoming a little uncertain as to his location. In an effort to travel more nearly in an air line he had left the river considerably to his right and was therefore in a district not entirely familiar to him.

At the expense of much labor and pain he crawled to the top of the hillock and was rewarded by a rather extensive view. By the topography of two familiar bends in the river and some neighboring hills, he was able to estimate that he must be still at least eight miles by the nearest route from Bullitt's Lick; and it was of course impossible for him to travel by the nearest route. He had not come more than half way!

But the unparalleled grit of the pioneers was exemplified in Henry Crist. He had no thought of giving up. All day long he toiled northeastwardly through the forest. He estimated his progress while actually moving at less than half a mile in an hour—and before nightfall it was doubtless slower than that; while enforced rest periods consumed many half hours of his infinitely precious time.

His wounded leg was frightfully swollen and black; by noon he was dragging it after him, unable to bear any weight at all upon the knee. During the day his vest was gradually consumed in the manufacture of shields for his hands and his one good knee. His feet were now bare, and the lower portions of his trousers were torn to shreds from being dragged over rough ground and through briers and bushes.

That night he made a little progress, but spent nearly half the time in resting. A very small thicket could stop him now and compel him to make a detour. At dawn he tried to pull himself together for a final effort to reach the Lick. He knew that he must reach it that day if he was to reach it at all.

The whole day was a hideous nightmare—worse than anything that had gone before. He moved forward only by inches. Every rag that he could interpose between the stones and his torn hands and legs was rapidly worn away, and finally he had nothing left. For the better part of the day he left bloody prints upon the ground behind him.

The sufferings of his own shattered body now struggled for domination in his thoughts. He found his brain taking curious little flights. At times he almost forgot how he had been brought to this condition. Only by exercise of the most indomitable will-power could he hold

himself to his task. Sometimes he feared that he was about to lose his senses altogether, and might lie down and make no further effort to save himself.

As evening drew on, he was aware that he was in the vicinity of Bullitt's Lick. He came across a dim trail that had been made by hunters and nutting parties, and recognized two or three familiar landmarks. But he had reached the extreme limit of his strength; he was utterly spent.

He could no longer raise himself on his hands, and only by the most gigantic exertions, which brought sweat streaming from every pore, could he pull himself forward a foot or two, snake-like, his whole body on the ground. He was suffering the tortures of Tophet from his bodily injuries; he was almost insane with thirst, having found no water since early morning; for three days and a half he had not tasted food, his last light lunch having been eaten about noon on the day of his scout up the river.*

He had reached the head of a gentle slope which, he believed, led down into the depression in which the Lick was situated. The sight of smoke in the air confirmed him in his belief. But there was not another ounce of energy left in his wasted frame—he had moved his last inch; and he lay with his sunken eyes straining eagerly toward the goal which his body could not reach.

As night came on he could see many of the hundred fires that blazed in the salt furnaces at the Lick. It was a beautiful sight. He fancied even that he could see men passing to and fro in front of the fires about their work—most of them friends of his, practically all of them acquaintances. The nearest furnace was not half a mile away; but to a man on the verge of death from starvation and exhaustion, it might as well have been a thousand.

Suddenly he heard the footfalls of a horse approaching from the direction of the Lick. He was able to prop himself on one elbow and raise his head a little to listen. Now he could distinguish the outlines of the horse and its rider. They were about to pass some twenty yards to the left of him. As the rider drew near, Crist tried to shout; but the best that his flaccid lungs could utter was only a feeble, childish cry. Weak as it was, the horseman heard it. He reined in his steed and appeared to listen, upon which Crist again uttered a small treble cry of "Help!"

To his bitter consternation the man hastily wheeled his horse and galloped back toward the Lick. Crist could not imagine why, unless he had mistaken the call for an Indian subterfuge.

The wanderer then for the first time fell into utter despair. He broke down and sobbed weakly like a child. After such a fearful journey as his, to die actually within sight of shelter and food and friends seemed the last dregs of the bitterest cup that Fate could offer to his lips.

He wished that he had fallen in the battle. Better to die fighting gloriously than to endure three days of such hellish torture and then perish, after all, like a crushed insect.

WHILE he lay thus disheartened, the horseman, a negro slave, had ridden into the settlement, yelling that the Indians were in the woods. Upon being questioned he could only reply that somebody—"sounded lak a little boy"—called to him—"makin' lak he weak and trimbly—" and had said something he did not understand. Believing that it was an Indian ruse, he had fled.

The white men, thoroughly familiar with the cowardice and superstition of the negroes, were inclined to doubt whether he had heard a human voice at all; but a dozen of them finally decided to investigate the story, and so accompanied the negro back to the woods.

When they reached what he thought to be the spot, he whispered huskily that the noise had "sounded lak it was right over yonder." Crist meanwhile as they approached had recognized the voices of several of his friends, including one who was of some prominence in the settlement. To this man he raised a thin, piping call—

"John Durbin! John Durbin!"

"That's no Injun," said one of the group.

"Sounds like a child!" thought another.

"Or a man, near death!" said Durbin solemnly.

The party hurried in the direction of the voice and, by the light of the torches and tin lanterns which they carried, discovered on the ground a something that might have once been a man. But what frightful ravage it had suffered!

*If this were fiction, one might sneer at it; but the narrative of Henry Crist's marvelous journey is an integral part of the annals of Kentucky and can not be gainsaid.

The body was emaciated, the cheeks and eyes were sunken, the face frowsed over with nearly a week's beard, the hair matted and intertwined with small twigs and trash. He was naked from the waist upward and from the thighs down, only the fragments of a pair of trousers clinging about his middle. The hands and lower legs were simply masses of raw flesh; one leg was swollen to shapelessness, and the whole body was caked with blood and dirt.

"Who are you, friend?" asked Durbin.

The swollen tongue and cracked lips could hardly articulate the words—

"Henry Crist."

With a quick intake of his breath Durbin stooped and peered into the face.

"Good God in heaven!" cried he. "Henry, is it you?"

"Yes."

The whole party broke into exclamations of astonishment and pity. Crist was known to them all. Three weeks before he had left them, a ruddy, powerful young athlete, brimming with health and buoyant spirits; now he returned to them only the ghastly caricature of a human being.

"Has anybody got any whisky or brandy?" asked Durbin.

Three sturdy fellows instantly produced bottles from their pockets.

"Jed, run to the branch yonder and get a little water in your hat," commanded Durbin; and in three minutes a very little of a roughly compounded mixture of brandy and water was poured between the exhausted man's lips.

A bit of sparkle came into his eyes at that, and his voice grew stronger.

Pomp, the negro, had in the mean time been sent back to the Lick for a blanket. When it came the tortured body was tenderly lifted upon it, and eight rough men, grasping the edges of the blanket, walked as gently as if they were treading on thin ice and as slowly as if they were marching in a funeral cortège. And it was thus that Henry Crist came to Bullitt's Lick.

V

NEWS of the "Battle of the Kettles," as it came to be called, had reached the Lick only an hour or two before Crist's arrival, a messenger having ridden from Clear's station, to which place Moore had fled after leaving the scene of the fight. The whole vicinity was being aroused. Whitaker's, Brashear's, Dowdall's and other stations had been notified, and a rendezvous was appointed for the next day at the scene of the battle.

The men of Bullitt's Lick were additionally stirred by the few halting sentences in which Crist told of his belief that Susan was a captive in the hands of the Indians. It was typical of pioneer methods that their contingent, nearly one hundred strong, was organized immediately, snatched three or four hours' sleep and was on the march before daybreak.

After telling his story Crist collapsed completely, and for many days lay unconscious, hovering on the borderland of death. More than two weeks had passed before he was able to talk to those around him of passing events. Even then the news was given him cautiously and in small doses.

He learned that the pursuing party, having assembled at the scene of the battle, had found all the bodies of the slain lying on the banks, where they had been thrown by the Indians, evidently as an exhibit of triumph for the pursuers who, they knew, would soon come. All the bodies had of course been scalped, and some had been badly torn by wild animals.

The poor remains were solemnly interred in a little plot in the woods near where they fell. Durbin was able to assure Crist that there was no woman's body found among the rest.

Of the survivors of the conflict, Moore reached Clear's station with the first news of the disaster. He alone got away unhurt. Fossett, in spite of his broken arm, escaped his pursuers, but Boyce and Floyd perished.

Crepps, it appeared, had not fallen when Crist saw him shot, but had staggered away into the bushes a few rods from the river and hidden himself for a while. Seeing Crist fall, he had supposed him to be dead.

After a time he made his way, slowly through the woods, and late in the evening fell, completely exhausted, in the vicinity of Long Lick. There he was found next day by a searching party, but died as he was being brought home.

The little daughter for whom he had been so fondly hoping was born a few days after his death. She lived to become the wife of Charles A. Wickliffe, member of the Legislature and of Congress, Governor of

Kentucky and Postmaster-General in the cabinet of President Tyler.

Moore's action in taking flight when he, Crepps and Crist went ashore was much debated in the neighborhood. It could not be denied that there had been many occasions during the Indian warfare on the frontier when it was regarded not only as excusable but as perfectly ethical and advisable for an individual to save himself as best he could, regardless of the rest of the party, especially when their case was admittedly hopeless. Men's lives were too valuable then to be sacrificed to mere heroics. But in the present instance there were not a few who argued that Moore should not have forsaken his two comrades who were fighting not only for their own lives but for that of a woman—and a woman mentally bereft, at that.

As for Crist, never during the remainder of his life was he heard to utter a word of blame for Moore because of his action. Many of his friends regarded it as significant, however, that he always avoided the subject. He and Moore never met again; in fact, Moore rather seemed to take pains to avoid such a meeting.

Desiring to convert the flatboat into a barge of state for themselves, the Indians had dumped all the kettles into the river; but they shrewdly went a mile downstream to do it and sank them in the middle of the channel, hoping that they would not be found. There they were discovered, however, by a passing boatman a few days later, when the river had fallen and the water cleared, and were fished up by a party from the Lick. The consignees generously paid Crist in full, as if he had delivered the merchandise at its destination; and so his loss was not as complete as he had at first believed it to be.

The expedition of the Kentuckians never caught up with the Indians. The latter floated out into the Ohio on their boat, and a hunter reported having seen them drifting down that stream in fine style, with a whole fleet of canoes tied on behind and everybody, both in the canoes and on the flagship, apparently enjoying himself hugely.

But they dared not remain long on the big river, which was becoming more and more a highway for the pale faces; so they presently dodged into the mouth of Blue River, on the Indiana side, and after proceeding several miles up that stream abandoned the boat. It was found there, sunk, a year later.

It was naturally difficult to follow the course of a party who had traveled by water and had therefore left no trail. After the Indians had swept out into the Ohio, the pursuing force was never thereafter able to trace that particular band as an organized body. Crist believed them to be Wyandottes—one of the tribes of the Iroquois confederacy—and they probably were, for he was an expert in such lore.

So the pursuing expedition, baffled in its search for clues and anxious to get back to young crops and its salt-boiling, presently returned, empty-handed. Crist was harried by remorse at the thought that he must have blundered somehow in coming away from the conflict alive and letting a beautiful and innocent girl fall into the hands of the savages; but his friends did not fail to assure him of their belief that he had done all that a man could do in such a situation.

His physical being had received too severe a shock to permit a quick recovery. The bullet was extracted from among the broken bones of his heel, but the doctor—who had come all the way from Lexington—was quite positive that because of the neglect of the wound the limb would have to come off, while Crist was equally certain that it would not.

He was determined to have two whole legs on which to range the woods again, and, though it was a close shave, yet he had his way. But it was a year before he was a man again and able to attend to any affairs; and he walked all the rest of his life with a slight limp.

He married a sturdy frontier girl two or three years later and set up a home in what is now Nelson County, Kentucky. He continued to engage in merchandising, for which he had a decided capability, but never failed to take the field whenever men were needed for the defense of the settlements.

Often and often, as he sat by the winter firesides with his wife and neighbors, he would speak of the terrible battle of that May morning on Salt River, and wonder what had become of beautiful Susan Lehane, who had borne the name of Susan Murkett for less than three days, and who had vanished apparently forever in the great, mysterious forests north of the Ohio.

Years passed. First General Harmar and

then General St. Clair were sent against the western Indians and sustained two of the most disastrous defeats in all our annals. Then "Mad Anthony" Wayne was put in command of an expedition in 1795, and at the Fallen Timbers on the Maumee River in northwestern Ohio he took a fearful revenge for the humiliations of the past and crushed the power of the Iroquois Confederation forever.

Crist served with the Harmar and St. Clair expeditions, and then, disgusted with the generals that Congress was sending out to the West, he remained at home and missed his opportunity to share in the great victory of Wayne.

One day in the spring of 1798 he was in Lexington, transacting some business with the proprietor of a store, when a clerk came to him and said:

"Mr. Crist, here is a lady who would like to speak with you."

Crist turned and saw a woman apparently middle-aged, lean and brown and with marks of suffering in her face, though one could also trace there indications of a former beauty.

"You don't recognize me," she said with a faint smile. "I don't wonder at it. But I'd have known you anywhere."

"I don't recall you, madam," admitted Crist, embarrassed.

"I am known now as Mrs. Stedman," said the woman. "Once, ten years ago, I was Susan Lehane."

"Gracious Heaven! Is it possible!" exclaimed Crist, almost reeling with astonishment.

A flush rose to her wan cheeks.

"I know I am greatly changed—" she murmured.

"Oh, I—I didn't mean that!" stuttered Crist, trying to find words to salve her feminine pride, of which, poor soul, she still retained her portion. "I was just astonished for the moment to find you alive. I had long ago given you up as dead."

Then she told him her story. First she repeated to him what he had already heard from an Indian prisoner a few years before; that the band which attacked the flatboat numbered about one hundred and twenty, and that of these the white men had killed thirty—pretty good shooting for a fast-decreasing party which never numbered more than twelve men. The Indians were so incensed that their leader swore to roast alive any man of the boat's crew who was captured.

Susan had been taken by the Indians to their villages on the upper Wabash River where—recovered from her temporary aphasia—she had spent nearly a year, carrying wood and cultivating corn with the squaws; a veritable slave, yet treated with a certain respect, too. Then she was taken to Detroit and sold into a worse slavery among the officers of the military post there.

From this she was rescued by a British officer who seemed to love her after his fashion and who married her, as she believed, legally. But he was a gambler and a poltroon and was presently cast out of his regiment in disgrace. Thence he went to live as a small trader among the Indians. He was with them when Wayne administered his crushing defeat at the Fallen Timbers, and was killed during the rout. The unhappy woman's cabin was not far from the scene of the battle, and she appealed to some of the Kentucky soldiers to take her back to that State with them, which they did.

Through all those miserable years she had remained alive only because of the continued hope of escaping or being ransomed, so that she might return to the beautiful Kentucky hills and learn—though she did not tell him this—whether Henry Crist, who appeared in her mind as an ideal, a personification of all chivalry and perfect manhood—had escaped alive. With the aid of tradesmen or forest wanderers she had tried twice to escape from Detroit; but each time the Indians captured her and took her back.

Wayne's victory brought more joy to her perhaps than to any one else in America. She had come to Lexington during the previous autumn and had supported herself by doing housework and sewing—for already Lexington had become enough of a city to boast of ladies who did not do all their own work.

After all these years of looking forward to the meeting, to her intense chagrin she could only muster a broken sentence or two to tell Crist how brave she had thought him in that fight on the river; and he for his part was equally awkward in disclaiming any bravery.

They met only occasionally thereafter

during the rest of their lives. In spite of the dreadful experiences through which she had passed, there was not wanting a worthy and chivalrous citizen of the young commonwealth who was willing and eager to offer her his hand in marriage; and she lived for many years thereafter, an honored wife and mother, near Lexington.

Crist became one of the prominent citizens of the State in his day. He served in the State House of Representatives for three years, was in the State Senate from 1800 to 1804, was elected to Congress for a term in 1808, and died at his residence in Bullitt County in August, 1844, aged eighty years.

Plants on LIFE

by Bill Adams

A SUNDAY MORNING

LIFE'S a rum deal, eh?

Thirteen years ago, on a wet and blowing Sunday morning, I was planting ornamental trees around the rich house of rich people. There was a tall new church close by, newly finished. On the top of its tower there shone a cross; emblem of common folk and poor.

I was out in the rain and the wind, making my pennies, work was scarce and winter long, and I'd an ill child in the little shanty where I dwelt. I did not think that God would judge me hardly for planting elm-trees on a Sunday morning.

The bells chimed near-by, and the people began to pass, going to church. Few noticed me, though my clothes were rain-soaked and my shoes muddied above the ankle. I must, very evidently, have been a poor man, very poor. Such few as turned to gaze a moment at me, gazed frowning, judging me sinful for planting trees on a Sunday, no doubt—which was mine and God's affair, not any one else's at all.

This morning I passed by the place where I planted trees that morning long ago. There are big trees there now, fit for birds to build in, and to shelter passers from summer's scorch. I planted well.

Again this morning the bells chimed, while I stood a moment under the trees I knew of old. It was as though I stood with my kin, there, under the elms.

I had dressed in good clothes, before leaving home, thinking that for this once, since I am in a strange town and know no one whatever, and feel the ache for fellowship at times alone in my little house—thinking for this Sunday to go to church. I have tried often enough to go to church; but do not find the whispers of truth therein. Often I blame that on myself, judging my ears hard of hearing, and my heart untrue to the right.

For a space I stood with my old friends the trees; remembering the wet earth of that morning thirteen years ago. Then I passed on, and came at once beside the big church, with its emblem of common folk upon its tower.

I saw people stare at me and whisper to one another. I was well and warmly clad, my overcoat heavy, and my collar white. My shoes were new and dry. Doubtless I appeared as a prosperous merchant come new to the town. A man advanced from amidst the church folk, his hand extended, and a smile on his face.

"Are you a stranger here?" he asked.

"Yes," said I. And added, "And there goes another."

Across the road a tramp was walking down the street with mud on his ankles, and wet clothing on his limbs.

"Oh, yes—there are lots of those fellows about just now—the country's full of tramps," said the churchman.

"You must come in, and we will be glad to welcome you," he added, smiling and nodding backward to the open church door.

"I travel with my kith and kin," said I, and started over the street to walk with the tramp, adding as I stepped from the curb:

"I was a tramp too, when you builded your church—and not welcomed. Ours is the cross of common men."

He stared at me, his eyes puzzled. I looked back a moment, up at the cross above them all, and to the skies above it, then went on.

The tramp, knowing me for a fellowman, asked me for the price of a meal as soon as I came up with him. We ate together, and laughed a good deal.

It's a rum life, isn't it?

[Author of "The Journey," "The Three Eggs," etc.

THE trouble began over the fires. I am almost certain it was the fires—the little winking camp-fires defying so insolently the black pall of night. One must admit it seemed a small excuse to begin hostilities upon, but wars have been started over less before now. Anyhow—there were the fires. There was Kifaru, bang in the middle of them, without warning, and his declaration of war and his attack in person arrived simultaneously.

Of course the askaris, or black guards, were asleep, being specially paid to keep awake. Also of course the fires were nearly out, special orders being to keep them alight. Wherefore the first thing any living soul in camp—white hunters, askaris and some fifty porters—knew about the existence even, much less the proximity of Kifaru, was his single, terrifying snort, delivered like a blast of hissing steam—smack bang in their midst.

A bomb could not have had more effect.

That was no moment to complain of heavy sleepers. The heaviest and the lightest awoke in the same instant. There was that in Kifaru's snort that demanded instant and complete attention; like the hiss of a snake it possessed that terrifying quality that could not be ignored. To that end it was perhaps designed—a danger signal for any whom it might concern.

Being on, or near, the ground, all eyes, waking at once, beheld Kifaru standing apparently above them—huge, it seemed, as a brontosaurus. That was a trick of the smoldering embers perhaps, which bewitched the dark.

Not that Kifaru needed magnifying at all, his actual, or daylight, proportions being quite startling enough. With a five-foot nine-inch height he boasted a length of thirteen feet. His chest, nine feet, one inch—unexpanded, I make no doubt—and his long, long head was about four feet, five and one-fourth inches around. His armed snout boasted two horns atop; the front, and longer, a full yard of spiked death, two feet three and one-fourth inches round at base; the second twelve and one-fourth inches long and twenty inches in girth at base. If, however, mere measurements convey little of the monstrous truth, his weight will supply the crowning touch—somewhere about two or three tons.

Of course Kifaru was a rhinoceros, of the prehensile-lipped persuasion, which is a two-horned rhino, which is a black rhinoceros, which is—in museums and such like—rhinoceros-bicornis, so that's that.

Then did camp boil. All the askaris' rifles went off at once, of course. Of course they endangered everybody's life except Kifaru's. The sentinels also went off at once. Fifty porters rose up like one man,

yelling, and fell over one another. Some genius shouted—

"Put out the fires!"

Another made up a fire. All the ground seemed to get up and tumble about. And seven donkeys, one mule and two horses stampeding did not quieten things very much. The noise was beyond asylums.

Kifaru had brought down one white hunter's tent in his first rush; the stifled remark from beneath sounded like a distant riot. The other white man, rearing for his rifle, was just in time to see Kifaru tossing the stores piled in front of the tents generously into the night. It sounded not unlike a railway accident.

Naturally one case of express rifle cartridges fell into a fire. It fell from some height and split in halves neatly like a walnut. The fireworks that followed were thrilling, and the vicinity of that fire became empty of human beings for quite some considerable radius.

Then the one white man under a collapsed tent not wriggling like a demon caterpillar put a revolver bullet—380 bore, it was—into Kifaru's battleship-like stern, and although it did not check that monster's maneuvering power it hurt his feelings, and he retired into the night, screaming like all the pig pens of the Chicago stockyards, not a snort less. And the only case of medical comforts for one hundred and fifty miles went with him, impaled upon his front horn and scenting the night like a chemist's shop.

Half a mile from the center of tumult Kifaru—whose walk was a Marathon one—stopped in the echoing, immemorial loneliness of the wilderness night and got rid of the incubus of the medical case upon a ten-foot ant heap. Thereafter he began supper on a four-inch-thorned mimosa bush, chewing twigs and leaves and thorns with machine-like indifference; but broke off to move out on to the open veld, where he appeared to graze, but searched really with his prehensile upper lip, for a very small shrub that usually tickled his mighty palate.

Somehow tonight, however, loneliness assailed Kifaru—it can not have been the revolver bullet, because it had in part contributed to his attack upon the camp. Nor would anything suffice. He broke off eating to jump into a most unexpectedly easy trot, that became a gallop of equally surprizing speed—all simply out of cussedness, to upset the stalk of a lion after zebra, he had scented a quarter of a mile away. Yet he had—to his enormous horns this may be attributed—utterly failed to see two hunting-leopards or cheetahs feeding upon a hen ostrich twenty yards from him before he started.

The excitement, however, accomplished nothing. The one burst of temper—never sweet at the best of times—had only served to awaken a worse.

Kifaru stopped and peered around with his little pig's eyes and short pig's tail stuck up at one end as straight as his horns at the other end, and the whole moonlit wonderland became distasteful to him. He, who had lived in this wild place for nobody knows however many years, now felt alone, alone among teeming thousands of feathered and furred wild kindred—alone because he was the only rhinoceros. At least he was the only rhinoceros he had ever met or scented or heard; seeing was out of the question unless they had got within ten or fifteen yards of each other.

And in that moment the beast's effete, prehistoric mind realized the fact that had taken him all those scores of years to find out—he was alone. He, *R. Bicornis*, wanted another *R. Bicornis* to snort to. Yes, the *Wanderlust* had him by the throat. He must "see behind the ranges"—***must.*** Life in that part now *alone* was intolerable without a—without a what? Without a Madame *R. Bicornis*. *That* was it. Kifaru was in love, in love with the rhinocerosess he had never seen.

And not all the company of all the zebras, all the ostriches, of all the antelopes, gnu, hartebeest, impalla, eland, oribi, waterbuck or gazelle after their kind, could suffice, or ever would again.

Some of us can sympathize with him; but unlike many who are not rhinoceroses Kifaru at any rate knew what to do—trek! Then he trekked. He trekked northward through the always grim—and at night terrible—thorn bush.

The spell of the scene lay heavy upon all things, and the stillness—increased, not broken, by the hundred and one little sounds—was the silence of the world when this antediluvian beast's ancestors, in common with elephant and hippopotami, had their "day." Surreptitious rustlings, sudden, startled crashes, swift patterings,

snorts, whistles, grunts or thuds—who knew what sinister or startled shapes they implied?

"And who cared?" Kifaru seemed to say, with his gigantic head up, his big, fringed ears cocked forward, his restless, absurd tail cocked high.

He did not anyway—not even for the barbed wire mimosa, the wait-a-bit thorn or the acacia, upon whose four and even six-inch meat-hook or straight, spiked skewers you or I would have left all the flesh we owned. Kifaru went through them all with that armor-plated unconcern that can go only with pretty well the thickest hide in Nature, and the weight of a steam roller to back it.

Once, as happened to *Tartarin of Tarascon*, Kifaru heard lions roar; but it was they, not he, who stood aside—growling in a horrible sinister way among the inky shadows. Once too he came upon that last word in agile death, two leopards, with the dam of a zebra foal at bay, and chased them, exploding with snarls, up a phenix palm tree full of bees; and once—*ough!*—he trod upon a python fifteen feet long, who, after the unspeakable manner of the serpent, had dined, not wisely but too well, and could not—simply could not—get out of the way. It did, however, when Kifaru had done with it—get out of everybody's way forever.

And all the time Kifaru traveled with his patent India-rubber, steam-press jog-trot that not the roughest of rough ground or the most fearsome of impenetrable thickets seemed able to check, till the great umbrella-like euphorbia trees closed in and marched him solemnly along by the double-troughed, tunnel-like hippopotamus paths to the river. The river slid in the moonlight, like a flood of mercury between banks all alive with fireflies, tree frogs and wheeling, churring nightjars.

NOW it is written that, though he may feed, not even the greatest land animals, the "left-overs" from the prehistoric, rhinoceros, elephant—but not hippopotamus for he is a water beast—may drink in safety. Kifaru must have known this, but his size had made him arrogant.

He drank, and, because his horns seemed always to get in the way of his eyes, he failed to see the quiet unimportant little ripple upon the oily current that may have been the ring of a fish on the rise, or—it may not. Certainly he with the wonderful nose did not fail to note the abominable stench of stale musk that pervaded the air a minute later. He drew back with that amazing agility that is always something nearly akin to magic with rhinoceroses and elephants; but the quickness of the crocodile's rush was even a quicker miracle.

Twelve feet of corrugated horny armor plating, two rows of hooked meat saws, a chaos of flying waters, and—the "croc" had him—by the horn.

Apparently the crocs do not look before they leap. Equally apparently, having once taken hold, they are either almost physically unable, or too cold-blooded, to let go.

Certain it is that the saurian's grip upon Kifaru's peculiar twenty-nine inch, three-toed "near fore" seemed as if it was a fixture for good.

Only one mistake the scaled nightmare made—in the depth of the water. It was shallow under her ponderous belly, and a crocodile not in deep water is robbed of half its terrors. Still, she had quite enough left, and the tug of war that ensued was—titanic.

What might have happened, what might not have happened, after that no man can say, for with extraordinary suddenness and heralded solely by a deep, cavernous grunting comparable only to a fog-horn, some tremendous Thing awoke to life and commotion in the forest labyrinths on the top of the riverbank and charged down the hippo path to the water with not much more noise than a runaway traction engine.

As a matter of fact, it was an old bull hippopotamus, lord of those particular reaches, who, hearing the uproar of the battle, suddenly conceived the notion that enemies were between himself and his beloved deeps. And when a hippo gets that into his slow brain it is all up with any living thing in his path that may not be able to get out of it. Get to the water he will, straight and in the least possible interval of time. Nothing can stand up to him, and all that he knocks down comes out the other end flat as a pancake.

It was sheer luck that he passed so close to Kifaru as to brush his side, instead of barging clean into and upsetting even the rhino, as he weighed four tons. Then he

saw the crocodile, and—stopped. He did his stopping as suddenly as he had accomplished his starting.

Of all mammals the hippopotamus alone seems designed by Nature successfully to cope with the crocodiles; he could not live where he does else. The elephant even is liable to be seized. Observers seem to have overlooked this fact.

One reason perhaps for the enormously disproportionate size of the beast's jaws. All his armament is there—tusks thirty inches long, thin bull head, and twelve huge teeth in proportion—and a very terrible armament it is, built evidently to face a very terrible adversary. A beast that can scrunch up boats as we scrunch biscuits can not be lightly set aside. Wherefore hippopotami and crocodiles seem to have arrived at a complete understanding.

And now for the first time the low, crawling thing saw the hippo. Other crocodiles, too, that had gathered like ghouls at the scent of blood, beheld him in the moonlight. *They* sank backward with prawn-like speed. The inky ripples splashed with silver moonlight sucked over them. They did not reappear.

The big crocodile began to writhe. Surely there was expression at last in these horrible, cold eyes—an expression of fear. She seemed to have difficulty in unlocking the vise of her jaws. The lashing of her terrible, plated tail whipped the shallows like soda and milk. If Kifaru's brain had not been as slow as the ages from which he was a survival, he would have horned her in her side; but he had no precedent for such a position.

The old bull hippopotamus paused only for a moment. The crocodile was in his path—enough! His jaws opened like an iron-spiked portcullis; a lion, one felt, could have been engulfed therein. His single bass grunt, hollow as the tomb, reverberated from tree-girt bank to bank all down the river. Then—he heaved forward. Followed a geyser of foam and apparently a submarine earthquake.

Kifaru backed up the slope, squealing like a shipload of porkers. The hippopotamus passed on straight and unchecked to his secret daylight quarters. But Heaven knows what became of the crocodile. The water took her back. But perhaps the other crocodiles, spread out to bask on the sand banks next day, might have added, with a wink of a slime-coated, horny eyelid—

"The rest is—silence."

THE sun they keep in those parts to cook the dinner had been blazing down upon the already sizzled-up red scenery for perhaps two hours, and the vultures had disappeared heavenward to do their daily undertaker's stunt, when we discovered Kifaru still on the move.

He had traveled about six miles in that time. Not more, because, since he weighed much, he had to eat much and eat often.

The heat flurry was dancing over against the landscape like the air above a locomotive's funnel, and the dust hung like fog above the restless antelope and zebra herds.

A white hunter under a huge sun helmet was moving in the tinder-dry grass, and appeared to be looking for something. He was as a matter of fact looking for Kifaru. He had been under the tent that Kifaru had knocked down the night before. Yet he was within fifty yards of the mighty beast before he realized that Kifaru was not a huge mound of earth.

At about this time the two native trackers with the hunter, who had alone made the finding of Kifaru possible, developed ancestral climbing powers into the nearest trees. The hunter and his black gun bearer—with the heavy rifle—completed the approach alone.

So big was the helmet that one had difficulty in discovering the white hunter beneath. It looked like a mighty mushroom. Still it seemed impossible that the rhinoceros should fail to discover him even when he approached to within twenty yards—moving up wind of course.

At about this time the gun bearer also took the ape route to a tree, and of course forgot to leave the heavy rifle behind him. Also some startling-like birds on and about Kifaru who had been relieving him of insect pests gratuitously, began to shoot and crash about in the air, trying to warn him.

Kifaru with his long, long head up was browsing, *via* his prehensile lip, upon leaves and twigs and thorns. Imagination reels to think what the inside of his mouth must have been like. Eating packing-needles was scarcely in it. Out of the compost mixed and chewed up he appeared miraculously to generate enjoyment and nourishment.

The hunter raised his light .275 magazine rifle and aimed 'twixt little eye and big ear. The report that followed seemed to outrage the sublime stillness of centuries, and set the game thundering away out on the plains yonder under whirling dust clouds. All the trees and bushes and grass hurled forth birds.

And Kifaru — Kifaru never moved. Never moved! He remained there with that colossal head of his up, as utterly indifferent and motionless as if he were posing for one of those Nature photographer's pictures; at least, he did so for ten seconds.

Then the white hunter backed off a bit—it may have been ten paces—and fired for the heart. By this time he had felt behind him for his heavy rifle and found it not. But it did not seem to matter very much, for Kifaru went down as if he had been struck by lightning—rigid.

That last point ought to have put that white hunter wise to the truth, but it did not. He started to approach the huge mass in the grass, rubbing his hands at the length of the horn trophy he had captured. Then he—*he did not.*

The alacrity with which these great pachyderms—pachyderm is right—can hoist their tons of weight on to their feet is only exceeded by the speed with which they can charge. And Kifaru did all these things between the time you could draw one breath and the next.

I said that he had fallen rigid. *That* showed. The bullet, being aimed for the heart, naturally struck inches above where it should have and jarred the spine, inducing temporary stunning. His motionlessness at the first shot showed that the bullet had flown over his head. Perhaps a gun bearer, or some clutching branch belike, had been fooling with the rifle sights.

The white hunter, who had got himself one hundred yards away in haste, fired now as quickly as he could—once. There was no time to shoot twice; Kifaru was upon him in ten seconds or less. The man tried to run to one side, caught his foot in some one of the thousands of foot entanglements all around, and fell headlong.

Kifaru arrived just as his foe was struggling to his feet, aimed deliberately, dropped his terrible armed snout and, still deliberately, tossed the luckless one over his head. 'Twas a shocking business throughout.

Then he charged on into the scenery, snorting, rearing, dashing and rushing to right and left, wheeling round as if to meet a following foe and generally making things hum in his immediate vicinity.

The path that he left was like unto the path of a tank, and the distance that he went seemed as if it never, never was going to come to an end. Presumably that bullet under the hump was still rankling on the monster mind as well as in the monster carcass. Anyhow the other white hunter tracked him ten miles next day and gave it up. Indeed, true it is that if you do not hit a rhinoceros in the right place it is no good hitting him at all.

A river he struck and went through and out on the other side—glistening most wonderfully black in the sun. A marsh he struck and went through and out on the other side, as did a lion asleep in a rushy bed in his path—red now from wallowing in the all-pervading red clay.

An elephant herd he met, went through and out on the other side. One could indeed see the towering backs swerving and dodging in all directions—for even Tembo the elephant, giant of all giants, had a wholesome horror of that long, low battering ram running in and spiking his enormous fat tummy. Last but not least, the day he went through and out on the other side—his blood spore had long since stopped—and the spell-binding, mystic moon found him still going when she climbed aloft to show up the night.

Kifaru did not seem to come out of that night anywhere at all, however. He just marched into it and the unspeakable thorn scrub and vanished like a spook. One supposes, however, that even he, with his back-number brain, knew his own business best; and that monastic retirement from the public eye, backed by as many and as fearsome thorns as possible to prevent attack by enterprising lions, who might take advantage of the .275 bullet, was urgently prescribed by Nature for a little while, at least till he mended.

One week later after the red sun had gone down on the red hills, where red rocks stuck out of the red earth in all shapes and sizes among riots of red flowers, a red and monstrous shape hoisted itself swingingly up the steep slope with that effortless sureness of foot that—as with the elephant also—is one of the surprizes about a rhinoceros.

Of course Kifaru was not red really. He was black-gray; but he had been wallowing in red clay in a pond of that red land, and, as if his own thick skin were not enough, had plastered himself with an armor coating of the landscape, so to speak. Scarcely of this age, and hardly beautiful at any time, Kifaru now resembled more than ever some terrific prehistoric beast of the Tertiary Age, which in fact was just what he was.

The moon slipped above the crest of that hill, which had been a volcano once, and lighted a weird path full of flitting tiny klipsringer antelopes, bouncing like chamois from rock to rock on their toes like very spirits of the place, as Kifaru climbed.

Far up, half an hour before, a lion had flung forth his deep, coughing bass thunder; and the rhinoceros met the royal pair now, slouching down to the plains to make their kill. His short-sighted eyes may not have seen, though certainly his wonderful nose did not fail to scent them, but he never turned aside.

He never swerved, hesitated nor faltered. It was the lions who had to do that or be trodden upon—growling and snarling horribly, as do all tyrants when they have to give way. One lion even made a gripping pass at him with his great paw when he had gone by, but Kifaru spun, literally spun, around in his stride with such surprizing agility and readiness that King Leo thought it prudent to go on downhill.

Anon Kifaru came to a track beaten flat on the steep ascent. He stopped for a moment and looked—if he could see—down upon the wilderness spread in the moonlight at his feet. Then, following the path, he climbed again.

Evidently that path had not been made in a day, or a year, or a century even. Kifaru, for that is known for certain, may have climbed it on the day Queen Victoria ascended the throne; and it was old, old, then. Only rhinoceroses could have beaten a track pavement flat like that—rhinoceroses or elephants, and considerably more than one, too.

At that elevation, though within a few miles of the equator, it was cold, almost frosty. Heather, bramble and bracken grew at every turn. It might have been a scene in the Scotch Highlands if Kifaru had not continued climbing till all vegetation stopped and there were only the naked boulders and the lip of the extinct crater atop, when it might have been a scene in the moon—but for the noise.

And the noise was over the lip of the crater. And it was the most extraordinary din one ever heard or dreamed of. And it made Kifaru stop as he topped the crest, stop short and listen, rigid, carven, monstrous, grotesque.

I DO not know what Kifaru saw, because he was so beastly near-sighted. What he heard and smelled was quite enough for his ears and nose, sharp even for a citizen of Nature.

There was the crater—the moon showed it—stark and cold and naked—indecently bold, horribly crude. There was a pool of water—but it really looked like molten silver in that light—filling the bottom of the crater. There was the blue-black, velvet sky and a round hole to let the light in. And that was all.

At least, it was all the human eye took in at first. After a time it occurred to one that the sloping sides of that amphitheater were not sloping sides at all, but *rhinoceroses' backs!* The ground they were slowly treading into a pavement was hidden beneath their bodies.

No man knoweth—not even the Wanderobo, who are the wildest hunting savages in Africa—how many rhinoceroses there were there, and to guess were absurd. All the rhinoceroses for very many, many square miles around, at any rate. Kifaru himself had come thirty miles from the river, alone; and there were others—but never mind.

The map, and all natives, said this was a district without water—but perhaps the Wanderobo knew. Anyway one might have passed the volcano a few hundred yards on the other side and never guessed what a natural reservoir of clear water there was over the lip.

But that was only a side count. What did matter was the rhino.

All patterns and makes and shapes and plans of rhinoceros were there in that elemental place. Rhino there were, low and of great length; leggy rhino, rhino fat and tubby; rhino with front horns aspiring for records; rhino with back horns longest; rhino with both horns equal, with long thin horns, short stubby horns, sharp horns, blunt horns, malformed horns, *three*

horns and no horns at all! They were all there, nearly all squealing like a thousand ungreased brakes, snorting or blowing off steam like all the engines of a terminal round-house, and all pushing and shoving and squeezing like pigs in a cattle-market pen toward the pool.

They were all there for water—perhaps. Certainly water rhino must have. But Kifaru had marched thirty miles from water, for one, so—that's that.

Another too could not have stayed there in that press solely for water at any rate, for she was standing smack in the middle of the pool all shining wet, and remarkable—besides the shrillness of her locomotive-whistle squeal—in that she owned the longest, thinnest pair of bayonet horns that ever one did see. By the slenderness of her horns one knew her sex; but Kifaru, being far away, must have gained enlightenment otherwise.

Rhinoceroses were continually arriving and leaving the assembly—going off arm in arm, so to speak, to their respective corners of the wilderness—but Kifaru, for all his age, was the only one of the whole lot who, from the day the .450 Express bullet coming from nowhere special took his mother in the forward ribs and she died, had never seen a rhinoceros before. Now he was seeing them in bulk, was looking down upon a sort of annual dance of the rhinoceroses in their ballroom. At least, that is what the natives think. Elephants indulge in a yearly ball, so why not rhinos? Only in this case it was not so much a dance as a "scrum."

Kifaru, however, was "the goods." For a space he had remained transfixed, mesmerized. Then what he saw and heard—a man could not have heard himself shout above the dim—went to his head, and he galloped down that slope and into that heaving mass like a—like an avalanche.

It will always remain one of the mysteries of Kifaru's career—but then so little is known of their life anyway, only plenty after their death—how he managed to get through that conglomeration of assembled monsters without being: 1, squeezed flat; 2, horned to ribbons; or 3, trampled to mud; but he did, though it took him some time, and the whistling snorts, the squealing and the general terrifying uproar in his vicinity were prodigious.

Now the position of that black, bayonet-horned female bulk in the middle of that pool there, though it appeared precarious, was really peculiar. With squeals that absolutely made one deaf she rushed upon and drove off every other rhino that attempted to drink at the pool, male or female, and so shamefully, selfishly conducted herself that unless they were willing to fight for it, it looked any odds on the whole gathering going without a drink that night.

Of course they could have fought for it, but the bull rhinos seemed to feel restrained by some antediluvian or pachyderm etiquette about "going for" a lady, while the cows appeared to take into consideration the obvious fact—as revealed by moonlight—that this was not only a lady rhinoceros of exceptional bulk, but that her horns were abominably long.

Therefore all the noise. Therefore also, no water. But how human, after all; how like a profiteer.

Rhinoceroses possess the tempers of Eblis at the best of times, and it takes very, very little to touch them off, so to speak. All the same, things must have transpired to Kifaru in forcing his way through that crowd that would have slain a lesser brute. Be that as it may, Kifaru arrived at the pool on end with rage—literally on end, prancing on his hind legs, dancing, pawing the cold night, choking, backfiring, exploding with rage, spinning round and round darting hither and yon, and generally behaving as if possessed of all the fiends on cinders.

The big female rhinoceros, standing in the pond, watched him. She watched him lower his hooky nose and drink. She watched another vast bull rhino bulk hurl at him with the deadly, low, long, sudden rush of all the pigs—hurl himself at Kifaru's battleship-like stern, and—meet Kifaru's yard-long, curving, murderous front horn instead. You know the awful, heaving, wrenching, sidelong slash of the pigs. Just so it lifted that rhino almost bodily into the air instead.

How Kifaru had swerved his ponderous bulk about in the quarter second of grace and with no warning given is one of those unfathomable secrets of the great pachyderms that Nature has not so far chosen to reveal. One thing only we know; power, steam-power, could not have spun his tons' burden round in the time, or rather the lack of time, he received anyway.

And it was a terrible thing, that terrific rendering, lifting stroke. It even drove Kifaru back on to his haunches like no more than a dog, for you can not stop two or three tons of weight charging at say twenty miles an hour, quite instantly without things happening.

They did. There was a sound like the last despairing shriek of boilers before they burst. There was an explosion of dust and stones and lava, as if an earthquake had selected that spot to start life in and—there was the other bull rhinoceros rolling upon his side, crater open, and spurting blood with every kick.

Then Kifaru looked round at the landscape. Kifaru tossed his odd, long snout. Kifaru drank long and thirstily, none approaching to say him nay. And—Kifaru walked up to the cow rhinoceros with the long thin horns and the short thin temper, and the dog-in-the-manger disposition, who had stood all the time as if turned to stone in the silvered trembling ripples.

Nay, he did more; he squealed at her a squeal that would have made even sphinxes jump. He "demonstrated" with his horns. He "danced" like a rocking-horse, only sidewise, and—and she meekly turned and trotted up out of the pool before him, up the slope of the crater, over the lip—would pen could picture their gigantic silhouettes against the cold moon—and—well, into the night.

