MARCH
3rd
1921
25c

PUBLISHED
TWICE A MONTH

Adventure

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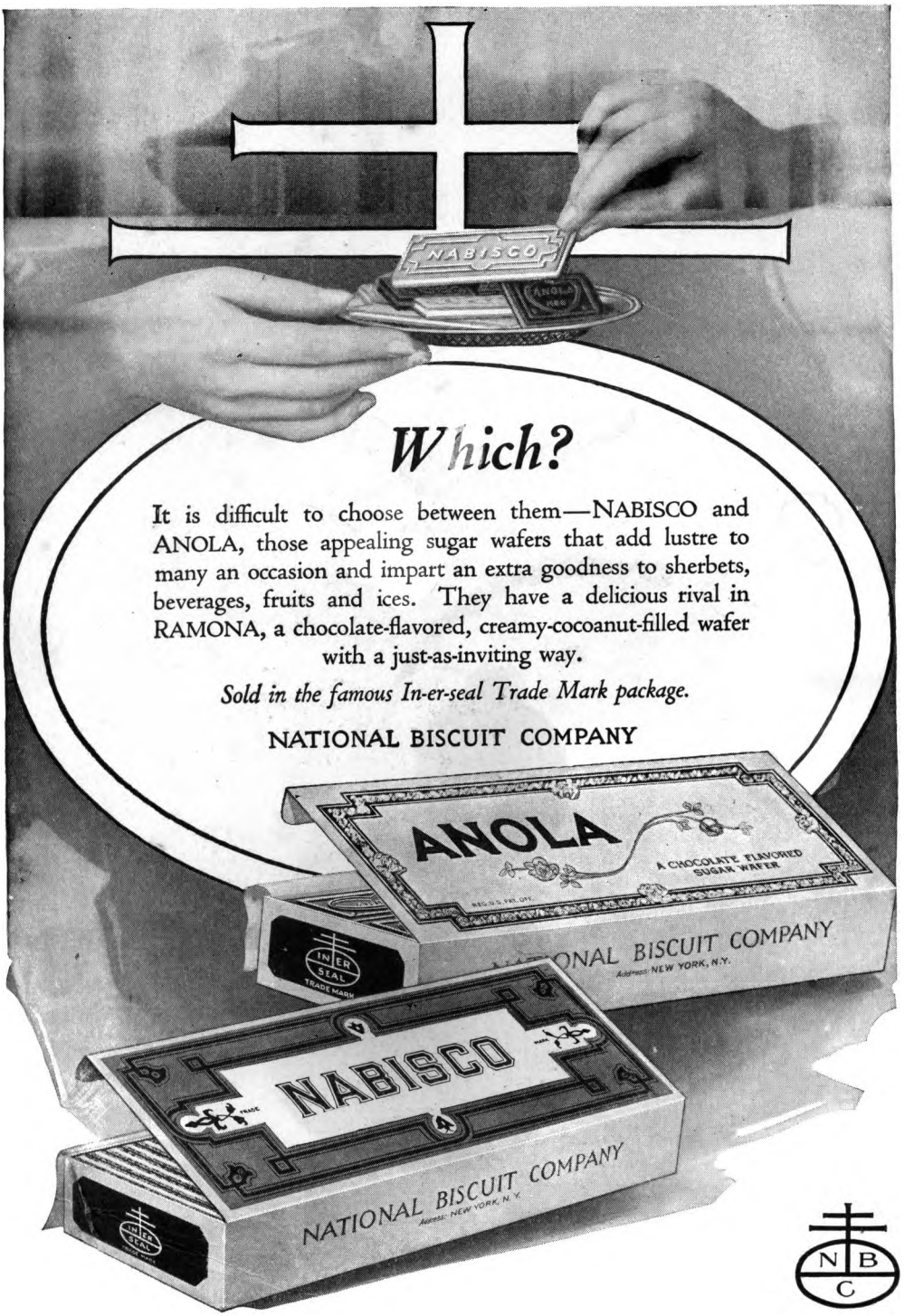
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ADVENTURE
March 3d, 1921

Published twice a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York City. Yearly subscription $4.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 28
Number 5

Five Days to Prove I Can Raise Your Pay

I've done it for thousands of others. I can doubtless do it for you. If I can't, then it won't cost you a cent

I MEAN just what I say. There's no trick or catch about it. Give me five days and I'll prove that I can get your pay raised for you. I'll do it on a "show you" basis. You get the proof before you pay me a cent.

You've probably heard of me. My name is Pelton. Lots of people call me "The Man Who Makes Men Rich." I don't deny it. I've done it for thousands of people—lifted them up from poverty to riches. There's no sound reason why I cannot do it for you. So let's try.

Now, follow me carefully. I'm going to tell you exactly how to do it. I'm the possessor of a "secret" for which men have been searching since Time began.

There's no need to discuss the whys and the wherefores of this "secret." Suffice it to say that *It Works*. That's all we care about—*It Works*. Over 400,000 men and women the world over have proved it for themselves.

Among them are such men as Judge Ben B. Lindsay; Supreme Court Justice Parker; Governor McKelvie of Nebraska; Wu Ting Fang, ex-U. S. Chinese Ambassador; Governor Ferris of Michigan, and thousands of others of equal prominence.

Some of the things this "secret" has done for people are astounding. I would hardly believe them if I hadn't seen them with my own eyes. Adding ten, twenty, thirty or forty dollars a week to a man's income is a mere nothing. That's merely playing at it. Listen to this:

A young man in the East had an article for which there was a nation-wide demand. For twelve years he "puttered around" with it—barely eking out a living. Today this young man is worth $200,000. He is building a $25,000 home—and paying cash for it. He has three automobiles. His children go to private schools. He goes hunting, fishing, traveling whenever the mood strikes him. His income is over a thousand dollars a week.

In a little town in New York lives a man who a few years ago was pitied by all who knew him. From the time he was 14 he had worked and slaved—and at sixty he was looked upon as a failure. Without work, in debt to his charitable friends, with an invalid son to support, the outlook was pitchy black.

Then he learned the "secret." In two weeks he was in business for himself. In three months his plant was working night and day to fill orders. During 1916 the profits were $20,000. During 1917 the profits ran close to $40,000. And this genial 64-year-young man is enjoying pleasures and comforts he little dreamed would ever be his.

I could tell you thousands of similar instances. But there's no need to do this as I'm willing to tell you the "secret" itself.

Then you can put it to work and see what it will do for you. I don't claim I can make you rich over night. Maybe I can—maybe I can't. Sometimes I have failures—everyone has. But I do claim that I can help 90 out of every 100 people if they will let me. The point of it all, my friend, is that you are using only about one-tenth of that wonderful brain of yours. That's why you haven't won greater success. Throw the unused nine-tenths of your brain into action and you'll be amazed at the almost instantaneous results.

The Will is the motive power of the brain. Without a highly trained, inflexible will, a man has about as much chance of attaining success in life as a railway engine has of crossing the continent without steam. The biggest ideas have no value without will-power to "put them over." Yet the will, although heretofore entirely neglected, can be trained into wonderful power like the brain or memory and by the very same method — intelligent exercise and use.

If you held your arm in a sling for two years, it would become powerless to lift a feather, from lack of use. The same is true of the Will—it becomes useless from lack of practice. Because we don't use our Wills—because we continually bow to circumstance—we become unable to assert ourselves. What our wills need is practice.

Develop your will-power and money will flow in on you. Rich opportunities will open up for you. Driving energy you never dreamed you had will manifest itself. You will thrill with a new power—a power that nothing can resist. You'll have an influence over people that you never thought possible. Success—in whatever form you want it—will come as easily as failure came before. And those are only a few of the things the "secret" will do for you. The "secret" is fully explained in the wonderful book "Power of Will."

A Few Examples

Personal Experiences

Among over 400,000 users of "Power of Will" are such men as Judge Ben B. Lindsay; Supreme Court Justice Parker; Wu Ting Fang, Ex-U. S. Chinese Ambassador; Assistant Postmaster General Britt; Gov. McKelvie of Nebraska; General Manager Christeson of Wells-Fargo Express Co.; E. St. Elmo Lewis, of Detroit; Gov. Ferris, of Michigan, and many others of equal prominence.

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But if you do feel that "POWER OF WILL" will do for you what it has done for over four hundred thousand others—if you feel as they do that it's the next greatest book to the Bible—send me only $4.00 and you and I'll be square. If you pass this offer by, I'll be out only the small profit on a four-dollar sale, but you—you may easily be out the difference between what you're making now and an income several times as great. So you see you've a lot—a whole lot—more to lose than I.

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Published Twice a Month by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY

J. H. GANNON, President — C. H. HOLMES, Secretary and Treasurer

Spring and Macdougal Streets - - New York City
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered as Second-Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post-Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

Yearly Subscription, $4.00 in advance — **Single Copy, Twenty-Five Cents**

Foreign postage, $1.00 additional. Canadian postage, 60 cents.

Contents for First March, 1921, Issue

(Continued on next page)

(*Continued from preceding page*)

DAN ("SLED") WHEELER, whose adventures in the underworld you have already read, appears again in the next issue in a complete novelette—"SLED WHEELER AND THE DIAMOND RANCH," by Dr. John I. Cochrane, author of "Sled Wheeler, Manhandler," "The Crook and the Doctor," "A Drop of Doom," "The Swinging Mirrors," etc. "Sled Wheeler and the Diamond Ranch" is an exploit of *Sled's* young manhood—a tale of war upon the Border bandits.

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

Adventure

March 3. 1921.
Vol. 28. No. 5.

GUNS OF THE GODS

A Story of Yasmini's Youth

A Five Part Story Part I by Talbot Mundy

Author of "Barabbas Island," "On the Trail of Tippoo Tib," etc.

OUT OF THE ASHES

OLD Troy reaped rue in the womb of years
For stolen Helen's sake,
Till tenfold retribution rears
Its wreck on embers, slaked with tears
That mended no heart-ache.
The wail of the women sold as slaves
Lest Troy breed sons again
Dreed o'er a desert of nameless graves—
The heaps and the hills that are Trojan graves
Deep-runneled by the rain.

But Troy lives on. Though Helen's rape
And ten-year hold were vain;
Though jealous gods with men conspire
And Furies blast the Grecian fire;
Yet Troy must rise again.
Troy's daughters were a spoil and sport—
Loot—limbs for a labor gang,
Who crooned by foreign loom and mill
Of Trojan loves they cherished still,
Till Homer heard, and sang.

They told, by the fire when feasters roared
And minstrels waited turns,
Of the might of the men whom Troy adored—
Of the valor in vain of the Trojan sword—
With the love that slakeless burns,
That caught and blazed in the minstrel mind
Or ever the age of pen.
So maids and a minstrel rebuilt Troy,
Out of the ashes they rebuilt Troy
To live in the hearts of men.

INTRODUCTION

"Set down my thoughts, not yours, if the tale is to be worth the pesa."

THE why and wherefore of my privilege to write a true account of the Princess Yasmini's early youth is a story in itself too long to tell here; but it came about through no peculiar wisdom. I fell in a sort of way in love with her, and that led to opportunity.

She never made any secret of the scorn with which she regards those who singe wings at her flame. Rather she boasts of it with limit-overreaching epithets. Her

respect is reserved for those rare men and women who can meet her in unfair fight and, if not defeat her, then come close to it.

She asks no concessions on account of sex. Men's passions are but weapons forged for her necessity; and as for genuine love-affairs, like Cleopatra she had but two, and the second ended in disaster to herself. This tale is of the first one that succeeded, although fraught with discontent for certain others.

The second affair came close to whelming thrones, and I wrote of that in another book with an understanding due, as I have said, to opportunity, and with a measure of respect that pleased her.

She is habitually prompt and generous with her rewards, if far-seeing in bestowal of them. So, during the days of her short political eclipse that followed in a palace that had housed a hundred kings, I saw her almost daily in a room where the gods of ancient India were depicted in three primal colors working miracles all over the walls and where, if governments had only known it, she was already again devising plans to set the world on fire.

There, amid an atmosphere of Indian scents and cigaret-smoke, she talked and I made endless notes, while now and then, when she was meditative, her maids sang to an accompaniment on rather melancholy wooden flutes.

But whenever I showed a tendency to muse she grew indignant.

"Of what mud are you building castles now? Set down my thoughts, not yours," she insisted, "if your tale is to be worth the pesa."

By that she referred to the custom of all Eastern story-tellers to stop at the exciting moment and take up a collection of the country's smallest copper coins before finishing the tale. But the reference was double-edged. A penny for my thoughts—a penny for the West's interpretation of the East was what she had in mind.

Nevertheless, as it is to the West that the story must appeal it has seemed wiser to remove it from her lips and so transposed that, though it loses in lore unfortunately, it does gain something of directness and simplicity. Her satire, and most of her metaphor, if always set down as she phrased it, would scandalize as well as puzzle Western ears.

This tale is of her youth, but Yasmini's years have not yet done more than ripen her. In a land where most women shrivel into early age she continues, somewhere perhaps a little after thirty, in the bloom of health and loveliness, younger in looks and energy than many a Western girl of twenty-five. For she is of East and West, very terribly endowed with all the charms of either and the brains of both.

Her quick wit can detect or invent mercurial Asian subterfuge as swiftly as appraise the rather glacial drift of Western thought; and the wisdom of both East and West combines in her to teach a very nearly total incredulity in human virtue. Western morals she regards as humbug, neither more nor less.

In virtue itself she believes, as astronomers for example believe in the precession of the equinox; but that the rank and file of human beings, and especially learned human beings, have attained to the very vaguest understanding of it she scornfully disbelieves. And with a frankness simply Gallic in its freedom from those thought-conventions with which so many people like to deceive themselves she deals with human nature on what she considers are its merits. The result is sometimes very disconcerting to the pompous and all the rest of the host of self-deceived, but usually amusing to herself and often profitable to her friends.

Her ancestry is worth considering, since to that she doubtless owes a good proportion of her beauty and ability. On her father's side she is Rajput, tracing her lineage so far back that it becomes lost at last in fabulous legends of the moon (who is masculine, by the way, in Indian mythology). All the great familes of Rajputana are her kin, and all the chivalry and derring-do of that royal land of heroines and heroes is part of her conscious heritage.

Her mother was Russian. On that side, too, she can claim blood royal, not devoid of at least a trace of Scandinavian, betrayed by glittering golden hair and eyes that are sometimes the color of sky seen over Himalayan peaks, sometimes of the deep lake-water in the valleys. But very often her eyes seem so full of fire and their color is so baffling that a legend has gained currency to the effect that she can change their hue at will.

How a Russian princess came to marry a Rajput king is easier to understand if one

recalls the sinister designs of Russian statecraft in the days when India and "warm sea-water" was the great objective. The oldest, and surely the easiest, means of a perplexed diplomacy has been to send a woman to undermine the policy of courts or steal the very consciences of kings. Delilah is a case in point. And in India, where the veil and the rustling curtain and religion hide woman's hand without in the least suppressing her, that was a plan too easy of contrivance to be overlooked.

In those days there was a prince in Moscow whose public conduct so embittered his young wife, and so notoriously, that when he was found one morning murdered in his bed suspicion rested upon her. She was tried in secret, as the custom was, found guilty, and condemned to death. Then, on the strength of influence too strong even for the Czar, the sentence was commuted to the far more cruel one of life imprisonment in the Siberian mines. While she awaited the dreaded march across Asia in chains a certain proposal was made to the Princess Sonia Omanoff, and no one who knew anything about it wondered that she accepted without much hesitation.

LESS than a month after her arrest she was in Paris, squandering rubles in the fashionable shops. And at the Russian Embassy she made the acquaintance of the very first of the smaller Indian potentates who made the "Grand Tour." Traveling abroad has since become rather fashionable, and is even encouraged by the British-Indian Government because there is no longer any plausible means of preventing it; but Maharaja Bubru Singh was a pioneer, who dared greatly, and had his way even against the objections of a high commissioner. In addition he had had to defy the Brahman priests who, all unwilling, are the strong supports of alien over-rule; for they are armed with the iron-fanged laws of caste that forbid crossing the sea, among innumerable other things.

Perhaps there was a hint of moral bravery behind the warrior eyes that was enough in itself; and she really fell in love at first sight, as men said. But the secret police of Russia were at her elbow, too, hinting that only one course could save her from extradition and Siberian mines.

At any rate she listened to the raja's wooing; and the knowledge that he had a wife at home already, a little past her prime perhaps and therefore handicapped in case of rivalry, but nevertheless a prior wife, seems to have given her no pause. The fact that the first wife was childless doubtless influenced Bubru Singh.

They even say she was so far beside herself with love for him that she would have been satisfied with the Gandharwa marriage ceremony sung by so many Rajput poets, that amounts to little more than going off alone together. But the Russian diplomatic scheme included provision for the maharaja of a wife so irrevocably wedded that the British would not be able to refuse her recognition. So they were married in the presence of seven witnesses in the Russian Embassy, as the records testify.

After that, whatever its suspicions, the British Government had to admit her into Rajputana. And what politics she might have played—whether the Russian gray-coat armies might have encroached into those historic hills on the strength of her intriguing, or whether she would have seized the first opportunity to avenge herself by playing Russia false—are matters known only to the gods of unaccomplished things. For Bubru Singh, her maharaja, died of an accident very shortly after the birth of their child Yasmini.

Now law is law, and Sonia Omanoff, then legally the Princess Sonia Singh, had appealed from the first to Indian law and custom, so that the British might have felt justified in leaving her and her infant daughter to its most untender mercies. Then she would have been utterly under the heel of the succeeding prince, a nephew of her husband, unenamored of foreigners and avowedly determined to enforce the Indian custom of seclusion on his uncle's widow.

But the British took the charitable view, that covering a multitude of sins. It was not bad policy to convert the erstwhile Sonia Omanoff from secret enemy to grateful friend, and the feat was easy.

The new maharaja, Gungadhura Singh, was prevailed on to assign an ancient palace for the Russian widow's use; and there, almost within sight of the royal seraglio from which she had been ousted, Yasmini had her bringing-up, regaled by her mother with tales of Western outrage and ambition, and well schooled in all that pertained to her Eastern heritage by the thousand-and-one

intriguers whose delight and livelihood it is to fish the troubled waters of the courts of minor kings.

All these things Yasmini told me in that scented chamber of another palace, in which a wrathful government secluded her in later years—for its own peace as it thought, but for her own recuperation as it happened. She told me many other things besides that have some little bearing on this story but, if all related, would crowd the book too full. The real gist of them all is that she grew to love India with all her heart, and India has repaid her for it after its own fashion, which is manifold and marvelous.

There is no fairer land on earth than that far northern slice of Rajputana, nor a people more endowed with legend and the consciousness of ancestry. They have a saying that every Rajput is a king's son, and every Rajputni worthy to be married to an emperor.

It was in that atmosphere that Yasmini learned she must either use her wits or be outwitted, and women begin young to assert their genius in the East. But she outstripped precocity and, being Western too, rode rough-shod on convention when it suited her, reserving her concessions to it solely for occasions when those matched the hand she held. All her life she had had to play in a ruthless game, but, the trump that she had learned to lead oftenest is unexpectedness; and now to the story.

ROYAL RAJASTHAN

THERE is a land where no resounding street
With babel of electric-garish night
And whir of endless wheels has put to flight
The liberty of leisure. Sandled feet
And naked soles that feel the friendly dust
Go easily along the never measured miles—
A land at which the patron tourist smiles
Because of gods in whom those people trust
(He boasting One and trusting not at all);
A land where lightning is the lover's boon,
And honey oozing from an amber moon
Illumines footing on forbidden wall;
Where, 'stead of jeweler's display,
The flaunting peacocks brave the passer-by,
And swans like angels in an azure sky
Wing swift and silent on unchallenged way.
No land of fable! Of the Hills I sing,
Whose royal women tread with conscious grace
The peace-filled gardens of a warrior race,
Each maiden fit for wedlock with a king,
And every Rajput son so royal born
And conscious of his age-long heritage
He looks askance at Burke's becrested page
And wonders at the new-ennobled scorn.
I sing (for this is earth) of hate and guile,
Of tyranny and trick and broken pledge,
Of sudden weapons, and the thrice-keen edge
Of woman's wit—the sting in woman's smile—
But also of the heaven-fathomed glow,
The sweetness and the charm and dear delight
Of loyal woman, humorous and right—
Pure-purposed as the bosom of the snow.

NO TALE, then, this of motors, but of men
With camels fleeter than the desert wind,
Who come and go. So leave the West behind
And, at the magic summons of the pen
Forgetting new contentions if you will,
Take wings, take silent wings of time untied—
And see, with Fellow-friendship for your guide,
A little how the East goes wooing still.

CHAPTER I

"Gold is where you find it."

DAWN at the commencement of hot weather in the Hills, if not the loveliest of India's wealth of wonders—for there is the moon by night—is fair preparation for whatever cares to follow.

There is a musical silence out of which the first voices of the day have birth; and a half-light holding in its opalescence all the colors that the day shall use; a freshness and serenity to hint what might be if the sons of men were wise enough; and beauty unbelievable. The fortunate sleep on roofs or on verandas, to be ready for the sweet, cool wind that moves in advance of the rising sun, caused, as some say, by the wing-beats of departing spirits of the night.

So that in that respect the mangy jackals, the monkeys, and the *chandala* (who are the lowest human caste of all and quite untouchable by the other people the Creator made) are most to be envied; for there is no stuffy screen, and small convention, between them and enjoyment of the blessed air.

Next in order of defilement to the sweepers—or, as some folk with inside reservations on the road to heaven insist, even beneath the sweepers, and possibly beneath the jackals — come the English, looking boldly on whatever their eyes desire and tasting out of curiosity the fruit of more than one forbidden tree, but obsessed by an amazing if perverted sense of duty. They rule the land, largely by what they idolize as "luck," which consists of tolerance for things they do not understand. Understanding one another rather well, they are more merciless to their own offenders than is Brahman to *chandala*, for they will hardly let them live. But they are a peopl of

destiny, and India has prospered under them in certain ways.

In among the English, something after the fashion of grace notes in the bars of music—enlivening, if sharp at times—come occasional Americans, turning up in unexpected places for unusual reasons, and remaining because it is no man's business to interfere with them. Unlike the English, who approach all quarters through official doors and never trespass without authority, the Americans have an embarrassing way of choosing their own time and step, taking officialdom, so to speak, in flank. It is to the credit of the English that they overlook intrusion that they would punish fiercely if committed by unauthorized folk from home.

So when the Blaines, husband and wife, came to Sialpore in Rajputana without as much as one written introduction, nobody snubbed them. And when, by dint of nothing less than nerve, nor more than ability to recognize their opportunity, they acquired the lease of the only vacant covetable house, nobody was very jealous, especially when the Blaines proved hospitable.

It was a sweet little nest of a house with a cool stone roof, set in a rather large garden of its own on the shoulder of the steep hill that overlooks the city. A political dependent of Yasmini's father had built it as a haven for his favorite paramour when jealousy in his seraglio had made peace at home impossible. Being connected with the Treasury in some way, he had made a luxurious pleasance of it; and he had taste.

But when Yasmini's father died and his nephew Gungadhura succeeded him as maharaja he made a clean sweep of the old pension and employment list in order to enrich new friends, so the little nest on the hill became deserted. Its owner went into exile in a neighboring State and died there, out of reach of the incoming politician who naturally wanted to begin business by exposing the scandalous remissness of his predecessor. The house was acquired on a falling market by a money-lender, who eventually leased it to the Blaines on an eighty per cent. basis—a price that satisfied them entirely until they learned later about local proportion.

The front veranda faced due east, raised above the garden by an eight-foot wall—an ideal place for sleep because of the unfailing morning breeze. The beds were set there side by side each evening, and Mrs. Blaine—a full ten years younger than her husband—formed a habit of rising in the dark and standing in her nightdress, with bare feet on the utmost edge of the top stone step, to watch for the miracle of morning. She was fabulously pretty like that, with her hair blowing and her young figure outlined through the linen; and she was sometimes unobserved.

The garden wall, a hundred feet beyond, was of rock—two and a half men high, as they measure the unleapable in that distrustful land; but the Blaines, hailing from a country where a neighbor's dog and chickens have the run of twenty lawns, seldom took the trouble to lock the little, arched, iron-studded door through which the former owner had come and gone unobserved. The use of an open door is hardly trespass under the law of any land; and dawn is an excellent time for the impecunious who take thought of the lily how it grows in order to outdo Solomon.

When a house changes hands in Rajputana there pass with it, as well as the rats and cobras and the mongoose, those beggars who were wont to plague the former owner. That is a custom so based on ancient logic that the English, who appreciate conservatism, have not even tried to alter it.

So when a cracked voice broke the early stillness out of shadow where the garden wall shut off the nearer view, Theresa Blaine paid small attention to it.

"*Memsahib!* Protectress of the poor!"

She continued watching the mystery of coming light. The ancient city's domed and pointed roofs already glistened with pale gold, and a pearly mist wreathed the crowded quarter of the merchants. Beyond that the river, not more than fifty yards wide, flowed like molten sapphire between unseen banks. As the pale stars died, thin rays of liquid silver touched the surface of a lake to westward, seen through a rift between purple hills. The green of irrigation beyond the river to westward shone like square-cut emeralds, and southward the desert took to itself all imaginable hues at once.

"Colorado!" she said then. "And Arizona! And southern California! And something added that I can't just place!"

"Sin's added by the scow-load!" growled her husband from the farther bed. "Come back, Tess, and put some clothes on!"

She turned her head to smile, but did not move away. Hearing the man's voice, the

owners of other voices piped up at once from the shadow, all together; croaking out of tune:

"*Bhig mangi shahebi! Bhig mangi shahebi!*" (Alms! Alms!)

"I can see wild swans," said Theresa. "Come and look—five—six—seven of them, flying northward, oh ever so high up!"

"Put some clothes on, Tess!"

"I'm plenty warm."

"Maybe. But there's some skate looking at you from the garden. What's the matter with your kimono?"

However, the dawn wind was delicious, and the nightgown more decent than some of the affairs they label frocks. Besides, the East is used to more or less nakedness and thinks no evil of it, as women learn quicker than men.

"All right—in a minute."

"I'll bet there's a speculator charging 'em admission at the gate," grumbled Dick Blaine, coming to stand beside her in pajamas. "Sure you're right, Tess; those are swans—and that's a dawn worth seeing."

He had the deep voice that the East attributes to manliness, and the muscular mold that never came of armchair criticism. She looked like a child beside him, though he was agile, athletic, wiry, not enormous.

"*SAHIB!*" resumed the voices. "*Sahib!* Protector of the poor!" They whined out of darkness still, but the shadow was shortening.

"Better feed 'em, Tess. A man's starved down mighty near the knuckle if he'll wake up this early to beg."

"Nonsense. Those are three regular bums who look on us as their preserve. They enjoy the morning as much as we do. Begging's their way of telling people howdy."

"Somebody pays them to come," he grumbled, helping her into a pale-blue kimono.

Tess laughed.

"Sure! But it pays us too. They keep other bums away. I talk to them sometimes."

"In English?"

"I don't think they know any. I'm learning their language."

It was his turn to laugh.

"I knew a man once who learned the gipsy bolo on a bet. Before he'd half gotten it you couldn't shoo tramps off his doorstep with a gun. After a time he grew to like it—flattered him, I suppose—but decent folk forgot to ask him to their corn-roasts. Careful, Tess, or Sialpore 'll drop us from its dinner lists."

"Don't you believe it! They're crazy to learn American from me, and to hear your cow-puncher talk. We're social lions. I think they like us as much as we like them. Don't make that face, Dick—one maverick isn't a whole herd, and you can't afford to quarrel with the commissioner."

He chose to change the subject.

"What are your bums' names?" he asked.

"Funny names. Bimbu, Umra and Pinga. Now you can see them; look, the shadow's gone. Bimbu is the one with no front teeth, Umra has only one eye, and Pinga winks automatically. Wait till you see Pinga smile—it's diagonal instead of horizontal—must have hurt his mouth in an accident——"

"Probably he and Bimbu fought and found the biting tough. Speaking of dogs, strikes me we ought to keep a good big fierce one," he added suggestively.

"No, no, Dick; there's no danger. Besides, there's Chamu."

"The bums could make short work of that parasite."

"I'm safe enough. Tom Tripe usually looks in at least once a day when you're gone."

"Tom's a good fellow, but once a day—A hundred things might happen. I'd better speak to Tom Tripe about those three bums—he'll shift them."

"Don't, Dick. I tell you they keep others away. Look, here comes Chamu with the *chota hazri*."

Clad in an enormous turban and clean white linen from head to foot, a stout Hindu appeared, superintending a tall, meek underling who carried the customary "little breakfast" of the country—fruit, biscuits and the inevitable tea that haunts all British byways. As soon as the underling had spread a cloth and arranged the cups and plates Chamu nudged him into the background and stood to receive praise undivided.

The salaams done with and his own dismissal achieved with proper dignity, Chamu drove the *hamal* away in front of him, and cuffed him the minute they were out of sight. There was a noise of repeated blows from around the corner.

"A big dog might serve better after all," mused Tess. "Chamu beats the servants, and takes commissions—even from the beggars."

"How do you know?"

"They told me."

"Um, Bing and Ping would better keep away. There's no obligation to camp here."

"Only, if we fired Chamu I suppose the maharaja would be offended. He made such a great point of sending us a faithful servant."

"True. Gungadhura Singh is a suspicious raja. He suspects me anyway. I screwed better terms out of him than the miller got from Bob White, and now whenever he sees me off the job he suspects me of chicanery. If we fired Chamu he'd think I'd found the gold and was trying to hide it. Say, if I don't find gold in his blamed hills eventually——"

"You'll find it, Dick. You never failed at anything you really set your heart on. With your experience——"

"Experience don't count for much," he answered, blowing at his tea to cool it. "It's not like coal or manganese. Gold is where you find it—there are no rules."

"Finding it's your trade. Go ahead."

"I'm not afraid of that. What eats me," he said, standing up and looking down at her, "is what I've heard about their passion for revenge. Every one has the same story. If you disappoint them—gee whiz, look out! Poisoning your wife's a sample of what they'll do. It's crossed my mind a score of times, little girl, that you ought to go back to the States and wait there till I'm through."

She stood on tiptoe and kissed him.

"Isn't that just like a man!"

"All the same——"

"Go in, Dick, and get dressed, or the sun will be too high before you get the gang started."

She took his arm and they went into the house together. Twenty minutes later he rode away on his pony, looking if possible even more of an athlete than in his pajamas, for there was an added suggestion of accomplishment in the rolled-up sleeves and scarred boots laced to the knee.

Their leave-taking was a purely American episode, mixed of comradeship, affection and just plain foolishness—witnessed by more wondering, patient Indian eyes than they suspected. Every move that either of them made was always watched.

As a matter of fact Chamu's attention was almost entirely taken up just then by the crows, iniquitous black humorists that took advantage of turned backs—for Tess walked beside the pony to the gate—to rifle the remains of *chota hazri*, one of them flying off with a spoon since the rest had all the edibles. Chamu threw a cushion at the spoon-thief and called him *balibuk*, which means "eater of the temple offerings," and is an insult beyond price.

"That is the habit of crows," he explained indignantly to Tess as she returned laughing to the veranda, picking up the cushion on her way. "They are without shame. Garud, who is king of all the birds, should turn them into fish; then they could swim in water and be caught with hooks. But first Blaine *sahib* should shoot them with a shotgun."

HAVING offered that wise solution of the problem, Chamu stood, with fat hands folded on his stomach.

"The crows steal less than some people," Tess answered pointedly.

He preferred to ignore the remark.

"Or there might be poison added to some food, and the food left for them to see," he suggested, whereat she astonished him, American women being even more incomprehensible than their English cousins.

"If you talk to me about poison I'll send you back to Gungadhura in disgrace. Take away the breakfast things at once."

"That is the *hamal's* business," he retorted pompously. "The maharaja *sahib* is knowing me for most excellent butler. He himself has given me already very high recommendation. Will he permit opinions of other people who are strangers to contradict him?"

The words "opinions of women" had trembled on his lips, but intuition saved that day. It flashed across even his obscene mentality that he might suggest once too often contempt for Western folk who worked for Eastern potentates. It was true he regarded the difference between a contract and direct employment as merely a question of degree, and a quibble in any case, and he felt pretty sure that the Blaines would not risk the maharaja's unchancy friendship by dismissing himself; but he suspected there were limits.

He could not imagine why, but he had noticed that insolence to Blaine himself was fairly safe, Blaine being superhumanly indifferent as long as Mrs. Blaine was shown respect, even exceeding the English in the absurd length to which he carried it. It was a mad world in Chamu's opinion. He went and fetched the *hamal*, who slunk through his task with the air of a condemned felon. Tess smiled at the man for encouragement, but Chamu's instant jealousy was so obvious that she regretted the mistake.

"Now call up the beggars and feed them," she ordered.

"Feed them? They will not eat. It is contrary to caste."

"Nonsense. They have no caste. Bring bread and feed them."

"There is no bread of the sort they will eat."

"I know exactly what you mean. If I give them bread there's no profit for you—they'll eat it all; but if I give them money you'll exact a commission from them of one pesa in five. Isn't that so? Go and bring the bread."

He decided to turn the set-back into at any rate a minor victory and went in person to the kitchen for chupatties such as the servants ate. Then, returning to the top of the steps, he intimated that the earth-defilers might draw near and receive largess, contriving the impression that it was by his sole favor the concession was obtained.

Two of them came promptly and waited at the foot of the steps, smirking and changing attitudes to draw attention to their rags. Chamu tossed the bread to them with expressions of disgust. If they had cared to pretend they were holy men he would have been respectful, in degree at least, but these were professionals so hardened that they dared ignore the religious apology, which implies throughout the length and breadth of India the right to beg from place to place. These were not even true vagabonds, but rogues contented with one victim in one place as long as benevolence should last.

"Where is the third one?" Tess demanded. "Where is Pinga?"

They professed not to know, but she had seen all three squatting together close to the little gate five minutes before. She ordered Chamu to go and find the missing man and he waddled off, grumbling. At the end of five minutes he returned without him.

"One comes on horseback," he announced, "who gave the third beggar money, so that he now waits outside."

"What for?"

"Who knows? Perhaps to keep watch."

"To watch for what?"

"Who knows?"

"Who is it on horseback? A caller? Some one coming for breakfast? You'd better hurry."

The call at the breakfast-time is one of the pleasantest informalities of life in India. It might even be the commissioner.

Tess ran to make one of those swift changes of costume with which some women have the gift of gracing every opportunity. Chamu waddled down the steps to await with due formality the individual, in no way resembling a British commissioner, who was leisurely dismounting at the wide gate fifty yards to the southward of that little one the beggars used.

He was a Rajput of Rajputs, thin-wristed, thin-ankled, lean, astonishingly handsome in a high-bred Northern way, and possessed of that air of utter self-assuredness devoid of arrogance which people seem able to learn only by being born to it. His fine features were set off by a turban of rose-pink silk, and the only fault discoverable as he strode up the path between the shrubs was that his riding-boots seemed too tight across the instep.

There was not a vestige of hair on his face. He was certainly less than twenty—perhaps seventeen years old, or even younger. Ages are hard to guess in that land.

Tess was back on the veranda in time to receive him, with different shoes and stockings and another ribbon in her hair; few men would have noticed the change at all, although agreeably conscious of the daintiness. The Rajput seemed unable to look away from her but, ignoring Chamu, as he came up the steps, appraised her inch by inch from the white shoes upward until as he reached the top their eyes met. Chamu followed him fussily.

Tess could not remember ever having seen such eyes. They were baffling by their quality of brilliance, unlike the usual slumbrous Eastern orbs that puzzle chiefly by refusal to express emotion. The Rajput bowed and said nothing, so Tess offered him a chair, which Chamu drew up more fussily than ever.

"Have you had breakfast?" she asked, taking the conscious risk.

Strangers of alien race are not invariably good guests, however good-looking, especially when one's husband is somewhere out of call. She looked and felt nearly as young as this man, and had already experienced overtures from more than one young prince who supposed he was doing her an honor. Used to closely guarded women's quarters, the East wastes little time on wooing when the barriers are passed or down. But she felt irresistibly curious, and after all there was Chamu.

"Thanks. I took breakfast before dawn."

THE Rajput accepted the proffered chair without acknowledging the butler's existence. Tess passed him the big silver cigaret-box.

"Then let me offer you a drink."

He declined both drink and cigaret, and there was a minute's silence during which she began to grow uncomfortable.

"I was riding after breakfast—up there on the hill where you see that overhanging rock—when I saw you here on the veranda. You, too, were watching the dawn—beautiful! I love the dawn. So I thought I would come and get to know you. People who love the same thing, you know, are not exactly strangers."

Almost if not quite for the first time Tess grew very grateful for Chamu, who was still hovering at hand.

"If my husband had known, he would have stayed to receive you."

"Oh, no! I took good care for that! I continued my ride until after I knew he had gone for the day."

Things dawn on your understanding in the East one by one, as the stars come out at night, until in the end there is such a bewildering number of points of light that people talk about the "incomprehensible East." Tess saw light suddenly.

"Do you mean that those three beggars are your spies?"

The Rajput nodded. Then his bright eyes detected the instant resolution that Tess formed.

"But you must not be afraid of them. They will be very useful—often."

"How?"

The visitor made a gesture that drew attention to Chamu.

"Your butler knows English. Do you know Russian?"

"Not a word."

"French?"

"Very little."

"If we were alone——"

Tess decided to face the situation boldly. She came from a free land, and part of her heritage was to dare meet any man face to face; but intuition combined with curiosity to give her confidence.

"Chamu, you may go."

The butler waddled out of sight, but the Rajput waited until the sound of his retreating footsteps died away somewhere near the kitchen. Then—

"You feel afraid of me?" he asked.

"Not at all. Why should I? Why do you wish to see me alone?"

"I have decided you are to be my friend. Are you not pleased?"

"But I don't know anything about you. Suppose you tell me who you are and why you use beggars to spy on my husband."

"Those who have great plans make powerful enemies, and fight against odds. I make friends where I can, and instruments even of my enemies. You are to be my friend."

"You look very young to——"

Suddenly Tess saw light again, and the discovery caused her pupils to contract a little and then dilate. The Rajput noticed it, and laughed. Then, leaning forward:

"How did you know I am a woman? Tell me. I must know. I shall study to act better."

Tess leaned back entirely at her ease at last and looked up at the sky, rather reveling in relief and in the fun of turning the tables.

"Please tell me. I must know."

"Oh, one thing and another. It isn't easy to explain. For one thing, your insteps."

"I will get other boots. What else?. I make no lap. I hold my hands as a man does. Is my voice too high—too excitable?"

"No. There are men with voices like yours. There's a long golden hair on your shoulder that might, of course, belong to some one else, but your ears are pierced——"

"So are many men's."

"And you have blue eyes—and long, fair lashes. I've seen occasional Rajput men with blue eyes, too, but your teeth—much too perfect for a man."

"For a young man?"

"Perhaps not. But add one thing to another——"

"There is something else. Tell me!"

"You remember when you called attention to the butler before I dismissed him? No man could do that. A man would be more discreet. You're a woman, and you can dance."

"So it is my shoulders?" she said. "I will study again before the mirror. Yes, I can dance. Soon you shall see me. You shall see all the most wonderful things in Rajputana!"

"But tell me about yourself," Tess insisted, offering the cigarets again. And this time her guest accepted one.

"My mother was the Russian wife of Bubru Singh, who had no son. I am the rightful maharanee of Sialpore, only those fools of English put my father's nephew on the throne, saying a woman can not reign. They are no wiser than apes! They have given Sialpore to Gungadhura, who is a pig and loathes them, instead of to a woman who would only laugh at them; and the brute is raising a litter of little pigs, so that even if he and his progeny were poisoned one by one there would always be a brat left —he has so many!"

"And you?"

"First you must promise silence."

"Very well."

"Woman to woman."

"Yes."

"Womb to womb—heart to heart?"

"On my word of honor. But I promise nothing else, remember."

"So speaks one whose promises are given truly! We are already friends. But now that we are friends, I will tell you all that is in my heart now."

"Tell me your name first."

She was about to answer when interruption came from the direction of the gate. There was a restless horse there, and a rider using resonant strong language to the nervous animal.

"Tom Tripe!" said Tess. "He's earlier than usual."

The Rajputni smiled. Chamu appeared through the door behind them with suspicious suddenness and waddled to the gate, watched by a pair of blue eyes that should have burned holes in his back and would certainly have robbed him of all comfort had he been aware of them.

THAW ON OLYMPUS

BRIGHT spurs that add their roweled row
To clanking saber's pride;
Fierce eyes beneath a beetling brow;
More license than the rules allow;
A military stride;
Years' use of arbitrary will
And right to make or break;
Obedience of men who drill
And willy-nilly foot the bill
For authorized mistake;
The comfort of the self-esteem
Deputed power brings—
Are fickler than the shadows seem,
Less fruitful than the lotus-dream,
And all of them have wings
When blue eyes, laughing in your own,
Make mockery of rules!
But when the fustian shams have flown
Wise warriors new doctrine own
And leave dead form to fools!

CHAPTER II

"Friendship's friendship and respect's respect, but duty's what I'm paid to do!"—TOM TRIPE.

THE man at the gate dallied to look at his horse's fetlocks. Tess' strange guest seemed in no hurry either, but her movements were as swift as knitting-needles. She produced a fountain pen, and of all unexpected things a Bank of India note for one thousand rupees—a new one, crisp and clean.

Tess did not see the signature she scrawled across its back in Persian characters, and the pen was returned to an inner pocket and the note, folded four times, was palmed in the subtle hand long before Tom Tripe came striding up the path with jingling spurs.

"Morning, ma'am—morning! Don't let me intrude. I'd a little accident, and took a liberty. My horse cut his fetlock—nothing serious—and I set your two *saises* (grooms) to work on it with a sponge and water. Twenty minutes will see it right as a trivet. Then I'm off again—I've a job of work."

He stood with back to the sun and hands on his hips, looking up at Tess—a man of fifty—a soldier of another generation, in a white uniform something like a British sergeant-major's of the days before the Mutiny. His mutton-chop whiskers, dyed dark brown, were military mid-Victorian, as were the huge brass spurs that jingled on black riding-boots. A great-chested, heavy-weight athletic man, a few years past his prime.

"Come up, Tom. You're always welcome."

"Ah!"

His spurs rang on the stone steps, and, since Tess was standing close to the veranda rail, he turned to face her at the top. Saluting with martinet precision before removing his helmet, he did not get a clear view of the Rajputni.

"As I've said many times, ma'am, the one house in the world where Tom Tripe may sit down with princes and commissioners."

"Have you had breakfast?"

He made a wry face.

"The old story, Tom?"

"The old story, ma'am. A hair of the dog that bit me is all the breakfast I could swallow."

"I suppose if I don't give you one now you'll have two later?"

He nodded.

"I must. One now would put me just to rights and I'd eat at noon. Times when I'm savage with myself and wait I have to have two or three before I can stomach lunch."

She offered him a basket chair and beckoned Chamu.

"Brandy and soda for the *sahib*."

"Thank you, ma'am!" said the soldier piously.

"Where's your dog, Tom?"

"Behaving himself, I hope, ma'am, out there in the sun by the gate."

"Call him. He shall have a bone on the veranda. I want him to feel as friendly here as you do."

Tom whistled shrilly and an ash-hued creature, part Great Dane and certainly part Rampore, came up the path like a catapulted fantom, making hardly any sound. He stopped at the foot of the steps and gazed inquiringly at his master's face.

"You may come up."

He was an extraordinary animal—enormous — big-jowled — scarred — ungainly and apparently aware of it. He paused again on the top step.

"Show your manners."

The beast walked toward Tess, sniffed at her, wagged his stern exactly once and retired to the other end of the veranda, where Chamu, hurrying with brandy, gave him the widest possible berth. Tess looked the other way while Tom Tripe helped himself to a lot of brandy and a little soda.

"Now get a big bone for the dog," she ordered.

"There is none," the butler answered.

"Bring the leg-of-mutton bone of yesterday."

"That is for soup today."

"Bring it!"

Chamu was standing between Tom Tripe and the Rajputni, with his back to the latter; so nobody saw the hand that slipped something into the ample folds of his sash. He departed muttering by way of the steps and the garden to avoid the dog, who growled recognition of the compliment.

Tess' Rajputni guest continued to say nothing, but made no move to go. Introduction was inevitable, for it was the first rule of that house that all ranks met there on equal terms, whatever their relations elsewhere.

Tom Tripe had finished wiping his mustache, and Tess was still wondering just how to manage without betraying the sex of the other or the fact that she herself did not yet know her visitor's name, when Chamu returned with the bone. He threw it to the dog from a safe distance, and was sniffed at scornfully for his pains.

"Won't he take it?" asked Tess.

"Not from a black man. Bring it here, you!"

The great brute, with a sidewise growl and glare at the butler that made Chamu sweat with fright, picked up the bone and at a sign from his master laid it at the feet of Tess.

"Show your manners!"

Once more he waved his stern exactly once.

"Give it to him, ma'am."

Tess touched the bone with her foot, and the dog took it away, scaring Chamu along the veranda in front of him.

"Why don't you ever call him by name, Tom?"

"Bad for him, ma'am. When I say, 'Here, you!' or whistle, he obeys quick as lightning. But if I say, 'Trotters!' which his name is, he knows he's got to do his own thinking, and keeps his distance till he's sure what's wanted.

"A dog's like an enlisted man, ma'am—ought to be taught to jump at the word of command and never think for himself until you call him out of the ranks by name. Trotters understands me perfectly."

"Speaking of names," said Tess, "I'd like to introduce you to my guest, Tom, but I'm afraid——"

"You may call me Gunga Singh," said a

quiet voice full of amusement, and Tom Tripe started.

He turned about in his chair and for the first time looked the third member of the party full in the face.

"Hoity-toity! Well, I'm jiggered! Of all things! Dash my door-knob, it's the princess!"

HE ROSE and saluted cavalierly, jocularly, yet with a deference one could not doubt, showing tobacco-darkened teeth in a smile of almost paternal indulgence.

"So the Princess Yasmini is Gunga Singh this morning, eh? And here's Tom Tripe riding up-hill and down-dale, laming his horse and sweating through a clean tunic—with a threat in his ear and a reward promised that he'll never see a smell of—while the princess smokes cigarets ——!"

"In very good company!"

"In good company, aye; but not out of mischief, I'll be bound. Naughty, naughty!" he said, wagging a finger at her. "Your ladyship 'll get caught one of these days, and where will Tom Tripe be then? I've got my job to keep, you know. Friendship's friendship, and respect's respect, but duty's what I'm paid to do.

"Here's me, drillmaster of the maharaja's troops and a pension coming to me consequent on good behavior, with orders to set a guard over you, miss, and prevent your going and coming without his Highness' leave. And here's you giving the guard the slip! Somebody tipped his Highness off, and I wish you'd heard what's going to happen to me unless I find you."

"You can't find me, Tom Tripe. I'm not Yasmini today; I'm Gunga Singh."

"Tut-tut, your ladyship; that won't do! I swore on my Bible oath to the maharaja day before yesterday that I'd left you closely guarded in the palace place across the river. He felt easy for the first time for a week. Now, because they're afraid for their skins, the guard all swear by Krishna you were never in there, and that I've been bribed. How did you get out of the grounds, miss?"

"Climbed the wall."

"I might have remembered you're as active as a cat! Next time I'll mount a double guard *on* the wall, so they'll fall off and break their necks if they fall asleep. But there are no boats, for I saw to it, and the bridge is watched. How did you cross the river?"

"Swam."

"At night?"

The blue eyes smiled assent.

"Missy—your ladyship—you mustn't do that. Little ladies that act that way might lose the number of their mess. There's crockadowndillies in that river—aggilators—what d'ye call the —— things? Mugger! They snap their jaws on a leg and pull you under. The sweeter and prettier you are the more they like you. Besides, missy, princesses aren't supposed to swim; it's vulgar."

He contrived to look the very incarnation of offended prudery, and she laughed at him with a voice like a golden bell.

He faced Tess again with a gesture of apology.

"You'll pardon me, ma'am, but duty's duty."

Tess was enjoying the play immensely, shrewdly suspecting Tom Tripe of more complaisance than he chose to admit to his prisoner.

"You must treat my house as a sanctuary, Tom. Outside the garden wall orders, I suppose, are orders. Inside it I insist all guests are free and equal."

The Princess Yasmini slapped her boot with a little riding-switch and laughed delightedly.

"There, Tom Tripe! Now what will you do?"

"I'll have to use persuasion, miss. Tell me how you got into your own palace unseen and out again with a horse without a soul knowing?"

" 'Come into my net and get caught,' said the hunter; but the leopard is still at large. 'Teach me your tracks,' begged the hunter; but the leopard answered, 'Learn them!' "

"Oopsichefoosalum!"

Tom Tripe scratched his head and wiped sweat from his collar. The princess was gazing away into the distance, not apparently inclined to take the soldier seriously. Tess, wondering what her guest found interesting on the horizon all of a sudden, herself picked out the third beggar's shabby outline on the same high rock from which Yasmini had confessed to watching before dawn.

"Will your ladyship ride home with me?" asked Tom Tripe.

"No."

"But why not?"

"Because the commissioner is coming and there is only one road and he would see me and ask questions. He is stupid enough not to recognize me, but you are too stupid to tell wise lies, and this *memsahib* is so afraid of an imaginary place called hell that I must stay and do my own——"

"I left off believing in hell when I was ten years old," Tess answered.

"I hope to —— you're right, ma'am," put in Tom Tripe piously, and both women laughed.

"Then I shall trust you and we shall always understand each other," decided Yasmini. "But why will you not tell lies if there is no hell?"

"I'm afraid I'm guilty now and then."

"But you are ashamed afterward? Why? Lies are necessary, since people are such fools!"

Tom Tripe interrupted, wiping the inside of his tunic collar again with a big bandanna handkerchief.

"How do you know the commissioner is coming, your ladyship? Phew! You'd better hide! I'll have to answer too many questions as it is. He'd turn *you* outside in!"

"There is no hurry," said Yasmini. "He will not be here for five minutes, and he is a fool in any case. He is walking his horse up-hill."

Tess too had seen the beggar on the rock remove his ragged turban, rewind it and then leisurely remove himself from sight. The system of signals was pretty obviously simple. The whole intriguing East is simple, if one only has simplicity enough to understand it.

"Can your horse be seen from the road?" Yasmini asked.

"No, miss. The *saises* are attending to him under the neem-trees at the rear."

"Then ask the *memsahib's* permission to pass through the house and leave by the back way"

Tess, more amused than ever, nodded consent and clapped her hands for Chamu to come and do the honors.

"I'll wait here," she said, "and welcome the commissioner."

"But you, your ladyship?" Tom Tripe scratched his head in evident confusion. "I've got to account for you, you know."

"You haven't seen me. You have only seen a man named Gunga Singh."

"That's all very fine, missy, but the butler—that man Chamu—he knows you well enough. He'll get the story to the maharaja's ears."

"Leave that to me."

"You dassen't trust him, miss!"

AGAIN came the golden laugh, expressive of the worldly wisdom of a thousand women, and sheer delight in it.

"I shall stay here, if the *memsahib* permits."

Tess nodded again.

"The commissioner shall sit with me on the veranda," Tess said. "Chamu will show you into the parlor."

The Blaines had never made the least attempt to leave behind their home-grown names for things. Whoever wanted to in Sialpore, might have a drawing-room, but whoever came to that house must sit in a parlor or do the other thing.

"Is it possible the *burra-sahib* will suppose my horse is yours?" Yasmini asked, and again Tess smiled and nodded.

She would know what to say to any one who asked impertinent questions.

Yasmini and Tom Tripe followed Chamu into the house just as the commissioner's horse's nose appeared past the gate-post; and once behind the curtains in the long hall that divided room from room, Tom Tripe called a halt to make a final effort at persuasion.

"Now, missy—your ladyship—please!"

But she had no patience to spare for him.

"Quick! Send your dog to guard that door!"

Tom Tripe snapped his fingers and made a motion with his right hand. The dog took up position full in the middle of the passage, blocking the way to the kitchen and alert for anything at all, but violence preferred. Chamu, all sly smiles and effusiveness until that instant, as one who would like to be thought a confidential coconspirator, now suddenly realized that his retreat was cut off. No explanation had been offered, but the fact was obvious, and conscience made the usual coward of him. He would rather have bearded Tom Tripe than the dog.

Yasmini opened on him in his own language, because there was just a chance that otherwise Tess might overhear through the open window and put two and two together.

"Scullion! Dish-breaker! Conveyer of uncleanness! You have a son?"

"Truly, heaven-born. One son, who grows into a man—the treasure of my old heart."

"A gambler!"

"A young man, heaven-born, who feels his manhood—now and then gay—now and then foolish——"

"A *budmash!*" (bad rascal.)

"Nay, an honest one."

"Who borrowed from Mukhum Dass the money-lender, making untrue promises?"

"Nay; the money was to pay a debt."

"A gambling debt, and he lied about it?"

"Nay; truly, heaven-born, he but promised Mukhum Dass he would repay the sum with interest."

"Swearing he would buy with the money two horses which Mukhum Dass might seize as forfeit after the appointed time."

"Otherwise, heaven-born, Mukhum Dass would not have lent the money."

"And now Mukhum Dass threatens prison?"

"Truly, heaven-born. The money-lender is without shame—without mercy—without conscience."

"And that is why you—dog of a spying butler set to betray the *sahib's* salt you eat—man of smiles and welcome words—stole money from me? Was it to pay the debt of thy gambling brat-born-in-a-stable?"

"I, heaven-born? I steal from thee? I would rather be beaten!"

"Thou shalt be beaten, and worse—thou and thy son. Feel in his cummerbund, Tom Tripe. I saw where the money went."

Promptly into the butler's sash behind went fingers used to delving into more unmilitary improprieties than any ten civilians could think of. Tripe produced the thousand-rupee note in less than half a minute and, whether or not he believed it stolen, saw through the plan and laughed.

"Is my name on the back of it?" Yasmini asked.

Tom Tripe displayed the signature, and Chamu's clammy face turned ashen-gray

"And," said Yasmini, fixing Chamu with angry blue eyes, "the commissioner *sahib* is on the veranda! For the reputation of the English he would cause an example to be made of servants who steal from guests in the house of foreigners."

Chamu capitulated utterly, and wept.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" he demanded.

"In the jail," Yasmini said slowly, "you could not spy on my doings nor report my sayings."

"Heaven-born, I am dumb! Take back the money and I am dumb forever, never having seen or heard you! Take back the money!"

But Yasmini was not so easily balked of her intention.

"Put his thumb-print on it, Tom Tripe, and see that he writes his name."

The trembling Chamu was led into a room where an ink-pot stood open on a desk, and watched narrowly while he made a thumb-mark and scratched a signature. Then:

"Take the money and pay the puppy's debt with it. Afterward beat the boy. And see to it," Yasmini advised, "that Mukhum Dass gives a receipt, lest he claim the debt a second time."

Speechless between relief, doubt and resentment, Chamu hid the bank-note in his sash and tried to feign gratitude—a quality omitted from his list of elements when a patient, casteless mother brought him yelling into the world.

"Go!"

Tom Tripe made a sign to Trotters, who went and lay down, obviously bored, and Chamu departed backward, bowing repeatedly with both hands raised to his forehead.

"And now, your ladyship?"

"Take that eater-of-all-that-is-unnamable—" she meant the dog—"and return to the palace."

"Your ladyship, it's all my life's worth!"

"Tell the maharaja that you have spoken with a certain Gunga Singh, who said that the Princess Yasmini is at the house of the commissioner *sahib*."

"But it's not true; they'll——"

"Let the commissioner *sahib* deny it then. Go!"

"But, missy——"

"Do as I say, Tom Tripe, and when I am Maharanee of Sialpore you shall have double pay—and a troupe of dancing girls—and a dozen horses—and the title of *bahadur*—and all the brandy you can drink. The sepoys shall furthermore have modern uniforms, and you shall drill them until they fall down dead. I have promised. Go!"

With a wag of his head that admitted impotence in the face of woman's wiles Tom strode out by the back way, followed at a

properly respectful distance by his "eater-of-all-that-was-unnamable."

Then the princess walked through the parlor to the deeply cushioned window-seat, outside which the commissioner sat quite alone with Mrs. Blaine, trying to pull strings whose existence is not hinted at in blue books. Yasmini from earliest infancy possessed an uncanny gift of silence, sometimes even when she laughed.

NO TRESPASS!

THERE'S comfort in the purple creed
Of rosary and hood;
There's promise in the temple gong,
And hope (deferred) when evensong
Foretells a morrow's good;
There's rapture in the royal right
To lay the daily dole
In cash or kind at temple-door,
Since sacrifice must go before
The saving of a soul.
The priests who plot for power now,
Though future glory preach,
Themselves alike the victims fall
Of law that mesmerizes all—
Each subject unto each—
Though all is well if all obey
And all have humble heart,
Nor dare to hold in curséd doubt
Those gems of truth the church lets out;
But where's the apple-cart,
And where's the sacred fiction gone,
And who's to have the blame
When any upstart takes a hand
And, scorning what the priests have planned,
Plays Harry with the game?

CHAPTER III

"Give a woman the last word always; but be sure it is a question, which you leave unanswered."

HE WAS a beau-ideal commissioner. The native newspaper said so when he first came, having painfully selected the phrase from a "Dictionary of Polite English for Public Purposes" edited by a college graduate (at present in the Andamans).

True, later it had called him an "overbearing and insane procrastinator," "an apostle of absolutism," and—plum of all literary gleanings, since it left so much to the imagination of the native reader—*"laudator temporis acti."* But that was because he had withdrawn his private subscription prior to suspending the paper *sine die* under Paragraph So-and-so of the Act for Dealing with Sedition; it could not be held to cancel the correct first judgment, any more than the unmeasured early praise had offset later indiscretion. Beau ideal must stand.

It was not his first call at the Blaines' house, although somehow or other he never contrived to find Dick Blaine at home. As a bachelor he had no domestic difficulties to pin him down when office work was over for the morning, and, being a man of hardly more than forty, of fine physique, with an astonishing capacity for swift work, he could usually finish in an hour before breakfast what would keep the routine rank and file of orthodox officials perspiring through the day. That was one reason why he had been sent to Sialpore—men in the higher ranks, with a pension due them after certain years of service, dislike being hurried.

He was a handsome man—too handsome, some said—with a profile like a medallion of Mark Antony that lost a little of its strength and poise when he looked straight at you. A commissionership was an apparent rise in the world, but Sialpore has the name of being a departmental *cul-de-sac*, and they had laughed in the clubs about "Irish promotion" without exactly naming Judge O'Mally. (Mrs. O'Mally came from a cathedral city where distaste for the conventions is forced at high pressure from early infancy.)

But there are no such things as political blind alleys to a man who is a judge of indiscretion, provided he has certain other unusual gifts as well. Sir Roland Samson, K. C. S. I., was not at all a disappointed man, nor even a discouraged one.

Most people were at a disadvantage coming up the path through the Blaines' front garden. There was a feeling all the way of being looked down on from the veranda that took ten minutes to recover from in the warmth of Western hospitality.

But Samson had learned long ago that appearance was all in his favor, and he reinforced it with beautiful buff riding-boots that drew attention to firm feet and manly bearing. It did him good to be looked at, and he felt, as a painstaking gentleman should, that the sight did spectators no harm.

"All alone?" he asked, feeling sure that Mrs. Blaine was pleased to see him, and shifting the chair beside her as he sat down, in order to see her face better. "Husband in the hills as usual? I must choose a Sunday next time and find him in."

Tess smiled. She was used to the remark.

He always made it, but always kept away on Sundays.

"There was a party at my house last night, and every one agreed what an acquisition you and your husband are to Sialpore. You're so refreshing—quite different to what we're all used to."

"We're enjoying the novelty too—at least, Dick doesn't have much time for enjoyment, but——"

"I suppose he has had vast experience of mining?"

"Oh, he knows his profession, and works hard. He'll find gold where there is any," said Tess.

"You never told me how he came to choose Sialpore as prospecting-ground."

Tess recognized the prevarication instantly. Almost the first thing Dick had done after they arrived was to make a full statement of all the circumstances in the commissioner's office. However, she was not her husband. There was no harm in repetition.

"The maharaja's secretary wrote to a mining college in the States for the name of some one qualified to explore the old workings in these hills. They gave my husband's name among others, and he got in correspondence. Finally, being free at the time, we came out here for the trip, and the maharaja offered terms on the spot that we accepted. That is all."

Samson laughed.

"I'm afraid not all. A contract with the British Government would be kept. I won't say a written agreement with Gungadhura is worthless, but——"

"Oh, he has to pay week by week in advance to cover expenses."

"Very wise. But how about if you find gold?"

"We get a percentage."

Every word of that, as Tess knew, the commissioner could have ascertained in a minute from his office files. So she was quite as much on guard as he—quite as alert to discover hidden drifts.

"I'm afraid there'll be complications," he went on with an air of friendly frankness. "Perhaps I'd better wait until I can see your husband?"

"If you like, of course. But he and I speak the same language. What you tell me will reach him—anything you say, just as you say it."

"I'd better be careful then," he answered, smiling. "Wise wives don't always tell their husbands everything."

"I've no secrets from mine."

"Unusual!" he smiled. "I might say obsolete. But you Americans with your reputation for divorce and originality are very old-fashioned in some things, aren't you?"

"What did you want me to tell my husband?" countered Tess.

"I wonder if he understands how complicated conditions are here. For instance, does your contract stipulate where the gold is to be found?"

"On the maharaja's territory," replied Tess with an air of surprize.

"Anywhere within those limits?"

"So I understand."

"Is the kind of gold mentioned?"

"How many kinds are there?"

He gained thirty seconds for reflection by lighting a cigar, and decided to change his ground.

"I know nothing of geology, I'm afraid. I wonder if your husband knows about the so-called 'islands'? There are patches of British territory, administered directly by us, within the maharaja's boundaries; and little islands of native territory administered by the maharaja's government within the British sphere."

"Something like our Indian reservations, I suppose?"

"Not exactly, but the analogy will do. If your husband were to find gold—of any kind—on one of our islands within the maharaja's territory, his contract with the maharaja, in spite of its legality otherwise, would be useless."

"Are the boundaries of the islands clearly marked?"

"Not very. They're known, of course, and recorded. There's an old fort on one of them, garrisoned by a handful of British troops—a constant source of heart-burn, I believe, to Gungadhura. He can see the top of the flagstaff from his palace roof; a predecessor of mine had the pole lengthened, I'm told.

"On the other hand, there's a very pretty little palace over on our side of the river with about a half square mile surrounding it that pertains to the native State. Your husband could dig there, of course. There's no knowing that it might not pay—if he's looking for more kinds of gold here than one."

TESS contrived not to seem aware that she was being pumped.

"D'you mean there might be alluvial gold down by the river?" she asked.

"Now, now, Mrs. Blaine!" he laughed. "You Americans are not so ingenuous as you like to seem! Do you really expect us to believe that your husband's purpose isn't in fact to discover the Sialpore Treasure?"

"I never heard of it."

"I expect he hasn't told you."

"I'll bet with you, if you like," she answered. "Our contract against your job that I know every single detail of his terms with Gungadhura!"

"Well, well—of course I believe you, Mrs. Blaine. We're not overheard, are we?"

Not forgetful of the Princess Yasmini hidden somewhere in the house behind her, but unsuspicious yet of that young woman's gift for garnering facts, Tess stood up to look through the parlor window. She could see all of the room except the rear part of the window-seat, a little more than a foot of which was shut out of her view by the depth of the wall. A cat, for instance, could have lain there tucked among the cushions perfectly invisible.

"None of the servants is in there," she said, and sat down again, nodding in the direction of a gardener. "There's the nearest possible eavesdropper."

Samson had made up his mind. This was not an occasion to be actually indiscreet, but a good chance to pretend to be. He was a judge of those matters.

"There have been eighteen rajas of Sialpore in direct succession father to son," he said, swinging a beautiful buff-leather boot into view by crossing his knee, and looking at her narrowly with the air of a man who unfolds confidences. "The first man began accumulating treasure. Every single raja since has added to it. Each man has confided the secret to his successor and to none else—father to son, you understand. When Bubru Singh, the last man, died he had no son. The secret died with him."

"How does anybody know that there's a secret then?" demanded Tess.

"Everybody knows it! The money was raised by taxes. Minister after minister in turn has had to hand over minted gold to the reigning raja——"

"And look the other way, I suppose, while the raja hid the stuff!" suggested Tess.

Samson screwed up his face like a man who has taken medicine.

"There are dozens of ways in a native State of getting rid of men who know too much."

"Even under British over-rule?"

He nodded.

"Poison—snakes—assassination—jail on trumped-up charges, and disease in jail—apparent accidents of all sorts. It doesn't pay to know too much."

"Then we're suspected of hunting for this treasure? Is that the idea?"

"Not at all, since you've denied it. I believe you implicitly. But I hope your husband doesn't stumble on it."

"Why?"

"Or, if he does, that he'll see his way clear to notify me first."

"Would that be honest?"

He changed his mind. That was a point on which Samson prided himself. He was not hidebound to one plan as some men are, but could keep two or three possibilities in mind and follow up whichever suited him. This was a case for indiscretion after all.

"Seeing we're alone, and that you're a most exceptional woman, I think I'll let you into a diplomatic secret, Mrs. Blaine. Only you mustn't repeat it. The present maharaja, Gungadhura, isn't the saving kind; he's a spender. He'd give his eyes to get hold of that treasure. And if he had it, we'd need an army to suppress him.

"We made a mistake when Bubru Singh died; there were two nephews with about equal claims, and we picked the wrong one—a born intriguer. I'd call him a rascal if he weren't a reigning prince. It's too late now to unseat him—unless, of course, we should happen to catch him *in flagrante delictu*."

"What does that mean? With the goods? With the treasure?"

"No, no. In the act of doing something grossly *ultra vires*—illegal, that's to say.

"But you've put your finger on the point. If the Treasure should be found—as it might be—somewhere on that little plot of ground with a palace on it on our side of the river, our problem would be fairly easy. There'd be some way of—ah—making sure the fund would be properly administered. But if Gungadhura found it in the hills, and kept quiet about it as he doubtless would, he'd have every sedition-monger in India in his

pay within a year, and the consequences might be very serious."

"Who is the other man—the one the British didn't choose?" asked Tess.

"A very decent chap named Utirupa—quite a sportsman. He was thought too young at the time the selection was made; but he knew enough to get out of the reach of the new maharaja immediately. They have a phrase here, you know, 'to hate like cousins.' They're rather remote cousins, but they hate all the more for that."

"So you'd rather that the Treasure stayed buried?"

"Not exactly. But—" he tossed ash from the end of his cigar to illustrate off-handedness—"I think I could promise ten per cent. of it to whoever brought us exact information of its whereabouts before the maharaja could lay his hands on it."

"I'll tell that to my husband."

"Do."

"Of course, being in a way in partnership with Gungadhura, he might——"

"Let me give you one word of caution, if I may without offense. We—our government—wouldn't recognize the right of—of any one to take that treasure out of the country. Ten per cent. would be the maximum, and that only in case of accurate information brought in time to us."

"Aren't findings keepings? Isn't possession nine points of the law?" laughed Tess.

"In certain cases, yes. But not where government knows of the existence somewhere of a hoard of public funds—an enormous hoard—it must run into millions."

"Then if the maharaja should find it would you take it from him?"

"No. We would put the screws on, and force him to administer the fund properly if we knew about it. But he'd never tell."

"Then how d'you know he hasn't found the stuff already?"

"Because many of his personal bills aren't paid, and the political stormy petrels are not yet heading his way. He's handicapped by not being able to hunt for it openly. Some ill-chosen confidant might betray the find to us. I doubt if he trusts more than one or two people at a time."

"IT MUST be —— to be a maharaja!" Tess burst out after a minute's silence.

"It's sometimes —— to be commissioner, Mrs. Blaine."

"If I were Gungadhura I'd find that money or bu'st. And when I'd found it——"

"You'd endow an orphan asylum, eh?"

"I'd make such trouble for you English that you'd be glad to leave me in peace for a generation."

Samson laughed good-naturedly and twisted up the end of his mustache.

" 'Pon my soul, you're a surprizing woman! So your sympathies are all with Gungadhura?"

"Not at all. I think he's a criminal. He buys women, and tortures animals in an arena, and keeps a troupe of what he is pleased to call dancing-girls. I've seen his eyes in the morning, and I suspect him of most of the vices in the calendar. He's despicable. But if I were in his shoes I'd find that money and make it hot for you English!"

"Are you of Irish extraction, Mrs. Blaine?"

"No, indeed I'm not. I'm Connecticut Yankee, and my husband's from the West. I don't have to be Irish to think for myself, do I?"

Samson did not know whether or not to take her seriously, but recognized that his chance had gone that morning for the flirtation he had had in view—very mild, of course, for a beginning; it was his experience that most things ought to start quite mildly, if you hoped to keep the other man from stampeding the game. Nevertheless as a judge of situations, he preferred not to take his leave at that moment. Give a woman the last word always, but be sure it is a question which you leave unanswered.

"You've a beautiful garden," he said; and for a minute or two they talked of flowers, of which he knew more than a little; then of music, of which he understood a very great deal.

"Have you a proper lease on this house?" he asked at last.

"I believe so. Why?"

"I've been told there's some question about the title. Some one's bringing suit against your landlord for possession on some ground or another."

"What of it? Suppose the other should win—could he put us out?"

"I don't know. That might depend on your present landlord's power to make the lease at the time when he made it."

"But we signed the agreement in good

faith. Surely, as long as we pay the rent——"

"I don't know, I'm sure. Well—if there's any trouble come to me about it and we'll see what can be done."

"But who is this who is bringing suit against the landlord?"

"I haven't heard his name—don't even know the details. I hope you'll come out of it all right. Certainly I'll help in any way I can. Sometimes a little influence, you know, exerted in the right way— Well—please give my regards to your husband—good morning, Mrs. Blaine."

It was a pet theory of his that few men pay enough attention to their backs—not that he preached it; preaching is tantamont to spilling beans, supposing that the other fellow listens; and if he doesn't listen it is waste of breath. But he bore in mind that people behind him had eyes as well as those in front.

Accordingly he made a very dignified exit down the long path, tipped Mrs. Blaine's *sais* all the man had any right to expect, and rode away, feeling that he had made the right impression. He looked particularly well on horseback.

Theresa Blaine smiled after him, wondering what impression she herself had made; but she did not have much time to think about it. From the open window behind her she was seized suddenly, drawn backward and embraced.

"You are perfect!" Yasmini purred in her ear between kisses. "You are surely one of the fairies sent to live among mortals for a sin! I shall love you forever!

"Now that *burra-wallah* Samson *sahib* will ride into the town, and perhaps also to the law-court, and to other places, to ask about your landlord, of whom he knows nothing, having only heard a servants' tale. But Tom Tripe will have told already that I am at the *burra* commissioner's house, and Gungadhura will send there to ask questions. And whoever goes will have to wait long.

"And when the commissioner returns at last he will deny that I have been there, and the messenger will return to Gungadhura, who will not believe a word of it, especially as he will know that the commissioner has been riding about the town on an unknown errand. So, after he has learned that I am back in my own palace Gungadhura will try to poison me again. All of which is as it should be. Come closer and let me——"

"Child!" Tess protested. "Do you realize that you're dressed up like an extremely handsome man, and are kissing me through a window in the sight of all Sialpore? How much reputation do you suppose I shall have left within the hour?"

"There is only one kind of reputation worth the having," laughed Yasmini; "that of knowing how to win!"

"But what's this about poison?" Tess asked her.

"He always tries to poison me. Now he will try more carefully."

"You must take care! How will you prevent him?"

By quite unconscious stages Tess found herself growing concerned about this young truant princess. One minute she was interested and amused. The next she was conscious of affection. Now she was positively anxious about her, to use no stronger word. Nor had she time to wonder why, for Yasmini's methods were breathless.

"I shall eat very often at your house. And then you shall take a journey with me. And after that the great pig Gungadhura shall be very very sorry he was born, and still more sorry that he tried to poison me."

"Tell me, child, haven't you a mother?"

"She died a year ago. If there is such a place as hell she has gone there, of course, because nobody is good enough for heaven. But I am not Christian and not Hindu, so hell is not my business."

"What are you, then?"

"I am Yasmini. There is nobody like me. I am all alone, believing only what I know and laughing at the priests. I know all the laws of caste, because that is necessary if you are to understand men. And I have let the priests teach me their religion because it is by religion that they govern people.

"And the priests," she laughed, "are much more foolish than the fools they entice and frighten. But the priests have power. Gungadhura is fearfully afraid of them. The high priest of the temple of Jinendra pretends to him that he can discover where the Treasure is hidden, so Gungadhura makes daily offerings and the priest grows very fat."

"WHO taught you such good English?" Tess asked her; for there was hardly even a trace of foreign accent, nor the least hesitation for a word.

"Father Bernard, a Jesuit. My mother sent for him, and he came every day, year after year. He had a little chapel in Sialpore, where a few of the very low-caste people used to go and pray and make confessions to him. That should have given him great power; but the people of this land never confess completely, as he told me the Europeans do, preferring to tell lies about one another rather than the truth about themselves.

"I refused to be baptized because I was tired of him, and after my mother died and she was burned with the Hindu ritual, he received orders to go elsewhere. Now there is another Jesuit, but he only has a little following among the English, and can not get to see me because I hide behind the *purdah*. The *purdah* is good—if you know how to make use of it and not be ruled by it."

They were still in the window, Yasmini kneeling on the cushions with her face in shadow and Tess with her back to the light.

"Ah! Hasamurti comes!" said Yasmini suddenly. "She is my *cheti*" (hand-maiden).

Tess turned swiftly, but all she saw was one of the three beggars down by the little gate twisting himself a garland out of stolen flowers.

"Now there will be a carriage waiting, and I must leave my horse in your stable."

The beggar held the twisted flowers up to the sunlight to admire his work.

"I must go at once. I shall go to the temple of Jinendra, where the priest, who is no man's friend, imagines I am a friend of his. He will promise me anything if I will tell him what to say to Gungadhura; and I shall tell him without believing the promises.

"One of these days perhaps he will plot with Gungadhura to have me poisoned, being in agreement with the commissioner *sahib* who said to you just now that it is not good to know too much. But neither is it good to be too late!

"Lend me a covering, my sister—see, this is the very thing. I shall leave by the little gate. Send the gardener on an errand.

"Are the other servants at the back of the house? Of course yes; they will be spying to see me leave by the way I came."

Tess sent the gardener running for a basket to put flowers in, and when she turned her head again Yasmini had stepped out through the window shrouded from head to heels in a camel-hair robe such as the Bikanir Desert men wear at night. The lower part of her face was hooded in it.

Provided you wear a turban you can wear anything else you like in India without looking incongruous. It is the turban that turns the trick. Even the spurs on the heels of riding-boots did not look out of place.

"You'll sweat," laughed Tess. "That camel-hair is hot stuff."

"Does the panther sweat under his pelt? I am stronger than a panther. Now swiftly! I must go, but I will come soon. You are my friend."

She was gone like a shadow without another word, with long, swift strides, not noticing the beggars and not noticed by them as far as any one could tell. Tess sat down to smoke a cigaret and think the experience over.

She had not done thinking when Dick Blaine returned unexpectedly for early lunch and showed her a bagful of coarsely powdered quartz.

"There's color there," he said jubilantly. "Rather more than merely color! It's not time to talk yet, but I think I've found a vein that may lead somewhere. Then won't Gungadhura gloat!"

She told him at great length about Yasmini's visit, dwelling on every detail of it, he listening like a man at a play, for Tess had the gift of clear description.

"Go a journey with her if you feel like it, Tess," he advised. "You have a rotten time here alone all day, and I can't do much to 'liven it. Take sensible precautions but have a good time anyway you can."

Because Yasmini had monopolized imagination she told him last of all, at lunch, about the commissioner's call, rehearsing that, too, detail by detail, word for word.

"Wants me to find the Treasure, does he, and call the game on Gungadhura? What does he take me for? One of his stool-pigeons? If it's a question of percentage, I'd prefer one from the maharaja than from him.

"If the tale's true the stuff belongs to Gungadhura. If I ever stumble on it he shall know first go off the bat, and I'll see the British Government in——before I'll answer questions."

"They'd never believe Gungadhura hadn't rewarded you," said Tess.

"What of it?" he demanded. "What do we care what they believe? And supposing it were true, what then? Just at present I'm in partnership with Gungadhura."

JINENDRA'S SMILE

DEEP broods the calm where the cooing doves are mating
And shadows quiver noiseless 'neath the courtyard trees;
Cool keeps the gloom where the suppliants are waiting,
Begging little favors of Jinendra on their knees.
Peace over all, and the consciousness of nearness,
Charity removing the remoteness of the gods;
Spirit of compassion breathing with new clearness,
"There's a limit set to *khama;* there's a surcease from the rods."
"Blessed were the few who may trim the lights of kindness,
Toiling in the temple for the love of one and all—
If it were not for hypocrisy and gluttony and blindness,"
Smiles the image of Jinendra on the courtyard wall.

CHAPTER IV

"The law . . . is like a python after monkeys in the treetops."

YASMINI, hooded like a bandit in the camel-hair cloak, resumed an air of leisurely dignity in keeping with the unhurried habit of Sialpore the moment she was through the gate, for Mukhum Dass the money-lender, followed by a sweating, lean parasite on foot, was riding a smart mule on his customary morning round to collect interest from victims and oversee securities.

He was a fat, squat, shiny-looking person in a black alpaca coat, with a black umbrella for protection from the sun, and an air of sour dissatisfaction for general business purposes—an air that was given the lie direct by a small, acquisitive nose and bright brown eyes that surely never made bad bargains.

Yasmini's hooded figure brought him to a halt just at the corner, where the little road below the Blaines' wall joined the wider road that led down-hill. Business is business, and time a serious matter only for those who sign promissory notes; he drew rein without compunction.

"This house is yours?" she asked, and he nodded, his sharp eyes shining like an animal's, determined to recognize his questioner.

"There is a miscalculating son of lies who brings a lawsuit to get the title?"

He nodded again—a man of few words except when words exacted interest.

"Dhulap Singh, is it not? He is a secret agent of Gungadhura."

"How do you know? Why should the maharaja want my property?"

"He hunts high and low for the Sialpore Treasure. Jengal Singh, who built this house, was in the confidence of Gungadhura's uncle, and a priest says there will be a clue found to the Treasure beneath the floor of this house."

"A likely tale indeed!"

"Very well, then—lose thine house!"

Yasmini turned on a disdainful heel and started down-hill. Mukhum Dass called after her, but she took no notice. He sent the sweating parasite to bring her back, but she shook him off with execrations. Mukhum Dass turned his mule and rode down-hill after her.

"True information has its price," he said. "Tell me your name."

"That also has its price."

He cackled dryly. "Names cost money only to their owners—on a *hundi*" (promissory note).

"Nevertheless there is a price."

"In advance? I will give a half-rupee."

Once more Yasmini resumed her way down-hill. Again Mukhum Dass rode after her.

"At any rate name the price."

"It is silence firstly; second, a security for silence."

"The first part is easy."

"Nay, difficult. A woman can keep silence, but men chatter like the apes in every coffee-shop."

His bargain-driver's eyes watched hers intently, unable to detect the slightest clue that should start him guessing. He was trying to identify a man, not a woman.

"How shall I give security for silence?" he asked.

"I already hold it."

"How? What? Where?"

The money-lender betrayed a glimpse of sheer pugnacity that seemed to amuse his tormentor.

"Send thy jackal out of earshot, tiger."

He snapped at his parasite angrily, and the man went away to sit down. Then:

"Where are the title deeds of the house you say you own?" she asked him suddenly.

Mukhum Dass kept silence, and tried to smother the raging anger in his eyes.

"Was it Mukhum Dass or another who went to the priest in the temple of Jinendra on a certain afternoon and requested intercession to the god in order that a title deed might be recovered, that fell down the *nullah* when the snakes frightened a man's mule and he himself fell into the road? Or was it another accident that split that ear of thine in two pieces?"

"Priests cackle like old women," rowled the money-lender.

"Nay, but this one cackled to the god. Perhaps Jinendra felt compassionate toward a poor *shroff* (money-lender) who can not defend his suit successfully without that title-deed. Jengal Singh died, and his son, who ought to know, claims that the house was really sold to Dhulap Singh, who dallies with his suit because he suspects, but does not know, that Mukhum Dass has lost the paper, eh?"

"How do you know these things?"

"Maybe the god Jinendra told. Which would be better, Mukhum Dass—to keep great silence and be certain to receive the paper in time to defend the lawsuit—or to talk freely, and so set others talking? Who knows that it might not reach the ears of Jengal Singh that the title deed is truly lost?"

"He who tells secrets to a priest," swore the money-lender, "would better have screamed them from the housetops."

"Nay—the god heard. The priest told the god, and the god told a certain one to whom the finder brought the paper, asking a reward. That person holds the paper now as security for silence."

"It is against the law to keep my paper."

"The law catches whom it can, Mukhum Dass, letting all others go, like a python after monkeys in the treetops."

"From whom am I to get my paper for the lawsuit at the proper time?"

"From Jinendra's priest—perhaps."

"He has it now? The dog's stray offspring! I will——"

"Nay, he has it not. Be kind and courteous to Jinendra's priest, or perhaps the god will send the paper after all to Dhulap Singh."

"As to what shall I keep silence?"

"Two matters. Firstly, Chamu the butler will presently pay his son's debt. Give Chamu a receipt with the number of the bank-note written on it, saying nothing."

"Second?"

"Preserve the bank-note carefully for thirty days—and keep silence."

"I will do it. Now tell me thy name."

Yasmini laughed.

"Do thy victims repay in advance the rupees not yet lent? Nay, the price is silence. First pay the price; then learn my name. Go—get thy money from Chamu the butler. Breathe as much as a hint to any one, and thy title deed shall go to Dhulap Singh."

Eying her like a hawk, but with more mixed emotions than that bird can likely compass, the money-lender sat his mule and watched her stride round the corner out of sight. Then, glancing over her shoulder to make sure the man's parasite was not watching her at his master's orders, she ran along the shoulder of the hill to where, in the shelter of a clump of trees, a carriage waited.

It was one of those lumbering, four-wheeled affairs with four horses, and a platform for two standing attendants behind and wooden latticework over the windows, in which the womenfolk of princes take the air But there were no attendants—only a coachman and a veiled woman who came running out to meet her; for Yasmini, like her cousin the maharaja, did not trust too many people all at once.

"Quick, Hasamurti!"

卐 FUSSING and giggling over her—the very name means Laughter—the maid bustled her into the carriage, and without a word of instruction the coachman tooled his team down-hill at a leisurely gait as if told in advance to take his time about it; the team was capable of speed.

Inside the carriage, with a lot more chuckling and giggling, a change was taking place almost as complete as that from chrysalis to butterfly. The toilet of a lady of Yasmini's nice discrimination takes time under the easiest circumstances; in a lumbering coach, not built for leg-room, and with a looking-glass the size of a saucer, it was a mixture of horse-play and miracle.

Between them they upset the perfume bottle, as was natural, and a shrill scream at one stage of the journey—which started a rumor all over Sialpore to the effect that Gungadhura was up to the same old game again—announced as a matter of plain fact

that Yasmini had sat on the spurs. There was long, spun-gold hair to be combed out—penciling to do to eyebrows—lac to be applied to pretty feet to make them exquisitely pretty—and layer on layer of gossamer silk to be smoothed and hung exactly right. Then over it all had to go one of those bright-hued silken veils that look so casually worn but whose proper adjustment is an art.

But when they reached the bottom of the long hill and began twisting in and out among the narrow streets, it was finished. By the time they reached the temple of Jinendra, set back in an old stone courtyard with images of the placid god carved all about in the shade of the wide, projecting cornice, all was quiet and orderly inside the carriage, and there stepped out of it, followed by the same dark-hooded maid, a swift vision of female loveliness that flitted like a flash into the temple gloom.

It was not so squalid as the usual Hindu temple, although so ancient that the carving of the pillars in some places was almost worn away, and the broad stone flags on the floor were hollowed deep by ages of devotion. The gloom was pierced here and there by dim light from brass lamps, that showed carvings blackened by centuries of smoke; but there was an unlooked-for suggestion of care, and a little cleanliness that the fresh blossoms scattered here and there accentuated.

There were very few worshipers at that hour—only a woman who desired a child and was praying to Jinendra as a last recourse after trying all the other gods in vain, and a half-dozen men—all eyes—who gossiped in low tones in a corner. Yasmini gave them small chance to recognize her. Quicker than their gaze could follow, a low door at the rear, close beside the enormous, jeweled image of the god, closed behind her and the maid, and all that was left of the vision was the ringing echo of an iron lock dying away in dark corners and suggesting nothing except secrecy.

The good, square room she had entered so abruptly unannounced was swept and washed. Sunlight poured into it at one end through a window that opened on an inner courtyard, and there were flowers everywhere—arranged in an enormous brass bowl on a little table—scattered at random on the floor—hung in plaited garlands from the hooks intended to support lamps. Of furniture there was little—only a long, cushioned bench down the length of the wall beneath the window, and a thing like a throne on which Jinendra's High Priest sat in solitary grandeur.

He did not rise at first to greet her, for Jinendra's priest was fat; there was no gainsaying it. After about a minute a sort of earthquake taking place in him began to reach the surface; he rocked on his center in increasing waves that finally brought him with a spasm of convulsion to the floor.

There he stood in full sunlight with his bare toes turned inward, holding his stomach with both hands, while Yasmini settled herself in graceful, youthful curves on the cushioned bench—with her face in shadow, and the smirking maid at her feet. Then before climbing ponderously back to his perch on the throne the priest touched his forehead once with both hands and came close to a semblance of bowing, the arrogance of sanctity combining with his paunch to cut that ceremony short.

"Send the girl away," he suggested as soon as he was settled into place again.

But Yasmini laughed at him with that golden note of hers that suggests illimitable understanding and unfathomable mirth.

"I know the ways of priests," she answered. "The girl stays."

The priest's fat chops darkened a shade.

"There are things she should not know."

"She knows already more in her small head than there is in all thy big belly, priest of an idol."

"Beware, woman, lest the gods hear sacrilege."

"If they are real gods they love me," she answered. "If they have any sense they will be pleased whenever I laugh at your idolatry. Hasamurti stays."

"But at the first imaginary insult she will run with information to wherever it will do most harm. If she can be made properly afraid, perhaps——"

Yasmini's golden laugh cut him off short.

"If she is made afraid now she will hate me later. As long as she loves me she will keep my secrets, and she will love me because of the secrets—being a woman and not a belly-with-a-big-tongue who would sell me to the highest bidder if he dared. I know a Brahman.

"Thou and I are co-conspirators because

my woman's wit is sharper than thy greed. We are confidants because I know too much of the misdeeds. We are going to succeed because I laugh at thy fat fears, and am never deceived for a moment by pretense of sanctity or promises however vehement."

SHE said all that in a low, sweet voice, and with a smile that would have made a much less passionate man lose something of his self-command. Jinendra's priest began to move uneasily.

"Peace, woman!"

"There is no peace where priests are," she retorted in the same sweet-humored voice. "I am engaged in war, not honey-gathering. I have lied sufficient times today to Mukhum Dass to need ten priests if I believed in them or were afraid to lie.

"The *shroff* will come to ask about his title deed. Tell him you are told a certain person has it, but that if he dares breathe a word the paper will go straight to Dhulap Singh, who will destroy it and so safely bring his lawsuit. Then let Dhulap Singh be told also that the title deed is in certain hands, so he will put off the lawsuit week after week, and one who is my friend will suffer no annoyance."

"Who is this friend?"

"Another one who builds no bridges on thy sanctity."

"Not one of the English? Beware of them, I say; beware of them!"

"No, not one of the English. Next, let Gungadhura be told that Tom Tripe has ever an open-handed welcome at Blaine *sahib's*——"

"Ah!" he objected, shaking his fat face until his cheeks wabbled. "Women are all fools sooner or later. Why let a drunken English soldier be included in the long list of people to be reckoned with?"

"Because Gungadhura will then show much favor to Tom Tripe, who is my friend, and it amuses me to see my friends prosper. Also I have a plan."

"Plans—plans—plans! And whither does the tangle lead us?"

"To the Treasure, fool!"

"But if you know so surely where the Treasure is, woman, why not tell me and——"

Again the single note of mocking, golden laughter cut him off short.

"I would trust thee with the secret, Brahman, just as far as the herdsman trusts a tiger with his sheep."

"But I could insure that Gungadhura should divide it into three parts, and——"

"When the time comes," she answered, "the priest of Jinendra shall come to me for his portion, not I to the priest. Nor will there be three portions, but one—with a little percentage taken from it for the sake of thy fat belly. Gungadhura shall get nothing."

"I wash my hands of it all," the priest retorted indignantly. "The half for me, or I wash my hands of it and tell Gungadhura that you know the secret. I will trust him to find a way to draw thy cobra from its hole."

"Maybe he might," she nodded, smiling, "after the English had finished hanging thee for that matter of the strangling of Rum Dass. Thy fat belly would look laughable indeed hanging by a stretched neck from a noose. They would need a thick rope. They might even make the knot slippery with cow-grease for thy special benefit."

The priest winced.

"None can prove that matter," he said, recovering his composure with an effort.

"Except me," she retorted, "who have the very letter that was written to Rum Dass that brought him into thy clutches—and five other proofs beside. Two long years I waited to have a hold on thee, priest, before I came to blossom in the odor of thy sanctity; now I am willing to take the small chance of thy temper getting the better of discretion."

"You are a devil," he said simply, profoundly convinced of the truth of his remark; and she laughed like a mischievous child, clapping her hands together.

"So now," she said, "there is little else to discuss. If Gungadhura should be superstitious fool enough to come to thee again for auguries and godly counsel——"

"He comes always. He shows proper devotion to Jinendra."

"Repeat the former story that a clue to the Treasure must be found in Blaine *sahib's* house——"

"In what form? He will ask me again in what form the clue will be, that he may recognize it."

"Tell him there is a map. And be sure to tell him that Tom Tripe is welcome at the house. Have you understood?

"Then one other matter; when it is known that I am back in my palace Gungadhura will set extra spies on me, and will double the guard at all the doors to keep me from getting out again. He will not trust Tom Tripe this time, but will give the charge to one of the Rajput officers. But he will have been told that I was at the commissioner *sahib's* house this morning, and therefor he will not dare to have me strangled, because the commissioner *sahib* might make inquiries. I have also made other precautions—and a friend.

"But tell Gungadhura, lest he make altogether too much trouble for me, that I applied to the commissioner *sahib* for assistance to go to Europe, saying I am weary of India. And add that the commissioner *sahib* counseled me not to go, but promised to send English *memsahibs* to see me."

She very nearly used the word American, but thought better of it on the instant.

"He will ask me how I know this," said the Brahman, turning it all over slowly in his mind and trying to make head or tail of it.

"Tell him I came here like himself for priestly counsel and made a clean breast of everything to thee. He will suspect thee of lying to him; but what is one lie more or less?"

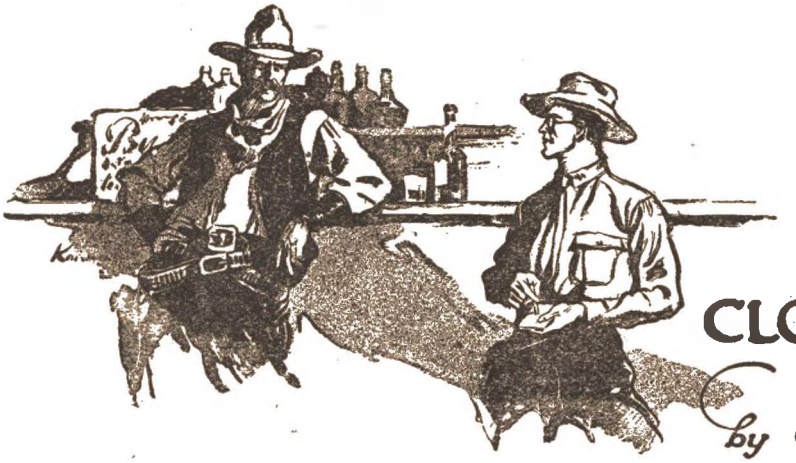
With that final shaft she gathered up her skirts, covered her face, nudged the giggling maid and left him, turning the key in the lock herself and flitting out through gloom into the sunlight as fast as she had come.

The carriage was still waiting at the edge of the outer court, and once again the driver started off without instructions, but tooling his team this time at a faster pace, with a great deal of whip-cracking and shouts to pedestrians to clear the way. And this time the carriage had an escort of indubitable maharaja's men, who closed in on it from all sides, their numbers increasing, mounted and unmounted, until by the time Yasmini's own palace gate was reached there was as good as a state procession, made up for the most part of men who tried to look as if they had made a capture by sheer derring-do and skill.

And down the street, helterskelter on a sweating thoroughbred, came Maharaja Gungadhura Singh just in time to see the back of the carriage as it rumbled in through the gateway and the iron doors clanged behind it. Scowling—altogether too round-shouldered for the martial stock he sprang from—puffy-eyed, and not so regal as overbearing in appearance, he sat for a few minutes stroking his scented beard upward and muttering to himself.

Then some one ventured to tell him where the carriage had been seen waiting, and with what abundant skill it had been watched and tracked from Jinendra's temple to that gate. At that he gave an order about the posting of the guard, and, beckoning only one mounted attendant to follow him, clattered away down-street, taking a turn or two to throw the curious off the scent, and then headed straight for the temple on his own account.

TO BE CONTINUED



CLOTHES and the MAN

by G. A. Wells

Author of "The Devil a Man Would Be," "Tactics," etc.

THE sun was as near the zenith as it ever gets to be at Sutton, Arizona, thus marking high-noon. The heat was intense and the air above the desert quivered nervously.

Evidence that Sutton was inhabited by human beings was scarce. The only visible sign of human life was to be found in the shade of the big cottonwood-tree that grew alongside the Gray Wolf saloon. There Jack Hawkins, proprietor of the saloon, sat at a little table playing seven-up with his friend, Tom Peters, of the Circle-S ranch.

With the exception of a grunted monosyllable now and then, only the riffling and dealing of the cards broke the silence. The two players showed a woful lack of interest in their game, as if it bored them, or as if it were merely preliminary to cutting their throats as a protest against the terrific heat and the dull monotony of sand and cactus that stretched away to the horizon on every hand.

Then suddenly Peters, about to play his jack of trumps upon his opponent's eight of the same suit, held the card poised and cocked his head. His eyes squinted interestedly up the ribbon of road that wound its hot way nine miles across the desert to Hamden, the nearest point of contact with the line of the Pacific Railroad.

"Who's that fool ridin' round this time of day?" he grumbled with an air of personal injury.

"Where at, Tom?" asked Hawkins.

"Comin' down the road there," nodded the other.

Hawkins turned in his chair and followed Peter's gaze with his eyes. Down the road toward them jogged a lone horseman. A stranger he proved to be when he came closer, dusted from head to feet with the powdery sand his mount had kicked up.

"That there animal he's ridin' looks a whole lot like Bill Simmons' Dolly," observed Peters.

"I'd know that hamstrung off hind leg anywheres," agreed Hawkins.

Bill Simmons conducted a public livery-stable at Hamden and the inference was that the stranger had probably dropped off a Pacific train at Hamden and engaged the mare from Simmons for the ride over to Sutton.

The horseman came on and finally reined in a dozen feet or more from the table where the two men sat. From one of his hip-pockets he pulled a silver cigaret-case and, taking out a cigaret and tapping one end lightly against the case, put it between his lips and lighted it.

"My ——!" ejaculated Peters under his breath. "Store cigarets!"

There was a world of contempt and derision in his voice, which was eminently fair in a land where cigaret-smokers rolled their own with one-handed deftness.

"Tom, have a squint at them clothes an' tell me if I'm seein' things!" said Hawkins in a hoarse whisper. "The —— dude!"

Hawkins too was justified in the scornful condemnation his tone indicated.

According to the standards of dress set up in Sutton and its far-flung neighborhood,

the stranger did show an amazing lack of sense of the fitness of things. Clothing such as he at that moment wore was as scarce as the proverbial roc's egg in Sutton. It was utterly ridiculous in the eyes of Hawkins and his friend Peters.

It consisted of a light blue silk shirt with collar attached and a pocket on either breast, a black four-in-hand tie, khaki riding-breeches, leather puttees, tan shoes, and a straw hat with a wide, flapping brim, the crown of which was decorated with a narrow blue ribbon-band secured at the ends on the left side of the hat with a neat silver buckle.

Whether the horn-rimmed "specs" that straddled his rather prominent nose should be considered a part and parcel of his attire or classified alone is a matter for individual choice.

Though he sat a saddle it was plain that he was a small man, almost effeminate in appearance, weighing probably one hundred and forty pounds. He was smoothly shaven and about thirty years of age. His eyes were a soft gray with a piercing quality that impressed one quite forcefully. His hands were small and shapely like a girl's though deeply tanned.

The most incongruous thing about him, however, and the one thing that was most responsible for the contempt displayed upon the faces of the two card-players, and yet the only thing about him that conveyed the least suggestion of the Western spirit, was the .38-caliber revolver whose pearl handle protruded from the holster swinging at the belt that girdled his slender waist.

In a country where Colt's .44, the famous "six-gun," has played such a stern part in shaping the destinies of empire, a trifle in firearms like a pearl-handled .38-caliber revolver was bound to receive the adverse criticism and ridicule it richly merited. Only a man's tools have any place in a man's country.

Nor was the saddle in which the stranger sat with such perfect ease really and truly a saddle when measured by the Western yard-stick, unless one were gifted with imagination and a keen sense of humor. It had neither pommel nor cantle to speak of, and the stirrups were totally devoid of those ponderous leather contrivances which are at once the bona fide Westerner's delight and his assurance of safety.

"Jack, is that there a saddle or a scrap of boot-sole?" whispered Peters ironically. "If I'd of knowed Bill Simmons had any of them kinda contraptions round his stable I wouldn't of been speakin' to him all this time. None a-tall, Jack."

"I hear them New York dudes sojournin' over to Phœnix flops round in saddles like them," said the other. "I reckon he's one of them dudes."

"I bet she's a school-teacher comin' in to give us light an' learnin'," was Peter's conjecture.

"It's mebbe a preacher."

"My ——!" wheezed Peters.

If the stranger heard he took no notice of the whispered comments. He sat silent and looked at the two men through the smoke of his cigaret for at least three minutes before he spoke.

"HOWDY, gentlemen," he greeted them. "May I ask if you happen to have a hotel in this town?"

"Stranger, this town happens to have a shack what some well-meanin' folks favors with the name of hotel," Hawkins replied. "'Tain't nothin' to go in fits about but she's the best we got an' suitable to the town. If you figger to feed an' bed yourself there you'll find her down the road where you see that sign hanging out front."

"I'm not hard to please; three meals a day and a bed to sleep in suits me," returned the stranger with a little smile that made him seem more effeminate than ever.

"Aim to stay long?" asked Peters curiously.

"It all depends; I may and I may not. How are you fixed for livery-stables?"

"I reckon old Wilkins'll let you put your mare in his corral down below the hotel," said Hawkins. "Ask for him at the hotel. Anybody particular you was lookin' for?"

"Possibly," the other answered noncommittally.

"Figgered mebbe we could point him out to you if there was," said Hawkins, his tone apologetic.

"Oh, I see. Yes, I am looking for a man by the name of Henry Buskirk."

Both Hawkins and Peters batted their eyes and sent each other a swift glance. When they turned their gaze upon the stranger again they looked at him with a new interest.

"Henry Buskirk, did you say?" said Hawkins.

"Yes, sir."

"You're lookin' for Henry Buskirk?" Hawkins insisted, as if he doubted his hearing.

"Yes, I am looking for Henry Buskirk," was the emphatic reply. "I understand that he may be found in this neighborhood and I came here to see if I could locate him. Either of you gentlemen know anything about him?"

Jack Hawkins and his friend should say they knew something about Henry Buskirk! They had more than a suspicion that at that very moment a keen searcher might possibly find him somewhere in the hills that ranged north and south for a considerable distance not far from Sutton.

Furthermore, they knew, as did everybody who knew anything at all about Buskirk, that perhaps no man in all the world more deserved hanging. And no man, perhaps having broken the laws of the land as often as he, seemed more immune to arrest and prosecution. It would appear either that the officers of the law were afraid of him or he was too sly to get caught.

Buskirk was considered a dangerous man to meddle with. He was never without two .45's hitched to his belt, and he had demonstrated time and again that he knew how to use them with deadly effect, shooting as readily and accurately with one hand as with the other. A gun-fight with Buskirk was equivalent to his opponent's signing his own death-warrant.

A sight of the man was sufficient to inspire fear. He stood much over six feet tall in his silver-spurred boots and was brawny and deep-chested. His face showed a mixture of viciousness and cunning and the cast of his glittering black eyes was a constant threat.

There was a report based upon pretty reliable authority to the effect that at various times he had killed five men. There was no reason for doubting the truth of the report, while there were several reasons for accepting it. He at least looked capable of the killings.

In the opinion of those who knew the man and his moods it was far safer to trifle with high-percentage dynamite than with Buskirk. He was the sort of man to let alone, and conservative people with a wish to live did let him alone.

Yet here was a total stranger, whoever he might be, coming from Heaven only knew where, actually inquiring for Buskirk and seemingly anxious to find him. Knowing what they did about Henry Buskirk, there was no wonder that Jack Hawkins and his friend looked at the little man askance.

"You say you was a friend of his, mister?" said Hawkins at length.

"I didn't say, but if you happen to ask me I'll say no," returned the horseman.

Had the two men been watching his face closely they might have seen his lips tighten perceptibly and the subdued gray of his eyes flash like sunlight on ice.

"Buskirk's a way big man," said Peters suggestively.

"Yes, I believe he is, but big men are not always invincible men," was the answer to that. "However, if you can't tell me anything about him I'll go on."

"I reckon we can tell you something about him," said Hawkins quickly, "seein' he drops in my place two or three times a week for his liquor. He was in yisterday an' he may be in tomorrow or next day. When he comes in ag'in I'll tell him you're lookin' for him."

"I'll be much obliged if you will," the other said. "You say that's the hotel down there where I see the sign hanging out front?"

"That's her."

"Thanks, gentlemen."

The horseman gathered up his reins and prepared to ride on.

"Who'll I tell him's lookin' for him?" called Hawkins.

"Just say that a special deputy sheriff from Yuma, recently appointed by your sheriff for this particular job, is here looking for him about a certain matter of a month ago down round Tacna. He'll know all about it."

The special deputy from Yuma rode away. Behind him a pair of jaws dropped and a pair of eyes stared after him with astonishment. Then a pair of mouths opened and gave vent to a series of noisy guffaws.

"Ain't some people the ——est fools you ever seen!" cried Peters.

"The idea of that little maverick lookin' for Buskirk makes me laugh!" shouted Hawkins.

And he did laugh, uproariously, Peters joining him.

"Jack, I aim to lay round this here town next few days till Buskirk comes in an' see

him chew up that there Yuma party an' spit him out," said Peters.

"Wait till the boys hears about this," the other said. "Tom, I'm tellin' you that *hombre* from Yuma ain't got enough sense to pound rock. It stands to reason anybody who'd corral hisself in duds like them ain't got no more gumption than a locoed jackass. Your play, ain't it?"

NOT only the "boys" but everybody in Sutton in short order heard how a special deputy sheriff from Yuma, a stranger appointed by the sheriff for the sole task of making an important arrest, had come to Sutton looking for Henry Buskirk. As a consequence there followed a good deal of speculation regarding the exact form of death the desperado would visit upon the man from Yuma.

Not that anybody in Sutton sympathized with Buskirk; he was cordially hated for the bully he was. As a matter of fact Sutton's sympathies were all with the Yuma deputy. He seemed so pitifully weak and impotent alongside the huge, fierce-looking Buskirk, the man who was said to have killed five men and who boasted that he could shoot the eye from a needle at a distance of thirty paces.

But while Sutton sympathized with the Yuma deputy, at the same time its risibilities were keenly aroused; the humor of the situation appealed to the town. If such an event as the battle between David and the Philistine did repeat itself in history Sutton wanted to be a spectator.

The remainder of that day and a good portion of the next the Gray Wolf Saloon was the civic center of Sutton. Many men darkened its doors; some of them residents of Sutton and others riding in from outlying ranches to be in at the death of the foolhardy deputy from Yuma, and incidentally to help with Buskirk's lynching if such a commendable deed came to pass.

Men, and women too for the matter of that, hunted up the man from Yuma, surveyed him appraisingly, then went away to laugh. The little deputy could not help but see that the town was making sport of him but he received their stares with good-natured coolness and even jocularity, which attitude on his part caused more than one remark concerning his sanity to be passed.

At the bar of the Gray Wolf a number of men stood quaffing their bitter water and discussing the deputy.

"If I'd of knowed I was voting my vote for a man who'd make a toad like him a deputy I'd of went out in the chaparral somewheres an' busted my head open with a slug from my gun before I'd 'a' done it," one Buck Dugan growled disconsolately.

"That fool sheriff down to Yuma shore must be loco when he makes a dude like him a deputy," complained Sam Parker, another disgruntled voter.

"Funniest lookin' clothes I ever seen a man wear," said Ed Rawlins, foreman of the Two-Line outfit.

"I ain't satisfied yit them's clothes, Ed," chimed in Phil Thompson, a Bar-X man. "I kinda figgered them things just sprouted outa him like horns on a cow."

"Did you-all note that ferocious gun he's totin'?" inquired some one.

"Where at's he totin' a gun?" said Rawlins scoffingly.

"Why, that there thing he's packin' in that holster on his belt, Ed."

"Oh, was that a gun? I figgered it out a tack-hammer. Will she shoot?"

"I've heard tell they brings down hummin'-birds an' cow-ticks with them kinda pistols now an' then," Hawkins said.

"Shore 'nuff?" doubted Danny Phelps, Rawlins' right-hand man on the Two-Line.