A week later there were two rhinoceroses in the district in which Kifaru had always resided alone—two. And Kifaru was one of them, and, so far as I could ever find out, a good-tempered, placid, loyal old sort of husband he made.

THE CROATAN INDIANS OF NORTH CAROLINA

***by* Alanson Skinner**

ALMOST every schoolboy has been fascinated by the story of the colony sent out from England by Sir Walter Raleigh and landed on the Island of Roanoke in 1587, only to be temporarily abandoned. When succor arrived in 1591 the colony had vanished, and the only clew to their whereabouts was the word "Croatan" carved on a tree. Later, neighboring Indians told settlers at Jamestown that the colonists had abandoned Roanoke and lived among the natives for several years, when they were accused of witchcraft, and all murdered except a handful who were spared at the order of a chief.

In North Carolina, principally in Robeson County, there are almost six thousand persons who claim to be descendants of the lost Roanoke colonists and their Indian neighbors. For many years these people, who are still obviously of mixed Indian and white blood, were classed with the Free Negroes, but at length, sometime during the eighties, they succeeded in having their claim officially established, and they were given a separate legal existence under the name of Croatan Indians. They now have their own schools and churches, and are admitted to other privileges not granted the blacks, classification and segregation with whom they have always resented.

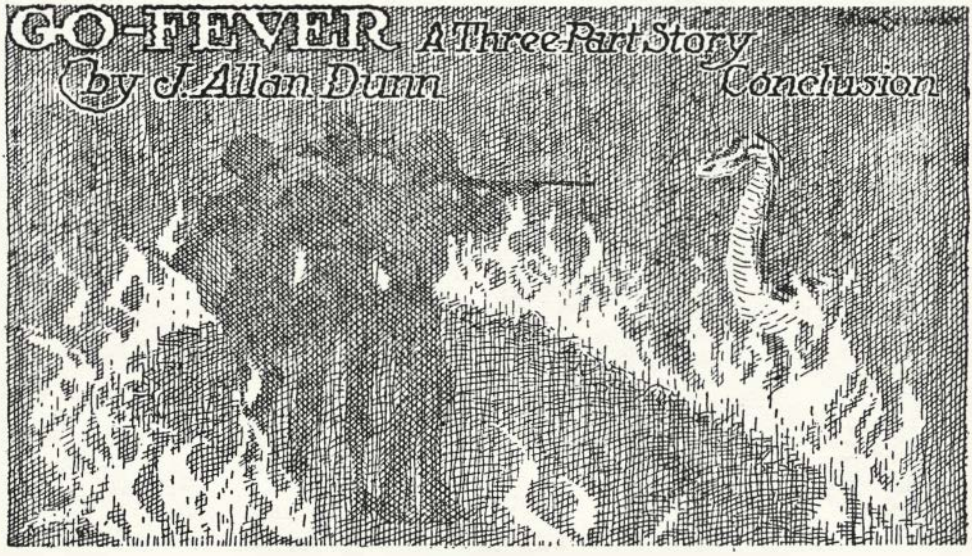
The best authorities declare that the claim of the Croatans to descent from the lost Roanoke colonists is baseless, and that the Indians are the mixed blood descendants of local tribes and early forest rovers, colonists, stranded seamen and negroes. But perhaps one opinion is as good as another.

Across the State line in South Carolina is another group of mixed bloods, called the Red Bones. In Delaware there are more, under the name of Moors, and in the Ramapo Mountains of New York and New Jersey is still another group known as Jackson Whites—Blacks and Whites?—known to be made up of the descendants of Delaware and Tuscarora Indians, with a strain introduced by runaway Hessian soldiers who fled there during the Revolutionary War.

GO-FEVER

A Three-Part Story

Conclusion



by J. Allan Dunn

Author of "Barehanded Castaways," "Jinx," etc.

The first part of the story briefly told in story form.

"GOLD!" said the Anzac to the Yankee as they sat on a park bench in San Francisco. "Slathers of gold. Me and my partner Bill would have got it, only seventy-nine Myalls came out of the holes in the lava and chased us with spears. They got Bill. Now I'm looking for another partner to go back with me after it."

"Where'd you say it was?"

"Queensland. Up north Australia. Headwaters of the Herbert River. Want to take a chance?"

Sergeant Jimmy Cole, late of the A. E. F., would take a chance. He had nothing to lose. In fact, he and his new-found partner, the Australian Reynolds, were so poor they had to wash dishes that night for their dinner and seek lodging in a flop-house, where they got a room for the small price of six-bits and a fight with a husky individual who coveted their quarters.

The proprietor of the flop-house observed the fight with a pleased and appreciative eye. He was a boxing promoter, in a way. Some days later Jimmy Cole, who had been a champion with the A. E. F., was in training for a battle with "Sailor" Shannon.

The fight lasted five rounds. Although it was full of action and blood the gobs in the audience walked out with sour looks. All the money they had bet on the Pride of the Navy was lost, but Sergeant Jimmy Cole had won enough to take him and Reynolds and a third partner they had picked up, Petrie, an artist, to Australia.

They set sail. What they would do for further funds when they got there they hadn't decided, but Petrie was an ingenious chap and they were all in perfect health, except for a strong touch of the world-old adventurer's disease, go-fever.

REYNOLDS and Cole counted out their money on the bed in the little room they had hired in a Sydney boarding-house.

"Two shillings and elevenpence," said Reynolds, "which is not enough to buy the neat little boat I saw this afternoon. What's the answer?"

"Here is the answer," cried Petrie, coming in. "Gold!" He held aloft a cake of soap.

"I've got a commission to paint a fancy wrapper for this for enough money to buy your neat little boat, I reckon," he explained.

They celebrated that night by going to the movies. The picture was exciting, but more exciting was the fight that started on their way home when a gang of street-corner loafers shouted after them—

"—— Yanks!"

The —— Yanks and their Anzac pal had little trouble licking the larrikins, who were led by a young tough named Sevier, a friend of their landlady's son with a fancied grievance against the three. Some days later they forgot all about the battle as they sailed in the sloop *Adventurer* through the shallow sea between the Great Barrier Reef and the mainland, bound for North Australia and the Herbert River.

Then came dirty weather. The sloop bucked and rolled, and Reynolds fell sick. It seemed to Cole and Petrie that they spent an eternity fighting a heartbreaking fight against wind and wave before the sun shone out and found them safe—but without water. It was the juice from some forgotten tomato cans that saw them through to the mouth of the Herbert.

With a dinghy full of provisions from the little town, and with ears full of dark prophecies from the townspeople, they rowed up the river, leaving the sloop behind. At the end of twenty-five miles they camped, and two skinny black fellows came stalking out of the bush.

"You like sugar bag?" they asked, and proceeded to supply the party with wild honey. Also they invited the three to view a Myall kangaroo hunt

and a native dance, and hired themselves out as guides. Their names, they said, were Morobora and Dangoran.

They made excellent guides until they tried to sacrifice Petrie's dog, Perro, to the grim gods of the forest.

"I don't fancy we've seen the last of them," said Petrie as the white men pushed on alone.

It was harder going after that, for the terrors that inspired the Myalls to believe in fierce jungle gods had their origin in very real dangers that now threatened the white men on every side. They knew great hardship before they broke through to the place from which they could see the five lava upthrusts, which marked the deposit of gold, shining in the sun.

THE forest of disheartened trees with straggly, somewhat feathery and yellowish foliage, had practically no undergrowth. The sun blazed down as through a lattice. At first it seemed as if there was no life within it, no birds, no beasts, no reptiles, only great quantities of red and black ants making their lengthy caravans. But there was a dim sort of trail that they followed as best they could, and it led them at dusk to a swampy place with a reedy pool in the center, where they made their fire. Then things began to make themselves manifest.

Perro, who had been uneasy all day, looking backward continually, sniffing, sometimes standing with lifted ears and muzzle as if he suspected pursuit, an attitude that kept them on the *qui vive* for prowling blacks, went into the reeds after drinking and almost immediately began to bark furiously. Petrie followed him in, his gun ready, stepping carefully as Reynolds cautioned him against snakes.

The Airedale was facing a black serpent, as long as Cole was tall, with a belly the color of bright copper and a flattened, venomous head with fangs ready to strike. Petrie shot the head off with his pistol, kneeling for better aim, and dragged out the body.

"Bush-devil," said Reynolds. "If he bites you you swell up and turn the color of a ripe plum. At least you do if your skin's black. By gum, there's another. The —— place 's alive with 'em. It's the fire bringin' 'em out of the reeds. Get some clubs."

In the dusk, from all directions, snakes came writhing, in curiosity or anger. They broke the backs of nine of them in as many minutes, three bush-devils, others stubbier and brown, equally poisonous. They retreated to higher, barer ground on a knoll and restarted their fire, adding to it, building a circle of dry logs with brush packed against them to make a blazing ring against the crawling interlopers.

The night had turned quite cool and they did not mind the extra heat but it plainly attracted the snakes. They came up out of the reeds by the score and ventured close to the burning wood, rearing their spiteful crests above the flaming barrier with their eyes shining in the glare like rubies. Perro, tied to a tree, went almost frantic with restrained wrath, choking with his rage. A musky odor came from the serpents and every moment others emerged from the swamp and twined their sinuous lengths with the rest.

"Gives me the Jimmies," said Cole. "What do we do, roost in the tree tonight or back up into the woods? We've got our water."

"I vote we back up," said Reynolds. "We'll leave 'em the fire to warm at. Better pick up the pup, Petrie. We'll all walk pretty. Look at that! There's the daddy of all the snakes for you. Food enough for a whole tribe here. Want a snake cutlet, either of you?"

"Looks like the original from the Garden of Eden." said Petrie. "Wait a bit. He's a beauty."

"Beauty, my hat!" said Reynolds. "That's a python. A twenty-footer, if he's an inch. We'd better cut our luck. They say that *vindchehs* — that's the native name—will tackle men in the pairing season—tackle anything. Come on or we won't get out. They've got us surrounded."

It was the python after all who gave them their chance to get out of the ring of writhing, hissing muskiness. Whether the mating season theory was correct or not it was plain that the serpents were now angry, restrained only by the circle of burning logs about which they crawled, apparently seeking an opening. But the python, magnificently mottled with dark brown on orange, his belly plated in silver, was the king of the swamp and a monarch whose path was left clear by lesser reptiles. They slid out of his way, gathering into knotted tangles as he glided majestically on and, close to the barrier, lifted his head several

feet on his undulating neck and surveyed the three bipeds before he concentrated attention on Perro, struggling in Petrie's arms.

Cole put a Winchester slug clean through its head and it lunged blindly forward, the thrashing body half inside and half outside the burning logs, the smell of its burning flesh nauseating, lashing out in wild contortions, sweeping the ground in breaks of its constant coils, involuntarily clearing a way for their hasty exit, hurrying between the boughless, leafless tree-trunks, guided by the glow of the fire to a drier, less exciting spot.

It was a long time before any of them got drowsy. Perro was restless, directing his attention, not toward the snake-infested swamp but to the dark aisles of the wood. It kept them on the alert. The dim trail, they argued, must have been made by the blacks and a tribe might be near them. Or Reynolds' hunch about Dango might be correct.

Several times during the day's march they had suddenly wheeled about and tried to see something to account for Perro's persistency. The naked trees gave clear view enough, they thought, for them to have seen something of any natives who might be observing them. There was no ground cover; the distance between trees was considerable; it seemed as if they must have seen figures as they leaped for cover.

This mystery appeared solved when Perro, lying by the new fire, couched with his head between his paws, sprang up, bristling and made the bare forest send his voice echoing weirdly back.

Too far from the firelight for anything to be visible but eyes and shadowy forms shifting position, noiseless, mute creatures gathered and gazed at them with orbs the hue of the flames of burning alcohol in which salt is dissolved; lambent and greenish, spectral.

"Dingoes," said Reynolds. "Like your western coyotes, Cole. Cowardly. They won't attack a man. But you can tame 'em. Curious as a monkey in a fruit store. Natives find 'em in hollow trees when they're pups. Give 'em a name, let 'em sleep with the family, kiss 'em on the snoot, pick the fleas off 'em and eat the fleas. Fact.

"I've seen 'em carrying the dingoes on their shoulders. They get tired hunting and won't go any farther unless they're carried, like a kid. Leave 'em behind and you lose 'em. They're one-man brutes though, at that. Never bark, got a wonderful scent and kill game on the run. If Perro wasn't along we might coax 'em in. It's a cert some of 'em have been tamed—if you call it that. They nearly always run off in the breeding season and never show up, though they'll breed with dogs readily enough. Spooky, ain't they?"

One handsome female, reddish yellow with a white breast, came in close to the fire and stood waving her plumy tail. Perro stopped barking and sniffed, then whined.

"Perro's got the call of the wild," said Petrie. "Look at her vamping him."

"Think he'd go, if you weren't holding him? Think his affection for you would offset the mating instinct, Petrie?"

The artist looked quizzically across at Cole.

"Hard to tell."

"Go to sleep, the pair of you, while I take first watch. I'll amuse myself by watching the dingo lady vamping Perro."

IN the middle of the night some evil genius opened a flood-gate in the sky and tons of water descended, not in regular rainfall but in unbroken bodies of water that utterly drenched them, extinguished the fire with one despairing hiss, satisfied the parched earth and turned it into a shallow lake under the trees within an hour. The wood seemed haunted with misfortune and the unkindly element seemed resolved that they should have no assistance from its foe.

All efforts at making a fire failed. It was pitchy dark and the felling of a tree a riddle for better woodsmen than themselves to solve, as they stumbled about, trying for higher, drier ground, bumping into each other, trying to salve their possessions; while Perro, wet and whimpering, wandered with his master and friends. They ran into trees and fell over roots and found no fallen wood, while the only boughs of that stingy growth were far beyond ax reach, and unseen.

The downpour changed gradually to mere javelins of water rather than cascades. The ground seemed to steam, but it was cold and they shivered as with ague. The blackness was absolute and they called

to each other with hoarse cries like so many bullfrogs, sloshing around ankle-deep.

By sheer good luck Cole tripped over a projecting root and, embracing the trunk, found it hollow and with an opening almost large enough to admit him. This entrance was about three feet from the ground. He halloed his find to keep the rest near him, wedged in and groped gingerly, afraid of snakes yet driven by necessity, and yelled with joy to find the bottom of the interior stored with decayed wood that was dry while the sides were also free from damp and smelled resinous.

He lighted a match and saw that the hollow ran high like a chimney though it must be closed at the top. Carefully he coaxed and fed a tiny fire that flickered, faltered, smoked confoundedly but persevered though it gave little heat until Reynolds broke through the side of the shell and the draft sucked at the flames and soon, in defiance of the slowly failing rain, flared like a mighty torch while they turned themselves about like spitted roasts, took off their clothes and dried them, reveling in the warmth and light.

There was no wind, the hollow tree had few boughs and no foliage, the neighbors were well soaked and far enough apart to resist contagion and the roaring pillar burned alone until it collapsed just before morning that came gray and foggy, with an atmosphere that Petrie likened to a combination of a hothouse and an overworked steam laundry. The wet ground had kept them from bedding down and they ate a sleepy breakfast while the reluctant sun sucked up the mist and once more dried the soil of the forest—the hoodooed forest—as Cole christened it.

Nor had the hoodoo ended. Petrie woke with Reynolds striking off his face a black spider with a scarlet splash on its body that had swung its aerial cable from above and descended to within an inch of his nose before the Anzac wakened and happened to observe it.

"Tarantula?" asked Petrie, inspecting the insect calmly.

"Worse. That spider means a three days paralysis, if you're lucky. If you're not you stay that way till they put a lily in your hand and wire your folks what shall they do with the body.

"You chaps may think I'm jollying you about the snakes and spiders but I'm not. There's a big woolly black spider that makes you vomit and gives you cramps and there are a dozen snakes that are pals of the undertakers."

"I'll take your word for it," said Petrie.

That was a short day's hike. They passed the swamp by circling it. Low mist still rose from the reeds and one vista showed them dark water with overhanging trees and others that leaned or lay rotted in the water. These were festooned with snakes, sluggishly looped from the boughs, their coils intermingled, their musky odor heavy on the air.

It took them three days to work through the forest scrubs. On the evening of the third day Reynolds found that his favorite pipe was missing—the bowl of his alternate was charred and cracked.

"I laid it at the foot of the tree where we had noon chow," he said. "It's two hours till dark and I'm going back. I won't be packing anything and I'll make good time."

"Risky going it alone this time of the day," suggested Cole. "The dog's been fussing, too. Better let one of us go back with you and the other can stay by a fire."

"The pup's been fussy right along. I wouldn't lose that pipe right now, for a farm. I'll take my automatic and if anything shows up I'll fire—just once—to save cartridges. That 'ud scare off any Myalls—and stop you worrying," Reynolds added with a grin.

He went off at a good gait whistling. It was dusk when he came back guided by the leaping flames, supper ready. His face was serious.

"There are blacks around all right," he said. "I didn't see any tracks. They're too smart for that. But I left that empty tobacco can right with the pipe—and they're both gone. No dingo did that—or snake either. The can they'd be crazier for than the pipe. It's my own fault. I'll have to make the old one last out, but I guess the pup was right. They are tracking us for some reason. That ain't all. I shortcut back knowing I'd see the fire easy enough when it got dark and I picked this up."

It was a burned match end. Not wood but the remnant of a vesta match, tiny woven wicks covered with wax and headed with ignition, sold in small metal boxes and popular for their damp-resisting package. They did not have any of them in their

outfit, having bought safeties carried in waterproofing, with a flint and steel for emergency.

"Might have been a native," said Reynolds doubtfully. "But they ain't apt to have *madhsi*, as they call 'em, way out here. When they get any from a white man they usually burn 'em up like a kid does fireworks, right off."

"Think some one's on our trail? Heard about the gold?"

"Whoever it is, they've got blacks with 'em," said Reynolds. "They'd never make it on their own. It may be all a false alarm but we'll find out as soon as we get in the sand. The blacks 'll keep 'em out of sight but, if we leave camp and circle round back to it, we're liable to find better trail. I don't like it."

They were down to bush-fare now, finding the ration fairly well balanced and supplying sufficient energy. They had corned beef and some canned mutton that was almost tasteless as meat and came close to the epithet of "boiled rag" that Reynolds bestowed upon it. Slices of this with damper, fresh made of flour, salt and water, baked in flat cakes in red-hot ashes, excellent when fresh, washed down with tea brewed in a pannikin, made the staple meal topped off with tobacco.

They had a few cans of tomatoes and of peaches and greengages which they hung on to for emergencies and when their craving for sweets became overstrong. They made no bower huts but slept on a waterproof under woolen blankets with one or two boughs stuck up at their heads—when they could get them—a trick insisted upon by Reynolds who said it would prevent them from inhaling the dew which was apt to be malarial. It was a bushman's trick.

Then the desert opened before them. Comparatively level sand set with clumps of spinifex, or porcupine grass, needle-pointed, the spikes often crossing blades and forcing them to detours. Scratches were inevitable and sores formed at every laceration, stubborn to heal despite medication. It was hard going for all of them, it was hardest on Perro. They pushed on under a broiling sun, conserving their water. They could get a supply in the caves by digging, Reynolds promised them, but if there was none when they reached the nearest hills of lava, they were going to be in desperate case.

THERE was no elevation on the grassy wilderness from which they could sight the lava until they were close on it. Each realized the dangers of their trip as they plunged farther into the maze with the spiky grass all around them or lurched over patches of soft, shifting sand. They burned blacker and blacker and nightfall found them dog-tired, too tired to suggest carrying out the idea of circling back to see if they were trailed. To find a previous camp would be almost impossible. There was no fuel for fire and they ate stale damper sipped at their tepid water and chewed the salt beef with the determination of hardihood.

The only life they saw was in battalions, armies of great ants that lived in the spinifex clumps, inexhaustible myriads of them; and vast droves of grasshoppers that leaped ahead of them as they beat through the grass. They had tried to keep a straight course from where they had sighted the lava hills from the mountains that now began to lift behind them, gray green with deep blue shadows above the rocky flanks, vivid at sunset, purple in the early mornings.

They spoke little as they pushed on, taking turns to lead with frequent rests, irritated by the pricking spinifex, the sores where it had penetrated the skin, the shuffly sand, the salt sweat that ran everlastingly out of them, the air that seemed to scorch their lungs and never fill them, chary of an extra step under a sky like glazed pottery with a sun of red-hot brass beating down. The nights were chilly and a relief, but it all tested their manhood to the core.

No one grumbled. Petrie once epitomized the thoughts of all of them.

"I don't care how much gold there is, Tom Reynolds. I am here to tell you we're earning every ounce of it. When I think of packing it out I get more moderate in my desires each time. I'm down to ten pounds as my limit right now."

Reyncld grunted. His pipe was only half a bowl now and he dared not clean the charcoal out of it for fear of the crack. Their tobacco was dusty and stinging, gone in a whiff.

"If we take out enough to fit up a proper expedition," said Cole. "We can come back and get all we want, once we've staked our claims and registered them."

"I'll send a proxy," said Petrie. "No, I won't. We'll put in and hire an aeroplane. Buy one. Kind of a spiky landing, but I've seen worse. Make regular trips to our bank. The Goldseekers' Special. Modern, speedy, cool and comparatively comfortable. We could tote out enough. It's practical, fellows, though I was joking when I mentioned it."

"Sounds all right, at that," said Cole. "We'd get rid of these —— ants by the air route, anyway. Cooties are love-birds compared to 'em."

"We wouldn't lose our way," said Petrie again. "As it is we've kept direction and I've tried to figure out our leeway. I don't believe we're much out of the road."

"Hope not," said Reynolds, gingerly refilling his pipe. "We're getting shy on water."

"We've been that way before," said Cole. "It may rain." And he looked up at the cloudless sky.

The fourth day saw a horn of rock rising above the spinifex clumps in midmorning. It heightened, bifurcated, showed a spiny back-bone that joined it to lower serrations, a pinnacled mass of dark brown with shadows of darker purple. They halted before they could see the base. The upthrust seemed to be about half a mile in length from their viewpoint.

"How about it, Tom?" Cole asked huskily.

Reynolds squinted with his eyes narrowed between gummy, inflamed lids. The sand blight had got its work in on all of them.

"Hard to tell from here," he said slowly. "But I think—fellows—I think we've walked straight up to the —— old dump after all."

CHAPTER VIII

GLAMOUR OF GOLD

THE winds of untold centuries must have beaten against those obsidian crags mounting above the sand that might well have slowly risen about them like a flooding sea, year after year, to engulf this sharp reminder of the times when the earth shook and spouted steam and flame. The siliceous grit had ground and fretted against those pinnacles and failed to blunt them, unless they had eaten away the softer pumice and left only the harder cores of igneous rock fused into volcanic glass, black, and in places only semi-opaque, the shining, polished surfaces flinging back the rays of the sun.

Perhaps the wind had worried out the caves that pittied it in places. Perhaps all this was sea-bed, lifted high in some supreme convulsion that brought the land smoking from the main.

The supreme effect was primordial. Utter solitude and remoteness from all the world of men. A dinosaur, emerging from the dark mouths of the caves, would have seemed so wholly in keeping with time and place that it was more surprizing not to see it than actually to behold it.

Stark and sere they lifted from the sand and the spinifex. The scene held all three of them in a sort of hypnosis. Petrie found himself chanting improvisations.

"In the beginning there was rock and sand and spiny grasses.
So it was before things came to be and after all were ended.
Desolation and the desert—the abomination of desolation."

Here was the goal they had come far to find and fought to reach. The treasure-box that held the gold they sought. Yet the frowning mystery of the mass with its turrets, buttresses and spires, its naves and transepts, its yawning doorways, kept them back as if they had come across the castle of a wizard, the black cathedral of a fiendish creed.

"Abandon hope, all ye who enter there," said Petrie in a high voice that broke the tension.

Cole looked at him anxiously, fearful that he was delirious. The food, eaten cold, the stale water and sour damper, had given all three of them mild dysentery, but ever since they sighted the first lava peak the attack had become severe with Petrie, though he had insisted upon pushing on, staggering now and then yet making light of it.

"I'll take the gold cure," he told them laughingly. "I'll own up I'd like some hot grub, but there's no prospect of it in this wilderness and the sight of Tom Reynolds' glittering lode will work wonders."

Now his eyes were a little glazed and his talk was off balance from the rational. They might get no fire here, Cole told himself, but they would make Petrie rest up, they would stake their claims, gather what

gold they might and get away from the place. The glamour of it held him but, with the fascination, he felt a curious dread. Treasure-trove like this was oftenest found in places where the earth denied sustenance to man or beast. It was a recurrence of a law of chemistry, he supposed, that placed elementary minerals in the still raw matrices of the world, yet now it seemed like a warning.

All about them the endless caravans of ants perpetually crossed and recrossed, carrying provender, marching to battle, herding slaves, migrating, going about their own business, unmindful of the giant beings that could crush them underfoot by the tens of thousands and still not deter them from the hidden purposes of their steady evolution.

A flight of grasshoppers whirred out of a spinifex clump, dropped and rose again. Armored, like the ants, bony things like machines, terrible in their possibilities of ravage; destructive, at the last perhaps omnipotent.

Suddenly the base of the lava crags wavered as if they looked through flawed glass. It disappeared and, in its place, there showed a ravishing vision of a pool with giant ferns about it, trees drooping overhead, blue waterlilies afloat amid great emerald leaves where brown, long-legged birds stilted, seeking snails.

The mirage was so vivid that Perro rushed forward to the phantasmal brink of the water and paused half way to give a short bark and come foolishly back looking appealingly at his men friends as if to ask them what wizardry had roused this mocking magic. His eyes had deceived him but his surer nose did not. He saw water, but he smelled only sand and the faint spice of the spinifex, the sour stink of the ants.

"This place is haunted, but nothing daunted,
We'll gaily——"

The song died on Petrie's lips and he collapsed, his lips blue, his fingertips pinched and his eyes sunken.

They had found the treasure-place—the caves proved that and the closer view of the formation, recognized by Reynolds, but sickness had reached out and touched Petrie with a spectral hand. The gayest, gamest of the three was paying the penalty of trespass.

Cole and Reynolds picked him up and carried him through the mirage that faded as they advanced, reaching the caves, bearing him into the largest of them and putting him down on its damp floor. His flesh was cold, his eyes closed and his pulse barely susceptible. Cole opened the medicine kit and dosed him with cholera mixture that reeked of laudanum.

"We've got to get a fire," he said to Reynolds, "if it's only of dry grass. Got to get him warm and boil his water."

The dose restored Petrie slightly and the word "water" made him repeat it with his parched, blue lips. He was close to collapse and Cole saw the importance of checking the disease before it ravaged the weakened system. Reynolds hurried out to come back with great bunches of the lower tiers of the spinifex clusters, his hands and wrists pricked badly but making nothing of it as he hastened to avert the disaster that threatened them. Soon there was a pile of yellow and brown blades on the floor of the cave that blazed up readily and flung out an intense heat. The crude petroglyphs that Reynolds had mentioned showed on the walls and ceiling, the light played far into the tunnel like interior of the cave.

Petrie stirred to the warmth and vigor of the medicine. His eyes cleared, stayed open and his pulse went up.

"I'm thirsty as the ——," he whispered to Cole. "Better, though, lots better, old chap. Not going to flop at this stage of the game."

Cole wrapped him in blankets, and while Reynolds went out for more of the far too inflammable grass that flared up and reduced itself almost instantly to gray ash, he looked for a spot where water might be dug for. It showed moist on the walls and there were places where the ground was slippery with a pasty mud. It was damper in the tunnel and he entered it.

Less than twenty feet in he came across the remains of a fire and other relics of savage occupancy. There were calcined bones, a scorched skull that separated as his foot struck it, but he barely noticed them as he saw several good sized pieces of charcoal and fragments of partly charred wood. He clutched at them eagerly and bore them back, putting them on the grass ashes and blowing at them until he had a compact fire on which he set a pannikin, with the last of their canteen water in it and a pinch of

tea. He knew enough about dysentery from his wartime experience to guess that the deadly amoeba germ was in the water and that boiling would sterilize it sufficiently for Petrie's use.

REYNOLDS went into the tunnel and dug at the wet earth, making a hole that soon began to fill. The grass flare died down and it was too dim for him to notice the bones at first. Cole said nothing. Aside from dampness, there was no smell of decay; the bones were old, innocuous remains of some cannibal feast held long since. As long as the water was boiled——

After his weak tea and another dose of the laudanum mixture Petrie slept; his pulse and breathing showed that he was fighting successfully against the attack. Cole and Reynolds made themselves a warm meal and some fresh damper, opening a can of peaches, setting some aside for Petrie, feeding Perro, boiling more water while the charcoal lasted and refilling their canteens. At last they lit their tobacco and sat talking in low tones.

"We'll get out of here as soon as we can," said Reynolds. "It's a weird sort of dump. You'd think the blacks would be afraid to come here but those figures they've marked up show they used it and they must have packed in that wood specially. I'm not stuck on the hang-out. The gold ledge is sticking right out of the sand on the west side. Want to go and see it or wait till Petrie can go with us?"

"Good idea, Tom. It'll buck him up, maybe and he'll like us to find it all together. I guess you're right about their packing in the wood. Wonder if there's any stowed away. Solve things for us if there is."

They had two electric torches that they had reserved so far, not having had especial use for them, with a feeling that they might come in useful in emergencies. With one of these they explored the tunnel. The broken top of the skull leered at them. It had high cheek-bones and practically no forehead. It looked as if it had belonged to ape rather than man.

Cole said so, inspecting the skull with the torch ray.

"They ain't much better," said Reynolds. "One thing, they never use skins for clothing. If they get cold they light a fire Some of the women make little bark capes, but that's all. But they're smart, like monkeys. Cut down the telegraph poles and use the wire for fishhooks. Just a bit better than animals. Man told me once in the Sydney Museum the highest development they showed was that they knew how to polish stone for axes. Say, look there, up in that hole!"

The tunnel and the cave itself were probably first caused by a blowout of gas or the outflow of melted lava as a liquid core from the hardening mass. In the sides of the tunnel were fissures that had been used as closets. In the one Reynolds pointed to where the beam of the torch had strayed—and in two others—lengths of wood were stored, dry wood roughly severed into four-foot sticks. The labor of bringing them across the desert, unless somewhere a tongue of woodland projected into it closer to the cave—and they had seen nothing of the sort from the mountains—must have been prodigious. It marked the cave as a grisly rendezvous for secret orgies but the sight of the fuel was far more precious to them in the emergency than the gold they had come for.

It meant sterilized water and hot food; it meant life itself to Petrie. There was enough of it, used sparingly, to last them for days.

They packed it jubilantly into the outer cave and started a real fire. When Petrie woke it was still glowing and he stared at it unbelievingly.

"Almost makes one believe in the personal God," he said weakly but cheerily, "or have you chaps sold yourselves to the devil who made this place for a load of his own private fuel?"

He was better in the morning, insisting upon getting up.

"Fine gold-hunters we are," he said. "Imagine you two aren't as keen for wealth as you pretend to be." And the light in his eyes was bright with friendliness and recognition of their real cause for delay.

The fierce sun, coming straight at them while it flung grotesque shadows from the spinifex clumps and silhouetted the strange shadow of the lava peaks, made him stagger a little but he refused the help of an arm and went with them round the rugged buttresses of lava, Reynolds leading, striding on ahead, anxious to prove his claim.

At last he whirled upon them, his eyes blazing.

"There you are, chummies," he shouted. "There's the layout. Now call me a ruddy liar if you want to!"

The words he had spoken to Cole in Portsmouth Square flashed back to the ex-sergeant.

"Gold! Slathers of it! Spattered all over the reef! Bright as brass in the sun!"

There it was with the level rays of the sunrise fair upon it. A hill of siliceous sinter, flinty, almost colorless, the output of a geyser in some remote age. The sloping face of it was fully two hundred feet in height and near it were similar formations of lesser proportion. They did not look at these. They saw only the gleams of gold, chafed bright by wind-carried sand, not in veins but spattered, in such irregular pattern as mud would make flung at a wall. Specks here and spots as large as a thumb nail, zigzags and streaks an inch wide, glittering like polished brass, indeed, but gold, soft to the knife-blade.

A fortune incalculable! A miniature mount of Midas!

The glamour of gold was on them as they dug at the stuff, laughed and shouted and hefted the heavy fragments they dug out in the palms of their hands. Perro romped between them, barking furiously.

"Now call me a ruddy liar!" cried Reynolds again and again. His excitement was the reaction from the responsibility under which he had been laboring.

"Bring on your airship," he shouted. "Crack the nut, chummies, and pick out the meat."

Cole slapped him on the back and Petrie, too weak for such demonstration, grinned ecstatically. They turned to go back to the cave for their tools. They had won. All they had to do was to cash in.

"Bail up!"

THE command was emphasized by the hum of a bullet overhead, followed by another. Not twenty yards away stood five white men, three of them bearded, roughly clad in bushranger's clothes. The fourth—to their astonishment—was Mart Sievers and the fifth his pigeon, Alec. Brown, son of their Sydney landlady. The key to the solution of it all flashed through their minds. Somehow—at Sydney—some one had discovered their secret. Had listened — overheard, pieced together—followed.

All five were armed with rifles, there was no mistaking the imperative menace of the "Bail up!" the challenge of the bush-whacking highwayman. In the background, grinning and furtive—Dango and his fellow black.

They had their automatics belted on them but they were covered. For a moment they hesitated. A third bullet went through Cole's hat, carrying it away, the rush of the bullet plainly felt through his hair, passing a deathly finger over the top of his scalp. Furious but impotent, they raised their arms.

Two of the bearded men came forward with Sievers. The other stepped aside, flanking them with his rifle. Young Brown essayed to follow his example but his rifle wobbled in his hands and it was plain that he was nearly done up. His face was badly burned, his lips split and festered and he limped when he walked. The man who seemed to be the leader and spokesman swore at him.

"Much obliged to the three of you," sneered Sievers. "Here's where I get even with you, you ——!"

He struck out to slap Cole in the face as the latter stood defenceless, arms raised. Cole ducked the blow and kicked Sievers hard on the shin. Cursing, the bully clubbed his rifle, but the man next to him caught his arm.

"None o' that, you larrikin," he said. "We ain't goin' to swing for your private quarrels."

"You're fussy, for a bunch of robbers," said Cole, his dammed-up wrath overflowing, his eyes flaming. "This is our discovery. You'll pay for this, anyway."

The leader grinned, showing stumpy and yellow teeth, spitting a stream of tobacco juice before he answered, after he had taken their weapons from them.

"Your discovery?" he drawled. "Say, Yank, how you going to prove it? You say you got here first; we say you didn't. Our word's better than yourn, I'm thinkin'. I don't see no location sign. There ain't no record of claims, but there's goin' to be—in our names. Not that we give a —— about that. Time we leave here we'll take the gold along with us. We ain't goin' to pick it out with our jack-knives, like we

was pickin' teeth, either. We're goin' to mine it—right. Put a blast into it.

"Tough luck for you chaps, but all's fair in gold-minin'. You shudn't have left an open trail all the way from Sydney. This duck, who has the grudge ag'in' you, picked us up as partners in Townsville, knowin' he'd warn't long on bush trailin'. Easy enough to foller you up river an' then we met these two blacks you had a row with. After that it was like takin' ha'pence from a blind beggar.

"Natcherul *you* feel sore, but it ain't no good callin' hard names an' gettin' us that way. As it is, we're feelin' prime an' inclined to do the right thing. You can put down your hooks now. It's all over, providin' you don't make a break. Glarin' won't get you a —— thing, Yank. You lose an' we win."

"What are you goin' to do with us?" demanded Reynolds.

"Ah! Now you show sense, cocky. You know when to quit. Why, we're goin' to give you these two Myalls for guides an' hunters back to the coast. Back to Herbert River, anyway. You promise 'em plenty of *suttongo* at the other end an' maybe they'll get grub an' water for you. We've promised 'em all the *suttongo* you've got with you, so you'll have to swear off smokin'. And we'll be needin' the rest of your stuff ourselves. More gold here than I hoped for. Goin' to take us quite a while to clean it up proper. Make you feel bad to see us doin' it an' you'd cut heavy into the grub-pile, so off you go."

"You talked about swinging just now," said Reynolds. "Sending us off with two blacks who've quarreled with us is just the same as murder. My pal here is sick. Myall grub'll kill him. And you know what the blacks'll do to us without arms. You've even taken our jack-knives, you —— thief!"

The man shrugged his shoulders, his eyes grew cold and his voice lost its tone and manner of bluff raillery.

"You heard me," he said. "Now get to —— out of here, the three of you, and your mangy dog! I'll give you a last tip. Murder ain't murder till it's found out. You wouldn't be the first to stay out in the scrub and no one find you but the dingoes.

"I'm tellin' you why I don't put all of you out of the way an' be done with it. Why I'm givin' you a fightin' chance to get through. Because no one won't listen to your yarn, in the first place. Minin' ways are rough an' ready. Possession proves property. Second place, I don't want to spoil our luck by christenin' this find with blood. Otherwise I'd crack all of you on the head an' blame it on the blacks."

"You standing for this, Alec Brown?" asked Reynolds.

Brown's eyes shifted and he looked shamefaced.

"He'll stand for what we do or he'll never spend his share of the gold. Sievers 'll keep him in order."

"Are you going to let us have our canteens?" asked Petrie mildly, though his narrowed eyes were like those of his companions in expression. "They've got boiled water in them. We've all got dysentery and I'm pretty sick with it."

"Go get 'em," the man said to Brown. The youngster limped off, turned as the other shouted after him. "And bring up their *suttongo*—their baccy. Come here, you two boys. This *suttongo* I promised you. Now you go back along your people. You take these white men along of you."

"*Wainta?* Where?" asked Dango haughtily. "*Allinkpa kola* along those *malle*. They shoot *margin* at us. All same *malle vikku*. We two are angry with those men. They fired a gun at us. They are no good."

"Maybe they give you plenty *suttongo*."

"No got *suttongo*, now we take. *Malle vikku*."

The scornful way in which Dango regarded his late employers and the spite he put into his denunciation of them was ominous. They had spears and *nolla-nollas*. They might elect to kill them and leave their bodies for the ants in the spinifex to clean to white and disarticulated skeletons, or they might merely desert them to the same ultimate fate through thirst and starvation.

"You come Dungeness belong to us, we give plenty *suttongo*," said Reynolds with an air of indifferent bargaining. "Maybe you like boat we hide. You catch us plenty grub, plenty water, we give you that boat."

"Huh! Too easy we find that boat." Dango replied contemptuously.

"You do your bargainin' later," broke in the leader roughly. "Get out of camp, the lot of you."

Alec Brown came up with the tobacco

and the canteens. The leader tossed the tobacco at the two blacks who took it and started off back to the unmarked spinifex trail that led to the mountains. Brown handed over the canteens.

"I can't do a thing for you," he said in a low tone. "I tried. They're a lot of —— murderers. They'll do me up."

"Quit your jawin', Brown."

Brown gave the leader a deprecatory look. Though he, through his sister, was the source of their first information, it was plain that the three bushwhackers did not consider him worth much consideration. Cole fancied that Sievers too had to walk carefully with the men he had taken into nefarious partnership. The fancy was promptly emphasized as Sievers came toward them, vituperative and vindictive.

"If I thought there was a charnce of your gettin' through," he said, "I'd head you for —— right this —— minute. I've done you in proper. Made poor suckers out of you. Go on and eat grass and sand, blarst you, while I'm pickin' up gold. I'll be spendin' it when you're rotting, what's left of you. You poor suckers! Shoe's on the wrong foot, ain't it? Yah!"

He was like a cur yapping at a cripple's heels. It was clear that he only wanted an excuse to use his gun, that the memory of his humiliation by the fists of Cole still rankled. But the leader curtly ordered him to get busy and the bully obeyed with a promptness that suggested previous arguments had proved that the authority of the gang was not vested in him.

Two of the men stood watching them with rifles across their arms as they filed after the two blacks, their spirits low but their heads up. Their exaltation had turned to bitterness. The wine of success had been at their lips and changed to gall that they had been forced to swallow.

THEY had no weapons with which to defend themselves against the two natives who had disappeared in the spinifex. It was true that they had nothing left to reward them. But Dango and his mate would think that they might be held accountable for having guided the party which had robbed the three white men of the mine. They knew enough about rights to realize that here was a deliberate theft in which they had taken part. There was the matter of the dog in which they had been balked. There was their fear of some reprisal from the men they had wronged, even though they were unarmed.

It would not be a matter of reasoning, Reynolds told himself, but a series of impulses all leading to the conclusion that the best thing for them to do was to kill off the three and to revenge themselves on the dog. The clothes the whites wore provided temptation enough for a dozen murders. They were tacitly encouraged by the bearded men whom they recognized as types of the whites they knew, the sort of men who themselves killed blacks, captured their women, hunted tribes for amusement; men who were always on top, to be feared and placated.

It was not necessary for Reynolds to voice this conclusion. All three felt sure that the sending of them away was merely a vicarious form of murder. With only water in their canteens they could never hope to cross the desert or reach the snake infected woods. The blacks could thrive on grasshoppers in the desert, snakes in the forest. They could underlive the white man.

There was scant choice between starvation or a savage spear. The latter might prove the more merciful.

Yet none of the three was made of the stuff that gives up. They had served through their baptism of fire and hardship before they entered on this adventure. Their resentment against the treacherous blacks, against Sievers and his bearded bandits, spurred them to an attempt to retrieve their fortune, lost before they had barely laid their hands upon it. Alec Brown was merely a miserable tool. Yet any attempt against such an armed force seemed purely suicidal. They trudged on, with the sun rising, beating down their strength, sapping their energy as they shuffled through the soft sand toward the bristling spinifex and flung themselves down in the shade of a great clump of the unfriendly grass.

Petrie was in bad shape again.

"I'm a bit bucked," he said. "You two had better make it alone. I may be able to make Perro go with you. I'd like to see him get through. The heat takes it out of me," he gasped with a wry attempt at a grin as a spasm seized him.

"I suppose you think the dog is a better pal than we are," said Reynolds after the

paroxysm passed. "You know —— well you couldn't make him leave you, just as you know we ain't none of us got a chance to last through. Might as well play it out here as further on. We stick it out together to the end and it sure looks like we're heading west. What about it, Jim?"

Cole nodded. His face was grim and gaunt.

"You said it. Petrie knows that. Looks as if we're up against it, but I sure hate to see those skunks get away with it. There may be a chance yet."

"Fat chance we got. What?"

"We're alive yet, Tom. For one thing. And—" he suddenly sunk his voice to a whisper! "grab the dog and don't let him bark, Petrie. He's winded those two black ——. They're looking for us."

Petrie caught the Airedale by the muzzle and forced him down beside him, the dog squirming with rage, but obedient. By the lava crags he had growled deep in his throat when the blacks appeared, but had seemed to realize the odds against an attack, even as he now realized the peril of his master and friends to be more acute.

The minutes passed as they crouched there. They had not spoken loudly at any time in the stress of the situation and it seemed probable that the natives had not heard them. The dawn wind had not gone down and came through the grass in hot gusts that bore the scent that had made Perro furious.

The crisp, needle-pointed blades rustled stiffly. The interminable ants crawled over the sand. Death was stalking in the spinifex.