"I'm askin' why somebody don't go talk to that little lizard an' git him to toddle along back to Yuma before he gits hisself all messed up," said Thompson. "I'm right willin' for to admire nerve in a man but I allus likes to see him git a chancet when he goes up ag'in' another man's game thataway. Somebody oughta tell him about this Buskirk he's honin' to meet so bad."

"He's already been told," announced Peters.

"Who told him?"

"Me an' Sam Parker. I feels kinda sorry for him, so I asts Sam would he go 'long with me an' have a talk with him. I ain't wantin' to see him all et up thataway when Buskirk comes to town."

"I don't notice he's makin' any tracks outa town," said Rawlins skeptically.

"You ain't goin' to see him makin' no tracks outa town, neither," declared Parker. "That *hombre's* got sand, Ed, he shore has. Else he's plumb crazy an' off his feed. He figgers to stick here till he meets up with Buskirk."

"Huh! That man's business with Buskirk must be mighty important to make him flirt with Death thataway," Rawlins said.

"I reckon he figgers it's important, anyway," answered Peters.

"He told me an' Tom he'd wait here till —— freezes over four mile but he'd see Buskirk, didn't he, Tom?" said Parker.

"What's he want with Buskirk, nohow?" asked Dugan. "Tom, did this Yuma party tell you-all what he wants with Buskirk?"

"Shore he tell us; didn't he, Sam? It's somethin' about Buskirk stealin' cows. Seems like one night nigh a month ago this Buskirk an' a passel of his friends amused theirselves cuttin' out a bunch of Old Man Fletcher's steers down round Tacna. A posse lit out after 'em an' one of 'em was ketched."

"Fletcher's boys would of strung him up right there if that fool Tacna marshal hadn't hustled him off to the Yuma jail to save his neck," interposed Parker.

"The judge down at Yuma tells this ketched party he leave him off light if he'll tell ever'thing he knows about that rustlin'," went on Peters. "So he ups an' tells as how this Buskirk's mogul of a gang of cattle-rustlers that's been runnin' off with cows down thataway, an' when they ain't workin' at their trade they're hidin' out in the hills up here. The judge figgers Buskirk needs takin', so he sends this deputy sheriff along to fetch Buskirk back to Yuma."

"Ain't no kinda doubt Buskirk ought of been took in a long time ago," said Rawlins. "But this here dude sheriff ain't the proper party to send after him. Takin' Buskirk to Yuma's a man's job, an' I'm tellin' you nobody but a man can do it."

"Anybody what'd wear clothes like them ain't no part of a man," said Hawkins. "I bet that's the first straw hat ever in Sutton."

"Missus Parker's got a straw hat, ain't she, Sam?" said Peters with not a little pride.

"Wimmin don't know no better," said Hawkins scornfully. "I was referrin' to men's hats, Mister Peters."

"Anyhow, who's goin' to lay this sheriff party out when Buskirk gits through with him?" Dugan wanted to know.

"I'll bet anything from a drink up to that pinto pony of mine when Buskirk gits through with this here deputy there ain't goin' to be enough of him left to lay out," predicted Rawlins.

WORD of the advent of the deputy of Yuma County and the purpose of his visit to Sutton must somehow have been conveyed to Buskirk at his camp in the hills, for he showed up in town the second afternoon of the deputy's stay. Sutton was immediately agog with excitement.

Women with men-folks begged them to stay away from the Gray Wolf, where it was surmised the pending passage at arms between Buskirk and the Yuma deputy would take place. Those male citizens of Sutton who were already at the Gray Wolf were the recipients of earnest entreaties summoning them home, or at least to shun the Gray Wolf as they would a plague.

But the men of Sutton were not so easily to be led away from their mutton. Might as well have expected the ancient Romans to eschew the gladiatorial combats in the Colosseum. The Gray Wolf was therefore crowded with expectant men, eager to see the renegade Buskirk exterminate the deputy sheriff of Yuma County.

Buskirk, truly a formidable-looking man, rode up to the door of the Gray Wolf and dismounted. His black eyes were keenly alert, for while all men were awed to meet him in open battle, there were any number of men who would have liked, had they dared risk vengeance at the hands of Buskirk's friends, to bring him down from ambush.

For a few moments after dismounting Buskirk stood frowning up and down the road that served Sutton for a main street, as if seeking the man who had come all the way from Yuma to arrest him and take him back a prisoner. He saw nobody; the road was deserted. But for all that he saw nobody dozens of people were watching him from behind drawn blinds and more than one trigger-finger itched.

With a disdainful shrug of his broad shoulders Buskirk hitched his guns well to the front, then stalked into the saloon. The line of men at the bar fell back or edged toward the end and gave him plenty of room.

He glared at them, as if daring any of them to make a threatening move. Such has been the way of bad men since the first day of the first bad man. They go their

way unmolested and unscathed by virtue of sheer bluff and impudence. Almost any man there could have shot Buskirk down, and very few of them but would have delighted in the job. But not one of them offered to lift a finger against the man. There was a psychology about it. The devil looks after his own.

Finally Buskirk turned sidewise to the bar and rapped on it with his knuckles. Hawkins answered that well-known signal by setting a bottle and a glass on the bar. Keeping the crowd in view from the corner of his eye, vigilant for a hostile move, Buskirk poured and drank a glassful of liquor. He wiped his mouth with the back of a hairy hand.

"I heard tell there's a gent here from Yuma lookin' for me," he broke the silence growlingly. "If he's present let him step out so as I can have a look at him."

Nobody moved or spoke.

At that precise moment the deputy from Yuma stepped from the door of the hotel down the road and started toward the Gray Wolf Saloon, and he too hitched the holster containing the pearl-handled .38-caliber revolver where it was most convenient for quick use.

"I heard tell," Buskirk went on sourly when nobody spoke, "this here gent from Yuma's a deputy sheriff of this county, an' he's figgerin' on arrestin' me an' takin' me to Yuma to put me in jail account of rustlin' cows.

"Gents, I aims to say if that party's here in this saloon he's a yaller houn' pup without no teeth if he don't step out an' meet me personal. I wants to see the color of his hair. Is he here, gents, or do I have to insult myself goin' after him where he's hid under a bed somewheres? Let's have a look at you, mister man from Yuma."

His request could not have been better timed, for at that exact moment the deputy of Yuma County entered the door and advanced to within eight or ten feet of where Buskirk stood before he seemed to see him and stopped.

The crowd to a man pressed back against the wall, and above the dead silence that followed came a sound similar to that the winds make when they blow through the branches of a tree on a Winter's night. The sound was caused by the crowd sucking in its breath.

For several moments the Yuma deputy stood looking at Buskirk; then to the utter astonishment of his apprehensive audience he calmly removed his glasses and painstakingly polished them with the silk handkerchief he jerked from his pocket. He replaced the glasses on his nose and lighted a cigaret.

Then and not till then did he condescend to fix his gaze upon Buskirk again. Buskirk towered over him like a crag over a stone.

"Sonny, does it happen you come from Yuma?" the renegade inquired with feigned politeness.

The other nodded and flicked the ashes from the tip of his cigaret.

"Appointed special deputy sheriff two weeks ago," he replied. "Does it happen you are Henry Buskirk?"

"I reckon you-all called the turn there, youngster. I heard tell you're lookin' for me."

"I am. About that Fletcher matter at Tacna, Buskirk."

Buskirk laughed and uncovered a mouthful of yellow teeth.

"You was sent up here to take me back, eh?" he rasped.

"Yes."

"Didn't they send no men with you?"

"I came alone."

"Think you're big enough to take me back all by yourself?"

"No harm trying."

Buskirk laughed jeeringly. The idea of the almost diminutive man before him taking him to Yuma or any other place against his will unassisted was highly amusing.

"Well, sonny, I reckon there ain't no dude like you's goin' to take me nowheres I don't want to go," he said. "Was you tryin' to disguise yourself in them wimmin's clothes you got on?"

Somebody in the crowd snickered.

"This is my customary garb," replied the Yuma deputy with studied unconcern.

"Well, well, you're a brave little boy," laughed Buskirk jovially. "Sonny, mebbe you didn't know when you started up here I was considered a purty bad man to deal with."

"It seems to me that I have heard that you consider yourself a rather tough character," answered the other with a calmness that was astounding to the crowd that caught every word of the banter going on between the two men. "I'll admit that you

are a bad man, Buskirk, but not exactly in the sense you think you are. You are more evil than bad, though in a way evil and bad are synonymous."

"Go ahead, sonny," invited Buskirk when the other paused to puff at his cigaret. "I like to hear you chatter; it don't hurt me none. You're a funny-lookin' bug, an' when I git tired seein' you crawl around I'm goin' to put my foot on you an' hear you squash."

"Thank you, Mr. Buskirk," said the deputy solemnly. "Then before you step on me I want to tell you just what I think of you with all these gentlemen as witnesses. In the first place you are a fraud and in the next place you're just a plain murderer. You're the kind of man that scares women and children in the dark, but a man with the right idea about you could scare you stiff with a *boo!* A real man could make you lick his shoes. No, you're not a bad man, Buskirk. A genuine bad man wouldn't take the trouble to spit on you. You're nothing but a mongrel cur with a sore tail. That's what I think of you, Buskirk."

THE crowd gasped and held its breath. Even Buskirk blinked his eyes with surprize. The little deputy was certainly justifying the town's remarks relative to his sanity. Ah, well, his end would be all the more horrible. Buskirk would undoubtedly pull him to pieces when he got ready.

"Done insultin' me, sonny?" the renegade asked harshly.

"Not quite. I want to tell you that I think you are a coward. As a bad man you are an awful joke. You're as yellow as a ripe lemon, Buskirk, and when I say you're a rotten coward I am ready to play my hand. This ought to show you up one way or the other."

The deputy deliberately flipped the burning butt of his cigaret in Buskirk's face. The cigaret struck him on the forehead and sent forth a shower of sparks.

Buskirk roared with pain and indignation. He forgot his threat to squash the deputy under his foot. Nothing but instant death would wipe out the affront.

He dropped his right hand to his side. His gun was not more than half out of the holster when the deputy's revolver barked at him. Buskirk's gun rattled on the floor and, howling and cursing, he grabbed his right hand where thumb and forefinger dangled uselessly and spurted blood.

Nobody there had seen the deputy draw his gun. Yet he had drawn it from full repose and a flash of lightning could not have been much quicker. The crowd was amazed with the expertness of the draw and the little deputy's stock rose many points.

"Before you make it necessary for me to shoot again, Buskirk," the deputy said quietly, "let me warn you that I can outshoot you any day of the week, so you might as well save your other hand to handle the reins when you and me ride over to Hamden in the morning to take the train for Yuma."

Keeping his man covered with the pearl-handled revolver the deputy strode to where Buskirk stood cursing and holding his injured hand and took his other gun away from him.

"Now there is something else I have to say to you," he went on, backing away a few feet. "Two years ago I was captain of a company of Texas Rangers. At that time you and your gang were operating at the cattle-rustling business along the river in Valverde County. I regret that I never had the pleasure of meeting you personally before my company drove you from the State. Perhaps you heard of me more or less down there. Ever hear of Logan Cole, Buskirk?"

The desperado stopped swearing and looked hard at the deputy from Yuma. A sign of recognition came to his eyes. To a close observer he seemed to wilt and give down. In fact, at the mention of that name all desire for fight ebbed from him.

"I see you know me," said the deputy. "Yes, I am Logan Cole, brother of the late William Cole, of my own company of Rangers, whom you and your gang tortured to death from sheer brutality that night in the deserted branding-pen near Del Rio. You remember the occasion well; I see it in your eyes. A week or so later I left a message for you with one of your Mexican sweethearts and I often wondered if you got it. I lost track of you for a while, but I knew I'd run across you sooner or later."

Buskirk swore at him.

"I don't think there would be any trouble getting the necessary requisition papers to transfer you to Texas to answer for the murder of my brother and at least another man that I know of. But as long as you

hang in Arizona for murdering Old Man Fletcher it doesn't make much difference."

"How's that, pardner?" burst from Ed Rawlins.

"I thought it best not to tell the gentlemen who called at the hotel to warn me about this man that Buskirk shot Old Man Fletcher through the head in his own ranch-house because the old man wouldn't tell where his money was hidden," replied Cole. "You see, gentlemen, I was pretty sure Fletcher would have friends up this way, and I didn't want Buskirk hurt before I made good on that message I sent him."

"Somebody git a rope!" bawled the foreman of the Two-Line ranch. "I punched cows for Fletcher one time, and a whiter man never lived. Somebody git a rope an' we'll string this coyote up on that cottonwood outside!"

Cursing, several men, including Rawlins, started to rush Buskirk. Cole gave his prisoner a shove toward the bar and sprang in front of him with a gun in each hand. Buskirk cowered behind him fearfully.

"Hold on, boys!" cried Cole, a metallic ring in his voice. "I'm not going to let you lynch this man, though he deserves it. I've got a bigger score to settle with him than any of you and if I am willing to let the law take its course you have no kick coming. Hands off!"

The crowd hesitated, its savage gaze alternating between the guns in the deputy's hands and his determined eyes. These men knew how to read other men. Finally Rawlins, the leader, gave his shoulders a pitch and threw down the rope somebody had handed him.

"Thank you, gentlemen," said Cole. "I'd hate like —— to shed decent blood protecting a man like this, but I'm sworn on the Book. By the way, I have made arrangements with your marshal to keep my prisoner in his calaboose overnight, and if any of you think about coming there after him I advise you to consider the proposition well before you start. I'll be hanging around there somewhere with my eyes wide open. Off you go, Buskirk!" he snarled at his prisoner.

When they had gone, Cole prodding the other in the small of the back with the barrel of his own gun, the men they left behind them gave vent to a deep sigh.

"If that *hombre* ever runs for sheriff in this county I'm goin' to vote for him three or four times," Sam Parker shouted.

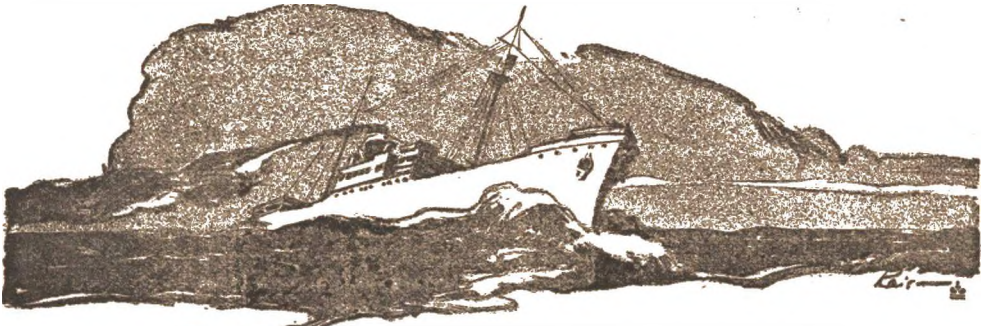
"If he only wouldn't wear clothes like them," Dugan voiced himself. "Don't seem natural."

"Buck, if your daddy owned eighty thousand head of cattle in the Pan Handle like his daddy does, an' if you'd been all through the Texas University like he has, I bet a million dollars ag'in' a rotten peg-rope you'd wear them kind of duds too," he was answered by Hawkins. "Soon's as he said what his name was I knowed all about him. Gamest little ranger the Lone Star ever paid money to, that boy."

"Dog-gone my buttons if I don't git me some clothes like them!" declared Danny Phelps.

"What for you-all figger to make a danged monkey outa yourself thataway, Dan?" snorted Peters in disgust.

" 'Cause why I sees them's the kinda clothes sure 'nuff men wears, that's what for," replied Danny admiringly. "Say, ain't he the sandy *hombre*?"



The BURDEN PATERNAL

by Captain Dingle

Author of "The Liar," "The Avenging Sea," etc.

SOMEHOW old Captain Basil always struck me as foreordained to carry an overburden of this world's cares. I had sailed as a boy with him in the *Murmurous* bark, had found in the old chap a lot of the fatherly interest I had lacked after my own parents left me a child orphan, and had successively passed second and first mate's examinations with his kindly help. In time I fell into the second mate's berth, and lacked only the vacancy for mate, filled, so far, by his own son Dick.

Dick was a limb of the devil. One of those slim, dark lads, looking almost effeminate with his pretty face yet as strong as a steel rod; opportunity played a big part in molding his behavior while ashore. At sea he was a decent sailorman, his thorough grasp of his profession marred at times only by outbursts of black temper which, however, he managed to control generally; but in port, at home or in the tempting little Eastern places to which we mostly traded, he let go all and flew a high kite.

Perhaps he did not actually take so much liquor as we thought; but he certainly acquired all the effects of a lot, and many a police blotter lacked his name only on account of the old man's record: many a dark-skinned lover sought him with gritted teeth because of some brazen meddling with a black-eyed girl who was not as unattached as Dick chose to believe.

It was pitiful sometimes to see the old gentleman's face on sailing-day, after he had for the twentieth time rescued Dick from detention ashore which would have surely meant leaving him behind; and I knew very well that down in his heart he longed to see his boy go into other employ, or another ship anyhow, so that he might rise to command, but feared to let him go out of his sight for the evil that lived in him.

"Billy," he said to me one dog-watch just outside the Molucca Passage. He called me Mr. Cleaver in the common run of ship's duty, but this was one of his gloomier moments. "Billy, my lad, I'm afraid for Dick. He ought to have a ship of his own by now. You ought to have been mate too, before this. Why don't you ask for another ship, Billy?"

He turned away and stumped the deck a while, his handsome old face drawn and wan, then rejoined me, muttering:

"I daren't let Dick go, Billy. He's wild, and a danger to himself, and—and he's worrying his mother to death."

That proved a long, trying voyage home, for apart from the weather, which was mostly windless and sultry throughout the Indian Ocean, and perverse with headwinds and lumpy seas right up to the northern tropic in the Atlantic, there was an indescribable air of brooding about the after part of the ship which made a chap jumpy in his watch on deck and uneasy in his watch below.

I can't say whether the old man hauled Dick over the coals about his conduct or not, but a restraint certainly had grown up between father and son, and Dick passed his watches whistling through smiling lips and clenched teeth, smooth as silk in his speech to the men, yet carrying a glitter

in his dark eyes which I, who knew him so well, cared little to see. It was all to be explained a little later.

The day we docked in London Dick went ashore the minute he had given the crew the word, "That'll do, men!" and I saw no more of him, except through a binocular, from that day to this. I thought I caught sight of him once, the day we paid off, but can't be sure.

I was ferreting around St. George's, looking for Jamrach the animal-importer, to whom I hoped to sell a couple of blue-faced monkeys and a tangle of baby pythons from Borneo, when I spotted a natty sailorman dodging into the grimy office of a notorious shyster lawyer whose name had more than once been linked with that of some defaulting or barratrying skipper needing a defender. The chap looked like Dick; but as I say, I can't be sure, and far be it from me to plaster an acquaintance of that kidney on a shipmate without certainty to back me.

However, to fill away again with the yarn, Captain Basil met me at the gangway on my return on board with a look on his brave old face only to be described as high hope struggling with black misgiving.

"Mr. Cleaver," he said with a shake in his voice, "you will shift your dunnage over to the mate's room. I congratulate ye, Billy."

His hard, honest fist gripped mine. He made the bald announcement of my promotion in official style; that done, it was the man, kindly, fatherly, glad, who added the friendly grip.

"Has Dick—?" I stuttered, too surprized to thank him for my own bit of fortune. He interrupted me with a grave smile.

"Dick is master of a steamer, Billy. Went to sea this tide, bound for Huelva. Let's hope for everything that's good for him, lad. Anyhow, you got your own boost sooner than ye expected to, hey?"

"I'm glad it came through Dick's own promotion, sir," I said warmly, and the old man's eyes lighted gratefully as if sensing the alternative which I had in mind.

The new second mate plays a negligible part in this tale, and I'll simply mention that he seemed to know his work and his place, which pair of qualifications will always ensure a second greaser a comfortable berth if the ship affords such for anybody.

Our Eastern cargo was out and the holds swept, ready for the full cargo of machinery and building-material we were to carry out to Adelaide, when the skipper came aboard one afternoon along with the principal owner.

"It's a pity your son hadn't a little more patience, Captain Basil," the owner was saying. "This new departure we're making will be a big thing for our captains and mates. Dick would have got his ship in a few months, in any case, under the superannuation plan alone, for we propose to retire you, after giving you one voyage in one of the new steamers to bring your wages up to a better level."

And later in the evening, when we stood alone at the dimly lighted gangway, the old man told me with a little shake in his voice:

"'Twould have been splendid, Billy! Dick would have had the old *Murmurous*, with you getting your promotion just the same, only a voyage later. Then ye'd both have gotten fine steamers very soon, for the old bark is to be the last of the fleet to go, after she's carried out all the gear for the establishment of the branch offices and docks and sheds out there.

"Fine big steamers they're building, Billy; none of your cheap second-hand tramps, lad, but Clyde-built ships that'll carry a lumping big cargo at a level fourteen knots, and have plenty of room and comfort for a score or so of passengers."

He paused, gazing out across the dark basin of the East India dock, at a tall, black maze of rigging which, with the *Murmurous* herself, alone represented the vanishing romance of sail in all that mass of hulls and funnels and derrick-masts which crammed the basin to the gates.

"I suppose the owners are right, Billy lad," he muttered presently, laying a hand on my shoulder. "I don't believe I'd be very happy in one o' them steamers. It's best for me to retire. It's a very decent thing they're doing, too; very decent. Starting a pension scheme they are, for masters who have served them for twenty years or more, and they're going to retire me at half-pay.

"You heard what he said, Billy? Giving me command of the first new steamer just so's my wages will be nearly double when I'm retired. Jove, Billy! That's a firm to work for! And Dick's lost his chance; the young fool. But you stick to 'em, Billy

Cleaver, and you're made. Stick to owners like that. Run your ship to orders, keep your record clean, and when ye've got passengers aboard remember they're but woolly lambs in your tender care and bear with their whims and their grouches and their sometimes dum foolishment as you would toward children.

"But above everything else, Billy, keep clean hands and a clean record. That's about the only thing the owners are flint-hard about. They never give a man another chance who turns a bad trick on 'em. If I lost this ship, and the court decided against me, good-by to me, that's all. If the decision said 't wasn't my fault, my job would be waiting for me whatever the world said about the case. Oh, they're the men to tie to, Billy!"

The old man had waxed quite enthusiastic in his warmth, and for once in a long time I saw him go to his late train with a lighter step and a smoother face. Every night he went to his suburban home, where his fine old domestic partner awaited him all through his long voyages, hoping for that day to come when she need no more scan the maritime news for reports of his movements.

The imminent realization of that high hope would help wonderfully to offset the sorrow she had suffered through Dick. Oh, no doubt the old man carried home that night a heart full of cheer.

NEXT morning I stepped outside the dock-gates to buy my morning paper before breakfast, and the news was burned into my brain even as I took the damp sheet. Headlines, they were; big, black, appalling to me who was interested more than a little.

STEAMER'S LIFEBOAT PICKED UP IN BAY OF BISCAY. CAPTAIN AND FOUR MEN SAVED. VESSEL, THE S. S. *Hispaniola*, STRUCK ON ROCK IN THE NIGHT.

"*Hispaniola!*" I muttered unbelievingly. "Dick's new ship? Can't be!"

I hurried aboard and propped the paper against the stanchion of the table while I ate. The details were meager; just the names of the survivors and the very scanty report made by the skipper himself to the man who picked him up. But right there beneath the main item of interest was another bit which started my thoughts whirling and kept them whirling all day.

AEROPLANE FLYING FROM CADIZ TO BREST WITNESSES WRECK OF STEAMER. AVIATOR MAKES STARTLING REPORT.

Only to give the casting away of the *Hispaniola* its due importance in the story, it suffices to say that Dick Basil's step into foul business proved disastrous. When he became foolish, taking silly offense at his father's reprovings, and joined in with a crooked gang of ship-murderers he overlooked the fact that the air has been conquered.

The old man fought hard to save him at the inquiry, engaging counsel without regard to cost; but that aviator's evidence damned the lad in the eyes of the grim old seamen who sat in judgment. They could not see any reason why a steamer, under control, due west of the Chausée de Sein and bound from Huelva for the Channel, should be steering a few degrees south of east, even allowing for the seventeen degrees of variation in that region and any possible deviation the ship herself might have.

"Ticket suspended for one year," the old man told me when all was over.

His eyes glistened suspiciously.

"And I heard 'em saying, Billy, when they didn't think I could hear, that he'd have been broke for good only they felt sorry for me! D'ye hear that, Billy Cleaver? Sorry for me, so they let him down easy! They think they can make me feel it less, the disgrace of it!"

We loaded and sailed for Australia, and only once, just after dropping the pilot off Dungeness, did the skipper mention Dick to me. It appeared that, besides his other follies, Dick had become entangled in an affair with a barmaid in London and faced a paternity case.

I heard very little about it, except that it had, coming a-top of the casting away of his ship, almost killed his mother. The only saving circumstance in the whole messy business seemed to be that when Dick started for Australia, passage paid by the old man, to seek a fresh start, the lad had stood by the girl, married her honestly and insisted upon taking her with him.

For the rest, the old *Murmurous* slogged her way around the world again, discharged

her cargo, loaded up with wool and cases of tinned rabbit and slogged home again, taking fifteen months over the voyage as if she sulked at the prospect of losing her revered old master.

We tied her up, unloaded her, left her in charge of the second mate to await her new skipper, and Captain Basil and I proceeded to the builder's yard to supervise the finishing touches on the new steamer.

The S. S. *Solander* was a beauty; even we two hard-bitten windjammer sailors saw something in her to praise; and that is all that need be said to prove her merits. In the novelty of his new command, the feverish activity of his days and the planning for the morrow of his evenings, the skipper found plenty to take and keep his mind off his troubles.

But I knew from the little he let fall that Mrs. Basil was failing, that he wanted nothing so much as to throw up the whole shipping-business and go home to her; but she insisted that he remain and complete his service as desired by the owners. And I knew, or had a shrewd notion, that his defense of Dick, his staking him to a fresh start, and the illness of the old lady had sucked him almost dry financially. There was every reason for his staying on until he could haul down his flag for good and all.

Sometimes a bright streak shone through the gray, and he would tell me with something like his old smile that he had heard from Dick.

"Doing very well, Billy, very well," he would say. "Took on as mate in a little tub of a steamer when he landed out there, and made good. Seems as if he'll get command of one of the smaller ships now that his suspension's up. Hope so, by gracious!"

Everything looked fine when at last our steamer passed out of the river to steam her trials. If she satisfied the owners we would take her around to the Thames right away to load for Adelaide—first ship of the new line. And she satisfied all right; exceeded her required speed, behaved like a sweet ship and merited all the popping corks in the saloon which saluted her return trip.

That night Captain Basil was ashore at a big banquet given the owner by the builder, and did not get a letter which had come aboard for him until after midnight. He woke me up—it must have been but a few minutes after he came on board—and as he turned on my electric light I saw his face. It was gray, gray, the gray of skeleton-dust, and a full score years aged since morning.

"She's dead, Billy," he said slowly, as if striving to let me thoroughly understand what he was telling me. "She's gone, my old woman, Billy, and Dick killed her, by ——!"

He quit my cabin as abruptly as he had entered, and I resumed my broken sleep. There seemed nothing else I could do until morning. Then I turned the hands to and stood by for events.

About mid-forenoon the owner sent down a clerk to say Captain Basil had gone to London by train and that I was to take the ship around myself. The Clyde pilot came on board, and when we dropped him well outside, it was simple coastwise steaming until we picked up the mud-pilot off the shipwash for the run up-river to the docks.

IT WAS a changed Captain Basil who took command after his wife's funeral and carried the new steamer to sea. As for me, I found so much strange and interesting about my first steamship that I had small time to bother my head about the moods of my skipper. But Captain Basil, being what he was, my oldest friend and shipmate, it was inevitable that his troubles and sorrows should in a measure reflect themselves in me.

He spoke seldom, and when he did it was in curt, almost snappish monosyllables which speedily discouraged our few passengers from trying further to dig beneath his reserve. To me he was ever kindly, yet even to me he showed a distaste for conversation other than simple orders and remarks concerning ship's business.

We had coaled and left St. Vincent before he touched on any intimate matter, and then, gazing ahead into the dusky blue of the creeping night, he suddenly exclaimed to me:

"By gracious, Billy! That boy's got a heavy load on his conscience. Killed his mother, he did. Just as sure as if he'd beaten her to death with a club. I hope his days may be dark and his nights——"

The old man broke off suddenly, and as he raised his eyes to the skies I saw a look of awe, almost fear, cross his haggard face. Then he turned to me and seized my hand, careless of the curious grin on the quartermaster's face within the wheelhouse.

"Billy," he said quietly and shakily, "Billy, lad, 't ain't for us to judge the boy. I told you he was doing right well, didn't I, Billy?"

Thereafter the ship plowed her stately way to Table Bay, down on the Great Circle past the Crozets and Kerguelen, and along the blustering, long-sweeping "Forties" toward Australia, without the skipper's ever once returning to the subject of his family affairs.

About the forty-seventh day out we began to haul up for the land, aiming to make landfall about Kangaroo Island, and our radio man started picking up scraps of news from ships and shore-stations.

It was all amazingly new to the skipper and me, whose windjammer days had been spent without the luxuries of wireless or electric light even; and each item of news that came to hand from those unseen sources away over the sky-line found in us an eager audience which must have been amusing to the second and third mates, both steamer men from boyhood.

" 'Dark horse possible United States President,' " read the old man from a sheaf of radio forms. I peeped over his shoulder as he went through them. " 'Great fires in Gippsland' "—then, as a passenger knocked on the chartroom door to ask him for a moment of his time, Captain Basil crammed the last radio form into my fist and growled out:

"There! Read that—confound their dinner-parties and cruises! Why can't a man be left to carry his ship to port without interference?"

"That" turned out to be a message from the colonial representative of the firm saying that they were coming to meet the steamer—a party of twelve—at Adelaide, and would go around to Melbourne in her. Captain Basil was instructed to order his steward to prepare in a manner worthy of the great occasion.

An off-lying pilot picked us up soon afterward, and apparently had been so confident of getting the new ship that he had brought us some letters. My own correspondence was negligible; but the old man got a letter which seemed to banish the grumpiness he had assumed on learning of the forthcoming joy-cruise. As he almost invariably had done since losing his life-partner, he came over to me with his news.

"I said so, Billy, d'ye remember? Listen to this. It's from an old shipmate o' mine; he's kept an eye on Dick for me."

He read from the letter:

" 'The lad seems to have come back to himself, old friend. The girl he married has turned out trumps, and he never made a better investment than buying her a plain gold ring. There's a papoose, too, a young rip with limbs like stanchions and lungs like Boreas. Dick's got command of a steamer, too; she's the *Flamingo*, an apple-bottomed, flake-plated old ballyhoo plying the coast; not such a much, says you, but he'll get a better one if he sticks by the long-necked bird until her engines tumble through her double-bottoms, which won't be long, God willing.

" 'I'm sending this out by Tranter, the pilot. He's sure to get your steamer. Look out for the boy as you come up. You'll know his ship, for her red funnel's long and thin and uncertain, just like a flamingo's neck.' "

I could see that the letter had brightened up the old man a lot. The news of Dick pleased me more than a little, too, for after all, he had long been a shipmate of mine; but any news of him or his fortune, since he had made that one bad break, was important only in so far as it rendered his dad less melancholy or sad. So my own vision was the keener as I peered ahead for the land, because of the possibility of detecting the wisp of smoke from a lean, unstable funnel, which should gladden the heart of old Captain Basil when he saw it.

But no decrepit *Flamingo* hove in sight. At the Semaphore our directors came on board earlier than we expected them and joined in the farewell feed in the saloon along with the passengers. Of the dozen, nine were the sort a sailor likes well to serve: well-groomed, prosperous-looking, keen though kindly of eye, and using speech that carried conviction without any barking or blustering.

Two of the others were not so agreeable at first sight; but that may have been due to the fact that they could be heard criticizing things while they were actually drinking the old man's cocktails in his own room. But the last of the dozen properly soured the good impression made by the first nine, for he was a rat-faced, mean-appearing little man with a cro'jack eye and nervous fingers, which were ever tweaking at his long nose as if for want of another man's

snout to haul at. I noticed the old man scanning him pretty closely, as if seeking to place him, but he seemed to be in doubt; so I asked the pilot—

"Who's the little, queer fellow, pilot?"

The pilot smirked a bit, then spat out with emphasis:

"A bad woman's baby, by gosh! Worst shippin' man in th' Colonies!"

"An old-timer?" I grinned. "One of the last of the ——?"

"No, sir! Australia don't breed that strain, though we raise some smudgy devils too. Ain't been out here more'n a year or so, but he's into everything, and some not so clean, either. I heard tell of some bother he was in home; lost a ship, or had one lost or something. I think he nearly got his toes in the trap, too. But you'll know him well enough before you leave Melbourne. He's one o' your owners, ain't he?"

The pilot's grin was so utterly knowing, so slyly insinuating, that I could only grin responsively and leave him for the other end of the bridge. In a few minutes the old man came up, having excused himself as soon as he could escape from the vapory atmosphere of a saloon full of gaseous passengers, bent on patting him on the back with verbal wallops at the end of a fair passage.

I had heard the cheers and shouts through the skylight dome, and I could hear the voices of some of the passengers as they laid the old man aboard and bombarded him with fine compliments and sugared speeches. But you know the sort of thing.

The spokesman hoists himself on his hind legs and spills a mess of words about the perfect trip, the splendid loyalty of the crew, the amazing perfection of the grub—after all hands have spent three-quarters of the voyage grousing at the stewards—and sets it all down to the old man's eternal credit.

The principal stockholder in our ship got up, took a hold of the table, and chipped in with a lot of slumgullion about no steamship firm ever enjoying the services of a better commander than Captain Basil, gentlemen! The health of Captain Basil, ladies and gentlemen, standing!

So it went, and so it ever goes—until the day after, when they haul the old man across the coals because he couldn't get his bunkers in Table Bay in less than two days, and had to pay one day's harbor-dues too much.

It's all very funny to listen to, and we've all got to go through it sooner or later if we quit sail to go into steam—passenger steam, that is. However—

The directors stayed on board while we discharged the Adelaide portion of our cargo, apparently bent on making a yachting trip out of it. Captain Basil worried me a bit, for once he had completed his ship's business it seemed to me that he should have been on board a good deal more, especially with all those keen-eyed directors aboard, and that ratty-faced one in particular. I felt certain Rat-face was marking time on the old man.

But nothing was said, and Captain Basil came on board in good time on sailing-day, stepping more briskly, looking less drawn about the eyes than I had seen him since that gray day when he had told me of his wife's death. I had seen something similar in the case of sailors often before; but in this case I could see nothing to indicate a bursting out into liquor, so tried to rest easy as I took my station on the forecastle in pulling out.

LUNCH time came just as I reached the bridge after seeing everything clear forward, and I went down for a quick meal before relieving the second mate for his. We were carrying the pilot around with us, he being licensed for Melbourne as well as for Adelaide, and having asked for a passage; so I tried to get him to talk some more about Mr. Rat-face. But he seemed slow to respond, and before I got a peep out of him the skipper and his guests appeared.

First of all the rat-faced one appeared, and even through the greasy glow of good feeding and plenty of red wine his mean face seemed to be a proper ticket for him. The old man followed him on to the bridge, trying to appear happy but evidently making heavy weather of it, and I sidled over to leeward, leaving them to the weather end. But as I passed them I heard Rat-face snap at the skipper:

"No, sir! Once the spasm's worn off this first-steamer business, you'll look for no such darn nonsense from owners as you're seeing now. There's too much soft stuff and hullabaloo, as if no steamer ever arrived out here before. That comes of having old

sailing-ship fogies for directors. But I'm here to see that none of the come-day-go-day-God-send-pay-day, go-as-you-please methods of ship-running take root out this side of the world. There's enough of that in London. What I'm telling you goes, too, in your own case, captain. You spent too much time altogether ashore in Adelaide. It'll pass this time, but——"

He stopped, permitting the old man to tack his own conclusion on, and I noticed the skipper gave him just one short, sharp look and muttered something in reply. I couldn't catch the words, nor did I wish to eavesdrop once I had passed them; but I did see Rat-face start, snarl like a mean dog, and leave the place where he was standing in rather a hurry. He came over to me, but I started first and crossed over as he came, keeping my duty-face fixed ahead. There was something about the man that made me shiver, like rubbing the hide of a shark from aft to for'ard with the bare hand.

A covert glance showed me the old man's face grim and hard, but his eyes seemed to twinkle. It may have been glitter, though, which is different. I crossed over again, keeping a steady stride, and Rat-face looked as if he had lost his peeve, for he passed me and rejoined the skipper.

Then, next breath, I got a shock. Rat-face said something I failed to catch again, but I caught the skipper's reply all right.

"Get off the bridge, sir!" he roared, and shook his fist in the other's face. "D'ye hear me? Owner or no owner, I'm master here, and by the living Kafoozelum if you're not off the bridge in thirty seconds I'll heave you off myself!"

Rat-face stared in stupefaction; then, backing before the menacing figure of the angry old chap, I saw his mean little face snarl up like a monkey-face knot with each strand spun of sheer malice.

"All right, Captain Basil," he grinned, backing down the ladder faster; "make the most of your chance while you are master. But don't count too much on that pension, my friend. You haven't completed this voyage without fault yet!"

He slipped around the social-hall doorway and vanished just as three or four of the more pleasant directors walked up from aft, and for my part I saw no more of him until we picked up Cape Otway some forty hours later. Then he came on deck again, and from that moment until the steamer was in the Rip inside Port Philip, he remained like a figurehead at the rail immediately beneath the bridge. And from there he kept up a running fire of evil mutterings which went to the old man's ears, as they were intended to.

Before the pilot took charge I could hear Captain Basil trying to pump him regarding some hints he had let fall. And I had a bit of curiosity myself about what the ratty one had meant by telling the old man not to make too sure of his pension. The pilot seemed suddenly struck with discretion, but he said with a hesitating laugh:

"There's a yarn going around that Rat-face, as you call him, had to come out here to escape the consequences of losing a steamer in a shady way. His skipper did the job all right, it seems, but some nosey flying-machine spotted the business and blabbed."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the skipper impatiently. "I heard all that at home. But what about the other matter you hinted at? I want to get that without any mistake. If it's true——"

I glanced over the rail at the rat-faced one standing below; he had his head on one side, listening with his lugs wide open, but the pilot lowered his voice and fooled him.

"That's true, too, so far as anybody knows. I don't know what the young chap's name is, but I hear he's the same skipper who lost that steamer back home, and this was the only job he could get. She's a wild steamer, is the *Flamingo*, and has a name for such. She manages to pass inspection, somehow, God knows how; but she's a shocking old brute, and she'll lose her master his ticket before long. That seems to be the idea. The owner bought her, knowing her record; gave this youngster the mate's berth until his suspension was up, then let him have her. He'll lose her sooner or later; can't help it; then, with his past record——"

"The lad'll be condemned without a hearing!" the old man vehemently broke in. "Perhaps they won't take his ticket from him, but owners won't look at him except cross-eyed!"

"You've hit it," rejoined the pilot, earnestly. "And what's more, by keeping the *Flamingo* on this Melbourne run where she must make this bad entrance twice a voyage, she's as surely fixed for trouble as if dynamite had been laid under her boilers."

"Why, how do you mean?"

"It's like this, captain."

The pilot peered over the rail, watched Rat-face for a moment and drew back, bringing the old man beside the telegraph where I stood.

"This way, skipper; she's fitted with that single rod and bevel steering-gear. You know it, of course. Mighty good, too, in a new ship, or where it's been looked after. But in the *Flamingo* it's worn out. While she lies at a dock or at anchor, it passes all right; the inspectors try it, and it controls perfectly; but when the ship's under way and working like such an old ballyhoo does even in a calm, that gear slips a cog as often as not, and that's no joke if she has to maneuver in the tail of the Rip."

The old man's face was grim and drawn. He was silent for perhaps five minutes; then, with Points Nepean and Lonsdale opening ahead, he relinquished command to the pilot and stationed himself at the port side weather cloth with his binoculars.

WE HAD no passengers other than the shareholders, and they clustered at the fore rail of the bridge-deck as we raised the land. I could hear them chatting; and pretty soon it was made obvious that Rat-face was scarcely of the crowd though with them. He, too, had binoculars, and I believe he stood actually in one spot without moving his feet from that moment until Mud Island was so close he might have jumped on to it.

But once within the Heads there was little time for star-gazing. I kept my end of the lookout with every faculty alert, scarcely noticing the old man until I heard him swear gruffly under his breath. Then I followed the direction of his gaze and saw enough to keep me awake properly.

To starboard, apparently coming out through Pinnace Channel, a red, long-necked smokestack swayed above a wall-sided, rust-marked hull which squattered along without regard for the directness of a straight line, seemingly bent upon laying her old bones upon the flats.

So amazingly erratic were her antics that I could not believe them due to faulty steering-gear. They looked more like deliberate intention to me; and the same thought struck the old man, for I heard him swear again, damning Dick for a dark-souled fool.

Then I stole a glance at Rat-face beneath us, and in doing so came against the skipper on the same errand. We both surprized Rat-face looking upward, and he immediately turned his head toward the *Flamingo* again. There was no doubt as to the identity of that sway-backed, wry-necked old ruin hurrying across our course as we steamed fair for the Symonds Channel ourselves.

Nor was there any doubt about the thoughts running through Rat-face's mean little soul. The *Flamingo* swerved badly even as he met our glances, and as she barely drew clear, with swirling waters tearing at her stern as she got farther into the tidal sweep, triumphant expectancy sat upon Mr. Rat-face like a new hat.

"By Cripes, she'll never make it this trip!" exclaimed the pilot excitedly. "It's a darn shame to send her out!"

"Has she a pilot, think?" The question came in such cold, level tones that I could scarcely realize it was the old man who uttered it. The *Flamingo* was about two hundred fathoms away now, broad on our starboard beam and crossing us. Ours was the duty to give her room, by passing across her stern if necessary; hers the right of way; she had but to hold her course, and——

"Get caught once more, and she's done!" cried Captain Basil, taking the words out of my mouth as if he knew what I was thinking. The men on the deck below were chattering excitedly, glancing up as if to see what we were going to do. Rat-face so far forget himself as to yell up something about having a care, but somebody beside him told him to keep quiet, and I heard the old man repeat his question.

"No, captain," the pilot replied absently. "She carries no pilot. Skipper has a piloting license. But look at her!"

No need to tell us. We saw the *Flamingo* yaw abruptly, as if to ram us with malice aforethought, and as she fought to straighten out against the deadly suction of the racing waters, her stern seemed to touch the ground slightly. Slowly, so slowly that it seemed flying straight into the face of destruction, her head came toward us. She was not holding her course, as the law demands; but by her erratic movements put us in peril too if we obeyed the law and held our course.

"One of us is going to strike!" I muttered.

Then the skipper did the amazing thing.

"Pilot, I'll take charge. You are relieved," he said.

For ten seconds there was silence; then as the pilot repeated the order doubtfully, a clamor arose from beneath us, and Rat-face made the greater part of it. The skipper called down the tube for all the steam available, paused but a breath to shove Rat-face back down the ladder which he had mounted in fury, then took the wheel himself as if utterly to absolve everybody else from blame.

The *Solander* throbbed as she gathered greater speed, and to a hard-over helm circled around close to the *Flamingo's* laboring stern. Then she straightened out and started to overhaul the cripple.

Slowly we drew up until our stem was nosing the *Flamingo's* quarter. Our own propeller was churning up the mud of the flats, and on the *Flamingo's* bridge a harassed officer waved us off excitedly. But our old man carried on as if bent upon steaming clean through the other fellow's bridge. Then we came together with a smash; I heard something go—I think it was our forward boat, which we carried swung out—and as the splinters began to fly the skipper shouted to me to get aft and range out a stern anchor and wire in case of need.

As I hung over the after hatch, directing the work, davits and boats, ventilators and rails, port glasses and wind-chutes began to carry away with one long tearing smash. Furious voices rang out on our decks; others as mad sang out from the *Flamingo* demanding where in some place we green-truck farmers were coming; but I noticed that we held a hard starboard helm, and while the débris rained about our ears we were shoving that long-necked old ballyhoo out into the fairway, clear of the Rip.

"Keep her going! You're all right now!" bawled Captain Basil, ignoring a capering figure which shook a heavy fist at him. The long, crazy red funnel, the *Flamingo's* neck, tottered as two guys parted, and smoke poured out from the torn plates near the fiddley. But the other guys held, the steamer was clear and in deep water, and something seemed to tell her skipper that he had been hauled out of a bad mess by design and not by accident.

I had got the small kedge up and the wire was coming over the hatch-coaming when we struck ourselves, right on the tail of the bank, and listed over until anchor and men fetched away to leeward. The *Flamingo* started to turn clumsily, as if to stand by, but our old man bawled to them to carry on, that we were all right, then had the engines reversed, shifted his helm and waited for results.

For some moments it was doubtful whether we had struck badly or only just clipped the edge of the flats; but as it happened, and I think the old man counted on it, our draft was too deep for us to catch on the real ledge, and we simply grazed the outer overfall of the soft mud. The *Flamingo*, with ten feet less draft, must have slipped right up on to the flats themselves but for the skipper's amazing exploit.

However, there we were. We slipped off in no time, and the carpenter reported the hull tight as a bottle. But our upperworks and topsides were a sight. Another sight was that group of directors standing under the bridge, surrounding the deposed pilot and bombarding him with questions and assertions. And loudest of all was the acid voice of Rat-face, charging deliberate intention to cast away the *Solander* and threatening all sorts of dire penalties.

The pilot interjected short, snappy scraps of speech which seemed at first to be merely his ineffectual effort to get into the noisy confab; but soon a new note was discernible in the loud denunciations of Rat-face. He swung around and raved at the pilot, who stood his ground stubbornly, blazing out at the angry little man; and presently the other directors demanded that the pilot repeat some charge he had just made. He did so, in spite of Rat-face's furious interruption; and one of the directors left the group, saying tersely:

"We'll soon find out! I'll send a wireless ashore and have an inquiry cabled. We'll get a reply long before we hit the dock, gentlemen."

He went to the radio-room, and soon the spark began to crackle overhead. When he rejoined his party Rat-face was standing apart from the rest, who were apparently deep in some story the pilot was spinning them. One glance I took at Rat-face and decided that something the pilot had said or was saying hadn't agreed with his stomach, and vaguely, for no reason that I knew, I felt that what was bad for Rat-face could not be other than good for Captain

Basil. The mere thought was comforting. I turned to business and resumed my neglected lookout from the bridge-end.

I glanced to port, where the *Flamingo* squelched drunkenly to seaward, all her damage failing to add to her general air of decrepitude. On her bridge I saw a figure which my glasses told me was Dick Basil, and as I looked he semaphored with his arms a final question as to our situation. Then the old man ran out to the end of our bridge and semaphored back, roaring vocally as he waved his arms, as if to leave no doubt as to his meaning—

"Keep your head pointing seaward, you young fool, and have that —— old booby-trap condemned soon as you get alongside again!"

THEN I watched the skipper as he piloted his steamer up the bay. I had seen gray faces; I saw his own handsome old face look ashy gray twice: when Dick got into trouble and when his old wife pegged out, but I never believed a face could wear the gray pallor that I saw there now.

I could almost read his mind. I could imagine him chewing it all over. Here he was, all but penniless, an old man, too old to start again, casting everything broadcast to the sea for the sake of a boy who had not made any great records as a son.

For there could be no doubt he would lose his ship, his pension, and at least have his certificate suspended for what must have seemed to the owners a mad action. I wanted to speak to him, but his grim expression warned me not to. He would carry his own load and weather his own storm or go under without complaint; that I knew.

I turned away and spotted one of the pleasantest of the diretcors coming out of the radio-room. Even his usually pleasant face wore a grim and forbidding frown, and any hope I had nursed for the old skipper was frozen to death right there.

Beneath the bridge the voices were still vociferous. The pilot's voice rose at times above the rest, and he seemed angry. That was natural. Any pilot would feel angry at being turned off the bridge only to see a mess such as Captain Basil had made. At least, that's how it struck me.

"Oh well, that's the way it goes," I muttered to myself. "It's the way of the sea. Never a man can tell whether old Ocean will hand him a slap on the back or a slam in the eye!"

In good time we tied up snugly to the railway pier with our wounded side to the gaping crowd ashore. Our passengers stepped down the gangway and stood away off, inspecting us, nodding and shaking heads sagely as they toted up the damage. There was a train at the pier station, and I could see a hot argument afoot between Rat-face and some of the rest; and soon he screamed something hot, shook his fist at the others, and bolted off to catch the train.

Some of them moved after him, but came back when the train started, and at last they all came aboard again and one of them, the one I saw coming from the radio-room, knocked on the skipper's door. The old man was dressing to go up-town.

"Who's there?" snapped the old man sharply.

"I want to speak to you, captain," said the director in a voice that seemed to me more pleasant than unpleasant.

"Oh, it's you, eh? Well, come on in and let's get the dirty business over, mister!"

The door was flung wide and I saw the skipper inside, half-dressed, his face set with a sort of dogged obstinacy as if he had resolved to defend his course against all creation.

"I want personally to congratulate you on a piece of fine, daring seamanship, captain," said the man, standing in the doorway. I could see amazement come over the skipper, as anybody looking on might have seen it in me. My ears stuck out like bat-wings for the rest.

"I may say, with one exception, that all of us admired, personally, of course, your splendid act; and all the more so since I received a reply to a radio message ashore which made clear some things we did not know concerning one of the directors and your son Richard.

"Of course, as directors of the company we shall be forced to take action in this matter different to our actions as individuals. The steamer is rather badly damaged, captain, and it would be unfair to our shareholders to pass it. But I am sent to inform you that one of our members, who need not be named, will be very closely examined concerning his connection with that steamer *Flamingo*, and will certainly

find himself *persona non grata* at future board meetings of this firm.

"Also, although we can't say anything at present regarding any action the Board of Inquiry will take about you or your certificate, I may say that your past record will not be lost sight of, and unless you feel you must return to England, you need not worry about finding employment, for we can use a man of your sort out here on the shore-end—a man able to decide quickly and with guts enough to act on the decision. Will you come up to the office with us now?"

I felt as if I'd swallowed a wad of dry oakum, but my feet didn't want to stay on the deck. I sneaked a look down at the open door and twigged the director, standing off a bit with a big cigar, waiting for the skipper to finish dressing; and from time to time, as he pottered about in a half-daze, I caught a slant at Captain Basil's face, and it was the face of a mighty proud man, I tell you.

Then, when the pilot, no other, stumped along and stuck a great hairy fist inside the door and speechlessly gripped the old man's hand and wrung it, I seemed to feel a sort of presentiment that a sacrifice had not been made in vain, and that perhaps, after a rat-faced shipping man had answered a few questions yet to be put, there might be brighter days even for Dick Basil and the girl who stood by him when he started out to prove himself a man.

TYPHOON

by Gordon Malherbe Hillman

THERE'S a patch of red in the western sky,
And a soft wind sways a palm,
As the schooner glides with the sluggish tides
Out from the atoll's calm.

There's a furnace glare in the western sky
As the worn sails tug and slew,
And the typhoon tears through the tropic airs
To blacken the channel's blue.

There's the blackness of night in the western sky
As the sand drives on the deck,
And the great waves race through pitch-black space
As she pounds like a broken wreck.

There's the thresh of rain on the inky seas
As we race before the gale,
And she buries her stern in the typhoon's churn,
With a reef in every sail.

THE WIFE OF FLANDERS

by John Buchan

The Third Tale in the series "The Path of a King." Each story complete in itself.

The Story behind the Stories

SO THAT the general idea of this series of stories may be more visible in each issue, two of them each time appear together. For in the stories themselves there is practically nothing concrete to indicate any connection between one of them and any of the others. Each story stands entirely on its own feet, complete in itself and differing from all the others in place and time and plot. Yet through them all runs a Path—a Path of a thousand years—"The Path of a King."

As expressed in the author's foreword to the series, it is not for nothing that a great man leaves posterity. The spark once transmitted may smolder for generations under ashes, but at the appointed time it will flare up to warm the world. God never allows waste. Yet we fools rub our eyes and wonder when we see genius come out of the gutter. We none of us know our ancestors beyond a little way. We all of us may have king's blood in our veins. The dago who blacked your boots may be descended by curious byways from Julius Cæsar.

"I saw the younger sons carry the royal blood far down among the people, down even into the kennels of the outcast. Generations follow, but there is that in the stock which is fated to endure. The sons and daughters blunder and sin and perish, but the race goes on, for there is a fierce stuff of life in it. Some rags of greatness always cling to it, and somehow the blood drawn from kings it never knew will be royal again. After long years, unheralded and unlooked for, there comes the day of the Appointed Time."

You will note that practically the only surface suggestion of any kind of connection between one story and any of the others is that the king's ring of the old Norse viking, introduced in the first story, is more or less casually mentioned in following stories and of course is always in possession of some one descended from that king, though the king himself has long since faded from human memory.

FROM the bed set high on a daïs came eery spasms of laughter, a harsh cackle like fowls at feeding-time.

"Is that the last of them, Anton?"