A little cloud of grasshoppers came hurtling over their heads. The breeze brought with it, unmistakable, even to the white's decadent sense of smell, the strong stink of black men, the odor from their sweat-glands mingling with the dirt of a body that never knew water or cared for decent cleanliness. Perro struggled—suddenly became still and tense.

The wind still favored them. They shrank back in the grass, heedless of the myriad pricks. A long shadow projected itself—another—one on either side of the ten foot clump. Cole nudged Reynolds and a glance passed between them.

Suddenly Dangoran and Morbora appeared, bent at the hips, spears in their left hands, clubs in the right, their lips back showing their teeth, their wide nostrils dilated and their eyes bloodshot with greed and the lust to kill.

Out of the grass Cole and Reynolds launched themselves in a supreme effort as if they had been catapulted. Cole caught Dangoran about the knees and bore him to the ground with the sudden shock, pouncing on the astounded black, whose grasp of his weapons encumbered him for a fatal moment that gave Cole his chance to fling himself upon him and pin him down though Dangoran writhed and fought like a wild cat. He strove to shorten a spear, to use his *nolla-nolla*, but Cole had him by the wrists, striving to set a knee upon one arm and give him one fist free. For an instant he succeeded and sent his right smashing against the native's jaw in a blow that should have paralyzed his nerves, the hardest blow that Cole had ever delivered, fair to the mark, all his strength and the knowledge that he was fighting for his life behind it.

He might as well have struck a block of cement. Dangoran's head went back, darted forward like a snake's and the big teeth sank into Cole's shoulder. They rolled over and over, into the stabbing grass-blades and out again into the sand, in a wild fury, black against white, life against life. Once more those apelike tusks bit to the bone, mangling the flesh through the clothing that gave the black all the grip advantage. His own sweaty, stinking skin held no more chance for clutch than that of an eel. Cole grasped a chance handful of sand when he could, to help to a hold on that slimy epidermis.

They broke at last in a flurry of elbows and knees and both were up like a flash. The black's agility was tremendous; the strength of his almost invisible muscles was that of steel wire. He had lost his spears but he still gripped a *nolla-nolla* by its hatchet handle and he sprang back for thrust or blow, the sharp end as dangerous as the swell of the club.

Cole went after him, his best chance to get in under the swing of the weapon—or to draw a stab and dodge it. He had closed one of Dangoran's eyes. If he could blind him, if he could gouge his other blood-set optic? He had no thought of fair play. It was strength against strength, fists against a hardwood bludgeon that was also a stabbing spear, wielded by a master of its use.

His own face was scored with rips from Dangoran's talons; once the black's thighs and knees had got him in a scissors that nearly sheared the breath out of him and left his ribs sore. The savage knew every disabling trick and fought like the brute he was, striving to maim with upthrust knee to the crotch and groin, and he hurt Cole badly more than once. If anything, his wind was the better of the two, but he lacked the white man's dynamic bursts of fury and the ring-learned trick of holding for a rest between attacks.

Their breath came in sobbing bursts as Dangoran leaped back, jumping high, and Cole followed with hands ready to clutch or pound. The black came down squatting from a spring and lunged with his weapon at his opponent's belly. Cole's shirt was loose from his belt and, as he swerved aside, the end of the *nolla-nolla* ripped through the cloth, grazing his side as he clutched Dangoran's right wrist with both hands, turned, bent and flung the astounded black over his shoulder into the heart of the spinifex clump. The wrench sent the club to the ground and Cole retrieved it.

Dangoran came out of the porcupine grass with his savage face convulsed with rage, looking more like beast than man, despite his comparatively hairless hide on which tiny drops of blood brought by the bayonetting grass blades showed vivid scarlet like crimson sweat. He emerged on all fours and, before he could uprear, Cole brought down the *nolla-nolla* with all his might where neck joined skull and Dangoran rolled limply over on the sand, red blood gushing from mouth and nostrils, his fingers digging into the grains, his legs beating a tattoo before they stretched out. The whole body shivered and lay still. Almost immediately the pioneers of a column of white ants mounted the flesh mountain that blocked their path and proceeded to investigate as Cole turned, panting, to see how Reynolds fared.

The Anzac's face was bloody where the spike of the club had torn his cheek. The red stuff had dripped down over his white skin, naked from the waist up, his shirt torn completely away. There was a livid bruise over his left ribs from a side swipe of the club. He was clinging to Morbora's wrist to prevent another blow of the heavy *nolla-nolla* while his right hand grasped a shortened spear with which he jabbed at the black, who cleverly warded off the blows with stiffened forearm. Morbora was getting the worst of it. Perro had torn the calf of one leg and was worrying him with springs that the native had to fend off with kicks.

His foot, its sole horny as a hoof, was a good enough weapon but he had to use it blindly. The Airedale might have settled the matter more easily had he been able to leap for the throat, but there the two men opposed each other, still it was evident that sooner or later he would bring down his man, either from severed tendons or loss of blood. Cole settled the affair with Dango's club, tapping Morbora behind the ear and dropping him.

PETRIE came round the clump, dragging his feet, his face gray, twisting into a grin.

"Weak as a kitten," he said. "Lucky there weren't three of 'em."

The dysentery had him again in clutch and he slumped to the ground wearily.

Perro went up to his master and placed his muzzle, wet with the blood of Morbora, in Petrie's hot palm.

A dull boom came from the lava crags, half a mile away. They were blasting out the gold.

"Advertising themselves," said Petrie, affecting to make light of his condition. "They'll bring up all the blacks within sound of that—or scare them off."

"Hard to say which," said Reynolds, squatting down as the second blast went off. "I've seen 'em more curious than afraid lots of times."

"Well," said Cole, "we're not barehanded now. It would be crazy to fight them by daylight against their rifles, perhaps, but I'm not going to stand it much longer. We've got to get medicine for Petrie, got to get grub. The gold can hang. I don't suppose we can rush 'em but if we can hang out till dark Tom and I can snake up on 'em and club the senses out of them before they know we're on them. They figure we're done for. The gold's got 'em too interested to think of anything else. They may set a watch, but it'll only be one man, and its tough if we can't get to him.

"Think you can stick it out, Petrie, old man?" he asked anxiously. "This place is going to be a little —— from now on."

Petrie nodded and Cole gave him a drink.

Another blast sounded from the crags where they were splitting the treasure rock open. Morbora groaned slightly.

"What are we goin' to do with him?" asked Reynolds. "Dango's dead, by the way he lies and this one ought to be," he added vindictively, picking up a *nolla-nolla* and handling it. "Might as well make one job of it and bury both of them at once. They won't be pleasant toward evening."

"I don't know," said Cole. "I've killed men on the other side who were trying to kill me and I haven't worried about them. We can't trust Morbora but I'm hanged if I want to butcher him."

"They'll stir up the tribe against us—at least Morbora will—if we let him go. They'll either come out after us or more likely ambush us. It's up to you, Cole. You cracked him."

Cole walked over to Morbora, beside whom Perro sat growling as the black stirred and moaned. They were in serious jeopardy as it was. To let him go trebled the hazards of their case. To kill an enemy, in cold blood, even a savage maneater and murderer, went against his grain. It was not the code of the white man.

"We'll tie him up," he said finally. "Let the dog watch him. When we go we'll take him along and turn him loose when we're down the river."

"You'll be sorry for it," said Reynolds shortly.

"I'll be sorry if I don't do it, Tom. If it's up to me?"

Reynolds shrugged his shoulders and turned away. His wounds were smarting; there was no way of cleansing them; later in the day they would become almost unendurable. He was in no mood to turn up his thumb for mercy.

Dango was dead. There was no doubt as to that. Reynolds made one suggestion when Cole announced the fact.

"Make the other —— bury him."

Within five minutes Morbora was sitting up stupidly, eyeing his conquerors furtively and fearfully. Reynolds ordered him to dig the grave in the sand and gave him a *nolla-nolla* for the purpose, standing over him with another while Perro snarled and kept close to the black's calves. Morbora showed no sign of any feeling as he plied his grim task, rolled in the corpse of his companion and covered it over. That ended, with the blasts at the lava crags sounding like funeral guns, they tied the black with his hands clasped below his knees and the bonds about wrists and ankles connected, setting him in the rapidly diminishing shade of a neighboring spinifex clump.

The morning would have been an endurance test for the strongest. Petrie wilted slowly like a plant drooping in the heat. He lay motionless with the others on either side of him, keeping the ants away as best they could with brushes made from the grass blades, giving him water sip by sip till his throat refused the muggy liquid.

They spoke very seldom, even the effort to open their lips seemed a tax on waning energies in that furnace where the wind ceased, the spiny blades stood stiff and the ants marched, marched in endless, persistent columns.

The blasting ceased long before noon. From time to time they heard shouts but, as the sun mounted, even the lure of gold appeared to lose its power. They could fancy the marauders in the cool caves and their envy stiffened their resentment and their fortitude.

Petrie was racked with griping pains and he lay supine between their weakening conclusions, beginning to lose blood, to drift toward coma. From time to time, as Cole glanced toward him, the ex-sergeant gripped a war-club until his knuckles showed white against the brown skin. The cholera mixture, if that could check the insidious ravages of the dysentery, was in the cave. If he had thought he had the remotest chance of getting it he would have risked his own life cheerfully, but it was impossible to believe that they would let him get within talking distance, certain that they would jeer at his plea for the sick man, probably kill all three of them.

On the *Adventurer* they had all three suffered together, save in the case of Reynolds' temporary seasickness, but here he watched his comrade drifting slowly out on a low tide of mortality that could be checked surely, before the ebb became too great. if they only had the means. Reynolds caught his glance, interpreted it.

"If he dies, we'll even matters," was the return message in the eyes of the Anzac, and Cole nodded understanding and agreement.

They were in none too good shape themselves, but they forgot their own sickness,

though they could not evade the curious sensation of gradually losing strength. It was as if their bodies were hour-glasses and they could feel the sand that marked the hour of life left to them gradually falling as the feeling of faintness crept up like a tide. Hunger—as hunger comes, with appetite—was impossible in such an oven of a place. They could not crave food but they felt the lack of it, and they zealously husbanded the remaining water in the canteens, hot, insipid, boiled stuff as it was. When it was gone they must get more from the lava cave or perish.

They grimly accepted these conditions. Reynolds was entirely of a mind with Cole to make attack after nightfall. It was a bit of a forlorn hope, but the only one left them and it would be better to go down before bullets than try to last out another dessicating day. As for Petrie, neither of them believed that he would last much after sunset unless the bloody fluxes were stopped. He did not move, he did not murmur as the shadow reduced towards noon, but lay face downward, his head pillowed between his folded arms.

Cole watched the lessening shadow and the ants until it seemed to him that the sun was addling his brains, for the line of shadow became an ebbing sea and the ants were magnified until they looked like a horde of enormous creatures—or machines, so many modernized tanks moving on in an army of destruction. And when he looked out across the waste to where the lava crags should have lofted harsh and dark brown with deep purple markings in the narrow places where the shadows lay, he saw again the mocking mirage of the lake and the trees, the sparkling water, the green lily-pads with their blue blossoms and the long-legged brown birds stilting about looking for snails.

He did not know whether to trust his eyes. The ants were only magnified by illusion of course, the mirage might not be real—could not be real—and——

He got to his feet, stiffly, for Dango had left him souvenirs. He stood still till the dizziness that immediately tackled him wore off. The mirage was gone now. There was no sign of life at the crags though he could see the dark mouth of the cave that held coolness, water, food, their weapons, medicine for Petrie—who seemed beyond all medicine.

The sands were running out of the hour-glasses. Petrie lay dying as plainly and as surely as a landed fish dies. To try to cross the cleared sand that glared orange-yellow with blue outlines where the wind had rippled it and the not quite overhead sun gave slender shadows, was madness. There would be a bright flash from the cave, the crack of a rifle.

He turned away to see how the Airedale was sticking it. Perro had deserted his post of watchman and guard over Morbora to be closer to his master, knowing perhaps with animal instinct, ripened by affection, that the end was coming. He looked up indifferently at Cole from under his mat of a brow, not moving, his tongue running back and forth, pink and dripping no longer but turning brown like a withering leaf as he panted like a small motor exhaust.

Reynolds had his arms about his knees, his head on them, motionless, enduring, waiting.

MORBORA? Despite his wounds the black was physically in far the best shape. The heat did not affect him any more than it would a lizard. His ugly, repulsive lips were not cracked; he did not even look thirsty. But his dark eyes seemed to swim uneasily on the yellow, blood flecked portions of the balls that surrounded the cornea. There was fear in them, apprehension.

"What you do along with me?" he asked Cole.

The ex-sergeant looked at him coldly. A flash of rage came to him that this treacherous brute—that was all he was—should be so vital with Petrie passing.

"I've been thinking about an ant hill," he said on the urge of the moment.

To set a bound man or woman where angry ants swarm is the supreme torture known to any tropical tribe and common to most of them. Morbora had not the stolidity of an Indian. And he needed no imagination to tell him what would happen to him when the ants got busy. As it was, able to move with fair freedom, he had been nipped already.

"One masta—" he nodded toward Petrie—" one masta belly too plenty loose?"

Cole merely looked at him but Morbora went on.

"Suppose bimeby you let me go, all same can fix that belly—all same can fix it now."

Cole forced himself to give attention. It wasn't easy. His brain didn't seem to work properly in the heat, there was no correlation of ideas. But this seemed fair enough if the native was not lying. To cure Petrie now and to accept freedom later as reward. But Petrie was owner of the dog and Morbora might be seeking vengeance on Petrie for Dango and himself.

He doubted whether Morbora would do that and face certain death. The careless mention of the ant hill had really frightened him. No—the black was in earnest. But he was naked as a garden slug. He carried nothing with him. Where would he find the cure for dysentery out here with the sand, the spinifex and the ants?

Morbora watched his face.

"Can do," he persisted. "You speak along him."

He meant Reynolds, and Cole took his advice. He had to tap the Anzac on the shoulder to rouse him from the sort of stupor into which he had sunk. But his eyes brightened as he took in the meaning of Cole's words. He got up and talked with Morbora while Cole went over to Petrie and squatted down by him.

"Petrie, old chap, this black says he knows something that will stop your dysentery if we'll let him go free. Reynolds is talking with him. It may be all lies but—do you want to try it?"

The answering voice was low; Petrie did not move as he talked.

"Try—anything once. Don't—want to go—west. Not afraid but—hate to get skinned out—after all——"

"All right. Well, Tom?" Reynolds had come up.

"I'm —— if I know what to think of it. I've heard something about it, in a way, but it seems crazy. The blacks often get dysentery from eating rotten meat and the odds and ends they pick up and gobble and they do cure themselves. But it's ants—some special kind—I don't quite savvy that part of it. He wants us to make a fire and boil 'em, like tea leaves. What d'ye think of it, Jim? I've heard of folks out in the bush making ant vinegar."

"I know something about ants. Read quite a little about 'em. Got a book in hospital time I got the shrapnel shower. They've got formic acid in 'em and that would be an astringent—make your vinegar. It might stop the fluxes. Or it might be the exudates."

"The what?"

"Sort of fatty stuff that works out of ants through their belly plates. Other ants eat it. Queen ants have lots of it. They grow big and they're full of this butter-fat. May be that. Or it might be the stuff they spray on their enemies and paralyze 'em. It sounds half-way reasonable, Tom, and we've got to do something."

They were out of earshot of Petrie, talking low, standing beside Morbora.

"Petrie's game to try anything," Cole went on, "and if he sinks much lower, there won't be any Petrie."

Reynolds nodded. Then he spoke to Morbora.

"Go get your ants. You try any tricks and I'll settle you."

"How about the fire? They may spot it from the cave."

"The dry grass won't make much smoke if we don't pile it. Got to chance that. It's going to take all the rest of the water, though."

Cole shrugged his shoulders.

"If we get too thirsty, a dose of the stuff may not do us any harm. Save out a little for the pup, though. Might give Morbora a drink."

"I'll be —— if I do. Let him chew grass roots."

They stood guard over Morbora as the black began to hunt under the decaying vegetation and grass mould. He squatted, digging with his hands as rapidly as Perro could have done with his legs and claws, heedless of the swarms of indignant and excited termites that came rushing wildly, lifting their antennæ for sense of smell and touch. Black, brown, red and yellow ants the black ignored, finally locating a galley from which poured ants that were practically colorless. Morbora looked up at Reynolds and Cole and grinned.

"You catch paper?" he asked.

Cole gave him an empty envelope which he swiftly filled with the white ants, scraping them into it. When it was full he gave it over to be held while he delved more deeply into the broken stronghold. At last he triumphantly displayed what looked more like a white grub, over three inches long, than an ant. It was the queen, an egg-laying automaton, modified and distorted for motherhood.

"*Tamin, toongu.* Fat and sweet," said Morbora, smacking his lips. "Can do now."

The queen and her unfortunate subjects were put into a canteen and stewed and brewed over a hot fire of dry grass for long after the water boiled. Then the black buried it in sand to cool slowly.

"Bimeby he all right," he said affably. "Bimeby you give me *shirshi.* Bimeby, suppose I belong along you, you give me *suttongo.*"

"Blast your impudence," said Reynolds. "If that stuff does any harm to him I'll skin you before we let the ants get you. If it cures him you can have anything I've got. Or can get for you."

Morbora grinned again. He was happy. Sure of his cure. The white men in his debt. Dango forgotten—at least temporarily.

He seemed suddenly alert. He sat up, his ugly head cocked to one side, his wide nostrils slowly expanding and contracting as he sniffed.

"He looks like a pointing setter," said Cole.

"There's something in the wind, all right," answered Reynolds, "and he's scented it."

"*Komorobory. Molle.*" said Morbora in a low voice.

Reynolds looked puzzled.

"What?" he asked.

"*Kollel Kollel Hush Komorobory molle.* Many men are near. Plenty men—black fella close up."

"You smell?"

"*Pul komorobory.* I smell."

He pointed west and began to crawl between the clumps to where they could see the crags. It was plain that he was not anxious to attract the attention of the men he had smelled out. The three of them crouched flat between two clumps and watched, Morbora's eyes giving the direction. Long, hot minutes passed; then black figures appeared on the opposite side of the clear space of sand hubbed by the lava crags. More and more came. Men and women both, Morbora told them, long before they could distinguish anything but upright biped forms.

"They come along this *mangan*—mountain—two-three time every year," he said.

"What for they come?"

Morbora seemed incapable of putting the reason into English nor could Reynolds follow his native words.

"He keeps on saying something about *ballan* and *baggoro. Ballan's* moon and *baggoro* means the liver of a snake. They come here at a certain time of the moon to eat snakes' livers, maybe. I don't imagine Morbora knows much about their customs. He's scared pink of 'em though. Says they're *talgoro* men and that means cannibals. Not that he's any better. If we weren't along he'd have been eating Dango before this."

IT LOOKED as if the tribe that was appearing out of the desert were coming to the crags as to a rendezvous where some special ritual was regularly performed. They came out of the grass in twos and threes, tall men and saggy-breasted women bent under burdens of from two to five baskets, a long sharp stick in one hand and many of them with a lighted, slow-burning brand in the other. The heads of children showed from out of some of the baskets, larger ones were perched on the shoulders of their mothers.

The men carried only their weapons, spears, clubs and boomerangs. There were no shields visible. It was a peaceful pilgrimage and they advanced as if they were on their own exclusive territory without fear of interruption. Every man was bearded, some were so woolly that they almost seemed clothed in close fitting jerkins of fur.

"There's going to be something doing in a minute or two," said Reynolds. "If the gang's asleep in the cave they're likely to get wiped out. Suits our book."

"We can't warn them, anyway," answered Cole. "The blacks 'ud make us look like porcupines with their spears first move we made."

"Who wants to warn 'em? It's their lookout. I wouldn't tip 'em off if I could."

Cole wondered whether *he* would. Speculation was idle. The blacks cut that knot by some discovery that threw the foremost into commotion and soon spread among the rest. This was apparently the finding the evidence of invasion, either from the shattered appearance of the rock or from signs easily visible to their keen senses. The women were immediately grouped in the back ground while the men gathered together in council of war before they began to approach the mouth of the big cave in furtive fashion.

They counted sixty warriors, advancing in little groups of from three to five. There had been no yelling, no sound that came to the watchers in the spinifex. There may have been no warning but, when the nearest of the blacks were some twenty yards from the cave and perceptibly slowing up, each group apparently content to give another the honor of being the first to enter —by this time they could have had little doubt as to the occupancy of the cavern, the number and color of those within—a white man appeared, yawning and stretching.

Then came the first yell from the blacks as the man jumped back before a flight of spears hurled from throwing-sticks, some of them entering the cavern itself. The answer was rifle-fire. Cole and Reynolds could hear the dull reports, like some one beating a carpet. The blacks scattered and fell prone on the sand, crawling away for cover, none apparently hurt. It looked as if the volley had been given for warning.

The odds were twelve to one but the whites, with their weapons of which the tribesmen were evidently supremely afraid, held a real advantage, at least for the present. They could make a sally whenever they wanted to without much risk. The spears and boomerangs were short ranged. With repeating rifles the blacks could be massacred by good shooting.

The Myalls—scattered as they were—began calling to each other. Having once hugged the sand they were afraid to recommence an attack or leap up and make themselves a running target. Once more a man came to the cave mouth—this time with a rifle carried across the hollow of his arm—and called to them. It was too far to distinguish anything of what he said, though sounds seemed to magnify and carry far across the sand, but it was evidently a peace palaver. The fear inspired by the rifles was the best argument, according to Reynolds and it proved effective.

First three tribesmen slowly neared the cavern. Others joined them. Four of the whites appeared. Cole imagined Alec Brown staying inside, not trusted, very likely in such an emergency. But the palaver went on and after a while a man made a signal to the women and they came up. Some of the tribe went inside the cave. Friendship seemed established, barring treachery.

"They are wise birds, all right, the ones Sievers took into partnership," said Reynolds. "They could stand off the blacks here all right, chase 'em away but, when they started to go out through the spinifex with the gold, spears 'ud be as good as rifles —better.

"But they've cooked *our* goose, making friends. We can't tackle that bunch. They'd spot us coming before we were out of the grass. And the last of the water's in that ant dope for Petrie."

"Let's give it to him, anyway. He must be wondering what's up."

Cole spoke thickly and both of them, as they went back to where Petrie lay, walked like men who have seen a forlorn hope crumbled before it could be tried. The desert suddenly laid a heavy hand upon them. Both had a brief vision of whitening skeletons. The game was up.

Morbora dug up the canteen, smelled, tasted and pronounced the infusion ready. Cole had carried his tin cup out to the mine that morning that seemed so long away, and Morbora swiftly plaited grass blades to make a sieve through which they filtered the bitter stuff, without much faith in it. It looked as if Petrie was the best off after all. Unless he was rallied he would probably stay in coma until the last of his strength and life oozed out of him.

It tasted like strong vinegar and it smelled curiously like vanilla. It stung their lips and parched inner membranes. Once in the stomach it set up an intense warmth. They all took some, but Petrie's dose was a large one, measured by Morbora.

"This time one more day, you take three time, you feel fine along your belly," he announced. "One more day you all right."

And it was Morbora who gave them another little ray of light.

"Those *malle* — men — no good. Too much *talgoro.* Suppose white fella no look smart all time I think maybe they *vooly* pretty soon. *Talgoro* men too much smart all time. Not very long, I think, white fella, black fella, along that place have *borboree.*"

The day dragged on to sundown with the sky flaming orange and crimson. The wind sprang up again, shifting the grains of sand, rattling the spinifex. By sunset their thirst was almost unendurable, but Petrie was undoubtedly better.

"It's stopped the dysentery, chaps," he

said. "No more cramps, either. You don't know how much better I feel. There isn't a ration of straight water, is there?"

"Not yet," said Cole. "We're going to get some soon," he added with gummy lips.

Petrie was too worn to ask him how.

"I think I can sleep," he said, and turned on his back, his bent arm for a pillow.

The queen ant's miraculous exudates, or whatever secretions had checked the dysentery, had reduced his fever, strengthened his pulse. Cole and Reynolds, envying him his slumber, sat hunched up miserably. In gratitude to Morbora they had left him free, though weaponless, and he busied himself digging. Presently he came over with a double handful of white grubs, which he offered to them and, when they refused, toasted in a small fire for which he begged a match and ate them with relish.

"*Tamin!*" he said unctuously. "*Tamin!*" Which meant that they were excellent besides being merely fat.

Night came with the wind chill in the rustling spinifex, with a host of stars glittering in the sky. A fire would have been a comfort, but the blaze that was invisible under the sun would be almost certain to be seen at night and investigated if they made it large enough for warmth. There were fires going by the crags and against their glare they could see wild figures passing and repassing. After that came the faint sharp sound of sticks beaten together in rhythm and the dim wail of chanting.

Petrie still slept, Perro beside him, and Morbora curled himself up like another dog with head close to knees.

Cole and Reynolds sat close together, stupid with lowered vitality. There seemed no way out and the machinery of their existence had idled down to the point where they did not greatly care one way or the other. Almost automatically they fought against giving up. One was in as bad shape as the other. If they slept—Morbora had probably reprieved the life of Petrie, but he had no stability. That had been done as a bargain—to save his own life. He would have no compunction about hitting them over the head and starting back with their possessions if the idea came into his head that he could get away with it, any more than he had bothered about betraying them to Sievers and his confederates.

Cole wondered dully—it was more of a short-circuiting repetition than a present thought—how Sievers and Brown had come to follow them, to know that they were after gold. They must have been pretty positive. At Townsend every one had guessed where they were going—but in Sydney? He supposed they had talked too much—there had been the guns and the purchase of the *Adventurer*—enough to make anyone wonder what they were after—hardly to induce trailing unless some one had pretty definite knowledge that they had once found gold—or Reynolds had—and were going after it again.

He found he could not follow out a line of reasoning, and he gave it up. The stars shifted position slowly as the night wore on.

The fires lit by the blacks went out—they might have used up all the wood or they might be all inside the cave—it was big enough—with the whites. The grasshoppers were silent—he wondered whether the ants were in for the night or whether they kept marching, marching all round the twenty-four hours.

Reynolds was a blurred shadow beside him, chin between his hands, his eyes open. It grew colder. And it seemed to grow darker.

AND then—the sky in the east was graying and Morbora was on his feet, alert. He was all excitement, like a retriever in a duck-blind before the morning flight, actually shivering, his head stretched out toward the caves.

"Plenty *boroboree* along there," he said.

They strained eyes and ears—nothing came to their dulled senses. But Morbora persisted.

"Plenty *boroboree*."

The sky flushed pink, the sun was imminent, climbing up now back of the violet mountains they had crossed, beyond which lay the sea.

Then they heard it.

A long ululating cry of savage wrath—rising and falling like a wolf pack in full cry. A shout of triumph—yells of bafflement—shots.

The mouth of the cave vomited natives—both men and women. Others of both sexes sprang up from the ground, where they had apparently passed the night. Two or three of these leaping, hurrying figures fell as more shots sounded. The black men scattered

in all directions — some jumped nimbly on the rocks and scrambled up above the cave-mouth. The women and children held together in a frightened mass, running across the sand for cover, mothers with their children tucked under their arms, while they clutched at their belongings.

Three men came out—the bearded partners of Mart Sievers—kneeling to fire their repeating-rifles, picking off the Myalls who had gradually formed three quarters of a circle about them, the crags closing the gap.

The blacks sprang, swerved, fell flat and leaped sidewise to confuse the white mens' aim, hurling their spears and scaling their boomerangs, tossing even their *nolla-nollas*, slowly closing in on three sides to get in range with their primitive weapons while their women and children fled toward safety.

Savage after savage fell, and the ring began to falter. One of the three whites started deliberately firing into the mass of women. At five hundred yards his fire was deadly. One after another figure pitched forward, writhed or lay still, while all her comrades set up a shrill screaming that came over the sand faintly but still, charged with fright and agony.

A fourth white came into the mouth of the cave—a rifle ready—emerged, looking about him at the routed natives before he knelt and steadied his rifle with knee and elbow.

It was Mart Sievers. But before he could squeeze trigger, could sight, he sprang upright, his rifle falling, arms outstretched. A spear had gone deep into him from behind, flung with the urge of a throwing-stick to speed it from the crags, piercing far into his back, quivering where the muscles and flesh socketed it. As if by magic, others seemed to grow beside it as Sievers fell with a shout for help, porcupined by the weapons hurled by the blacks on the rocks above the cave over which they now madly scrambled, as the man who had been firing at the women concentrated his attention on them. One fell, spread-eagled; the rest dropped to the level and raced away in leaping zigzags, bounding high, to right and left.

The women and children merged with the spinifix scrub on the far side of the clearing, the men, giving up the fight, raced after them. One of the three whites had been struck by a boomerang but not badly injured and as if determined to exterminate the tribe, or to teach them a lasting lesson, the three, stopping to deliberately refill their rifle-magazines, charged after the fugitives, disappearing among the clumps of grass whence came the *pop-pop* of their guns, growing fainter.

"—— fool," said Morbora. "They no come back. Black fella too smart. Bimeby all *vooly*."

If he was right the Myalls had shown plenty of cunning in their depiction of sheer terror and headlong flight. But if they were not overwhelmed with fright it was quite on the cards that they could even matters by ambushing the pursuit, if the bushwhackers were fools enough to go far into the thick scrub.

With Petrie seated between Cole and Reynolds, they looked for the reappearance of the men. The popping had ceased. The scrub had swallowed up all action. Half a dozen black bodies lay naked under the sun with that of Sievers, whose corpse was face-down, as if pinned to the sand by the spears that stuck out of him at all angles like an ill-assembled pin-cushion. Alec Brown was unaccounted for, though they guessed him as having been killed inside the cave unless, by some miracle, he had hidden himself in a crevice and escaped notice.

The impulse gathered force to go out there, to risk everything for the sake of the water they would find, without which they could not last through another day. There was the prize of Siever's rifle, probably of the one young Brown had carried. Now, while the bearded men were in the scrub was the time to make the rush. The crags stood fairly well in the center of the comparatively open space. On even terms of distance, with their weakness, with the absolute incapacity of Petrie to travel—though he was undoubtedly in better shape, with the cramping convulsions conquered—they had little chance. But the cave with its water and food was the prize to risk all for.

"They no come back," said Morbora.

"Bimeby maybe black fella come back some time, I dunno. White man *vooly*. Ngallo—water—there."

He pointed to the cave. At the same time he started to pick up some of the weapons, but Cole stopped him.

"Bimeby maybe you get," he said. Morbora's face twitched in a half-grin, more of impudence than shame. "You give me *shirshi*, bimeby," he reminded them.

"Suppose you carry him," said Reynolds,

"you get *shirshi*. Suppose you no carry him you get *this*." He swung a *nolla-nollo* and Morbora grinned again.

"One fella I carry all right along he sick," he said, saving his face. "Other thing I not carry. *Kallo*. Come on."

It seemed touch and go. Caught before they got to the cave, even sighted from the edge of the spinifex, they would without doubt be shot down by the men who already imagined them dead. But the clamor of their bodies for fuel, for the food and water that waited their success magnified their chances, minimized the risks. It was better to die from bullet or spear while they had strength to make effort for the crossing than to perish miserably. They hoisted Petrie to Marbora's shoulders, Perro trotting along with ludicrous anxiety divided between his hatred of the black and his conviction that the hated one was doing the master a service. The sun enveloped them in its glare and they found the exertion exhausting them rapidly. After the first fifty yards it was all they could do to hobble on in the wake of Morbora who, sustained by his habits of fasting and the meal of fat, sweet grubs he had taken overnight, could have overcome all of them, taken away their weapons, killed and stripped them. They gave him credit for his act of faithfulness whether it was founded on mistaken and exalted ideas of their staying powers or not. The results of the hand-to-hand combats had not been yet forgotten by Morbora, short though the duration of most lessons remained in force with the savages.

THEY reached the body of the first black, shot through the heart, lying on the back, blue-red gums drawn back, showing the strong teeth and the dark eyes looking like bruised fruit. Then came Sievers, fingers clawed deep in the sand. He had on only a singlet and trousers and blood had welled up about the buried spear-heads and blackened on his skin. His rifle was close to him and Cole picked it up with a sense of returning power. Testing it, he found the magazine full.

Now they were close to the cave, close to another dead Myall who had been brought down from the rocks above. The black's face was covered with blood and ants. Morbora seemed to regard the body with some special interest.

They had no torches with them this time, but the cave entrance was light enough, after a little while, for them to see objects. There was another dead black, shot through the head, sprawled out, still clutching his *nolla-nolla* and, in the entrance to the tunnel, they found Alec Brown with the back of his head a mass of clotted blood. But he was breathing stertorously. Morbora set Petrie down amid a confusion of clothes, blankets and food and stood looking about him.

It was plain that he did not like the situation and that he expected more trouble in the near future, though his anxiety was divided by his interest in the goods scattered on the floor.

The little well they had dug had been enlarged and was half-filled with water. There was the warm remnant of a fire and some charred embers they blew to a blaze. More ends of wood outside, they could collect besides what might be left in the tunnel niches. Not to boil the water might mean death for Petrie. Cole and Reynolds felt that they could not drink before he did and that wisdom called for them to leave the raw water alone, but it took supreme effort of will to restrain themselves. Morbora, like Perro, shared no such scruples and both helped themselves freely.

Reynolds made damper dough and put it in the ashes while Cole found can and opener and pried apart a tin of bully beef after he and the Anzac had set down Brown close to the cave mouth, cleansing his wound, which had evidently been made with a club. Only Brown's shock of thick hair had prevented his skull being smashed. As it was, it looked as if he was in for nothing worse than a bad headache, though they could only guess at fracture.

The water boiled at last and they set it aside to cool while they made tea, poured it out in pannikins and drank it as soon as it had a chance to cool. They were all close to collapse and they ate carefully but the food swiftly stimulated them. Then they started to take an inventory of the cave's contents. Brown was moaning intermittently, Petrie resting easily.

There had been more or less of a feast the night before, with considerable food consumed by the blacks but there was enough left to last them for a couple of weeks. The tools were there, their own outfits, including the electric torches, tools, ammunition, three revolvers besides the two rifles and

all their own little armory. Tobacco and—tucked away in a niche where it would keep safe and cool—a dozen sticks of dynamite with caps and fuse. Best of all, for the moment, there was a metal flask nearly full of brandy hidden under a coat that had served for pillow.

This was medicine that was a welcome addition to the retrieved first aid kit. The liquor was good and a sup of it brought color back fleetingly to Petrie's cheeks. Swallowed by Brown, it brought him close to consciousness, though his opening eyes showed such horror that they did not bother him when he closed them again and either swooned or fell asleep.

Morbora, uneasy, muttering to himself, watched their actions, going frequently to the mouth of the cave. He ate little of the bully beef, at which Cole wondered idly.

Then Cole saw him going out of the cave carrying something concealed in his hand. This, it turned out, must have been a knife. He made no effort to hide what he brought back as he prepared to broil it over the fire with a pointed stick of wood. Cole's involuntary cry of horror and disgust brought Reynolds up.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"See what that fiend's cooking," said Cole.

Morbora looked up at them in surprise.

"What matter?" he asked. "This *tamin*, this *toongu*." (Fat and sweet.) White fella no good *tolgoro*. This fine meat." He struck the inside of his own thigh. "*Malli tolgoro*. Excellent. Make plenty strong."

Cole, nauseated, told him to take it outside.

"Why do you eat man-flesh?" he asked.

Morbora, with the utmost sincerity, countered—

"Why not?"

Cole, knowing his primitive limitations, could not answer him. But he made the black give up his hideous meal. Then they disposed of all the dead bodies, burying Sievers separately, keeping keen lookout all the while.

"White fella all *vooly*, all —— fool," Morbora persisted. "Black fella take *gin*—women—along camp then they come back along of this." He indicated generally the things that he was sure would bring back the tribe as soon as they had got their women and children back to camp. "Better we go quick," Morbora insisted.

THEY could not attempt to travel with two sick men. Petrie would be unable to walk for a day or so, even with continued improvement, and they were not sure of Brown's condition. They held a brief council of war.

"We can hold them off from the cave, easily enough," said Cole. "So long as we are not fool enough to let them come in or to chase them into the spinifex."

"Those white fella, they make friend with black fella along black fella *gin*," said Morbora. "Black fella get *kola*, he plenty mad, let white fella go asleep, then he try kill. White fella gun too much along those black fella. They run. White man try keep black fella *gin*, go too far, no come back."

"Wouldn't wonder if he was right," said Reynolds. "They took the women and they've paid for it. But we can hold 'em off. They won't attack nights. Too afraid of the dark. I don't believe we need worry about 'em till tomorrow morning. But Morbora's between the —— and the deep sea. He don't want to stay and he don't want to leave us because he's afraid they'll catch him and make *tolgoro* out of him."

"We want to put the fear of the white man into their hearts for good," said Petrie. The brandy and the recovered cholera mixture had bucked him up wonderfully. His eyes were bright and some color had come to stay in his lips. "If we just chase them off they'll lay for us and get us in the spinifex the way Morbora figures they got the others."

"That'll be easy enough," said Cole. "We'll bomb 'em. We can spare some of that dynamite, since we didn't bring any ourselves. Half-sticks with a short fuse'll convince 'em of the white man's magic. Give Morbora an object lesson too. I wouldn't trust that beggar. He'd desert us any minute on the way back and get his tribe to murder us unless we convince him we're big wizards. He's seen us licked once by our own sort and we'll have to reinstate ourselves. The dynamite'll do it and it's good as a machine-gun battery in case they try to get into the cave. They don't know we're here to begin with."

Morbora was outside. The interior of the cave with its wall paintings and its general gloom did not seem to attract him. He kept watch, in which capacity he far excelled Perro.

Food equipment had set fresh heart in

them. Once more they were the favorites of fortune, dealt good cards and able to play them. They saw no problems ahead now that could not be solved. Once they had been caught napping—now they had learned their lesson.

"Good thing they didn't use up all their dynamite on the mine," said Reynolds. "Let's go outside and see what they did do. Mind, Petrie?"

Petrie shook his head and Reynolds went out with Cole, Morbora following. It was clear that in many ways the black thought the whites far inferior to himself, and the attitude with which he regarded their efforts to secure the yellow rock, the delight they had exhibited over the discovery, showed that his conviction of superiority was firmly established.

But the sight was a welcome one to their eyes. The sinter had been shattered and splintered by well-placed explosions for results that would have taken them days of labor with tools. Everywhere the stuff showed the rich interlarding of gold. There were some portions disclosed where there was none of it; doubtless there was plenty of the stuff where they would ultimately find more but there was enough in sight to mean thousands of dollars, pounds of it to be picked out like plums from a pudding, virgin gold worth at least eighteen dollars the troy ounce, twelve ounces to the pound—5,760 grains—call it an even two hundred dollars a pound and allow for variant values.

With Petrie well again they could surely each manage to tote out twenty pounds apiece—fifteen at the least—three thousand dollars worth of the precious stuff—cache the rest and come back for it in the aeroplane as Petrie had suggested.

THEY carried back double handfuls of the prime bits into the cave, Morbora stalking along, as disdainful as a philosopher of the child tossing up pebbles, and still manifestly uncomfortable, throwing up his head every little while and moving it about to left and right like a questing hound, staying outside again as they went in with their trove.

"Brown's coming round," said Petrie. "Spoke to me just now. The chap's scared silly. Thought I was going to torture him or something. I jollied him and he's gone to sleep again. What have you got there? Talk low. No sense in waking him up."

They showed him, spoke of the cache, the final cartage.

"There must be a plane we can hire somewhere," said Petrie. "Buy it, if we have to. It won't carry all of us, of course. I know something about the general run of 'em, learned it on the other side, but they all vary. The De Haviland's the one they use in the U. S. transcontinental mail service, weights round five thousand pounds, carries a pilot and four hundred pounds of mail, flies at an average of about a hundred and ten, eats up twenty gallons of gas an hour and carries seventy-five gallons in its tank. But that's a four-hundred horse-power motor and the machine's built to stand blizzards. The bomber type would be best for us, I imagine, if we get any choice. Plenty of machines can carry one passenger and a couple of hundred pounds in ballast, if they call it ballast. We can't clean up this gold better than fifty-fifty, I imagine, but a hundred pounds of pure gold, if there is that much, 'll fix us up nicely for the first trip."

"There were chaps in Sydney right after the war who were going to start big things in the aeroplane line," said Reynolds. "Mail and passenger service, new exploration of the interior, stunts at outdoor shows and the races and all sorts of things. There must be machines enough and aviators. But it's a long fly from Sydney up here."

"About fifteen hundred miles—as the crow flies," said Petrie. "I'm only guessing at that from what I remember of our charts on the sloop. About nine hundred from Brisbane. Wonder if they'd have a plane there?"

"It's not more than about twenty thousand," Reynolds said. "It ain't the distance so much as gasoline, is it? You can get gas anywhere along the coast. Get it at Townsville, Dungeness, Cardwell. Wouldn't they stare if they saw us taking on gas at Dungeness to go up river again? That wouldn't be much of a hop. About a hundred and fifty, eh, Petrie?"

"Round that, air route."

"I vote we keep mighty quiet when we do get back to Dungeness," suggested Cole. "Let 'em laugh at us and think we've come back broke. There's been one leak. We'll have to keep an eye on Alec Brown. Even if he meant to keep his mouth shut any one could get him off in a corner and extract it.

"Can we go by train from Townsville to Sydney, Tom?"

"No. Railroad just runs south and west to Winton. It's local, like the one at Rockhampton. You have to go to Brisbane, though there's a branch there runs north along the coast a way. Why?"

"I thought we'd sail the *Adventurer* down to a railroad port and sell it. Save time. We could break the aeroplane flight at Brisbane, Rockhampton and Townsville, couldn't we? Better clear up what we can on the first trip. Unless you let the pilot in on the deal he'd be bound to tip the thing off. You could take in some dynamite, Tom, and finish the job."

"Me? How d'ye know I'll be the one to go?"

"It's your trip if you want it, I reckon. Your discovery."

"Rats. If only one of us can go we'll match for it. The rest can keep an eye on little Alec here. Anything in sight?" This to Morbora, who came in yawning.

"No trouble along lillul while now," said the black, and coiled himself up and went to sleep.

"I'd give a farm to have that chap's senses," said Cole. "He's satisfied himself there's no one inside of twenty miles, I suppose."

"And his belly's full of *tolgoro*, I'll bet another farm," said Reynolds.

IT WAS well on toward the middle of the afternoon before Alec Brown looked at them with frightened eyes and a weak and quivering mouth.

"Don't be too hard on me, you chaps," he whined.

"Shut up," said Cole good-naturedly. "No one's going to be stiff with you. You're lucky to be alive, but we're going to keep you that way. Take a drink. Think you can get something? Give you a smoke afterwards."

There was small sense in bullying the young fool and Cole felt no enmity against him save a general disgust that he concealed out of pity for the lad's condition.

"It was all Sievers," Brown began.

"Don't snitch too much," Cole warned him. "Your pal is dead and buried. Sievers is through for good. How did you know we were after gold?"