A little serving-man with an apple-hued face bowed in reply. He bowed with difficulty, for in his arms he held a huge gray cat, which still mewed with the excitement of the chase. Rats had been turned loose on the floor and it had accounted for them to the accompaniment of a shrill urging from the bed. Now the sport was over, and the domestics who had crowded round the door to see it had slipped away, leaving only Anton and the cat.

"Give Tib a full meal of offal," came the order, "and away with yourself. Your rats are a weak breed. Get me the stout gray monsters like Tuesday se'ennight."

The room was empty now save for two figures, both wearing the habit of the religious. Near the bed sat a man in the full black robe and hood of the monks of Cluny. He warmed plump hands at the brazier and seemed at ease and at home. By the door stood a different figure in the shabby clothes of a parish priest, a curate from the kirk of St. Martin's who had been a scandalized spectator of the rat-hunt. He shuffled his feet as if uncertain of his next

step—a thin, pale man with a pinched mouth and timid earnest eyes.

The glance from the bed fell on him.

"What will the man be at?" said the voice testily. "He stands there like a sow about to litter and stares and grunts. Good e'en to you, friend. When you are wanted, you will be sent for. ——'s name, what have I done to have that howlet glowering at me?"

The priest at the words crossed himself and turned to go, with a tinge of red in his sallow cheeks. He was faithful to his duties and had come to console a death-bed, though he was well aware that his consolations would be spurned.

As he left, there came again the eery laughter from the bed.

"Ugh, I am weary of that incomparable holiness. He hovers about to give me the St. John's Cup and would fain speed my passing. But I do not die yet, good father. There's life still in the old wolf."

The monk in a bland voice spoke some Latin to the effect that mortal times and seasons were ordained of God. The other stretched out a skinny hand from the fur coverings and rang a silver bell. When Anton appeared she gave the order, "Bring supper for the reverend father," at which the Cluniac's face mellowed into complacence.

It was a Friday evening in a hard February. Out of doors the snow lay deep in the street of Bruges, and every canal was frozen solid so that carts rumbled along them as on a street. A wind had risen which drifted the powdery snow and blew icy drafts through every chink.

The small-paned windows of the great upper room were filled with oiled vellum, but they did not keep out the weather, and currents of cold air passed through them to the doorway making the smoke of the four charcoal-braziers eddy and swirl.

The place was warm, yet shot with bitter gusts, and the smell of burned herbs gave it the heaviness of a chapel at high mass. Hanging silver lamps, which blazed blue and smoky, lighted it in patches, sufficient to show the cleanness of the rush-strewn floor, the glory of the hangings of cloth-of-gold and damask and the burnished sheen of the metalwork. There was no costlier chamber in that rich city.

It was a strange staging for death, for the woman on the high bed was dying. Slowly, fighting every inch of the way with a grim tenacity, but indubitably dying. Her vital ardor had sunk below the mark from which it could rise again, and was now ebbing as water runs from a little crack in a pitcher.

The best leeches in all Flanders and Artois had come to doctor her. They had prescribed the horrid potions of the age—tinctures of earth-worms; confections of spiders and wood-lice and vipers' flesh; broth of human skulls, oil, wine, ants' eggs and crabs' claws; the *bufo preparatus*, which was a live toad roasted in a pot and ground to a powder, and innumerable plasters and electuaries.

She had begun by submitting meekly, for she longed to live, and had ended, for she was a shrewd woman, by throwing the stuff at the apothecary's head. Now she ordained her own diet, which was of lamb's flesh lightly boiled and woman's milk, got from a woman in the purlieus of St. Sauveur. The one medicine which she retained was powdered elk's horn, which had been taken from the beast between two festivals of the Virgin. This she had from the foresters in the Houthulst woods and swallowed it in white wine an hour after every dawn.

The bed was a noble thing of ebony, brought by the Rhine road from Venice, and carved with fantastic hunting-scenes by Hainault craftsmen. Its hangings were stiff brocaded silver; and above the pillows a great unicorn's horn, to protect against poisoning, stood out like the beak of a ship. The horn cast an odd shadow athwart the bed, so that a big claw seemed to lie on the coverlet, curving toward the throat of her who lay there. The parish priest had noticed this at his first coming that evening and had muttered fearful prayers.

The face on the pillows was hard to discern in the gloom, but when Anton laid the table for the Cluniac's meal and set a lamp on it, he lighted up the cavernous interior of the bed, so that it became the main thing in the chamber.

It was the face of a woman who still retained the lines and the coloring of youth. The voice had harshened with age and the hair was white as wool, but the cheeks were still rosy and the gray eyes still had fire. Notable beauty had once been there. The finely arched brows, the oval of the face which the years had scarcely sharpened,

the proud, delicate nose—all spoke of it. It was as if their possessor recognized those things and would not part with them, for her attire had none of the dishevelment of a sick-room. Her coif of fine silk was neatly adjusted, and the great robe of marten's fur which cloaked her shoulders was fastened with a jewel of rubies which glowed in the lamplight like a star.

SOMETHING chattered beside her. It was a little brown monkey which had made a nest in the warm bedclothes.

She watched with sharp eyes the setting of the table. It was a Friday's meal and the guest was a monk, so it followed a fashion, but in that house of wealth, which had links with the ends of the earth, the monotony was cunningly varied. There were oysters from the Boulogne coast and lampreys from the Loire and pickled salmon from England. There was a dish of liver dressed with rice and herbs in the manner of the Turk, for liver, though contained in flesh, was not reckoned as flesh by liberal churchmen.

There was a roast goose from the shore-marshes, that barnacle-bird which pious epicures classed as shell-fish and thought fit for fast-days. A silver basket held a store of thin toasted rye-cakes, and by the monk's hand stood a flagon of that drink most dear to holy palates, the rich, sirupy hippocras.

The woman looked on the table with approval, for her house had always prided itself upon its good fare. The Cluniac's urbane composure was stirred to enthusiasm. He said a *Confiteor tibi Domine,* rolling the words on his tongue as if in anticipation of the solider mouthfuls awaiting him. The keen weather had whetted his appetite and he thanked God that his northern peregrinations had brought him to a house where the church was thus honored.

He had liked the cavalier treatment of the lean parish priest, a sour dog who brought his calling into disfavor with the rich and godly. He tucked back his sleeves, adjusted the linen napkin comfortably about his neck and fell to with a will. He raised his first glass of hippocras and gave thanks to his hostess. A true mother in Israel.

She was looking at him with favor. He was the breed of monk that she liked—suave, well-mannered, observant of men and cities. Already he had told her entertaining matter about the French king's court and the new burgrave of Ghent and the escapades of Count Baldwin. He had lived much among gentlefolk and kept his ears open. She felt stronger and more cheerful than she had been for days.

That rat-hunt had warmed her blood. She was a long way from death in spite of the cackle of idiot chirurgeons, and there was much savor still in the world. There was her son, too, the young Philip. Her eye saw clearer, and she noted the somber magnificence of the great room, the glory of the brocade, the gleam of silver. Was she not the richest woman in all Bruges—aye, and in all Hainault and Guelderland? And the credit was her own.

After the fashion of age in such moods her mind flew backward, and she saw very plain a narrow street in a wind-swept town looking out on a bleak sea. She had been cold, then, and hungry and deathly poor. Well, she had traveled some way from that hovel. She watched the thick-carved stems of the candle-sticks and felt a spacious ease and power.

THE Cluniac was speaking. He had supped so well that he was in love with the world.

"Your house and board, my lady, are queen-like. I have seen worse in palaces."

Her laugh was only half-pleased.

"Too fine, you would add, for a burgher-wife. Maybe, but rank is but as man makes it. The Kings of England are sprung of a tanner. Hark you, father! I made a vow to God when I was a maid, and I have fulfilled my side of the bargain.

"I am come of a nobler race than any Markgrave—aye, than the emperor himself—and I swore to set the seed of my body, which the Lord might grant me, again among the great ones. Have I not done it? Is not Philip, my son, affianced to that pale girl of Avesnes, and with more acres of pleasant land to his name than any knightlet in Artois?"

The Cluniac bowed a courtly head.

"It is a great alliance—but not above the dignity of your house."

"House you call it, and I have had the making of it. What was Willebald but a plain merchantman, one of many score at

the Friday Market? Willebald was clay that I molded and gilded till God put him to bed under a noble lid in the New Kirk. A worthy man, but loutish and slow like one of his Lockers. Yet when I saw him on the plain-stones by the English harbor, I knew that he was a weapon made for my hand."

Her voice had become even and gentle as of one who remembers far-away things. The Cluniac, having dipped his hands in a silver basin, was drying them in the brazier's heat. Presently he set to picking his teeth daintily with a quill and fell into the listener's pose. From long experience he knew the atmosphere which heralds confidences and was willing to humor the provider of such royal fare.

"You have never journeyed to King's Lynne?" said the voice from the bed. "There is little to see there but mud-bars and fens and a noisy sea. There I dwelt when I was fifteen years of age, a maid hungry alike in soul and body. I knew I was of the seed of Forester John and through him the child of a motley of ancient kings, but war and famine had stripped our house to the bone.

"And now I, the last of the stock, dwelt with a miserly mother's uncle who did shipwright's work for the foreign captains. The mirror told me that I was fair to look on, though ill-nourished, and my soul assured me that I had no fear. Therefore I had hope, but I ate my heart out waiting on fortune."

She was looking at the monk with unseeing eyes, her head half-turned toward him.

"Then came Willebald one March morning. I saw him walk up the jetty in a new red cloak, a personable man with a broad beard and a jolly laugh. I knew him by repute as the luckiest of the Flemish venturers. In him I saw my fortune. That night he supped at my uncle's house, and a week later he sought me in marriage. My uncle would have bargained, but I had become a grown woman and he was silenced.—

"With Willebald I made no terms, for I read his heart and knew that in a little he would be wax to me. So we were wed, and I took to him no dowry but a ring which came to me from my forebears and a brain that gold does not buy."

The monkey by her side broke into a chattering.

"Peace, Peterkin," she said. "You mind me of the babbling of the merchant-folk, when I spurred Willebald into new roads. He had done as his father before him and bought wool and salted fish from the English, paying with the stuffs of our Flemish looms. A good trade of small and sure profits, but I sought bigger quarries. For, mark you, there was much in England that had a value in this country of ours which no Englishman guessed."

"Of what nature?" the monk asked with curiosity in his voice.

"Roman things. Once in that land of bogs and forests there were bustling Roman towns and rich Roman houses, which disappeared as every tide brought in new robbers from the sea Yes, but not all. Much of the preciousness was hidden and the place of its hiding forgotten. Bit by bit the churls found the treasure-trove, but they did not tell their lords. They melted down jewels and sold them piecemeal to Jews for Jews' prices, and what they did not recognize as precious they wantonly destroyed.

"I have seen the marble heads of heathen gods broken with the hammer to make mortar of and great cups of onyx and alabaster used as water-troughs for a thrall's mongrels. Knowing the land, I sent pedlers north and west to collect such stuff, and what I bought for pence I sold for much gold in Germany and throughout the French cities.

"Thus Willebald amassed wealth, till it was no longer worth his while to travel the seas. We lived snug in Flanders, and our servants throughout the broad earth were busy getting us gear."

The Cluniac was all interest. The making of money lay very near the heart of his order.

"I have heard wondrous tales of your enterprise," he told her. "I would fain know the truth."

"Packman's tricks," she laughed. "Nevertheless it is a good story. For I turned my eyes to the East, whence came those things that make the pride of life. The merchants of Venice were princes, and it was in my head to make those of Bruges no worse. What did I profit that the wind turned daily the sails of our three hundred mills if we limited ourselves to common burgherwares and the narrow Northern markets? We sent emissaries up the Rhine and beyond the Alps to the Venice princes and brought hither the spices and confections

of Egypt and the fruits and wines of Greece and the woven stuffs of Asia till the marts of Flanders had the savor of Araby.

"Presently in our booths could be seen silks of Italy and choice metals from Innsbruck and furs from Muscovy and strange birds and beasts from Prester John's country, and at our fairs such a concourse of outlandish traders as put Venice to shame. It was a long fight and a bitter for Willebald and me, since, mark you, we had to make a new road over icy mountains, with a horde of freebooters hanging on the skirts of our merchant-trains and every little burg on the way jealous to hamper us.

"Yet if the heart be resolute, barriers will fall. Many times we were on the edge of beggary, and grievous were our losses, but in the end we triumphed. There came a day when we had so many bands of the Free Companions in our pay that the progress of our merchandise was like that of a great army, and from rivals we made the roadside burgs our allies, sharing modestly in our ventures.

"Also there were other ways. A pilgrim travels unsuspected, for who dare rob a holy man? And he is free from burghal dues; but if the goods be small and very precious, pilgrims may carry them."

The monk, as in duty bound, shook a disapproving head.

"Sin, doubtless," said the woman, "but I have made ample atonement. Did I not buy with a bushel of gold a leg of the blessed St. George for the New Kirk and give to St. Martin's a ruby as big as a thumb-nail and so bright that on a dark day it is a candle to the shrine? Did not I give to our Lady at Aix a crown of ostrich-feathers, the marrow of which is not in Christendom?"

"A mother in Israel, in truth," murmured the cleric.

"Yes, in Israel," said the old wife with a chuckle. "Israel was the kernel of our perplexities. The good Flemings saw no farther than their noses and laughed at Willebald when he began his ventures. When success came, it was easy to win them over, and by admitting them to a share in our profits, get them to fling their caps in the air and huzza for their benefactors.

"But the Jews were a tougher stock. Mark you, father, when God blinded their eyes to the coming of the Lord Christ, He opened them very wide to all lower matters. Their imagination is quick to kindle, and they are as bold in merchantcraft as Charlemagne in war. They saw what I was after before I had been a month at it and were quick to profit by my foresight. There are but two ways to deal with Israelites—root them from the face of the earth or make them partners with you. Willebald would have fought them; I, more wise, bought them at a price. For two score years they have wrought faithfully for me. You say well, a mother in Israel!"

"I could wish that a Christian lady had no dealings with the accursed race," said the Cluniac.

"You could wish folly," was the tart answer. "I am not as your burgher-folk, and for my own affairs I take no man's guiding, be he monk or merchant. Willebald is long dead; may he sleep in peace! He was no mate for me, but for what he gave me, I repaid him in the coin he loved best. He was a proud man when he walked through the Friday Market with every cap doffed. He was ever the burgher, like the child I bore him."

"I had thought the marriage more fruitful. They speak of two children, a daughter and a son."

THE woman turned round in her bed so that she faced him. The monkey whimpered and she cuffed its ears. Her face was sharp and exultant, and for a sick person her eyes were oddly bright.

"The girl was Willebald's. A poor slip of vulgar stock with the spirit of a housecat. I would have had her marry well, for she was handsome after a fashion, but she thwarted me and chose to wed a lout of a huckster in the Bredestreet. She shall have her portion from Willebald's gold, but none from me.

"But Philip is true child of mine and sprung on both sides of high race. Nay, I name no names, and before men he is of my husband's getting. But to you at the end of my days I speak the truth. That son of wrath has rare blood in him. Philip——"

The old face had grown kind. She was looking through the monk to some happy country of vision. Her thoughts were retracing the road of time, and after the way of age she spoke them aloud. Imperiously she had forgotten her company.

"So long ago," came the tender voice. "It is years since they told me he was dead

among the heathen, fighting by the Lord Baldwin's side. But I can see him as if it were yesterday, when he rode into these streets in Spring with April blooms at his saddle-bow. They called him 'Phœbus' in jest, for his face was like the sun.

"Willebald, good dull man, was never jealous, and was glad that his wife should be seen in brave company. Ah, the afternoons at the Baths when we sported like sea-nymphs and sang merry ballads! And the proud days of carnival when men and women consorted freely and without guile like the blessed in paradise! Such a tide for lovers. Did I not lead the dance with him at the Burgrave's festival, the twain of us braver than morning? Sat I not with him in the garden at St. Vaast, his head in my lap, while he sang me virelays of the South? What was Willebald to me or his lean gray wife to him. He made me his queen, me the burgher wife, at the jousting at Courtrai, when the horses squealed like pigs in the mêlée and I wept in fear for him. Ah, the lost sweet days! Philip, my darling, you make a brave gentleman, but you will not equal him who loved your mother."

The Cluniac was a man of the world whom no confidences could scandalize. But he had business of his own to speak of that night, and he thought it wise to break into this mood of reminiscence.

"The young lord, Philip, your son, madam? You have great plans for him? What does he at the moment?"

The softness went out of the voice, and the woman's gaze came back to the chamber.

"That I know not. Traveling the ways of the world and plucking roadside fruits, for he is no home-bred and womanish striping. Wearing his lusty youth on the maids, I fear.

"Nay, I forget. He is about to wed the girl of Avesnes and is already choosing the bridal train. It seems he loves her. He writes me she has a skin of snow and eyes of vair. I have not seen her. A green girl, doubtless with a white face and cat's eyes. But she is of Avesnes, and that blood comes pure from Clovis and there is none prouder in Hainault. He will husband her well, but she will be a clever woman if she tethers to her side a man of my bearing. He will be for the high road and the battle-front."

"A puissant and peaceable knight, I have heard tell," said the Cluniac.

"Puissant beyond doubt and peaceable—when his will is served. He will play boldly for great things and will win them. Ah, monk! What knows a childless religious of a mother's certainty? 'Twas not for nothing that I found Willebald and changed the cobbles of King's Lynne for this fat country. It is gold that brings power and the stiffest royal neck must bend to him who has the deep coffers. It is gold and his high hand that will set my Philip by the king's side.

"————, what a fortune I have made for him! There is coined money at the goldsmith's and in my cellars and ships at the ports and a hundred busy looms and lands in Hainault and Artois and fair houses in Bruges and Ghent. Boats on the Rhine and many pack-trains between Antwerp and Venice are his, and a wealth of preciousness lies in his name with the Italian merchants. Likewise there is this dwelling of mine, with plenishing which few kings could buy.

"My sands sink in the glass, but as I lie a-bed, I hear the bustle of wains and horses in the streets and the talk of shipfolk and the clatter of my serving-men beneath, and I know that daily, hourly, more riches flow hither to furnish my son's kingdom."

The monk's eyes sparkled at this vision of wealth and he remembered his errand.

"A most noble heritage. But if the Sire God in his inscrutable providence should call your son to His holy side, what provision have you made for so mighty a fortune? Does your daughter then share?"

The face on the pillows became suddenly wicked and very old. The eyes were lighted with hate.

"Not a bezant of which I have the bequeathing. She has something from Willebald, and her dull husband makes a livelihood. 'Twill suffice for the female brats, of whom she has brought three into the world to cumber it. By the Gospels, she will lie on the bed she has made. I did not scheme and toil to make gold for such leaden souls."

"But if your most worthy son should die ere he has begot children, have you made no disposition?"

The monk's voice was pointed with anxiety, for was not certainty on this point the object of his journey? The woman perceived it and laughed maliciously.

"I have made dispositions. Such a chapel will be builded in the New Kirk as Rome can not equal. Likewise there will be benefactions for the poor and a great endowment for the monks at St. Sauveur. If my seed is not to continue on earth, I will make favor in paradise."

"And we of Cluny, madam?"

The voice trembled in spite of its training.

"Nay, I have not forgotten Cluny. Its Abbot shall have the gold flagons from Jerusalem and some wherewithal in money. But what is this talk? Philip will not die, and like his mother he loves Holy Church and will befriend her in all her works.

"Listen, father. It is long past the hour when men cease from labor, and yet my provident folk are busy. Hark to the bustle below. That will be the convoy from the Vermandois. Jesu, what a night!"

FLURRIES of snow beat on the windows, and drafts stirred the hot ashes in the braziers and sent the smoke from them in odd spirals about the chamber. It had become perishing cold, and the monkey among the bedclothes whimpered and snuggled closer into his nest. There seemed to be a great stir about the house door. Loud voices were heard in gusts and a sound like a woman's cry. The head on the pillow was raised to listen.

"A murrain on those folk. There has been bungling among the pack-riders. That new man Derek is an oaf of oafs."

She rang her silver bell sharply and waited on the ready footsteps. But none came. There was silence now below, an ominous silence.

"God's curse upon this household," the woman cried.

The monkey whimpered again and she took it by the scruff and tossed it to the floor.

"Peace, ape, or I will have you strangled. Bestir yourself, father, and call Anton. There is a blight of deafness in this place."

The room had suddenly lost its comfort and become cold and desolate. The lamps were burning low and the colored hangings were in deep shadow. The storm was knocking fiercely at the lattice.

The monk rose with a shiver to do her bidding, but he was forestalled. Steps sounded on the stairs and the steward entered. The woman in the bed had opened her mouth to upbraid, when something in his dim figure struck her silent.

The old man stumbled forward and fell on his knees beside her.

"Madam, dear madam," he stammered, "ill news has come to this house. There is a post in from Avesnes. The young master——"

"Philip," and the woman's voice rose to a scream. "What of my son?"

"The Lord has taken away what He gave. He is dead, slain in a scuffle with highway-robbers. Oh, the noble young lord! The fair young knight! Woe upon this stricken house!"

The woman lay very still, while the old man on his knees drifted into broken prayers. Then he observed her silence, scrambled to his feet in a panic and lighted two candles from the nearest brazier. She lay back on the pillows in a deathly faintness, her face drained of blood. Only her tortured eyes showed that life was still in her.

Her voice came at last, no louder than a whisper. It was soft now but more terrible than the old harshness.

"I follow Philip," it said. "*Sic transit gloria.* Call me Master Arnulf the goldsmith and Robert the scrivener. Quick, man quick. I have much to do ere I die."

As the stewart hurried out, the Cluniac, remembering his office, sought to offer comfort, but in his bland worlding's voice the consolations sounded hollow. She lay motionless, while he quoted the Scriptures. Encouraged by her docility, he spoke of the certain reward promised by Heaven to the rich who remembered the church at their death. He touched upon the high duties of his order and the handicap of its poverty. He bade her remember her debt to the Abbot of Cluny.

She seemed about to speak, and he bent eagerly to catch her words.

"Peace, you babbler," she said. "I am done with your God. When I meet Him, I will outface Him. He has broken His compact and betrayed me. My riches go to the Burgrave for the comfort of this city where they were won. Let your broken rush of a church wither and rot!"

Scared out of all composure by this blasphemy, the Cluniac fell to crossing himself and mumbling invocations. The diplomat had vanished and only the frightened monk remained. He would fain have left the

room had he dared, but the spell of her masterful spirit held him. After that she spoke nothing.

AGAIN there was a noise on the stairs and she moved a little, as if mustering her failing strength for the ultimate business. But it was not Arnulf the goldsmith. It was Anton, and he shook like a man on his way to the gallows.

"Madam, dear madam," he stammered, again on his knees. "There is another message. One has come from the Bredestreet with word of your lady daughter. An hour ago she has borne a child. A lusty son, madam."

The reply from the bed was laughter. It began low and hoarse like a fit of coughing and rose to the high cackling mirth of extreme age. At the sound both Anton and the monk took to praying. Presently it stopped, and her voice came full and strong as it had been of old.

"*Mea culpa*," it said, "*mea maxima culpa.* I judged the Sire God overhastily. He is merry and has wrought a jest on me. He has kept His celestial promise in His own fashion. He takes my brave Philip and gives me instead a suckling. So be it. The infant has my blood and the race of Forester John will not die.

"Arnulf will have an easy task. He need but set the name of this new-born in Philip's place. What manner of child is he, Anton? Lusty, you say, and well-formed? I would my arms could have held him. But I must be about my business of dying. I will take the news to Philip."

Hope had risen again in the Cluniac's breast. It seemed that here was a penitent. He approached the bed with a raised crucifix and stumbled over the whimpering monkey. The woman's eyes saw him and a last flicker woke in them.

"Begone, man," she cried. "I have done with the world. Anton, rid me of both these apes. And fetch the priest of St. Martin's, for I would confess and be shriven. Yon curate is no doubt a fool, but he serves my jesting God."

THE EYES OF YOUTH*

The Fourth Tale in the series "The Path of a King."

Each story entirely complete in itself.

ON THE morning of Shrove Tuesday in the year of our Lord 1249 Sir Aimery of Beaumanoir, the envoy of the most Christian king, Louis of France, arrived in the port of Acre, having made the voyage from Cyprus with a fair wind in a day and a night in a ship of Genoa flying the red and gold banner of the Temple.

Weary of the palms and sun-baked streets of Limasol and the eternal wrangling of the crusading hosts, he looked with favor at the noble Palestine harbor and the gilt steeples and carven houses of the fair city. From the quay he rode to the palace of the Templars and was admitted straightway to an audience with the grand master. For he had come in a business of some moment.

The taste of Cyprus was still in his mouth; the sweet sticky air of the coast-lands; the smell of endless camps of packed humanity, set among mountains of barrels and malodorous sprouting forage-stuffs; the narrow streets lighted at night by flares of tarry staves; and over all that rotting yet acrid flavor which is the token of the East.

The young *damoiseau* of Beaumanoir had grown very sick of it all since the royal dromonds first swung into Limasol Bay. He had seen his friends die like flies of strange maladies, while the host waited on Hugh of Burgundy. Egypt was but four days off across the southern waters, and on its sands Louis had ordained that the War of the Cross should begin.

But the king seemed strangely supine.

* See note to preceding story.

Each day the enemy was the better forewarned, and each day the quarrels of Templar and Hospitaller grew more envenomed, and yet he sat patiently twiddling his thumbs, as if all time lay before him and not a man's brief life. And now when at last the laggards of Burgundy and the Morea were reported on their way, Sir Aimery had to turn his thoughts from the honest field of war. Not for him to cry "Montjoie St. Denis" by the Nile. For behold, he was now speeding on a crazy errand to the ends of the earth.

There had been strange councils in the bare little chamber of the Most Christian King. Those locusts of the dawn whom men called Tatars, the evil seed of the three kings who had once traveled to Bethlehem, had, it seemed, been vouchsafed a glimpse of grace. True, they had plundered and eaten the faithful and shed innocent blood in oceans, but they hated the children of Mahound worse than the children of Christ.

On the eve of Christmas-tide four envoys had come from their Khakan, monstrous men with big heads that sprang straight from the shoulder, and arms that hung below the knee and short thin legs like gnomes. For forty weeks they had been on the road, and they brought gifts such as no eye had seen before—silks like gossamer woven with wild alphabets, sheeny jars of jade and pearls like moons.

Their Khakan, they said, had espoused the grandchild of Prester John and had been baptized into the Faith. He marched against Bagdad and had sworn to root the heresy of Mahound from the earth. Let the King of France make a league with him, and between them, pressing from east and west, they would accomplish the holy task. Let him send teachers to expound the mysteries of God, and let him send knights who would treat on mundane things. The letter, written in halting Latin and sealed with a device like a spider's web, urged instant warfare with Egypt.

> For the present we dwell far apart, (wrote the Khakan) therefore let us both get to business.

So Aimery had been summoned to the king's chamber, where he found his good master, the Count of St. Pol, in attendance with others. After prayer, Louis opened to them his mind. Pale from much fasting and nightly communing with God, his face was lighted again with that light which had shone in it when on the Friday after Pentecost the year before he had received at St. Denis the pilgrim's scarf and the oriflamme of France.

"God's hand is in this, my masters," he said. "Is it not written that many shall come from the East and from the West to sit down with Abraham in his kingdom? I have a duty toward those poor folk and I dare not fail."

There was no man present bold enough to argue with the white fire in the king's eyes. One alone caviled. He was a Scot, Sir Patrick, the Count of Dunbar, who already shook with the fervor which was to be his death.

"This Khakan is far away, sire," he said. "If it took his envoys forty weeks to reach us, it will be a good year before his armies are on the skirts of Egypt. As well make alliance with a star."

But Louis was in missionary mood.

"God's ways are not as our ways. To Him a thousand years are a day, and He can make the weakest confound a multitude. This faraway king asks for instruction, and I will send him holy men to fortify his young faith. And this knight, of whom you, my lord of St. Pol, speak well, shall bear the greetings of a soldier."

Louis' face, which for usual was grave like a wise child's, broke into a smile which melted Aimery's heart. He scarcely heard the Count of St. Pol, as that stout friend enlarged on his merits.

"The knight of Beaumanoir," so ran the testimony, "has more learning than any clerk. In Spain he learned the tongues of the heathen, and in Paris he read deep in their philosophy. Withal he is a devout son of Holy Church."

The boy blushed at the praise and dared not meet the king's kindly regard. But St. Pol spoke truth, for Aimery, young as he was, had traveled far both on the material globe and in the kingdom of the spirit. As a stripling he had made one of the Picardy nation in the schools of Paris. He had studied the metaphysics of Aristotle under Aquinas and voyaged strange seas of thought piloted by Roger, the white-bearded Englishman. Thence by the favor of the queen mother he had gone as squire to Alphonso's court of Castille, where the Spanish doctors had opened windows for him into the clear, dry wisdom of the Saracens.

He had traveled with an embassy to the emperor, and in Sicily had talked with the learned Arabs who clustered around the fantastic Frederick. In Italy he had met adventurers of Genoa and Venice, who had shown him charts of unknown oceans and maps of Prester John's country and the desert roads that led to Cambaluac, that city farther than the moon, and told him tales of awful and delectable things hidden beyond the dawn. He had returned to his tower by the springs of Canche, a young man with a name for uncanny knowledge, a searcher after concealed matters, negligent of religion and ill at ease in his world.

Then Louis cast his spell over him. He saw the king first at a great hunting in Avesnes and worshiped from afar the slim body, royal in every line of it, and the blue eyes which charmed and compelled, for he divined there a spirit which had the secret of both earth and heaven. While still under the glamour he was given knighthood at the royal hands and presently was weaned from unwholesome fancies by falling in love.

The girl, Alix of Valéry, was slim like a poplar and her eyes were gray and deep as her northern waters. She had been a maid of Blanche the Queen and had a nun's devoutness joined to a merry soul. Under her guiding Aimery made his peace with the Church and became notable for his gifts to God, for he derived great wealth from his Flemish forebears.

Yet the yeast of youth still wrought in him, and by Alix's side at night he dreamed of other lands than his gray-green Picardy. So, when the king took the *croix d'outre mer* and summoned his knights to the freeing Jerusalem, Sir Aimery of Beaumanoir was the first to follow. For to him, as to others like him, the goal was no perishable city made by mortal hands, but that *beata urbs* without foundations which Youth builds of its dreams.

He heard mass by the king's side and, trembling with pride, kissed the royal hands and set out on his journey. His last memory of Louis was of a slim figure in a surcoat of blue samite, gazing tenderly on him as if bidding farewell to a brother.

The Grand Master of the Templars, sitting in a furred robe in a warm upper chamber, for he had an ague on him, spoke gloomily of the mission. He would have preferred to make alliance with the Soldan of Egypt and by his aid recover the holy cities.

"What Khakan is this," he cried, "to whom it is a journey of a lifetime to come nigh? What kind of Christian will you make of men that have blood for drink and the flesh of babes for food and blow hither and thither on horses like sandstorms? Yours is a mad venture, young sir, and I see no good that can come of it."

Nevertheless he wrote letters of commendation to the Prince of Antioch and the Constable of Armenia; and he brought together all those about the place who had traveled far inland to make a chart of the journey.

Aimery heeded little the Templar's forebodings, for his heart had grown high again and romance was kindling his fancy. There was a knuckle of caution in him, for he had the blood of Flemish traders in his veins, though enriched by many nobler streams.

"The profit is certain," a cynic had whispered to him ere they left Aigues Mortes. "Should we conquer, we shall grow rich, and if we fail, we shall go to heaven."

The phrase had fitted some of his moods, notably the black ones at Limasol, but now he was all aflame with the quixotry of the Crusader. He neither needed nor sought wealth, nor was he concerned about death. His feet trod sacred soil of his faith, and up in the hills which rimmed the seaward plain lay all the holiness of Galilee and Nazareth, the three tabernacles built by St. Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration, the stone whence Christ ascended into heaven, the hut at Bethlehem which had been the Most High's cradle, the sanctuary of Jerusalem whose every stone was precious.

Presently his king would win it all back for God. But for him was the sterner task—no clean blows in the mêlée among brethren, but a long pilgrimage beyond the east wind to the cradle of all marvels. The king had told him that he carried the hopes of Christendom in his wallet; he knew that be bore within himself the delirious expectation of a boy.

Youth swelled his breast and steeled his sinews and made a golden mist for his eyes. The new, the outlandish, the undreamed of! Surely no one of the Seven Champions had had such fortune! Scribes long after would write of the deeds of Aimery of Beaumanoir and minstrels would sing of him as they sang of Roland and Tristan.

The Count of Jaffa, whose tower stood on the borders and who was therefore rarely quit of strife, conveyed him a stage or two on his way. It was a slender company—two Franciscans bearing the presents of Louis to the Khakan—a chapel-tent of scarlet cloth embroidered inside with pictures of the Annunciation and the Passion; two sumpter mules with baggage; Aimery's squire, a lad from the Boulonnais, and Aimery himself mounted on a Barbary horse warranted to go far on little fodder.

The lord of Jaffa turned back where the snows of Lebanon were falling behind on their right. He had nodded toward the mountains.

"There lives the old man and his Ishmaelites. Fear nothing, for his fangs are drawn."

And when Aimery asked the cause of the impotence of the renowned Assassins, he was told—

"That Khakan whom ye seek."

AFTER that they made good speed to the city of Antioch, where not so long before angels from heaven had appeared as knights in white armor to do battle for the forlorn Crusaders. There they were welcomed by the prince and sent forward into Armenia, guided by the posts of the constable of that harassed kingdom. Everywhere the fame of the Tatars had gone abroad, and with each mile they journeyed the tales became stranger. Conquerors and warriors beyond doubt, but grotesque paladins for the cross. Men whispered their name with averted faces, and in the eyes of the traveled ones there was the terror of sights remembered outside the mortal pale. Aimery's heart was stout, but he brooded much as the road climbed into the mountains.

Far off in Cyprus the Khakan had seemed a humble devotee at Christ's footstool, asking only to serve and learn; but now he had grown to some monstrous Cyclops beyond the stature of man, a portent like a thundercloud brooding over unnumbered miles. Besides, the young lord was homesick and had long thoughts of Alix, his wife, and the son she had borne him. As he looked at the stony hills, he remembered that it would now be Springtide in Picardy, when the young green of the willows fringed every watercourse and the plovers were calling on the windy downs.

The Constable of Armenia dwelt in a castle of hewn stone about which a little city clustered, with mountains on every side to darken the sky. He was as swarthy as a Saracen and had a long nose like a Jew, but he was a good Christian and a wise ruler, though commonly at odds with his cousin at Antioch. From him Aimery had more precise news of the Khakan.

"There were two," said the constable. "One who rules all western Asia east of the Sultan's principates. Him they call the Ilkhan, for title, and Houlagou for name. His armies have eaten up the Chorasnians and the Muscovites and will presently bite their way at Christendom, unless God change their heart. By the Gospels, they are less and more than men. Swinish drinkers and gluttons, they rise from their orgies to sweep the earth like a flame. Here inside our palisade of rock we wait fearfully."

"And the other?" Aimery asked.

"Ah, he is as much the greater as the sun is greater than a star. Kublai, they name him, and he is in some sort the lord of Houlagou. I have never met the man who has seen him, for he dwells as far beyond the Ilkhan as the Ilkhan is distant from the Pillars of Hercules. But rumor has it that he is a clement and beneficent prince, terrible in battle, but a lover of peace and all good men. They tell wonders about his land of Cathay, where strips of parchment stamped with the king's name take the place of gold among merchants, so strong is that king's honor. But the journey to Cambaluc, the city of Kublai, would fill the lifetime of a man."

ONE April morning they heard mass after the odd Syrian fashion and turned their faces eastward. The constable's guides led them through the mountains, up long sword-cuts of valleys and under frowning snow-drifts or across stony barrens where wretched beehive huts huddled by the shores of unquiet lakes. Presently they came into Summer, and found meadows of young grass and green forests on the hills' skirts, and saw wide plains die into the blueness of morning. There the guides left them, and the little cavalcade moved east into unknown anarchies.

The sky grew like brass over their heads, and the land baked and rutted with the sun's heat. It seemed a country empty of

man, though sometimes they came on derelict plowlands and towns of crumbling brick charred and glazed by fire. In sweltering days they struggled through flats, where the grass was often higher than the horses' withers, and forded the tawny streams which brought down the snows of the hills. Now and then they would pass wandering herdsmen, who fled to some earth-burrow at their appearance.

The constable had bidden them make for the rising sun, saying that sooner or later they would foregather with the Khakan's scouts. But days passed into weeks and weeks into months, and still they moved through a tenantless waste. They husbanded jealously the food they had brought, but the store ran low and there were days of empty stomachs and light heads. Unless, like the King of Babylon, they were to eat grass in the fashion of beasts, it seemed they must soon famish.

But late in Summertime they saw before them a wall of mountain and in three days climbed by its defiles to a pleasant land, where once more they found the dwellings of man. It appeared that they were in a country where the Tatars had been for some time settled and which had for years been free of the ravages of war. The folks were hunters and shepherds, who took the strangers for immortal beings and offered food on bent knees like oblations to a god.

They knew where the Ilkhan dwelt and furnished guides for each day's journey. Aimery, who had been sick of a low fever in the plains, and had stumbled on in a stupor torn by flashes of homesickness, found his spirits reviving. He had cursed many times the futility of his errand. While the Franciscans were busied with their punctual offices and asked nothing of each fresh day but that it should be as prayerful as the last, he found a rebellious unbelief rising in his heart. He was traveling roads no Christian had ever trod on a wild-goose errand, while his comrades were winning fame in the battle-front. Alas, that a bright sword should rust in these barrens!

But with the uplands peace crept into his soul and some of the mystery of his journey. It was a brave venture, whether it failed or no, for he had already gone beyond the pale even of men's dreams. The face of Louis hovered before him. It needed a great king ever to conceive such a mission.

He had been sent on a king's errand, too. He stood alone for France and the cross in the heart of a dark world. Alone, as kings should stand, for to take all the burden was the mark of kingship. His heart bounded at the thought, for he was young. His father had told him of that old Flanders grandam, who had sworn that his blood came from proud kings.

But chiefly he thought of Louis with a fresh warmth of love. Surely the king loved him, or he would not have chosen him out of many for this fateful work. He had asked of him the ultimate service, as a friend should.

Aimery reconstructed in his inner vision all his memories of the king. The close fair hair now thinning about the temples; the small face still contoured like a boy's; the figure strung like a bow; the quick eager gestures; the blue dove's eyes, kindly and humble, as became one whose proudest title was to be a "sergeant of the Crucified." But those same eyes could also steel and blaze, for his father had been called "the Lion," his mother "Semiramis" and his grandsire "Augustus." In these wilds Aimery was his vicegerent and bore himself proudly as the proxy of such a monarch.

The hour came when they met the Tatar outposts. A cloud of horse swept down on them, each man riding loose with his hand on a taut bowstring. In silence they surrounded the little party, and their leader made signs to Aimery to dismount. The constable had procured for him a letter in Tatar script, setting out the purpose of his mission. This the outpost could not read, but they recognized some word among the characters and pointed it out to one another with uncouth murmurings. They were strange folk, with eyes like pebbles and squat frames and short broad faces, but each horse and man moved in unison like a centaur.

With gestures of respect the Tatars signaled to the Christians to follow and led them for a day and a night southward down a broad valley, where vines and fruit-trees grew and peace dwelt in villages. They passed encampments of riders like themselves, and little scurries of horsemen would ride athwart their road and exchange greetings.

On the second morning they reached a city, populous in men but not in houses. For miles stretched lines of skin tents, and

in the heart of them by the river's edge stood a great hall of brick, still raw from the builders.

Aimery sat erect on his weary horse with the hum of an outlandish host about him, himself very weary and very sick at heart. For the utter folly of it all had come on him like the waking from a dream. These men were no allies of the West. They were children of the Blue Wolf, as the constable had said—a monstrous brood, swarming from the unknown to blight the gardens of the world. A Saracen compared to such was a courteous knight. He thought of Kublâi, the greater Khakan. Perhaps in his court might dwell gentlehood and reason. But here was but a wolf-pack in the faraway guise of man.

They gave the strangers food and drink —half-cooked flesh and a porridge of rye and sour spiced milk—and left them to sleep till sundown. Then the palace-guards led them to the presence.

The hall was immense, dim and shapeless like the inside of a hill, not built according to the proportions of mankind. *Flambeaux* and wicks floating in great basins of mutton-fat showed a dense concourse of warriors, and through an aisle in the middle of them Aimery approached the throne. In front stood a tree of silver, springing from a pedestal of four lions, whose mouths poured streams of wine, sirup and mead into basins, which were emptied by a host of slaves, the cup-bearers of the assembly.

There were two thrones side by side, on one of which sat a figure so motionless that it might have been wrought of jasper. Weighted with a massive head-dress of pearls and a robe of gold brocade, the little grandchild of Prester John seemed like a doll on which some princess had lavished wealth and fancy. The black eyelashes lay quiet on her live cheeks, and her breathing did not stir her stiff jeweled bodice.

"I have seen death in life," thought Aimery as he shivered and looked aside.

Houlagou, her husband, was a tall man compared with the others. His face was hairless and his mouth fine and cruel. His eyes were hard like agates, with no light in them. A passionless power lurked in the low, broad forehead, and the mighty head sank deep between the shoulders; but the power not of a man but of some abortion of nature, like storm or earthquake. Again Aimery shivered. Had not the prophets foretold that one day Antichrist would be reborn in Babylon?

Among the Ilkhan's scribes was a Greek who spoke a bastard French and acted as interpreter. King Louis' letter was read, and in that hall its devout phrases seemed a mockery. The royal gifts were produced, the tent-chapel with its woven pictures and the sacred utensils. The half-drunk captains fingered them curiously, but the eyes from the throne scarcely regarded them.

"These are your priests," said the Khakan. "Let them talk with my priests and then go their way. I have little concern with priestcraft."

Then Aimery spoke, and the Greek with many haltings translated. He reminded Houlagou of the Tatar convoys who had sought from his king instruction in the Christian faith and had proclaimed his baptism.

"Of that I know nothing," was the answer. "Maybe 'twas some whim of my brother Kublai. I have all the gods I need."

With a heavy heart Aimery touched on the proposed alliance, the advance on Bagdad and the pinning of the Saracens between two fires. He spoke as he had been ordered but with a bitter sense of futility, for what kind of ally could be looked for in this proud pagan?

The impassive face showed no flicker of interest.

"I am eating up the caliphs," he said, "but that food is for my own table. As for allies, I have need of none. The children of the Blue Wolf do not make treaties."

Then he spoke aside to his captain and fixed Aimery with his agate eyes. It was like listening to a voice from a stone.

"The King of France has sent you to ask for peace. Peace, no doubt, is good, and I will grant it of my favor. A tribute will be fixed in gold and silver; and while it is duly paid, your king's lands will be safe from my warriors. Should the tribute fail, France will be ours. I have heard that it is a pleasant place."

THE Ilkhan signed that the audience was over. The fountains of liquor ceased to play, and the drunken gathering stood up with a howling like wild beasts to acclaim their king. Aimery went back to his hut and sat deep in thought far into the night.

He perceived that the shadows were closing in upon him. He must get the friars away and with them a message to his master. For himself there could be no return, for he could not shame his king, who had trusted him. In the bestial twilight of this barbaric court the memory of Louis shone like a star. He must attempt to reach Kublai, of whom men spoke well, though the journey cost him his youth and his life.

It might mean years of wandering, but there was a fragment of hope in it. There, in the bleak hut, he suffered the extreme of mental anguish. A heavy door seemed to have closed between him and all that he held dear. He fell on his knees and prayed to the saints to support his loneliness. And then he found comfort, for had not God's son suffered even as he and left the bright streets of paradise for loneliness among the lost?

Next morning he faced the world with a clearer eye. It was not difficult to provide for the Franciscans. They, honest men, understood nothing save that the Tatar king had not the love of holy things, for which they had hoped. They explained the offices of the Church as well as they could to ribald and uncomprehending auditors and continued placidly in their devotions. As it chanced, a convoy was about to start for Muscovy, whence by ship they might come to Constantinople. The Tatars made no objection to their journey, for they had some awe of these pale men and were glad to be quit of foreign priestcraft.

With them Aimery sent a letter in which he told the king that the immediate errand had been done, but that no good could be looked for from this western Khakan.

I go (he said) to Kublai the Great, in Cathay, who has a heart more open to God. If I return not, know, sire, that I am dead in your most loving service, joyfully and pridefully as a Christian knight dies for the cross, his king and his lady.

He added some prayers on behalf of the little household at Beaumanoir and sealed it with his ring. It was the ring he had got from his father, a thick gold thing, in which had been cut his cognizance of three lions' heads.

This done, he sought an audience with the Ilkhan and told him of his purpose. Houlagou did not speak for a little, and into his set face seemed to creep an ill-boding shadow of a smile.

"Who am I," he said at length, "to hinder your going to my brother Kublai? I will give you an escort to my eastern borders."

Aimery bent his knee and thanked him, but from the courtiers rose a hubbub of mirth which chilled his gratitude. He was aware that he sailed on very desperate waters.

Among the Tatars was a recreant Genoese who taught them metalwork and had once lived at the court of Camgaluc. The man had glimmerings of honesty and tried hard to dissuade Aimery from the journey.

"It is a matter of years," he told him, "and the road leads through deserts greater than all Europe and over mountains so high and icy that birds are frozen in the crossing. And a word in your ear, my lord. The Ilkhan permits few to cross his eastern marches. Beware of treason, I say. Your companions are the bloodthirstiest of the royal guards."

But from the Genoese he obtained a plan of the first stages of the road, and one morning in Autumn he set out from the Tatar city, his squire from the Boulonnais by his side and at his back a wild motley of horsemen, wearing cuirasses of red leather stamped with the blue wolf of Houlagou's house.

OCTOBER fell chill and early in those uplands, and on the fourth day they came into a sprinkling of snow. At night round the fires the Tatars made merry, for they had strong drink in many skin bottles, and Aimery was left to his own cold meditations. If he had had any hope, it was gone now, for the escort made it clear that he was their prisoner.

Judging from the chart of the Genoese, they were not following any road to Cambaluc, and the sight of the sky told him that they were circling round to the south. The few Tatar words he had learned were not enough to communicate with them, and in any case it was clear that they would take no orders from him.

He was trapped like a bird in the fowler's hands. Escape was folly, for in an hour their swift horses would have ridden him down. He had thought he had grown old, but the indignity woke his youth again and he fretted passionately. If death was his portion, he longed for it to come cleanly in soldier-fashion.

One night his squire disappeared. The

Tatars, when he tried to question them, only laughed and pointed westward. That was the last he heard of the lad from the Boulonnais.

And then on a frosty dawn, when the sun rose red-rimmed over the barrens, he noted a new trimness in his escort. They rode in line and they rode before and behind him, so that his captivity was made patent. On a ridge far to the west he saw a great castle, and he knew the palace of Houlagou. His guess had been right; he had been brought back by a circuit to his starting-point.

Evidently he was face to face with the Ilkhan, who was hunting. The Greek scribe was with him, so the meeting had been foreseen. The king's face was dark with the weather and his stony eyes had a glow in them.

"O messenger of France," he said, "there is a little custom of our people that I had forgotten. When a stranger warrior visits us, it is our fashion to pit him in a bout against one of our own folk, so that if he leaves us alive, he may speak well of his entertainment."

"I am willing," said Aimery. "I have but my sword for weapon."

"We have no lack of swordsmen," said the Ilkhan. "I would fain see the Frankish way of it"

A man stepped out from the ring, a great square fellow, shorter by a head than Aimery and with a nose that showed there was Saracen blood in him. He had a heavy German blade, better suited for fighting on horseback than on foot. He had no buckler and no armor save a head-piece, so the combatants were fairly matched.

It was a contest of speed and deftness against a giant's strength, for a blow from the great weapon would have cut deep into a man's vitals. Aimery was weary and unpractised, but the clash of steel gave life to him. He found that he had a formidable foe, but one who lacked the finer arts of the swordsman. The Tatar wasted his strength in the air against the new French parries and guards, though he drew first blood and gashed his opponent's left arm.

Aimery's light blade dazzled his eyes, and presently, when breath had grown short, claimed its due. A deft cut on the shoulder paralysed the Tatar's sword-arm and a breast-stroke brought him to his knees.

"Finish him," said the Ilkhan.

"Nay, sire," said Aimery. "It is not our custom to slay a disabled foe."

Houlagou nodded to one of his guards, who advanced, swinging his sword. The defeated man seemed to know his fate and stretched out his neck. With a single blow his head rolled on the earth.

"You have some skill of the sword, Frenchman," said the Ilkhan. "Hear now what I have decreed concerning you. I will have none of this journey to my brother Kublai. I had purposed to slay you, for you have defied my majesty. You sought to travel to Cathay instead of bearing my commands forthwith to your little king. But I am loth to kill so stout a warrior. Swear to me allegiance, and you shall ride with me against the caliphs."

"And if I refuse?" Aimery asked.

"Then you die ere sundown.

"I am an envoy, sire, from a brother-majesty, and of such it is the custom to respect the persons."

"Tush!" said the Ilkhan. "There is no brother-majesty save Kublai. Between us we rule the world."

"Hear me, then, sire," said Aimery.

The duel had swept all cobwebs from his brain and doubts from his heart.

"I am a knight of the Sire Christ and of the most noble King Louis, and I can own no other lord. Do your work, king. I am solitary among your myriads, but you can not bend me."

"So be it," said Houlagou.

"I ask two boons as one about to die. Let me fall in battle against your warriors. And let me spend the hours till sundown alone, for I would prepare myself for my journey."

"So be it," said Houlagou, and turned to his hounds.

THE *damoiseau* of Beaumanoir sat on a ridge commanding for fifty miles the snow-sprinkled uplands. The hum of the Tatars came faint from a hollow to the west, but where he sat, he was in quiet and alone.

He had forgotten the ache of loss which had preyed on him. His youth had not been squandered. The joy of young manhood, which had been always like a tune in his heart, had risen to a nobler song. For now, as it seemed to him, he stood beside his king, and had found a throne in the desert.

Alone among all Christian men he had

carried the cross to a new world and had been judged worthy to walk in the footprints of the captain, Christ. A great gladness and a great humility possessed him.

He had ridden beyond the ken of his own folk and no tale of his end would ever be told in that northern hall of his when the hearth-fire flickered on the rafters. That seemed small loss, for they would know that he had ridden the king's path, and that can have but the one ending.

Most clear in his memory now were the gray towers by Canche, where all day long the slow river made a singing among the reeds. He saw Alix, his wife, the sun on her hair, playing in the close with his little Philip. Even now in the pleasant Autumn weather that curly-pate would be scrambling in the orchard for the ripe apples which his mother rolled to him.

He had thought himself born for a high destiny. Well, that destiny had been accomplished. He would not die, but live in the son of his body, and his sacrifice would be eternally a spirit moving in the hearts of his seed. He saw the thing clear and sharp, as if in a magic glass. There was a long road before the house of Beaumanoir and on the extreme horizon a great brightness.

Now he remembered that he had always known it—known it even when his head had been busy with ardent hopes. He had loved life, and God had given him life everlasting. He had known it when he sought learning from wise books. When he kept watch by his armor in the Abbey church of Corbie and questioned wistfully the darkness, that was the answer he had got. In the morning, when he had knelt in snow-white linen and crimson and steel before the high altar and received back his sword from God, the message had been whispered in his heart.

In the June dawn when, barefoot, he was given the pilgrim's staff and entered on his southern journey, he had had a premonition of his goal.

But now what had been dim, like a shadow in a mirror, was as clear as the colors in a painted psaltery. He seemed to be on a high mountain, looking back on the road he had come and noting all the turnings and wanderings as directed by God's hand.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem," he sighed, as his king was wont to sigh.

For he was crossing the ramparts of the secret city.

He tried to take the ring from his finger that he might bury it, for it irked him that his father's jewel should fall to his enemies. But the wound had swollen his left hand and he could not move the ring.

He was looking westward, for that way lay the holy places and likewise Alix and Picardy. His minutes were few now, for he heard the bridles of the guards, as they closed in to carry him to his last fight.

He had with him a fragment of rye-cake and beside him on the ridge was a little spring. In his helmet he filled a draft and ate a morsel. For, by the grace of the Church to the knight in extremity, he was now sealed of the priesthood and partook of the mystic body and blood of his Lord.

Somewhere far off there was a grass fire licking the hills, and the sun was setting in fierce scarlet and gold. The hollow of the sky was a vast chapel ablaze with lights like the lifting of the Host at Candlemas.

THE tale is not finished. For, as it chanced, one Maffeo of Venice, a merchant who had strayed to the court of Cambaluc and found favor there, was sent by Kublai the next year on a mission to Europe, and his way lay through the camp of Houlagou. He was received with honor and shown the riches of the Tatar armies.