"That was Ma. She got worried you wouldn't come through with the money for your room and lodgings. She wanted to know what you were up to. She used to go in your room while you were out, of course, and she'd snoop around. You had guns and charts, to begin with. Amy hung around a bit to find out what she could. You know what girls are. Anyway, she was gone on you, Mister Cole. She'd listen at the keyhole and she and Ma 'ud put two and two together. They never said much to me about it until after you'd gone. There was a bit in the paper about your having bought the sloop and sailed north. Then Ma came out with what she and Amy knew, that you'd gone after a gold mine Mister Reynolds found before the war.

"Sievers got it out of me—he had no use for any of you. I got some money out of Ma after you paid her up and Sievers got a lucky tip at the races. So we took the steamer after you. We saw the sloop at Townsville and we went on up to Cardwell first. Ma said Amy said she heard you talking about Cardwell one time. Then we heard you'd put in at Dungeness and we went back. Every one there seemed to know what you'd gone after, but they thought it was just a prospecting trip that wouldn't amount to anything. They didn't know you'd been there before. And we picked up some news in Cardwell about a man named Reynolds being brought in once by troopers and raving about the gold he'd found. That all fitted in.

"Sievers found some men who claimed to know the Herbert River country and they must have tumbled to something. They got Sievers scared about the blacks. I was ready to quit any time. First go-off Sievers just said we'd follow you and stake our claims. That was square enough. Then he got to talking about doing you in and keeping it all for ourselves. The men he was chumming with backed him up after they'd found out what we were after when Mart was drunk and bragging one night.

"We went up-river after you and found the tribe you met. Those two blacks that you'd chased out of your camp came in and they trailed you for us. They promised 'em all your tobacco, planned to take away your guns and send you back to the coast with the blacks. You know all about that. I told 'em it was just the same as murder."

"What about last night?" asked Cole. "What happened?"

"They didn't want to get in wrong with

the blacks because they might make trouble for us on the way back. So Harris—he was the man who did most of the talking for the three we picked up—got 'em to come in the cave with some tobacco and grub he offered 'em. Everything went all right till they got drinking. We had some booze left. Then they began to make trouble with the women. You could see the blacks didn't like it but they didn't do anything.

"Not till daylight. I didn't have anything to do with the *gins* and I didn't have anything to drink, to speak of. So I woke up the first move they made. I hadn't slept much anyhow. A black saw me and swung up his club. I yelled and tried to dodge and that's the last I knew till I saw you fellows. Then I thought——"

He stopped and gingerly felt his bandaged head.

"Well, you're alive," said Cole, guessing at what Brown had imagined when he first came to. "And you're lucky. Outside of a stiff neck you'll be all right again in a few days. Now, you've talked enough."

"You said Sievers was through," persisted Brown. "What happened?"

"Your crowd got wiped out by the blacks. Sievers was, anyway, and it looks as if the rest were. They went after the blacks and they haven't come back. Now, hold on to yourself."

Young Brown fought with hysteria, his eyes filled again with horror and the fear of sudden death. He rocked to and fro, moaning.

"O God, if I ever get home again! Sievers made me come. Oh, my God!"

After a while he quieted down and they left him alone, going out again to the gold, separating the shining metal from the sinter as best they could and piling it up into a little glittering heap. Petrie insisted on coming with them into the air and sat in the shadow of the crags, watching them.

Presently Morbora joined them.

"You eat now?" he asked.

When they put him off, he demanded *sutongo*. He was more assured, though still watching the spinifex to the south where the blacks had disappeared and the scrub had swallowed up Harris and his mates.

They worked until the sun was low and then went into the cave to get the evening meal. They watched through the night, Morbora taking turn with them, Petrie insisting on his watch.

"I owe my life to that beggar Morbora," he said. "Funny the way they'll be ready to murder you one minute and then pull you out."

"That was a trade on Morbora's part," said Cole. "He thought we were going to tie him over an ant-heap. A couple of *shirshi* 'll fix him up."

Dawn came without alarm though Morbora was still confident that the tribesmen would come back to get the loot they had left behind. Just as sure the white men would not. They prepared the dynamite sticks, explaining to Morbora that they were great magic.

"Seems sort of tough to kill them in cold blood," said Petrie. "Those other chaps brought it on themselves after all. But we couldn't make friends with them after what happened to their women."

"If they're half as smart as Morbora," said Cole, "they'll smell us out."

"Huh!" Morbora snorted contemptuously. "You no fool that black fella. Suppose you no bury, maybe can do. Pretty soon he come."

The shadow of the crags had diminished by more than half before he gave warning. Presently figures appeared coming out of the spinifex in twos and threes, spreading out over a wide area, cautiously approaching the caves in converging lines, as the sticks of a fan lead to the handle. They were smeared with red and yellow and white paint and, as they came closer, the soot with which they had blackened their chocolate-colored skins was visible. Their hair was glued with beeswax into solid masses into which white and yellow feathers had been stuck so closely that their heads, peering round their narrow shields that were crudely blazoned with totem patterns, looked like so many chrysanthemums.

They were unmistakably a war-party. Suddenly a tall warrior swung his bundle of spears above his head and uttered a terrible yell. At once the rest rushed toward him, shouting at the top of their voices, lifting their shields and swinging their weapons high in the air. They divided and marched in two bodies to right and left, advancing in zigzags, stopping at every turn for a moment in silence and starting afresh with terrific howls.

Again they broke up, starting to run swiftly toward the cave with long elastic leaps, jumping high in the air and falling

behind their shields, entirely concealed save for the waving cockatoo plumes as they gazed toward the cave. They took advantage of every clump of grass that grew sparsely about the crags and worked up to within a hundred and fifty yards. Every now and then they gave yells that might have been meant for taunts or were intended to foment themselves up to a rush.

"Fire over their heads," said Cole quietly. "It may scatter them."

The scheme failed to stop them. Perhaps the humming bullets and the bark of the rifles meant nothing to them as long as immediate disaster did not follow. They were too far apart for any contagious fear. And they had already conquered the men who used the fire sticks. Their savage strategy was the best possible.

Coming in with those wild leaps, springing from side to side, they were difficult targets at the best. Even with direct hits only a few could be knocked over before the rest rushed the cave and, with their tremendous odds, settled the matter in hand-to-hand combat.

Morbora—they had let him take his weapons—was gray with fear.

"Now they come," he said. "Too many."

The tall warrior had yelled again and the charge was on. They came rushing with incredible speed, bounding along in open order that gradually closed in as they neared the crags, halting to fling spears that came whizzing, actually reaching the cave; a few of them, impelled by the throwing sticks, passing into the interior, others rattling against the rocks, while boomerangs glided with even better aim, turning in their flight, drumming as they struck the cliff; the howling mob coming on in a frenzy of killing, their eyes and teeth flashing, leaping and shouting like fiends, closer—closer!

It was a hazard to stand in the mouth of the cave. Cole took it, Reynolds beside him with a flaring torch of resinous wood. A boomerang struck Cole in the left shoulder as he drew back his arm and a spear passed through his shirt, grazing his flesh.

It had been imperative to get them within throwing range and the wait set success or failure on a single chance. If the dynamite failed to stop them——

The half-stick flew sputtering through the air. A soaring boomerang collided with it as it curved downward and it exploded fairly over the closing mob with a deafening roar and a flare of gas that was yellow in the sunlight amid a cloud of heavy yellow vapor. Under it blacks were flung prostrate and more halted with strenuous efforts like viciously reined-in horses. Cole took a second bomb, lit the split fuse from Reynolds' torch and flung it after the first.

This time it struck the ground and sand flew high into the air with the flash and thunder of the detonation that sent the air back so hard into the cave mouth that Cole and Reynolds went staggering back, dazzled, fogged by the smoke and dust.

When they could see clearly again the tribe was in full and frantic flight. Weapons and shields had been tossed aside. Painted figures were racing for the spinifex, plunging through grass clumps in their terror, some limping, others falling and clawing themselves along on their bellies.

Cole sent a third shot rocketing and it burst overhead as if a bolt of lightning had fallen. He was a Jove flinging thunderbolts, a devil-god of devil-gods! Morbora was cowering on the ground, prostrate. There were a dozen prostrate blacks within twenty yards of the cave. Some lay still, the life shattered out of them, others writhed feebly. It was slaughter, sickening but necessary and forever the desert tribes would be convinced that the white men had made a league with Kvingan and Bunyip. From then on the caves were to be a place accursed.

IT WAS two weeks later when they arrived at the torrent in the gorge. The raft was still there, drawn up on the shelf of rock where they had left it, the rope gone, chafed away, though it would have been of no use to them, fastened as it was to the opposite bank. But they had brought tough vines from the edge of the snake swamp and they hauled the raft up-stream and repeated their crossing to the wonderment of Morbora. The black might not be civilized but he was effectually tamed, less among these wizards, in his own eyes, far less than Perro.

He and Dangoran had brought Sievers and his party by another route far up the head of the gorge. The bushwhackers had forced their service as guides into the dreaded desert at the muzzles of guns. A mountain of *suttongo* would not otherwise have made them take the risk, Morbora swore. Not all the *suttongo* and *shirshi* in

the world would ever tempt him back again, he swore.

Not till they reached Herbert River where the boat was cached, advancing by short marches on account of Petrie and Brown, did he regain any self assertion. He took the *shirshis* given him—three of them, striped in pink and blue and green, as if they were the greatest of gifts, receiving them with reverence. He had been with wizards. When he got to his tribe again he would have wondrous tales to tell. He would have the pick of the women—Molle Molle would be his and forever he would be great in the greatness of the Thunderess.

So humble had he become that he even begged for the honor of carrying a load and, all unconsciously, bore on his back a burden that would have brought him more *suttongo* than his tribe could have smoked in a lifetime. To him the shining bits of yellow heavy dirt were no longer to be laughed at as white man's foolishness but regarded as magic ingredients of their wizardry.

It solved their portage problem. Petrie and Brown were barely capable of walking though both were growing stronger gradually. They carried out forty pounds of practically pure metal. It would mint at least eight thousand dollars. There was twice that much left behind, carefully cached by paced off measurements and bearings of which Morbora, otherwise employed, was ignorant and the main mass was untouched.

The *Adventurer* was in good shape and the owner of the mooring greeted them with voluble commiseration. They did not look much like successful fortune hunters; he had no sight of the gold, stowed under the transoms and they let him do his own talking and draw his own deductions.

"Never expected to see you agen," he said. "Reckon you didn't find much gold by the looks of ye." And he cackled at his own wisdom. "There was another party went up-river right after you did. Didn't see anything of 'em did, ye?"

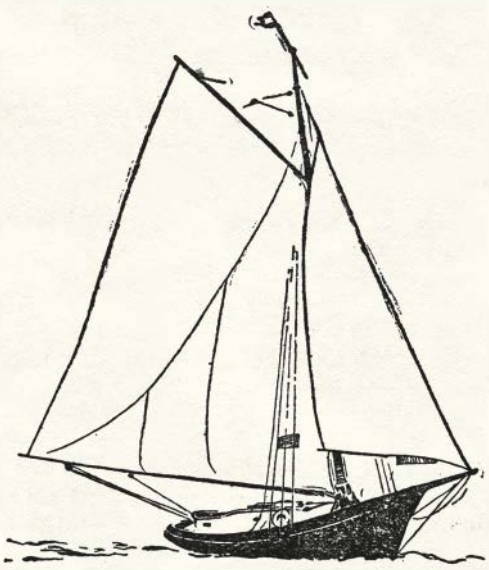
"It's a big country, back there," said Cole.

Brown, obedient, subdued, still a little doubtful as to what disposition they might make of him for his share in Siever's plan, had been put out of sight in the galley when they saw the man coming. The old fellow nodded.

"You bet it's a big country," he said. "You're lucky to be back alive."

"I agree with you," assented Petrie solemnly. "We are."

THE END



Author of "Position Doubtful," "Blaze," etc.

"I FANCY it will not touch us though; eh, Crabbe?" asked Sir Harrod Debenha of his medical officer on the staff of the Kwala Luwas residency.

Crabbe achieved what might be termed an explosion of whiskers. His fat eyes and open mouth popped out of the mass of wrinkles under that erupted beard. His hands flew out on either side energetically.

"I've taken every precaution, Sir Harrod," he assured the resident positively. "The cholera will be confined to the native part of Kwala Luwas. It would be stamped out within the stockade itself if you would give me a free hand over the blighters."

He glared around like an offended ape upon the rest of the staff at the residency table, who only laughed indulgently. "Pills" took his profession very seriously; the mere sight of a village *pawang's* measures against cholera—the industrious hanging of baskets of food in the jungle to appease the evil spirits and the setting adrift on the river of many sacrificial boats laden with money and provisions to entice them away—drove him to scandalized professional snorts. It was all futile and positively criminal and un-Christian, he would have them know!

The staff howled down in gales of laughter his importunities to Sir Harrod to be allowed to abolish all that. Browne, the big and bony police commissioner, purred soothingly upon the bellicose Crabbe, muttering something about all Malays being —— rotters and adding—

"We can't interfere with native customs ever, Pills, y'know."

Ranleigh, of the administrative, nodded in corroboration; his business was to keep Sir Harrod neatly tied to a telegraph wire which connected him by cable with Singapore and the Home Office in London. The Colonial Office was quite explicit upon the respect due native beliefs, he told the irate Crabbe.

"Respect due!" snorted the medico, and then gave it up, being without words forceful enough to condemn any respect due a native medical system that had more faith in the eyeball of a lizard tied to a mummied snake than in the whole British Pharmacopœia.

Sir Harrod leaned back in his Canton cane chair at the head of the table and smiled benignly upon all his staff, gleaming with starched whites under the ceiling lamp. He was a traditional British aristocrat of the ruling class. He meant well by the natives he had been sent out to govern, but he was as yet densely ignorant and incurious as to their lives, customs and prejudices.

For that knowledge he relied on the assistant resident, Webster Yates, the

American ethnologist whom he had picked up, here in the jungles of Samang, and given the position because of his knowledge even in the face of colonial policy toward foreigners. Good sort, Yates! And guided by intimate acquaintanceship with native ways in all he advised, thought Sir Harrod, as his big frame relaxed under the punkah breeze and his intolerant blue eyes smiled upon the Yank's lean figure and angular face.

"What do you suggest, Mr. Yates?" he asked. "You know the ropes out here. Shall we give Pills a free hand to mop up over there and set Browne and his Sikhs to backing him up?"

The native table "boys," Ya Israng and Awang Kria, came in serving curry and chutney at that moment. There was a busy and occupied silence as each man around the residency table went through the curry-and-rice ritual with the absorbed interest of strong men in the presence of food. Over a left elbow would bend Ya Israng's green turban and resplendent scarlet jacket, his wrinkled old monkey face concentrated intensely upon the management of rice and curry dish and chutney jar, each presented in turn on the big lacquer tray.

Directly he had moved on, Awang Kria swung into his place with a round lacquer box filled with China trays of curry condiments, grated coconut, tiny fried fish, seeds, nuts and flakes of some native delicacy. With a small spoon the white *tuan* would add a bit of each to his curry pile and Awang Kria would float on to the next man. It was the big ceremonial of the meal; the earnest, concentrated silence upon it of each man, from Sir Harrod down, gave one but little inkling that, in their lighter moments, these men held the destinies of the whole native State of Samang in their hands.

Indeed an outsider would have found something excessively romantic in that scene; the bamboo room with cane furniture and teak dining table and its two solemn brown punkahs swinging overhead; the bearded Sikh guards in scarlet and khaki standing rigidly at attention around the walls; the native table boys in flowing white robes and scarlet sashes; and the five robust and sunburned white men in starched uniforms seated at dinner—all of them at ease and unalarmed while outside in the darkness a wild jungle and a native stockade seethed with intrigue and rebellion.

"Hardly yet, Sir Harrod," smiled Yates in reply to the resident's question directly he had finished with his curry. "Malay *adat*, custom which amounts to law with them, is unsafe to tamper with. It is better to fool 'em, to get what you want without opposing any *adat*, however absurd and irrational. The situation here requires no end of tact just now. Your Government has just taken over Samang from Siam. Browne can tell you that Raja Sharif Ahmad over in the stockade is none too pleased over that transfer and that rebellion is all around us because of this cholera outbreak. Tough luck, but they hold us responsible for it, you see. We've got to stamp it out to win their friendship. Yet to mop up over there would set them all off whooping.

"I should say that Pills ought, first of all, to guard the residency alone against the epidemic. It won't do for us to be stricken down. The first wind of it down there—" Yates waved a bony hand toward the open veranda window where the stockade lay simmering with lights and subdued noise in the darkness below Residency Hill—"would give Ahmad and his chiefs their cue."

Sir Harrod tugged thoughtfully at his heavy white mustache.

"Right-o!" he agreed. "Pills, what precautions are you taking to protect the residency itself?"

Crabbe pursed his bearded lips while his pop-eyes smiled with confidence up-table.

"Every precaution, Sir Harrod," he replied. "Nothing save cooked food is being served now. No salads, no opened fruit. The only danger point is our water. In order to insure that being pure I have appointed Ya Israng, our trusted head boy, himself to go down the road to that spring with a couple of oil tins on a bamboo yoke for spring water."

Sir Harrod nodded approvingly, but Webster Yates gasped.

"Good heavens, Pills, but you *have* done it!" he exclaimed. "I've been wondering why old Ya Israng has been so glum during the last few days! Trusted servants, my eye! Don't you know that he's expecting a child to his old age?"

"A son, Raja Ketchil; Allah knows that it will be a son," corrected Ya Israng

humbly, for he had been listening and the conversation concerned him intimately. "I have prayed, but *apa guno?* Of what avail, if I must bear burdens like a coolie while my son is expected?"

"Without doubt a son, Old Wise One!" said Yates affectionately, smiling at the trusted servant.

Sir Harrod frowned at this familiarity and the breach of etiquette in a native servant presuming to speak at mess—Americans did such extraordinary things! But Yates was entirely in earnest, and he now appealed to the resident:

"Pills should have spoken to me before doing this, sir. It is strictly against Malay *adat* for the husband to do coolie labor during this time, lest the child be still-born. They believe it absolutely. It is a fact to them.

"There are a lot of other tabus, too—he may not cut his hair, nor sit on top of the hut ladder, nor go into or come out of his house save by the front door—all for good and sufficient reasons which any *pawang* can explain to you. Ya Israng should have a coolie to carry those cans for him, sir," he insisted strongly.

"Most extraordinary!" mused the resident, his eyes twinkling good naturedly nevertheless. "But I fancy we'd jolly well better give him one, eh? Ranleigh, can you detail a coolie from the clerical force?"

The administrative assented, but with no very good grace. It seemed absurd to him, this giving in to a ridiculous native tabu. But he did not venture to protest; Sir Harrod was already growing restive under the orders from home requiring him to do nothing warlike in the face of open rebellion brewing. The old lion needed humoring just now.

"Browne, I presume you are ready to 'allay any tendencies to excitement' as our delightful Home Office has it, eh?" pursued Sir Harrod blandly, having disposed of Ya Israng.

The big police officer growled out a sonorous, "Rather!" under his heavy black mustache—no toothbrush affair but one already grown and curled before that style came in.

"The earthworks around Residency Hill are completed, sir," he reported, "and I have two cannon mounted, commanding the stockade. The Navy is lying doggo under the opposite bank of the river, where it can sweep the waterfront of Kwala Luwas with machine-gun fire if need be."

"Not bad, that," commented Sir Harrod dryly. "That motor launch that the *Warspite* lent us makes a dashed respectable Navy, y'know, with the machine gun in her bows. Better change her lascar crew, Browne. The gunner and coxswain are white, but—I'd prefer Sikhs to lascars in a row. Malay boatmen have been known to rise and capture a launch before, the treacherous brutes!"

A STARTLING double crash interrupted the entire table. Awang Kria had come in bearing a huge joint on a platter; now the roast was rolling across the polished teak floor, the platter lay in broken pieces smeared with gravy, and Awang Kria was doubled up convulsively on the floor, livid and retching.

"Good God! That's the onset of cholera, Sir Harrod!" pronounced Crabbe after one glance. "Get a stretcher, quick!" he ordered one of the Sikhs.

The men in the room looked on the dying native with mingled feelings of pity, fear and uneasiness for the residency itself. Awang was such a nice "boy"! His usually smooth, handsome and alert face, with its slant eyes and light skin betraying the Chinese blood in the Malay, was now wrinkled and distorted with agony, his teeth bared by twitching lips, his arms and legs jerking convulsively in the throes of the disease.

Cholera was already *in* the residency in spite of Crabbe's precautions, that stricken native was warning them! There was deadly danger in his vomit, in the mere touching of him.

Who was to pick him up? The questioning eyes of all the white men who sat looking at one another gravely were asking that. Their minds had with one accord revolted against making the Sikhs do it. Caste restrictions, the feeling that these were helpless soldiers who *had* to obey orders, had settled that.

Crabbe, who was brave as a lion in spite of his preposterous hirsute adornments, had already volunteered in the honor of his profession. After that first glance he had dashed for his room and was now returning with a disinfectant sprayer and medicine bottles.

But it took two to handle Awang.

Browne could not be risked—the military head of the infant white Government of Samang. Ranleigh was needed as the home tie in case of insurrection, a man who knew how to cut red tape and get a warship here quickly in spite of the northeast typhoons closing the whole east coast. Webster Yates sprang forward to help, seeing that the unshaken and unalarmed Sir Harrod, filled with the inborn courage of his class, was about to do so.

"It is not for you, sir, of all men!" he protested, while Browne and Ranleigh interposed their bodies in affectionate remonstranee.

"Nonsense!" demurred Sir Harrod fearlessly, putting them aside.

Just then the Sikh returned with a stretcher and Crabbe took command, forcefully shoving away Sir Harrod, who was trying in mercy to ease the unfortunate native's sufferings.

"It's as much as your life is worth, sir!" he grunted shortly. "Take up his feet, Yates—and then don't touch anything," he ordered, lifting Awang by his shoulders.

They deposited him on the stretcher.

"To the sick bay!" Crabbe ordered the soldiers, and then turned to give the rest their directions.

"Keep away from this spot, all of you," he said, pointing to the sinister pool on the floor. "You too, Ya Israng; no touch!" he ordered the elderly native who had come in with troubled countenance. "Yates, you will find disinfectant in my room. Have some one mix it in a basin, and wash your hands and wrists. Burn that jacket."

He turned and left the room to go to the sick bay.

"By Jove, y'know!" ejaculated Sir Harrod.

An anxious silence fell on the others as they awaited his orders. This onset of the dread disease into the very residency itself, and in spite of the best medical precautions too, was most disconcerting. It made them all realize how insignificant was man in comparison to Nature and her utterly hostile life, from the tiger in the hills to the unseen germ in the very water they drank.

That last thought bade Yates stop and reflect where he stood, his hands held out contaminated and unclean, waiting for Sir Harrod to dismiss his staff. The water they drank! There, if anywhere, lay the secret of this invasion. Cooked food; no salads; no fruits except bananas, which you peeled with a knife, never allowing the fingers to touch the edible core, or oranges eaten with a sterilized spoon—all were part of Crabbe's quarantine regulations.

Granting them efficient, what *was* there left but the water? Most of it went into "pegs" of Scotch, wherein the alcohol killed all germ life; but no man could quench the thirst of the tropics with pegs. Water was usually served boiled and tasteless in remote jungle residencies like Kwala Luwas; Crabbe had avoided that nuisance by his spring-water idea. There could be no question of *that* being infected. And yet——

Yates decided to watch Ya Israng, the trusted servant, next day. Faithful he was to his white masters—but yet more faithful to that Malay *adat* which required him to perform no coolie labor while the great event was coming on of the birth of a son and heir to bury him properly according to Islam when life ended.

"Really, there's nothing to do but carry on, is there?" said Sir Harrod after a spell of troubled reflection. "This is the country where you shake hands with a chap one day and attend his funeral the next. Here we are, and here we stay. Look carefully to your diet, gentlemen.

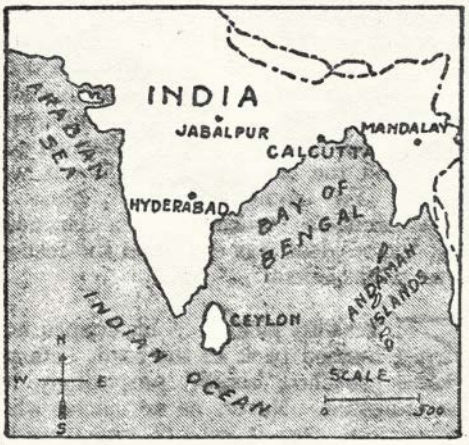
"If I go down, Browne takes charge, Ranleigh," he told his chief clerk. "You won't mind, Yates? You're a Yank and a topping good sort, but legally, when it comes to dealing with native chiefs in the name of our Government, y' know— My appointing you was quite irregular, y' see——"

Yates bowed and smiled cheerfully. Sir Harrod looked relieved.

"We all need to show the utmost moderation and tact in taking over this Government, gentlemen," he resumed. "Our great difficulty is our own ignorance of what may be vitally important in the native mind. Ya Israng, for example," he smiled. "I shall rely on you, Mr. Yates, to steer Browne in his dealings if anything happens to me. You know the ropes. We'll carry on as before, taking only the most elementary military precautions for the safety of the residency, and doing our best meanwhile to win the friendship of Raja Sharif Ahmad."

Gallant gentleman! It was the last order he was destined to give; for that night the cholera struck, and in spite of Crabbe's frantic efforts with the pressure pump,

filling his veins with salted waters to sustain the nerves and deceive the body into assuming that it still had blood, Sir Harrod passed on to join the great company of knights and soldiers whose names have made the white race glorious.



Next morning the order was, "Carry on!" The residency flag still flew at full mast, for it was essential not to let Raja Ahmad know what had happened. Browne had taken over as acting resident, sober and grief-stricken, but determined that the white man's Government should continue. He attended court as usual over the raja's *balei*, surrounded by his Sikhs, interfering only by a quiet word of counsel when Ahmad's judgments of the native cases brought before him verged on the fantastic or the cruel

Yates had begged off early. The resident lay in state in his own room, a martyr in the White Man's Graveyard, and Ranleigh was busy in the telegraph office. Yates had time to himself; time to pursue an investigation of vital importance in his mind. It was essential to find out at once where Ya Israng had been getting that water. He had countermanded the order giving the old fellow a coolie, for then there would have been no question but that he would have marched the laborer before him triumphantly to the distant spring.

Ya Israng had asked for that coolie immediately after *chota haziri*, the early breakfast at six. His weird old monkey face had fallen and a look of ferocity had leaped into it for an instant as Yates explained that in the present upset state of affairs no coolie could be spared. Then had come the usual shrug of submission. Now Ya Israng was shouldering grumblingly the bamboo yoke. Yates watched him swing out down the road, cursing volubly all unbelievers in Arabic phrases out of the Koran, and kicking the oil cans as he went.

Yates followed, paralleling him along a jungle trail which gave occasional glimpses of the road. The spring was about a mile down it; one turned to the right and took a path along a tiny rill, which led to the clear stone well of the spring under a beetling cliff of limestone.

Hardly had Ya Israng gone a third of the way before he suddenly turned to the left, and, with a glance about, darted down a jungle path. Yates uttered a fierce exclamation of censure as he watched. Good Lord! On *that* side ran the capricious windings of the village brook! It was kept from joining the main river by a geologic basalt dike, and in a bend of that brook the stockade of Kwala Luwas had been built.

Its water was clear down here, Yates knew, but deceitful, for all the seepage of the village refuse eventually reached it. A microscope would show a drop of its water swarming with cholera germs!

Yates cursed the niggardly administration which refused a colonial doctor the protection of such an instrument. A sick weakness had overwhelmed him as he saw Ya Israng vanish toward that brook—they had all been drinking that filth four whole days! Immediately there followed a towering and a righteous wrath as Yates himself crashed through the jungle toward the road, crossed it and hurried down the jungle trail.

He met Ya Israng already returning, groaning under the yoke of two brimming tins of water.

"You—unspeakable—swine!" yelled Yates, advancing upon him with clenched fists and flashing eyes and unable to say more in his raging passion.

The monkey face looked at him startled. dismayed. Ya Israng stopped submissively under his load of spilling tins, his palms held outward across his forehead in token of injured innocence.

"Is this the going for pure water to the spring—grandson of a flea!" shouted Yates when he could find breath, and then he lost

his temper utterly and *smack!* went the palm of his hand, rocking Ya Israng's cheek, while the yoke slipped off and both cans fell to the ground and upset.

Ya Israng glared ferociously for an instant while his hand leaped to where a creese should have been in his girdle. Then he eyed this *tuan* who had befriended him the night before, reproachfully and puzzled.

"Nay, if it pleases the Presence to smite his faithful servant," he mumbled. "But wherefore? It is good water and clear. There is no wrong——"

"Peace—offspring of a frog!" barked the exasperated Yates, all his tact and knowledge of what is insulting in word and deed to a Malay thrown to the winds in his indignation. "Know you what you have done? Because there was no going to the spring as was the order, behold! The Raja Besar, the resident, lies dead of drinking this filth; a gentle and harmless boy of thine own race was borne out dead last night; and the rest of us— Nay, heavy will be the hand of Tuan Browne upon thee for this, O Ya Israng!"

Ya Israng stared at the gasping Yates as if he thought that the heaven-born was without doubt mad. Why all this pother about mere water? What difference whether it came from spring or brook? It was all lost on him; but the last part of Tuan Yates' outburst was intelligible. He was to be punished by Tuan Browne for this water-carrying; with what atrocious tortures no man could imagine! Also this false friend had not only spied upon him, but—unforgivable in Malay eyes—had caught him in the very act.

Fear-lines wrinkled his brown face; then rage and open rebellion. A monkey-like ferocity narrowed his brown eyes, and his mouth framed its lips into an open diamond of malevolence.

"Bah!" he shot out. "What is it all to me! I that have a son coming in mine old age yet was forced to labor like a buffalo, to the end that he might be delivered dead —still-born! *Ya, Allah!* Unjust and accursed is the white man! And now to be beaten!"

That cry of the tabu-ridden native, most unjustly used according to his beliefs, pierced Yate's heart. It was all so real to Ya Israng, however absurd in the light of common sense! The innocent Crabbe had been hideously unjust in allowing the old fellow no coolie. Yates could appreciate Ya Israng's side of it, in spite of the enormity of the consequences of this water fiasco.

He was about to ignore the disrespect and attempt a conciliatory explanation, but Ya Israng gave him no time. With a whirl of bitter oaths and a sudden flinging off of his scarlet jacket of livery, the old fellow had turned and fled down the trail, leaving Yates fighting the coat off his own head. He tried to follow for a moment, but a splash in the brook and the rustle of bushes on the other side told him it was useless. Ya Israng was gone; gone to Raja Ahmad's stockade—with the news that the resident was dead and the rest all down with cholera!

YATES picked up his toupee and hurried back to the road. He reproached himself unsparingly for that outburst. Never, on no matter what provocation, was it safe to give way to temper before the calm and courteous Malay. And God help the white man who has incurred the Brown Man's enmity! A Malay can hold a grudge for fifty years. Sooner or later it will be appeased, usually long after reconciliation has been sworn and the white man forgotten all about it. The thing would just happen; an appalling and unspeakable treachery apparently without rime or reason.

The vision of the dead resident lying in state in his room and the certainty that the rest of the staff was already infected had given Yates excuse enough, he felt. But the fact was there; an undying hate forever to be on watch against. He had caught Ya Israng in a misdemeanor, an unforgivable insult in Malay eyes. Nothing less than his own death could satisfy that grudge.

Yates reached the residency at last, hot and tired and blown, and his head swimming from the effects of the sun. Ranleigh met him with a very grave face in the quiet and darkened living room of the residency.

"Browne and Crabbe both down, Mr. Yates," he announced gloomily. "They are in the doctor's room. Sick as he is, Crabbe is fighting to the last for both their lives."

"I should think they *would* be down!" snorted Yates warmly, and he told the administrative of Ya Israng's precious water-carrying.

The clerk went white.

"I suppose it's you and I next," he said in a very small and frightened voice. "We can hardly escape it, can we? Four whole days! I hope you arrested the scoundrel. He shall swing for it as soon as I get authority from the Home Office."

Yates listened to him uneasily. This whole attitude in the man who was now acting resident was discouraging. It would do no good to hang the man for an act of ignorance. It would only precipitate violence and rebellion at once. Strong and wise measures were needed now and no hesitation about it or waiting for approval from Singapore.

Under Ranleigh the whole residency bade fair to be massacred within two days. If nothing more, the lives of Browne's fifteen devoted Sikhs were not to be sacrificed in the white man's attempts at misgovernment.

"Unfortunately he was too quick for me and got away," Yates replied. "It's all our fault really, Ranleigh. Ya Israng expects a son shortly, and the last thing we should have done was to make him carry that water, even if he was the only one who could be trusted to see that it was got from the spring. We should have detailed him a coolie——"

"What rot!" interjected Ranleigh impatiently over Yates' sympathy for the benighted native. "Really, Mr. Yates!"

He raised his eyebrows.

"And now he's gone to the stockade—with news to Raja Ahmad of just how matters stand here," finished Yates imperturbably.

Ranleigh whistled. He realized now their danger. Fear came into the green eyes in his flabby and sallow face. The severe and carping spirit with which his clerkly mind was beginning to upbraid Yates for letting Ya Israng get away was now replaced by a very different attitude, that of shelving the responsibility on someone else—any one so long as it was not himself.

"I say, Yates," he began conciliatorily, "you're an American of course—" as if that placed him somehow in a lower order of human beings—"but you are assistant resident here, y'know. Sir Harrod left no orders as to who was to succeed Browne, but— Of course there is no precedent for it, y'see— And I have no instructions from the Home Office!"

"That's all right!" broke in Yates quickly, glad to terminate all this backing and filling and relieved to get hold of the affair himself. "I'll take charge here. I'll take all the responsibility; only, you keep out of that telegraph office. I doubt if you could get even Singapore now anyway. The wire is probably cut somewhere in the jungle by this time. I want a free hand until Browne pulls through. You leave it to me; I used to have *some* influence with these natives!"

His reassuring tones quieted Ranleigh, who tacitly turned over the office of resident to the Yank and hurried out of the room to look after the two patients.

Webster Yates, acting resident of Samang, paced the room considering. Rebellion; pestilence; a private grudge, insatiable, unappeasable; this was the cheerful array of things to be dealt with. Yet his craggy face was cracked by a pleased grin of enjoyment over it all as his lean body bent forward with hands clasped behind him in the onward march of that thinking spell. The face was all planes and angles; cheek bones a pair of twisted flats; jaw and chin another pair; sunburned nosebridge as crooked as a dog's hind leg.

A more and more jubilant and resolute expression grew as Yates' mind grasped cheerfully the reins of this business. The grudge, he decided, could be settled in only one way; a life for a life. That lay on the knees of the gods. The pestilence might claim him next; the danger to the residency had abated, now that its source was clear. A detail of Sikhs and a coolie to the spring would insure pure water hereafter. Browne's superb constitution and Crabbe's care of himself as a wise doctor in the tropics gave them both a chance to pull through. There remained the question of how to abate the cholera over in the stockade of Kwala Luwas. That was one thing.

The other was rebellion, and the answer to that was just plain bluff. To show no fear at all before the natives and use tact in carload lots was their only salvation there. His intimate knowledge of Malay life as an ethnologist gave Yates a grand advantage in managing this situation.

Great stuff, knowledge! He grinned to himself as he paced about and about. It gave him the key over there. And, like all explorers, Yates was a fair doctor himself and possessed a highly efficient medical kit.

War or peace? he mused as he stopped to gaze out over the valley to where the stockade lay broiling in the heat. The confused noises of village life came distantly from it—the wail of women mourners, the occasional outburst of despair over some new death, the deep and incessant funereal chanting from the Koran in the square, thatched *mesingit*, the mosque which rose alongside the raja's *balei* out of a huddle of peaked bamboo gables.

Other funereal chants came from white-robed pall bearers carrying out into the jungle coffins without bottoms, so that the victims could sleep on Mother Earth yet not be oppressed by earth above them. Cholera was pursuing its deadly way unchecked over there among the raja's people.

As Yates looked, it came to him that there was a better thing than either War or Peace, and its name was Mercy. To stop that massacre of a whole town—that way lay friendship undying, loyalty, gratitude. Just to sit tight and govern by force simply imposed a sullen endurance upon these people, an endurance with longing eyes turned back on Siam, whose Government had been the mere requirement of an annual money tribute and had left them free.

Samang had been a nuisance to the civilized world, of course; under Siam the place had been a nest of petty piracy and a refuge for all the malefactors escaping from the well-policed Malay Federated States—but somehow Yates found himself sympathizing with the raja, with his dislike of white interference, of veto on cherished native customs, of work and progress—soon there would even be missionaries!

He took his decision and called Ranleigh.

"I'm going over there, Ranleigh, old chap," he announced. "You will probably get an ultimatum from the raja by noon. It will be hazily worded, but it will mean just one thing; for us to get out and leave them in peace. Pay no attention to it, but just sit tight. Never mind me; I'm going over there with Crabbe's salt pump and try a few miracles. Spectacular thing, that pump! The mere sight of it would cure most Malays! And Crabbe is through with it over here."

Ranleigh nodded, puzzled. The whole idea seemed to him foolhardy and without precedent, but he was not a man of decision one way or the other.

"Don't pay any attention to any demands for ransom for me, nor to any rumors that they have done me in," went on Yates. "Just sit tight; load your two cannon with grape shot, and keep the Sikhs on guard in case they rush you.

"I'm moving the Navy over to this bank where it can command Residency Hill from the flank. You send Brett a crew of Sikhs.

"Well—I guess that will be about all. I'm taking Crabbe's two medical Eurasians."

Ranleigh had been listening more and more uneasily. At last he was to be left all alone in charge, and he liked it not.

"My dear fellow!" he entreated the moment Yates had finished. "Have you any conception of the risks you run in going over there into that den of thieves? At least take a couple of Sikhs with you!" he begged.

"What's the use?" grinned Yates. "The poor fellow's lives are valuable to them at least. And any show of force is a confession of fear. I'd rather go it alone, and I intend to. You just hold the hill and get off our telegraph man into the jungle to tap the wire in case any trouble develops. I'll make out!"

"You Americans!" sighed Ranleigh unhappily.

There was a finality about all this that upset him. Everything was being hazarded upon the cast of the dice and they might come down wrong.

It was like jumping over a narrow but dangerous forest waterfall. The bold man measured the distance, took the leap, and the thing was done. The timid one measured the risks and decided he'd better not—thereby letting himself in for endless jungle going, most likely.

BUT Yates had gone out of the room, leaving Ranleigh standing there uncertainly and thinking up further objections. He possessed himself of the doctor's salts and apparatus. The pump was a fearsome and gleaming thing, having all the spectacular horrors of a surgical instrument array. No *pawang* could ask for better outward and visible signs of great magic! Yates picked it up and called away Crabbe's two medical apothecaries, both Hindus and both very much frightened.

"We're going over there, babus. No

funking now, or you'll never see Calicut again!" he warned them grimly.

He led them down to the riverbank, where he called over the Navy and then headed for the stockade. At its gate the idle and dissolute guard of the raja, fully armed with musket and creese, stopped him insolently, and then all grinned derisively when Yates told them he was on his way alone and unarmed to Sharif Ahmad's *balei*.

But Yates did not go there first off. Of an urchin he inquired the way to Ya Israng's house and turned down a dusty and filthy alley, clamoring with the voices of mourners, to seek it.

The hut stood in a tiny garden backed up against the stockade. An old hag whom Yates recognized as the *bidan* or midwife sat cursing him on the ladder to the veranda. He greeted her with a Mohammedan blessing and looked about the garden under the papaya trees.

There was the usual auspicious place for the birth selected by the *pawang*, surrounded with thorns, nets, ray's tails, bees' nests and bitter herbs to drive away evil spirits. There was the iron plate with a fire under it for the new-born babe to lie upon, the cannon crackers, the black tossing cloth, the platter of rice to bury him in. Robust would the infant have to be to survive those ordeals.

Yates gathered that the birth was to take place very soon and that Ya Israng was purifying himself at the mosque. He called his coolies and headed for the *balei*.

There was no difficulty about entering it; the problem would be to get out again alive. Raja Sharif Ahmad sat in his chair of state, a gross, fat Malay with big and pouting lips and with shifty brown eyes, whose whites were tinged with yellow, rolling in his brown face. His sword-bearer stood at one hand with the gold and jewel ornamented sword of state held ceremoniously with its point resting on a small square of red plush. At the other side stood the *muntri* or vizier, and around the raja were native *pawangs* and black-and-white-garbed priests of Islam in dome-shaped turbans bound about with brown cords of camel's hair from Arabia. All were consulting anxiously about the plague.

Ahmad, perceiving Yates in the doorway of the audience hall with his two coolies behind him, scowled sullenly.

"Now, by Allah, the Scourge of Unbelievers—darest thou come here, Yates Tuan!" he burst out angrily. "Know then that by Choree, my sword of state, have I already sent messengers to the dogs of English on the hill commanding them to take their boat and go back to the sea whence they came!

"Behold the black plague which they have brought upon my people!" he went on, voicing his woes to Yates, whom he had once much admired as a white scientist among his people. "Is it not enough that they die like flies? When did the benign old king in Siam ever bring us such misfortune?

"Once thou wert in great favor here, 'Ku Yates," the raja said almost kindly, using the affectionate diminutive of *tunku*, ruler, as an echo of old times. "Go back and tell them to go away, or my fighting men will blight them utterly before this day's sun goes down."

Yates temporized. He had come with great magic against the plague, he told them, pointing to the gleaming brass pump. It belonged to the English on the hill; therefore would it not be well to try this magic first and then send them away?

The raja's face took on an expression of interest as he and all the *pawangs* looked at the pump. The latter, Yates could see, were dying to get their hands on it. He had always worked through them before, as it was very bad medicine to oppose the native sorcerers or to laugh at their methods. It was far better policy to slip a powder or a pill into the vile decoctions they gave their patients and let them take all the credit for the cure. The raja's next words gave him a gorgeous, a superb, opportunity.

"'*Ku*," he said gloomily, "my heart is heavy within me; for I know that my son, the Raja Muda himself, lies at death's door of the evil spirits. If thy magic——"

"Let him be brought, O Raja Sharif Ahmad, whom may Allah cherish!" said Yates in a loud and confident voice. "Thou, Mat Panku, and thou also, Si-Pijak, shall make this magic," he called out, pointing to the two principal *pawangs* around the raja and enlisting them with him before any objections due to jealousy could be made. "I too will do a poor part; but it is not seemly for an unbelieving Nazarene such as I to presume to have

any powers over the exalted Raja Muda."

It was a master speech and hit just the right note. The *hadjis* all nodded approvingly. Islam had been flattered by that reference; and this unbelieving Nazarene had strange powers, they knew of old. The two *pawangs* disengaged themselves from the crowd and came forward eagerly—but with them was coming Ya Israng!

Yates watched him uneasily out of the tail of his eye as he gave directions about the pump. Ya Israng had invited himself, appearing from nowhere out of the throng. The rajah was not making any objections to that volunteer but rather watching him with a curious and unfathomable expression on his face.

Yates shrugged his shoulders cheerfully as lurid instances of the well known Malay treachery floated through his mind. The near presence of this enemy with an undying grudge was almost amusing! He would be creesed some time soon; the only point was, when? Ya Israng's monkey face, peering at him furtively from behind the two *pawangs*, told him nothing. There was no nod of recognition, no gleam of hate, nothing.