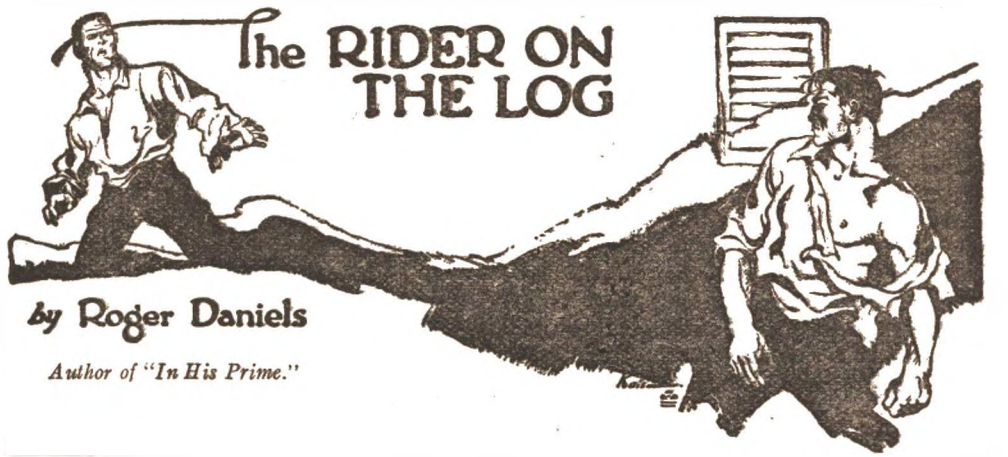
Among other things he heard of a Frankish knight who had fallen in battle with Houlagou's champions and won much honor, they said, having slain three. He was shown the shriveled arm of this knight, with a gold ring on the third finger.

Maffeo was a man of sentiment, and begged for and was given the poor fragment, meaning to accord it burial in consecrated ground when he should arrive in Europe. He traveled to Bussorah, whence he came by sea to Venice.

Now at Venice there presently arrived the Count of St. Pol with a company of Frenchmen, bound on a mission to the emperor. Maffeo, of whom one may still read in the book of Marco Polo, was become a famous man in the city, and strangers resorted to his house to hear his tales and see his treasures.

From him St. Pol learned of the dead knight, and, reading the cognizance on the

ring, knew the fate of his friend. On his return-journey he bore the relic to Louis at Paris, who venerated it as the limb of a saint; and thereafter took it to Beaumanoir, where the Lady Alix kissed it with proud tears. The arm in a rich casket she buried below the chapel altar and the ring she wore till her death.



by Roger Daniels

Author of "In His Prime."

THERE have been fights at the Algoma, plenty of them. Its habitués are rough men who lead a rough life, principally the lumberjacks from the spruce camps to the north. The rush season is the Spring of the year, after the ice has gone out and the log-drives are over. Then money jingles in burning pockets.

It was at the Algoma McKendrick the grumbler came to know the art of team-work.

McKendrick belonged to Crozier's outfit and was a garrulous customer, even before the war. If it wasn't the cook he was finding fault with it was the cookee.

When he grew tired of complaining about the grub, he found divers other means to feed the fire of his ever-present discontent. His trips to the Algoma usually wound up with a fight if there was a fight to be had.

Had it not been for his skill as a river-man, McKendrick's stay at Crozier's would have been short-lived. As it was, he was tolerated, despite the fact that more than one youngster found his services would be more useful elsewhere after he absorbed too much of McKendrick's philosophy for his good.

That was before the war.

McKendrick had enlisted in the Ontario contingent with the first news of the invasion of Belgium and after weeks in the great camp at Valcartier had sailed for France.

He was one of those who got through the first gas attacks at Ypres when gas-masks were an unknown quantity. Three clouds of the noxious fumes had passed over the hastily dug Canadian trenches and after each had passed, McKendrick had climbed to the parapet to get a clearer view of the oncoming grav-green mob. What they did to that same mob at Ypres is history.

But after the fourth gas-cloud went over, McKendrick did not climb to the parapet. A few minutes later he was clumsily trying to dodge a big boche who stood over him with the butt of an upraised rifle. It seemed to McKendrick that the butt was taking a prodigious time to reach his already numbed head. He grew tired of waiting for it to come and fainted.

When the rifle-butt finally crashed down, it struck the ground harmlessly, for the simple reason that a thrown bayonet had gone through the boche's neck with a hand's breadth to spare sticking out the other side.

Presently, McKendrick felt the sensation of being lifted. He opened his eyes and looked up. All his smarting eyes could see was a strange picture of a blue river-man astride a red log. He looked again to make sure he had seen aright. The river-man and the log seemed to jump away from him. Then everything turned black again.

When he came out of the hospital fit for further service the vision of the blue river-man clung to him. It clung throughout the war. He could never quite fathom why it had come to him but gradually he grew to

accept it as a sort of talisman, assuring him he would return to the Goulais.

So with the signing of the armistice, he headed back for Crozier's camp, bringing with him the harvest of more than four disgruntled years in the army.

He found reason to grumble the day he arrived at Crozier's. Old Peterson, who had been foreman when he left, had gone and in his stead was a swarthy French-Canadian, who went by the name of Jules.

"So that's what a guy gets, is it? Gives his blighted soul away for God and Country and comes back to be bulled around by a dirty frog! Well, we'll see what we'll see."

McKendrick addressed the shanty in general. The murmurs of approval that went the rounds of the bunks told him he had hit upon a popular chord. The men looked on Jules as a hard man to work under.

It was just at the beginning of the Spring drive. The Winter's cut of timber lay piled high on skidways all up and down Shepherd's Creek. With the breaking up of the ice the logs would be sent tumbling down into the creek. Then the drive would be on in earnest, down Shepherd's Creek to the Goulais and down the Goulais to Lake Superior, where the huge log-rafts were fashioned and towed to the big pulp mills at the "Soo." Crozier's was a spruce camp, the price of paper was soaring and there had been a record cut.

"With the thaw comin' on I guess the old creek'll be kinda choked up with this big cut unless the logs are kept humpin'. Might make it a trifle uneasy for old Peasoup's job if there came a real man-sized jam."

McKendrick's hint at trouble was seized upon with avidity.

"You tell 'em, Mac!" shouted a voice from the corner of the long shanty.

"An' seein' Frenchy knows so all-fired much about runnin' a crew o' lumberjohnnies I s'pose he could teach a class on how to ride a balky log."

One accomplishment McKendrick prided himself on was his ability to ride a log. It is one thing to spin a log in comparatively quiet water and an entirely different matter to ride an obstreperous forty-foot timber that breaks away from a jam and goes crashing down in a surge of boiling foam. McKendrick had done just that, times without number. There wasn't another river-man in the whole Goulais district who could hold a candle to him at that game. Moreover, McKendrick knew it. So did the others in the shanty.

As he had predicted, with the thaw, the drive began in earnest. All along Shepherd's Creek the logs went tumbling down the skidways into the slush ice to rise again in the swelling current. The job was to keep them moving.

Grumbling as usual, but doing the work of half a dozen men, McKendrick had been going up and down the creek all day; freeing logs from snags, breaking little jams that threatened to choke the creek, spinning a log now and then for sheer joy of it.

THE second day of the drive, things did not go so well. Two or three skidways down near the mouth of the creek loosed the logs of their own accord. With no one to see that they were kept straightened out and headed down-stream into the Goulais, the logs began the usual process of piling up. This, combined with the timber coming down from up above, soon had the whole creek choked.

There is a rapid fall just where Shepherd's Creek enters the Goulais. Two long natural flumes have been worn by the current on either side. In the middle of the stream one rock after another rears its rugged head above the surface. It was just at the beginning of this fall of water the jam occurred.

Logs, turned lengthwise, began by gathering in others. A little while of that and both flumes were blocked. Then came a giant timber fully three feet across the butt. In some strange whim of the current this big one was caught head-down. Slowly the logs coming down up-ended it. Other logs were woven in from the sides until there was a wall of spruce extending from bank to bank.

When McKendrick, swinging down the creek, sighted it, the big log was reared fully twenty feet in the air. He saw the season's cut of timber piling up on this huge dam or else slipping aimlessly off into the backwater. Unless the jam was cleared at once the drive would be held up.

Hopping from log to log, McKendrick reached the jam and clambered up until he stood on the big up-turned timber. He surveyed the havoc with a practised eye and

figured just which logs would have to be eased out of the pile before the jam would give way.

It was a ticklish job, one that required plenty of nerve as well as strength and skill. Satisfied that he had a plan of action that would clear the creek, McKendrick sat down on the jam and waited. It was no task to be performed without an audience. Also he wanted to display his skill for the benefit of Jules, the foreman.

In a few minutes another river-man appeared. McKendrick sent him back up the creek to bring Jules and the others.

"Jimmy, tell that frog to come a-runnin' *beaucoup* toot sweet! He'll know what I mean!"

In about a quarter of an hour the rest of the river-gang arrived on the run. The foreman, Jules, was one of the first to reach the jam.

"*Sacrê bleu!* Thees ees no tam to seet aroun'! Why een —— you don' break heem up?" he roared at McKendrick.

McKendrick got up and carefully picked his way toward the foreman.

"I'm kinda stuck, perfessor. Mebbe you could tell us just how this little job ought to be done." He rubbed his hand over his mouth to hold back a smile and winked in the direction of the others.

But if he thought the foreman would be nonplussed he received a jolt.

"*Certainement, m'sieu,*" came the ready answer. Jules picked up a peavy and clambered over the jam.

He went hopping from log to log with the air of one who knows exactly what he is about. McKendrick, his face still covered with a broad grin, watched the foreman's efforts. And as he watched, the grin slowly gave place to a sullen scowl.

Not one of the men had offered to help Jules. Nor had he asked for help. He went at the work of freeing the jam just as McKendrick had planned to free it himself. The foreman would ease a log, pry it loose from its fellows, then with a vicious shove send it scurrying away down the flume.

For half an hour he bent over the task and as each log was detached from the tangle, the butt of the big up-ended timber was lifted higher and higher by the logs still coming down from up above.

Then there was a significant rumble. The whole mass swayed. The watchers on the bank grew tense. Jules sprang for the big timber and went up it like a grind-organ monkey just as the jam gave a mighty lurch. The big log stood straight in the air with the foreman clinging to the very top, while the jam, a roaring avalanche of logs, swept into the flumes on either side. For another moment the giant timber seemed to hang in mid-air.

The men on the banks yelled frantic advice to Jules. Then the big log went crashing over. Still the foreman clung to it, clung to it until the watchers thought he would be crushed in the grinding onrush that was being hurled down the flumes. Just as the big log plunged down in a mountain of spray, Jules made a flying leap, struck a whirling log, held a precarious balance for a moment, then leaped again and found firm footing on the big one as it rose in the boiling flume. It had been a circus performance and Jules turned to wave a flaunting hand at McKendrick on the bank. No one doubted his ability after that.

If the men had no raillery for McKendrick, it was because they feared the consequences that were sure to follow such a procedure. He was sullen throughout the remaining days of the drive.

There were hushed murmurs about the shanty at night.

"Old Mac's goin' to fix that frog's stew. Wait'll he gets a dose of that Algoma firewater down his gullet." The shanty looked forward to the fight as a foregone conclusion. Not a few of the men made bets on the probable outcome of it and Jules was not without backers. When finally it did come off it was memorable.

They still talk about that fight down at the Algoma. But mere mention of it is tabu at Crozier's.

McKENDRICK began it as he had begun many another. Crozier's outfit was lifting the Algoma roof. There had been half a dozen minor affrays. Winter's bad blood was coming into its own.

Then Jules entered, looked around the riotous room, picked out a table in the corner and sat down alone.

McKendrick spotted him and in that instant saw red.

"Let's see if the —— frog has got nerve enough to fight!"

He picked up an empty bottle and, taking careful aim, sent it crashing in a thousand

bits against the wall just above the foreman's head.

Almost at the same instant the bottle crashed Jules was on his feet and swung around toward McKendrick.

"*Mais, ouil M'sieu* lak to have hees leetle joke?"

"Look out, Mac! He's got a knife!" yelled some one in the crowd.

But the warning hardly was necessary. With an underhand sweep of his arm Jules sent the steel flying through the air. McKendrick felt the wind of it as it passed just above his head. There was a resounding twang as the knife bit its way through a crack in a big beam and buried itself to the hilt. The crowd gasped in one long breath.

"Jules can play thees game too? What *m'sieu* tink?"

Again McKendrick had come off second best.

He stood for a moment eying the grinning foreman. Then with a snarl of rage he sprang at Jules. Cleverly the foreman ducked; McKendrick went headlong into the wall.

That sobered him. When he turned around again the snarl was gone. He was crouched over and went after Jules with all the pent-up cunning of a hundred battles.

Hastily tables and chairs were thrown back and a ring of eager faces held in the combatants. The Algoma sensed that this was to be a fight worth witnessing.

Jules met McKendrick's rushes as a skilled boxer meets brute force. He showered the big river-man with rights and lefts, dodged out of close quarters and went dancing away on his toes. Always he avoided clinching.

This was a manner of fighting strange to McKendrick. His was the rough-and-tumble, catch-as-catch-can method when everything goes from finger-nails to spikes.

Blood trickled from an ugly cut over his left eye as he backed Jules around the room. Twice he doubled up the foreman and sent him hurtling into the crowd. But each time Jules was on his feet before McKendrick could profit by the advantage gained.

The Algoma was strangely silent, save for the heavy breathing of these two; the shuffle of heavy river-boots; the dull thud of blows. It was stand up and fight and God help the man who went down. The Marquis of Queensbury is as far from the Algoma as the North Pole is from her sister in the south.

McKendrick grunted with pain as Jules sent a full-arm swing boring into his midriff. Then, as the river-man bent over under the hurt of the blow, Jules sent a stinging smash that caught McKendrick just below the right eye. The thing puffed out like a purple toy balloon.

Half-blinded, McKendrick swung wildly, his blows having little effect. But the pace was telling on Jules. He was less quick in getting back. Once he tripped. He was saved that time only by McKendrick's inability to see him clearly.

To the close-mouthed onlookers there was no sign of the finish. It looked as if these two would go on mauling each other forever. McKendrick appeared to be the principal sufferer. Yet Jules was getting slower and slower. No longer did he spring away on his toes. The river-man's ponderous blows brushed him where before they had gone wide.

It was one of these, a haymaker swing coming from the side, that caught Jules just below the armpit. The foreman was slow in getting back and a second sledge-hammer swing sent him sprawling. As he got up McKendrick bore down on him. Jules tried to dodge. Instead, he walked into a clinch.

McKendrick's great arms closed about him like a vise. In one last effort Jules tried to tear himself loose and only half-succeeded. Most of his shirt came away in one of McKendrick's great paws. A terrific blow from the other sent him spinning through the crowd and back against the wall. He seemed to hang there, half-naked and unable to move.

"You got him, Mac! Finish him." A roar went up from the crowd.

With his heavy fists held wide, McKendrick crouched forward. The crowd closed in behind him. Nearly on top of the limp figure against the wall, McKendrick stopped. He stood there irresolute. With one hand he tried to clear the smeared blood from before his one good eye. Then the other hand unclenched and groped at the empty air.

In that moment McKendrick was back in Flanders. A boche stood over him with upraised rifle. The rifle seemed an age in coming down——

The figure against the wall swayed. With a wild cry McKendrick sprang forward.

"For the love o' ——!" he cried. "Was you at Wipers?"

THE knife buried hilt-deep in the big beam at the Algoma stays there as a warning to all and sundry who would pick trouble with Crozier's outfit—Crozier's gang, they're called—whose foreman goes by the name of Jules and whose right-hand man is McKendrick, McKendrick the grumbler, who came to know the art of team-work. A blue riverman astride a red log should be mentioned in passing. That device remains just where McKendrick saw it on two most important occasions—tatooed on the broad chest of Jules!

ANIMAL WORSHIP

by **Hugh Pendexter**

AMONG the many deities of the Indians, animals, birds and crawling things had an important place. Among the Zuñi, the blue coyote is the hunter god of the West. Subordinate to him are the yellow coyote of the North, the red coyote of the South and the white coyote of the East. Then there is the many-colored coyote of the upper region and the black coyote of the lower region.

The many-colored eagle is god of the upper region and subordinate to him are the white, red, blue, yellow and black eagles of the other regions. The hunter god of the North is the mountain-lion, and the Zuñi color symbolism makes him yellow. Then follow the lesser lion gods in their appropriate colors. In the South the wildcat is the supreme deity of hunters, and is red, of course.

The white wolf is the god in the East, with a younger brother in each of the four cardinal regions, one also in the upper and one in the lower region. Very appropriately the mole is god of the lower region. These are the prey gods of the six regions. The priesthood of the bow worship the mountain-lion and the great white bear as their war-gods.

Point Barrow Eskimos carefully arrange the heads of seal and other marine animals before the door of their huts instead of throwing them into the sea or hurling them aside. This so as not to enrage the soul of the seal.

The Pawnee were given to star-gazing, the phenomenon of the heavens impressing them tremendously; yet their secret societies were based on their belief in supernatural animals. Grinnell says the Pawnee located five of these animal-lodges ("Pawnee Hero Stories").

The Ojibway say animals once had the faculty of human speech but lost it after plotting the destruction of man. The plain tribes said the Milky Way was dust kicked up by the buffalo and horse that once ran across the sky. The Cherokee myths are replete with animals who talk and plot and take on human attributes.

Two of the four things which puzzled the wise man (Prov. xxx: 19) were—

"The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock."

Among all aboriginal people the serpent has been an object of veneration or fear; the eagle a symbol of power. Thus with the American Indian. The spider, too, occupied the attention of the Indian because of his cunning in building his wigwam, his skill in planning ambushes, his art as a weaver.

Among northern tribes (the Cheyenne) the beaver was a reflection of a supernatural beaver, who was gnawing through the post upholding the world. Apologies were made to animals slain in the chase, while in some tribes certain gens or clans could not eat certain meats, the same being tabu. The bear is reverenced by the Navaho and Blackfeet.

The Hurons say the dove is the keeper of souls of the dead. Four white swans control the four cardinal points and send the winds. Tribes numbering birds among their deities include the Natchez and Creeks. The Bears had council-houses among the mountains in the Cherokee country, and magic lakes where they bathed when wounded.

The wolf was generally esteemed by the Indian. Albino animals were held sacred by many tribes.

THE HEART OF THE RANGE

A Five-Part Story by William Patterson White
Conclusion

Author of "Lynch Lawyers," "High Pockets," etc.

CHAPTER XXV

STRATEGY

RACEY DAWSON and Rack Slimson, riding up a hill on the way to Farewell, simultaneously turned their heads and looked at each other. Rack's expression was dolefully sullen. Racey's was hard and uncompromising.

"Who was it put you up to this?" asked Racey.

"What?"

"Comin' out here after me."

"I didn't come out after you, I tell you!"

"Shore, shore," soothed Racey. "I know all about that. Who put you up to it?"

"I dunno what yo're talkin' about."

"The ignorance of some people," said Racey, recalling sundry occasions when other folk had oddly failed to grasp his meaning.

They rode onward silently.

When they reached the southern slope of Indian Ridge, Racey headed to the east. A spirit of unease alighted heavily upon the sagging shoulders of Rack Slimson.

"You ain't goin' straight for Farewell?" he remarked at a venture.

"I ain't—no."

"I thought you was."

"I am—but not straight."

"Huh?" Rack Slimson wrinkled his forehead at this.

"We're goin' in town from the side," explained Racey Dawson.

This too was a puzzler.

"Why?" queried Rack Slimson.

"So's nobody will know we're comin' till we're there." The smile with which Racey garnished his answer was chilling to the soul of Mr. Slimson.

"But I don't see——"

"You wouldn't. I'll tell yuh how it is all in words of one syllable. You an' me are comin' into town from the east where that draw is an' them shacks behind the dance-hall. We'll leave our hosses in the draw and proceed, like they say in the Army, on foot. Then you an' me——"

"But why me?" Rack Slimson desired to know. "What are you always puttin' me in for?"

"'Cause yo're a-goin' with me, Rack, that's why. Yo're a-hoin' with me while I'm huntin' for Coffin' an' Honey Hoke an' Punch-the-breeze Thompson an' Peaches Austin. Them four will likely be together, see; 'n' I wanna use you for a breastwork sort of."

"A breastwork!" cried the now thoroughly upset Mr. Slimson. "A breastwork!"

"Shore a breastwork. I'll shove you ahead of me into the saloon an' if they—there's four of 'em, y' understand—cut down on me you'll be in the way."

"But they'll down me!"

"I'm countin' on that."

"But——"

"Aw, shut up, you —— skunk! You come out to Moccasin Spring on purpose to get me to come to Farewell an' be peaceably shot by Doc Coffin an' his gang. Can't tell me you didn't. I know better."

"I didn't! I didn't! I——"

"Aw right, you didn't. In that case you got nothin' to scare yuh. If Doc an' his outfit ain't got no harsh thoughts against me they won't shoot when we run up on 'em. That'll prove yo're tellin' the truth, an' I'll beg your pardon. I'll do more'n beg yore pardon. I'll eat yore shirt an' my saddle."

Racey's assurance that he would do the right thing if his suspicions proved unfounded did not appear to cheer Rack Slimson.

"I— Lookit here," he began desperately, "can't we fix this here up some way? I dunno as——"

"Shore we can fix it up," interposed Racey heartily. "Go after yore gun any time you feel like it. I been lettin' you keep it on purpose."

Rack Slimson did not accept the invitation. He had not the slightest desire to go after his gun. He was not fast enough, and he knew it.

"It ain't necessary to do that," said he.

"Suit yoreself," Racey told him calmly. "Hop into action any time you feel like it. Of course before we get to that draw outside Farewell where we're gonna leave our hosses I'll have to take yore gun away. Later I might be too busy to do it an' I can't afford to take every chance. Not with four or five men. You can see that yoreself."

Rack Slimson saw. He saw other things, too. Oh, there was no warmth in the sunlight, and the sky was a drabby gray, and he was filled with bitterness unutterable.

"We'll be at the draw some time soon," suggested Racey ten minutes later.

But Rack Slimson's hands continued to remain in plain sight, the while Rack gnawed a thin and bloodless lip.

When at last the draw opened before them Racey calmly reached over and removed the saloon-keeper's six-shooter. After satisfying himself that the weapon was fully loaded he stuffed it down inside the waistband of his trousers. Then he buttoned the two lower buttons of his vest and pulled the garment in question over the protruding butt.

For a space of time they rode the bottom of the draw. Where a few heavy willows grew about a tiny spring Racey pulled in.

"We'll leave the cayuses here," said he. "We're right close in back of Marie's shack."

They dismounted, tied the horses to separate willows and climbed the side of the draw.

"No hurry," cautioned Racey, for Rack Slimson was showing signs of a nervous haste. "Besides I wanna pat you all over for a hideout."

Behind the blind end of Marie's shack Rack Slimson submitted to being searched for concealed weapons. Racey found none, not even a pocket-knife.

"Let's go," said Racey Dawson. "We'll go to yore saloon first. An' you pray hard that nobody sees us from the back window."

They diagonaled down past the stage company's corral to the house next door to the Starlight.

"They haven't seen us yet," Racey observed cheerfully to Rack Slimson, whose wretched knees had been knocking together ever since he had dismounted. "Slide over this way a li'l more, Rack. Now take off yore spurs."

Racey stooped and removed his own. And not for an instant did he lose the magic of the drop. As a matter of fact he had kept Rack covered from the moment Rack set his boot-soles to earth. Rack's spurs jingled on the ground. Racey let them lie. His own spurs he jammed each into a hip pocket.

"I'll have to be careful how I sit down now," he remarked jocularly to Rack Slimson. "You ready? Aw right. You know the way to the Starlight's back door."

The back door of the saloon was wide open. They entered on tiptoe, the proprietor in the lead.

"Remember," whispered Racey, when he discovered the back room to be empty, "remember, I'm right behind yuh. Keep on yore toes."

HE HELD Rack Slimson by the belt and pushed him toward the door giving into the front room. This door was shut. They paused behind it.

"He oughta be along pretty soon," complained a fretful voice that Racey recognized as belonging to Honey Hoke.

"We don't mind waitin'," chimed in Punch-the-breeze Thompson.

"It's the best thing we do." This was big Doc Coffin speaking.

The two behind the door heard a bottle-neck clink against the rim of a glass.

"You better not take too much," said Thompson.

"Aw, who's takin' too much?" flung back Honey Hoke.

"Well, you don't see the rest of us touchin' a single drop, do yuh? Speakin' personal, I wouldn't drown *my* insides with liquor when I'm due to go against a proposition like Racey Dawson."

Here was praise indeed. Racey thumbed Rack Slimson in the ribs. Rack turned his head and saw that Racey was grinning. Rack grew even more spineless.

"You see," pointed out Racey in a sardonic whisper. "You're up against the pure quill, feller."

Which remark at any other time would have been in the worst possible taste, but license is extended to men in peril of their lives.

"They're at the table in the corner beside the bar, this end, ain't they?" resumed Racey. "Ain't it lucky the door opens that way?"

Then he was silent for a time while he strove to catch the accents of Peaches Austin. He wanted to know if they were all four at the one table. But Peaches was either not talking or elsewhere. A moment later the question was answered for him by Honey Hoke.

"If he slips by Peaches without Peaches seein' him—" began Honey.

"Aw, how in —— can he?" sneered Doc Coffin. "They's Peaches camped down in front of the blacksmith shop right where he can see the trail alla way down Injun Ridge. A dog wouldn't get past Peaches without bein' seen, let alone a two-legged man on a four-legged hoss."

"S'pose he goes round the ridge," offered the doubter, unconsciously hitting the nail on the head.

"He won't," declared the confident Doc. "He'll come boilin' right in like he owned the place. Don't you lose no sleep over that."

"Maybe Rack couldn't find him," pursued Honey Hoke, and an answering quiver ran through the frame of Rack Slimson.

"Rack will find him all right," said Punch-the-breeze Thompson.

"He might be suspicious of Rack alla same," Honey Hoke wavered on.

"Not the way Rack will tell him. Didn't we fix it all up just what Rack was to say an' all, before he went? Shore we did. He won't make no mistake, Rack won't. You'll see."

"An' anyway," broke in Doc Coffin, "they's four of us to take care of any mistakes."

At which the three laughed loudly.

"I hope," Racey whispered in Rack's rather grimy left ear, "I hope you heard all them fellers said. Proves I was right, don't it? Nev' mine noddin' yore head more'n once. Hold still. Yo're doin' fine. Yep, I'm shore glad we stood here a-listenin' like we done. Makes me feel a heap easier in my mind about yuh. Otherwise I might always 'a' had a doubt I done right. I'd 'a' been shore, y' understand, but I wouldn't 'a' been dead shore."

At which the unfortunate Rack came within an eye-wink of fainting. As it was his stomach seemed to roll over and over. He began to feel a little sick.

"The bartender now," went on Racey after a moment, "is he likely to mix into this?"

"I dunno," breathed Rack.

"Who is he? I ain't been in yore place for some time."

Rack told him the name of the bartender, and Racey nodded quite as if Rack were facing him and could see everything he did.

"Then that's all right," whispered Racey. "I know that feller. He's a friend of Mike Flynn's. He won't do nothin' hostyle. Let's go right in. Open the door. G'on, —— yore soul, or I'll blow you apart!"

Rack Slimson opened the door and immediately endeavored to spring to one side. But he reckoned not on the strength of Racey Dawson. The latter swung Rack back into place between himself (Racey Dawson) and the table at which Doc Coffin and his two friends were sitting.

It was a painfully surprized trio that confronted Racey and his unwilling barricade. The bartender was likewise surprized. He immediately fell flat on the floor. Not so the three men at the table. They sat quite still and stared at the man and the gun behind the body of their friend Rack Slimson. They said nothing. Perhaps there was nothing to say.

"I hear yuh was expectin' me, Doc," drawled Racey, his eyes bright with cold anger. "Whatsa matter?" he added. "Ain't

three of yuh enough to take care of any mistakes?"

At which Doc Coffin's right hand flashed downward. Racey drove an accurate bullet through Doc Coffin's mouth. The bullet, ranging upward and making its exit through the parietal bone, let in the light on Doc's hitherto darkened intellect in more ways than one.

Doc Coffin's forefinger, tightening convulsively on the trigger of its wearer's six-shooter, sent an unaimed shot downward. But previous to embedding itself in a floor board, the bullet passed through Honey Hoke's foot. This disturbed Honey's aim to such an extent that instead of shooting Racey through the head he shot Rack through the hat.

Racey, attending strictly to his knitting, bored Honey Hoke with a bullet that removed the top of the second knuckle of Honey's right hand, shaved a piece from the wrist-bone and then proceeded thoroughly to lacerate most of the muscles of the forearm before finally lodging in the elbow. Thus was Honey Hoke rendered innocuous for the time being. He was not a two-handed gun-fighter.

As yet Punch-the-breeze Thompson had remained strictly neutral. His hands were on the table-top, and had been from the beginning.

"It's yore move, Thompson," Racey said with significance.

"Then I'll be goin'," said Thompson calmly. "See you later—maybe."

So saying he rose to his feet, turned his back on Racey and walked out of the place. Racey had no illusions as to Thompson, but he obviously could not shoot him in the back. He let him go. Watching from a window, he saw Thompson go to the hitching-rail in front of the saloon, untie his horse, mount and ride away northward.

And the blacksmith shop in front of which Peaches Austin was supposed to be on guard lay at the south end of the street. Where then was Thompson going?

"Where's he goin'?" he demanded of the now wriggling Rack Slimson.

"Huh? Who? Punch? I dunno."

"Where's Jack Harpe?"

"I dunno."

"Yo're a liar. Where is he?"

"I dunno! I dunno! I tell yuh! Yo're gug-gug-chokin' me!"

"Yo're lyin' again. If I was chokin' yuh couldn't talk. Yo're talkin', ain't yuh? Where's Jack Harpe?"

"I dud-dud-dunno," insisted Rack Slimson, his teeth chattering as Racey shook him.

"Is he in town?"

"I dud-dunno."

"Is Thompson goin' after him, do yuh think?"

"I dud-dunny-dunno!"

"I guess maybe you don't after all," Racey said disgustedly, flinging the unfortunate saloon-keeper from him with such force that the fellow skittered quite across the floor and sat down in the wash-pan into which the bartender was accustomed to throw the broken glassware.

"*Ow-wow!*" It was a hearty, full-lunged howl that Rack Slimson uttered as he bounded erect and clutched at his trousers.

Racey's eye brightened at the sight.

"Y' oughta knowed better than to sit down in all that glass. I could 'a' told yuh you'd get prickles in yuh. Why don't yuh stand still an' let yore barkeep pick 'em out for yuh? You can get most of the big pieces out with yore fingers," he added to the bartender, who was gingerly emerging on all fours round the end of the bar. "An' the little ones you can dig out with a sharp knife. Yep, Rack, old-timer, I'll bet you won't carry no more messages on hossback for a while."

THERE was a sudden crashing thud at the back of the room. Honey Hoke had fallen out of his chair. Now he lay on the floor, his legs drawn up and the rack of his frowzy head resting against a rung of the chair in which still sat the dead body of Doc Coffin.

Racey went to Honey and spread him out in a more comfortable position.

Calloway and Judge Dolan entered the saloon together.

"We thought we heard shootin'—" began Calloway, staring in astonishment at the grotesque posture Rack Slimson had assumed, the better to endure the ministrations of the bartender.

"We heard shootin' all right," said Judge Dolan, his glance sweeping past Slimson and the bartender to the rear of the room.

"What's happened, Racey?" queried Dolan, striding forward. "Both of 'em cashed?"

Racey shook his head. "Doc Coffin

passed out," said he in a hard, dry voice. "But Honey Hoke's heart is beatin' regular enough. Guess he's only fainted from loss of blood."

The judge nodded.

"They do that sometimes." Here he looked at Doc Coffin's body lying humped over the table, an arm hanging free, the head resting on the table-top.

"Was they rowin' together?" was the judge's next question.

Racey gave him a circumstantial account of the shooting and the incidents that had led up to it. The judge heard him through without a word.

"They asked for it," said he, when Racey made an end. " 'Sfunny Punch didn't pick up a hand. Tell yuh what you do, Racey. You come to my office in about a hour. Nothin' to do with this business. I got no fault to find with what you done. Even break an' all that. Somethin' else I wanna see you about. Huh' What's that, Piggy?"

The place was beginning to fill up with inquisitive folk from the vicinity, and Racey decided to withdraw. He went out the back way. Closing the door, he set his shoulder against it and remained motionless a moment. His eyes were on the distant hills, but they neither saw the hills nor anything that lay between.

"I had to do it," he muttered bitterly. "I didn't want to down him. But I had to. They was gonna down me if they could. An' he—they—they asked for it."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE QUARREL

"'LO, PEACHES, ain't you afraid of gettin' sunburnt?"

Peaches Austin, gambler though he was, flickered his eyelashes. He was startled. He had not had the slightest warning of Racey Dawson's approach.

"Didn't hear me, did yuh?" Racey continued conversationally. "I didn't want yuh to. That's why I kept my spurs off an' sifted round from the back of the blacksmith shop. An' you was expectin' me to come scamperin' down the trail over Injun Ridge, wasn't you? Joke's on you, Peaches, sort of."

Still Peaches said nothing. He sat and gazed at Racey Dawson.

"Don't be a hawg," resumed Racey. "Move over an' lemme sit down too. That's the boy. Now we're both comfortable. Peaches, yuh mean to sit there an' tell me yuh didn't hear no shootin' up at the Starlight a while back?"

Peaches Austin wetted his lips with the tip of a careful tongue.

"I heard shootin'," he admitted, stiff-lipped.

"An' what did you think it was?"

"I didn't know."

"Didn't you see Thompson ride away?"

"Shore."

"An' didn't you think nothin' about that either?"

"Oh, I thought, but——"

"But you had yore orders to sit here an' wait for li'l Willie. An' you always obey orders. That it, Peaches?"

"What are you drivin' at?"

"Yo're always askin' me that, Peaches. Try somethin' new for a change. Look."

Racey extended a long arm past Peaches' nose and pointed up the street toward the Starlight Saloon. A man was backing out through the doorway. Another followed, walking forward. Between them they were carrying a third man. The hat of the third man was over his face. His arms, which hung down, jerked like the arms of a doll. Even at that distance Peaches could see that there was no life in the third man.

"That's Doc Coffin," Racey murmured without rancor. "I wonder where they're takin' him. He used to bach with Nebraska Jones, didn't he? I guess that's where they're takin' him to. Yep, they've done gone round the corner of the stage company's corral."

"Where's Honey?" queried Peaches in a still, small voice.

"In the Starlight. He ain't hurt bad. Foot an' arm. Lucky, huh?"

Peaches Austin considered these things a moment.

"Doc Coffin was reckoned a fast man," he said in the tone of one who, after adding up a column of figures, has found the correct total, "an' Honey Hoke wasn't none slow himself. An' you got 'em both."

"I didn't get 'em both," corrected Racey. "Honey is only wounded."

"Same thing. You could 'a' got him if you wanted to. Yo're lucky, that's what it is. Yo're lucky. An' you been lucky from the beginnin'. I ain't superstitious, but—" Here he lied. Like most gamblers

Peaches was sadly superstitious. He looked at Racey, and there was something much akin to wonder on his countenance. He shook his head and was silent a long thirty seconds. "Yo're too lucky for me—I quit," he finished.

"How much?"

"Complete, I tell you. I don't buck no such luck as yores no longer. I'll never have none myself if I do. I'm goin'."

Peaches Austin got to his feet and walked across the street to the hotel. Twenty minutes later Racey, sitting on the bench in front of the blacksmith shop, saw him issue from the hotel, carrying a saddle, packed saddle-bags and *cantenas*, blanket and bridle, and go to the hotel corral.

Within three minutes Peaches Austin rode out from behind the hotel. As he passed the blacksmith shop he said, "So long" to Racey.

"See yuh later," nodded that serene young man.

"I hope not," tossed back Peaches, and rode on down the trail that leads over Indian Ridge to Marysville and the south.

Racey watched him out of town. Then he went to Mike Flynn's to see and, if it were possible, cheer up his wounded friend, Swing Tunstall. But he was not allowed to see him. Swing, it appeared, had been given an opiate by Joy Blythe, who was acting as nurse, and she refused to awaken her patient for anybody. So there.

Racey went to the Happy Heart to while the remainder of the hour set by Judge Dolan. The bartender greeted him respectfully and curiously. So did several other men he knew. For that respect and that curiosity he understood the reason. It lay on a bunk in Nebraska Jones' shack.

No one asked him to drink. People are usually a little backward in social intercourse with a citizen who has just killed his fellow man. Of course in time the coolness would wear off. In this case the time would be short, Doc Coffin having been one of those that more or less encumber the face of the earth. But for the moment Racey felt his ostracism and resented it.

He set down his drink half-drunk and walked out of the Happy Heart.

"SEE anythin' of Luke Tweezy lately?" asked Judge Dolan when Racey was sitting across the table from him in the judge's office.

"Saw him today."

"Where?"

"Moccasin Spring."

Judge Dolan nodded and rasped a hand across his stubby chin. "Luke is in town now," said he.

"I ain't lost any Luke Tweezys," observed Racey, looking up at the ceiling.

"I wonder how long Luke is figurin' on stayin' in town," went on Judge Dolan, sticking like a stamp to his original subject.

"Nothin' to me."

"It might be. It might be. You never can tell about them things, Racey."

Racey Dawson's eyes came down from the ceiling. He studied the judge's face attentively. What was Dolan driving at? Racey had known the judge for several years and he was aware that the more indirect the judge became in his discourse the more important the subject-matter was likely to be.

"No," said Racey, willing to bite, "you never can tell."

"We was talkin' one day about a feller makin' mistakes." The tangent was merely apparent.

"Yep," acquiesced Racey. "We was sayin' Luke Tweezy made a good many."

"Somethin' like that, yeah. You run across any of Luke's mistakes yet, Racey?"

Racey shook his head.

"No."

"Did yuh go to Marysville?"

"Why for Marysville?"

"Luke Tweezy lives in Marysville."

"An' yuh think there's somebody in Marysville would talk?"

Judge Dolan looked pained.

"I didn't say so," he was quick to remark.

"I know you didn't, but——"

"I don't guess they's many folks in Marysville know much about Luke—no, not many. Luke is careful an' clever, —— clever. But they's other things besides folks which might have useful information."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. A gent, a lawyer anyway, keeps a lot of papers in his safe as a rule. Sometimes them papers make a heap interestin' readin'." The judge paused and regarded Racey coolly.

"They might prove interestin' readin', that's a fact," drawled Racey.

"Now I ain't suggestin' nothin'," pursued Judge Dolan. "I couldn't on account of my oath. But it ain't so —— awful far from Farewell to Marysville."

"It ain't too far."

"I got a notion Luke Tweezy will find important business to keep him here in Farewell the next four or five days."

"I wonder what kind of a safe Luke has got," murmured Racey.

"—— if I know," said the judge. "You know anythin' about dynamite—how it's handled, huh?"

"Shore, handle it carefully."

"I mean how to prepare a fuse an' detonator an' stick it in the cartridge. You know how?"

"I helped a miner man once for a week. Shore I know. Yuh cut the fuse square-ended. Stick the square end into the cap until it touches the fulminate, an' crimp down the copper shell all round to hold the fuse with a dull knife, then yuh make a hole in the end of the cartridge an'——"

"I guess you know yore business, Racey," interrupted Judge Dolan. "You'll find a package on that shelf by the door. Handle it carefully. I'm glad you dropped in, Racey. Nice weather we're havin'."

"But there are some people about due for a cold wave," capped Racey, stopping on his way out to take the package from the shelf and wink at Judge Dolan.

The wink was not returned. But the judge's tongue may have been in his cheek. He was a most human person, was Judge Dolan of Farewell.

Racey, handling the package with care, went back to the draw where he had left the two horses. In the draw he opened the package. It contained six sticks of dynamite and the necessary detonators and fuse.

"Good ol' judge," said Racey admiringly and rewrapped the dynamite, the detonators and the fuse with even more care than he had employed in unwrapping them.

He rolled the package into his slicker and tied down the slicker behind the cantle of his saddle. Untying the two horses, he mounted his own and, leading the other, rode to the hotel corral.

Bill Lainey was only too glad to lend him a fresh horse and a bran sack.

It was dusk when he dismounted at the Dale corral. There was a lamp in the kitchen. Its rays shone out through the open door and made a rectangle of golden light in the dust. Molly was standing at the kitchen table. She was stirring something in a bowl. She did not turn her head when he came to the door.

"Evenin', Molly," said Racey.

"Good evening." Just that.

"Uh—Yore ma around?"

"She's gone to bed." Still the dark head was not raised.

He misunderstood both her brevity and the following silence. He left his hat on the wash-bench outside the door and stepped into the kitchen.

"Don't take it so to heart, Molly," he said awkwardly. "It's hard, but—Shucks, I got somethin' to tell yuh."

In very truth he had something to tell her but he had not meant to tell her so soon.

"Lemme take care of yuh, Molly—dear. Yuh know I love yuh, an'——"

"Stop!" Molly turned to him an expressionless face. She looked at him steadily. "You say you love me?" she went on.

"Shore I say it." He was plainly puzzled at her reception of what he had said. Girls did not act this way in books.

"How about that—that other girl? Marie, I think her name is."

"What about her?"

"A good deal."

"What has she got to do with my lovin' you, I'd like to know?"

"She loves you."

"Marie? Loves me? Yo're crazy!"

"Oh, am I? If she hadn't loved you do you think for one minute she'd come riding all the way out here to give you a warning?"

"Marie an' I are friends," he admitted. "But there ain't no law against that."

"None at all." Molly's eyes dropped. Her head turned back. She resumed her operations with a spoon in the bowl.

"Lookit here, Molly——"

"Don't you call me Molly." Her tone was as lacking in expression as was her face.

"But you gotta listen to me," he insisted desperately. "I tell you there ain't nothin' between Marie an' me."

"Then there ought to be." Thus Molly. Woman-like she yearned to use her claws.

"But——"

"Oh, I've heard all about your carryings-on with that —— creature. How you talk to her, and people have seen you walking with her on the street. I saw you myself. Yesterday when Mis' Jackson drove out here to buy three hens she told me when that girl was arrested and fined for trying to murder a man you stepped up and paid her fine. Did you?"

"I did. But——"

"There aren't any buts! You've got a nerve, you have, making love to me after running round with that wretched hussy!"

"She ain't a hussy," denied the exasperated Racey, who was always loyal to absent friends. "She's all right. Just because she happens to be a lookout in the Happy Heart ain't nothin' against her. It don't give you nor anybody else license to insult her."

This was too much. Not content with confessing his friendship for the girl, he was standing up for her. Molly whirled upon him.

"Go!" Tone and business could not have been excelled by Peg Woffington herself.

Racey went.

"What's the matter?" queried a sleepy voice from the doorway giving into an inner room, as Racey's spurred heels jingled past the wash-bench. "What's goin' on? Who was here? What you yelling about anyway?"

"Racey was here, ma," said Molly.

"Seems to me you made a uncommon racket about it," grumbled her mother, plodding into the kitchen in her slippers. Her gray hair was all in strings about her face. Her eyes and cheeks were puffed with sleep. She had pulled a quilt round her shoulders over her night-dress. Now she gave the quilt a hitch up and sat down in a chair.

"Make me a cup o' coffee, will yuh, Molly?" said Mrs. Dale. "My head aches sort of. I hope you didn't have a fight with Racey Dawson."

"Well, we didn't quite agree," admitted Molly, snapping shut the cover of the coffee-mill and clamping the mill between her knees. "I don't like him any more, ma."

"And after he's helped us so! I was counting on him to fix up this mortgage business! Whatever's got into you, Molly?"

"He's been running round with that awful lookout girl at the Happy Heart."

"Is that all?" yawned Mrs. Dale, greatly relieved. "I thought it might have been something serious."

"It is serious! What right has he to——"

"Why hasn't he? You ain't engaged to him."

"I know I'm not, but he—I—you—" Molly began to flounder.

"Has he ever told you he loved you?" Mrs. Dale inquired shrewdly.

"Not in so many words, but——"

"But you know he does. Well, so do I know he does. I knew it soon as you did; before, most likely. Don't you fret, Molly, he'll come back."

"No, he won't. Not now. I don't want him to."

"Then who's to fix up this mortgage business with Tweezy, I'd like to know? I declare, I wish I'd taken that lawyer's offer. We'd have something then anyhow. Now we'll have to get out without a nickel. Oh, Molly, what did you quarrel with Racey for?"

CHAPTER XXVII

BURGLARY

MERELY because he believed that the well-known "all" was over between Molly Dale and himself, Racey did not relinquish his plans for the future.

He rode to Marysville as he had intended. That is, he rode to the vicinity of Marysville. For, arriving at a hill five miles outside of town in the broad of an afternoon, he stopped in a hollow under the cedars and waited for night. Daylight was decidedly not appropriate for the act he contemplated.

"I wonder," he muttered, as he lay with his back braced against a tree and stared at the bulge in his slicker, "I wonder if I use all them sticks at once. I never heard that miner man say how much of an argument a safe needed. I s'pose I ought to use 'em all."

Luke Tweezy was a bachelor. His office was in his four-room house, and he did not employ a housekeeper. Further than this, Racey Dawson knew nothing of the lawyer's establishment. But he believed that his knowledge was sufficient to serve his purpose.

About midnight Racey Dawson removed himself, his horse and his dynamite from the hollow on the hill to where a lone pine grew almost directly in the rear of and two hundred yards from the residence of Luke Tweezy. He had selected the tall and lonely pine as the best place to leave his horse because, should he be forced to run for it, he would have against the stars a plain landmark to run for. He thoroughly expected to be forced to run. Six sticks of dynamite letting go together would arouse a cemetery. And Marysville was a lively village.

Racey, taking no chances on the Lainey

horse stampeding at the explosion, rope-tied the animal to the trunk of the pine. After which he removed his spurs, carefully unwrapped the dynamite and stuck three sticks in each hip pocket. The caps, in their little box, he put in the breast pocket of his shirt. With the coil of fuse in one hand and the bran sack given him by Lainey in the other he walked toward the house of Tweezy.

The house was of course dark. Nor were there any lights in the irregular line of houses stretching up and down this side of the street. The neighbors had apparently all gone to bed. Through an opening between two houses Racey saw a brightly lighted window in a house an eighth of a mile away.

That would be Judge Allison's house. The judge then was awake. Two hundred and twenty yards was not a long distance even for a portly man like Judge Allison to cover at speed. And Racey had known Judge Allison to move briskly on occasion.

Racey, moving steadily ahead, slid past some one's barn and opened up a view of the dance-hall. It had previously been concealed from his sight by the high posts and rails of three corrals. The dance-hall was going full blast. At least all the windows were bright with light. He was too far away to hear the fiddles.

The dance-hall! He might have known it would still be operating at midnight. But it was almost twice as far from the Tweezy house to the dance-hall as it was from the judge's house to Tweezy's. That was something. Indeed it was a great deal. But he would have to work fast. All the neighbors would come bouncing out at the crash of the explosion.

Racey paused to flatten an ear at the kitchen door. He heard nothing, and tiptoed along the wall to the window of the room next the kitchen. The ground-plan of the house was almost an exact square. There was a room in each angle. The office, which Racey knew contained the safe, was diagonally across from the kitchen.

Racey, halting at the window of the room next the kitchen, was somewhat surprized to find it open. He stuck in his head and saw a faint glow beyond the half-closed door of the office. The glow seemed to be brighter near the floor. Racey listened intently. He heard a faint grumble and now and then a squeak.

He crouched beneath the window and removed his boots. Then he crawled over the sill and hunkered down on the uncarpeted floor. The floor boards did not creak. Still hunkering, his arms extended in front of him, he made his way silently across the room, skirting safely in the process two chairs and a table, and stood upright behind the crack of the door.

Looking through the crack he perceived that the glow he had seen from the window emanated from a tin can pierced with several holes. The dim, uncertain light revealed the figure of a tall and hatless man kneeling beside the safe.

The man's back was toward the lighted tin can. One of the tall man's hands was slowly turning the knob of the combination. The side of the man's head was pressed against the front of the safe near the combination. Racey could not see the man's face.

Across the window of the room two blankets had been hung. The door into the other front room was open. Then suddenly the doorway was no longer a black void. A man stood there—a fat man with a stomach that hung out over the waistband of his trousers. There was something very familiar about the figure of that fat man.

The fat man leaned against the doorjamb and pushed back his wide, black hat. The light in the tin can illumined his countenance dimly. But Racey's eyes were becoming accustomed to the half-darkness. He was able to recognize Jacob Pooley—fat Jakey Pooley, the registrar of the district, whose home was in Piegan City.

"You ain't as fast as you used to be," observed fat Jakey in a soft whisper.

"Shut up!" hissed the kneeling man, and turned his face for an instant toward fat Jakey, so that the light shone upon his features.

It was Jack Harpe.

"What's biting your ear?" fat Jakey asked good-naturedly.

"I've told you more'n once to let what's past alone," grumbled Jack Harpe.

"——, there's nobody around."

"Nev' mine whether they is or not. You get out of the habit."

"Rats," sneered fat Jakey.

"What was that?" Jack Harpe's figure tautened in a flash.

"Rats," repeated fat Jakey.

"I thought I heard somethin'," persisted Jack Harpe.

"You heard rats," chuckled fat Jakey. "You're nervous, that's what's the matter, or else you ain't able to open the safe."

"I can open the safe all right," growled Jack Harpe, bending again to his work.

"I wonder what he did hear," Racey said to himself. "I thought I heard somethin' too."

Whatever it was he did not hear it again.

"There she is," said Jack Harpe suddenly, and threw open the safe door.

It was at this precise juncture that a voice from the darkness behind fat Jakey said, "Hands up!"

Oh, it was then that events began to move with celerity. Fat Jakey Pooley ducked and leaped. Jack Harpe kicked the tin can, the candle fell out and rolled guttering in a quarter-circle only to be extinguished by one of fat Jakey's flying feet.

THERE was a slithering sound as the blankets across the window were ripped down, followed by as craping and a heaving and a grunting as two large people endeavored to make their egress through the same window at the same time.

"So that window was open alla time," thought Racey as he prudently waited for the owner of the voice in the other room to discover himself. But this the voice's owner did not immediately do. Racey could not understand why he did not shoot while the two men were struggling through the window. Lord knows he had plenty of time and opportunity.

Even after Jack Harpe and fat Jakey had reached the outer air and presumably, gone elsewhere swiftly, there was no sound from the other room. Racey, his gun ready, waited.

At first his impulse had been to flee incontinently from the premises as Jack and Jake had done. But a saving second thought held him where he was. It was more than possible that the mysterious fourth man had designs on the contents of the safe. In which event——

Racey stood pat.

He heard no sound for at least a minute after Jack and Jake had left, then he heard a soft swish, and a few stars which had been visible through the upper half of the window were blotted out. The blankets were being readjusted.

A match was struck and a figure stooped for the candle that had been dashed out by the foot of fat Jakey Pooley. A table shielded the figure from Racey. Then the figure straightened and set the flaring match to the candle end. And the face that bent above the light was the face of one he knew.

"Molly!" he whispered, and slipped from his ambush.

At which Molly dropped candle and match and squeaked in affright. But her scare did not prevent her from drawing a six-shooter. He heard the click of the hammer and whispered desperately:

"Molly! Molly! It's me! Racey!"

He struck a match and retrieved the candle and lighted it quickly. By its light he saw her staring at him uncertainly. Her eyes were bright with conflicting emotions. Her six-shooter still pointed in his general direction.

"Put yore gun away," he advised her. "We got no time to lose. Hold the candle for me! Put it in the can first!"

Automatically she obeyed the several commands.

He knelt before the open safe and, beginning at the top shelf, he stuffed into his bran sack every piece of paper the safe contained. Besides papers there were two six-shooters and a bowie. These he did not take.

When the safe was clean of papers Racey tied the mouth of the bran sack, took Molly by the hand and blew out the candle.

"C'mon," he said shortly. "We'll be leavin' here now."

Towing her behind him he led her to the window of the rear room. Holding his hat by the brim, he shoved it out through the window. No blow or shot followed the action. He clapped the hat on his head and looked out cautiously. He satisfied himself that the coast was clear and flung a leg over the sill.

When he had helped out Molly he gave her the sack to hold and pulled on his boots.

"Where's yore hoss?" he whispered.

"I tied him at the corner of the nearest corral," was the answer.

"C'mon," said he and took her again by the hand.

They had not gone ten steps when she stumbled and fell against him.

"Whatsa matter?"

"Nothing," was the almost breathless reply. "I'm—I'm all right. I just stepped on a sharp stone."

"Yore shoes!" he murmured contritely. "I never thought. Why didn't yuh say somethin'? Here."

So saying he scooped her up in his arms, settled her in place with due regard for the box of caps in his breast pocket, and plowed on through the night. Her arms went round his neck and her head went down on his shoulder. She sighed a gentle little sigh. For a sigh like that Racey would cheerfully have shot a sheriff's posse to pieces.

"I left my shoes in my saddle-pocket," she said apologetically. "I—I thought it would be safer."

There was a sudden yell somewhere on Main Street. It sounded as if it came from uncomfortably close to the Tweezy house. Then a six-shooter cracked once, twice and again. At the third shot Racey was running as tight as he could set foot to the ground.

Encumbered as he was with a double armful of girl and a fairly heavy sackful of papers, he yet made good time to the corner of the nearest corral. The increasing riot in Main Street undoubtedly was a most potent spur.

"Which way's the hoss?" he gasped when the dark rails of the corral fretted the sky before them.