Yates decided that this was going to be no end of a show. Nothing would be done until an unseen hint from the rajah would give Ya Israng his cue. And then——

Well, it would be right after the "magic" on the crown prince. If the man died, Yates would feel Ya Israng's creese in his back. If Muda recovered—and the salt pump was positive and quick in its effects—there might be a slim ghost of a chance to defend himself somehow. At least it would be left between himself and Ya Israng with his private grudge.

The young Raja Muda was brought in from the mosque presently. He lay quite still on the couch, livid, gasping spasmodically, far gone. Yates saw that there was scant hope for him. Only, the native responded far more quickly than the white man to any kind of treatment.

The critical point before dissolution had arrived now, he perceived. Young Yusuf's body was utterly white and bloodless. Strychnin salts pumped in through a vein alone had power to sustain the nerves and give the heart something to work with in place of blood.

"It is great magic, and thus is it done," directed Yates as his coolies brought over the pump. "Bring thou here a bowl of clear water, Mat Panku—but it must have the dried ear of a bat in it," he insisted earnestly.

The *pawang* hastened off to prepare the bowl while Yates thought over all the rhythmic savage dances he knew of that would be sufficiently diabolical yet would operate the handle of that pump. A vision of the syncopated hop of the Navaho fire dance, seen ten years before, floated into his mind.

"Thus one makes *hobat-an* with the magic thing of brass, Si-Pijak," he said, showing the native that absurd leap of the Navaho buck, which yet rang true as the dance of wild men the world over.

Si-Pijak, approving, caught on quickly. Yates, correcting with the utmost seriousness a minor detail, caught a glance being exchanged between the rajah and some one behind him.

Ya Israng was there! A tiny spark of ferocity, like a gleam on a seething coal, burned deep in his eyes as Yates moved carelessly to one side to show Si-Pijak that the handle of the brass thing must indeed move up and down as he danced. Ya Israng's hand was on his creese, his body bent over them, close. It needed but the flicker of the rajah's eyelash for him to strike.

Yates kept his nerve and paid him no attention whatever.

"Now there will be a letting of bad blood," he said, pointing to Yusuf's emaciated wrist when all was ready and the pump tube in the bowl.

It was an unfortunate remark, a tiny slip that nearly cost him his life; for when Si-Pijak severed the great vein of the arm only a thin, watery fluid trickled out feebly. A murmur of disillusionment, disblief, went around. The white man had lied! Yates moved over handy to Mat Panku's creese, and—

"Shove in the nozzle here," he commanded hastily, pointing to the severed end of the vein.

Again the strained attention of all was concentrated on the patient. There was yet more to this magic. A crisis had been passed without Ya Israng's creese terminating everything with the finality of one sudden stroke.

Si-Pijak began a pagan and un-Christian dance with the pump handle. Yates

crooned barbarously over the unconscious Muda, working his arms vigorously and keeping close to Mat Panku, murmuring incantations over the bowl. To snatch that amiable *pawang's* creese and defend himself against Ya Israng the moment the operation was over was his plan. Hopeless, but he could die fighting!

Slowly the strychnin water in the bowl was sucked down. The young Raja Muda on the couch began to breathe more slowly and less hectically. Finally he moved, kicked out a leg impatiently, then turned feebly over and opened his eyes to look at the crowd.

Rajah Sharif Ahmad was bending forward tensely on his throne, all his soul concentrated on his son. Their eyes met for an instant—and there was at last recognition in Muda's! He opened his lips and sighed out the one word, "*Allah*," then heaved a deep breath, rolled over on his side and slept, his breathing regular and enormously drawn-out and slow.

IT WAS a miracle, a miracle of science, Yates knew, as an overwhelming flood of relief and thankfulness rolled over his whole being. They had wrested a life from the grip of cholera! He found himself punching and slapping on the shoulder old Mat Panku as if it were the most natural thing in the world, grinning tremulously with delight and wringing the hand of Si-Pijak with professional enthusiasm.

Then he remembered where he was—in a hostile Malay *balei*, with his life hanging by a thread and his direst enemy somewhere near him with drawn creese. Still congratulating the *pawangs*, Yates glanced cannily around. Ya Israng was nowhere to be seen, but a tall *hadji* was lifting up his voice in praise to Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate, while the raja was pouring out heartfelt and sincere phrases of thankfulness, extravagant in their Oriental imagery.

"It is indeed most passing great magic, O Rajah Sharif Ahmad!" he returned enthusiastically. "But—Ya Israng? To him I owe a debt——"

The raja held up a hand.

"No," he commanded. "Leave not the *balei*, 'ku. Hearest thou the voices of them that rejoice in the streets? A son is born to Ya Israng—who loves thee not. Therefore is he gone."

"But I must see to that, too, Ahmad," insisted Yates. "Ya Israng was forced to break tabu by them that knew not what they did. Thou knowest, rajah."

"Go then, *tunku*, and my heart goes with thee," said the rajah after a space of troubled reflection. "Take this. The blue turquoise is a charm against the snake that crawls on his belly."

He took a gold bracelet off his arm in which a single blue stone glowed. Yates knew that it was the Malay warning against treachery.

"Even so, Illustrious; yet must I go. But thy charm is potent. I return soon, and we will drive the cholera from all this thy village. Come thou, Mat Panku!"

With the native *pawang* he hurried down the street toward Ya Israng's house. Yates was fumbling with his pocket kit as he stalked along. He took out a small hypodermic syringe and concealed it in his fist, with the point of the needle buried between his fingers. There might be need of it; and if so his chance to cancel the grudge of Ya Israng had come!

Natives were looking at him glumly down here as he neared the house. Up around the mosque they were still shouting the glad news; here they already knew that things were not going well and that the infant had come into the world only to die. Hisses and curses came to his ears as he and Mat Panku strode along.

The crowd in Ya Israng's garden parted as Yates and Mat Panku rushed in. A *pawang*, helped by the *bidam*, was busy at barbarous and inhuman rites over a small, naked, brown baby who remained limp and silent under treatment rough enough to kill him.

Yates took in the trouble at a glance. The baby needed nothing more than that smart slap that is often necessary after birth to make him go and start his lungs working. The hot iron plate, the cannon crackers, the tossing cloth, were all for that purpose, but they were not succeeding. In a few more minutes the poor little mite would be dead of self-suffocation.

"Do thou take charge, Mat Panku," he told the native, who at once plunged into the fray.

Yates looked about for Ya Israng. He discovered the old fellow under the house, tearing his hair distractedly and shrieking prayers to Allah to hear him in his great need

He spied Yates immediately. A wild glare of ferocity sprang at once into his eyes as he drew his creese and came rushing forth.

"Die, accursed Nazarene!" he screamed. "Thou who hast done this thing with thy devil's water cans!"

He broke through the crowd that would restrain him. Yates held up the raja's bracelet.

"Have a care, Ya Israng!" he warned.

The old man recoiled from it as from a cobra. He would die a lingering death on the pointed bamboo stake if he affronted that charm!

"Come!" said Yates persuasively. "A life for a life, Ya Israng. I have called thee the grandson of a flea and the offspring of a toad and have threatened thee with beatings, but—I shall but touch thy baby and he lives. What sayest thou?"

"If the heaven-born will but deign! And quickly!" gasped Ya Israng, suddenly collapsing into the humble and submissive native in his extremity. "The magic that I have seen!"

Yates snatched the baby from Mat Panku's none too gentle ministrations. In a single press the needle went home into the fat little thigh, and there was a sudden convulsive stiffening of all his limbs, a choking cough, a retching, and then a lusty yell, howl upon howl of outraged infancy. Ya Israng's son had at last come into his world, shouting his displeasure at the top of his lungs!

Yates handed down the squalling infant to Ya Israng, who now clasped the heaven-born's puttees and was mumbling incoherent blessings.

"Do thou whisper the name of Allah into his ear, Old Wise One," he said, "and let there be no more of anger between us."

"Aye, *tunku!* Allah is my witness that a life cancels a life—and he that gives his word shall keep it like a fort," mumbled Ya Israng gratefully.

"God is good," said Yates shortly. "Thou and I, Mat Panku, are needed back at the *balei*, for there is yet more magic to perform and many lives to save."

On the way back Yates launched the master stroke that broke the back of the cholera at Kwala Luwas.

"There is a spring down the road from the residency, O Mat Panku," he told the head *pawang*. "Harken thou carefully unto me concerning this spring. Thou wilt take a dried frog, sewn up in a bag made of the pelt of an unborn tiger cub—hearest thou?" he directed earnestly.

"I hear, O *hadji!*" said Mat Panku, trembling, for this was very great magic and hard to obtain.

"It is well! This wilt thou put in that spring, so that its waters become magic waters. Then thou wilt tell the raja to command that no man may drink, save from the waters of that spring. Thus will the plague be charmed away."

"It shall be done, O Great One," said Mat Panku earnestly.

THAT and the salt pump. Three days later Yates returned to the anxious Ranleigh, to find Browne and Crabbe well on the road to recovery.

"You'll find 'em gentled and loyal, all right, I guess," he told Browne casually. "You just missed a fat little revolution! I've got 'em drinking good water, and that ought to finish the cholera. Only, if Crabbe finds any queer things in the spring, he's on no account to throw 'em out," he laughed.

"Rather not!" purred Browne.

He, too, was making a beginning at understanding the silent, sullen peoples over whom he ruled.

BIANCA CAPPELLO

by **F. R. Buckley**

THERE have been women who wore trousers and served guns for love of some man; women who wore mail and swung swords for love of country; but of women possessing that cheerful and reasonless restlessness characteristic of the true adventurer, there have been very few. I know of only one. Her name was Bianca Cappello; she was the daughter of a Venetian noble family; and she died of poison in the year of our Lord 1587.

It was the theory, at that time, that the more adventurous the males of a family, the stricter should be the seclusion of the females. Bianca came into violent collision with this theory long before her twentieth birthday; found she could do nothing about it unaided; enlisted the aid of a young Florentine named Pietro Bonaventuri; married him as a reward for helping her escape from her father's house, and fled with him to Florence. Rightly judging that no dowry would be sent after her, she robbed her father extensively before she left. Pietro, who corresponded to the modern tango-lizard, had, it seems, done a little forgery on his own account. What with one thing and another, the Venetians thought it would be well to get the pair extradited from Florence and brought back for punishment.

But before the extradition proceedings could proceed very far, Bianca had attracted the attention of Grand Duke Francesco I, of Florence and Tuscany. He happened, according to history, to see her at the window of a mean house as he rode across St. Mark's Square; but I doubt whether the happening was entirely accidental on Bianca's part.

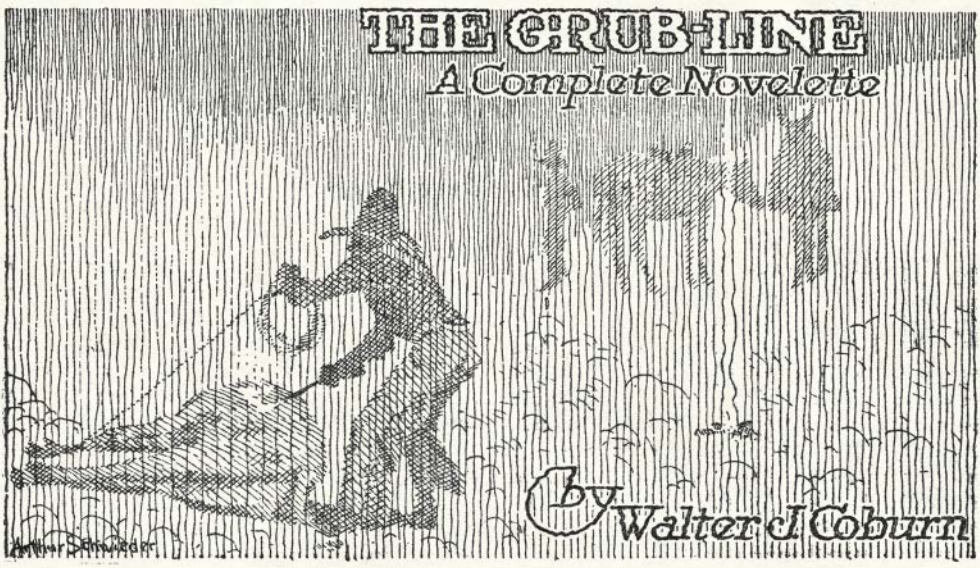
Anyhow, the extradition proceedings ended with a sharp rebuke to Venice; the mean house was vacated; Pietro Bonaventuri was given a well-paid sinecure at court; and so on and so on. Then there was another happy accident.

Pietro, having served his purpose in Bianca's career, had the good taste to offend a clique of powerful courtiers, and then to go home alone, late at night. I forget whether there were thirty-six or forty-six dagger wounds in him when he was found the next morning; but in either event, he ceased to present an obstacle to Bianca's marriage with the Grand Duke.

After a little more time, the other obstacle—the Grand Duchess—was also removed by death; and the marriage took place. And, characteristically, Bianca's first action, on ascending the ducal throne, was to compel her native city to inscribe her name in the Golden Book of Venice. Also characteristically, she did not insist that her name be erased from the roll of proscribed criminals; and the contrasting entries are in the archives of the city to this day.

That she remained Grand Duchess for nine years, in those fickle and violent times, and with her shady past offering a point of attack for all her enemies, is a better indication of her personality than a catalog of her deeds could be. At the end of that period, she decided that the time had come to see about the succession, which promised to fall to the Duke's brother, the Cardinal Ferdinand. She hated Ferdinand; so, after welcoming him fulsomely to the Duke's country house in 1587, she endeavored to tempt his appetite with a marchpane full of arsenic. Ferdinand suggested that the Duke help himself first; the Duke, knowing nothing of the scheme in hand, did so; and Bianca, preferring death to the admission of defeat, helped herself next. The Duke died within twenty-four hours; Bianca, the day after. Ferdinand, who apparently decided not to eat the marchpane, after all, became Grand Duke.

There is another story, which attributes the death of Francesco and his consort to marsh-fever; but I would rather not believe it.



Author of "Worked Brands."

"YEAH." Tad Ladd's voice was more than heavy with sarcasm. "Yeah, you shore do know this country, 'Shorty.' You shore do. What's the name uh that last crick we crossed?"

"Alkali Crick, 'Taddie,' " grunted Shorty as he searched one pocket after another for tobacco enough to make a cigaret. "I told yuh when we crossed 'er."

"You win, pardner. You win all bets. We done crossed seventeen thousand cricks since we hit the Montana line and they all got the same name. Alkali! Yuh got one uh these here one way minds, I reckon. A heap uh learnin' might git drove through that bone head uh yourn but none of it ever comed out. Alkali! Alkali ——!"

"What's the odds, dang it," protested Shorty mildly. "A crick's a crick, regardless. We gotta cross 'em, no matter what name folks call 'em. With fair to middlin' luck we'll hit some ranch by night."

He carefully inspected the dubious looking mixture of lint, tobacco, and sand that he had gathered from his pockets, produced a wrinkled cigaret-paper, and was about to start the construction of a smoke when his horse snorted, jumped sidewise and all but unseated the rider. Tobacco and paper were gone when Shorty gathered his slack bridle reins and looked reproachfully at the coiled rattler that had caused the horse to jump.

"Snake, yuh jest nacherally raised ——, buzzin' thataway at this here skewball pony. That was the last smoke standin' between me and poverty. My heavy-set pardner was to git butts on that smoke. No two ways about it, I gotta blow that purty head uh yourn off." He reached for the .45 in his chaps pocket as he spoke.

"Hold on, yuh loco runt," growled Tad. "Don't waste good lead on a rattler. Git off and throw rocks at him. We ain't got any ca'tridges 'ceptin' what's in our guns. I'll he'p yuh rock him."

Tad dropped the hackamore rope of the pack horse he was leading and slid to the ground.

Five minutes later and they were again in the saddle. The snake's rattles now adorned Shorty's hat-band.

"Was it yesterday er the day before that we e't last, Tad?" asked Shorty.

"The day before. That dry-land farmer's place, mind? Sow-bosom and beans cooked in alkali water. They was so hard they rattled when they went down. I'm shore ga'ant and if I don't git a smoke afore long I'll die shore."

"It's a bad wind that don't blow somebody some good. I allers did want that yaller-hammer hoss yo're ridin'. I'll give

yuh a fit send-off when yuh lays 'em down, Taddie. ——! Look yonder!"

A quarter of a mile away, traveling at right angles to the direction in which the two cow-punchers were going, four riders were hazing a bunch of cattle into a long coulée.

"Give you one guess what them boys is doin', Tad."

"One's a plenty. Rustlin' cattle. Well, 'tain't our place to stop 'em. Swing into that draw afore they spot us, Shorty."

Tad spoke too late. One of the riders had already seen them and was leaving the cattle to head their way. Another of the riders joined him and the two men rode at a lope.

Tad and Shorty exchanged a quick look and both grinned. But their right hands were within a few inches of their guns when the two riders drew rein.

Both the men were well mounted, had good outfits and carried saddle guns. Their clothes showed signs of service and both needed a shave. The man on the roan horse, a burly, coarse-featured individual with bloodshot, pale-blue eyes, seemed to be leader. The other man looked like a half-breed and wore his six-shooter in a home-made shoulder holster.

The burly man's pig-like eyes seemed to grasp every detail of the two cow-punchers' outfits.

The double-rigged saddles, the tie loops in the ends of their catch-ropes, the gaunt condition of their horses, the pack horse, all told their tales. It needed only Tad's soft Texan drawl to clinch the fact that the two travelers were from the southern ranges.

"Ridin' the grub-line, boys?" he asked with a hint of a sneer in his tone.

A quick flash colored Shorty's tanned cheeks. There are times when the best of cow-hands "ride the grub-line," drifting from one outfit to the next in search of a job. There is no disgrace attached to the procedure and it is no insult to be asked if one is riding the grub-line. It was the burly man's tone, rather than the question, that nettled the hot-tempered Shorty.

Tad, reading the danger signal in his partner's expression, cut in quickly.

"We're headin' fer the Circle C, mister," he volunteered, a slow grin on his lips.

"Yeah? Kinda off the trail some, ain't yuh?"

"Wouldn't be surprized. We're strangers on this range. Mebbeso we're a mite off the trail."

The burly man laughed shortly.

"A mite and then some, stranger. See them blue peaks to the west? The Circle C lays at the foot uh them mountains. Yo're only about a hundred miles off the trail and headin' in the wrong direction, that's all. Huntin' work?"

Into the minds of both Ted and Shorty flashed the picture of that bunch of cattle being hazed into the coulée. Broke, hungry, out of tobacco and a hundred miles off the trail on a strange range, the offer of a job sounded like music in their sunburned ears. But to take a job with an outfit whose business was rustling other men's cattle? They looked at each other inquiringly.

"The Slash R pays top wages, gents," the big man put in. "Best in the State. And we carry a keg uh licker in the mess-wagon."

"I could use a slug uh good liker," mused Tad aloud. "What say, pardner?"

"We gotta eat soon, Tad, no foolin' about that. I reckon yuh done hired two hands, Mister."

"Good. Wagon's camped at the head uh that long draw. The cook'll take care uh yuh. Me 'n' 'Frenchy' has to ketch up with them dogies we're shovin' across the crick. We jest finished workin' the herd and those was nester cattle that those —— scissor-bills throwed in on our range. This ain't the cow country she used to be, boys. Sheep and nesters has dang nigh crowded us out. Well, you fellers go on to camp and take it easy. Yore pay starts from this mornin' but you don't start work till tomorrow mornin'. Tell that orn'ary ole grub sp'iler to feed yuh plenty and show yuh where the keg is. So-long. C'mon, Frenchy."

The big man whirled his horse and the breed followed him out of sight over the ridge.

"Yuh got that, Shorty? The Slash R?" grinned Tad as the two punchers got under way.

"I ain't deef. The big 'un must be 'Ribs' Austin. Reckon he read our brands, Tad?"

" 'Tain't noways likely. He quit the Gila Bend country afore we come there. H'd never heered tell uh Tad Ladd ner Shorty Carroway. Barrin' accidents, we'd orter

git away with it. Let's rattle our hocks and tap that keg."

TWO hundred head of saddle horses, of all sizes, shapes, and colors, milled in the rope corral, kicking up dust as they ducked and pushed and crowded each other. In the center of the corral stood half a dozen cow-punchers, their loops spread, their eyes searching the milling *remuda* for the horse they were to ride on circle that morning. Ribs Austin, Tad and Shorty stood together and as the horses crowded past, the Slash R boss pointed out to the two new hands the string of horses each of them was to ride.

To the uninitiated, it would seem an impossible task to tell one horse from another in the dim light of dawn, packed as they were in the corral and enveloped in a dust cloud that rose and settled and rose again. Yet a man is considered a poor hand if he can not rope out his own horses on a dark morning.

"Yonder's yore top-circle hoss, big feller," announced Ribs as he designated a high-headed sorrel. "Better throw yore line on him."

Tad, holding his loop across his right shoulder, nodded. The sorrel ducked his head, was lost to sight for a moment, then showed again ten feet to the left. Tad's loop shot out, settled, and went taut as the big cow-puncher braced himself. The sorrel ran on the rope, whirled, and as Tad pulled gently on the rope, walked mincingly toward the man who had snared him. Tad, moving with that slow, easy manner that comes from years of handling half-broken horses, reached up and slipped the rope behind the sorrel's ears. The animal followed him out of the corral without tightening the slack.

"That 'Paint' hoss yonder is yore meat, little 'un," said Ribs in an offhand manner, as he pointed to a raw-boned pinto. "He may swaller his head fer a few jumps. Reckon yuh kin set him?"

Shorty did not answer. His rope flipped back in a short, upward movement and the next instant the big pinto was dragging the short-statured cow-puncher about the corral. Ribs grabbed the flying end of the rope and the combined weight of the two men brought the horse to a whistling, stiff-legged halt.

Shorty approached the pinto warily. He grinned as he was met by a pair of wicked fore feet.

The pinto's hoofs had missed Shorty's head by a scant foot, yet it left him unmoved, save for a determined look in his gray eyes.

Ribs Austin, at the end of the rope, grinned evilly. It had been weeks since the pinto had been saddled and no man had yet ridden the Slash R Paint without being thrown.

"Still feelin' lucky, little 'un?" he called in a bantering tone that caused Shorty's eyes to snap with anger.

"If yo're meanin' me, mister," the little cow-puncher replied as he again approached the horse, "my name's Carroway. Shorty Carroway, savvy. And I'm still feelin' lucky. —— lucky. That goes more ways than one."

Shorty half-turned, his hand creeping towards his gun.

"Meanin' jest what?" sneered Austin.

"Grab yore own meanin' and you won't be fur from right."

"That's fine talk, stranger."

Ribs Austin, his bulk still braced on the taut rope, shifted a trifle to free his gun hand.

It was Frenchy who broke the tension.

"By gar, de Shorty's goin' to ride de Paint, Reebs. Don' go for mak' de fight talk now. Long tam we don' see Paint get rode. I'm want bad for to see dees show, me." His white teeth gleamed in a wide grin.

Tad Ladd, unseen by either Ribs or Shorty, had slipped into the corral. Hidden by a gentle horse, he had stood motionless, his .45 in his hand. Now he shoved the gun back in his waistband and as Frenchy and Shorty led the Paint outside, he was reaching under his horse's belly for the flank cinch.

"Drawed a snake, pardner?" he grinned as he unhooked his stirrup from the saddle-horn and straightened up.

"Looks thataway, Tad." He turned to Frenchy. "Me 'n' Tad'll handle the calico pony now, Mister."

"*Oui*," grinned Frenchy. "Watch dem front foots, Shorty. Han' by gar," he added in a lower tone, "keep de eye hon de boss. You mak one —— bad play hin de corral. Reebs, she's shoot queck."

"Thanks, Frenchy. But I ain't aimin' to let no kettle-bellied, wind-broke——"

"Yo're runnin' off at the head consider'ble, pardner," Tad interrupted hastily. "Lead that spotted hoss up a step while I gets a rope on his front feet."

He gave Shorty a meaning look.

Frenchy went back into the corral to catch his horse and the two partners were left alone.

"Of all the dang fools that ever spoke outa turn, yo're the dangest, yuh runt," whispered Tad. "Want to spile things? I heered yuh pow-wowin' with that big bull-toad. I rode herd on yuh last night when yuh got a snort uh that red-eye under yore belt and yore hair-trigger disposition was due to break out like a case uh smallpox if ary gent looked cross-eyed at yuh. You know what brung us to this range. Likewise, if yuh got a lick uh sense, you'd orter know we're overmatchin' ourselves if we starts ary play in this spread. Next time yuh flare up I'll throw yuh in the crick. I taken a heap from yuh but I got my limit."

Shorty grinned shamefacedly.

"Aw, dry up, yuh danged ole settin' hen. I know I acted foolish. But if you stood five-foot-five in yore socks and had to take what I do offen human oxes that thinks because I'm a runt, you'd——"

"I savvy, pardner." Big Tad's voice was soft as a woman's. "I savvy. Reckon I'd be the same way. Let's fergit it and get yore hull on this spotted snake he staked yuh to. He looks like a bad 'un, boy."

"Yeah." Shorty side stepped in time to avoid the snapping teeth of the big horse. "He's spoiled bad."

"Want to hobble yore stirrups?" asked Tad when the Paint was saddled and a blindfold adjusted over his white eyes.

"Hobble nothin'," grunted Shorty as he pulled on his chaps. "Jest haze him away from the cut banks when I git goin'."

The Slash R boss and his men were in the saddle, covertly watching the cow-puncher as he prepared to mount.

"Bet a new hat he don't stay ten jumps," laughed Ribs in a tone loud enough for both Tad and Shorty to hear.

"Call that and raise the ante," drawled Tad. "Me 'n' Shorty is broke, but we're bettin' our private hosses, outfits and bed ag'in' a sack uh smokin' that the Paint gits rode straight up. Fork him, Shorty."

Shorty eased into the saddle and got his right stirrup. Tad slacked the foot rope as the rider jerked the blindfold free.

The Paint stood motionless, then as Shorty jabbed him gently with the spurs, leaped forward.

Pitching, bawling every jump, the Paint went into action. Shorty, riding with slack rein, sat easily in the saddle, fanning the bronc with his hat. Weaving, twisting, the big horse sun-fished and landed limber-legged. Shorty loosened up, expecting the animal to turn over. Tad, riding behind, drew a sharp breath as he saw the Paint shoot up like a sky-rocket. Shorty got the stirrup that he had kicked free and the little puncher's hat slapped the pinto's neck.

"Good ridin', boy!" yelled Tad. "Stay a long time!"

Shorty half-turned in the saddle, his lips bared in a mirthless grin. Then the Paint hit the ground at an angle, his knees buckled, and he turned over in a cloud of dust. Shorty, guided by that sixth sense that goes to make a bronc rider, had jerked his feet from the stirrups and landed on his feet. When the Paint rose again he was in the saddle, waving his hat.

A cheer went up from the Slash R punchers as they rode at a lope in the wake of the pitching horse.

"By gar, Reebs, you lose that sack of tobac, eh?" grinned Frenchy as he stood in his stirrups to get a better view.

Ribs Austin scowled at the half-breed without replying.

Suddenly the Paint's head came up and he tore across the flat.

"The danged brute's cold-jawed on him," muttered Tad, then spurred his horse to a run.

The big pinto was heading straight for a high cut bank.

Foot by foot the sorrel gained. Shorty shifted his weight to the left stirrup and grabbing his left bridle rein close to the bit, pulled steadily. The Paint's head did not move an inch. Shorty swung harder on the rein, then suddenly gave way. The rein had broken next to the bit!

A scant hundred feet away was the cut bank. Shorty set his jaws as he loosened in the saddle preparatory to quitting the stampeding horse.

Tad, leading the rest of the cow-punchers by a hundred yards, was hopelessly outdistanced. Not a chance in a million of heading the pinto before he crashed over the bank.

Then out of a short coulée directly in the pinto's path, appearing as if by magic with the rising sun, a man on a big gray horse loped into sight. The rider did not see the stampeding horse for a second. The pounding of the Paint's hoofs reached him and the next instant the big gray was covering the ground in great leaps. Cutting in at an angle, he headed straight for the pinto. A sickening crash as the two horses met. The gray staggered to his knees and was up again. The man who had ridden him was on the ground, astride the fallen Paint's neck, twisting the fear maddened animal's head back to hold him down.

Shorty, white about the lips but grinning gamely, got to his feet from where he had been thrown by the terrific impact. He was scratched and bruised and his nose was bleeding profusely.

Tad drew rein in a whirl of dust and slid to the ground. The man astride the Paint's neck looked from one to the other with a quizzical smile as Tad examined Shorty hastily for all the world like a hen mothering a chick.

Shorty jerked free from his partner and limped toward the man who had saved him from injury, perhaps death. Wiping the blood from his mouth, he spoke haltingly:

"I'm—I'm shore obliged, Mister. I don't know who yuh are ner where yuh come from, but yuh shore got here jest in time. I'm hopin' I kin do as much fer you some day."

"That goes double," added Tad. "Yuh done made two friends today stranger. Tad Ladd and Shorty Carroway owes yuh more than they kin ever pay."

The man astride the Paint's neck looked up with an odd smile. He was a young man, probably in his late twenties. Smooth-shaven, tanned a deep bronze, his eyes were of that odd shade of deep blue that can look like the sea on a summer day or like frozen steel when the occasion demands.

"If you gents will take over the horse, I'll be on my way," he replied.

Tad slipped his catch rope over the pinto's head and the young man swung aboard his own horse just as Ribs Austin and his men rode up.

The man on the gray horse seemed to grow tense as he met the gaze of the Slash R boss.

"Kinda off yore range, ain't yuh, Dunlap?" sneered Ribs, paying no heed to Shorty or Tad.

"Kinda," admitted the youth easily. "I'm gatherin' a few head uh my stuff that strayed off while I was buildin' fence."

"I told yuh onct tuh keep offen the Slash R range, Steve Dunlap. I'm tellin' yuh again now. But there won't be no third tellin', savvy? The next time yuh cross the Slash R boundary, you'll go back feet first. I'll have no danged scissor-bill nester rustlin' my calves."

"Rustlin' talk sounds kinda comical, comin' from yuh, Austin," smiled Dunlap. "Yo're fergettin' I worked with yore spread one fall."

"You'd play —— provin' anything!"

"Exactly," agreed Dunlap. "And I ain't fool enough to start no ruckus when yo're backed up by yore gunmen. I crossed Mud Creek to hunt my cattle, Austin, not to pick no row with you and yore men."

"And you'll cross right back on yore own side, savvy?" Ribs slouched sidewise in his saddle, his hand on his gun.

Shorty opened his bruised lips but the angry exclamation died unspoken as Tad's gloved hand gripped his arm in a significant pressure.

"Hold yore fire, pardner," whispered the cautious Tad.

Steve Dunlap, with a quick glance, caught Tad's eye and the big puncher winked.

"Austin," said Dunlap, his calm voice a pleasant contrast to the Slash R man's grating tone, "if you go after yore gun there'll be trouble. The odds is in yore favor but yuh'd never live to brag about it. Besides yo're bein' watched through a pair uh field-glasses that is shore far-sighted."

He pointed towards a distant knoll.

Outlined against the sky was the figure of a horse and rider, motionless as if carved of stone.

"Hidin' behind a woman's skirts, eh?" sneered Ribs, his thick face mottled with anger.

"Nope, jest postin' a witness in case yuh took it into yore head tuh down me, that's all."

"I got a dozen witnesses here that'll swear to anything!"

"And their evidence won't be worth two-bits Mex if *she* takes the stand, Austin, and you know it. I'm a-goin' now. You kin shoot me in the back if yuh want to risk hangin' fer it, Mister."

Ribs Austin and his crew watched Dunlap out of sight. The rider on the hill rode

down the draw and a moment later appeared again with Dunlap. Together they rode across the ridge on the far side of the creek.

"I'll git him some day," growled the Slash R boss. "And that land-grabbin', water-stealin' gal will wish she'd treated Ribs Austin better when she had the chanct. I'll kill every hoof uh cattle he ——"

"Shh," cautioned Frenchy as he rode alongside his boss. "By gar, you better not say so much. Dem words she don' do you no good, Reebs."

Ribs swung to face the half-breed, an ugly look in his bloodshot eyes. Frenchy merely grinned and shook his head. The Slash R boss regained his composure with an effort and turned to watch Shorty who had mended his bridle rein and had again mounted the Paint. The outlaw horse seemed docile enough now.

"I'm askin' fer that sack uh terbaccer, Ribs," grinned Tad.

"You'll git a whole caddie uh the stuff when we git to camp, big feller. And yore pardner kin have that Paint critter. He earned him fair."

"Be as good as he is, Shorty," laughed Tad. "Give that hoss back to the Slash R afor he kills yuh."

"Reckon not, Taddie. I'm goin' to make a cow horse outa him afore I'm done." Shorty leaned over and patted the sweaty neck of the big pinto.

"She's one —— good rider, dat Shorty," Frenchy put in.

The half-breed had voiced the verdict of the entire Slash R outfit. To a man, including the boss, they respected the little cow-puncher. Shorty had won his spurs.

BUT it takes more than a spectacular ride to clog the wheels of a round-up and the group of riders were presently under weigh once more. The circle was a long one but Shorty and Tad, being new to the range, were the first to be dropped.

"Foller on down that draw," Ribs told them. "Gather what yuh find and drift 'em towards the flat below camp. We'll work the herd there. Take yore time because we won't be in with the last drives afore ten o'clock. Watch out fer any stuff in the Bar B iron."

"Bar B?" echoed Tad.

"Yeah. On the left ribs. Belongs to that bald-faced kid that lives across Mud Crick."

"This Dunlap feller?"

"Yeah. We're gatherin' his stuff fer him, savvy?" Ribs winked broadly. Frenchy grinned and the two partners started at a trot down the draw.

"Tad?"

"Uh-huh?"

"If I didn't know you was the gamest feller that ever looked down the wrong end of a six-gun, I'd say you was scared uh this here Ribs pole-cat. There we was, beholdin' to this here Steve boy and we sits back in the shadder while this Ribs bulldozer rawhides the kid and runs him off like he was a sheepherder. When I rears up to declare myse'f yuh shuts me up. Tad, I'm plumb ashamed uh yuh, danged if I ain't. Why the three of us could 'a' gone through that Slash R gang like a pack uh wolves goin' into a band uh woolies. ——!"

Shorty spat disgustedly and reached for his tobacco. The movement startled the pinto and the little cow-puncher spent the next few minutes quieting his mount.

"Looks like yuh gotta steal yore terbaccer when yuh fork that Paint hoss," grinned the unruffled Tad as he rolled and lighted a cigaret. "This smoke shore tastes good. Shore white uh that cook tuh stake us tuh terbaccer yesterday. Only yours ain't doin' yuh much good. Nothin' like a after-breakfast smoke tuh quiet a man's nerves."

"Dry up, yuh big ox," growled Shorty as he watched the Paint's ears for indications of trouble. "Yo're dodgin' the question. I jest insulted yuh a few minutes ago and yuh ain't takin' it up like a man orter. How come yuh set back on yore haunches when that nester boy needed us?"

"There was one time in yore varied and sundry career when I was dang nigh sure you'd got human intelligence," said Tad solemnly. "It was when that bronc throwed yuh at Phoenix and you was outa yore head fer two days. I'll allers remember them two days as bein' the one time in yore life when yuh acted almost sane."

"I'm still waitin' fer that there answer, feller."

"An' you'll get it, son. I shore hates to tromp on a gent when he's put up as purty a ride as you did this mornin', but I reckon I gotta. To begin, the Steve boy wasn't lookin' fer fight. He ain't cravin' none to

get all shot up. Second, it ain't helpin' nobody none to go shootin' permiscus. Ribs Austin is backed by mebbeso eight er ten er twelve tough hands. And there was three of us. Somebody's bound to lose in a gun scrap and to a man with the brains of a sheep, it'd look like the three boys goin' into that ruckus was kinda overmatchin' theirselves some. Yeah. Third, I gives the Steve feller the Injun sign that me 'n' you is backin' whatever play he makes. If you'd 'a' took the trouble to look clost, yuh might 'a' noticed my gun was coverin' the Ribs *hombre* from the start. Does that cover all the points uh that question yuh asked, runt?"

"Shucks! Shucks, Taddie, I—dang it all, rub it in, yuh big elephant. Hold a grudge till yuh die and take it with yuh when yuh go, yuh big bench-legged hoss killer. Yuh got ary plan under yore hat, pardner? That kid's gettin' a raw deal, looks like. We're beholdin' to him, sorter. I'd like tuh——"

"Course yuh would, ole timer. And we're goin' to. Last evenin', while you was tellin' it scary to the cook and the kid hoss wrangler about what a —— of a poker player you was afore yuh got rheumatiz so bad in yore off-laig, I was ridin' close hard on Ribs and the Frenchy gent without them knowin' it. I'm a-settin' in the shadder uh the bed-wagon, smokin' of a cigaret now and then, and lappin' at a tin cup full uh Slash R licker. I'm kinda off to myse'f, savvy, like a bull that's been whipped outa the herd.

"Well, Ribs and Frenchy is makin' medicine and havin' taken on a few horns uh the fire-water, they fergit to keep their voices low. Near as I kin make out, here's the lay: The Slash R is runnin' most uh their stuff on open range that is nobody's land. Steve Dunlap done taken up a homestead and bought hisse'f a bunch uh cattle. Likewise, him and a gent named Patsy Darcey has located on the land above the Slash R ranch and owns the water rights. Dunlap is throwin' a dam across the crick, aimin' to build a reservoir. He'll use the water fer irrigatin' and waterin' his cattle durin' a dry season. He's agreed to let part uh the water go down the crick to the Slash R and they're to let his stock graze on Slash R range."

"Sounds fair enough, Tad. But it looks like they was havin' trouble about it."

"Yeah. And it's this Patsy feller that caused it. Near as I could make out, Ribs jumps this Patsy out and Steve takes up the scrap. He must 'a' whupped Ribs plumb scan'lous from the way he took on about it. 'Frenchy,' says he, 'I'm goin' to hang Dunlap's hide on the fence, then I'm goin' after Patsy Darcey rough-shod.' "

"And the agreement's off between Steve and Austin?"

"Nope. And that's where Ribs has the bulge. It's a written agreement, savvy? Ribs is to gather all the Bar B stock and brand the calves. Steve ain't got no more right on the Slash R range than a buck Injun has to buy licker. But he's gotta let one third uh the water go down the crick jest the same."

"Meanwhile, Ribs is draggin' a hungry loop, brandin' Bar B calves with the Slash R iron, stealin' the boy blind! And Steve is hog-tied. Nacherally, Ribs'll keep all the Bar B stuff shoved back from the bound'ry. ——, that's what they was doin' when we seen 'em yesterday, Tad!"

"Shore thing. And that's why me 'n' you gotta hang on to our bushy tails and go at this easy-like. I never yet double-crossed the outfit that was payin' me wages, Shorty, but beginnin' today, we're doin' jest that."

"Now yo're shoutin', pardner," grinned Shorty. "But how'll we go at it?"

"It's ——, hoss," said Tad sorrowfully, addressing the twitching ears of his horse. "But I reckon I orter be used to it by now. Pore li'l' ole cuss, he's been thataway since he was a yearlin'. I gotta do all his thinkin' fer him. All of it, mind. There's times when I has hopes uh the li'l' cuss gettin' some kind of a idee but nope, it allers turns out to be jest a lot uh fool words together, makin' no sense. So I go along, thinkin' fer me and him both. When he dies, I reckon I'll have to cash in too and go with him. I done rode herd on him so long that he'd be plumb lost without me. There he'd be, wanderin' aroun' like a wind-bellied calf, playin' the wrong tunes on his harp er pickin' up the wrong pitch-fork if he drawed the —— fer his boss. No, hoss, I reckon he . . ."

But Shorty had spurred the Paint to a lope and was riding up a coulée toward a bunch of cattle.

Tad grinned cheerfully and swung to the left to pick up another bunch.

Not until they were driving the cattle down the draw did either of the cow-punchers speak. Tad, grinning and chuckling to

himself, watched his partner get red in the face and repeatedly choke back some speech that he was suppressing by main force.

"I've seen fellers jest nacherally swell up and bust, doin' that, Mister Carroway. Better git shet uh it quick er it'll pizen yore system."

"Aw, dry up. I—I got a idee, Tad. Quit rawhidin' me, will yuh?"

"Let's have it afore it slips yore feeble mind, runt."

"I was noticin' the Bar B on that red cow. It'd be shore easy to make the Slash R into a Bar B."

"Why yuh danged li'l' ole cow thief!" grinned Tad. "You'll wind up in the pen yet."

"Ribs Austin is nothin' if he ain't a rustler, Tad. He's aimin' to steal the Steve boy's stock. Now if me and you was to play our cards keerful we could——"

"He's done it, hoss! He's done it after all these years uh tryin'! It must 'a' been that fall he taken back yonder when the Paint piled up with him. Same thing happened in Phoenix when——"

"Aw, ——, Tad. Won't yuh quit ridin' a man? Lemme tell——"

"You figger that fer every head uh stock Ribs Austin rustles, me and you makes over a Slash R into a Bar B and throws in a maverick to boot?"

"That's it, Tad."

"We gotta go keerful, Shorty. Regardless uh what Ribs Austin is doin' to Steve Dunlap, me and you is bustin' the law when we changes those brands. We're goners if our foot slips and we git caught."

"Yuh ain't fergettin' what brung us north, have yuh, Tad?"

"Reckon not, Shorty. The li'l' ole feller that lays planted on the butte above the P Cross ranch was yore uncle, Shorty. But he was more than kin-folks to me. No, I ain't fergettin'." Tad Ladd's smiling gray eyes went hard as glass and the lines at the corners of his large mouth deepened.

They had reached the flat now, and Tad rode around the cattle to hold up the leaders. When the cattle halted and went to grazing, Tad rode around to where Shorty was.

"I been wonderin' what Ribs meant when he said the Steve boy was hidin' behind a woman's skirts, Shorty."

"Hmm. Dunno, Tad. Mebbe the kid's married and that was his wife that was watchin' with the glasses."

"Mebbeso. Gosh! Look, feller! D'you see what I do?"

Tad pointed to a yearling that had followed a Slash R cow out of the herd.

"Gosha'mighty, Tad! The critter's packin' a Bar B and he ain't weaned off his Slash R mammy yet!"

"And the Bar B has been worked from the Slash R iron. Worked bad, too. Awful bad. See how the tail uh the R has been left stickin' out and where he's run the slash into B. A ten-year-old kid could do a better job uh brand-changin' than that."

"Steve Dunlap must 'a' been drunk when he did it."

Tad, in the act of rolling a cigaret, suddenly crushed tobacco and paper in the palm of his hand.

"Shucks! ——, Shorty, me 'n' you'd better go to herdin' sheep. Steve never branded that yearlin'. Ribs Austin done that. He's fixin' to frame up on the boy. He dropped us down this here draw so's we'd find this critter. The Slash R on his ribs is scabbed over good. But where the Slash is hooked to the B and where the under part uh the R is run to make it a B, them places is plumb fresh. Fresh as if they was made yesterday. Chances is, that brand was worked yesterday evenin' while me and you was gettin' the wrinkles outa our bellies at the chuck wagon. Then they plants mister yearlin' and his mammy where you and me, new hands and takin' no sides in this here range argument, finds 'em. He aims to use us as star witnesses, savvy?"

"What'll we do, Tad? Kill the critter and cache the hide, er run him outa the country?"

Tad did not answer. He had taken a small notebook from his jumper pocket and was studying a list of brands that Ribs Austin had given him the previous evening.

"Here we are, ole timer," he exclaimed triumphantly. "Triangle H B connected. Fall off that hoss, Shorty, and get a fire goin'. Better ride up into that cut-coulée outa sight and build her. I'll work mister yearlin' up there and we'll have him back in the herd afore the other boys gets in with their drives."

"What's the idee in——"

"Get that fire goin', bonehead, and shove yore runnin'-iron into the blaze. We ain't got more'n two weeks to do this job."

Shorty muttered some reply and rode off to obey the orders of the now jubilant Tad.

A thin column of blue smoke rose from the cut-coulée and Tad drove the cow and yearling toward it. Once out of sight, he took down his rope, and riding alongside the yearling, heeled the animal neatly. A minute later the yearling lay on its right side, its feet securely bound with Tad's hogging-string.

"Iron's hot, Tad!" called Shorty.

Tad ran to the fire, grabbed the iron, and the smell of scorching hair announced the fact that a clumsy Bar B was being rapidly converted into a fairly neat looking Triangle H B connected— ◁B.

"Gosh!" muttered Shorty admiringly. "Gosha'mighty, Tad. That's shore slick. But who owns this here Triangle H B iron?"

"The Slash R owns it, pardner!"

Tad jerked his hogging-string free, tailed the yearling to its feet, and grinned widely as the animal trotted into the herd, followed but its dumbly inquisitive mother.

They stamped out the fire, covered the half-burned greasewood sticks with dirt, then rode slowly toward the herd.

Two hundred feet up the coulée, hidden by the sage-brush, Frenchy rose from his cramped position and slipped up the coulée to where he had cached his horse.

FROM all directions, headed toward the position on the flat where Tad and Shorty held their little bunch of cattle, long strings of cattle traveled, driven by cow-punchers, barely visible through the clouds of alkali dust.

Snatches of range songs, a tuneless whistle, shouted bantering, all mingled with the bawling of anxious cows who had been separated from their calves in the driving. The strings of cattle bunched up as they emerged from the coulées and were drifted across the sage-dotted flat.

Shorty and Tad separated to ride around the fast increasing herd. One drive after another was thrown into the herd, and dust-covered cow-punchers rolled cigarets as they sat their sweat-caked horses.

"One —— beeg round-up, eh, my good frien'?" grinned Frenchy as he met Tad.

"Must be fifty irons represented," was Tad's shrewd guess as he looked the cattle over. "Good many outfits has stock in this here hold-up. But they don't have no men with the Slash R wagon. How's that happen, Frenchy?"

"Reebs don' like reps to work weeth hees wagon. Sometimes thees other outfits send over one rep. She don' last long, somehow. Mebbeso hees horses get los' een de night. Sometimes Reebs keep thees rep on day herd hall de time. So de rep she's say, 'De Slash R ees one —— of a outfit.' She's cut her string, pack de bed hon de pack hoss, han' go back home. You onderstan'?"

"Ribs gives the reps such a tough deal, they won't stay, eh?"

"*Oui!*" Frenchy nodded. "One —— tough outfit, dees Slash R."

"Kind of a fightin' spread, eh?"

"*Oui.* Ees bad to mak' bad frien' weeth Reebs, M'sieur. Me, Frenchy, who ees half-French han' half-Cree, ees know 'bout dem theengs. Onderstan'?"

Tad glanced sharply at the breed, but Frenchy was looking at a yearling that had pushed to the edge of the herd. Tad, following Frenchy's gaze, saw that it was the yearling he and Shorty had branded.

Frenchy looked up, meeting the big cow-puncher's eyes.

"Onderstan', M'sieur Tad?" he asked softly, then before Tad could reply, the half-breed turned his horse and rode away, whistling a gay song.

Tad, puzzled, watched him draw rein as he met Ribs Austin on the other side of the herd.

"Doggone! That breed is wise," muttered the cow-puncher. "I bet he helped Ribs brand that critter yesterday. Things is li'ble to tighten when Ribs sees that yearlin'. Only one thing'll keep him from jumpin' me and Shorty. He's as good as confessin' to workin' that brand hisse'f when he jumps me fer makin' a Bar B into the Triangle H B. He's gotta kill me 'n' Shorty er keep mum about the yearlin' and grin like his medicine tasted good. I'm wonderin' which he'll do."

Tad turned his horse and rode at a walk towards Ribs and Frenchy.

"I punched cows fer a long, long time
And I ain't run a wagon yet.
I punched cows fer a long, long time
And this is what I e't."

The voice that rendered this ballad of the cow camps was a bit off key and somewhat cracked as to tone, but it was sweet music to the ears of Tad Ladd for the singer was his partner, Shorty, and Shorty was riding towards Ribs and Frenchy from the opposite direction.

Shorty rode at a walk, swinging the end of his catch-rope, letting it drag on the ground behind the shying pinto to accustom the bronc to it.

"Two ag'in' two," muttered Tad. "Fair enough. But why don't that danged runt put up that rope so's he kin git his gun out?"

Shorty was still twenty feet away when Tad reached Ribs and Frenchy. The breed's lips bared in a grin, but his black eyes were bright with suppressed excitement, hard and unsmiling.

Ribs, his bloated face dark with rage, scowled at the big cow-puncher who drew rein and nodded carelessly.

"I done kept my eyes peeled fer Bar B stuff, Austin," he announced.

The Slash R boss eyed him for a moment without replying. There was murder in his bloodshot eyes and his right hand was shoved inside his shirt.

"Got the other un covered, Frenchy?" he growled without taking his gaze from Tad's face.

"*Oui*," came the answer, and the sunlight glittered on the blue barrel of the .45 that suddenly appeared in the breed's right hand.

"All right. Now we'll talk, Mister Longhorn. Keep yore hand clear from yore gun and listen clost, savvy?"

"Speak yore piece, Austin," said Tad quietly as he met Shorty's glance for the fraction of a second.

Shorty, still toying with his rope, calmly sat the prancing pinto. Perhaps it was a grain of dust that closed the little puncher's left eye for an instant, but it looked very much as if Shorty winked. Otherwise he gave no sign that anything unusual was happening.

"Yo're drawin' Slash R wages, big feller," Ribs went on. "Big wages. Yo're workin' fer me, not fer ary —— scissor-bill, savvy? It looks to me like you knowed too much fer a common cow-hand. Too danged much. There ain't room here on this range fer gents like you and yore pardner. You act like yo're huntin' trouble and you shore come to the right place to get it!"

There was a slight movement of the hand hidden beneath the shirt, accompanied by the *click-click* of a .45 coming to full cock.

Shorty's wrist suddenly twisted. The rope flipped up under the tail of Austin's horse. With a snort, the horse jumped forward, dropped his head, and landed stiff-legged.

Ribs Austin's gun roared, tearing a burning hole in his flannel shirt as the bullet went wild. The horse, now frightened thoroughly, was doing a good job of pitching. Another jump and Ribs would be thrown.

As Tad's gun flipped out to cover Frenchy, the breed's six-shooter belched flame. Ribs Austin toppled from his saddle, blood spurting from an ugly gash in his cheek.

"De —— gun, she's pull to de lef'," grunted Frenchy as he tossed the weapon to the ground and held up his hands.

Ribs, stunned by the fall, lay still. The crimson blood was rapidly staining his cheek and neck. The hole in his shirt smoldered where the flame of the gun had ignited it.

Tad and Shorty looked at each other in a bewildered manner for a second. Frenchy looked from one to the other.

"It was you that shot Ribs, Frenchy?" asked Tad finally.

"I'm shoot at you, M'sieur Tad. De —— gun she pull hon de trigger. De nex' time I'm have better luck mebbeso." Frenchy fished something from the deep pocket of his chaps and handed it to Shorty. It was the little cow-puncher's running-iron. "I'm find heem at de place where you brand de yearlin'. Mebbeso you need heem again, eh?"

"Well I'll be doggoned!" gasped Tad. "You win that pot, Frenchy. But how in——"

"I'm theenk you boys better pull out now. Two-three Slash R boys ees ride thees way weeth Reebs' hoss. Reebs she's come alive purty queeck too. Get yore hoss from de *remuda*, pack de bed, han' hit de trail. You have shoot Reebs han' tak my gun away. Ees bad. Go queeck!"

"Well, I be ——! What do you say, Taddie?"

"I reckon he's right, son. Frenchy, yo're a slick un. I don't savvy yore game. Don't want to. Mebbe our trails'll cross again. Mebbe not. I reckon yo're doin' me and Shorty a good turn, Mister. But I'm tellin' yuh right now that I don't like gents uh yore breed. Me 'n' Shorty fights fair and we don't want yore kind to be doin' us favors ner tryin' to throw in with us. Savvy?"

The half-breed's eyes narrowed to twin slits of black fire. Then he shrugged, and his white teeth shone in a smile.

"Oui. I'm onderstan', M'sieur. You better go now."

Without a word of farewell, Tad and Shorty rode toward camp.

Frenchy dismounted and bent over Ribs who was groaning and moving his head as consciousness returned.

Cursing softly, the breed looked down into the flabby, mottled face of his employer. He examined the wound with a look of disgust.

"De nex' time I'm shoot straight," he muttered, then rose to his feet to beckon to the approaching riders.

TAD and Shorty, riding their private horses and leading their pack horse and the pinto, crossed the creek that marked the boundary of the Slash R range.

"I'm kinda glad we're shet uh that low-down outfit, Tad."

"Yeah. Me too. Kinda throwed a crimp in the plan I had in mind, but we'll figger out somethin' better."

"Uh-huh."

Shorty twisted a cigaret into shape and lighted it. He addressed his next remark to the blue sky overhead:

"It shore does pay to go at things cautious. Yeah, you bet. Allers take 'er easy and play the game clost to yore belly. I'd tell a man. Don't never fly off the handle when a gent jumps yuh out fer a fight, savvy? It's bad manners. Figger cautious so's yuh git into a tight, then let yore pardner save yore wuthless pelt. Shore thing. I learned that offen a feller named Ladd. Big gent with a face like that brockle-faced cow yonder. He's —— on changin' brands, this big feller is. Grand idee. A few more uh them brain stampedes and him and his faithful pardner'll be stakin' out a two-by-six lot where some kind-feelin' gent kin plant 'em."

Tad grinned tolerantly.

"I been watchin' yuh millin' that speech aroun' in that thing yuh calls a head, runt. I been a waitin' fer nigh an hour fer yuh to git a tail-holt on it and th'ow it outa yore feverish system. It must be shore —— to have one uh these low-withered, narrow-hipped, jug-headed brains that balks on a man thataway. And the faces yuh make! Some cold day yore face'll freeze thataway and you'll——"

"Aw, let a man be, yuh ox. That brandin' idee uh yourn has cut us loose from our grub supply. You claim to have the world's supply uh brains corralled, where we gonna eat? Huh, elephant?"

"We might hit a sheep camp fer tonight and——"

"And git e't up by fleas like we did across the river?"

"Seems like there *was* fleas in that last sheep camp we hit," agreed Tad. "But it wasn't what they e't that bothered me. It was what the danged critters tromped down and sp'iled. Reckon we'll make a dry camp in the hills tonight. Come mornin', we'll mosey over to the Steve feller's place and make medicine with him."

"Why not ride down there now?"

They had topped a ridge and halted. Below them lay the Dunlap homestead.

"Ribs Austin and his gang might foller us down there, Shorty. The Steve boy's wife might be there and we don't want to drag no gun fight in on her."

"Yo're right, Tad. Looky yonder. See? To the left uh the hoss corral? Feller on a gray hoss, drivin' eight er ten head uh cattle?"

"I ain't blind, runt. He's——"

A puff of white smoke, followed by the faint report of a rifle, cut Tad's speech in two. The man on the gray horse swung to the ground, the cattle scattered, and the man on the ground bent over a red-and-white blot that moved feebly.

"Looks like the Steve gent was butcherin' a beef, Tad. He'll be havin' liver and bacon fer supper. I'm shore fond uh liver and bacon. Bet I could eat a bait uh that fresh liver like——"

"Come on, pardner. I got a sack full uh jerky that the cook staked me to. Me 'n' you'll take on a mess uh dry jerky and crick water."

Tad swung back off the ridge, followed by the reluctant Shorty.

ON A distant knoll, hidden by the grease-wood, Frenchy watched the two cow-punchers turn back and ride out of sight. Then he turned his powerful field-glasses to focus on Steve Dunlap who was busy skinning his beef. For some minutes the breed watched the young rancher at work. Then a wide grin spread across his swarthy face, and he chuckled softly as he put the glasses back in their case.

"By gar, she's lucky theeng I ride thees

way," he told himself as he mounted and rode at a lope towards the Slash R camp. "By tomorrow night we have de Steve Dunlap behin' de jail bars."

SUNRISE of the next morning found the two partners in the saddle and well on the way to Steve Dunlap's homestead. They crossed the ridge and swung into a wide trail that led to the cabin below.

"Gosha'mighty, Tad! Looky! Somethin's goin' on down there!"

The jocular reply died unspoken on Tad's lips and the grin on his tanned face disappeared as if by magic.

"Four saddle hosses standin' by the corral and a bunch uh gents there by the cabin. Bet it's the Slash R spread up to some orn'ariness, Shorty. Let's go!"

Tad spurred his horse to a run and Shorty followed on the big pinto. Both of them kept their right hands close to their guns. A swirl of white dust and they set their horses back on their haunches, ten feet from the group of men in front of the cabin.

Ribs Austin, Frenchy, a Slash R cowpuncher and a big man wearing a sheriff's star on his vest turned to greet the newcomers. Steve Dunlap, his wrists fastened by handcuffs, stood by the sheriff. Steve's tanned face was set and drawn and his eyes blazed defiantly. He looked a trifle relieved as he saw who the two new arrivals were.

"What's the row, gents?" asked Tad, meeting Austin's scowl with a cold stare.

"We caught this cow-stealin' nester red-handed, that's all," sneered Ribs, his tone exultant.

"I wasn't talkin' to you, Austin. I was speakin' to the sheriff."

"Dunlap's done put his foot in it," said the sheriff. "Fresh beef in his meat house and a Slash R hide hid under the haystack. He never even took the trouble to cut the brand out. It ain't no pleasure to go arrestin' a boy like Steve Dunlap but I jest nacherally gotta."

"How about it, son?" asked Tad, looking at Steve.

"I'm doin' my talkin' through a lawyer, Mister," replied the youth grimly. "I been framed, that's all."

"Frame, eh?" grinned Frenchy. "We see 'bout dat." The breed turned to the sheriff. "Yesterday, 'bout sundown, when I'm see de Steve run de cow down de coulée han' shoot heem, I'm see two more feller hon de reedge. De two feller see de Steve shoot de beef, den she's ride off, dem two feller. You know who she ees, dem two? She's Shorty han' Tad who sit hon de hoss han' ask 'bout what's de row!" The breed pointed to the two astonished partners.

The sheriff eyed the two punchers sharply:

"How about it? Is this breed speakin' the truth?"

"We seen Steve Dunlap, er a feller that looked like him, shoot a beef yesterday evenin'," admitted Tad reluctantly. "But I figgered he was butcherin' his own stuff. We never rode down to see."

"It was my own critter," Steve put in hotly. "I butchered him and hung his hide on the fence."

"Where is the hide, Steve?" asked the sheriff.

"It disappeared in the night. Afore I had time to hunt it this mornin' you gents rode up and arrested me."

"It disappeared, all right," sneered Ribs. "And we found it in the place where it disappeared to. Under the haystack. Yore best bet is to plead guilty and take yore medicine like a man, Mister Rustler."

"Where's yore pardner?" asked Shorty. "Where's the Pat feller?"

The pounding of a horse's hoofs prevented an answer. The next moment a girl dressed in a worn and faded riding-habit, jerked her mount to a halt and slipped to the ground.

"Patsy!" cried Steve hoarsely, as the girl ran toward him and took her place by his side.

She made a striking picture as she faced Ribs and Frenchy. Her tanned cheeks flushed with anger, her large dark eyes blazing, she looked like a tigress defending her young.

"What's the meaning of this outrage?" she asked the sheriff.

That gentleman turned brick-red as he removed his hat and shifted his weight uneasily from one foot to the other.

"I'm shore sorry, Miss Darcey. I shore am. But I gotta take Steve into town. Austin's swore out a warrant fer him and it looks plumb bad fer the boy."

"Don't worry, Pat," said Steve, forcing a smile. "I'll come clear. I'm innocent. I'll get outa this somehow."

"With Frenchy and them two strangers testifyin' that they seen yuh kill the beef?" sneered Ribs. "You gotta slim chanct, Dunlap."

Patsy Darcey had turned to Shorty, her eyes seeming to bore a hole in the little cow-puncher:

"You're the man that Steve kept from going over the bank, aren't you? And the other man is your partner. I saw it through the glasses. And this is the way you repay him for risking his life to save yours! Haven't you a spark of manhood or decency in your make-up? Are you men or just tools for this fat toad that makes war on women and men who haven't the means to fight back?"

Shorty, abject misery written in every line of his red face, squirmed in his saddle. He tried to speak, but no words came. Instinctively he turned to his partner for help.

Tad, as unused to women as was his little partner, made a game attempt to step into the breach.

"Ma'am," he began, "Ma'am, I—we—me 'n' Shorty here ain't aimin' fer to do the boy no harm. We——"

"I reckon we savvy yore game, stranger," Steve cut in coldly. "Yo're workin' fer the Slash R, drawin' fightin' pay. Lyin' pay, I reckon I should 'a' said. No honest cow-hand works with the Slash R spread. Don't waste time on 'em, Pat. I'm ready to go now, Sheriff. Pat'll stay here, I reckon."

"Pat will go wherever you go, Steve," said the girl. "To jail if they take you there. It's through me that the Slash R got it in for you. I'm no quitter, Steve."

"I'll take that hide along, Austin," said the sheriff. "Roll it up so's I kin pack it across my saddle."

Ribs stepped into the house and in a moment reappeared, dragging a spotted hide.

Tad's eyes were fixed on the hide as Ribs spread it out on the ground and then rolled it carefully.

Frenchy led the horses around and the sheriff and his prisoner mounted.

"I'll want you two gents to be in town tomorrow mornin' at the preliminary hearin'," the sheriff told Tad and Shorty.

"We'll be there, Sheriff," replied Tad. "We'll be on hand in the mornin'."

"Better grab 'em afore they quit the flats on yuh, sheriff," growled Ribs.

"I got one man arrested. That's a plenty. I can't take 'em in without a subpoena."

The little cavalcade got under weigh. The sheriff, Steve and the girl rode together. Ribs, the cow-puncher and Frenchy brought up the rear. Frenchy turned and grinned over his shoulder at Tad and Shorty who sat their horses in dejected silence.

Together the two partners watched the party until they were lost to view.

"Patsy Darcey," muttered Tad softly, then grinned down at Shorty. "She shore read yore brand, didn't she, runt? That there part about the spark uh manhood was shore regular book language. She said yuh was a tool. That was plumb——"

"Quit it, yuh danged magpie. She was meanin' you as much as she was me. Yuh claim to be so danged wise. Now's a good chanct to work at it. Get us outa this, Tad."

"I'm figgerin' now, runt. Keep yore shirt on. Supposin' yuh go in the house and fix up some grub while I stable the hosses. Me 'n' you is a-goin' tuh have a busy day and we can't work without grub. I e't jerky and crick water till I'm swelled up fit tuh bust. We're goin' tuh show the Steve boy and his gal that we're white folks, Shorty."

Tad put the horses in the barn and sat smoking as Shorty prepared breakfast. Frowning and chuckling by turns, Tad sat enveloped in a haze of blue smoke.

Shorty, guided by years of close companionship, knew that the big puncher was mapping out a plan of campaign. This cheered him up and as he fried steak and potatoes, he hummed softly.

Not until breakfast was over and they had washed the dishes, did Tad divulge the plan that he had thought out.

Shorty listened in silence, nodding occasionally. When Tad had finished, the little puncher gripped his partner's hand heartily.

"Put 'er there, ole timer! If we kin put it over without gettin' caught, it'll shore hit Ribs Austin plumb between the horns. Let's git goin'!"

Tad and Shorty rode back to their camp in the hills where Shorty changed his saddle from the big pinto to Skewball, his private horse. Then they took a roundabout course that brought them across the creek and on to the Slash R range.

Cattle dotted the ridges and across the flat they could see the beef herd grazing under the guidance of several Slash R punchers.

"Nary rider except the day herders, Shorty," grinned Tad. "Looks like things was movin' our way."

" 'Pears thataway, Tad. Bet the crew's makin' the most uh the chanct and all hands is drunk while Ribs is gone."

"Uh-huh. Well, let's see what we kin find up that long draw to the right."

It was some minutes later that they emerged from the upper end of the draw, hazing a small bunch of cattle. Keeping to the coulées, they worked the bunch across the creek and into a cut-coulée on the Bar B range.

In the course of the next half-hour the cattle drifted out of the coulée. Shorty sat on a knoll, smoking and scanning the surrounding country. Tad remained in the coulée. Only once did Shorty leave his look-out station and then only long enough to lope to Steve's ranch and return with a burlap sack, a pick and shovel. These he left in the coulée and again resumed his stand on the knoll.

Near sundown, Tad whistled and Shorty joined his partner in the coulée. Together they rode toward town in the gathering dusk. Across the pommel of Tad's saddle was the sack, and the sack bulged with some flabby object. Shorty left the pick and shovel at the Bar B ranch and then they rode on.

"Yo're gettin' off light, runt," grunted the perspiring Tad. "I got blisters bigger'n dollars on my hands from swingin' that pick."

"Good! Yo're allers travelin' on yore shape, swellin' yore chest and struttin' aroun' so's folks kin see that yo're bigger'n a skinned mule. It's the fust time I ever got a chanct tuh cash in on yore bigness. I furnish the brains, you supply the muscle, savvy?"

"Huh," grunted Tad. "Know what yuh gotta do when we hit town?"

"Shore do, Taddie."

"Well keep millin' it aroun' in yore skull so's yuh won't make no fool mistakes. Don't let it slip outa yore mind that me 'n' you is bustin' the law wide open and if we git caught, we're goners."

Over and over, as they covered the forty miles between the Bar B ranch and town, the two partners discussed their plan.

When the lights of town showed in the distance they separated and Shorty rode on at a lope while Tad loitered along slowly, taking care to keep far from the stage road that led into town.

Shorty let his horse slow down to a walk when he came to the main street.

Past the saddle shop and general merchandise store, without pausing at the row of saloons on his left, Shorty did not draw rein until he reached the hitch-rack in front of the sheriff's office.

The shades were not drawn, and the little cow-puncher made out the wide-shouldered form of the sheriff bent over some papers on his desk.

"Come in," called the sheriff in response to Shorty's knock. He looked up with a scowl when he recognized his visitor.

"Well?" he asked a bit gruffly.

"Jest dropped in to have a pow-wow with yuh, Sheriff," Shorty began, his level gaze meeting that of the officer unwaveringly.

The sheriff motioned him to a rawhide-seated chair.

"Yo're sizin' me and my pardner up kinda wrong, Sheriff. I come in to kinda set yuh right, savvy?"

The sheriff grunted skeptically.

"You and the big gent work fer the Slash R, don't yuh?"

"We did but we done quit yesterday mornin'."

"Hmm." The sheriff smiled his disbelief. "Yet you was forkin' of a Slash R hoss today at Dunlap's place."

"Austin give me the Paint hoss. Kinda outlaw, Paint is. I rode him without clawin' leather and Ribs Austin staked me to the critter fer keeps."

"Then why didn't he vent the hoss?" snapped the wary officer.

"Didn't have time. We left the spread in kind of a hurry."

"Uh-huh. Yeah. I reckon I savvy yore game, stranger. You and yore pardner is two uh the witnesses ag'in' the Steve boy. Yore evidence as strangers and unprejudiced cow-hands is worth a heap more with a jury than if you was drawin' Slash R pay. But yo're workin' kinda clumsy at it. Ribs Austin ain't in the habit uh givin' away good hoss flesh. And you two fellers happenin' along about the time Steve shoots his beef, then showin' today at jest the right time all looks to me like you was actin' under Ribs Austin's orders."

"No use arguin', I reckon," grinned Shorty sadly. "It *is* askin' a good deal uh you to grab my story. But I'm givin' it to yuh straight. You seem to kinda side in with the Steve feller on this."

"Why not?" snapped the sheriff. "No sane man would be danged fool enough to butcher an off-colored spotted critter like that." He pointed to the spotted hide that was soaking in a tub of water in the corner. "And he wouldn't leave the brand on the hide. I know Steve Dunlap is tellin' the truth. Ribs Austin is framin' him and you two strangers and that breed is doin' his dirty work. I don't like this Slash R spread ner the gent that owns it. And I ain't wastin' no kind feelin's on the gents that work for such a spread. Shut the door when yuh go out."

The sheriff turned once more to the papers on his desk.

Shorty reddened with anger at the insult, then grinned. With a tinkle of spurs he crossed to the door and obeyed the officer's orders to close it after him.

A dark blot moved in the shadow of the building. The blot took shape and Shorty recognized Tad. There was a moment of whispered conversation and Shorty moved on down the street. Tad flattened himself against the shadow of the building.

Shorty lighted a cigaret and moved down the dimly lighted street. When he was about fifty yards from the sheriff's office, he paused. The street seemed deserted. Ducking between two buildings, the little cow-puncher deliberately drew his .45 and emptied it into the air.

The effect of those six rapid shots was startling. The deserted street was lined with men, shouting and asking one another who had been shot. Cow-punchers, sheep-herders, white-aproned bar-tenders and hatchet-faced gamblers peering from under their green eyeshades into the deceptive darkness.

Shorty reloaded his gun and slipped unobtrusively into the excited crowd.

The sheriff, panting from an unaccustomed sprint, scanned the motley sea of faces.

"Who done that shootin'?" he barked. "Speak up, some uh you!"

"Must 'a' been some drunk," volunteered a bar-tender.

"There was six shots and they all came from one gun, sounded like," put in a cow-puncher. "Reckon it was jest some waddie feelin' his oats and shootin' at the stars."

A fifteen minute search seemed to satisfy the sheriff and he went back to his office grumbling and voicing his opinion, in rather strong language, of drunken cow-punchers that couldn't keep their guns where they belonged.

Shorty got his horse from the sheriff's hitch-rack and rode to the livery barn. He unsaddled and fed his horse, moving with deliberate slowness. Presently Tad rode up, dismounted and put his horse up.

Together the two partners strolled up the street.

"How'd yuh make out, Tad?" asked Shorty as they headed for a restaurant.

"Fine as frog-hair, son," grinned the big puncher. "I was half a mile out uh town by the time that sheriff got back to his office."

"Git shet uh the——"

"Nacherally, bone-head, er I wouldn't be back. Grub's what's worryin' me. We'll have tuh soak our spurs, I reckon."

"Looks thataway. Here we are, bustin' the law tuh save that Steve gent and he won't even look at us. The sheriff rawhided me scan'lous about workin' fer the Slash R. It's ——, Tad."

"And the Patsy gal thinks we're snakes. I shore hate tuh face that there female at the hearin' tomorrow. Me 'n' you has gotta testify that we seen Dunlap kill that spotted beef, Shorty. And she'll be settin' there lookin' at us. Makes a man feel like a sheep thief."

The Chinaman that ran the restaurant proved more generous than Tad and Shorty had hoped for. They got supper and the promise of breakfast without parting with their spurs. Supper over, they wandered down to the livery barn and with their saddle blankets for cover, slept in the haymow.

THE hearing the following morning proved an ordeal. Avoiding the eyes of Patsy Darcey and the cold gaze of Steve, they both testified that they had seen Steve Dunlap kill a spotted yearling.

Frenchy testified that he had watched Steve butcher the animal and bury the hide under the haystack. He had immediately ridden to the Slash R camp and Ribs had got the sheriff. Taking another cow-puncher for witness, they had,

in company with the sheriff, arrived at Dunlap's at daybreak and found the hide.

"Want to see the hide, Judge?" asked the sheriff. "It's over at my office. Deputy guardin' it. I put it in a tub uh water to keep it from dryin' hard."

"Don't know as it's necessary, Sheriff. You seen the brand on it there at the ranch. Evidence is strong enough to bind Steve Dunlap over to the district court fer jury trial lessen he pleads guilty now. How about it, Dunlap?"

Steve Dunlap rose to his feet, pale but self-composed.

"You think I'm guilty, Judge?" he asked in a low tone.

"It ain't what I think, son," said the judge in a kindly tone. "It's what the evidence shows. I punched cows with your daddy and I've knowed you since you was a baby. If it was up to me, Steve, I'd turn you loose in spite of all the evidence this Slash R outfit could bring against you. But I'm under oath to do my duty and my duty is to bind you over. The lowest I can make the bail is five thousand dollars."

Steve gasped.

"I can't raise it, Judge. Not in ten years!"

"And I don't know where we can get it for yuh, son. It'll mean a month in jail, I reckon. Order in the court, there, Austin! Twenty-five dollars for contempt. If you and that breed wants to snicker and run off at the head, go outside." The white-haired old judge glowered at Ribs and Frenchy.

"Evidence is all in. Clear the court, Sheriff. Prisoner is done bound over to district court for jury trial."

"You never give him a chanct to plead guilty!" roared Ribs.

"Guilty?" bellowed the irate judge. "Guilty? Why the —— *should* the boy plead guilty. Twenty-five more for contempt, Austin. You ain't in a bar-room!"

TO THE south of the Slash R range lay the Larbe Hills. Steep ridges, dotted with scrub-pine, narrow cañons choked with buck-brush and spotted with the tell-tale white blots that marked treacherous soap-holes where a four-year-old native steer would slip from sight in less than half an hour, leaving only a black spot in the dry white surface of the deceptive ground. Gyp-water springs, bitter as quinin and clear as crystal. The home of the black-tail deer, gray wolves and black diamond rattlers. The hiding-place of men with a price on their heads. The burial ground of lost hopes and broken dreams. Silent, sinister, uncompromising. These hills that men called the Bad Lands.

The chill gray of dawn found a thin spiral of blue smoke drifting skyward from the mouth of a box cañon. The odor of frying bacon and boiling coffee assailed the nostrils of the two men who hovered over the tiny blaze, shivering as they smoked thin cigarets.

Bearded, ragged, unkempt, the men watched the frying bacon and steak with hungry eyes.

"Weather's gettin' crimpy, Tad," grunted the smaller and more ragged of the two.

"Yeah. Yuh shore pulled covers last night, runt. And if yuh don't quit snorin' thataway, the Ribs feller's goin' tuh hear yuh some night. I bet the echo uh that snorin' carried plumb to Mud Crick."

"Never snored in my life, yuh ox. How many days till the trial?"

"Ten days. And we run outa flour yesterday. Looks like we gotta coyote another sack from the Slash R wagon. That danged cook is shore a light sleeper. He like to caught me the last time we played burglar."

Shorty had picked up a rusty lard can that stood near the head of the tarpaulin-covered bed on the ground. He tipped it upside down, spilling a number of bits of hairy gristle on the tarp. These he counted absently as he put them back in the can.

"Twenty-eight," he grinned. "Twenty-eight ear-tips offen twenty-eight mavericks. Not so bad, Taddie. And that Paint is gettin' to be plumb good fer a rope hoss. Yuh mind how he held that yearlin' on the slope yesterday? A man could take him and Skewball, a good rope and a runnin'-iron, and shore build hisse'f a good herd uh cattle in a year's time."

"If he didn't git caught at it," agreed Tad. "Better turn that steak, pardner."

They ate breakfast in silence, kicked dirt on the fire, and just as the sun peeped over the ragged ridge, they saddled and rode up the cañon.

The cañon narrowed to a breadth of thirty feet. The walls were perpendicular, rising to a height of perhaps a hundred feet. Tad and Shorty halted at a brush fence that

blocked the entrance to the upper end of the cañon. Beyond the fence were cattle, all yearlings and each yearling wore a fresh Bar B on his left ribs. Feed and water in abundance made the cañon an ideal pasture.

"Them critters is shore puttin' taller on their ribs, Tad," smiled Shorty. "They—What's wrong, Tad?"

Tad had dismounted and picked something up from the ground. The object was a home-made quirt.

"Looks like we'd had a visitor, Shorty."

"Ribs Austin?"

"Him er the breed, most likely. Only I don't remember seein' either of 'em use a quirt."

"Ner me, Tad. But then a man ain't li'ble to notice a thing like that, noways. When d'yuh reckon this *hombre* was here?"

"Hmm. Lemme see," Tad mused aloud. "We got into camp about dark yesterday evenin', didn't we? Mind how the Paint hoss nickered as we come up the crick and somethin' kicked gravel loose on the trail that rims out the east slope uh the cañon above camp? I bet a new hat that it was yesterday evenin' that the gent was here. Paint smelled his hoss and nickered. He kicked loose the gravel when he went up the trail. Shorty, ole timer, it looks like me and you had shore shoved our hoofs into a trap. All they gotta do is bring the sheriff down here and grab us. And we ain't got a foot to stand on if they bring us to trial."

"What'll we do about it, Tad?"

"We'll move camp," decided the big puncher. "Move camp to that deserted cabin across the ridge."

"How about these cattle, Tad?"

"Leave 'em here. You move camp, then come back and watch the trail, savvy? I'll be back about sundown."

"Where you goin', Tad?"

"I'm goin' over toward the Bar B ranch to kinda look around. I seen that Darcey gal ridin' the ridges the other day. She was all alone. The Slash R wagon moved in on the upper crossin' on Mud Crick yesterday and I ain't puttin' it past Ribs Austin to deal the gal some trouble. She'd orter stay in town while the Steve boy is in jail. It ain't noways safe fer a female woman to go prancin' around alone."

"Uh-huh," grunted Shorty. "I savvy now why yuh set up half the night trimmin' yore whiskers with yore pocket-knife and mendin' yore shirt. It ain't the fust time yuh acted loco thataway. The last time yuh took to slickin' yore mane down with axle-grease and usin' up all the taller in camp tuh shine yore boots, it was a cross-eyed book agent from New Jersey. Yuh drawed a month's wages in advance to buy a set uh books that told about the history uh Rome and only had one pitcher in each book."

Tad shifted his weight to the other stirrup and mumbled something.

"Yuh wa'n't man enough to tell her yuh couldn't read. She called yuh her dashin' cowboy." Shorty chuckled reminiscently.

Tad, red to his ears, whirled his horse and started up the trail.

"Mind what I told yuh about watchin' the trail, bonehead," he called over his shoulder.

"Better not git offen yore hoss, big 'un," replied Shorty. "Remember the seat's wore outa yore overalls. And don't bog down over there and fergit to come back."

Tad merely grinned good-naturedly and kept on up the steep slope. As his horse climbed the trail, the cow-puncher examined the quirt, frowning.

"It's hers, no two ways about it," he mused half-aloud. "It's the Patsy gal's quirt. And it was her that I seen three-four times, settin' on pinnacles a-watchin' me 'n' Shorty. Shorty figgers that it's some Slash R waddie that's a-ridin' herd on us occasional, but I'm bunchin' my bets that it was the gal that's been cold-trailin' us. Lemme see. She seen them yearlin's yesterday evenin', didn't she? And she figgers that me and my pardner is backin' Ribs Austin's play. She'll think we're framin' up on Steve again. Dang it all. She'll be sendin' the sheriff out here and jest nacherally raisin' —— all around. That's a woman fer yuh. Goin' off half-cocked, stirrin' up a hornet's nest. This ain't no country fer a woman, dang it! Why didn't she stay home and sew and mend the Steve boy's socks instead uh gallivantin' around these hills. ——."

Tad spat disgustedly and frowned at the quirt. Then the frown slowly gave way to a grin of admiration.

"Smart. Danged if she ain't. The Slash R thinks me and Shorty has quit the country. But this short-horn gal has brains. Brains and nerve to boot. Stayin' all

alone at her homestead, trailin' me and Shorty from sun-up till dark. Takin' her chances like a man would. Nerve? I'd tell a man!"

Musing thus, half angry, half pleased with this girl who thought he was a liar and a thief, Tad topped the ridge above the Bar B ranch and halted. His eyes narrowed to slits as he saw a rider draw rein at the cabin. He needed no second look to tell him that the rider was Frenchy.

The half-breed dismounted and, boldly entering the cabin, closed the door after him.

Swinging into a coulée that hid him from the house, Tad rode swiftly to the corral, slipped to the ground and approached the cabin from the side that had no window. Cautiously he approached the door and paused to listen to the voices that came from within the cabin.

"Don't go for be scare," came Frenchy's voice. "I'm good frien' for you. I'm come to tell you sometheeng."

"Friend?" The girl's voice, trembling a bit, was heavy with contempt. "I think not. I don't want your friendship."

"Suppose I tell you I can get Steve Dunlap free from de jail? Eh? You be friend weeth Frenchy den, eh? I'm theenk so, me."

"What do you mean?"

"Mebbeso I go hon de stan' han' testify de truth 'bout de hide. I'm tell how de hide get hin de haystack, mebbeso. By gar, you'll call Frenchy one —— good frien', eh?"

"You mean you'll tell the truth about the hide when you testify?"

"*Oui.*" Frenchy paused a second. "Mebbe. Depend hon you."

"On me?"

"*Oui.* Frenchy ees reech man, by gar. I'm go hon de stan' han' tell what I know. Reebs Austin she's go to de pen, savvy? Den de Slash R belong to me, Frenchy, onderstan'? Dees Steve, she's poor man. She's broke. No more cattle. She can't geeve de wife fine clothes. But Frenchy, who ees reech man, can geeve hees woman hall dese theengs. Before de trial we go han' get marry. Nobody know. De trial come. I'm swear Reebs Austin into de pen. W'at you say, eh?"

"You beast! Marry you? *You?* I'd die first. Get out of this house or I'll—"

Her voice ended in a thin scream and Tad, white to the lips, heard the crash of an overturned table.

The creak of the opening door caused the breed to release the struggling girl and face the intruder. His hand dropped to his gun. A fraction of a second too late, however. Tad's bony fist crashed against the breed's jaw. A second blow and Frenchy dropped in his tracks.

Patsy Darcey, white with fear but making a game fight to keep her self-control, faced the big cow-puncher.

"Better git yore hoss saddled and hit the trail fer town, ma'am." Tad, conscious of his disreputable appearance, became suddenly self-conscious.

"But—but I don't understand."

" 'Course yuh don't, ma'am. Let's get outa here afore that breed comes alive. I don't want tuh kill him while there's a lady present. I'll ride a ways with yuh, ma'am. We got somethin' to talk about, me and you has, ma'am."

Tad saddled her horse for her and they got under weigh before Frenchy commenced stirring.

For some distance they rode in silence. Then Tad handed her the quirt.

"Yuh dropped it yesterday evenin', ma'am," he grinned.

The girl flushed.

"How did you— You saw me yesterday?"

"Yesterday and the day before and the day before that and a few more times. Ma'am, if me and my pardner was the kind uh gents you think we are, you'd never have got home last night. You was goin' to town after the sheriff today?"

The girl did not answer.

"Looky here, ma'am. Yo're game as they make 'em. Plumb smart, too. Yo're wearin' yòrese'f plumb ga'nt, buckin' a framed game, tryin' to save the Steve boy from goin' to the pen. But yo're wearin' yorese'f out fer nothin'. Steve Dunlap is goin' to come clear."

"Have you a similar proposition to that one offered by that half-breed?"

Tad stiffened. Every vestige of embarrassment vanished as he met the girl's eyes.

"I reckon I'll be turnin' back from here, ma'am. You kin ride into town and tell that sheriff whatever you've a mind to. Tell him and be ——, beggin' yore pardon, miss."

Tad lifted his battered hat and with a stiff bow, turned his horse.

"Wait!" There were tears in the girl's eyes as she called to him. "I'm a little cat to say that. I'm sorry. I'm upset this morning. These days and nights of worry and running away from that breed have driven me to the point where I fear every man. Today isn't the first time that beast has come to the Bar B ranch. And yesterday he followed me, I'm sure. I don't understand about those cattle. Nor do I know any reason why I should trust you. But I don't believe you are as bad as you seem. I want to thank you for what you did for me this morning."

She held a small tanned hand toward the now embarrassed cow-puncher, who took it much in the same manner that a man holds a hot potato.

"You'll promise not to tell nobody if I tell you about them Bar B yearlin's, ma'am?"

"You bet I'll promise," smiled the girl.

As they rode toward town, Tad told her of the Triangle H B yearling and how they happened to leave the Slash R wagon.

"Ribs Austin is stealin' the boy blind, ma'am," Tad told her. "So me and Shorty is fightin' fire by buildin' a back-fire, *sabe?* We're pickin' up all the mavericks we kin find and puttin' 'em into the Bar B iron. The Steve boy will have a nice bunch uh stock when he gits outa jail."

"If he ever gets out," added the girl skeptically.

Tad chuckled.

"He'll come clear, don't worry. Me 'n' my li'l' ole pardner has that fixed."

"But Steve's lawyer has advised him to plead guilty and throw himself on the mercy of the court. He thinks that by making a strong plea he can get Steve off with a light sentence."

"Gosha'mighty! I never figgered on that. Listen, ma'am. You tell Steve to plead not guilty, no matter what the law sharp says. Sufferin' snakes! That'd shore sp'ile things fer keeps. Tell Steve to stick to the story that he killed one uh his own critters. Which he did, and me and my pardner aims tuh prove it fer him. You'll trust ole Tad Ladd enough to do as he says?"

"I'll do it. I promise. Perhaps I'm making a mistake but I think not."

"That's the idee, ma'am. The Slash R is shore goin' tuh git one big jolt at that trial. You bet." Tad chuckled and slapped his leg. "Meanwhile me and Shorty will keep on buildin' up the Bar B herd. Hmm. Did you say that breed follered yuh to our camp in the cañon?"

"I'm afraid he did. Or perhaps it was Ribs Austin. Whoever it was that followed me kept far enough away to keep their identity a secret. Thinking you and your partner were in the employ of the Slash R, I figured they were merely trying to keep me from finding that hiding-place to which you led the yearlings you were branding every day. I'd ride hard to give them the slip, then double back and hunt for the hidden corral where those cattle were going. I'm afraid I've tipped them off to your hiding-place."

"Hmm. And that breed is goin' to be shore on the prod by now. Reckon I'd better be gettin' back to Shorty. Mind what I told yuh. Tell the Steve boy to stick to his story and trust to me and Shorty. So long!"

Tad lifted his hat, grinned a cheerful farewell, and started back along the trail at a stiff lope.

The girl watched him out of sight, then rode on toward town, fresh hope lighting up her eyes and driving the worried lines from her tanned face.

TAD, pushing his horse hard, tried to shake off the vague premonition of evil that obsessed him. Fired by impatience, worried in spite of his efforts to control his feelings, the miles seemed endless and he had to fight himself to keep from spurring his horse to a run. Never had the miles seemed so long to Tad as they did now.