"You're heading straight," she replied calmly. "Thirty feet more and you'll run into him. Better set me down."

He did—literally. He turned his foot on a tin can and went down *ker-flop*. Forced to guard his box of caps with one hand, he could not save Molly Dale from a smashing fall.

"*Ah-ugh!*" gurgled Molly, squirming on the ground, for she had struck the pit of her stomach on a round rock the size of a football and the wind was knocked out of her.

Racey scrambled to his feet, and knowing that if Molly was able to wriggle and groan she could not be badly hurt, picked up the sack and scouted up Molly's horse. He found it without difficulty, and tied the sack with the saddle-strings in front of the horn. He loosed the horse and led it to where Molly still lay on the ground. The poor girl was sitting up, clutching her stomach and rocking back and forth and fighting for her breath with gasps and crows.

But there was not time to wait till she should regain the full use of her lungs—not in the face of the shouts and yells in Main Street. Lord, the whole town was up! Lights were flashing in every house. Racey stooped, seized Molly under the armpits and heaved her bodily into the saddle.

"Hang on to the horn," he ordered, "an' for gosh sake don't make so much noise."

Molly obeyed as best she could. He mounted behind her, and of course had to fight the horse, which harbored no intention of carrying double if it could help itself. Racey, however, was a rider, and he jerked Molly's quirt from where it hung on the horn. Not more than sixty seconds were wasted before they were traveling toward the lone pine as tight as the horse could jump.

At the pine Racey slipped to the ground and ran to untie his horse.

"Can you hang on all right at a trot if I lead yore hoss?" he queried sharply, his fingers busy with the knot of the rope.

"I cuc-can and gug-guide him too," she stuttered, picking up her reins and making a successful effort to sit up straight. "Lul-look! At Tut-Tweezy's huh-house!"

He looked. There were certainly three lanterns bobbing about in the open behind the house of Luke Tweezy. He knew too well what those lights meant. The Marysville citizens were hunting for a hot trail.

He swung up with a rush.

"Stick right alongside me," he told her. "We'll trot at first till we get behind the li'l hill out yonder. After that we can hit the landscape lively."

She spoke no word till they had rounded the little hill and were galloping south. Then she said in her normal voice—

"This isn't the way home."

"I know it ain't. We gotta lose whoever follows us before we skip for home."

"Of course," she told him humbly. "I might have known. You always think of the right thing, Racey."

All of which was balm to a hitherto tortured soul.

"That's all right," he said modestly.

"And how strong you are—carrying me and that heavy sack all that distance." Both admiration and appreciation were in her tone. Any man would have been made happy thereby. Racey was overjoyed.

And the daughter of Eve at his side knew that he was overjoyed and was made glad herself. She did not realize that Eve invariably employed the same method with our grandfather Adam.

He reached across and patted her arm.

"Yo're all right," he told her. "When we get out of this yo're goin' to marry me."

Her free hand turned under his and clasped his fingers. So they rode for a space hand-in-hand. And Racey's heart was full. And so was hers. If they forgot for the moment what dread possibilities the future held, who can blame them?

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE LETTERS

"BUT what was yore idea in coming to Marysville a-tall?"

"To get that release father signed. I thought it might be in his safe."

"Anybody give you the idea it might be?"

She shook her head.

"Nobody."

"You got more brains than I have, for a fact. But how was you figurin' on gettin' into the safe?"

"Oh, I brought a bunch of keys along. What are you laughing at? I thought one might fit."

"Keys for a safe! Say, don't you know you don't open safes with keys? They got combinations, safes have."

"I didn't know it. How could I? I never saw a safe in my life till I saw this one tonight. I thought they had locks like any other ordinary— Oh, I think you're horrid to laugh."

"I'm not laughin'. Lean over, an' I'll show yuh— There, I ain't laughin', am I?"

"Not now, but you were— Not another one, Racey. Sit back where you belong, will you? You can hold my hand if you like. But I wasn't such a fool as you seem to think, Racey. I brought an extra key along in case the others didn't fit."

"Extra key?"

"Surely—seven sticks of dynamite, caps and fuse. Chuck had a lot he was using for blowing stumps, so I borrowed some from his barn. He didn't know I took it."

"I should hope not," Racey declared fervently. "You leave dynamite alone, djuh hear. Where is it now?"

"Oh, I left it on the floor in Tweezy's house when I found I didn't need it any longer."

"Thank God!" breathed Racey, whose hair had begun to rise at the bare idea of the explosives still being somewhere on her person. "What was yore motive of holdin' up Jack Harpe an' Jakey Pooley?"

"Was that who they were? I couldn't see their faces. Well, when I had broken the lock and opened the back window and crawled through, I went into the front room where I thought likely the safe would be, and I was just going to strike a match when I heard a snap at the front window as the lock broke. Maybe I wasn't good and scared.

"I paddled into the other front room by mistake. Got turned around in the dark, I suppose. And before I could open a window and get out I heard two men in the front room I'd just left. I didn't dare open a window then. They'd have heard me surely, so I just knelt down behind a bed. And after a while, when one man was busy at the safe, the fat man came into my room and sat down in a chair inside the door. Lordy, I hardly dared breathe. It's a wonder my hair didn't turn white. Once I thought they must have heard me—the time the fat man said 'rats.' Honestly, I was so scared I was almost sick."

"But you had nerve enough to try and hold them up."

"I had to. When I found out they were going to rob the safe, I had to do something. Why, they might have taken the very paper I wanted, and somehow later Tweezy might have gotten it back. I couldn't allow that. I knew that I must get at what was inside the safe before they did. I just had to, so when the fat man got up from his chair and stood in the doorway with his back to me, I just gritted my teeth and stood up and said, 'Hands up.'"

"My —— girl, you might 'a' been shot!"

"I had a six-shooter," she said tranquilly. "But I wouldn't have shot first," she added reflectively.

Willy-nilly then he took her in his arms and held her tightly.

"But I don't see why," he said after an interval, "yuh had to go off on a wild-goose chase thisaway. Didn't I tell yuh I was gonna fix it up for yuh? Couldn't you 'a' trusted me enough to lemme do it my own way?"

"We had that—that quarrel in the

kitchen, and I thought you didn't like me any more, and—and wouldn't have any more to do with me and that it was my job to do something to help out the family—Please! Racey! I can't breathe!"

Another interval, and she resolutely pushed his arms down and held him away from her with both hands on his shoulders.

"Tell me," said she, her blue eyes plumbing the very depths of his soul, "tell me you don't love anybody else."

He told her.

"There was a time once when I thought you liked Luke Tweezy," he observed lazily. Later.

"How horrible," she murmured with a slight shudder as she snuggled closer.

And that was that.

"I think, dearest," said Molly, raising her head from his shoulder some twenty minutes later, "that it's light enough now to see what's in the sack."

So, in the brightness of a splendid dawn, snugly hidden on the tree-covered flank of one of the Frying-Pan Mountains, they opened the bran sack and went through every paper it contained.

There were deeds, mortgages, legal documents of every description. They found the Dale mortgage, but they did not find the release alleged to have been signed by Dale immediately prior to his death.

"Of course that mortgage is recorded," said Racey dolefully, staring at the pile of papers, "so destroyin' that won't help us any. The release he's carryin' with him, an' I don't see nothin'——"

"Here's one we missed," said Molly Dale in a hopeless tone, picking up a slip of paper from where it had fallen behind a saddle.

The slip of paper was folded several times. She opened it and spread it out against her knee.

"Why, how queer," she muttered.

"Huh?" In an instant Racey was looking over her shoulder.

When both had thoroughly digested the meaning of the writing on that piece of paper they sat back and regarded each other with wide eyes.

"This ought to fix things," breathed Molly.

"Fix things!" cried Racey. "Cinch! We got him like that."

He snapped his fingers joyfully.

Molly reached for the bran sack. "You only shook it out," she said. "I'm going to turn it inside out. Maybe we'll find something else."

They did find something else. They found a document caught in the end seam. They read it with care and great interest.

"Well," said Racey, when he came to the signatures, "no wonder Jack Harpe an' Jakey Pooley wanted to get into the safe. No wonder. If we don't get the whole gang now we're no good."

"And to think we never thought of such a thing."

"I was took in. I never thought nothin' else. An' it does lie just right for a cow-ranch."

"Of course it does. You couldn't help being fooled. None of us had any idea——"

"I'd oughta worked it out," he grumbled. "There ain't no excuse for my swallowin' what Jack Harpe told me. Lordy, I was easy."

"What do you care now? Everything's all right, and you've got me, haven't you?" And here she leaned across the bran sack to kiss him.

She could not understand why his return kiss lacked warmth.

"SUN'S been up two hours," he announced. "An' the hosses have had a good rest. We gotta be goin'."

"What are you climbing the tree for then?" she demanded.

"I wanna look over our back trail," he told her, clambering into the branches of a tall cedar. "I know we covered a whole heap of ground last night but you never can tell."

Apparently you never could tell. For, when he arrived near the top of the cedar and looked out across a sea of treetops to the flat at the base of the mountain, he saw that which made him catch his breath and slide earthward in a hurry.

"What is it?" asked Molly in alarm at his expression.

"They picked up our trail somehow," he answered, whipping up a blanket and saddle and throwing both on her horse. "They're about three miles back on the flat just a-burnin' the ground."

"Saddle your own horse," she cried, running to his side. "I'll attend to mine."

"You stuff all the papers back in the sack. That's yore job. Hustle now. I'll get you out of this. Don't worry."

"I'm not worrying—not a worry," she said cheerfully, both hands busy with Luke Tweezy's papers. "I'd like to know how they picked up the trail after our riding up that creek for six miles."

"I dunno," said he, his head under an upflung saddle-fender. "I shore thought we'd lost 'em."

She stopped tying the sack and looked at him.

"How silly we are!" she cried. "All we have to do is show these two letters to the posse an'——"

'S'pose now the posse is led by Jack Harpe an' Jakey Pooley," said he, not ceasing to pass the cinch-strap.

Her face fell.

"I never thought of that," she admitted. "But there must be some honest men in the bunch."

"It takes a whole lot to convince a honest man when he's part of a posse," Racey declared, reaching for the bran sack. "They don't stop to reason, a posse don't, an' this lot of Marysville gents wouldn't give us time to explain these two letters, an' before they got us back to town, them two letters would disappear, an' then where would we be? We'd be in jail, an' like to stay a while."

"Let's get out of here," exclaimed Molly, crawling her horse even quicker than Racey did his.

Racey led the way along the mountainside for three or four miles. Most of the time they rode at a gallop and all the time they took care to keep under cover of the trees. This necessitated frequent zig-zags for the trees grew sparsely in spots.

"There's a slidé ahead a ways," Racey shouted to the girl. "She's nearly a quarter-mile wide, an' over two miles long, so we'll have to take a chance an' cross it."

Molly nodded her wind-whipped head and Racey snatched a wistful glance at the face he loved. Renunciation was in his eyes, for that second letter found caught in the bran sack's seam had changed things. He could not marry her. No, not now. And yet he loved her more than ever. She looked at him and smiled, and he smiled back—crookedly.

"What's the matter?" she cried above the drum of the flying hoofs.

"Nothin'," he shouted back.

He hoped she believed him. And bitter almonds were not as bitter as that hope.

Then the wide expanse of the slide was before them. Now some slides have trails across their unstable backs, and some have not. Some are utterly unsafe to cross and others can be crossed with small risk. There was no trail across this particular slide, and it did not present a dangerous appearance. Neither does quicksand till you step on it.

Racey dismounted at the edge and started across, leading his horse. Twenty yards in the rear Molly Dale followed in like manner. At every step the footing gave a little. Once a rounded rock dislodged by the forefoot of Racey's horse bounded away down the long slope.

The slither of a started rock behind him made him turn his head with a jerk. Molly's horse was down on its knees.

"Easy, boy, easy," soothed Molly coaxingly, keeping the bridle-reins taut.

The horse scrambled up and plunged forward and almost overran Molly. She seized it short by the rein-chains. The horse pawed nervously and tried to rear. More rocks skidded downward under the shove of the hind hoofs. To Racey's imagination the whole slide seemed to tremble.

Molly's face when the horse finally quieted and she turned around was pale and drawn, which was not surprizing.

"It's all right, it's all right, it's all right," Racey found himself repeating with stiff lips.

"Of course it is," nodded Molly bravely. "There's no danger!"

"No," said Racey. "Better not hold him so short. Don't wind that rein round yore wrist! S'pose he does fall—down you'd go too. Here, you lemme take him. I'll manage him all right."

"I'll manage him all right myself!" snapped Molly, up in arms immediately at this slur upon her horsemanship. "You go on."

Racey turned and went on. It was not more than a hundred yards to where the grass grew on firm ground. Racey and his horse reached solid earth without incident. Then—a scramble, a scraping, and a clattering followed in a breath by the indescribable sound of a mass of rocks in motion.

Racey had wasted no time in looking to see what had happened. He knew. At the first sound of disaster he had snapped his rope-strap, freed his rope and taken two half-hitches round the horn. Then he leaped toward the slide, shaking out his rope as he went.

Twenty feet out and below him Molly Dale and her struggling horse were sliding downward. If the horse had remained quiet—but the horse was not remaining quiet and Molly's wrist was tangled in the bridle reins.

In the beginning the movement was slow, but as Racey reached the edge of the slide an extra strong plunge of the horse drove both girl and animal downward two yards in a breath. Molly turned a white face upward.

"So long, Racey," she called bravely, and waved her free hand.

But Racey was going down to her with his rope in one hand. With the other hand and his teeth he was opening his pocket-knife. The loose stones skittered round his ankles and turned under his boot-soles. He took tremendous steps, and, with that white face uplifted below him, lived an age between each step.

"Grab the rope above my hand," he yelled although by now she was not a yard from him.

Racey was closer to the end of his rope than he realized. At the instant that her free hand clutched at the rope it tightened with a jerk as the cow-pony at the other end, feeling the strain and knowing his business, braced his legs and swayed backward. Molly's fingers brushed the back of Racey's hand and swept down his arm. Well it was for him that he had taken two turns round his wrist, for her forearm went round his neck and the almost whole downward pull of girl and horse exerted itself against the strength of Racey Dawson's arm and shoulder muscles.

Molly's face and chin were pressed tightly against Racey's neck. Small blame to her if her eyes were closed. The arm held fast by the bridle was cruelly stretched and twisted. And where the rein was tight across the back of her wrist, for he could reach no lower, Racey set the blade of his pocket-knife and sawed desperately.

It was not a sharp knife and the leather was tough. The steel did not bite well. Racey sawed all the harder. His left arm felt as if it were being wrenched out of its socket. The sweat was pouring down his face. His hat jumped from his head. He did not even wonder why. He must cut that bridle rein in two. He must; he must.

Snap! Three parts cut, the leather parted. Molly's left arm and Racey's right fell limply. Molly's horse went down the slide alone. Neither of them saw it go. Molly had fainted, and Racey was too spent to do more than catch her round the waist and hold her to him in time to prevent her following the horse.

Smack! something small and hot sprinkled Racey's cheek. He looked to the left. On a rock face close by was a splash of lead. *Smack! Zung-g-g diminuendo,* as a bullet struck the side of a rock and buzzed off at an angle.

Racey turned his head abruptly. At a place where trees grew thinly on the opposite side of the slide and at a considerably lower altitude than the spot where he and Molly hung at the end of their rope shreds of gray smoke were dissolving into the atmosphere. The range was possibly seven hundred yards. The hidden marksman was a good shot to drive his bullets as close as he had at that distance.

Straight out from the place of gray smoke four men and four horses were making their way across the slide. They were half-way across. But they had stopped. The downrush of Molly's horse had apparently given them pause. Now two men started ahead. One stood irresolute and one started to retrace his steps.

IT IS a true saying that he who hesitates is lost. Straight over the irresolute man and his horse rolled the dust-cloud whose center was Molly's horse. When the dust-cloud passed on it was much larger, and both the man and his horse had disappeared.

The man who had started to retreat continued to retreat, and more rapidly. The two who had held on did not cease to advance, but they proceeded very slowly.

"If that feller with the Winchester don't get us we're all right for a spell," Racey muttered.

He knew that on their side of the slide for a distance of several hundred yards up and down the side of the mountain and for several miles athwart it the underbrush was impenetrable for horses and wicked traveling for men. There had been a forest fire four years before, and every one knows what happens after that.

In but one place, where a rock-ridge reared through the soil, was it possible to cross the stretch of burned-over ground. Naturally Racey had picked this one spot.

Whether the posse had not known of this rock-ridge, or whether they had simply miscalculated its position it is impossible to say.

"Them two will shore be out of luck when they get in among the stubs," he thought to himself, as he waited for his strength to come back.

But youth recovers quickly and Racey was young. It may be that the lead that was being sent at him and Molly Dale was a potent revivifier.

Certainly within three or four minutes after he had cut the bridle Racey began to work his way up the rope to where his patient and well-trained horse stood braced and steady as the proverbial boulder.

Monotonously the man behind the Winchester whipped bullet after bullet into the rocky face of the slide in the immediate vicinity of Racey Dawson and the senseless burden in the crook of his left arm. Nevertheless Racey took the time to work to the right and recover the hat that a bullet had flicked from his head. Then he resumed his slow journey upward.

Ages passed before he felt the good firm ground under his feet and laid the still unconscious Molly on the grass behind a gray and barkless windfall that had once been a hundred-foot fir.

Then he removed his horse farther back among the stubs where it could not be seen, took his Winchester from the scabbard under the left fender and went back to the edge of the slide to start a return argument with the individual who had for the last ten minutes been endeavoring to kill him.

CHAPTER XXIX

HUE AND CRY

"DID you hit him?"

"I don't think so," replied Racey without turning his head. "Keep down."

"I am down."

"How you feel?"

"Pretty good—considering."

"Close squeak—considerin'."

"Yes," said she in a small voice, "it was a close squeak. You—you saved my life, Racey."

"Shucks," he said, much embarrassed, "that wasn't anythin'. I mean— Yuh—you know what I mean."

"Surely. I know what you mean. All the same, you saved my life. Tell me, was that man shooting at us all the time after I fainted until you got me under cover?"

"Not all the time, no."

"But most of the time. Oh, you can make small of it but you were very brave. It isn't everybody would have stuck the way you did."

Smack! Tchuck! A bullet struck a rock two feet below where Racey lay on his stomach, his rifle-barrel poked out between shrubs of smooth sumac; another bored the bole of a gray stub at his back.

He fired quickly at the first puff of smoke, then sent two bullets a little to the left of the center of the second puff.

"Not much chance of hittin' the first feller," he said to Molly. "He's behind a log but that second sport is behind a bush same as me—Huh? Oh, I'm all right. I got the ground in front of me. He hasn't. Alla same, we ain't stayin' here no longer. I think I seen half-a-dozen gents cuttin' across the end of the slide. Give 'em time an' they'll cut in behind us, which ain't part of my plans a-tall. Let's go."

He crawfished backward on his hands and knees. Molly followed his example. When they were sufficiently far back to be able to stand upright with safety they scrambled to their feet and hurried to the horse.

"I'll lead him for a while," said Racey, giving Molly a leg up, for the horse was a tall one. "He won't have to carry double just yet."

So, with Racey walking ahead, they resumed their retreat.

The ridge of rock cutting across the burned-over area could not properly be called rim-rock. It was a different formation. Set at an angle, it climbed steadily upward to the very top of the mountain. In places weather-worn to a slippery smoothness; in others jagged, fragment-strewn, where the rain had washed an earth-covering upon the rock the cheerful kinnikinic spread its mantle of shining green.

The man and the girl and the horse made good time. Racey's feet began to hurt before he had gone a mile, but he knew that something besides a pair of feet would be irreparably damaged if he did not keep going. If they caught him he would be lynched; that's what he would be. If he weren't shot first. And the girl—well, she would get at the least ten years at Piegan City, *if* they were caught. But "if" is the longest and

tallest word in the dictionary. It is indeed a mighty barrier before the Lord.

"Did you ever stop to think they may come up through this brush?" said Molly, on whom the silence and the sad gray stubs on either hand were beginning to tell.

"No," he answered, "I didn't, 'cause they can't. The farther down yuh go the worse it gets. They'd never get through. Not with hosses. We're all right."

"Are we?" She stood up in her stirrups, and looked down through a vista between the stubs.

They had reached the top of the mountain. It was a saddle-backed mountain, and they were at the outer edge of the eastern hump. Far below was a narrow valley running north and south. It was a valley without trees or stream and through it a string of dots were slipping to the north.

"Are we all right?" she persisted. "Look down there."

At this he turned his head and craned his neck.

"I guess," he said, stepping out, "we better boil this kettle a li'l faster."

She made no comment but always she looked down the mountainside and watched, when the stubs gave her the opportunity, that ominous string of dots. She had never been hunted before.

They crossed the top of the mountain, keeping to the ridge of rock, and started down the northern slope. Here they passed out of the burned-over area of underbrush and stubs and scuffed through brushless groves of fir and spruce where no grass grew and not a ray of sunshine struck the ground and the wind soughed always mournfully.

But here and there were comparatively open spaces, grassy, drenched with sunshine and sparsely sprinkled with lovely mountain maples and solitary yellow pines. In the wider open spaces they could see over the tops of the trees below them and catch glimpses of the way they must go.

A deep notch, almost a cañon, grown up in spruce, divided the mountain they were descending from the next one to the north. This next one thrust a rocky shoulder easterly. The valley where the horsemen rode bent round this shoulder in a curve measured in miles. They could not see the riders now.

"There's a trail just over the hill," said Racey, nodding toward the mountain across the notch. "It ain't been regularly used since the Daisy petered out in '73, but I guess the bridge is all right."

"And suppose it ain't all right?"

"We'll have to grow wings in a hurry," he said soberly, thinking of the narrow cleft spanned by the bridge.

"Does this trail lead to Farewell?"

"Same thing—it'll take us to the Farewell trail if we wanted to go there, but we don't. We ain't got time. We'll stick to this trail till we get out of the Fryin'-Pans an' then we'll head northwest for the Cross-in-a-box. That's the nearest place where I got friends. An' I don't mind sayin' we'll be needin' friends bad, me an' you both."

"Suppose that posse reaches the trail and the bridge before we do?"

"Oh, I guess they won't. They gotta go alla way round an' we go straight mostly. Don't you worry. We'll make the riffle yet."

His voice was more confident than his brain. It was touch and go whether they would reach the trail and the bridge first. The posse in the valley—that was what would stack the cards against them. And if they should pass the bridge first, what then? It was at least thirty miles from the bridge to the Cross-in-a-box ranch-house. And there was only one horse. Indeed, the close squeak was still squeaking.

"Racey, you're limping!"

"Not me," he lied. "Stubbed my toe, thassall."

"Nothing of the kind. It's those tight boots. Here, you ride, and let me walk." So saying, she slipped to the ground.

As was natural the horse stopped with a jerk. So did Racey.

"You get into that saddle," he directed sternly. "We ain't got time for foolishness."

Foolishness! And she was only trying to be thoughtful. Foolishness! She turned and climbed back into the saddle, and sat up straight, her backbone as stiff as a ramrod, and looked over his head and far away. For the moment, she was so hopping mad she forgot the danger they were in.

They made their way down into the heavy growth of Engelmann spruce that filled the notch, crossed the floor of the notch and began again to climb.

AN HOUR later they crossed the top of the second mountain and saw far below them a long saddle-back split in the middle by a narrow cleft. At that distance it looked very narrow. In

reality it was forty feet wide. Racey stopped and swept with squinting eyes the place where he knew the bridge to be.

"See," he said suddenly, pointing for Molly's benefit. "There's the Daisy trail. I can see her plain—to the left of that arrowhead bunch of trees. An' the bridge is behind the trees."

"But I don't see any trail."

"Grown up in grass. That's why. It's hid by the trees mostly, anyhow. But she's there, the trail is. You can bet on it."

"I don't want to bet on it.'" Shortly. She was still mad at him. He had saved her life, he had succeeded in saving the family ranch, he had put her under eternal obligations, but he had called her thought for him foolishness. It was too much.

Yet all the time she was ashamed of herself. She knew that she was small and mean and narrow and deserved a spanking if any girl did. She wanted to cuff Racey, cuff him till his ears turned red and his head rang. For that is the way a woman feels when she loves a man and he has hurt her feelings. But she feels almost precisely the same way when she hates one who has. Truth it is, that love and hate are close akin.

Down, down they dropped two thousand feet, and when they came out upon the fairly level top of the saddle-back Racey mounted behind Molly.

"He'll have to carry double now," he explained. "She's two mile to the bridge, an' my wind ain't good enough to run me two mile."

It was not his wind that was weak, it was his feet—his tortured, blistered feet that were two flaming aches. Later they would become numb. He wished they were numb now, and cursed silently the man who first invented cowboy boots. Every jog of the trotting horse whose back he bestrode was a twitching torture.

"We'll be at the bridge in another mile," he told her.

"Thank Heaven!"

Silent and grass-grown lay the Daisy trail when they came out upon it winding through a meager plantation of cedars.

"No one's come along yet," vouchsafed Racey, turning into the trail after a swift glance at its trackless, undisturbed surface.

He tickled the horse with both spurs and stirred him into a gallop. There was not much spring in that gallop. Racey weighed fully one hundred and seventy pounds without his clothes, Molly a hundred and twenty with all of hers, and the saddle, blanket, sack, rifle and cartridges weighed a good sixty. On top of this weight pile the many weary miles the horse had traveled since its last meal and you have what it was carrying. No wonder the gallop lacked spring.

"Bridge is just beyond them trees," said Racey in Molly's ear.

"The horse is nearly run out," was her comment.

"He ain't dead yet."

They rocked around the arrowhead grove of trees and saw the bridge before them one stringer. There had been two stringers and adequate flooring when Racey had seen it last. The snows of the previous Winter must have been heavy in the Frying-Pan Mountains.

Molly shivered at the sight of that lone stringer.

"The horse is done, and so are we," she muttered.

"Nothin' like that," he told her cheerfully. "There's one stringer left. Good enough for a squirrel, let alone two white folks."

"I—I couldn't," shuddered Molly.

They had stopped at the bridge-head, Racey had dismounted, and she was looking down into the dark mouth of the cleft with frightened eyes.

"It must be five hundred feet to the bottom," she whispered, her chin wobbling.

"Not more than four hundred," he said reassuringly. "An' that log is a good strong four-foot log, an' she's been shaved off with the broad-ax for layin' the floorin' so we got a nice smooth path almost two feet wide."

In reality that smooth path retained not a few of the spikes that had once held the flooring and it was no more than eighteen inches wide. Racey gabbled on regardless. If chatter would do it, he'd get her mind off that four-hundred-foot drop.

"I cuc-can't!" breathed Molly. "I cuc-can't walk across on that lul-log. I'd fall off. I know I would."

"You ain't gonna walk across the log," he told her with a broad grin. "I'm gonna carry you pickaback. C'mon, Molly, slide off. That's right. Now when I stoop put yore arms round my neck. I'll stick my arms under yore legs. See, like this. Now yo're all right. Don't worry. I ain't

gonna drop you. Close yore eyes an' sit still, an' you'll never know what's happenin'. Close 'em now while I walk round with you a li'l bit so's to get the hang of carryin' you."

She closed her eyes, and he began to walk about, carrying her. At least she thought he was walking about. But when he stopped and she opened her eyes, she discovered that the horse was standing on the other side of the cleft. At first she did not understand.

"How on earth did the horse get over?" she asked in wonder.

"He didn't," Racey said quietly, setting her down, "but we did. I carried you across while you had yore eyes shut. I told yuh you'd never know what was happenin'."

She sat down limply on the ground. Racey started back across the stringer to get the horse. He hurried too. That posse they had seen in the valley! There was no telling where it was. It might be four miles away, or four hundred yards.

"C'mon, feller," said Racey, picking up the reins of the tired horse. "An' for —— sake pick up yore feet. If you don't that dynamite is gonna make one awful mess at the bottom of the canon."

Dynamite! Mess! There was an idea. Although, in order to spare Molly an extra worry for the time being, he had told her they would push on together it had been his intention to hold the bridge with his rifle while Molly rode alone to the Cross-in-a-box for help. But those six sticks of dynamire would simplify the complex situation without difficulty.

HE DID not hurry the horse. He merely walked in front, holding the bridle slackly. The horse followed him as good as gold and picked up his feet at nearly every spike. Once or twice a hind hoof grazed a spike-head with a rasping sound that sent Racey's heart bouncing up into his throat. Lord, so much depended on a safe passage!

For the first time in his eventful life Racey Dawson realized that he possessed a full and working set of nerves.

When they reached firm ground Racey flung the reins to Molly.

"Unpack the dynamite," he cried. "It's in the slicker."

With his bowie he began furiously to dig under the end of the stringer where it lay embedded in the earth. Within ten minutes he had a hole large enough and long enough to thrust in the whole of his arm. He made it a little longer and a little wider, and at the end he made an offset. This last that there might be no risk of the charge blowing out through the hole.

When the hole was to his liking, he sat back on his haunches and grabbed the dynamite-sticks Molly held out to him. With strings cut from his saddle he tied the sticks into a bundle. Then he prepared his fuse and cap. In one of the sticks he made a hole. In this hole he firmly inserted the copper cap. Above the cap he tied the fuse to the bundle with several lappings of a saddle-string.

"There!" he exclaimed. "I guess that cap will stay put. You an' the hoss get out of here, Molly. Go along the trail a couple of hundred yards or so. G'on. Get a move on. I'll be with yuh in a minute. Better leave my rifle."

Molly laid the Winchester on the grass beside him, mounted the horse and departed reluctantly. She did not like to leave Racey now. She had burned out her "mad." She rode away, chin on shoulder. The cedars swallowed her up.

Racey with careful caution stuffed the dynamite down the hole and into the offset. Then he shoveled in the earth with his hands and tamped it down with a rock.

Was that the click of a hoof on stone? Faint and far away another hoof clacked. He reached up to his hat-band for a match. There were no matches in his hat-band. Feverishly he searched his pockets. Not a match—not a match anywhere.

He whipped out his six-shooter, held the muzzle close to the end of the fuse and fired. He had to fire three times before the fuse began to sparkle and spit.

Clearly it came to his ears, the unmistakable thudding of galloping hoofs on turf. The posse was riding for the bridge full tilt. He picked up his rifle and dodged in among the trees along the trail. Forty yards from the mined stringer he met Molly riding back with a scared face.

"What is it?" she cried to him. "I heard shots! Oh, what is it?"

"Go back! Go back!" he bawled. "I only cut that fuse for three minutes."

Molly wheeled the horse and fled. Racey ran to where a windfall lay near the edge of the cleft and some forty yards from the stringer. Behind the windfall he lay down,

levered a cartridge into the chamber, and trained his rifle on the bridge-head.

The galloping horsemen were not a hundred paces from the stringer when the dynamite let go with a soul-satisfying roar. Rocks, earth, chunks and splinters of wood flew up in advance of a rolling cloud of smoke that obscured the cleft from rim to rim.

A crash at the bottom of the narrow canon told Racey what had happened to that part of the stringer the dynamite had not destroyed.

Racey lowered the hammer of his rifle to the safety-notch just as the posse began to approach the spot where the bridge had been. It approached on foot by ones and twos and from tree to tree. Racey could not see any one, but he could see the tree branches move here and there.

"I guess," muttered Racey, as he crawfished away from the windfall, "I guess that settles the cat-hop."

THE sun was near its rising the following day when Racey and Molly, their one horse staggering with fatigue, reached the Cross-in-a-box. Racey had walked all the distance he was humanly able to walk, but even so the horse had carried double the better part of thirty miles. It had earned a rest. So had Racey's feet.

"My ——, what a relief!" Racey muttered, and sat back and wiggled gingerly his toes.

"—— shame yuh had to cut 'em up thataway," said Jack Richie, glancing at Racey's slit boots. "They look like new boots."

"It is an' they are, but I couldn't get 'em off any other way, an' I'll bet I won't be able to get another pair on inside a month. Lordy man, did you ever think natural-born feet would swell like that?"

"You better soak them a while," said Jack Richie. "C'mon out to the kitchen."

"Shore feels good," said Racey, when his swelled feet were immersed in a dish-pan half-full of tepid water. "Lookit, Jack, let Miss Dale have her sleep out, an' tomorrow some time send a couple of the boys with her over to Moccasin Spring."

"Whatsa matter with you an' one of the boys doing it?"

"'Cause I gotta go to Piegan City."

"Huh?"

"Yep—Piegan City. I'm comin' back though, so you needn't worry about not gettin' back the hoss yo're gonna lend me."

"That's good. But——"

"An' if any gents on hossback *should* drop in on yuh an' ask questions just remember that what they dunno won't hurt 'em."

Jack Richie nodded understandingly.

"Trust me," he said. "As I see it, Miss Dale an' you come in from the north, an' ——"

"Only me—you ain't seen no Miss Dale—an' I only stopped long enough to borrow a fresh hoss an' then rode away south."

"I know it all by heart," nodded Jack Richie.

"In about a week or ten days, maybe less," said Racey Dawson, "you'll know more than that. An' so will a good many other folks."

CHAPTER XXX

THE REGISTRAR

"MR. POOLEY," said Racey Dawson, easing himself into the chair beside the registrar's desk, "where is McFluke?"

Mr. Pooley's features remained as wooden as they were fat. His small, wide-set eyes did not flicker. He placed the tips of his fingers together, leaned back in his chair, and stared at Racey between the eyebrows.

"McFluke?" he repeated. "I don't know the name."

"I mean the murderer Jack Harpe sent to you to be taken care of," explained Racey.

Mr. Pooley continued to stare. For a long moment he made no comment. Then he said—

"Still, I don't know the name."

"If you will lean back a li'l more," Racey told him, "you can look out of the window an' see two chairs in front of the Kearney House. On the right we have Bill Riley, a Wells Fargo detective from Omaha; on the left Tom Seemly from the Pinkerton Agency in San Francisco. They know somethin' but not everythin'. Suppose I should spin 'em *all* my li'l tale of grief—what then, Mr. Pooley?"

"Still—I wouldn't know the name McFluke," maintained Mr. Pooley.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Pooley," said Racey, rising to his feet. "I shore am."

"Don't strain yoreself," advised Mr. Pooley, making a brave rustle among the papers on his desk.

"I won't," Racey said, turning at the door to bestow a last grin upon Mr. Pooley. "So long. Glad I called."

Mr. Pooley laughed outright. "G'by," he called after Racey as the door closed.

Mr. Pooley leaned far back in his chair. He saw Racey Dawson stop on the sidewalk in front of the two detectives in their chairs. The three conversed a moment, then Racey entered the Kearney House. The two detectives remained where they were.

Mr. Pooley arose and left the room.

"YOU gotta get out of here!" It was Mr. Pooley speaking with great asperity.

"Why for?" countered our old friend McFluke, one-time proprietor of a saloon on the bank of the Lazy.

"Because they're after you, that's why."

"Who's they?"

"Racey Dawson for one."

McFluke sat upright in the bunk. "Him! That ——!"

"Yes, him," sneered Pooley. "Scares yuh, don't it? An' he's got two detectives with him, so get a move on. I don't want you anywhere on my property if they do come sniffin' round."

"I'm right comfortable here," declared McFluke, and lay down upon the bunk.

"You'd better go," said Mr. Pooley softly.

"Not unless I get some money first."

"So that's the game, is it? Think I'll pay you to drift, huh? How much?"

"Oh, about ten thousand."

"Is that all?"

"Well, say fifteen—an' not a check neither."

"No," said Mr. Pooley, "it won't be a check. It won't be anythin', you —— worm."

So saying, Mr. Pooley laid violent hands on McFluke, yanked him out of the bunk, and flung him sprawling on the floor.

"Not one cent do you get from me," declared Mr. Pooley. "I never paid blackmail yet and I ain't beginning now. I always told Harpe you'd upset the applecart with yore bull-headed ways. You stinking murderer; it wasn't necessary to kill old man Dale. Suppose he did hit you, what of it? You could have knocked him out with a bung starter. But no, you had to kill him, and get everybody suspicious, didn't you? Why, —— you, you make me feel like cutting your throat, to have you upset my plans this way!"

McFluke raised himself on an arm.

"I didn't upset yore plans none," he denied sulkily. "Everythin's comin' out all right. ——, he wouldn't play that day anyway. Said he'd never touch a card or look at a wheel again as long as he lived, an' when I laughed at him he hit me. What else could I do? I hadda shoot him. I——"

"Shut up, you and your 'I's' and 'He wouldn't' and 'I hadda.' If you told me that tale once since you came here you've told me forty times. Get up and get out! Yore horse is tied at the corral gate. I roped him on my way in. C'mon! Get up, or will I have to crawl yore hump again?"

But McFluke did not get up. Instead he scrambled sidewise to the wall and shrank against it. His eyes were wide, staring. They were fixed on the doorway behind Mr. Pooley.

"I didn't do it, gents!" cried McFluke, thrusting out his hands before his face as if to ward off a blow. "I didn't kill him! I didn't! It's all a lie! I didn't kill him!"

Fat Jacob Pooley whirled to face three guns. His right hand fell away reluctantly from the butt of his six-shooter. Slowly his arms went above his head. Racey Dawson and his two companions entered the room. The eldest of these companions was one of the Piegan City town marshals. He was a friend of Jacob Pooley's. But there was no friendliness in his face as he approached the registrar, removed his gun and searched his person for other weapons. Jacob Pooley said nothing. His face was a dark red. The marshal produced a pair of handcuffs. The registrar recoiled.

"Not those!" he protested. "Don't put handcuffs on me!"

"Put yore hands down," ordered the marshal.

"Look here, I'll go quietly. I'll ——"

"Put yore hands down!" repeated the inexorable marshal.

Jacob Pooley put his hands down.

Racey and the other man were handcuffing McFluke, who was keeping up an incessant wail of, "I didn't do it! I didn't, gents, I didn't!"

"Oh, shut up!" ordered Racey, jerking the prisoner to his feet. "You talk too much!"

"Where's yore Wells Fargo and Pinkerton detectives?" demanded Mr. Pooley.

"This gent is the Wells Fargo detective," replied Racey indicating the man who had helped him handcuff McFluke. "There ain't any Pinkerton within five hundred miles so far as I know— Huh? Them? Oh, they was just drummers from Chicago I happened to speak to 'cause I figured you'd be expectin' me to after I'd told yuh who they were. The real Wells Fargo, Mr. Johnson here, was a-watchin' yore corral alla time, so when you got a friend of yores to pull them two drummers into a poker-game an' then saddled yore hoss an' went bustin' off in the direction of yore claim we got the marshal an' trailed yuh."

"You can't prove anything!" bluffed Mr. Pooley.

"We were here beside the door listenin' from the time McFluke said he was too comfortable to move out of here." Thus the marshal wearily.

Mr. Pooley considered a moment.

"Who snitched where Mac was?" he asked finally.

"Nobody," replied Racey promptly.

"Somebody must have. Who was it?"

"Nobody, I tell yuh. McFluke had to go somewhere, didn't he? He couldn't hang around Farewell. Too dangerous. But the chances was he wouldn't leave the country complete till he got his share. An' as nothin' had come off yet it wasn't likely any he'd got his share. So he'd wanna keep in touch with his friends till the deal was put through. It was only natural he'd drift to you. An' when I come here to Piegan City an' heard you had hired a man to live on yore claim an' then got a look at him without him knowin' it the rest was easy."

"But what," inquired Mr. Pooley perplexedly, "has Wells Fargo to do with this business?"

"Anybody that knows Bill Smith, alias Jack Harpe as well as you do," spoke up Mr. Johnson grimly, "is bound to be of interest to Wells Fargo."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE LAST TRICK

"I'D TAKE it kindly if you gents would stick yore guns on the mantelpiece," said Judge Dolan.

Jack Harpe and Luke Tweezy looked at each other.

"I ain't wearin' a gun," said Luke Tweezy, crossing one skinny knee over the other.

"But Mr. Harpe is," pointed out Judge Dolan.

Jack Harpe jack-knifed his long body out of his chair, which was placed directly in front of an open doorway giving into an inner room, crossed the floor and placed his six-shooter on the mantelpiece.

"What is this," he demanded, returning to his place—"a trial?"

"Not a-tall," the judge made haste to assure him. "Just a li'l friendly talk, thassall. I'm a-lookin' for information an' I've an idea you an' Luke can give it to me."

"I'd like a li'l information my own self," grumbled Luke Tweezy. "When are you gonna make the Dales vacate?"

"All in good time," the judge replied with a wintry smile. "I'll be gettin' to that in short order. Here comes Kansas an' Jake Rule now."

"What you want with the sheriff?" Luke queried uneasily.

"He's gonna help us in our li'l talk," explained the judge smoothly.

"I think I'll get my gun," observed Jack Harpe.

He made as if to rise but sank back immediately for Racey Dawson had suddenly appeared in the open doorway behind him and run the chill muzzle of a six-shooter into the back of his neck.

"Never set with yore back to a doorway," advised Racey Dawson. "If you'll clamp yore hands behind yore head, Jack, we'll all be happier. Luke, fish out the knife you wear under yore left armpit, lay it on the floor an' kick it into the corner."

Luke Tweezy's knife tinkled against the wall at the moment that the sheriff, his deputy and two other men entered from the street. The third man was Mr. Johnson, the Wells Fargo detective. The fourth man wore his left arm in a sling and hobbled on a cane. The fourth man was Swing Tunstall.

"What kind of ——'s trick is this?" demanded Jack Harpe, glaring at the Wells Fargo detective.

"It's the last trick, Bill," said Mr. Johnson.

At the mention of which name Jack Harpe appeared to shrink inwardly. He looked suddenly very old.

"Take chairs, gents," invited Judge Dolan, looking about him in the manner of a

minstrel show's interlocutor. "If everybody's comfortable, we'll proceed to business."

"I thought you said this wasn't a trial," objected Luke Tweezy.

"An' so it ain't a trial," the judge rapped out smartly. "The trial will come later."

Luke Tweezy subsided. His furtive eyes became more furtive than ever.

"Go ahead, Racey," said Judge Dolan.

Racey, still holding his six-shooter, leaned hip-shot against the door-jamb.

"It was this way," he began, and told what had transpired that day in the hotel corral when he had been bandaging his horse's leg and had overheard the conversation between Lanpher and Jack Harpe and later, Punch-the-breeze Thompson.

"They's nothin' in that," declared Jack Harpe with contempt, twisting his neck to glower up at Racey. "Suppose I did wanna get hold of the Dale ranch. What of it?"

"Shore," put in Luke Tweezy. "What of it? Perfectly legitimate business proposition. Legal, an' all that."

"Not quite," denied Racey. "Not the way you went about it. Nawsir. Well, gents," he resumed, "what I heard in that corral showed plain enough there was somethin' up. Dale wouldn't sell, an' they was bound to get his land away from him. So they was figurin' to have Nebraska Jones turn the trick by playin' poker with the old man. When Nebraska — They switched from Nebraska to Peaches Austin, plannin' to go through with the deal at McFluke's from the beginnin'. An' that was where Tweezy come in. He was to get the old man to McFluke's, an' with the help of Peaches Austin cheat Dale out of the ranch."

"That's a —— lie!" cried Tweezy.

"I suppose you'll deny," said Racey, "that the day I seen you ride in here to Farewell—I mean the day Jack Harpe spoke to you in front of the Happy Heart, an' you didn't answer him—that day you come in from Marysville on purpose to tell Jack an' Lanpher about the mortgage havin' to be renewed an' that now was their chance. I suppose you'll deny all that, huh?"

"Yo're—yo're lyin'," sputtered Luke Tweezy.

"Am I? We'll see. When playin' cards with old Dale didn't work they caught the old man at McFluke's one day an' after he'd got in a fight with McFluke an' McFluke downed him, they saw their chance to produce a forged release from Dale."

"Who did the forging?" broke in the judge.

"I dunno for shore. This here was found in Tweezy's safe." He held out a letter to the judge.

Judge Dolan took the letter and read it carefully. Then he looked across at Luke Tweezy.

"This here," said he, tapping the letter with stiffened forefinger, "is a signed letter from Dale to you. It seems to be a reply in the negative to a letter of yores askin' him to sell his ranch."

THE judge paused and glanced round the room. Then his cold eyes returned to the face of Luke Tweezy, who was beginning to look extremely wretched.

"Underneath the signature of Dale," continued the judge, "somebody has copied that signature some fifty or sixty times. I wonder why?"

"I dunno nothin' about it," Luke Tweezy denied feebly.

"We'll come back to that," the judge observed softly. "G'on, Racey."

"I figure," said Racey, "that they'd hatched that forgery some while before Dale was killed. The killin' made it easier to put it on record."

"Looks that way," nodded the judge.

"Lookit here," boomed Jack Harpe, "you ain't got no right to judge us thisaway. We ain't on trial."

"Shore you ain't," asserted the judge. "I always said you wasn't. This here is just a talk; a friendly talk. No trial about it."

"Here's another letter, judge," said Racey Dawson.

The judge read the letter, and again fixed Luke Tweezy with his eye.

"This ain't a letter exactly," said Judge Dolan. "It's a quadruplicate copy of an agreement between Lanpher of the 88 ranch, Jacob Pooley of Piegan City an' Luke Tweezy of Marysville, parties of the first part, an' Jack Harpe, party of the second part, to buy or otherwise obtain possession of the ranch of William Dale, in the northeast corner of which property is located an abandoned mine-tunnel in which Jack Harpe, the party of the second part, has discovered a gold-bearing lode."

"A mine!" muttered Swing Tunstall. "A gold-mine! An' I thought they wanted it for a ranch!"

"So did I," Racey nodded.

"I know that mine!" said Jake Rule. "Silvertip Ransom an' Long Oscar drove the tunnel, done the necessary labor, got their patent an' sold out when they couldn't get day wages to old Dale for one pony an' a jack. But Dale never worked it. A payin' lode! ——! Who'd 'a' thought it?"

"Old Salt an' Tom Loudon got a couple o' claims on the other side of the ridge from Dale's mine," put in Kansas Casey. "They bought 'em off of Slippery Wilson an' his wife. Them claims oughta be right valuable now."

"They are," nodded Judge Dolan. "The agreement goes on to say that Jack Harpe found gold-bearing lodes in both of Slippery's old tunnels, that these two claims will be properly relocated—I guess that's where Jakey Pooley come in—an' all three mines will be worked by a company made up of these four men, each man to receive one-quarter of the profits. This agreement is signed by Jack Harpe, Simon Lanpher an' Jacob Pooley."

"An' after Pooley was arrested," contributed Racey Dawson, "the Piegan City marshal went through his safe and found the original of this agreeement signed by Tweezy, Lanpher an' Harpe."

Luke Tweezy held up his hand. "One moment," said he. "Where was the agreement signed by Harpe, Pooley an' Lanpher found?'

"In yore safe," replied Racey Dawson.

"Did you find it there?"

"Yep."

"What were you doin' at my safe?"

"Now don't get excited, Luke. I happened to be in the neighborhood of yore house in Marysville about a month ago when I noticed one of yore back windows open. I snooped in an' there was Jack Harpe workin' on yore combination with Jakey Pooley watchin' him. Jack Harpe was the boy who opened the safe—Huh? Shore I know him an' Jakey Pooley sicked posses on my trail. Why not? They hadda cover their own tracks, didn't they? But that ain't the point. What I can't help wonderin' is why Harpe an' Pooley were fussin' with the safe in the first place. What do you guess, Luke?"

Evidently Tweezy knew the answer. With a yelp of, "Tried to cross me, you——!" he flung himself bodily upon Jack Harpe.

In a moment the two were rolling on the floor. It required four men and seven minutes to pry them apart.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE END OF THE TRAIL

MOLLY DALE looked at Racey with adoring eyes.

"How on earth did you guess that the Bill Smith who robbed the Wells Fargo safe at Keeleyville and killed the agent was Jack Harpe?"

"Oh, that was nothin'. Yuh see, I'd heard somebody say—I disremember exactly who now—that Jack Harpe's real name was Bill Smith, that he'd shaved off his beard an' part of his eyebrows to make himself look different, an' that he'd done somethin' against the law to some company in some town. I didn't know what company nor what town, but I had somethin' to start with when McFluke was let loose.

"I figured out by this, that, an' the other that Jack Harpe had let McFluke loose. Aw right, that showed Jack Harpe was a expert lock-picker. He showed us at Marysville that he was a expert on safe combinations. Now there can't be many men like that. So I took what I knowed about him to the detective chief of three railroads. He'd done somethin' against a company, do yuh see, an' of course I went to three different railroad companies before I woke up an' went to the Wells Fargo an' found out that such a man as Jack Harpe named Bill Smith was wanted for the Keeleyville job. So yuh see there wasn't much to it. It was all there waitin' for somebody to find it."

"But it lacked the somebody till you came along," she told him with shining eyes.

"Shucks."

"No shucks about it. That we have our ranch today with a sure enough producin' gold-mine in one corner of it is all due to you."

"Shucks, s'pose now them handwritin' experts Judge Dolan got from Chicago hadn't been able to prove at the time that the forgery an' them fifty or sixty copies of yore dad's name was wrote by the same hand, ink and pen? S'pose now they

hadn't? What then? Where'd you be, I'd like to know? Nawsir, you give them the credit. They deserve it. Well, I'm shore glad yo're all gonna be rich, Molly. It's fine. That's what it is, fine—great. Well, I gotta be driftin' along. I'm gonna meet Swing in town. We're ridin' south Arizona way tomorrow."

"Arizona!"

"Yeah, we're goin' to give the minin'-game a whirl."

"Why—why not give it a whirl up here in this country?"

"'Cause there ain't another mine like yores in the territory. No, we'll go south. Swing wants to go—been wantin' to go for some time."

"But—but I thought you were going to stay up here," persisted Molly, her cheeks a little white.

"Not—not now," Racey said hastily. "So long, take care of yoreself."

He reached for her hand, gave it a quick squeeze, then picked up his hat and walked out of the house without another word or a backward look.

"WHAT makes me sick is not a cent out of Old Salt," said Racey wrathfully, as he and Swing Tunstall walked their horses south along the Marysville trail.

"What else could yuh expect?" said the philosopher Swing. "We specified in the agreement that it was cows them jiggers was gonna run on the range. We didn't say nothin' about mines."

"We?" repeated Racey. "We? You didn't have nothin' to do with that agreement. I made it. It was my fool fault we hadda work all them months for nothin'."

"What's the dif?" Swing said comfortably. "We're partners. Deal yoreself a new hand and forget it. Tough luck we couldn't 'a' made a clean sweep of that bunch, huh?"

"Oh, I dunno. S'pose Peaches, Nebraska an' Thompson did get away. We done pretty good, considerin'. Yuh can't expect everythin'."

"Alla same they'd oughta been a reward for Jack Harpe anyway. Wells Fargo is shore gettin' mighty close-fisted."

"Jack done better than I thought he would. He never opened his yap about Marie bein' in that Keeleyville gang."

"Maybe he didn't know for shore or else he knowed better. Bull was in that gang too, an' Bull got his throat cut. If Jack had done any blattin' about Marie an' Keeleyville he might 'a' had to stand trial for murder right here in this county instead of goin' down to New Mexico to be tried for a murder committed ten years ago with all that means; evidence gone rusty with age an' witnesses dead or in jail themselves, most like. Oh, he'll be convicted, but it won't be first degree, yuh can stick a pin in that."

"I wonder if he did kill Bull."

"I wonder too. Didja know who Bull really was, Swing? Marie's brother. Yep, she told me about it yesterday."

"Her own brother, huh? That's a odd number. Alla same I'll bet she don't miss him much."

"Nor Nebraska neither. He'll never come back to bother her again, that's a cinch. Who's that ahead?"

"That" was Molly, waiting for them at a turn in the trail. When they came up to her she nodded to both men, but her smile was all for Racey Dawson. He felt his pulse begin to beat a trifle faster. How handsome she was with her dark hair and blue eyes! And at the moment those blue eyes that were looking into his were deep enough to drown a man.

"Can I see you a minute, Racey?" said she.

Swing immediately turned his horse on a dime and loped along the back trail. Left alone with Racey, she moved her horse closer to his. Their ankles touched. His hands were clasped on the saddle-horn. She laid her cool hand on top of them.

"Racey," she said, her wonderful eyes holding him, "why are you going away?"

This was almost too much for Racey. He could hardly think straight.

"I told you—" he said hoarsely. "We're goin' to Arizona—minin'."

She flung this statement aside with a jerk of her head.

"You used to like me, Racey," she told him.

He nodded miserably.

"Don't you like me any more?" she persisted.

He did not nod. Nor did he speak. He stared down at the back of the hand lying on top of his.

"Look at me, boy," she directed.

He looked. The fingers of the hand on

top of his slid in between his fingers.

"Look me in the eye," said she, "and tell me you don't love me."

"I cuc-can't," he muttered in a panic.

"Then why are you going away?" Her voice was gentle, gentle and wistful.

"Because yo're rich now; that's why," he replied thickly, the words wrung out in a rush. "You got lots o' money, an' I ain't got nothin' but my hoss an' what I stand up in. How can I love you, Molly?"

"Lean over here and I'll show you how," said Molly Dale.

And she did.

THE END

LIGHTS OF PEACE

by Kenneth Gilbert

Author of "The Man Who Could Read Static."

WE WERE pacing the deck and discussing the perfidy of nations. I walked with Harmon because, of the three hundred or more persons aboard the *Pawtucket* on this Alaskan cruise, he was the only one I had really come to know; I talked with him because I had found him singularly well-informed and because the odd assignments that had been his ten years as a wireless operator had given him insight of unusual incidents. The international trend of our discourse was suggested by a press dispatch that had just been flashed to the *Pawtucket* from a wireless station to the south. The dispatch tersely told of how one of the great powers, in the process of realigning world boundaries, had forced a crisis through occupying a territorial point by rather bland stealth.

It was night, and the lee gangway where we paced was dark, save that the faint light from stars glittered chilly in the vitreous-like hardness of the sky. And yet, as we walked, the darkness began to soften as if dawn approached. From where we were, all save a segment of the eastern sky was shut off from view by the deck above. Yet, although this was my first trip north, I was not unlearned.

"The midnight sun!" I guessed triumphantly.

Harmon merely grinned and took my arm, leading me to the upper deck. He pointed north.

"Miss Aurora Borealis," he said as if in introduction.

I saw that which is vouchsafed only those who get near the top of the world, for the northern lights one knows in the softer latitudes are but a washed-out counterpart of the glorious spectacle of the arctic approaches.

Great fingers of multi-colored light groped for the zenith; beams from mighty searchlights, focused from the pole, turned and twisted in search of something they never found. Gigantic rays dissolved into blue, green, red, golden and an infinite variety

of spectrum possibilities; they wheeled, they faded out, only to reappear elsewhere.

A god of the snows turned in his hands a prismatic iceberg held beneath the glare of some unknown polar light. The mystery of the northern wastes, at whose explanation scientist and schoolboy may guess alike, made twilight of the night.

"Beautiful!" I exclaimed, after futile search for a better word. "More beautiful than a rainbow—and as useless in this practical-minded world."

"Your simile is no good," contended Harmon, searching his pockets for a cigaret. "A rainbow's an inspiration of hope for every discouraged struggler and anything as helpful as that can not rightly be declared useless."

His tobacco-hunt was unsuccessful.

"And as for saying that Aurora Borealis is useless," he went on, in further refutation, "old Atoonyak, if you ever meet him up here, would avenge such blasphemy with his queer-looking Eskimo knife. Barring the knife, I'd put in with him. And you would, too, if you'd been with us last year."

I sat on a deck-chest and enticed him with a well-filled cigaret-case.

"DURING the war I was wireless operator on the United States Coast-Guard Cutter *Reindeer*," Harmon began, "and all the fighting we ever saw was an occasional spiritless brush with fish-trap pirates in Alaskan waters. At the time the armistice was signed we were southbound for the Winter, making our way through Icy Strait.

"It was a night like this when I picked out of the air the message that was electrifying the world. A night with intermittent bursts of static discharge in the atmosphere—the sound of far-away thunderstorms, you know—that would be audible to us only if picked up by wireless apparatus.

"For us the word of peace occasioned but little demonstrativeness. Coastguardsmen are rather undemonstrative anyway, and the boys had long ago given up hope of seeing any real action during the war, so the cessation of hostilities merely rubbed in the fact that they had been noncombatants.

"In fact, I was all but drowsing over my wireless instruments an hour later, when I heard some one fumbling at the door. Thinking it was one of the officers, I hastened to open it. Outside stood a weazened little Eskimo, clad in fur parka and mukluks, or skin boots. Maybe he was a hundred years old; he was toothless enough to be at any rate. It was Atoonyak.

"A month before he had paddled out to the ship at Point Barrow, announcing through a somewhat awed native interpreter, whom he brought with him, that he had been commissioned by his people, a nomadic tribe living somewhere in the white wilderness farther north, to visit the land of the white man. He was Atoonyak, a priest, he told us, and his mission was important. To pay his way he offered us curiously carved walrus-tusks and, what was unusual for an Eskimo, a small quantity of glacial gold.

"Just why Captain Millete let him remain aboard we couldn't figure out. Certainly the skipper overstepped the regulations. A coastguard cutter seldom carries passengers except by permission of official Washington. Yet Atoonyak insisted and when we finally pointed our nose southward toward Seattle, he and his man Friday were bedding down regularly on a couple of old mattresses, and drawing their rations with the rest of us.

"And now Atoonyak stood there jabbering in the strange tongue of his tribe, a succession of gutturals, interspersed with hissing aspirates. Occasionally, he cocked his head to one side in an inquiring, bird-like manner and said—

"'Pleece?'

"Apparently he was attempting English.

"'Police?' I hazarded and then, 'please?'

"That puzzled him for a second, but seemingly it wasn't right. He dragged his interpreter out of the darkness.

" 'Him ask you if peace come,' announced the native after the priest had hissed and clucked at him.

"Atoonyak nodded vigorously and grinned.

" 'Tell him yes,' I directed. 'Heap big peace come over all the world.'

"The native did so, and Atoonyak spun on his heel until he faced north. He sank upon one knee and stretched his arms heavenward. And then I saw what I had not noticed before; the northern sky was luminous with the first glow that presages the mad dance of the aurora.

"Slowly the light spread to the zenith. And as it crept upward, there came from the lips of Atoonyak a weird 'chirring' sound that rose and then died away. It began again; mournfully low and vibrant; rising and falling, and this time the body of the old priest began to sway from side to side. Squat and ugly though Atoonyak was, there was a rhythmic grace in his movements. All the while his arms stretched northward as if in supplication.

"Now his feet moved. A step forward, one rearward, and he sank to his knee again. Then he was up, his palms outward, as if pushing back something. Back and forth he weaved; now entreating, now repelling, while from his pursed lips came the savage, eery croon.

"And the lights, man! Foolish as it sounds, I tell you they seemed to follow his every motion. He beseeched and a golden streamer ten thousand miles long shot athwart the zenith; he thrust out his palms and the streamers dissolved into nothingness, only to reappear elsewhere the next second. It was uncanny, I tell you.

"Presently a castanet-like clicking beside me distracted my attention. I found the native interpreter, teeth chattering, and in pop-eyed terror. I led him around a corner of the wireless house.

"'You savvy him?' I demanded. The native nodded vigorously, and bit by bit I got from his badly hashed jargon that Atoonyak was a sort of polar sun-worshiper, only, instead of deifying the orb of day, he prayed to aurora borealis. He was of a tribe to which the interpreter did not belong and of which the latter had heard but little. A warlike nation—sort of arctic Aztecs—save that they fought not for conquest or spoils, but that there might be abiding peace. And whenever the flashing mystery of the northern lights showed itself, it was a sign that approval was theirs.

"Tradition had it, the priest had told him, that one day no man in all the world would fight his neighbor, and when that day arrived the aurora would flash forth in an intensity never known before. And it would never fade so long as peace remained. And the seals and walrus would come forth in great herds and the waters would be teeming with fish. No man would hunger so long as the aurora flamed.

"So, whenever the aurora wakened, the priest invoked it to remain constant, that it might be the sign that universal peace was here. And this was the symbolism of his mystic incantations.

"Just then I heard the rough voice of a bosun's mate ordering Atoonyak to 'pipe down the caterwauling.' I sought my berth.

"A few days later we dropped our mud-hook at Seattle. The next morning some one observed that Atoonyak and his interpreter had not rallied for breakfast, certainly an unusual circumstance. When we discovered a dingey missing from the boat-boom, where it had been made fast the night before, we decided it was unnecessary to search the ship for them."

HARMON paused and flicked the dead stub of his cigaret into a scupper. He sat silent for a moment, gazing at the oriflamme of the aurora which still painted the sky.

"When a police-boat found our dingey, our interest in Atoonyak and his companion rapidly subsided," Harmon resumed. "We hauled over to the navy-yard for repairs. We found the place deserted by all warships in commission. The Pacific Fleet, a mere skeleton during the war, as practically all of its units had been doing convoy work in the Atlantic, was now in Mexican waters, we were told. We of the *Reindeer* vaingloriously boasted that our craft, with its battery of three-inch rifles, could whip anything at the station.

"Repairs finished, we moved out to Port Townsend in the Straits, to coal and provision and await orders. And one night a week later, while I was idly listening to an interchange of code messages between two Japanese ships far out at sea, I heard the big wireless station at the navy-yard begin calling me.

"I leisurely snapped back the 'go-ahead' signal and he shot the message at me so fast I could hardly keep up with him. It was in navy code, and he made me repeat to make sure there was no error.

"By orders of Captain Millete, I always kept hidden in a locker in the wireless-room one of the lead-covered code-books, so that I could translate messages for him to save him the bother. In half a minute I had deciphered the radiogram. It was as clear and yet vague as it was cryptic.

"Proceed with all speed to Honak Harbor and hold at all costs. Further orders en route.

"BORDEN, acting.

"I read doubt in the skipper's mind when he saw the message. He checked my translation with his own code-book. But I had made no mistake.

"The message was official. It was an order. Moreover, it was a hurry-up command. Yet it might have been a direction to sail for the North Pole and land one keg of nails for all the sense it conveyed to us.

"Honak Harbor, you see, is one of the world's jumping-off places. It's an uninhabited spot a short distance west of where the great sea-arm of Cook Inlet begins to grope its way inland about the bases of fir-matted Alaskan mountains. We had put in there once to escape a nasty blow and we found it a wonderful haven; landlocked and not too deep for good anchorage.

"At the upper end an alluvial plain, through which runs a small river, makes a site for the town that will undoubtedly be there some day. For, back in the hills a few miles, easily accessible with a narrow-gage railway, are millions of tons of good steaming coal; great veins that stand out in black streaks on the sides of cliffs.

"In those hills, too, are iron, copper, nickel and antimony, to say nothing of gold and silver. It's a natural northern naval base, and some day they'll be building warships there from the materials right in those hills.

"All this was not new to us, yet why the order to 'hold at all costs?' Who would dare attempt to seize it? I knew the skipper was asking himself these questions while we were getting up anchor.

"At last the hook was being catted, when a power-boat chugged swiftly up to the port gangway, which was still down, and two men piled out and hurried up to the deck. I say hurried, because that is what the first man did. It was Atoonyak. And behind him, lugging a heavy box about three feet square, fitted with rope handles, came the interpreter. The motor-boat immediately shoved off.

" 'Who in —— told you to come aboard?' demanded a master-at-arms, but Atoonyak brushed him aside and headed straight for the deck officer who was approaching. The old fellow was all gesticulations and gutturals.

"The interpreter carefully deposited the box on deck and stepped forward.

" 'Him say we go home now,' naively explained the native, as if that settled the matter.

"The officer gazed after the vanishing motor-boat and swore. We were now under way. To have stopped and lowered a boat to put them ashore would have meant delay when our orders were to hurry. The ensign was puzzled.

" 'Come up to the bridge and tell it to the captain,' he finally ordered.

"The upshot was that they stayed.

"Uneventful days followed, while we churned steadily northward, with never another word from Washington, although I stood almost constant watch, fearing I would miss a call. And it was not until the rocky entrance to Honak Harbor began to show itself one evening just before dusk that I heard the high-pitched whine of a navy shore-station spark, querulously sounding the *Reindeer's* call. Captain Millete was in the wireless-room with me when I told the shore station to 'go ahead.'

"Again it was a code message, much longer than the previous one. I had to 'break' the 'sending' operator several times because of the atmospheric interference of a coarse, rasping spark of some strange ship not twenty miles distant and which opened suddenly. I made but one copy of the message and the skipper took it from me and hurried away to his own code-book before I could make a translation.

"No sooner had the shore station stopped than the stranger's spark opened again. It paused, and from somewhere far out in the ether void came a reply in an unknown code. The timbre of the second spark was identical with that of the first. It stopped, and once more my mysterious neighbor spoke. Then silence.

"Then came my call again, in the familiar high-frequency pitch of an American Navy ship. I knew that spark, though I hadn't heard it for months. It was the super-dreadnought *Luzon*, flagship of the Pacific Fleet, which I had supposed was off Lower California. He had a message. This time I decoded it.

" 'Two hundred miles south and making twenty knots,' it read. 'We have first division, including *Hawaii* and *Colon*. Hold at all costs for few hours and we will reinforce.'

"Again the 'hold at all costs!'

"I just naturally tore off my telephone receivers and dashed for the door, message

in hand. And there I bumped full into the captain's orderly, and sent him sprawling; but the kid was so excited that he didn't have any breath to lose. He thrust a message into my hand and I gave him the one I had just received.

" 'What—' I began, but he guessed my question.

" 'We're getting ready to go into action!' he yelled back over his shoulder as he dashed for the bridge.

"And darned if he wasn't right!

"All about on deck there was the orderly rush of men galvanized into efficient movement. They were unshipping our battery of six-pounders, while ammunition-hoists were clanking as they brought up food for the little spit-firers. Boat crews were getting their craft ready to be swung outward and cut loose when the time came, for no ship goes into action with more wood about her decks than is necessary. Wood makes splinters, you see. Everything else about our superstructure that was movable was being stowed below.

"Clearly, my place was at my instruments, so back to the wireless-room I went.

"From a port-hole I saw that we were swinging in between the two great mountains which guard the entrance to Honak. The strange wireless spark that had troubled me suddenly grew louder. With never a slackening of speed we swung around the jutting elbow that shelters the inner anchorage from the sea, and as we did so, I heard our bugler sound 'to quarters!'

"I craned my neck farther out of the port, and so help me, if there, hove to just inside the anchorage, wasn't a waspish-looking destroyer, broadside on. This was the ship whose spark I had been hearing. No other vessel was in sight.

"She was a muddy gray and small, but speed stood out all over her. So far as I could see she carried but two small rapid-firers and a torpedo-tube fore and aft. Smoke curled lazily from her four funnels. She flew no flag.

"No sooner did we come in sight than the men who had been idling about her decks jumped into activity. Over the water came the faint notes of a bugle, echoing from the darkening shadows of the hills about.

"On we went, until not more than four hundred yards separated us from the stranger. Then we stopped, and I heard our skipper hail.

" 'This is not an international port,' he called. 'I must request you to leave at once.'

"The destroyer's dapper little commander was disposed to argue. He dallied, protested, and invoked treaties and 'gentlemen's agreements.' Then I heard our captain bark through his megaphone again.

" 'Get under way in five minutes or we shall open fire!'

"It was bold language. If Captain Millete made good his threat it meant war with a world power, for although the destroyer flew no flag, she didn't need to. And war had not been declared. Moreover, we were but a coastguard cutter; an insignificant ship with a battery of mere pop-guns, and while the destroyer had even fewer guns than we, she had torpedoes, one of which would have obliterated us. And yet there we lay, stripped to our decks, our battle-flag at the main-peak, even as the *M'Culloch* had been with Dewey at Manila."

Harmon paused, and gazed silently at the dark line of the shore to the eastward.

"And what did the destroyer do?" I urged.

"She quit," replied Harmon shortly. "By the time the five minutes were up the smoke was belching from her funnels and she was quietly slipping toward the entrance.

"They passed within a hundred yards of us, a sinister, snake-like thing in the gathering gloom, and as they did so their captain made a mock obeisance.

" '*Au revoir!*' he called, a sneer in his voice. 'Perhaps we shall return. Then—look out!'

"Captain Millete spat over the side.

" '—— her!' he growled 'I'd like to riddle her shell with six-pounders!'

"Right on her heels we followed until we reached the outer entrance. There we stopped. On went the destroyer until she was beyond the three-mile limit. We marked her lights as she veered around and hove to.

"I slipped on the receivers again, and heard the destroyer's rough spark sounding over and over a call. Her operator stopped to listen, then began calling again. Captain Millete appeared at the door.

" 'The destroyer is trying to get some one, sir,' I reported.

"The skipper started.

" 'Their North Pacific Squadron!' he exclaimed.

" 'And she's got them, too,' I announced as I heard the far-away voice of a wireless spark make answer.

" 'Block her!' ordered the skipper. 'Drown out her spark. If those ships get here ahead of ours, it's good-by *Reindeer* and everything else!'

"And then he decided to satisfy a curiosity that had been eating me alive. Apparently the second message, which he had not allowed me to decode, had explained all.

" 'Perhaps it would be well for you to understand our position,' he said. 'It is this: That nation,' and he pointed toward the destroyer, 'wants Honak Harbor for a naval base so badly that she is willing to take a chance; she's wanted it for years and thinks she sees her opportunity now. While the world is in turmoil over boundaries, why not grab it on the pretext of a mythical ancient possession, just as territory has been grabbed in Europe and even the Orient, and then make a fight for it at the peace-table, she asks herself?

" 'If compelled to restore it, well and good; everything to gain, nothing to lose. She banks on possible ill-feeling toward the United States on the part of certain European powers, hoping they will strengthen her hand.

" 'When Washington heard about it, we chanced to be the best and only bet as a stop-gap; the fleet, as those tricky devils out there well knew, was in southern waters. And so, weak as we are, we were sent.

" 'The destroyer, of course, is a scout. Their main fleet is in rendezvous a hundred and fifty miles west of here, waiting word that the coast is clear. The destroyer must have arrived just ahead of us.

" 'And now, if they get here before our ships, we will have to dislodge them by main force. Yet if they find us here, awaiting the first overt act, as the diplomats would say, they'll never make the first break. They'll quit!'

"I had closed my sending key, and tightened the set screw until the contact was permanent. The spark was roaring steadily, while the ship's lights dimmed as the heavy load was thrown on the little generator in the engine-room.

" 'If nothing gives way, that'll hold them,' I told the captain. 'No ship lying as close as that destroyer can possibly send a message through the interference of our spark.'

"I stepped out of the wireless-room to be free of the spark's din. Far out, the destroyer's lights still showed. I chuckled as I thought of the invectives her wireless operator must be heaping upon me as he tried to make himself understood through the terrific commotion in the ether my wireless set was causing.

"Thus, upon a contrivance of copper wires rested the peace of two nations. If our set held up under the strain; if the sturdy little dynamo below did not falter, or an overcharged circuit fuse under its hot burden, succor for the checkmated destroyer might not arrive until our fleet appeared. If some weakened part gave way and the destroyer's operator got his message through——

"AS I leaned over the rail, speculating, some one sidled to me and there was Atoonyak, and behind him, his satellite. The latter still lugged the mysterious box—in fact, Atoonyak had never permitted it to be out of the reach of either as long as they had been aboard the ship. In the tense moments just past we had all but forgotten the little old priest, yet here he was, grinning toothlessly and amiably. Just to see what he would do, I tried to make him understand the situation.

" 'Look's like the old boy's goddess of peace is about to jilt him,' I told the interpreter.

" 'She seems to be losing her punch, although she's still on the job,' and I pointed toward the northern sky, where the ghostly glow of the aurora was beginning to show.

"Of course, the native didn't understand half of what I said, yet he obediently hissed and clicked at the old priest for half a minute. At my motion toward the north, Atoonyak faced that way. The delicate, whitish light that heralds the coming of the gorgeous phenomenon began to spread over the sky.

"A word from Atoonyak and the interpreter placed the box directly in front of the priest, as he faced the pole. And then Atoonyak's body began to sway as I had seen it do before. Slowly, from side to side he weaved, while from his lips came the weird croon.

"A broad streamer flared across the sky, and died out. Atoonyak's movement quickened, as if at a sign, and his 'chirring' grew louder. A banneret came and vanished. The priest's hands stretched in supplication. A phalanx of gilded spears shot upward as if in answer. His palms turned outward and the spears subsided. Once more they rose, this time half across the sky; wheeled, and disappeared. Then a baldric of bluish-tinted light connected pole with zenith. Others followed; twisting, shimmering things, fragile-looking as spun glass.

"And every man jack of those who clustered around and gazed with wide-eyed awe at the mystic rite which this strange little old man observed would have sworn that the glittering spectacle in the heavens moved at his command.

"The air became static. I felt the tremendous electrical energy which surcharged the atmosphere stir my hair, and away from the noise of the spark could be heard a crinkly, snapping sound as if some one rubbed the fur of a large black cat. Atoonyak still wove his spell, always with the box before him.

"Suddenly I forgot priest and aurora, for my spark, which had been keeping a roaring accompaniment to his crooning, abruptly died out. I jumped for the wireless-room, and a minute later Captain Millete, who had likewise noted the spark's cessation, was with me. A look confirmed a guess.

" 'Transformer burned out and I'll need hours to fix it,' I reported, and the skipper swore, not blasphemously, but feelingly.

"He turned toward the door to do the only thing remaining to be done, when an exclamation from me halted him.

"I had slipped on the receivers, just to hear the infernal destroyer's operator seize his opportunity. And there he was, sending away like mad, as if fearful I would again 'jam' him out of the atmosphere.

"And yet he finished his message, and waited for acknowledgment and none came. He began to call, first anxiously, then frantically. Yet the ether void remained silent as a crypt.

"His message had not got over!

" 'By ——, he's blanketed!' I shouted. And then, seeing the uncomprehending look on the skipper's face, and partly to excuse my profanity, I hastened to explain.

" 'If you take two C tuning-forks, such as are used in any singing-school, fasten one at each end of a table, and strike one, the other will vibrate in sympathy. That's wireless. Yet, if you suddenly strike the table a sharp blow, both forks will stop vibrating instantly. That's what has happened here.

" '*And it is the northern lights that have struck that blow!*

" 'The Alaskan blanket, wireless operators call it, and it is peculiar to these waters. When the lights are on, the working radius of a wireless set is cut down to but a few miles. For example, I can hear that destroyer's set, three miles away, yet the fleet he is trying to reach, a hundred and fifty miles distant, may as well be on the other side of the globe. No wireless set constructed by human hands can send out waves that will overcome the powerful electrical impulses from the pole. Those bands of light in the sky are wireless waves we can see.

" 'So long as the aurora continues to flare, he can't reach his fleet.'

"Captain Millete stepped outside, where Atoonyak still danced and invoked his flaming deity of the north.

" 'Make it strong,' he told the priest, now trance-gripped with religious fervor. 'Keep up that sun-dance until the *Luzon* gets here and I'll fill your hide full of the best grub on the ship!'

"AND Atoonyak did. He did it not for grub, but—well, perhaps this was the first opportunity he had had to pay his respects to his beloved goddess of peace since he had gone south with us weeks before, for as you have seen tonight the lights in the softer latitudes are uninspiring, compared to those witnessed up here. But all night long, while that ghostly flare—that silent semblance of limitless power—wove marvelous patterns in gossamer in the heavens, the old priest urged it on with an energy almost incredible.

"And when, just before dawn, it suddenly withdrew, the fire burned out of him, and he collapsed, and his awe-smitten retainer, aided by kindly bluejackets, carried him below. I chose to believe that it was disappointment and not exhaustion that had struck him down; for the lights did not flash on forever—somewhere in the world man still fought man.

"And an hour later, when the inland peaks were softening with the new day, there came out of the south the *Luzon* and her cohorts—their probescis-like prows throwing spray so that it glittered in the morning sun like a god's fistful of jewels. In fan-shape formation they spread out in front of the harbor entrance. And when the opposing fleet did show up, it never stopped turning a wheel, but steamed by, far out at sea. The prize wasn't worth the effort.

"Atoonyak we landed at Point Barrow again; made a special trip to do it, in fact. And when he and his interpreter were going over the side, the latter, carrying the mystery-box, slipped. The box struck the gangway steps and split open. And what do you suppose slid into the sea?

"Phonograph records!

"Yes, sir, that old spell-weaver had made the entire trip to the States for the sole purpose of getting for his people one of the white man's magic boxes and records. And, moreover, he had gone clear to Washington to get them; thinking, doubtless, that such powerful medicine must of necessity come only from headquarters. It had taken him weeks to make the trip. Perhaps he had been shrewdly waiting at Port Townsend until the bustle of our getting under way told him the time was opportune to board us for the return trip.

"When he saw his records vanish he would have jumped after them. And then he wanted to embrace Captain Millete when the latter ordered the entire collection of records for the ward-room machine given to him.

"Somewhere up north of the Arctic Circle tonight he's probably doing his shimmying incantations for his peace goddess to the jazziest tunes ever canned!"

THROWING THE FACE

by **Thomas S. Miller**

TO KILL your enemy without shedding blood is the motive behind most of the bad ju-ju or charms of West Africa. To spill blood is to spill the life—release the spirit, that is; and spirits lurk around to take horrible revenge. So the black tries to rid himself of his enemy by charming sickness on him.

Of these charms none are held in deeper horror and terror than "Throwing the Face." The victim becomes aware that a face has been thrown on him by seeing a face everywhere he goes. Probably his enemy has let him know he has thrown the face and his fears do the rest. Anyway he begins to see a face in places where a face would not ordinarily be—on the thatch of his hut, on the walls, in his mealie pot, in the bush—indoors and out of doors, daytime and night-time, a little way off—always a little way off, neither coming nearer nor going farther. Not a fancied face—a picture in the air—but a real flesh-and-blood face.

Go where he will, look in front or look behind, the face is always there where he looks. A great horror of it possesses him. He grows sick. He grows so sick he wants to die.

And that is the way it generally ends—in suicide, which gives the charmer the laugh on him, for he will meet that face in the next world. He can not get away from it. It would be no good to hunt down his charmer and kill him, even if the charmer didn't take special care to keep away—go off on a visit to another tribe till his victim has committed suicide; it is no good killing the charmer, for that person himself can not remove the curse; for when he put the charm on the other, something of himself went with it. For that reason the curse is used only in cases of great rage or terrible injury and mad hatred.

THAT FRONT-LINE FEELIN'

by **R. Rondale**

SAY! Buddy, won't you tell me straight, honest an' square dealin',
Ain't there times, now an' then, when you miss that front-line feelin'?
You know how it was up there when a-goin' in at first—
Feelin' kinda tight inside but rough—ready for the worst.
Then, after you'd been in a hitch an' learned to play the game,
That flirtin' around with Old Man Death never did get tame!
But since you're back an' seen the folks an' played about a bit,
Don't things get sadly slow, you know? Just nothin' seems to fit.
"War is ——!" I'll say it is! But now, Buddy, you compree;
Penny-ante has no kick after playin' limit free!
You'll remember how it was when we didn't give a ——
'Twas: "Here she comes! Hey! Hit a hole!"

wooOOSH—
Ka-Bam!
Ka-Bam!

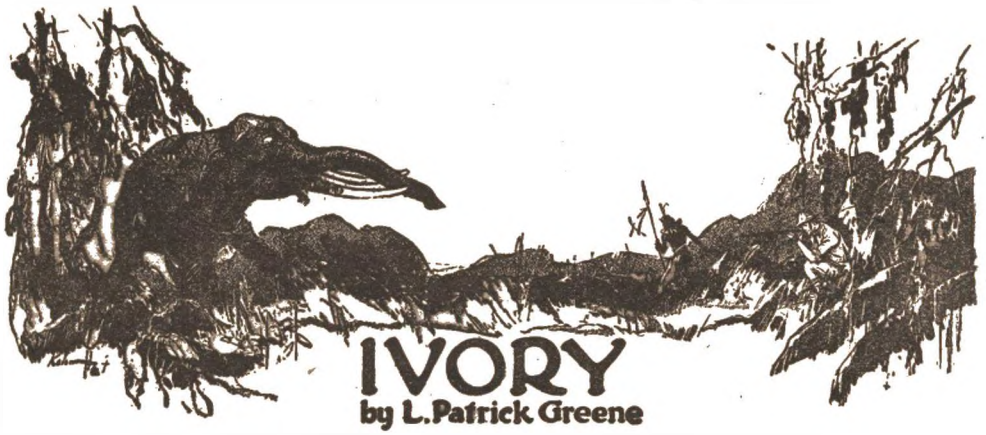
Yes, you remember how it was those mad days on the line.
Men's souls were stripped—an' then we found that most of 'em were fine.
These easy days an' easy ways are pretty soft, I know,
But ain't there times you long to hear our battle-cry, "Let's go!"?
Somehow that front-line feelin' is almighty hard to match.
Life always tastes th' sweeter when you've got 'er up at scratch.

Why, we lived years in minutes—crawlin' out in No-Man's Land—
A-jumpin' on a boche patrol an' fightin' hand to hand!
Over th' top for th' big show—your beatin' heart on fire;
Hot lead a-singin' in your ears, a-*pingin'* in the wire!
Followin' blind the blue barrage under the ol' tin hat,
Till their machine guns opened up—

Tat-tat!
Tat-tat!
Tat-tat!

You can see those smokin' batt'ries a-roarin' out their wrath
Where the spotted lanes o' camouflage hid every telltale path.
From forward observation posts (grandstands—the greatest game)
Tortured miles of hellish landscape steel-torn an' lit by flame.
An' darting flocks of flying ships a-jousting in the sky;
The dogged waves of infantry a-goin' in to die!
Battalions adventuring—venturing for a cause;
Youth thrilling to the battle-shock an' jesting in the pause!
Look backward now and see it! Fighting through with fighting men!
Don't you wish that front-line feelin' could come to you again?
When loving life but daring death—fearless the final pang—
We laughed at 'em crackin' over—

Whiz-Bang!
Whiz-Bang!
Whiz-Bang!



IVORY

by L. Patrick Greene

Author of "Two of a Kind," "Thicker than Water," etc

"SO YOU think you've got evidence to convict the Major?"

Trooper Fenwick of the Transvaal Mounted Police, in charge of an out-station near the Portuguese border, made no attempt to conceal the sarcasm in his voice.

His companion, a plain-clothes man from the Johannesburg headquarters, spat his disgust.

"What do I care about evidence? I've suspicions; that's enough for me. If I can't get evidence it's easy enough to manufacture."

"No wonder they call you 'Dirty' Norton," drawled Fenwick.

"What do you mean?" snarled Norton.

"Oh, nothing in particular. But they do call you that, don't they?"

"From what I heard on the way up here you are too bloomin' thick with the Major. First thing you know I'll have you in irons for aiding and abetting.

"Fat chance," laughed Fenwick. "Why, I'd be tickled to death to be able to get the goods on him and arrest him myself. I tried it once," he added reminiscently.

"Yes, and everybody's been laughing at you since," said Norton with vindictiveness.

"Well, from what I've heard he's made a fool of you once or twice."

"Yes, and he's going to pay for that."

"I suppose it's no good asking you to play a sportin' game with the Major? You wouldn't understand. I'll admit that he's broken more laws probably than any other white man in the country. But I doubt if he has any enemies—save you and a few others like you.

"There's not one of us in the 'Mounted' but would give a year's pay if we could only get the Major. But we play fair—we want to get the goods on him. The Major is royal game and is protected from traps and poison."

"Bah! You're all alike when you talk about the Major. I've got orders to get him. He's made laughing-stock of the police force long enough. The papers are calling him the African Robin Hood. Robin Hood, ——!

"But he's got his nerve with him, I'll say that. He camps up here within a mile of a police out-station and buys diamonds from the natives returning to their *kraals* from the mines. Yes, he's doing that right under your nose."

Norton laughed triumphantly as he noticed the look of blank amazement on Fenwick's face.

"And you've proof of that?"

"Yes. Right here."

Norton slapped his pocket, but he did not tell Fenwick that the proof consisted of several diamonds which he intended to "find" on the Major's person, failing to secure legitimate evidence.

"I'll ride out to his place," went on Norton. "It's too hot to walk."

"You'll have to. My horse is lame. Don't you want me along?"

"No. I'll handle this alone. I'll start in half an hour and be back here before sundown. And the Major will be with me— handcuffed."

Neither man had noticed a grizzled Hottentot gossiping idly with the Native Police boys, and who departed unobtrusively at this juncture.

When Norton arrived at the Major's camp he found it abandoned. Pinned to the door was a note:

Dear old chap (My boy didn't get your name. Is it Dirty?): I'm sorry I could not be at home to greet you, specially after your hot walk. And I'm so curious to know what your proof was. Diamonds? Tut! Tut! You really must be careful. You're under suspicion yourself. That's why they sent you up here after me—to get you out of the way for a while.

Ta-ta. Jim—he's up a tree watching the trail—says he can see you coming over the rise. It's time for us to depart.

The air resounded with Norton's curses as he made his way slowly back to the outstation. Once he stopped to throw a stone at a hyena whose laughter seemed to mock him.

Fenwick regarded him curiously as he drew near.

"Well, you didn't get him."

It was a statement rather than a question. Norton's answer was a stream of curses.

"Come into the hut," said Fenwick. "There's something I want to say to you."

Fenwick seated himself and played with the revolver on the table before him.

"Well?" snapped Norton.

"The mail-boy came while you were away. There's a warrant for your arrest."

"No you don't," he said sharply as Norton reached for his gun. "I've got you covered. Hold out your hands."

Sullenly Norton held out his hands.

"I don't like doing this to a white man," said Fenwick, snapping on the handcuffs. "But I can't take chances."

"What's the charge?" growled Norton.

"Accepting bribes from a diamond-running syndicate. It simply means you'll be broke, I suppose, and that won't worry a man like you any."

All of which simply explains why the Major thought it necessary to make a prolonged stay in Portuguese territory—knowing only of the fact that the order had gone out for his arrest and of how Norton swore viciously that he would one day get even with the Major, whom, by some queer twist of reasoning, he held responsible for the evil that had befallen him.

"FOR what purpose doth the white man desire to dwell among us?"

The old head man's tone was truculent. The warriors behind him nodded their approval.

The Major dismounted, and, adjusting his monocle, said:

"As ye see, great chief and warriors, my horse is lame and can go no farther. Far have we traveled, far and fast, since the going down of the sun on the day that was yesterday, until now it sets again. Also the wagon is broken and I needs must make repairs. I am at thy mercy, great chief."

He pointed to the small wagon, drawn by four mules, in which sat Jim, the Hottentot.

"Aye; I see, I see," replied the old fellow, visibly pleased at the Major's broad flattery. "Yet do I not see why thou didst come like a thief in the night to my country."

"I have heard that the lord of the jungle, the elephant, is wont to spoil thy crops, and thou hast no lead for thy guns."

"It is true; it is true. What then?"

"Methought I could assist thee in the killing of the wicked ones. Also I have much lead. But I see that thou dost not need me."

He made as if he would mount and called to Jim:

"We must trek still farther, Jim. The great chief hath no need of us."

"Stay," called the head man. "It was in my mind to pray thee to dwell for a space among us. Yet have I no hut worthy of thy acceptance. Thou hast lead, thou sayest?"

The Major walked to the wagon and took from it a large lump of lead weighing all of twenty pounds. This he held on outstretched palm toward the head man, who, unsuspecting the true weight of it, took it with one hand. But the weight was too much for him and he let it drop to the ground.

The warriors behind him shook visibly with mirth, but the Major gravely picked it up and gave it back to the head man and then put another on top of it.

"It is for thee, great chief," he said.

The head man turned and ran quickly with the precious gift to his hut.

"Outspan, Jim," commanded the Major. "We are going to stay here for a while."

FOR two weeks the Major lived at the village of Ugubu. Every day he explored the country round, sometimes with Jim as his only companion, but more often in company with the young warriors of the *kraal*. Game was plentiful and never before had the people of the *kraal* been so abundantly supplied with fresh meat. Because of his hunting-prowess and his knowledge of medicine and ability to pull teeth the Major became a power in the *kraal* and was regarded by all as a miracle-worker.

The evenings he spent gossiping with the head man and the old men, or watching the dances of the young men and maidens.

It was not until he had been with them two weeks and had fully won the confidence of the old head man that he spoke about the elephant-tusks that were built into the stockade that encircled the hut of Ugubu.

"Whence came the tusks, my father?" he asked.

"They were brought here by my father's father."

"He was a great hunter then—as thou art?"

"Nay, he was no hunter. Moreover the tusks were yellow with age, even as thou seest them now, when he brought them to this place."

"And knowest thou not whence they came?"

"It was whispered among the people, white man, that. having sold his snake to the spirits of evil, he was shown the place to which all bull elephants go when their time has come to die. Of the truth of that I know not.

"In the night-time, so said my father, my father's father was wont to leave the *kraal*, not returning until sunup of the next day. And when he returned he brought with him a tusk. He would not say where he had been, and because he was a head man none durst question him.

"One day he did not return, and warriors went out to look for him. But it had rained heavily in the night-time and they could not find his spoor. Without doubt he was carried off by the evil spirits."

NEXT day word was brought that a large herd of elephants was moving toward Ugubu's *kraal*, and the Major with Jim, accompanied by several of Ugubu's picked hunters, went down to the corn-patches. The native hunters were armed with heavy muzzle-loading guns, and among them was Umwese, Ugubu's only son.

It had been the custom for ages past for the hunters to await the elephants close by the corn-patches, but the Major demurred.

"If we wait here," he said, "we accomplish no good purpose, for even should we stampede the elephants some would run amuck through the corn, causing great damage. Let us therefore go farther along the way by which they must come."

The Major knew that could they succeed in killing the "bull," the leader of the herd, the rest would undoubtedly be frightened away from that vicinity. Being a true sportsman, he detested the wanton slaughter of the majestic creatures that so often was excused by the bald statement, "They were destroying the crops."

"Thy words are words of wisdom," assented the hunters.

"Then ye will do as I command?"

"Even so."

"It is my order then that ye shoot not the cows nor the young bulls. At the old bulls only shall ye fire, and the big bull, the leader of the herd, ye shall leave to me."

The party went forward, calling softly to each other at intervals that they would not lose track of one another in the dense jungle growth.

After about an hour's trekking Umwese, who was to the right and a little ahead of the Major, gave a grunt of astonishment. He had nearly walked into a young bull which was standing under a big tree, and as the wind was blowing from him showed no knowledge of the presence of a human being.

In his eagerness to get the first kill Umwese forgot all about the white man's instructions and neglected to give the word of warning.

Resting his gun on a convenient branch, he took steady aim and fired.

There was a terrific explosion. Somehow his barrel had become choked up with sand. The gun flew out of his hands, and he was knocked flat on his back. Quickly recovering, he sprang to his feet and saw the elephant, trumpeting with rage, charging at him. Umwese turned and ran swiftly back and toward the Major.

And now it seemed that the forest was alive with elephants charging madly this way and that. The jungle creatures of the

night were awakened from their sleep by the loud cries of the natives, the report of guns and shrill trumpetings of pain as a bullet found its mark.

The big bull, the leader of the herd, seemed to rise out of the ground directly in front of the Major and threshed about in savage indecision with his trunk.

Just as the Major was about to fire Umwese came dashing through the undergrowth, hard chased by the angry bull. The Major pivoted quickly and fired. It was a head shot. As if struck by a mighty pole-ax, the big beast swerved in his tracks and toppled over, dead.

"Quick, *baas*," said Jim. "The big one is going to charge."

The Major took the rifle Jim put into his hands.

"I'm going to try the 'knee halter'," he drawled in English, then fired.

The bull nearly fell as the bullet struck in the knee-joint; then, trumpeting shrilly with pain, he turned in his tracks and limped slowly away.

"Quick; another shot!" exclaimed Jim.

"It is enough."

"Umwese," he said, addressing that crest-fallen but grateful hunter, "bid the others to come here."

A long hail quickly summoned them, elated at the success of the hunt; for no less than five bulls had fallen.

"Thy crops are safe. Is it not so?"

"Aye, white man. Yet the big bull still lives. They will come again."

"Not so. His leg is broken. There is naught for him to do but die. No longer can he run with the herd."

"That is true, white man. Yet he still lives, and his tusks are mighty and his hide of great value to us. Let us therefore follow and kill him."

"Not so. I have said he was my meat. Now go ye back to the *kraal* and tell of thy prowess. Bring all the people hither that they may witness with their own eyes what thou hast done.

"And now," said the Major, speaking in English as he was wont to do when alone with Jim, "we'll find out where the old chappie at the *kraal* got his ivory."

"Yah, *baas*," assented Jim. "But first kill the big bull."

"You're a rum codger, Jim," mused the Major. "You want me to kill the old fellow because he's got a big pair of tusks. I want him to live long enough to show us where there are hundreds of tusks."

"Yah, *baas!*"

"Now we will follow him, but slowly," as Jim started off on the spoor at a run, "because I don't want to hurry the old fellow."

Though the elephant had had a good thirty minutes' start it did not take them long to catch up with him, so handicapped was he with his crippled knee. And once the trailers caught up with him it was no difficult matter to keep to his trail.

Though at times he was hidden from their sight, lost—giant of the forest though he was—among the thickly leaved trees and creeping vines, his spoor was plain in the soft ground, and always they could hear the crashing of his huge bulk and the snapping of branches which he tore down in his rage.

For a time he followed the trail taken by the fleeing herd, of which he had once been the prideful leader.

Where the trail crossed a small *spruit* he stopped for a while.

He stopped perchance to give his crippled leg a rest, perchance to send a silent farewell to the herd which had forsaken him. Certain it was that his stopping had nothing of indecision in it.

He trumpeted once; then, slowly turning, followed the course of the small stream.

The trail now was hard, leading as it did up-hill, and was strewn with boulders. Here he had much ado to keep his footing, hampered as he was by the broken leg which he trailed painfully on the ground. At first he essayed to make his way easier by removing with his trunk some of the smaller boulders. But evidently the process was too slow, and he soon gave it up.

At a shallow pool in a hollow of some rocks he filled his trunk with water and squirted it on his wounded leg. This seemed to revive him and he went on for a while at a faster gait, so that the two men had to break into a run in order to keep up with him.

He now left the course of the *spruit*, which skirted—as they now saw—the base of a rocky hill, and picked his way among the big boulders. He headed directly up the gently sloping sides of the hill toward the top, which was fringed with a queer rock formation. Sheer up from the ground stood the reef, some thirty feet in height, forming a solid, impassable barrier.

RESTING occasionally—for the big fellow was weakening—he made straight for the rock, and when but a hundred yards from it broke into a ludicrous attempt at a charge.

"Well, I'm jiggered," said the Major as he breathlessly seated himself on a boulder. "Have I come all this way just to see the bally blighter commit hara-kiri by dashing his bloomin' brains out on a rock?" He bent down to loosen his legging and was occupied with a balky buckle when a shout of amazement from Jim made him quickly look up.

The elephant had vanished.

"Where did he go, Jim?"

"I don't know, *baas*. Straight to the rock he went and it opened and swallowed him up. Let us go; this is a place of evil."

"Nonsense, Jim. He must have doubled on his tracks somewhere—or perhaps he's down behind a big boulder."

"*Ikona, baas!* With my own eyes I saw it. To the rock he went and then I saw him no more. Not once have my eyes left the place he entered."

And indeed Jim's eyes stared fixedly ahead of him, hypnotized by fear of the unknown.

"Deuced funny," quoth the Major. "Come, Jim. Let's go and look at this rock that swallows elephants alive."

Jim refused to budge and the Major, knowing the folly of trying to argue with a superstitious native, walked alone up to the rock.

He followed closely the path taken by the elephant; then at the place where it had spurred up its courage to a game attempt of a charge he stopped short. He walked a little way to the left; back again; then to the right; back again; and stopped.

"Come here, Jim," he shouted gleefully.

"Nay, *baas*. It is a place of evil."

"Thou speakest folly," he cried in the vernacular. "Come here."

Jim tremblingly obeyed. Great as was his fear of the spirits, his fear of the Major's wrath was even greater. When the Major commanded in that tone Jim, spirits or no spirits, obeyed.

"Look, Jim. What do you see?"

The Major pointed to the rock. Jim looked fearfully as if expecting to see the souls of the Wicked One awaiting him. But seeing to what the Major pointed he grinned foolishly.

"It is an opening in the rock, *baas*."

"Yes. It's the opening that swallowed up the elephant, and this is the only place from which it is visible. Come on."

The Major was excited, and as he ran to the opening he shouted like a boy released from school.

On reaching the cleft in the rock he sobered down.

"Bai Jove! It's a decidedly spooky feelin'. Just think, Jim, we're the only living mortals who've been here."

"Yah, *baas*," agreed Jim.

"It must have been a tight fit for the old fellow," said the Major as he and Jim passed into the cleft.

This they now saw was a deep ravine, as if the rock had been split by an earthquake. Though the entrance to it was, as the Major said, narrow, it at once widened and was all of twelve feet in width. The sides of the ravine, however, converged as they neared the top, and in some places actually touched.

Turning and twisting as the ravine did, they did not come in full view of the elephant—though at times they heard his shrill trumpeting—until half an hour later, when they emerged, as Jim put it, "from the belly of the earth."

Then they saw the bull leaning against a big rock, his breath coming and going in big choking gasps.

But their attention was held elsewhere. Before them, a sheer drop of twenty feet or more, was a small valley enclosed on all sides by the queer rock formation; a valley devoid of vegetation save round the edges where grew luxuriant vines and here and there, like sentinels, giant baobab-trees.

All was deadly calm. No living thing seemed to have its habitation there, and scattered on the ground in endless profusion were the skeletons of elephants—hundreds of them.

"They've been coming here to die," mused the Major, "since the birth of the world. It's majestic."

He doffed his helmet, as one in the presence of honored dead.

"Watch the bull, *baas*," whispered Jim.

The big fellow was slowly collecting his strength. Gradually he righted his big bulk until finally, disregarding the torture to his wounded leg, he stood on all four feet.

Then began the dance of the elephant, that monotonous lifting of the feet and the swaying of the big body.

Perhaps he saw the ghosts of his ancestors rise before him; heard their trumpeting of welcome; for suddenly he stopped the dance and sounded the shrill call proclaiming the lordship of the elephant. Still trumpeting, he lunged madly forward to the edge of the cliff, then out and down on to the rocks below, where the Major could see him rolling over and over with the impetus of his fall.

The Major took his rifle.

"It seems like sacrilege to do it and I fancy the old chap would rather await his end patiently, as his fathers did before him. But——"

A shot rang out and then all was still.

IT WAS long past sundown when the Major and Jim returned to the *kraal* of Ugubu. Their advent was heralded by glad shouts, and a number of young warriors surrounded the Major and escorted him in triumph to the guest hut.

After he had bathed and changed into a suit of white duck he strolled down to the hut of the chief to partake of the feast that had been prepared in his honor.

Ugubu with ill-concealed impatience waited until the Major had finished his meal before questioning him as to the happenings of the day. For it is not courteous, look you, to hold speech with a guest until he has eaten.

"Thou art a man," he said when the Major could eat no more and contentedly rolled himself a cigaret.

The Major, making no reply, lighted his cigaret with a brand from the fire.

"Aye. Thou art a man and a hunter."

"Thy young men are hunters also."

"But one, my son—it is to my shame I say it—played the part of a fool."

"He is yet young; he will learn. But he is a man."

"How sayest thou?"

"Having done foolishly, yet made he no attempt to hide his folly from thee. Yet none knew of his folly."

"Save thee?"

"Aye. I knew, but would not have told."

"And will not tell?"

"Nay. To what purpose?"

"Then can my son's folly be kept secret, for to none other hath he spoken. I have said thou wast a man. I thank thee." Ugubu spoke with simple dignity.

"It was but a small matter."

"Not so, white man. Thou hast preserved mine honor; that is no light thing. Also thou didst save my son from death."

"Thy son meant much, then, to thee?"

"He is my only son, and as yet no man child calls him father. Had he died this day my name would have passed out of the memory of this people. But say now how I reward thee."

The Major leaned forward.

"Hark thou, Ugubu. Rememberest thou that time thou didst tell me the story of the elephants' place of death?"

Ugubu nodded his assent.

"I have found that place."

"Is this how I can repay thee—by listening to tales of folly?" said Ugubu whimsically.

"It is no folly. I speak a true thing."

"What then?"

It is characteristic of the race that Ugubu showed no signs of undue interest.

"On the morrow I go with Jim to Lourenço Marques, the place of the white men, to make a bargain for the tusks that are at the place of the elephants' death. When I come again, or should I send that black one there—" he pointed to where Jim sat with the other hunters, roasting big chunks of elephant meat—"wilt thou give order to thy young men to do all that I command, that the ivory may be taken to the place of barter? It will mean great wealth for thee—guns, powder and lead in abundance."

"All shall be as thou desirest, white man. It is but a small thing thou askest."

"It is well, Ugubu. Tomorrow I and the black one go, as I have said, to the place of the white men. Ere the passing of another moon I will return."

TEN days later the Major entered the office of Nathan Abraham, "Dealer in Ivory, Loans, etc.," with a bland smile on his round, clean-shaven face.

Dressed in a suit of immaculate white duck, eye-glass firmly in place, he looked just what he pretended to be—the foolish son of a wealthy English family sent to Africa to acquire wisdom.

Abraham looked up at his visitor with no show of interest. Such men did not ordinarily have dealing with him save when their remittance was overdue. Then they came to negotiate a loan, and if the interest was exorbitant—well, as Nathan put it, "business is business."

He motioned the Major to a seat and watched him as he peered aimlessly round the room.

"My name is Aubert St. John,"—he pronounced it Sinjun—said the Major by way of introduction.

Nathan bowed his acknowledgement.

"Top-hole place you have here, old chappie," continued the Major. "Quite up to the minute, what? Typewriter and all that bally rot."

Nathan nodded patiently. They were all alike at the first visit. Talked about anything rather than the loan for which they had come.

"Say, old chappie, I'm in a deuce of a fix."

Nathan beamed. His visitor was running true to type.

"I've got a chance to make a bally lot of money, but I don't quite know how to go about it."

"There are a lot of us like that," assented Nathan. "I suppose you want me to loan you some money until you find out 'how to go about it.' Well, if your securities are all right I'll——"

"Oh, no. Really now, old top. Nothing like that," interposed the Major with a show of confusion. "No, really. I want some advice on a real business deal."

"Business deal? You?" Nathan laughed.

The Major looked peeved.

"That's always the way. People always laugh at me when I talk about business. They must take me for a bally fool."

"Well—" Nathan made no attempt to conceal his mirth—"I'd hardly say that. But what's your scheme?"

"Scheme? Oh, yes; you mean, how I mean to make a lot of money. I knew you'd help me. They told me at the hotel you were the best business man in town. Of course I might have gone to some of the other dealers, but I don't speak Portuguese."

The Major tiptoed to the door, opened it cautiously; then, shutting it, came back and drawing his chair up closer to Nathan, said in a whisper—

"You're a dealer in ivory, aren't you?"

"Yes; what of it?"

"Hush! Not so loud. I know where I can get lots of it."

"If you think you are going out to shoot a lot of elephants like they did in the old days, you are on the wrong track. Elephants are protected game nowadays."

"Oh, I'm not going to shoot them. I wouldn't know how. Always was frightened at guns ever since my brother lit a firework under me one Guy Fawkes Day."

"Then what are you going to do? Hypnotize them while you saw off their tusks?"

"Oh, now you're spoofin'," expostulated the Major. "I'll tell you what I'm going to do. Have you ever heard that when elephants are getting old they all go to the same place to die? A sort of old elephants' home?"

Nathan nodded wearily. He had heard the legend many times. What African ivory-trader has not?

"Well, I'm going to find it."

"Yes? And what do you want me to do? Advance you money to outfit your expedition? Because I won't."

"There you go again, talking about loans. I've already got my outfit ready."

"Then what *do* you want?"

"I want you to buy the ivory, old chap. What good will it do me unless I can sell it?"

"Well, I'll buy all you find."

"Do you really mean it? How much will you give me for each tusk?"

"We don't buy ivory that way," Nathan chuckled, "but by the pound."

"Really! Then how much a pound?"

Nathan reached for the local paper and made a pretense of looking up the latest ivory quotations.

"Ten shillings a pound," he said.

"Good," said the Major. "It's a bargain."

He rose to go, hesitated, and slowly reseated himself.

"Well?" said Nathan impatiently.

He wanted to get rid of his visitor and tell the story to his boon companions at a near-by saloon. The joke was too good to keep.

"Well?"

"I hope you won't misunderstand me, old chap, but I do want to be business-like. Won't you put that offer in writing?"

Nathan crossed to the typewriter, and, picking out the letters with one finger, wrote for a few minutes.

Taking the paper from the machine, he handed it to the Major, who, screwing his eye-glass more firmly into place, read:

I, Nathan Abraham, contract to buy from bearer at ten shillings a pound all the ivory that may come into his possession.

(Signed) NATHAN ABRAHAM.

"Thanks, old top," drawled the Major. "This is going to make me rich."

AS THE door closed on his visitor Nathan threw himself back in his chair and laughed long and loudly. He was still chuckling when a few minutes later Dirty Norton burst into the room.

Since being cashiered from the police force as Fenwick had predicted, Norton had deemed it wise to leave the Transvaal before other charges could be brought against him. Now more than ever did his appearance and conduct warrant the nickname Dirty, so unkempt was his dress, his mode of living so questionable. Possessed of a certain low cunning, he had been useful to Nathan in many unsavory episodes—fraudulent schemes for separating newcomers to the colony from their money.

"What was the Major doing in here?" he asked abruptly.

"The Major? Oh, you mean that fool who just went out. He—he's—" Nathan spluttered in his mirth—"got a scheme for getting rich quick."

"Yes, he would have. What is it?"

"He's going to find where all the good elephants die, and I've given him a contract to buy all the ivory he finds. Ten shillings a pound I offered him. Oh, these fool Englishmen will be the death of me."

"You gave him a contract, did you, and at ten shillings?" exploded Dirty. "Then he's fooled you as he's fooled all of us, —— him!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, he's the slimmest thing in pants that you ever ran up against. If he talked ivory you can gamble your soul that he's got it. He's no fool for all his soft ways, his cursed drawl and his pink, manicured nails. He's wise, I tell you; he's wise."