At last he reached the edge of the Bad Lands and spurred his mount at reckless speed down the steep trail. Sliding to a halt, he whistled three times. It was an old signal that he and his partner had used a hundred times.

The last echo of the signal died away, leaving an unbroken, sinister silence. Thoroughly alarmed, Tad rode swiftly up the cañon. He held his gun ready and his eyes swept the brush. A twist in the trail brought him to the brush fence. The cow-puncher's jaw sagged with astonishment. The fence had been torn down and the sign showed that the cattle had been driven down the cañon. Whirling his horse, Tad followed the sign.

As he neared the spot where he and

Shorty had been camped, Tad looked about anxiously. The bed, provisions, and cooking utensils were gone. Perhaps Shorty had got away? Perhaps he had moved camp? The nicker of a horse put an abrupt end to this train of thought. The next moment the pack horse, fully packed and dragging his hackamore rope, appeared in the clearing. The big pinto, still wearing his rawhide hobbles, followed.

Shorty had ridden Skewball that morning. Now neither the little puncher nor his pet horse was to be found. Once more taking up the trail, Tad rode on down the cañon.

A mile, two miles, then he halted sharply and a sickening lump rose in his corded throat.

Directly ahead lay a thirty-foot strip of white-crusted soap-hole bog. The dry crust was broken by cattle tracks and black, bubbling breaks in the treacherous white surface told their gruesome story. The Bar B yearlings that the two partners had branded were in that bog! Part of them, at least. The relentless cruelty of the thing stunned Tad for a moment.

Then his gaze focused on an object half-hidden in the black slime. His lips working soundlessly in a jumble of silent prayer and profanity, he dismounted and with a long limb broken from a dead pine, he fished the object on to firm ground. It was an old felt hat, mud spattered almost beyond recognition. Tad's trembling fingers sought and found a string of rattles in the hatband. Tad gazed at the rattles dazedly. His thoughts flitted back to the day he and Shorty had killed the rattler. Now those same rattlers identified the old hat as his partner's. Shorty in that slimy, black hole? The thought of it sickened the big cow-puncher as his fascinated gaze swept the bubbling black mud.

A wave of nausea swept over him, leaving his face a pasty yellow. Tiny beads of perspiration gathered on his forehead.

Shorty dead? His little partner gone forever? It was impossible! Yet there was the black mess and the mud-soaked hat! Tad turned his back on the soap-hole and, moving like a tired, feeble old man, he got into the saddle.

A magpie chattered from a scrub-pine near by. But Tad neither saw the bird that hopped insolently on the limb within arm's reach, nor did he hear the incessant chatter. Tears dimmed the cow-puncher's eyes and he choked back the dry sob in his throat.

He was looking at the ground like a man in a dream. Gradually it dawned on his numbed senses that there was something strange about that white strip of earth. It was stained red and there were marks of boot-heels indented there. Red. That was odd. And the dry surface at the edge of the bog hole was all marked where men had struggled. The red blotches were blood. Of course. Tad passed his hand across his eyes and shook his head vigorously as if trying to shake away the numbness in his brain. It was all clear enough now. Ghastly clear. They had driven the cattle into the bog and killed Shorty. Then they had pitched his lifeless body into the slime.

Tad's horror slowly gave way to a cold, deadly rage. He was calm now. Deadly calm. His gaunt, bearded cheeks looked hollow and the lines about his eyes seemed deeper. Under his bushy, sun-bleached brows, his eyes glittered with cruel hate.

Moving deliberately, he rode back to where the pack horse and Paint grazed in the clearing. He slipped the pack from the pack horse and saddled Paint. Then he rode up the trail, across the ridge and headed the pinto for the Slash R camp.

EIGHT o'clock. The two cow-punchers who were to stand first guard had ridden out to the herd and the men just relieved rode into camp and turning their horses loose, made for the lighted mess tent.

Ribs Austin had taken the whisky keg from the mess wagon and placed it on the mess table in the center of the tent. Tin cups, filled with the fiery liquor, tipped upward, were gulped empty, and were filled again. With one exception, the Slash R outfit was well on the way toward drunkenness.

The exception was Frenchy, the breed. Back in the far corner of the tent he smoked innumerable cigarets, maintaining a brooding silence. Always his beady black eyes shifted toward the door of the big tent as if he were waiting for a visitor.

"Dang me if yuh don't act like you was in love, Frenchy," called Ribs, lurching across the tent and spilling whisky down the front of his soiled flannel shirt.

The breed growled some inarticulate reply and lighted another cigaret.

"Where'd yuh git that lump on yore jaw and what become uh the two boys I sent with yuh this mornin'? Don't try any monkey business with me, yuh —— half-breed er I'll hang yore hide on the fence." Ribs Austin's tone was blatantly insulting as he leered down at Frenchy who made no reply.

"I been watchin' yuh closter than yuh think, Injun," Ribs went on. "I kept my eye on yuh lately. You've hed a —— of a lot uh business over at the Bar B lately, ain't yuh? But yuh won't have from now on. Keep away from there, savvy? Keep yore dirty Injun paws offen that gal er I'll gut shoot yuh and leave yuh to die a-sweatin'."

The men in the tent grew tense as they saw Ribs Austin's gun slide into view. The candle on the table guttered and flared up, revealing the foreman's bloated face, mottled with excitement. Frenchy blew a cloud of smoke upward.

"Yo're dronk, Reebs," he said softly, his white teeth showing in a mirthless smile. "Frenchy don't fight weeth dronk man."

"Ner sober ones, yuh yaller dog," growled Ribs. "I never seen a breed yet that wouldn't lay 'em down in a fight!"

Frenchy, tense as a coiled rattler, bared his lips in a snarl. Then his beady eyes shifted to the doorway and widened as if hypnotized. Ribs, seeing the sudden change of the breed's expression, turned slowly.

In the doorway of the dimly lighted tent stood Tad Ladd. Gaunt, haggard, terrible, the big puncher loomed up like a huge timber wolf. Tad's gun seemed to cover every man in the tent.

"Drop that gun, Austin!" The big cowpuncher's words cracked like a whip lash.

Ribs Austin's pudgy fingers relaxed and his .45 dropped to the ground.

"Get on yore laigs, Frenchy!" was Tad's next order. "And keep yore paws in the air! Pronto!"

Frenchy gathered himself slowly. His right hand crept cautiously toward his left armpit.

"Paws up, —— yuh!" snapped Tad. "I'm rearin' tuh kill yuh, Mister. Another move like that and yo're done fer."

Frenchy's hands went up and he got to his feet.

"Now every man here line up facin' the tent wall. Keep yore hands high. That's the idee. Cook, gather the guns and th'ow 'em outside. Make it quick!"

The old cook, mumbling and begging Tad not to shoot him, obeyed hastily. One after another, the guns were pitched outside.

"Austin," said Tad in a voice that carried the chill of a Winter night. "I come here to kill you and that murderin' breed. I'm killin' *you* fer the murder of Uncle Billy Jacobs down in the Gila Bend country. The jury cleared yuh, Austin, but you was guilty jest the same. It's fifteen years since you done that murder and stole them P Cross cattle. But you gettin' paid in full tonight."

Ribs Austin cowered as if struck. He tried to speak, but the cold look in Tad's eyes silenced him.

"I'm goin' to kill yuh with my two hands, Austin. Then, when I've finished you, I'm goin' to kill that murderin' breed." Tad turned to Frenchy, his eyes hot with hate.

"You killed my pardner today, yuh murderin' skunk. And you'll pay the same as Ribs Austin pays."

"And a danged good riddance it'll be," croaked the old cook. "Do a clean job of it, big feller. That low down breed has dealt me orn'ariness a plenty. I'd 'a' quit this bull-dozin', cow-thievin' spread long ago if that pot-bellied Austin hadn't kept me drunk and took my wages off me with his poker playin'. Have at 'em, big boy! I'm a-backin' yore play."

He jerked a long barreled old .44 from the mess box and poked Frenchy none too gently in the ribs.

"Better drop the shootin' iron, old timer," warned Tad. "I'm noways shore you ain't a playin' a smooth game tuh git a shot at me."

"Yuh ain't?" croaked the old cook slyly. "Yuh think I ain't tellin' it straight, eh? Lemme tell yuh somethin', Mister. I seen you and yore pardner a-swipin' that grub outa the mess wagon a week er two ago. I put a sack full uh grub where yuh'd find it easy when yuh come again. It's a-layin' there on top uh the canned stuff right now. And lemme tell yuh somethin' more. Billy Jacobs uh the P Cross is uncle to the Shorty boy. I worked fer the P Cross fer five years and I know. But I never told Austin. No ma'am. I laid low a waitin' fer you boys to jump out Ribs Austin. I'm poolin' my bets with you, win er lose. Play yore cards, Ladd."

"I'm believin' yuh, cook. Austin, put up yore hands and fight!" Tad tossed his gun on the table.

Ribs Austin, his big eyes red with hate, a sneer on his thick lips, crouched like a wrestler. Heavier by fifty pounds than his antagonist, the Slash R boss felt confident of an easy victory.

Tad, standing loosely, almost awkwardly, watched Austin with a cold, calculating stare.

With an animal-like snarl, Ribs rushed. Tad, side-stepping and avoiding the thick arms, swung viciously at the bloated face, then clenched. For several minutes they braced themselves, straining every muscle. Suddenly Tad dropped to his knees like a plummet. Ribs, caught unawares, lost his balance and his arms loosened. Slipping free from the bear-like pressure, Tad was on his feet, smashing at the mottled face now smeared with blood from a flattened, broken nose.

Hitting viciously, gouging, biting, with all rules of fair fighting thrown in the discard, they fought like beasts. Ribs Austin's breath came in great sobs. Tad, breathing hard, but handicapped by a broken left hand, fought silently.

The old cook, dancing about like a dervish, one eye on Frenchy, with stolen glances at the fighters, cheered Tad on with shouted advice.

The Slash R cow-punchers, grinning and talking among themselves, seemed to have no desire to interfere. Unpopular always with his men, Ribs had no backing now.

Frenchy, a trifle pale, but with a crafty gleam in his black eyes, watched silently. Unobtrusively, his hand had slipped into the leg of his boot and closed over the butt of a derringer hidden in an ingeniously constructed scabbard strapped to his leg.

Tad and Ribs, rolling over and over, crashed into the table. A thud as the table gave way. Inky darkness as the guttering candle was extinguished. From Frenchy's corner, a streak of flame and the roar of the derringer. A thudding crack, then a silence unbroken save by the panting struggle of the two men locked in a death grip.

Men crowded against the tent wall, uncertain whether to make for the door or stay where they were. In awed silence they listened to the sounds of that terrific death struggle that still went on.

The threshing of twisting bodies diminished gradually and a terrifying, whistling sound took its place. One or the other of the combatants had found the other man's throat and was slowly but surely choking him to death.

"What the —— goes on in here?" called a gruff voice from the tent door. The next instant the glaring ray of a powerful flashlight lit the interior of the tent.

The sheriff, followed by three men, pushed their way inside.

It was the sheriff who pried Tad's bony fingers from the other man's throat. Ribs Austin, his thick features a bleared, blood-spattered mass of purple flesh, gasped and choked for the breath that came back into his lungs in painful, whistling sobs.

The old cook, bleeding profusely from an ugly hole in his shoulder, sat astride the inert form of Frenchy. The half-breed's face was rapidly becoming crimson from a gash on the side of his head.

"The pole-cat had a second gun, big feller," croaked the cook. "I had tuh knock him on the head tuh keep him quiet. Sheriff, yuh got here too soon. Why in —— couldn't yuh wait till Ladd got a chance tuh work the breed over? I'd 'a' got the yaller hided houn' myself if I'd 'a' knowed the play was goin' tuh fizzle out thisaway."

"I don't know but what yo're right, ole timer," said the sheriff grimly. "Dog eat dog and no harm done to nobody. But I got here about half an hour too soon. Ladd, you and Austin and the breed git washed up. I got subpoenas here fer all uh yuh. Steve Dunlap's trial comes up at ten o'clock to morrow mornin'. Where's Shorty Carroway?"

"Dead," said Tad dully, wiping some blood from his bruised face. "Shorty's dead."

"Who killed him?"

"It was—" Tad's lips clamped shut. "I'm attendin' to that, sheriff," he finished.

Frenchy, his senses returning, gingerly felt of the gash in his scalp. His lips parted in a ghastly smile as he met Tad's glance. The grin widened as he looked at Ribs Austin, groaning feebly and caressing the thick neck that still bore the marks of Tad's terrific grip.

"By gar, I'm theenk Reebs ees gone for sure. *Sacré*, you heet hard for old mans, cook."

"Uh-huh," grunted the cook, who was

being taken care of by one of the deputies. "And you shoot rotten bad, Injun."

"*Oui.* Alway', I'm —— bad shot like dat."

"What started this row? Whisky?" growled the sheriff.

Nobody answered. The sheriff looked from one man to the next, frowning in a puzzled manner. Then with a shrug of resignation, he marshaled his forces and got the party started for town. Broken heads and bullet wounds were to be expected in an outfit that kept a keg of whisky in the mess wagon.

Had Tad Ladd been a bit more observing, he might have noticed that Frenchy kept peering about as if he expected to see some one ride out of the darkness from the direction of Larbe Hills. And had he known that two Slash R cow punchers were mysteriously absent from camp, he might have had food for further speculation.

But Tad's brooding thoughts flitted from the scene at the soap-hole to the vision of Patsy Darcey, then back again to ponder on the fate that had befallen his missing partner. Caught in the throes of the cold, merciless hate that enveloped him he formulated plan after plan for avenging Shorty. With Ribs, Frenchy and himself all unarmed and virtually prisoners of the law, Tad was helpless to act until after Steve Dunlap's trial. Then he would reclaim his gun, now in the sheriff's possession, and shoot it out with these two men whom he hated. What if he did get arrested and sentenced for killing them? That did not matter, so long as Shorty and Billy Jacobs were avenged. Let them do whatever they pleased with him. It did not matter. Nothing mattered now that his little partner was dead.

"I'm keepin' you three gents in jail till after the trial," the sheriff cut into his musing.

Tad nodded absently. It mattered little to the big cow-puncher where he slept or ate. With Shorty gone, life held nothing but memories and that cold hate.

AN HOUR before the time set for the trial, Ribs Austin and Frenchy were allowed their freedom. Tad, however, remained in his cell.

A good-natured deputy had trimmed the big puncher's hair, and a shave, hot bath and clean clothes had changed Tad from a ragged, unkempt tramp to a respectable looking cow-puncher. Solemn visaged, hard-eyed, brooding, Tad sat on the edge of his bunk.

At nine-thirty, the sheriff ushered Patsy Darcey into Tad's cell.

The girl looked fresh and lovely as some flower found blooming in the desert. Tad momentarily forgot the bitterness that gnawed at his heart as he rose to welcome her.

"The sheriff told me—about your partner. I'm sorry."

Tad nodded. He dared not trust himself to speak for some moments.

"It's—it's——, ma'am," he finally blurted. "Beggin' yore pardon fer cussin' thataway. That lil ole feller was more'n jest kin-folks. We gone through a heap together, me 'n' Shorty has."

"I understand," she told him softly, laying a small tanned hand on his sleeve.

They sat for some moments in silence.

"Yuh told the Steve boy and his law sharp that he was to plead not guilty?"

"Indeed I did. And Steve is taking your advice, much against the attorney's wishes."

"Good. The boy'll come clear, don't worry, ma'am."

"Here is a note and a package for you. A disreputable looking old man with his shoulder all bandaged gave this to me a few minutes ago, and said to be sure no one but you saw it."

"The Slash R cook," guessed Tad. "It was him that sent over the clean clothes to me."

Curiously he undid the package. Inside a thick bundle of newspapers was an old .44 six-shooter and a box of shells. The note was almost illegible and smeared with finger-prints. Tad read:

Here's my gun. She shoots like a rifle. Ribs and the injun is gettin' drunk and makin' fight talk. They'll be packin' guns at court. If yuh git in a tight and gotta run fer it, I'm at the barn and I got yore hoss ready. Good luck, big 'un.

"The danged ole cuss," grinned Tad as he shoved the gun inside his shirt and destroyed the note.

"Why did he——"

"All set, folks," called the sheriff who had come down the corridor and was unlocking the door. "Time to go to court."

Every seat in the courtroom was taken; every available foot of space filled by the shifting, whispering crowd that constantly maneuvered to better their position so that

they might catch a glimpse of the prisoner.

The last row of seats was packed solid by Slash R cow-punchers who had drifted into town during the night.

Apart from the rest of the outfit, well toward the front, Ribs Austin and Frenchy sat side by side.

Austin's battered features twisted in a sneering grin as he talked in a guarded tone to his companion:

"Dang foolishness fer me and you to go janglin' amongst ourselves, Frenchy. I was crazy drunk when I made that gun-play at camp. We got this Dunlap gent where we want him. See that dude-lookin' gent down in front? That's Trask, the law sharp from Helena. Best man in the State on these cases. Cost me several steers tuh hire him, but it's worth it. Dunlap ain't got a foot to stand on."

"She's goner for shore, Reebs, dat Steve feller. Han' den we get Ladd, eh?"

Austin's pig eyes reddened with hate as he felt of his bruised throat.

"Git Ladd? I'd tell a man we'll git him. Yo're shore that Shorty gent is outa the way?"

"*Oui*. Ten times I'm tell you 'bout dat."

"Then why don't them two boys show up?"

"Mebbeso find more cattle down de crick below de bog-hole. Look! Here come de sheriff weeth Dunlap."

Coming in by a rear entrance were the sheriff, Steve, his attorney and Patsy Darcey. A moment later Tad Ladd sauntered in and took a seat near them.

The jury, seated in a corner of the room, whispered among themselves as they eyed the prisoner.

A low murmur of voices swept over the courtroom, then suddenly hushed to silence as the judge entered and took his seat on the raised platform. On the flat-topped desk before the judge was a filled water pitcher, a glass and a sawed-off shotgun.

The judge, a short, heavy-set man with bushy white hair and tanned face, "broke" the gun, examined the shells, then with a nod of satisfaction, eyed the motley throng that watched him in awed silence.

"Before the trial starts," said the judge, his deep, sonorous voice filling the room, "I want to make one thing clear. I'm running this show, understand. No man, nor group of men, can intimidate me nor the jury. The prisoner on trial will get a square deal. In case any man here is tempted to burn any powder, let him remember that this scatter-gun is loaded with slugs and the law is on my side. Court's open."

Two deputies entered, carrying a spotted hide, dripping with water. They draped the hide on a tall saw-horse that stood near the witness stand.

"I kept it soakin' in water so she wouldn't dry out, yore Honor," explained the sheriff.

The judge nodded his approval.

Ribs Austin, the sheriff, Frenchy and the Slash R puncher who had been at the Bar B ranch the morning of Steve's arrest, were called to identify the hide.

They stood grouped about the hide, all of them more or less embarrassed as the eyes of every person in the courtroom followed them.

"That's the hide, all right, eh Frenchy?" grinned Ribs, an exultant smile on his thick lips.

"*Oui*," agreed the breed. "She's dat same spot' hide I'm find hin de haystack."

"Same hide that's been soakin' in that tub since the evenin' I brought it from the Bar B ranch, yore Honor," added the sheriff.

"The identity of the hide being ascertained, we'll continue with the trial," announced the judge.

Steve Dunlap, a worried frown puckering his brows, turned to the sheriff as that gentleman took his seat beside the prisoner.

"Looks like I was up against it, sheriff," he whispered.

The sheriff nodded gloomily.

"Yore Honor!" It was Tad Ladd who spoke and his voice carried to the far corners of the courtroom. "Yore Honor, I'd like to put in a word afore this trial goes any further."

"I object!" shouted the Slash R attorney, springing to his feet. "That man is a material witness and will be called to testify in due time. It is irregular——"

"Objection overruled," the judge cut in. He turned to Tad. "Go ahead with what you have to say."

"Yo're a cow-man yorese'f, ain't yuh judge?"

The judge nodded, suppressing a smile at the big puncher's earnestness.

"Then, afore this trial goes any fu'ther, I wisht you'd examine that there hide that the sheriff and them Slash R gents has identified as the one that was in the haystack."

"Hmm. Hardly necessary, I think," smiled the judge. "The hide has been positively identified."

Some of the Slash R men snickered.

"Reckon the fool must be drunk er loco," sneered Ribs in a tone loud enough to be heard by the judge. "I'd know that spotted hide in —— on a dark night."

The judge rapped for order, his eyes blazing with anger. More as an affront to the Slash R owner than to please Tad, the judge rose to his feet and walked to the dripping hide. For several minutes he examined the wet hide, tracing out the brand with his hands. Then he gave Tad a sharp look.

A faint smile played about the lips of the judge as he took his seat.

"Mr. Dunlap, what is your brand?" he asked carelessly.

"Bar B on the left ribs, yore Honor," replied Steve.

"And you brand Slash R on the left ribs, do you not, Austin?"

"You bet I do. I——"

The judge rapped for silence.

"Sheriff, examine the brand on that hide. Examine it carefully."

The sheriff, puzzled, did as he was ordered. An incredulous smile lighted up his face as he traced out the brand welt on the under side of the hide.

"What's the brand on that hide, sheriff?" snapped the judge.

"It's—why it's Bar B!"

"A —— lie!" shouted Ribs, jumping to his feet. "I——"

"Come up and see for yourself, Austin," ordered the judge. "And no more profanity or it'll cost you a fine."

Ribs Austin, his hands trembling with excitement, examined the brand. His blurred features turned pasty white.

"It's a dirty frame up! It's—Frenchy, yuh low down skunk, this is yore work. Think you'll get the gal by throwin' me down, do yuh, yuh lyin' snake? Well you won't live tuh brag about it, yuh ——"

AUSTIN'S .45 leaped into sight, belching flame. Frenchy's gun roared at the same instant.

Ribs Austin, a blank, incredulous look on his flabby face, lurched forward, his gun dropping from his hand. The half-breed had at last shot true.

Leaping over half a dozen seats, the breed was lost in the confused crowd that was now milling and crowding, heedless of the bellowed commands of the judge.

Tad, gun in hand, stood beside the judge, sweeping the crowd for a glimpse of the breed. The Slash R men huddled together, dazed by the sudden twist of affairs.

Twisting, dodging, bent double to conceal himself, Frenchy gained the door and was outside, running in a zigzag fashion for the line of horses at the hitch-rack. His left arm hung useless at his side, broken above the elbow by Austin's bullet. Looking back over his shoulder as he ran, shooting at the crowd that surged to the door, he did not see the mud-spattered, ragged form of a man that had just swung to the ground from one of the horses at the rack.

Not until a pair of wiry arms wrapped around him and a hard fist crashed again and again into his face, did he realize that his escape was cut off.

Tad, jumping out a window, ran toward the two men who struggled under the feet of the kicking, snorting horses that were jerking at their hackamore ropes in an effort to get free.

The two men rolled clear of the hitch-rack, coming to a halt at Tad's feet.

The dull thud of a gun barrel was heard crashing against Frenchy's skull, and the ragged man rose somewhat unsteadily to his feet, a .45 in his hand.

"Howdy, Taddie," he croaked hoarsely. "Long time no see yuh."

"Shorty! Shorty! Yuh son of a gun!" Tad gathered his partner in his arms, laughing, sobbing, profanely exultant.

"Quit pawin' me, ox," grunted Shorty. "Quit it, dang yuh. Yuh done busted open that hole in my shoulder."

"You been shot, pardner?" Tad's voice filled with anxiety.

"The breed knifed me yesterday at camp. I was loadin' the pack hoss when he done it. Snuck up from behind. Him and two more Slash R snakes. Left me hog-tied at the edge uh the soap-hole while they run out Bar B yearlin's into the bog. Our maverick herd is gone, Tad."

"I know it, pardner. I thought he'd th'owed you in the hole too."

"He aimed to, Tad. He acted plumb loco. Kept a-talkin' about you and Miss Darcey and how he was goin' to kill you and kill Ribs Austin and what not. He was hog

wild. The two gents with him was bad scairt, but they balked at th'owin' me into the bog. Frenchy loses his head complete and kills one uh them. Then he makes the other 'un pitch the dead feller into the bog. This kinda cools him off and he figgers out a new plan. He puts me on Skewball and ties me hard and fast in the saddle. Then he leads Skewball down the cañon and ties him to a tree. I'm bleedin' bad and it looks to the breed like I'd bleed to death in a hour er two. He tells this Slash R gent to watch fer you to come back and kill yuh. Says he'll kill this boy iffen he don't do as he says. Then he rides off to camp."

"And the Slash R feller cuts yuh loose?"

"When he makes sure Frenchy is gone. Then he pulls out fer a new country, I reckon. He was shore a-driftin' the last I seen uh him. I reckon I fainted some. It was night when I come to. I hit the trail fer camp, found you gone and headed Skewball fer town. It was one danged long ride. I—I jest got here. I—I ——" Shorty went limp in his partner's arms.

Back in the courtroom, the judge had restored order. The sheriff and his deputies had disarmed the Slash R men and herded them into a corner. Others had manacled Frenchy and brought him in. As Tad laid his unconscious partner on the platform, not ten feet from the lifeless body of Ribs Austin, a doctor pushed through the crowd in obedience to the judge's shouted request for a physician.

"The man's in a weakened condition but he'll pull through easily," the doctor told Tad and Patsy Darcey. "He'll need careful attention for a few days."

"He'll get it, doctor," cried Patsy.

Steve broke away from the crowd and approached Tad.

"Pat told me how you two boys was pluggin' for me, Ladd. I don't savvy how yuh beat Austin and Frenchy at their crooked game but yuh shore done a good job. I'm—I'm shore obliged. Ain't we, Pat?"

The girl, tears dimming her eyes, nodded vigorously. Then she impulsively threw her arms around Tad's neck and kissed him. Shorty, stirring feebly and opening his eyes, received the mate to that kiss. The crowd cheered and threw their hats in the air. It was a laughing, jubilant crowd that surged from the courtroom to the saloon across the street.

As they waited for a stretcher on which to carry the now conscious and vigorously protesting Shorty to the hotel, the sheriff drew Tad aside.

"Now that the smoke has cleared away and things has got quiet, would yuh mind tellin' me how come that Slash R brand on the hide yonder got changed to a Bar B?" he asked in a hoarse whisper.

Steve Dunlap, at the sheriff's elbow, mutely seconded the officer's question.

"Promise yuh won't th'ow me and the Shorty boy in jail and I'll tell yuh," grinned Tad.

"I promise, Mister," smiled the sheriff.

"It was thisaway. I knowed Ribs and Frenchy had switched hides on Steve, savvy? Thinks I, why can't me 'n' Shorty do the same thing? So we combs the range till we locates a spotted Bar B yearlin' that's marked enough like the Slash R hide to pass a ordinary inspection. We runs mister yearlin' into a coulée. I butchers him while Shorty stands guard. Then I buries the meat, covers the sign, and we starts fer town with the hide that night."

"Uh-huh. But when did yuh——"

"Keep yore shirt on, Sheriff. I'm a-comin' to that part. Yuh mind how some feller shoots six times that even' yuh brung Steve in? Mind how yuh spent consider'ble time huntin' the gent that done that permisc'us shootin'? Well it was Shorty that done it. You tears out and down the street on a keen lope. I slips into the office, takes the Slash R hide outa the tub and puts the Bar B hide in its place."

The sheriff's hand gripped Tad's.

"The judge tells me that he's goin' to turn the Slash R spread over to Steve," he said in a low tone, "fer damages that Austin' done him. We need men like you and Carroway in this country. Steve's aimin' to make you two boys his pardners. I'm congratulatin' yuh, Ladd."

Tad shook his head.

"Me 'n' Shorty belongs down South. We come here to git Ribs Austin. French done saved us the trouble. We'll be headin' south again, soon as my pardner kin travel. I'm shore obliged to yuh-all but me 'n' Shorty ain't built to stand these Montana winters."

"DUNNO when I been so ashamed uh ary human bein' as I was uh you yesterday, elephant," Shorty, mounted on Skewball, and leading Paint, called over his shoulder as he led the way

down the steep bank of a creek and splashed across.

"Huh?" Tad paused in the search for a cigaret paper to grin tolerantly at his partner.

"Meanin' the way yuh acted at the Steve boy's weddin' yesterday. Yuh mind that stage uh the game when the judge turned to yuh, after splicin' Steve and the Patsy gal?"

"Yeah. I recollect, runt. I wa'n't so lickered up as a short-complected friend uh mine that was millin' around in a suit uh checked store clothes, a-lettin' his spurs drag so's full grown folks 'ud see him and keep from trompin' on him. Who was that ole gal with the strawberry-roan hair and buck teeth that you and the Slash R cook was follerin' aroun'?"

"Yo're side-steppin' my question, ox. When the judge prods yuh behind the withers and says, 'Salute the bride, best man,' what do yuh do, huh? Yuh backs off from that there bride like she was a rattler. Best man? Best——!"

"And when ole Roany asked fer the third helpin' uh ice cream, yuh like to knocked a hip down beatin' the cook to her empty dish. Wait till we gits back to the Gila Bend and I tells that speckled-faced school-marm how yuh carried on with Roany. The older some men gets, the less sense they——"

"Aw, let a man be, can't yuh?"

"Then loan me the use uh a cigaret paper and quit runnin' off at the head. Kinda nacheral fer me 'n' you to be ridin' the grub-line again, runt."

Tad rolled and lighted a cigaret, then grinned at his partner.

"Wonder what's the name uh that last crick we crossed?"

"Alkali," returned Shorty promptly as he headed the Skewball horse south.

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.

EVERY time one of our old-timer readers breaks his silence and at last takes his turn at doing some of the talking at our Camp-Fire it makes me feel good. Shows the real Camp-Fire spirit is at work and every fellow doing his bit.

Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

For a matter of ten years have been a silent listener at Camp-Fire. It has been with keen appreciation I have listened, especially to the members of your writers' brigade. However, it has taken Bill Adams to stir me out of my shell.

My windjammer days are long since over. I have rounded Old Stiff seven times in all, summer and winter, and in digesting Bill's coffers I have lived at least some of it over again. He knows his subject thoroughly and his familiarity with real sailor-man's language prompted me to write him. Strange to say I found that I lay in company with him at the same wharf in 'Frisco in 1899. He was then third mate of the *Silberhorn* and I was apprentice on the *Springburn*. He mentions an incident he remembers in connection with the *Springburn* and that is, that she had a mixture of grand pianos and cement in her lower hold—through being on her beams'-ends off Cape Horn.—ERNEST RICHARDS.

SOMETHING from Harold Lamb in connection with his novelete in this issue:

I have followed the military and naval ranking as it was in Russia, 1788. The naval branch of the service was new, comparatively, and under the despotism of Catherine the Great queer grades were bestowed. The shipwrights on the Black Sea—the leaders, at least—were given commissions in some regiment of hussars. And wore the uniform of hussars!

John Paul Jones was originally offered the rating of captain-commandant, which meant very little. He stipulated that he should have the rank of rear-admiral and got it.

He ranked every Russian and foreign officer in the Black Sea except the Field Marshal, in command of all operations, and possibly Admiral Mordvinoff, who had the Crimea fleet. But,

secretly, equal authority was given Nassau Siegen; and the Prussian ultimately claimed credit for everything that Jones did.

EVERY principal character in the story is historical. The conspiracy is a fact. Nassau's plot is fact. It ultimately did much to discredit Jones with Catherine. Actually, this took place after Jones' return from the Black Sea, and at his quarters in Petersburg. I have used it to show the kind of opposition Jones faced.

I have colored up the actual conspiracy against him, and the events of his journey from Petersburg to Kherson are imaginary. Nassau never came to drawn swords with Jones, but his cowardly and bitter enemity is quite in keeping with the incident in the story.

Jones' daring reconnaissance of the Turkish fleet is fact. Nassau figured in a second trip. I have put them together in the first venture. Ivak's account of the strange and unheard of method of scouting used by Jones, follows the story pretty closely. It is given in the Bibliotekia dlia Tchtenia, and written by a Captain K. A translation can be found in De Koven's Life and Letters of John Paul Jones.

Captain K. relates that he came across an old Cossack living near the Danube who related this story, and showed him the dagger, the gift of Paul Jones. The story struck my fancy and "Forward" is the result.

As a matter of fact the actual events—even to the *tarantass* and Paul Jones' position toward it—and the personalities of the people are followed very closely.

Ivak's habit of alluding to Jones as John Paul may strike you as curious, but the Russians habitually called people by their first names, and usually affixed some Cossack term of liking or disliking. Instead of General Suvarof, Ivak would have said "Little father Michael."

Jones incidentally, never shirked a duel.—HAROLD LAMB.

CHEMISTS, physicians and naturalists, how about this—the effect of the presence of iron ore on scorpions and on people bitten by them? Travelers and scientists, what is the nino de la tierra? Mineralogists and philologists, how about native bronze and the usage of *"bronce"?* Gun fans, how about this little kink? Gentlemen desiring to hit other gentlemen on the head with an automatic, how about this method?

Washington, D. C.

There has been much camp-fire talk about alacrans and perhaps my experience in that line which has been rather varied may help to harmonize some of the discrepancies between the statements of men from different parts of the world.

MY FIRST experience with them was as a boy in Florida. The scorpions there were generally straw-colored, comparatively light, that is, and were not regarded at all seriously. We boys considered them about as dangerous as bumblebees and not more so either. Afterward I was in a mining-camp in Arizona. The scorpions were light brown, darker than than those in Florida. They were scarce but regarded as bad medicine. While there a child two or three years old was stung by one and the child died. Note: the ore in this camp contained considerable oxide of iron.

Later I was in a camp in Sonora and for several months killed, on an average, three scorpions per day in my bedroom; found them in my bed at times, but fortunately was never stung. The Chinese cook was stung on the hand several times without serious result other than pain and a slight swelling. A native was stung on the arm and his arm swelled badly and he suffered from it for several days or perhaps a week. An American was stung one morning as he put on his B.V.D.'s and suffered a great deal; had trouble with his throat. His tongue was partially paralyzed and he did not recover full use of it for several weeks. The scorpions were brown. More iron ore.

In Durango I was told of children being killed by scorpion stings and the scorpions were regarded as dangerous, particularly so. They were very dark. Durango has the greatest iron ore deposit in Mexico. I have an idea that the strength of the poison is more or less in accord with the color and is perhaps in some measure increased by the presence of iron. I have never known them to be regarded seriously except near some iron deposit.

NOW, can some one tell me what the Niño de la Tierra is? I have heard of it for twenty years as the most poisonous thing in Mexico and I have traveled extensively in that country but never seen it. It is supposed to be fatal. Is it the vinegaroon, otherwise the vinagron? The latter is supposed to be pretty bad but I have never known any one to be bitten by one. We called them mule-killers in Florida because they lived in rotten stumps and like places and it was said would bite a mule on the nose as it poked around looking for something to eat, the result presumably being death to the mule.

The Niño de la Tierra is said to get its name from its resemblance to a small child and to be an inch or two long. The supposed resemblance to a child would seem to bar out the vinagron but *quien sabe?*

SO MUCH for that. Ben Orth, in a recent number, told about hearing of a deposit of bronze, not copper, in South America. I think I can help him out a little on that. His conversation with the old Indian was apparently conducted in Spanish. Copper in that lanugage is *cobre* and bronze is *bronce,* but, and here is the point, all old-time Spanish miners call pyrites *bronce.* This applied to copper pyrites, iron pyrites, arsenopyrite. It is a name that has apparently been used colloquially for hundreds of years although it is not academic Spanish. The old Indian was probably telling the truth as he knew it and the vein was pyrites of iron, perhaps containing copper, perhaps not, but certainly not bronze or native copper.

HERE is a gun kink. I have used automatics of various makes and sizes and had them hang up. One perfectly new Colt did and I sent it back to the factory but found it no better on its return. I then happened to notice the ejected shells and found two slight creases in the rim at the base. I found that as the cartridge was pushed out of the magazine the sharp edges of the magazine creased it

lightly. I took a dead smooth file and smoothed over the edges of the magazine, emery papered and oiled them and the creases no longer appeared in the shells and the gun no longer caused trouble. The magazines are stamped out and present day high-priced labor can not take time to round these rough sharp edges and they catch and drag the top of the base of the shell so that the point is thrown up and jams. I have found this true in many cases. A little extra work with emery paper and oil will help several places on the average gun.

SOME one wants to know how to strike with an automatic—whether to hit with the barrel or reverse and use the butt. Do neither. Use the heel of the butt as it is held in the hand. A few kinds have a projection from the magazine that does not permit this, but most can so be used. Strike as if striking with the heel of the hand with the barrel pointing up. Do not use the bottom of the magazine but the point formed by the bottom of the magazine and the rear of the butt. It is liable to put a permanent groove in a man's skull if it lands. I know one man who waited around for about six hours before the other fellow waked up after that treatment.—ALFRED HAYNES.

THE following letter to me from William Byron Mowery concerning his story in this issue ought to be passed on to you:

Austin, Texas.

I want to anticipate a certain possible objection to "The Cannikin," *viz.*, the absence of names for the N. W. and H. B. Forts. Parts of this story come rather close to actual happenings given in Thompson's and Alexander Henry's (Younger) diaries. Those who are wise to the intimate records of the fur rivalry may recognize these happenings, but will not be sure enough to damn me for bending incidents and inconsequential matter to my story. I don't, for instance, want to be hauled up for saying that the Piegans traded at Fort Augustus instead of another Fort a few miles away, when it really matters nothing which. Those who are not wise will not give a whoop about the absence of names. I hope you understand exactly what I mean.

"The Cannikin" was the hardest thing I ever tried to write.—W. BYRON MOWERY.

DEEP waters, these, in our discussion of the origin of America's early peoples:

Oakland, California,.

It might interest Mr. J. A. P. Crampton to know that Dr. Le Plongeon and his wife lived for many years in Yucatan studying the ancient ruins of the Mayas.

He was the first man to decipher their glyphs and his opinion is that Yucatan was the home of the race (some of whom afterward settled in Egypt). It is remarkable that, as far as I can learn, civilization started full-grown, so to speak, in that country. The glyphs seem to be of the same character as Egypt, and Le Plongeon claims that the similarity is so great that one who can decipher Egyptian glyphs can easily do the same with the Maya glyphs. His volume, "11,000 Years of the Quichuas and Mayas," is quite bulky, but carries conviction, I imagine, to any who would read it with an open mind. His theory is that from Maya—Yucatan—they went forth across the then existent continent of Atlantis to the African and Mediterranean littoral, taking their civilization with them. He calls attention among other things to the passage in the New Testament where Christ said "Eloi, Eloi lama sabachtani" which he shows is pure Mayan. Evidently it was not Greek or Hebrew or the translators would not have been called upon to add to the above sentence "which being interpreted, etc."

HE CLAIMS to have traced from their glyphs eleven thousand years of their history, which, by the way, included an account of the Flood. To really understand these ancient civilizations and their religions, one should study the writings of the late I. N. Vail of Pasadena, whose interpretation of geologic data from the standpoint of our world once having had a ring system, because then one can understand why Ophiolatry, Phalicism everywhere and always preceded the conception of an impersonal god and can also understand why Atlantis was submerged, parts of Easter Island and many other places.

All these are merely suggestions and are as much entitled to consideration as the claims of the ordinary geologist about the origin of coal which is idiotically supposed to be vegetables or trees turned into coal.—GEORGE MARKS.

ONCE again I'm weak and print a letter whose writer asks to have only his initials used. But correct initials are better than no name at all, and gradually we're getting to the point where only the very exceptional letter will be heard at Camp-Fire unless its writer's name is heard along with it.

Akron, Ohio.

There was an inquiry in the *Adventure* of January 20, 1923, from a writer by F. L. B. about a flame on a hill that he was on. I do not know anything that is under that ground or anything about that country, but will try to make a reason for the flame.

Some years ago a farmer and his wife were coming home. It was in the summertime, if I remember correctly, and they were passing a graveyard when all at once a flame spread over the burying-ground. It frightened the horses and they started to run away. The suction caused by the fast moving horses caused the so-called flame to come after them.

A MAN for whom I used to work is a Swiss and was born near the German border in Switzerland. When he was a lad, the boy used to sneak across the line and smuggle in stuff, as they could buy cheaper in Germany. The guards were never in one place, but were always moving around trying to pick up the younger smugglers, as the old heads at the game were wise to all the tricks.

One night the guards were hiding in a graveyard when a young girl came by and the so-called flame started to rise out of the ground. The girl almost had a fit. She started to run, yell and scream and when she ran the suction started the flame after her.

The guards called to her to stop. Nary a stop, so they followed her home. This is their explanation: When the atmosphere is at a certain temperature, the fosforus from the bones of the dead come to the

surface and give a queer light, and as the air moves it makes it look like a flame.

So I think if F. L. B. would investigate the ground at those points he saw light, he would not be guessing what caused it after all.—P. W.

SOMETHING about the Panama Canal —what it does and how fast it does it:

Balboa Heights, Canal Zone.

Knowing the interest that most of our readers take in subjects of world-wide importance and believing that the performance of their own canal will be of special interest to them, I take pleasure in calling attention to figures recently compiled with relation to the April, 1924, traffic, as follows:

ONE of the outstanding features of the month's business is that United States vessels carried more tons of cargo through the Canal than did the combined ships of all other other nations of the world, and out of a total of 403 ships passing through the Canal, 232 belonged to Uncle Sam.

The month's tonnage is the largest on record for April being nearly twice that for April, 1922. About two million tons of cargo transited the Canal, for which tolls amounting to nearly two million dollars were paid.

Lumber shipments from the Pacific Coast of the United States exceeded all previous records. The shipments of iron ore from Chile also broke all previous records for a month. Wheat, in transit from the Pacific to the Atlantic, totaled nearly one hundred and seventy-five thousand tons during the month, the greatest quantity so far shipped during a month.

GREAT BRITAIN, aside from the United States, led in number of ships through the Canal, with 100; then came Japan, with 14; and Germany with 12; French and Peruvian vessels numbered 7 each; while Holland and Norway each had 6; the remaining 19 vessels were divided among Denmark, Italy, Panama, Chile, Sweden, Colombia, Danzig, and Spain.

The Panama Canal has always made a special point of not delaying vessels unduly. A case illustrating this is that of the *S.S.Ionic*, bound from Auckland to London, which entered the Canal at 6:21 a.m., May 9th, completed the transit at 1:05 p.m., tied up at the Cristobal Coaling Plant and began bunkering at 1:20 p.m., took 881 tons and 2,160 pounds of coal in one hour, and cleared for sea again at 2:45 p.m., on the same day. That's the way we do things at the Panama Canal.—R. S. CARTER.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom Alvin F. Harlow rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

The majority of my time has necessarily been spent indoors, but I have sought adventure and the wilderness whenever and wherever I had opportunity to seek them—in the Appalachians from Massachusetts and New York to Georgia and Alabama, in the North woods around the Great Lakes, in the Louisiana swamps and bayous and in the network of waterways along the Gulf coast; and in all these places, which ought simply to have reeked with danger, I have never, so far as I can remember, succeeded in having a single narrow escape! All of my close shaves have occurred while dodging traffic in Fifth Avenue and Michigan Boulevard.

THERE is a couplet of Stevenson's which I have quoted a few thousand times because it so completely expresses myself, and therefore gives me pride in so closely resembling R. L. S.—in one particular, at least:—

"The world is so full of a number of things,
I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings."

I have never lost my boyish interest in things. I never tire of sight-seeing. I am always eagerly curious about a city, a village or a stretch of country that I haven't seen before. I get fed up on a city after a while, because there is so much that is ugly about all of them; but the mountains, the rivers, the lakes, the woodland trails, never lose their fascination.

I LOVE the sort of folk who are nearest to the realities and the raw materials of life—Jake Snyder, the fire warden up near Lake Superior, for example; and Johnny Lestrade, with whom I camped and hunted alligators in the swamps bordering Lake Pontchartrain; and Diebold, that delightful game warden, who is a whole vaudeville show in himself; and Howe, the old Irish sergeant of more than twenty years service who, I fear, was killed in the big war, for I have never been able to locate him since; to say nothing of sailors, fishermen, trappers, loggers, sawyers and filers in lumber camps, railroad men (I used to be one myself), cross-roads blacksmiths and storekeepers and old backwoods farmers with whom one sits smoking on a little vineclad porch in the summer dusk and, to the accompanying music of whippoorwills and tree toads, listens to folk-lore and reminiscences such as Ben Ames Williams puts into his stories of "Fraternity."

BUT some of my best friends are among the Southern mountaineers, with whom I have worked and hiked and hunted and fished and robbed bee-trees during several happy past years. I have tasted their gracious hospitality, I have attended their dances and merrymakings and I have sat in church with them through interminable "Hard Shell" sermons. I have photographed with still and movie cameras many of their quaint customs and everyday activities. I feel that they are very nearly my own people; for my forefathers crossed the mountains with them from Virginia to Kentucky in the days of Boone and Kenton, and perhaps by the merest chance located a little farther down in the "valley country" than they did.

To some folks my adventures would seem very mild, but I've gotten a lot of joy out of them.

"THE Battle of the Kettles" is in the main a true story. I have merely developed and elaborated it from the skeletonized narrative which has come down to us through local history. Crist, Spears, Crepps, Boyce, Floyd, Fossett and Moore were all real characters and played their parts in this thrilling episode of pioneer history much as I have pictured them. The voyage of the flatboat

with the kettles, the scouting of Crist and Floyd, the Indian attack, the bravery of Fossett and the others, and then Crist's remarkable journey are all told in my story with a tolerable close adherence to facts. I have fictionized most with respect to the unfortunate woman on the boat, whose name and previous history are, as a matter of fact, unknown to us; but I have told her subsequent adventures with a little closer approximation to the few known facts. She was actually taken by the Indians to Detroit, as I relate herein, and was brought back by Kentucky soldiers several years later. The whole affair proves that truth is sometimes quite as strange and as interesting as fiction, especially in American pioneer history.—ALVIN F. HARLOW.

BEFORE letting Talbot Mundy talk at Camp-Fire in connection with his new serial beginning in this issue I want to say that this magazine is in no way sponsoring the opinions he offers. If you don't like them, settle it with him, not with the magazine or with me personally, and don't think for a minute that Camp-Fire is going to use any of its time or space for arguments pro and con. No religious discussions at our blaze. The only reason for allowing Mr. Mundy to express his opinions among us is because they seem a legitimate support of his story and of his sincerity in handling its material.

As opinions they are merely Mr. Mundy's not the magazines, and have place in our pages solely because the author had, in attempting to present and make real another religious world, an extremely difficult task in which he is entitled to a Camp-Fire hearing. For most of us reared in the Christian faith almost automatically react with scorn and hostility to any other religion that claims superiority over ours as ours does over it. And it is part of that scorn and hostility to doubt even the sincerity and good intent of the other faith's followers. This, in the case of the Lama of the story, seems an unfair handicap on the author, before even a word of the story is read, and should entitle him to opportunity to offset this handicap—if he can—and to do so also before the story is read.

"OM" explores two fields that have been hitherto untouched, so far as I know; and a third that has not been much investigated, at any rate in fiction, from the view point that there may be something in it. The Abor Valley, of course, is a real place, but that is about all that is actually known about it, although plenty of people have been within thirty-five miles of its border. On the north it touches Tibet, where the Tsang-po River goes tumbling over wide, but only moderately deep falls, into the Valley, to become the Brahmaputra lower down. Those falls have been seen and their height variously estimated at from thirty to three hundred feet; but somewhere in the Valley the river descends several thousand feet and, because of the comparatively short distance, it is calculated that there must be other falls immensely greater than Niagara.

AS MANY of the facts as are actually known about the Abor Valley are given in the story. My latest informant was Sven Hedin the explorer, but, although he has been probably nearer to the Abor Valley than any other white man, he could tell me no more than is to be found in some of the Indian Survey reports. For more than a hundred years the Indian Government has been trying to get information about the Abor Valley, but has signally failed, the mountains being unclimbable, the river unnavigable, the jungle impenetrable, and the Abors themselves being fiercer and more secretive than any other people in that part of the world. All of the numerous spies sent into the Valley have vanished and nothing has ever been learned of their ultimate fate; it is supposed thay have been killed or sold into slavery.

Samdrup, the most famous member of the Indian Survey force, spent several years trying to get into the Abor Valley, but failed, although he was as faithful, persistent and reliable as any spy who ever lived. He saw the upper falls, reaching them from Tibet, and actually threw a hundred marked logs into the river—none of which, however, was seen at the lower end by the people set there to watch for them; so that even today it has not been actually proved that the Tsang-po and the Brahmaputra are the same river. In the course of his great adventure Samdrup was sold into slavery, but escaped and was finally pensioned by the Indian Government. He made no notes during his wanderings, because to have been caught with them would have meant instant death; nevertheless, relying solely on counted footsteps, his estimate of distances has since been proven accurate within a few miles in almost every instance.

THE "Mahatmas" or "Masters" are mentioned in the story more than once, although none of them appears. Personally, I have never met one to my certain knowledge. although this may be due to the fact that no one who really was a Mahatma or Master would dream of admitting it. I have met several men who claimed to be "Masters," but in each instance I have been quite sure the individual was an imposter (of which breed there are all too many); and I have met one man who, to judge by his conversation and his conduct, might have been one of them, but as he did not admit it, and I have no other means of proving who or what he was, I can not lay claim to having seen one.

Nevertheless, I am convinced they exist. Rumor never dies concerning them. About half of the population of the world believes implicitly in their existence, and much nonsense is talked and written concerning them. But they are supposed to be men who, having gained in past lives, through experience, a fuller knowledge of what life means than has yet been attained by the rest of us, are born into the world on a somewhat higher plane of consciousness than we are. Their duty and delight is said to be to watch over the world and, from time to time, as opportunity offers, to release a little of their wisdom

for humanity's benefit—but not too much of it at a time, because men have a way of using knowledge for their own destruction (as the Lama in my story points out frequently).

They keep themselves to themselves, hardly ever revealing their identity and almost never letting their whereabouts be known, because humanity (that is to say, the rest of us) is much too prone either to deify or to murder whoever appears to possess unusual powers; and it is said that the natural powers of a Mahatma, due entirely to his higher spiritual development, are such as would appear quite unnatural and even superhuman to the average man in the street. There are some who says Jesus of Nazareth was a Mahatma; they offer what they say is proof.

I HAVE read everything I can find on the subject of the Mahatmas, both for and against, and have found nothing that even vaguely resembles proof that they do not exist; whereas there is a very great deal of testimony that they do exist, at the present time somewhere in Tibet or that neighborhood. Practically all the statements (they are hardly to be dignified by the name of arguments) that there are no such persons emanate from two sources: (1) the Christian missionaries and (2) the sort of so-called natural scientist who believes that Jenner was inspired, and who helps to prosecute and vilify whoever dares to disagree with him or stray outside the fold of scientific orthodoxy.

As for the latter, since their theories change with every passing year, they need not be taken too seriously, and certainly not at their word. Since I was a boy there seems to have been hardly one so-called scientific fact that has not been reversed and re-reversed two or three times; and while all of us respect the bold adventurer into unexplored realms of nature, as well as the careful analyst of ascertained facts, there are probably few of us left who waste much sympathy on the "scientific" pundits who try to limit knowledge and discovery within the compass of their own peculiarly narrow vision. There are plenty of them left, but they are fortunately losing influence, and the word of a dry-as-dust biologist to the effect that Mahatmas do or do not exist hardly adds confusion nowadays to the already existing noise of rival theories.

THE Christian missionaries naturally deny the Mahatmas. The two teachings are incompatible, and whichever shall stand, the other must crumble. It is necessary to dwell on this point for a moment, because, as I have said, it is from Christian missionary sources that a great part of the "anti-Mahatma" propaganda emanates. One should observe in passing, that the Christian missionaries, in all lands, at all times, have always done their utmost to destroy the reputation and, if possible, the records of whatever cult preceded them.

PERHAPS one reason the Mahatmas are assailed is that they and their chelas teach, or are said to teach, that it is wicked to accept money in return for spiritual services. No teacher of the true eastern esoteric doctrine would demean himself, or stultify himself, by accepting a cent or a favor of any kind from any one whom he saw fit to help or to teach. Like St. Paul of Tarsus, if he needed money he would go to work for it, at whatever trade he knew. The Lama in my story does not claim to be a Mahatma (no true Mahatma would ever claim to be one), but it will be noticed that he does not invite the public to contribute money for his expenses.

All signs point to an ancient Mother-religion. The Mahatmas are declared, by those who say they know, to be the men who preserve that ancient Mother-religion (they call it the Ancient Wisdom) and whose duty is to keep it in the world until such time as it can safely be brought to light again. It is said to include all science, and in fact all knowledge that the human mind is capable of understanding.

THERE is another side to it. An awful lot of nonsense has been written and told about Mahatmas, Swamis, Masters and Gurus, and the source of it is chiefly those East Indians who come to England and America to pocket the dollars of gullible ignoramuses, chiefly by means of fake miracles and mistranslations from the Vedas. They are easy to detect, because they accept money for their teaching, which establishes them at once as frauds; they usually end by falling into difficulties with the police, due to free-love tendencies and the flattery of over-fed and under-witted women. And they provide a fine income for "professors" and "investigators" who "expose" them and duplicate their pretended miracles at so much per exposure—money in advance.

IT IS impossible within the limits of one edition of a magazine to refer to a hundredth part of the information on which I have based this story, but I will be very glad to answer questions and to give such references as will enable those who are interested to follow up the subject for themselves. Personally, I have found it fascinating; and I have been careful throughout the story to make no statement as to which I have not definite confirmation at least as convincing to me as any argument that can be brought against it.

For the rest, there are several books that deal with Indian drama, but I have found none that gives any account whatever of the actor's life in India. *Maitraya* is an entirely fictitious character; but I have met actors here and there whose brief acquaintance helped me to imagine this one.

One or two friends, who have read the manuscript, have criticized the dog *Diana*, as being altogether too wise for a dog, and too well trained. But my friend Larry Trimble, who trained Strongheart, and who certainly knows as much about dogs as any man in the United States, assures me she is not overdrawn; and I myself have seen Larry Trimble do with dogs and wolves things that are much more wonderful than any that *Ommony* does with *Diana* in the story.

OMMONY is simply a tired Englishman, who has spent his life toiling in India, for India, without any self-consideration, and who has awakened after twenty years to a realization that the whole theory of empire is wrong. (There are plenty like him.) He does not know what to do, or what to think. He only knows that he has meant well and has dealt honestly according to his lights with all who have been subject to him. It bewilders him, almost to stupidity and speechlessness, to discover that all that work was done, apparently, in vain. When

the Lama points out it was not in vain, and explains why, he feels like a new boy in a new school —rather afraid, self-conscious and self-critical.

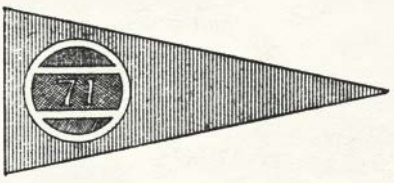
The Lama must speak for himself. It will be seen he is an individualist, who does not believe that much can be gained by politics. According to his theory, the only real problem in any man's life, in any circumstances, is: what do I intend to do about it? Without pretending to say whether he is right or wrong, I have tried to give his viewpoint.

I have tried to show how he believes in evolution —of the soul quite as much as the body, and both simultaneously; how reincarnation forms a part, as it were the mechanism, of that solution of the problem of life; and how he is convinced that whatever we do in this life, whether good, bad or indifferent, will set up chains of consequences with which we shall have to deal in lives to come—so that even the assassin and the traitor punishes himself, and the hero in secret rewards himself—until we all come, in the infinitely distant future, to a state of perfect spiritual wisdom and earned happiness, which, having earned, we shall enjoy. All which is beautiful, if true; encouraging and better, for example, than the creaky-rusty doctrine of eternal punishment and birth in sin.

However, each man to his own opinion; it seems likely we shall all know something of the real truth later on—unless one of these "anti-Mahatma" scientists should discover a new tortoise-gland that shall enable those of us who choose to live in a state of nervous ignorance in this very illogical world forever! (Maybe he will get a law passed to compel us all to submit to the operation; and *then* where will the Mahatmas be?)—TALBOT MUNDY.

OUR Camp-Fire pennants are now ready. The accompanying cut shows the design. Two feet long by nine inches at the base. The design itself reproduces the colors of our Camp-Fire button, the body of the pennant being dark blue. They are of rather better grade than the average pennant, the cost to us being 27½ cents each. Since a quarter is a convenient coin, we're making 25 cents the price to you. Though we're not specially good at mathematics here in the office, we've figured out that at this rate the financial profits to the magazine are what you might call sort of slight, but then we didn't start these pennants with any idea of making money on them. The main purpose is merely to add a bit more to the feeling of fellowship among all of us of Camp-Fire. As to profits, we of course profit more or less in publicity by having Camp-Fire's pennant flying from boats and autos and on expeditions, but if publicity were our main aim we'd certainly have had "Adventure" or "Camp-Fire" printed out on the pennants. Instead, there is only what you might call Camp-Fire's "secret" emblem.

You'll remember that when we chose the design for our button we very carefully avoided making it anything like an advertisement. What we wanted was something



that would make known a Camp-Fire comrade to any others he might meet on the trail or in the cities and yet not compel him to go around as a living advertisement for anything. So we took the word "Camp-Fire," assigned numbers to the alphabet—3 for *c*, 1 for *a*, 13 for *m*, etc.—and added up the numerical sum of the letters of the word "Camp-Fire," getting 71 as our working brand. That did the work. Those whom we wanted to know the meaning of the emblem would do so. It didn't matter whether the outsiders knew or not. In fact, maybe a bit better if they didn't, for their ignorance would at once label them as not belonging.

I think this pennant of ours is going to find its way into many far corners of the earth. If you carry it into one of them, or upon any interesting expedition, drop us a line. Camp-Fire will want to know about its pennant's tale of adventure and accomplishment.

A year from now, five years from now, what will be its story? Who will carry it farthest? Who through most dangers and hardships? Who to the strangest or most inaccessible places? How much of the world's map will be criss-crossed with its trail? Good luck go with it!

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the second and third issues of each month. Full list in second issue of each month.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons, etc., runs in the last issue of each month.

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.**
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1. The Sea Part 1 American Waters
BERIAH BROWN, 1624 Biegelow 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. The Sea Part 3 Statistics of American Shipping
HARRY E. RIESEBERG, Apartment 347-A, Kew Gardens, Washington, D. C. Historical records, tonnages, names and former names, dimensions, services, power, class, rig, builders, present and past ownerships, signals, etc., of all vessels of the American Merchant Marine and Government vessels in existence over five gross tons in the United States, Panama and the Philippines, and the furnishing of information and records of vessels under American registry as far back as 1760.

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J. F. EDWARDS, David Lane, East Hampton, N. Y. Travel, history, geography, politics, races, languages, customs, commerce, outdoor life, general information.

27. Asia Minor
(Editor to be appoi ted.)

28. Bulgaria, Roumania
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

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LIEUT. WILLIAM JENNA, Plattsburg Barracks, New York. History, politics, customs, geography, language, travel, outdoor life.

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ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

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FRED. F. FLEISCHER, care *Adventure*. History, politics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, outdoor life.

33. Great Britain
THOMAS BOWEN PARTINGTON, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., W. C. 2, London, England. General information.

34. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

35. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil
WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 423 Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

36. South America Part 3 Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay
WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Geography, travel, agriculture, cattle, timber, inhabitants, camping and exploration, general information. Questions regarding employment not answered.

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CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

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J. W. WHITAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austi , Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

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S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. 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.*)

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THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, Larkspur,, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

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VICTOR SHAW, Ketchikan, Alaska. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

49. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

50. Western U. S. Part 2 New Mexico
H. F. ROBINSON, 200-202 Korber Block, Albuquerque, N. M. Agriculture, automobile routes, Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance; oil-fields; hunting, fishing, camping; history, early and modern.

51. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.
FRANK MIDDLETON, 509 Frémont St., Laramie, Wyo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

52. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains
CHESTER C. DAVIS, Helena, Mont. Agriculture, mining,

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northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

53. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country

R. T. Newman, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, history and inhabitants.

54. 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.

55. 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.

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JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. 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.

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58. 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.*)

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RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif. 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.

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HOWARD A. SHANNON, care of *Adventure*. 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.

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62. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Southern Appalachians

WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

63. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.

HAPSBURG LIEBE, Box 432, Orlando, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

64. Eastern U. S. Part 6 Maine

DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

A.—Radio

DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

VICTOR SHAW, Ketchikan, Alaska. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

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, voyageur, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolver, 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.)

1.—**All Shotguns**, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*.

2.—**All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers**, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—**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.

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Forestry in the United States

ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass. Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild-animal life in the Forests.

G.—Tropical Forestry

WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

H.—Aviation

LIEUT.-COL. W. G. SCHAUFFLER, JR., 2940 Newark St., N. W., Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

I.—Army Matters, United States and Foreign

FRED. F. FLEISCHER care of *Adventure*. *United States:* Military history, military policy. National Defense Act of 1920. Regulatons and matters in general for organized reserves. Army and uniform regulations, infantry drill regulations, field service regulations. Tables of organization. Citizens' military training camps. *Foreign:* Strength and distribution of foreign armies before the war. Uniforms. Strength of foreign armies up to date. History of armies of countries covered by Mr. Fleischer in general "Ask Adventure" section. *General:* Tactical questions on the late war. Detailed information on all operations during the late war from the viewpoint of the German high command. Questions regarding enlisted personnel and officers, except such as are published in Officers' Directory, can not be answered.

J.—American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal

ARTHUR WOODWARD, 217 W. 125th St., New York. Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.

K.—First Aid on the Trail

CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb. Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake-bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Meeting all health hazards of the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.

L.—Health-Building Outdoors

CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb. How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel. Tropical hygiene. General health-building, safe exercise, right food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.

M.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write **J. Cox**, care *Adventure*.

For general information on **U. S. and its possessions**, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog

of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries**, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

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 for general information on **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.

National Rifle Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver Ass'n.** W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National Parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Washington, D. C.

The Old Spanish Trail

AMERICA'S first transcontinental route —four hundred years old:

Question:—"I would appreciate it very much if you would give me the following information relative to the Old Spanish Trail: Its history, approximate length, geographical features and any other information available. I have heard many people give the above, but so far none of them agree in anything and I would like very much to get authentic information on it."—H. S. DODD, Captain, Camp Marfa, Tex.

Answer, by Mr. Whiteaker:—Excuse this delay in answering your letter, for I have just recently returned from a trip over the western part of Texas, Mexico and New Mexico and have not entirely caught up with my correspondence. Will try to give you all the information that you asked for and perhaps more than you expect. I traveled about 618 miles on the Old Spanish Trail, and in places it certainly is a trail. Out of the 2,900 miles of the trail, about one-third or 950 miles is in Texas. I made a log of the route from San Antonio to El Paso and will give it to you. At the time we passed over some of the worst roads the material and men were on the ground, so it may be that the roads are in a better shape now than then.

For several years the transcontinental highway termed the Old Spanish Trail has been fostered, routed and intelligently pushed by men all along its course. Today it stands recognized as one of the most important and logical highway projects in the country, remarkable in its old history and important as a tourist, military and commercial factor of the national life.

Big things are actually moving respecting its development.

California has already voted the money to pave to the Arizona line. The live and fine cooperation of Tucson, Phœnix and other districts in Arizona assures good work there. Texas is voting on a $75,000,000 constitutional amendment, and her people are alive to the importance of this highway. Numerous Texas counties have already voted road bonds. New Mexico has 40 miles surfaced. In Louisiana many miles of the highway are surfaced with brick or concrete, and the rest of the work is proceeding splendidly. There is considerable Federal aid available for the construction of the Old Spanish Trail through Mississippi, about a half-million dollars being available. Alabama and Florida are preparing for their part of the work.

The ancient history and the old relics along the highway are fascinating in the span of time covered and in their revelations of those earliest days on the American continent. The trail from end to end speaks of the Spanish adventurers and Spanish conquests, Spanish Government and the devoted Franciscan fathers and the missions.

Ponce de Leon sought the fabled Fountain in Florida in 1513. Ponce de Leon was the first European so far as is known to disembark on the mainland of the United States.

De Soto landed at Tampa Bay in 1539 and followed along the Gulf of Mexico to the Mississippi River and beyond. He returned and was buried in its waters.

Menendez founded St. Augustine in 1565—the oldest city in the United States. Even earlier than De Soto, De Narvaez in 1522 traversed the country from the Rio Grande to Mobile, anciently Mauvila.

While De Soto with his remarkable expedition was breaking his trail through the eastern forests Coronado in 1540 was pushing westward up the Rio Grande into the heart of New Mexico and Arizona country, searching for the seven cities of Cibola, supposed to be teeming with Indians and wealth. He found the Pueblo (cliff-dwelling or town) Indians with their ancient civilization.

Then followed through the decades the ancient settlements in central New Mexico, among them Santa Fé, the second oldest city in the United States. A census of Santa Fé for 1605 is in existence and shows a population of 1,708.

Ysleta, on the Rio Grande below Santa Fé, was an important center and was the seat of the Franciscan missions of Texas and New Mexico Territory. After the Indian raids the mission moved to and settled the younger Ysleta, twelve miles east of El Paso. This is still a landmark on the Old Spanish Trail and claims 239 years of age. Opposite El Paso, at Juarez in Mexico, is another old mission whose bells came from Spain three centuries ago.

San Antonio was settled by De Leon in 1689; and the Alamo, the shrine of Americans, the Thermopylæ of Texas, was a mission planted at San Antonio about 1716. Then San Antonio became the center for the missions, for Alarcon transferred his government from Ysleta, and the old Spanish centers of activities went with him.

In the building of the San José Mission in 1718 the King of Spain sent his artist to supervise the fine carvings—they were sixty years building the mission. Thus Texas, New Mexico and Arizona were christened in the Spanish cradle, and four centuries is the span of history. The continent, too, is spanned by Spanish exploration, settlement and sentiment.

About 1,700 French and Spanish missionaries were active in all the Gulf country. New Orleans, Biloxi, Mobile and Pensacola all bear tribute to their ancient and devoted efforts.

New Mexico and Arizona were visited early by these fearless workers, and Indians were gathered to their fold in widely scattered sections. Earlier than San Antonio are the missionary works in Arizona, for Spanish effort never ceased after

Coronado's expedition of 1540. The mission of San Xavier del Bac, near Tucson, founded in 1692, is said to be more beautiful and interesting than any other in the country. Near by and older even than San Xavier is the picturesque ruin of San José de Tumacacori.

Across the continent at the Pacific end of the trail those heroic apostles of Christ had early pushed their way up through the fastness of western Mexico and founded those missions in southern California; and the continent stood linked ocean to ocean in a Spanish atmosphere as romantic and interesting as anything in the wide world. There are twenty-one missions in California built forty miles or one day's journey on horseback apart, connected by a well-defined road known as el Camino Real (the Royal or King's Highway) now a part of the Old Spanish Trail. The missions were built by Indian labor under direction of the Franciscan fathers.

It is the one trail in the United States tied ocean to ocean that consistently justifies its name—the Old Spanish Trail. Oldest in history, spanning a continent, still retaining the relics of its past ages, it is a trail worthy of the sentiment and devotion of the people and one that will attract tourists as no other trail can.

In California, Texas or Florida or the lands between, the old missions are sacred relics of an age of religious heroism almost impossible of belief.

San Antonio is the center of the trail. S. A. was also a center of Spanish adventures and the old Spanish civilization, of Spanish conquests and Spanish missions. The word of the Spaniard and the prayer of the priests penetrated the wildest lands.

While these fathers were building their missions in the southlands, in New England John Eliot, "the Apostle to the Indians," was carrying his religion to the tribes there. Eliot is a notable character in New England history; but Eliot's praying towns of stockades and wigwams are but memories now, and interesting contrasts to the old missions still standing scattered along the Old Spanish Trail. It is an interesting reflection that of all the missionary efforts among the Indians, the Franciscan fathers, John Eliot in New England, Marcus Whitman in the Northwest, Samson Occum—the Mohegan Indian of Connecticut with Dartmouth College to his credit—Stephen Riggs, forty years with the Sioux, and others, only the Spanish old missions survive as physical reminders of the work, and they were the first missionary works of all.

In east Texas, south Texas, central Texas, then in far-west Texas there were missions and early Spanish settlements. So the Old Trail in Texas in earliest days was marked by devoted feet. Through the days of the buffalo and Apache and Comanche, of massacre, of cow-puncher, ranger, rancher, of Spanish, Mexican and American rule, the trail was marked and scored and then crowned with a heritage of history and romance for the luxurious traveler of today.

Through Louisiana, both Spanish and French flavor are found—Louisiana, the land of legend and love, of grace and glory. Through Mississippi, Alabama, on to Jacksonville, the end of the trail nominally. But the real end is a step southward to St. Augustine, the city of a tinge so Spanish that time can never change it.

No highway in the country has the strategic importance of the Old Spanish Trail. San Diego is a naval and military headquarters on the Pacific. San Antonio is the greatest military center in the United States and growing greater because it is the gateway to Mexico and central for either Pacific or Gulf movements or the Mexican border-land. New Orleans is a southern military headquarters, and Pensacola is the great naval base of the South.

From ocean to ocean the Old Spanish Trail leads through never ending changes of scene, through old civilizations and new, into prehistoric times and out into the country so new the imagination sweeps vainly into future reckonings, into seething commercial struggle and then into quiet of pastoral scenes, into the murk of industry, then out into pictures tinted by legend, history, song and romance.

The full statement of the sections in this department as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

West Coast of Hudson Bay

LAND in which only oil-burning travelers can get by in the Winter:

Question:—"The writer would appreciate very much any information you can give him regarding the west coast of Hudson Bay from Port Nelson to Chesterfield Inlet. Am I right in supposing that this coast is very flat, that the rivers have very few rapids near the coast and that there is plenty of game, especially above Fort Churchill—bear, caribou, etc.?"—C. R. RILEY, Bristol, Conn.

Answer, by Mr. Hague:—From Port Nelson to Churchill and up to Chesterfield the country is flat and barren, with no timber once you enter the barren lands. Travelers coming in overland from Chesterfield Inlet during the Winter have to carry oil for burning purposes as there is no fuel.

There are many rapids on the Hayes, Nelson, Churchill Rivers, etc., and they are really big streams of water. While the falls are not great the water is swift and treacherous, and it takes expert canoemen who know the country to navigate it. Even then numerous portages are necessary. Of course there are not as many rapids near the mouths of the rivers.

Caribou abound on the barren lands, and there are a good many bears and numerous white foxes; but the country is a difficult and expensive one to get into.

A good trip is to leave in the Spring from Selkirk, near Winnipeg, by steamboat, which plies up the Red River to Lake Winnipeg; thence to the head of Lake Winnipeg and on up the Nelson and Hayes Rivers by canoe to York Factory. It is necessary to secure Indian guides at Norway House, a Hudson's Bay post on Playgreen Lake, an extension of Lake Winnipeg. The best course is to communicate with the Hudson's Bay Commissioner, Winnipeg, and arrange for a letter of credit to enable you to visit and secure supplies at the posts *en route*. He could also give you particulars regarding approximate date you could secure passage on the company steamer which visits the posts on Hudson Bay. There is excellent fishing in many of the lakes and

rivers; by this I mean trolling and not fly-fishing. Trout and pickerel assume a great size.

Another route to the bay is through The Pas, which has a tri-weekly train service with Winnipeg. Twice a month a train leaves The Pas and proceeds 214 miles up the uncompleted Hudson Bay Railway. From that point you could secure guides who would take you right through to the bay. You could also try some fly-fishing at Kettle Rapids *en route*, the only place to my knowledge where speckled trout are found north of the Great Divide. As a matter of fact I was dubious as to their existence there until I went along and saw for myself.

Should you decide to make this trip the best time of the year to start from Winnipeg is about the middle of May, and then you can have a little time before the mosquitoes and flies commence to make life unbearable in the woods. If you decide to pass through The Pas look me up, and if I am not in town visit Inspector Gates of the Provincial Police, who will give you any information and advice you may require. At York Factory give my regards to Mr. Harding, Hudson Bay Factor.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

Fall Hunting in the Ozarks

CONSULT the Memphis oracle:

Question:—"The writer together with a friend anticipates a two weeks' hunting trip next Fall for ducks, geese, quail, turkey and other game in Arkansas. Have in mind going to Big Lake or St. Francis Lake.

How is hunting in this vicinity? If not very good please suggest another place in Arkansas or Missouri where we could find same. What equipment would be necessary to make the trip? Also would appreciate any suggestion you can make."—C. WEBBS, Aurora, Ind.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—The vicinity of Big Lake and most places away from towns on the St. Francis River in Arkansas, are good for ducks, quail and turkeys, though the best goose-shooting is on the Mississippi close to Memphis.

Now when you get ready for this trip, drop a line to my friend Nash Buckingham, of Buckingham-Ensley-Carrigan Co., Memphis, Tenn. He keeps in touch all the time with all that country, in fact has a daily bulletin of same for patrons of his sporting-goods store, and you can rely on everything he tells you as a Gospel fact about the hunting, fishing, etc.

If you don't want to carry equipment along you can get it all at Memphis. You will need a .12 gun, tent and cooking-outfit in proportion to the size of party that goes with you.

If I can be of further service in the matter, will be glad to answer promptly.

A Year in Japan

HE WANTS to be a temple-dweller:

Question:—"I am thinking—we are thinking—of spending a year in Japan. It is long since I was there as any sort of a tourist, and then I was sort of tied up to officialdom. The very last time I was marking time in Tokyo with the rest of the war writers. So I don't know the details I want of modern conditions.

I'd like to get around Matsuyama—save for the hot season. Do you know if it is possible to get one of the old unused temples that Archie Bell writes of as being for rent? And what would be the approximate cost of such a place or a house in a large garden?

What I would prefer is some place where the tourist trek is very light—if there is such a place—out in the country. So that Matsuyama might prove quite unavailable.

How about cost of servants these days and food such as an American would need to buy to supplement general Japanese fare—meat, chickens, vegetables? Is such food generally available? I presume so in the swift progression of Japan; but how does cost of servants and food compare with New York?

You see, I don't want to live at hotels—save as we might take a brief trip to Lake Hakone or some such place—but we want to keep house—to live simply without any formal entertaining, but to live comfortably.

Can you tell me anything about the quarantine laws for the entrance of dogs or tell me where to find out?

Is the tourist trade heavy at Matsuyama, or can you name any other places off the beaten track where we can blend the Japanese mode with our own?"— —— ——, Patterson, N. Y.

Answer, by Mrs. Knudson:—You make me envious by talking of a year in Japan!

Matsuyama—now almost forgotten but at one time the world-known Russo-Japanese war camp, and the scene of Mrs. Scidmore's yet interesting volume of "As the Hague Ordains!" How quickly things pass from the public mind!

I've never landed there, but know the section and have seen the town and the famous old castle from the water. It's undeniably beautiful about there, as it is everywhere in Japan for that matter, and I believe it has good steamer connection with Kobe. I do not believe the Island of Shikoku—upon which Matsuyama is situated—is visited much by European tourists, though the hot sulfur springs near Matsuyama are resorted to by natives. The terrible September disaster in the north may send Europeans more into these southern resorts.

There are numerous attractive places on the Inland Sea, though I believe you might find some location on the Pacific to be more comfortably cool the year round. I think you may find it desirable to poke around a bit before settling down.

Why not investigate also the possibilities of Matsushima—"one of the 'Scenic Trio' of Japan"—with its wondrous view of the bay and pine-clad islands? There is a small Matsuyama a few miles north of "shima," but unless conditions have changed greatly in recent years I do not know that you could live comfortably there. There may be other Matsuyamas in the empire, since the name means "Pine Mountain" and pines are numerous.

Matsushima is too far north to attract any rabble of tourists. Nikko has become a refuge for many Europeans who escaped the disaster in Yokohama and Tokyo; this fact may have changed conditions somewhat in this locality.

Kamakura is doubtless out of the running since it was affected by the earthquake. I hope the old market with its sign of "Beef, lamb and hen meat" hasn't gone.

There are Suma and Maiko on Osaka Bay, west of Kobe, far enough to escape any influx of tourists, yet near enough to draw upon Kobe for supplies. The environs of Kobe itself offer some good living-chances.

Nikko and Lake Chuzenji are possibilities. There are places in the Hakone district, also at small shore towns bordering the plain at the foot of Fuji-san. I've noticed several beautiful spots in this last-named section, but can not recall names of towns now.

Karuizawa, in the mountains northwest of Tokyo, always has been a popular Summer resort for American residents of Tokyo and Yokohama and comfortable in every way. There's a general exodus for it in early Spring and many stay very late. I fancy it might be habitable and delightful the year round. It practically escaped the earthquake effects. The American residents in Japan may declare that some of the smaller places are impossible; but if you are on track of the unusual, investigation won't harm and may turn up just what you want.

My advice—if you have not friends in Japan now—would be to put up in Kobe at some inexpensive hotel, like the Pleasanton or the Tor, for a time. Then investigate through the hotel management, friends and acquaintances, the Japan Tourist Bureau, Thomas Cook & Son, and watch the daily papers for advertisements of houses to rent in various parts of the empire. It has been the custom for Europeans going home on leave for six months or a year to rent out their houses all furnished and with servants.

Such a house and garden, say for a family of two or four, equipped with a cook and house-boy, should be procured for about 150-200 yen per month—more or less in proportion to size, surroundings, location, etc. I understand that 400 yen per month will easily cover the entire cost for a family of three or four living modestly. This all means in European quarters.

Unfurnished houses used to be obtainable at much less expense. It may be possible to get a native house for around 30 yen per month. Furnishing can be done quickly and inexpensively at the auction-sales always going on in the ports—for these watch the daily papers. People going home to Europe or America put their furniture up for sale.

Inquiry amongst acquaintances will usually bring to light good servants. A cook's wages may be 20-30 yen, and a boy's 15-30 yen per month. These figures may be run up or crowded down according to style of living. I've read recently of a bachelor who got a native ten-room house in an "ample garden" for 20 yen per month.

Food I can't tell much about. The native foods are fairly inexpensive and are good mixers in a diet, all but milk—that's generally pretty poor. It's in process of improvement by the Government, however. H. C. L. struck Japan and hasn't departed yet.

The great disaster has knocked living conditions, in a sense, "galley west." Many Europeans and Americans are making their headquarters at Nagoya and Kobe now, the latter place taking over Yokohama's business and burdens for the time being. Many who lost their possessions are being sent back to America or to Europe by various relief associations. It is really a poor time to visit Japan.

However, personally I should reckon the cost of living there in good style with servants at about what it might cost in any city in the States without servants.

About the temples I can't say anything, for I know nothing of them. I like Archie Bell's books, and no doubt he's correct about this temple-renting. If the priests would sell the temple furnishings—and I've purchased some myself—I see no reason why they should hesitate to rent the temples. In old feudal days the temples were the foreign travelers' homes, I believe, so the priests were the "inn-keepers."

I am under the impression that the dog quarantine is not strict. A friend of mine took one in the last time I was over, and I don't recall any difficulty.

This year's Year Book lists no such quarantine, though it does list some agricultural animals as under quarantine. It also shows an alarming increase of dog cholera in Japan. The dog I mention contracted cholera there and my friend had to leave him in the dog hospital in Tokyo—the man himself had a business engagement in Budapest. I never heard how the dog came out. The steamship company with which you contemplate sailing will give you the correct information on dog entry.

The Japan Tourist Bureau has an office at 165 Broadway, N. Y. C., and may be able to give you more information on this living business, only you'll have to take it with grains of salt. The native son is apt to be optimistic in such matters, though at times remarkably helpful.

If you should find a nice, picturesque temple for rent over there, I'd really like to know about that. Seems to me it'd be rather of an experience to live in a nice old, god-haunted temple—bells a-ringin' at midnight—incense-perfumed air blowin' from nowhere—and— Etcetera, etcetera. It might be a dream of Heaven without half trying. If you run across them in shoals I'd be inclined to try it myself.

When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.

The Inca Country

WHERE the foot-hills—foot-hills, mind you—are twelve thousand feet high:

Question:—"Having never before availed myself of the 'A. A.' service I thought I would pick on you, first attempt.

Have always been more or less interested in the Lake Titicaca region of Peru, supposedly the site of most of the old Inca activities.

I was wondering what conditions were like down there at date. Such as population, kind of people, climate, disease and attitude of populace toward whites. Also living conditions in the Titicaca region (near lake).

What ground thereabouts is as yet open to the adventurer, and what chance would one have with the gold of the ancient Inca city?

To your knowledge, is it true that there are islands in the lake that sometimes disappear beneath the

surface due to volcanic action or others? I suppose this letter sounds rather foolish, but then, that's what we go to you fellows for, to be "shown the light," as it were.

I have read snatches of Prescott's Peru and Incan history but am not familiar with present-day situations. Please quote any recent books you may know of. Can you tell me what chance two or three young fellows would stand of "getting by" in that region?

Turning from my subject: I think you 'A. A.' editors are doing great things for inquiring, unfamiliar persons like myself, and I am certain that I, for one, appreciate it greatly.

Some time ago I opened a Camp-Fire station at my publishing-office, and since then I have become greatly absorbed in the work of *Adventure* and its affiliations. If at any time you feel I can be of service, do not hesitate to ask. And—thank you!

Again, best wishes for you and all the devotees of Camp-Fire.

Large regards."—JAMES FORT FORSYTH, North Muskegon, Mich.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—Thanks for the compliments! Also excuse my delay in answering your letter. Just got down to it. The boys had me snowed under for a time.

That country you are asking about—the Titicaca country—is not to be compared to anything else in the whole world. Here is a very large lake with steamers running on it some twelve thousand feet above sea-level. This may sound high, and it is high compared with our mountain-tops here; but for S. A. that is just medium high, and they still have a few peaks that are another ten and eleven thousand feet higher than this lake, which lies in a high plateau.

The steamer runs from the terminus of one railroad over to the terminus of another at the other side. Besides this steamer there are many boats of native make, made of bundles of grass bound together—or is it reeds?—and sailed with small sails of same grass—darned if I don't think they call them rushes. There is any number of them on the lake manned with swarthy Indians, stolid and silent as they were in the days of the Incas.

They build their stone houses and cover them with hay just as they did thousands of years ago.

Here and there along the bleak stretches of the plateau and up the mountain-sides are herds of llamas and alpacas, a few sheep—bleak, barren, icy cold—people and scenery matching—people whose very language betokens misery, whose songs are plaintive, whose manner is stolid to surliness—plateau that is as bleak as the graven faces of the stark idols, mountains gray and buttressed with gaunt spurs and ridges with the deep blue-black sky far beyond. She's some —— of a place and will take the guts out of a man for a while when he first lands. There is little danger; merely a repelling of country and people alike.

I do not know if any of the islands in the lake have disappeared recently. There are rumors that some have sunk during volcanic disturbances in the past. This is likely.

There are mining companies in Bolivia in several places where white men might get jobs. I am attaching a list. Get the booklets I have checked. Also see the sketches in the Encyclopedia Britannica under heading Peru and Bolivia. These are good. Best wishes.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose* full *return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

"ASK ADVENTURE" editors are appointed with extreme care. If you can meet our exacting requirements and qualify as an expert on some topic or territory not now covered, we shall be glad to talk matters over with you. Address F. K. NOYES, *Adventure*, New York.

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.

HOSTE HICKMAN, Kloete, Langenfeld, Albertus Pretorius, Franz van Zyl, Fritz Du Quesne or any others that were in the Transvaal war in 1900, please write.—Address H. L. BELL, 372 Oliver St., San Pedro, Calif.

LARRETT, HENRY. Please write.—Address E. N. TRIPP, 1912 Forest Ave., W., Detroit, Mich.

BROWN, HENRY W. Left home during the year 1915. Last heard of in first Field Artillery, Battery C., Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Your mother is anxious to hear from you.—Address MRS. KATIE BROWN, Box 294, Pricedale, Pa.

EWART. Dad is going fast; will not last long. Write me.—Address DAVE, care of *Adventure*.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

WOJEIK, CATHERINE SCHILLING, MRS. Age twenty-seven. Wife of John Wojeik. Born in Albany, N. Y. Last heard of in East Windsor Hill, Springfield, N. Y. Sept. 12, 1923. Blond hair, fair complexion, weight one hundred and twenty-five pounds, four feet ten inches tall. Any information will be appreciated.—Address JOHN WOJEIK, care of *Adventure*.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

HOFFMAN WILLIAM. Five feet ten inches, weight about two hundred pounds. Age sixty years. Last heard of in 1904. Worked on railroads in Texas, Oklahoma and Indian Territory a number of years. Any information will be appreciated.—Address R. C. HOFFMAN, 36 Annie St., San Francisco, Calif.

A COMPLETE list of unclaimed mail will be published in December 30th and June 30th issues of Adventure.

STRINGFELLOW, Harry and Jesse and any of the younger set who lived in Eddy, New Mexico from 1890 to 1894. Please write, giving address.—Address CHAS. FREEMAN, Box 113, Nyssa, Oregon.

THE following have been inquired for in either the August 30 or September 20, 1924, issues of Adventure. They can get the name and address of inquirer from this magazine.

BEAMES, Joe; Davis, Lillian; Eams, Ralph; Edmund, K. B.; Dickens, Allan; Gaffney, J. E.; Gibbs, William H.; Hankey, Edward A.; Howell, James Edgar; Hubbard, William Augustus; Knight, John; McDonald, James; McKelberg, A. J.; MacDonald, Fred B. (Bozo); Matthew, Harry Robbins; Moore, Anna; Murphy, George; Newton, Lucy Caroline, Miss, and father; Phillips, Fred Dillard; Ryan, James A.; Semple, James Lithow; Sharpe, Cecil; Smits, Fred H.; Tereume, Auguste; Waddell, William or James.

MISCELLANEOUS—Ike; Will M. L. who has sole copy of poem commencing "Music and Song and the Rhythmic Dance" write N. D.; Would be glad to hear from any or all of the boys who soldiered with me in Co. K. U. S. Infantry during war.

WAIT !

—*before you eat another mouthful!*

Do you know all about your digestive tract? Are you eating the right amount of fruits, vegetables, meat, water, etc.? What about sweets—what happens when you eat too many? What foods leave the stomach quickly; what foods stay? When you know and observe these facts you will enjoy better health than you have ever known! Where will you get this information? In

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