Nathan looked anxious, then, remembering his late visitor's appearance, quickly recovered with a chuckle.

"What are you trying to frighten me for, Dirty? He's just a monocled Johnny."

"Yes, and he's the same monocled Johnny that's played merry —— with every police force in this country. I've been up against him before, and I know. He's got the goods all right."

"And I contracted to buy ivory from him at ten shillings a pound and the highest it's ever gone is ten shillings and sixpence. I'm a ruined man," wailed Nathan.

"What did you want to give him that price for?"

"How did I know who he was? He looked and acted like a —— fool. I thought I was safe and only did it for a joke."

"Well, the joke's on you."

"I'll repudiate the contract."

"Fat chance you'd have. He'd go to court and you don't want to get your face known there. You've fleeced too many of the officials. There's a better way. I've got an old grudge to settle against the ——, and now I'm going to settle up with him. Have you got anybody you can trust, and knows his way about the country a bit?"

"How about Smithy?"

"No. The Major knows him."

Nathan thought deeply.

"Hawkins then? I've got him under my thumb. He tried to raise one of my checks."

"Fine. Send him with a note to the Major. Write it now; I'll tell you what to say."

Slowly Nathan typed at Norton's dictation:

DEAR SIR:

In order to protect my interests and as evidence—should the Portuguese authorities raise any question—that you did not shoot the elephants, I must ask you to take the bearer, Thomas Hawkins, along with you on your trip.

I have the honor to be, sir,

Your obedient servant,

NATHAN ABRAHAM.

"What then?" questioned Nathan.

"Hawkins will find out where the ivory is, or whatever the Major's little game happens to be. As soon as he finds out he'll invent some excuse for leaving the Major and report to me. I'll be a day or two's trek behind them. I'll take care of the Major afterward. White men die violently in this —— of a country and no questions are asked."

WELL pleased with himself—having extracted from Nathan a promise to pay a higher rate than he had dared hope for the ivory—the Major walked jauntily to the hotel.

Outside the building that served as a hotel Jim accosted him.

"*Baas*, the man from whom we ran is here."

"You mean the policeman, Norton?"

"Yah, *baas*. Nigger boys down at the

compound say he no more a policeman."

"Well, well," said the Major thoughtfully.

"You'll be careful, *baas?*"

"Yes, I'll be careful, Jim. Bring the horses round early tomorrow. We'll be on our way to Ugubu's *kraal* before sunup."

In the hotel lobby a man stepped up to the Major. His clothes were faultless, but he wore them with the air of one who finds himself clad in unaccustomed raiment.

In marked contrast to his white linen were the marks of moral filth which gleamed in his eyes. He looked like an unrepentant prodigal who after years of living with the swine had suddenly acquired wealth.

"Are you Mr. St. John?"

The Major nodded.

"Mr. Abraham asked me to give you this."

The Major read the proffered note.

"Bah Jove, I'm glad to know you, Mr. Hawkins. And you're going with me? That's top hole. I was just thinking how deuced lonely the trip 'u'd be. Have you had tiffin yet? No? Then let's go and eat."

After dinner they went out on to the wide porch to enjoy the cool breeze. A bottle of whisky stood on the low table between their chairs, and from it the Major poured out for himself a stiff drink.

By the time the bottle was empty the plant at the Major's right hand, and away from Hawkins, was plentifully "watered."

"It's a 'str'ordi'ary thing," he hiccuped presently, "but I've forgot the name of the shappie who sent you."

"Nort — Nathan Abraham," answered Hawkins, whose senses were momentarily dulled.

The slip was a slight one, but the Major noted it with satisfaction.

"Oh, yes. Stupid of me."

He began to laugh softly.

"Pardon me for seemin' rude, but the fact is I worked old Nathan splendidly."

The Major leaned forward confidentially.

"You know I got him to sign a contract to buy some ivory. And he signed it because he thought I'd never get any, and the joke of it is I know where it is all the time. We'll start tomorrow."

When the Major retired a little later Hawkins lost no time in carrying the news to Norton and Nathan.

"What did I tell you?" Norton said triumphantly.

"Watch him closely, Hawkins," begged Nathan. "I'm a ruined man if you let him get away from you."

Norton went over the details of the plan with Hawkins; then, first drinking to the Major's confusion, Hawkins went back to the hotel that he might be ready to leave with the Major in the morning.

He had not thought it necessary to tell Norton of the slip he had made.

Early-riser though the Major was, he found Jim and Hawkins awaiting him. Waving a gay good morning, he mounted his horse and cantered slowly up the street with Hawkins but a pace behind him. Jim, also mounted, brought up the rear with the pack-mules at a more sober pace.

As they passed the building which Abraham used as an office, a window-shade was pushed slightly to one side and Nathan and Norton peered out at them.

"Well, things are going our way," said Nathan, rubbing his hands.

"Yes, —— him. I'll get him this time."

ONCE well out of the town, the Major pulled up his horse and waited for Hawkins to catch up with him.

"So you've really found the elephants' dying-ground?" Hawkins questioned.

"How did you know that? Have you been talking with my boy?" said the Major angrily.

"Why, no. Don't you remember telling me so last night, and what a joke it was on Nathan?"

"Did I tell you that? Then I must have been drunk. But it doesn't matter; I've got old Nathan's contract. He can't go back on that.

"Yes, I've found it. The only drawback is that it is also the burial-place of a native chief who was a big pot in his day. We'll have to go slow for fear of offending the niggers."

"Is it near here?"

"We ought to make it in eight or nine days."

"It's strange it hasn't been discovered before."

"Oh, it's off the beaten track a ways. Very few of the natives know of it, and they're sworn to secrecy on pain of death and all that. I stumbled upon it by accident. It's a gruesome place." The Major shivered.

At the first opportunity Hawkins questioned Jim.

"Is it true that your *baas* has found where the elephants go to die?"

"Yah. I have seen the place. It is a place of evil. The spirit of a dead chief watches over it."

"And there are many tusks there?"

"Yah. Many tusks. The ground is strewn with them like the sand on the river-bed."

On the seventh day the Major sent Jim on ahead.

"The place is near here," he explained to Hawkins. "I have sent Jim to get the porters I engaged for the job on my last trip. We will wait here until he returns with them."

That day passed very slowly, and the next morning Hawkins could no longer conceal his impatience.

"Let us go to the place," he suggested. "We could locate the best tusks and save that much time when the porters arrive."

"That's a good idea," said the Major, pulling on a pair of rubber hip-boots. "Too bad you haven't a pair of these. You'll need them."

The Major led the way directly into the heart of the jungle. The going was hard and Hawkins, ill-conditioned as he was, had a hard task to keep up with the swift pace set by him. Striking a small *spruit*, the Major followed its course for about half an hour when suddenly the jungle opened out into a swampy clearing and directly in front of them lay a large tract of heavily wooded jungle—a sort of island in a swampy sea.

"Come on," said the Major. "That's the place over there."

Then, seeing that Hawkins hesitated as the mire came over his ankles:

"Don't be afraid, old chap. That's as deep as it gets anywhere save for one or two holes that I'll try to avoid."

With no liking for the thing Hawkins gingerly followed closely in the Major's footsteps.

"This swamp goes all round the island—the Isle of the Dead I call it, but perhaps you don't know the picture—like a moat. This is the narrowest place across."

Once across the narrow swamp Hawkins was anxious to take the lead.

"Where now?"

"Straight ahead through those two big trees; they——"

Hawkins did not wait to hear further, but darted eagerly forward, the Major following at a slower pace.

Suddenly Hawkins gave a yell of fear, and turning, ran back as fast as he could. Behind him, yelling fiercely, raced a party of savages brandishing ugly-looking spears. Some had guns which they fired as they ran.

The Major turned and ran, but the big boots impeded his progress and Hawkins swiftly caught up with him.

"I'm hit," gasped the Major. "Help me, Hawkins."

Hawkins gave one look at his blood-soaked shirt, then sped on with increased speed.

The Major stumbled after him a few paces, then fell to the ground, his big shoulders heaving convulsively.

Paying him no heed the warriors swept on after the fleeing Hawkins, crying:

"Death to the defilers of the grave of a chief. Kill, kill!"

At the edge of the swamp the warriors stopped and contented themselves with shaking their spears at Hawkins, who with never a backward glance was soon lost to sight in the thickness of the jungle beyond.

IT WAS a weary and frightened Hawkins who crept into Norton's camp several days later and told his story.

"You are sure the —— is dead?" Norton asked.

"If he wasn't killed then they finished him off afterward. The devils meant business, I tell you."

"Well, he's out of the way. That makes it easier for us. You're sure you can find the place again?"

"Yes. But you are not going there now, are you?"

Hawkins' voice was panic-stricken.

"No, you —— fool. I'm going back to get a crowd together that will know how to handle the niggers. It'll mean a smaller share for us, but at that there ought to be a fortune in it. Thousands of tusks, the nigger said, didn't he? Think of it, man, and brace up."

THREE weeks later Norton and Hawkins, accompanied by ten men of their kidney, all heavily armed, crossed over the swampy moat to the "Isle of the Dead." Getting their footing on the "island," they scouted carefully about, rifles at the ready.

Nothing stirred, and save for the droning

of mosquitoes and the harsh scream of a "go-away" bird nothing broke the unnatural silence. The island seemed devoid of life.

"Come on," shouted Norton. "There's nothing here to be afraid of."

But the others still hung back.

"Bah! I'll show you," sneered Norton, and he went forward alone while the others watched, their rifles ready.

He made for an opening in the thick jungle growth and saw right in his path a small piece of flannel tied on a stick. At the foot of the stick was a small canvas bag.

With a feeling of foreboding he stooped and opened the bag. In it was a note. It read:

DEAR DIRTY:

(I think you're at the bottom of this, though I may be mistaken.) There's no fun spoofin' you, you are such a gullible idiot. As for Hawkins, oh he's impossible and has a yellow streak too. You should have seen him run when Jim—you ought to know Jim—led the savages to the attack. It was simply priceless! But don't be too hard on him. I was bleedin' frightfully—a few crystals of permanganate of potash and a wet handkerchief make an awful lot of blood.

Soon—perhaps while you are reading this—I shall be collecting on my first delivery of ivory to our mutual friend Nathan. Won't he be surprized to see me! And he won't dare to refuse payment, for I shall take the Commissioner of Police with me. He's a friend of mine, and has no liking for Nathan.

I can't tell you how sorry I am not to be able to see you. Really.

I have the honor to be, sir,

(Do you recognize the style?)

Your obedient servant,

THE MAJOR.

In the bush nearby a tiny tree-hyrax screamed in derision.

THE MAN-EATER

by

J. P. Leland

OLD CALOMEL turned in the air. The moment his feet struck the running-board he gathered himself for a quick spring into the old darky's face, but the trained hands of the negro were too quick for him and he was smothered firmly but gently down on the padded board.

The old cock was in his usual sullen black rage. With no chance to strike he swung his head viciously and sunk his beak into the leathery back of the old negro's hand. Uncle Mose forgot that he was a deacon in the First African Methodist Church and swore long and loud.

To a chance observer he was mad all over but to one familiar with his disposition his language radiated pride and admiration.

"Yo' —— old debbil," he spluttered while he smoothed the rumpled plumage of the old warrior. "I jess lak to take yo' by yo' hine leg an' lam yo' gin de hen-house. Here I take yo' when yo' cut alter pieces an' nuss yo' an' put yo' on a good walk an' when I have to bring yo' in to make room for de young stags, I tries to give yo' er little exercise, an' yo' do yo' durned bes' to knock my eye out."

He bent over the raging cock to examine a broken feather. This was Old Calomel's opportunity; he reached the negro's cheek with his iron beak. The pain made Uncle Mose loosen his hold for a moment. The cock shuffled desperately; his bill-hold broke and he fell to the ground.

Without pausing for an instant he went to work on the old darky's legs. Uncle Mose had just doffed his Winter clothing, and the sharp rain of blows on his thinly protected shins fairly made him dance.

He picked up a broom from the corner of the pen and held the bushy end of it toward the infuriated game-cock. Old Calomel distinguished another enemy and buckled into the broom with beak and spur.

The hot African blood of Uncle Mose was boiling.

"Go to it, yo' punkin-colored ——cat," he spluttered. "I hope yo' breaks one o' yo' laigs. I hope yo' poke one o' yo' eyes out, —— yo'!"

He heard a reproving cough behind him and turned to see the Reverend Epaminondas Bung, his beloved pastor, regarding him with stern disapproval. He realized that he had violated church ethics and had been caught in the act.

He managed to grab the struggling cock by the leg; slouched over and put him in his pen. His brain was working like lightning. He knew that he was in for a lecture and was strengthening his defense.

The Reverend Bung was a disciple of muscular Christianity. A product of the Rooseveltian era, he was an enthusiastic sportsman. He owned a gun of tried usefulness, a bird-dog that was the envy even of the white folks and he was, perhaps, the most ardent fisherman that ever graced the banks of the Little Red.

Just now he was on his way to the shady spot beneath the big sycamore where Gin Creek empties into the river, below Bee Rock. It was an ideal day in Spring, and goggle-eye and crappie would be sure to bite.

He had gone a little out of the way to pass the shanty of Uncle Mose. He had to consult his favorite deacon. A new organ was needed for the church; interest on the mortgage was overdue. He had even dreamed that it was possible to cancel the debt that Spring.

Uncle Mose, while not exactly a man of means, was never without some money. His connection with the well-known and much-loved sportsman, John Holland, argued well for his financial condition.

John was always liberal with his faithful retainer and at times Uncle Mose was a financier. After returning from Helena or Memphis, where John usually fought his cocks each Winter, his pockets bulged with greenbacks.

It was generally supposed that this display of wealth was the legitimate fruit of his wages, but some of the brethren of a rival Baptist organization had at one time accused him of betting. This Uncle Mose neither confirmed nor denied. He was not ashamed of his connection with the cockpit. No real lover of the gallant bird ever is.

He did not believe that the Reverend Bung was fair in his denunciation of the sport and he was loaded up with a line of argument to combat him at the proper moment. That moment had evidently arrived. He braced himself and ambled over to the fence, looking sheepish but determined.

The Reverend Epaminondas lost no time.

"Br'er Moses," he sternly began, "you all 'er named arter a mighty holy man, an' lots am expected ob yo'. Dis ungodly business 'er fightin' roosters is shorely bringing our church inter disgrace."

"Nossir. Yo' wrong, Br'er Bung," the old man replied. "Me an' de rooster wasn' er fightin'. He fit some, but I was jess tryin' to pacificate him."

"Done 'quivocate, Br'er Moses," said the uncompromising parson. "Dese carr'in's on bring shame an' disgrace on our church. I ain't 'posed to harmless spote, yo' know dat. I loves de woods an fiel's—I loves de stream an' all de beauties ob de out-door worl'. I loves Nature an' all her pastimes, but dis business er puttin' two roosters togedder, and er makin dem peck one anodder till dey is kilt is crool an' onhuman."

"But, Br'er Bung," the deacon objected, "s'posen dey want ter peck one anodder?"

"Done make no difference. S'posen Cain wanter kill Abel? Is dat any reason he do hit?"

"Sholy—sholy, parson, you talk'n' for me now. S'posen Abel want ter take a chance er bein' kilt? Whar yo' goin'?" he whipped out with lightning rapidity.

"Er fishin'. Why?"

"Dem fishes don't wanter be caught!

"What you got dar? Er bucket er minners. Live! Dem minners don' wanter have yo' hook 'um frew de back, but yo' do hit. Yo' frow 'em in de water, an' say, 'Feesh, come ter dinner.' Yo' 'vite dem feeshes ter dinner, den you take dem to de table an' eat dem."

The parson drew his athletic figure to its most majestic height and launched his most convincing argument.

"Br'er Holland, I hunts an' I fishes, myself, but hit's for food!"

"How much food yo' get?" the old man flung back. "Yo' spend a hundred dollars for er gun, fifty dollars for er dog, and de Lord knows how much for shot an' powder an' j'inted fishin'-poles. How much food you-all get?"

This was a poser for the parson. There was some truth in the deacon's insinuations, he could not gainsay that. Still he was firm in the stand he had taken. He would not admit defeat so he patiently explained:

"Br'er Mose, de cow don' wanter be kilt but we got ter do hit if we gwine to have beefsteak. De hawg don' wanter have his froat cut but de butcher got ter do hit if we gwine to have spare-ribs. De patteridge don' wanter be shot but we got to shoot him if we gwine to have quail on tose. Now far as de patteridge er concarned, I hunt him——"

"'Cause you lak to see him tumble when yo' shoot at him, parson. Every ten-cent patteridge yo' eat cos' you four-bits."

"Cas' de mote out er yo' own eye," bellowed the parson. "What dat got ter do with fightin' roosters? How you gwine to justificate yo'self for doin' dat?"

Uncle Mose was in his element now.

"I ain't er gwine ter try! I don' care. Ma's'r John don' fight um. If he do, hit er good enough for me. Dese roosters yo' hear er crowin' come inter de worl' er fightin', an' dey er gwine out de same way. De only trouble dey have in dis worl', dey don' get ter fight enough."

SHE QUICKLY went to one of the coops, took out a bright red cock and tossed him on the running-board. The cock crowed instantly. For a moment he watched the negro's hand, as it drew near to him, undecided whether or not to strike, then allowed himself to be smoothed and caressed but emitting a few protesting clucks as the black hand moved him back and forth across the board.

The old darky's face registered enough of love and tenderness to make the fortune of a movie queen.

"Dat's Gander Eye," he beamed. "We can't match him. Mas'r John offered ter back him for five thousand dollars at Delta Point las' Winter. Dey all er'fraid er him."

The parson reached out and gingerly stroked the glossy neck that glistened like a ruby in the sun.

He closed his eyes. In some uncharted recess of his brain a dream was born. He saw a Zulu warrior, berserk, charge the foe. With assagai, he plunged headlong at the mass of spears. Plumes waved, black faces strained and writhing bodies moiled upon the ground. He heard a wild triumphant call of victory, and tumbled back to earth again. Old Gander Eye had crowed.

The parson's sporting-blood was on the rise.

Old Mose showed him down the line of coops. Each occupant had a story of his own.

This was Brigham Young; a brood cock now. Old Quantrell, winner at New Orleans, he who broke the Texas crowd. Even John Madison, the Houston millionaire and gamest sportsman of the South, had quit. Tecumseh, untried but rich in royal blood.

The parson stroked the graceful necks of red and spangle, black and brown. Why, these were children—effervescent with life—brimming with vitality.

The parson rather thought that he would try to borrow one of them from Mas'r John to run with his mongrel hens. He could then raise him some full-bloods of his own. It was a simple question of "figgers." The young from the mating would be each half-game. He could then mate a stag and a pullet, each half-game, and without the aid of higher mathematics he knew that two halves make a whole. Ergo, he could have full-bloods of his own.

They drifted back to the gate again and the Reverend Bung, once more a business-man, explained to Uncle Mose the need of funds for the church. Unconsciously he backed against a coop. A snake-like head flashed out between the bars and something caught him by the ear. A roll of kettle-drums sounded behind him as the old outlaw's feet beat against the slats. The parson squawked like a frightened hen and leaped out of danger.

Uncle Mose was convulsed with laughter. With tears streaming down his withered cheeks he explained:

"Dat's Ole Calomel; he a man-eater. He turn on his han'ler las' Winter in New Orleans. 'Fo' he got to facin', de yuther cock cut him down. He lay on his back till de yuther one clim' on top ob him—den he shuffle an' rattle him to deff. We thought he never gwine ter get well. Mas'r

John gin him ter me an' I brung him home. He dess as good as ever now, but we done use him no mo'. He de bes' rooster in de worl', but we cain't trus' him."

After a battle, Uncle Mose got the cock from his stall and placed him on the board.

With monotonous regularity he struck right and left at the black hands that encompassed him. Each time his bill found his mark he struggled convulsively in a vain effort to use his legs. Finally the old negro quieted him and left him standing on the board.

The Reverend Bung gasped; here was determination incarnate; beauty, grace and stability combined. Like some great battle-ship, with graceful lines, with streaming pennons and with frowning guns, all primed to take the sea, he stood.

Large, for a game, almost seven pounds. Profuse of plumage, slightly rumpled now but brilliant and enduring.

There was a sheen of iridescent radiance in his feathers that shone like polished metal. Uncle Mose called him "punkin-colored," but it was more of the shade of burnished copper—yet golden at certain angles. Slightly darker on the breast, he merged into a lighter shade above, but with hardly enough of a change to be considered a diversity in coloring. He might have been carved out of some beautiful block of agate.

His legs were of a uniform blue-green, well-formed and free from blemish. But perhaps his most noticeable feature was his eyes, large, lustrous and liquid brown.

Uncle Mose gave his history:

"He er Red Quill. His feathers at de roots er jess lak blood. Bes' stock in de worl'. Mas'r John's gran'pa brung hit from Norfumberlan County, Virginny. We kep 'em jes' de same in Missoury, den fotch 'em down here. He de las' one; when he go, no more lef'."

"How much he worf?" the parson asked.

The old man drew his thin lips together, and his brows puckered into a frown of concentration. He groped for words, then spoke with unconscious eloquence.

"Br'er Bung, they'r some things in this worl' worf mor'n money. Ole Ranter an' Ole Blue, my two ole houn's, an' dis here rooster ain't never gwine to be sold. When my two ole dogs get ter where life is er misery, I gwine ter shoot 'em, an' bury dem under dat honey-suckle vine. Dey ain't never gwine ter be hongry; dey ain't never gwine 'ter be kicked erround.

"I jes' gwine ter pat em on dey haids an' send dem whar de trail done never end. When dis ole cock gets ter where he cain't 'joy crowin' an' er' chasin hens no mo', I gwine ter put de gaffs on Ole Quantrell dar an' let 'em go. He always live jes' lak he wanter live. He gwine 'ter die jes' lak he wanter die."

There was a tear in the darky's eye as he housed the protesting cock but his happy old heart was soon bubbling with sunshine again.

"Bress de Lawd, Br'er Bung," he joyfully exclaimed. "It 'er a long time yet. Maybe dat ole debbil gwine ter get hisn in er fair fight. I hope he do; I know he hope so too."

The parson and Mose discussed their business matters. Several hundred dollars were needed. Part could be raised by giving church "festibles." Donations, in small amounts could be secured if the sisters of the church would "s'licit" among the charitably inclined white folks, but the sum was large and the organ was needed for a coming revival to be conducted by Br'er Hamilton Fish, a noted evangelist of Nigger Hill. Finally it was decided to lay the matter before Mas'r John Holland, and the conference adjourned.

JOHN HOLLAND sat on the lawn in his favorite armchair beneath the big catalpa. The sun was just down. He had been reading "The Lady of the Lake," but now it lay unheeded in his lap. He was confronted with a problem hard to solve. While he pondered over it he could hear the drone of beetles and the hum of bees, laden with the fruits of their industry, homeward bound.

His fox-hounds, singing in their kennels, told him that it was feeding-time. It was a symphony of which he never tired. That mellow-long-drawn note, that comes not from the throat, but deep down in the chest was vibrant with a chord in his own nature that was a source of unending melody. Uncle Mose would come with their evening feed and the chorus would swell to a cadence that would dispel his dreams but still delight him.

He heard the old man pass the kennels, coming toward the house. The dogs whined their disappointment. The old

man had company. John looked up to see his favorite servitor and the Reverend Bung standing with bared heads respectfully before him.

John rather liked the parson. He was a natural type of negro and while he firmly believed that he was the chosen vessel of the Lord, he was never offensive to white people, although somewhat tyrannical toward his parishioners. He was desperately in love with the music of his own voice and when John inquired what he wanted he launched into his story.

"Mas'r John; Br'er Moses an' myself would like yo' ad-vice. The morgidge on our church er due. We wanter pay it off; we jes' got ter have a new organ. De Baptist got one, an' we cain't 'ford to be behine 'em. De boll-weevil make it mighty hard fo' niggers roun' here.

"We got ter have five hundred an' we don' know how we gwine ter get hit. Now Br'er Mose has er plan. A yeller nigger from Memphis done come here wif er fightin' rooster. He 'low he fight him ergin Br'er Moses' rooster at de cullud picnic nex' Friday week. Br'er Mose say he bet him all he got an if he win he give it to de church.

"We cha'ge fo' bits to see hit. Maybe two hundred niggers'll come. That'll be two hundred four bitses. Br'er Mose done 'splained about de fightin' part. If de roosters wanter fight an' go'n ter fight, dey jes' as well fight fo' de Lawd. I don' lak de bettin' part—dat seem lak gamblin'.

"If it war fo' er prize an' Br'er Moses' rooster, and de yeller nigger's rooster war ter 'pete fo' hit an' de church got de money, hit wouldn't be so bad. Now, Mas'r John, what orter we do?"

A vague suspicion, dormant in John's mind, took life. He dispatched the negroes to feed the dogs while he reviewed the situation. The cock-fighting season was nearly over. It was to terminate in a big gathering of sportsmen at New Orleans. A tournament of the world's best cocks was to be fought—preliminary to which he had contracted for a main with his old friend, that astute fancier, Montevidio of Memphis.

The conditions of this main were peculiar. Montevidio had stipulated weights. According to the agreement John would be forced to show some large cocks. Those of his own breeding ran from light to middleweight. He was short on big ones and would be forced to buy—at all times a risky proceeding. At any rate it was supposed that he would use, for his top-weight, Old Calomel, now the property of Uncle Mose.

Old Calomel was a confirmed man-fighter, but even with that handicap was regarded as one of the greatest heavyweights in the South. If he started directly for his opponent when pitted he would likely cut him down in that first savage rush but if he turned on his handler he might lose before he sighted his antagonist.

While passing the depot that day, John had seen Hash Henderson, a yellow negro who he knew was employed by Montevidio, alighting from the negro compartment of the Memphis train.

Later in the day, on his way to the fairgrounds to inspect some horses that he had in training, he had heard a gamecock crow over behind some negro shanties. Rising in his stirrups, he could see "The General," one of Montevidio's best Roundhead cocks, tethered by the leg and enjoying a sun-bath near a high board fence. He had supposed that the negro had stolen the cock, and intended wiring a night-message to Montevidio telling him of its whereabouts, but all at once the full import of what he had just heard came to him.

Cock-fighting is essentially a fair sport—perhaps less contaminated by the canker of commercialism than any form of the more popular amusements. There are several reasons for this. The combatants can not, themselves, be bribed. Fights are attended only by those versed in the intricacies of the game. With a hundred men around the pit-side interested in the outcome, foul practise is seldom attempted.

Prior to the actual fighting there is some jockeying. For instance, it would be to Montevidio's interest to have Old Calomel out of the way. John had known of a case where Montevidio had allowed himself to be badgered into a hack fight that cost him a cock that might have won an important main.

This must be the situation: Montevidio wanted Old Calomel out of the way; he had sent the negro to pick a fight with Uncle Mose; he had sent one of his best cocks to battle with him. Then he must have other high-class heavyweights in reserve or he would not risk losing The General.

John enjoyed one of his quiet laughs.

Unknown to every one he had some large crested cocks on good runs out in the Armstrong Hills. He knew that every drop of blood that coursed through their veins flowed from hearts that would never falter or grow faint at any test. Of an old strain, almost extinct in its purity, he had nurtured them for years and had been waiting for the excitement that he would create when he would bring one of those old-time heroes to the pit.

Good! He would slip one over on that sly old fox, who must have felt secure in the possession of some great birds for the coming main.

His mind made up, he joined Uncle Mose and the parson at the kennels. By this time the parson's conscientious scruples were beginning to assert themselves.

He was not opposed to sure-thing games, in the interest of charity. Church lotteries, grab-bags, home-talent policy drawings, when the proceeds went to fill the coffers of the church were ethical, for they were sanctioned by general practise, but this was different.

John sensed his attitude as soon as he approached. He had been an actor of more than usual ability in his time, and now he entered, with consumate skill, into the spirit of his part.

"Parson," he began, "if this was an outright betting proposition, it might not be just right for your church to raise money in this way—as badly as you need it—but this is different. Now we will say that there will be a contest of skill between these two chickens. One of them contesting for your church and the other for that old reprobate Pete Montevidio.

"We will not bet on this contest—in this case it would be wrong. But Uncle Mose will put up one hundred dollars of his money as a prize. That yellow nigger will put up one hundred dollars of his money as a prize, and I will put up one hundred dollars of my money as a prize. If your gate-receipts will bring you one hundred dollars as you think, that will make a grand prize of four hundred dollars!

"According to your figures, you need five hundred dollars, so you should have very little trouble to secure the remainder."

The parson still demurred—

"Mas'r John, that er a whole lot er money but——"

"All right," John replied. "I don't want you to do anything you don't think is right. You can have the gate-receipts, anyway. Mose will fight against the Memphis chicken, and can keep his money if he wins it. And I will spend my one hundred dollars to buy a medal for my rooster!"

The parson reached a quick decision.

"No, Mas'r John," he said, "we ruther fight for de money!"

OLD CALOMEL spent a strenuous two weeks. Every moment of the time his stout old pirate's heart was bursting with happiness and rage. He loved to throw the litter of his stall in a cloud behind him. He loved to send his shrill challenge hurtling down the line of pens, telling them all that he was the master; that he feared not one thing in all the world.

He loved to see John coming at daybreak and just before the sun went down. It meant the battle that he loved. If he could not get at one of his feathered foes he could at least reach the protected hand of his trainer.

And, oh, that joyous day when he was sparred with Old Quantrell! At first, when they tied on the muffs, he thought that the hour of battle was at hand but they did not feel right; they hampered his movements. He sensed their inefficiency and tore at them savagely with his beak.

John had taken off his gloves in order to secure a firmer hold on the writhing body; the curved beak of the old renegade reached the tender back of his hand and brought a spurt of blood.

Immediately, upon releasing him, he had rubbed the spot with his bandanna handkerchief. Old Calomel took this for a challenge. Why were they flaunting that red flag in his face? He flew savagely at it, only to have Old Quantrell pounce upon his back. In actual battle it would have been his death but the thud of the soft gloves only enraged him. Instantly he turned, and they tumbled across the yard in a long rolling shuffle that landed them against the fence.

All too soon it was over and he was on the board again, to be rubbed and coddled and massaged until he fairly boiled with rage. And those last few days. It seemed that he was fairly bursting with vitality; that but for the roof of the coop that held

him in he could spread his pinions and fly to the sun.

John remembered the incident of the handkerchief and it was always in evidence. It would be flaunted in his face at times until his very heart caught fire at the sight of it. The night before the battle John and Uncle Mose sat on a chunk near the wood-pile and Uncle Mose received his instructions. The old man went to sleep that night with John's last message ringing in his ears:

"Whatever happens, don't forget your tactics! Remember, these are Barnyard rules and Hash can't help himself. Bull-fighters do the same thing. It is the only way to get him to break from you. If he turns his back on The General he is whipped but after he is warmed up he won't think of anything but what he's there for. Don't smother him between pitting. He don't want to be petted. Just leave the fight to him!"

IT WAS a record-breaking crowd that gathered in the little grove at the foot of Bee Rock. From the old-time slave who had followed his master to the war and bled for a cause now obsolete, to the fresh young buck and dusky belle of the new generation, they were there. Everything to gladden the heart or tempt the appetite was in evidence and the graceful limbs of the hackberry-trees that formed the little grove never sheltered a happier crowd of delighted darkies.

All the entertainment was not free. The parson was out for the money, and in a good cause he was willing to stretch a point to garner the coin.

Perhaps the most prominent figure on the grounds was Brother Hash Henderson of Memphis. His gaudy clothes of the most extravagant cut spoke of affluence. Besides, he was up in all the latest dances, was not a laggard in love and was to be the hero of the principal event of the day. He had already taken credit for the victory. According to his belief, he and not Old Calomel or The General was to be the central figure in the great event.

When Uncle Mose removed the big bronze cock from his carrying-case he saw that he was even in a more furious rage than usual. The General had been crowing continually and Old Calomel realized that the supreme moment was at hand. To him the world was welded into a league to hamper his desires.

The restraining hand of his trainer was a treaty that he longed to shatter. Uncle Mose soothed him as best he could, firmly and skilfully holding him so as to conserve every particle of energy that might be needed in the battle soon to come. Finally, with the aid of his helper, the gaffs were adjusted, and the great event was on.

The General was what is known as "a talker." With the unconscious egotism of the consistent winner he welcomed the opportunity that would add another trophy to his unbroken chain of victories. It was like the old days of the Baronne Cockpit back again, where thousands were freely wagered on the outcome.

Hash was in his element. He had always believed that when nature placed the tinge of Africa upon his features a perfectly lovely motion picture hero had been spoiled. Here was his chance to pose.

Holding firmly to The General's tail, he tossed him in the air, then ran him across the open space to the smooth and beaten spot that had been selected on the brim of Gum Springs. Every move was for the benefit of the spectators; he was the central figure—a close-up to the camera of the public eye.

Hash had been for years the assistant of the great "Chick" Worthington, and had absorbed enough of that grand feeder's knowledge to know that he was fretting his cock unnecessarily but the negro temperament could not resist the opportunity to grand-stand before his audience.

Uncle Mose was envious of this popularity, but curbed any display. While he growled at the lack of appreciation shown him, at the same time he knew that the foolish antics of his opponent would hamper The General in a long battle where the weight of a feather or the waste of a particle of energy might influence the final result. Besides, while he knew that John would never be openly present to mingle with such a motley throng, years of association whispered that he would be wild to witness the battle and some unknown instinct told him that his master's eye was following his every move.

He glanced upward, but could see nothing. Up there on Bee Rock were many crevasses left by the quarrymen of a past generation, and in the lee of some broken

point of jagged granite were deep shadows wherein a man might lurk.

The parson would have dearly loved to act as master of ceremonies, but dreaded to challenge criticism and so delegated Babe Watson, a local colored boxer, to act as referee.

At Babe's command the two handlers brought their respective birds to the score for the few preliminary pecks that would enrage them and cause them to begin the fight the moment they were pitted. Hash came jauntily forward with the crowing General resting on the palm of his hand, but Uncle Mose clung jealously to his bird conserving every particle of stamina for the coming battle.

The moment The General secured a hold he attempted to strike, fluttered off of his handler's hand and fell to the ground. Uncle Mose, immediately turned his back. The General ran around him and flew upward, only to have his opponent whisked out of his sight again. This was repeated several times before Hash could catch him, and although Uncle Mose clamored loudly for more billing Babe would not allow it and ordered the cocks pitted.

At his command, "Put um down," Uncle Mose quickly shifted Old Calomel to his left hand and placed him on his line. At the same time he caught the red handkerchief, resting on his shoulder, whipped it between the two birds and took a quick step toward the center of the ring.

Old Calomel flew for it, instantly, only to have it drawn upward out of his reach as he clashed into the charging General. Hash fairly raved, but the fight was on and Babe was too deeply interested even to hear his frenzied protests.

The unexpected move had disconcerted The General and the cocks met breast to breast with neither in a position for efficient action. The result was, that they tumbled awkwardly over each other and regained their feet at the same time, too close together for a telling blow. In a crowded buckle one of them hung slightly and the pitting ended.

In the interval of rest Hash was in his element. He rubbed his bird's legs, smoothed his plumage, spat in his mouth and blew desperately under his wings. A spectator blurted out:

"Watch dat yeller nigger. He sho' know how to take care er a rooster," and Hash was happy. Uncle Mose crouched over his bird, holding him firmly to the ground. He had no fear of the result. Old Calomel had but one single purpose now. All petty animosities were forgotten, and in his brain blazed a single thought. That blatant, crowing foe that jeered at him so constantly; to reach him, to beat him down, then batter at the broken body until torn away by his trainer's hands!

He was across the circle like a flash but missed. Before the Roundhead could turn he was after him again. The General dodged and countered with a quick rush. Not being set for action Old Calomel rode his tail desperately backward, but with flying feet between his body and the charging foe.

Many times before he had caught his opponent coming in and rattled him to death, or failing in this, had sidestepped when he struck the wall of the pit and flanked his enemy. This time he struck the yielding dress of one of the sisters and before he could swing out of danger The General had both heels buried deep behind his wings.

Amidst the pandemonium raised by the younger generation Uncle Mose lost his head. Wild to assist the choking fowl he kneaded and squeezed him desperately. In the midst of his frantic efforts a clear-cut sentence boomed down from the rocks above—

"Stop it, you —— fool!" and as he glanced upward, he saw John's face outlined for a second and then vanish.

Quickly and silently he stretched the bird's neck and with gentle fingers worked the clotted blood down into his crop, but the time expired before he could be of much assistance.

When pitted Old Calomel staggered weakly on his score, dazed, dim-eyed but braced for the attack. At sight of the oncoming General he advanced weakly to meet him but stumbled and went down just in time to avoid a fatal blow. Prone on his back, he reached up and caught the feathers of his opponent's breast in his beak. He was too weak to strike but he held on and was dragged to his feet and stood on tottering legs, helpless, before his foe.

Uncle Mose, hovering over them, knew that the next bad cut would bring him down for good and when The General struck, he reached between them and took

both gaffs through the back of his hand.

Hash danced and howled, claiming all kinds of fouls, but the audience was with Uncle Mose for the first time when he explained—

"No nigger would be fool enough to stick his han' thar a purpose."

But Hash had seen the trick before and claimed the fight. Whatever the referee's opinion may have been, he resented this town negro's airs of superiority. This Memphis coon had been in the center of the stage too long, and Babe looked able to carry out his threat when he replied—

"Put yo' rooster down on de groun', nigger, 'fore I bust yo' one."

The argument had been a life-saver for Uncle Mose. He worked intelligently and could feel the old veteran tighten in his hands.

IN ALL his glorious life Old Calomel had never sulked or faltered and as sorely wounded as he was, he hurtled forward, breaking upward with all his remaining strength. Finding that he would be topped, he threw himself backward and met the Roundhead with flying feet. A rapid clashing of steel, a sharp snap, and both were down.

As neither moved they were given a minute's time, and when pitted again The General angled aimlessly across with a dragging wing.

The Reverend Bung dashed the perspiration from his eyes and murmured—

"Bress de Lawd!"

For the first time since the battle started he could hear the sweet tones of the new organ playing the interlude to "Come Salvation from the Skies."

Perhaps some rude barbarian of ages past had perpetuated a certain strain of cocks, so valiant, so indomitable that they had been passed uncontaminated down through the golden days of chivalry and thence to us. Be that as it may, there exists today one type of perfect courage that should be our national emblem—the gamecock.

Such were these two and both went forward to face the inevitable—not driven, not encouraged—but of their own free will.

If there was an element of cruelty in this contest, it was not in evidence. They were both so perfectly matched that there was no under-dog to arouse the sympathy of the audience. This last great fight of the two old warriors was the crowning glory of their lives.

At the end The General struck with his last remaining gasp. The old Red Quill picked weakly in the direction of his departed foe, and died before the count proclaimed him victor.

That evening, while John was reading beneath the big catalpa, Uncle Mose passed on his way to the kennels.

John glanced up and smiled.

"Uncle Mose," he said, "I understand your church is free from debt."

"Yas, sah, hit shorely is," was the reply.

"And you remembered your tactics?"

"Yas, sah," he answered as he looked ruefully at his bandages.

"Dem tictacs er all right fo' de church, but dey sho' is hard on er nigger's han's!"

THE DREAM'S END

by Chester L. Saxby

Author of "Not for a Thousand," "El Capitán Arrnie," etc.

SOMEWHERE in the broad Pacific Ocean, buried so deep that neither tempest nor sunshine could reach it with the most attenuate finger to stir it ever so feebly, lay a ship that had carried a dream.

Somewhere in a town on the Chilean coast lived and moved—with what languorous grace—a woman who had breathed upon that dream the enchantment of ripe bloom.

Somewhere, everywhere, in the crudity of the past stretched close upon eighteen years of sea service that had nursed and nurtured and led and starved that dream. And here in Frisco, surrounded by that wrecked ship's company which—crude as those years of the past—had brought to that delicate dream its first whisper of reality, was the dreamer, Arnie Sondheim.

Without ship's instruments Arnie knew well within a minute of latitude and longitude just where that ship had made her bed, could visualize in detail the whereabouts and associations of that desirable Castilian woman, could recite each meaningless movement of those blear eighteen years—and for the first time now without rancor.

But he could not tell even in the vaguest terms how, with that ship gone and that woman all but yielded up and the past apparently reproduced in its most starving mood, he grinned almost happily around upon these strong-smelling, weak-souled men whose needs had cheated him out of his last great hope.

Mental wonder though he was, he admitted utter stupidity over the warm flow of satisfaction accompanying a situation which rendered him a pauper in heart and pocket. He had given up everything he knew and all besides that he believed in to save ten more or less worthless human hides; and now he stood on shore shaking ten horny hands and grinning and chuckling and breathing deep in the fashion of a contented man.

Next he would be sitting in Jake's place where liquor tainted the air, and until the detested whisky lifted him ridiculously into unreality he would contemplate how complete a failure he was. Common sailor slaving before the mast for seventeen years; second mate for a mere watch in the night; master of a bark—or it was more truthful to say, of a lugger—for less than three months. And now mast-hand again, a mast-hand without a job.

A sudden light smote him. He thought he knew to what his contentment was due; he had accepted the tenets of fatalism, whereby reverses had no further power to disturb him. Immediately his keen mind repudiated the theory, for the acceptance of fatalism might drug him as the whisky did, but it could not induce satisfaction such as he felt at the look and hand-grasp and rude comment of these men.

"No money, boys," he told them. "Can't pay you off. I'm cleaned. Give me the places you're staying at, and I'll divvy the first wages I get."

"Ain't in no 'urry, cap'n," one of them put on a large front to say.

"Pigger tuh git on," another mumbled without losing his wide grimace. "Enj'yed muself right up tuh the ears, thank 'ee. Sign on any time 'ith yuh, sir."

A third surmised he "allus did cal'late a decent skipper beat wages six ways. Never

see yer like," he growled self-consciously. "Like tryin' it ag'in."

So it was with the rest. Ten men, dug up from the flotsam and jetsam of life, spat and pumped his hand as furiously as they had pumped the doomed *Jessica* and nodded gravely or foolishly as the moment directed them and rolled sailorwise out of his ken; ten men who would have murdered a malicious ship's master without compunction.

Arnie watched them go, counted nine of them with the mate who had not opened his mouth, but whose grip and the look in his eyes signified a new faith in his existence, and turned about to face the tenth waiting beside him.

"I reckon we had us an elegant time, what say?" remarked Japes.

He thrust back his jacket-front, lovingly brushed his hand over his wondrous flowered vest and from his dwarf height squinted up quizzically at Arnie.

Two thousand dollars of his had gone down with the *Jessica;* his vision of home on the Maine coast with a trawler lifting and falling in the bay and more than a score of years of slaving in a hot, killing cook's galley put forever behind him, had become in a twinkling a mirage.

He aired his gaudy, hand-worked vest for the admiring world to gaze upon—and waited for the next turn of events. Yet Japes knew nothing of fatalism and next to his beloved vest revered his Bible, most of which he did not in the least understand.

"You'd best take the long boat and sell it," Arnie said.

He would not attempt condolence; eighteen hard years disposed of that thoroughly.

Japes blinked.

"Up Dirkenhills way a long boat I rec'lect made a tol'able ferry. Was yuh set on leggin' it on yer own now, er doos I team up?"

The bit of a Yankee, his faith in Arnie supremely blooming in spite of everything, looked so longingly, spoke so hungrily . . . Arnie floundered hopelessly.

"What could we do?" he asked. "The boat won't keep two of us. I give you my share in 'er."

He began searching through his pockets for a piece of paper, thereon to note the transaction. It was then he came upon the dirty yellow envelop that the San Carlos official had stuffed into his hand as he weighed ship, a dirty yellow envelop containing the insurance company's respects to his unconscious honesty, a dirty yellow envelop . . . and as he read the cablegram inside, an eleventh hand-grasp went out to him that made the included mention of money of secondary importance.

Big stuff in you want see you give full coverage return trip thanks you are white

Several readings were required; then Arnie passed the slip to Japes and stared round at the world with a smile of pure discovery. Japes fell to jabbering—inanely, Arnie thought—of a fortune in money. But Japes was Yankee, and Arnie was not. There were just three words that stood out; they were, "you are white."

BOTH forgot the long boat. The water-front disappeared behind them.

In the offices of the signers of the cablegram Arnie put down the yellow paper upon a shiny counter. The clerk vanished. A gray-haired, spectacled man issued from out a glass door, pushed straight through the gate and put out his hand.

"Honored, Captain Sondheim! Come right in, sir. And you," he said to Japes, whereupon the little cook placed a very large face upon the moment indeed and pursed his lips and nodded his head as if it were a sprightly pendulum.

They entered the private office. Arnie wedged in a word when he could. He did not yet believe this friendliness; he remembered Zeesman; it was not sincere; the truth would come out presently; it was a game. He said—

"Beg your pardon, but I guess you don't know the *Jessica* foundered three hundred miles out of port."

"Don't know it? What's that?" The spectacled eyes grew benign where they had been penetrating. "Our business, sir, is to know everything. We even profess to know men; you've rather shaken us lately, I may say. Well, sir——"

And on he went, from one thing to another. To his earnest congratulations upon gaining free from a sinking vessel, Arnie replied that he might have brought her in if he had not been afraid to risk it on the men's account; that they were doing fairly well with her at the time that he ordered her abandoned. The other stared roundly.

"Here!" he ejaculated. "Put this check into your pocket before you say another

word. 'Pon my soul, you're too infernally honest for me!" He wagged his head; in a moment he brightened.

"By the by, you're out of a command. I want you to drop in on Tibbert—Merl and Tibbert. You'll find Tibbert's no Zeesman. Looking for a captain, he tells me. Had a notion about you, Sondheim, if I may be honest. I told him I didn't think it could be so. But you can settle that with him."

"No," Arnie disagreed. "He'll settle that with himself like all the rest."

The warm surge of his blood cooled a little. He was a fool to jump so quickly at an appearance of good fortune. Hadn't his life been full of these appearances?

The gray-haired man leaned forward and grasped his knee, saying:

"It was drink Tibbert spoke of—or some such nonsense. If it's not the truth—and I'm sure it's not—why didn't you convince them as easily as you've convinced me?"

"You don't own ships——"

But here Japes, to whom Arnie with hardly a second glance had passed the check, found his voice and broke in excitedly:

"Gorry! I want tuh know! This 'ere says twenty-five thousan' dollars!"

The little man's jaw had sagged so that it was difficult to tell his emotion.

"Shipping is at ebb-tide," came the explanation.

Japes only gaped.

"Besides," continued Arnie as if he had not heard Japes at all, "what was it to me what they thought? No getting anywhere by talking about yourself."

"*Mm!* An odd philosophy. We've always felt it wise to advertise."

"I guess it depends on what you're after," Arnie speculated.

A brisk laugh answered this, and—

"You're a queer one, Sondheim."

"Then I ought to get along in a queer world."

Arnie shrugged; but he had no note of cynicism in his voice; he had never known a morning like this—so full of incomprehensible exhilaration. He got up.

"I'm mighty obliged to you, sir."

"Tut! tut! I'm going to call Tibbert before you reach him."

"What'll you say?" Arnie's blue eyes were confusing. "It's the truth. I used to drink a good deal, and likely I will again when there's nothing else to do."

Facing those mild blue eyes, the man of business knew himself at a loss to measure and catalog this enigmatical character. Outguessed, he would have said. And yet Arnie was simplicity itself in nature, in intent. The man was interested.

"No doubt you would," he smiled, "in spite of anybody and everybody."

"It's up to the world and Whoever runs it," spoke the seaman in Arnie.

"It's up to you and the way you fight it," briskly returned the other.

Of all that was said, this Arnie took away definitely when he shook hands once more and with Japes came again to the street. It was nothing but the schoolboy's common lesson: to Arnie it represented a novel scheme. He thought it "funny."

"I snum! With so much money mebbe ye'd be junketin' off tuh buy some pieces in a whaler, er leastways a smack all yer own and mebbe a bit of a home——"

"Money?" Arnie adjusted himself to this required angle. "We'll divide it—if that's fair. Twelve thousand for a ship?" He shook his head. "No bottoms that cheap. A smack—that's not a vessel. A home——"

He stared away the idea.

"I thinked—I thinked— Twelve thousan'!" A deep sigh filled the little cook's thin chest and fluttered on to the air. "Be ye wishful I sh'd siggest——"

Arnie mused:

"A bigger ship, she says. That would be Tibbert's."

Japes uttered not another word but trotted along beside him.

Tibbert was a coldly commercial type with none of the old-time traditions of the sea to soften his judgment of what the ocean highway stood for. He greeted Arnie with a nod and a wave of his hand to a chair. He looked out of eyes steel-edged to mark every slightest chance of fortune. His mouth had a singular twist.

"You're Sondheim. Kofel phoned about you. I know who you are."

This remark carried a stern meaning. Arnie smiled and reached for his cap.

"You've done one or two uncommon things lately. I've got a wind-boat, the *Samson*, loading with flour for Victoria, returning with fish. Captain Loman's willing to take you as mate."

Arnie considered in silence. He could not have misunderstood Lelona. It was not after all a question of being mate or master; it was simply a question of a big ship and

more money. He knew the *Samson*—a fine craft and good pay.

The situation in some manner ill became the dream; but this was no time for being particular as to a dream's fabric if by adaptation one might come to the dream's end, which was happiness—though revising the aspect of his shadowy dream was no easy thing in Arnie's case; times without number he had smiled foolishly into his haunting vision of unreality, enjoying each riotous hue.

Ah, well, Lelona wished for the same thing: happiness. And if she set down the elemental hues as a big ship and money, seeing more clearly than he, then he must not doubt her. He should be jubilant over an unwarranted favor.

"I'm your man, Mr. Tibbert," he said. "I'll do my best."

"That's got to be understood."

Tibbert, after a flinty scrutiny of him, crossed to a closet and came back bearing a large, dark-colored bottle and disposed it on the desk-arm between them.

"They call me a queer one, Sondheim. I have my own methods; and they manage to work out. I've used this one several times before.

"Ahem! You have a certain weakness we may as well take notice of." He smiled stiffly. "The berth is yours for this one cruise, provided you take this quart of whisky with your dunnage, keep it by you, and return it to me unopened. In case you can show me the bottle just as it is, I have a regular place for you—and no doubt shortly a better one. I mean in this manner to make you fight a natural tendency. It goes without saying that you promise to have no other liquor about you."

A mask of irony settled upon Arnie's visage. The world's opinion again. But he took no real offense; saw it indeed as nothing but a grim joke.

"If you trust me that much, what's the bottle for?" he queried.

"It's a test. I'm deliberately tempting you. Return it—or no excuses."

Arnie agreed. A grin had erased the mask. He accepted the wrapped bottle and asked if the offer included Japes. The little Yankee exhibited some dismay.

"I thinked I would—I thinked—I reckon, howsomever, there's things as 'll bide their hour. Yer spells o' bein' lonesome——"

He blinked and beamed.

THUS it was that they found themselves in due time upon the 'midships deck of the proud *Samson* with a letter for Captain Loman. Japes spoke in a hushed voice:

"Stout ez a whaler, I declare—an' much finer. 'Most takes me back."

Certainly the *Samson* stood out among sailing vessels. In an age given over so largely to steamships, she lifted her three great masts without excuse and extended her bowsprit sweepingly before the lissom curve of her clipper bows.

Considerable of her haughty air was transposed to her master, Cable Loman. One could see that in the first casual glance; in the sonorous tones of his commands one seemed to hear it. He had a hard eye for details, a jealous eye. Pride. That was his underlying attribute.

The spirit of the vessel walked with him, scented out the most insignificant of discrepancies, imbued him with a tragic defensive anger when her crew slighted her ever so little. His anger was a rare and wonderful thing, a bare and thunderful thing, an appalling, instinctive—and therefore unreasonable—thing.

Arnie and Japes arrived at a moment when he was loosing the full storm of it. Heads sank before that tempest; backs bent to it like waving wheat in a hot wind.

He broke off at sight of Arnie and came marching in the gait of an admiral. He contributed no explanation for his burst of temper. He shook hands with Arnie but not with Japes. He indicated the cook's galley with his thumb and led Arnie aft and down the companion into cabins no less than spacious to one who had but now sojourned aboard the *Jessica*.

There were rules and regulations; there were discipline and dispatch. Mr. Sondheim met Mr. Grover, the second officer. On deck once more Arnie marked how each man of the crew kept his station and his silence. It was astonishing; it was a revelation. Arnie anticipated a smart voyage north.

To be sure, a survey of the forecastle rather spoiled the general effect; not that it was so disreputable a forecastle as forecastles went, but this forecastle did not go with this vessel. Its dimness and narrowness and poor ventilation seemed a blemish upon an otherwise perfect mold. Holes in the feet of stockings of a faultlessly dressed

dandy. Captain Loman easily admitted the fact. He shrugged.

"Who sees your forecastle?" he remarked. "The crew are better for it."

Here was a note that jarred, this note in the master's make-up. Arnie, too, was instinctive. He thought this very like the world he knew and despised.

In his cabin he bestowed his meager belongings and set the tall bottle of whisky—shapely and sealed in gold-leaf and somehow very like the proud *Samson*—in plain view on a shelf, wedging it there so it might not fall and break and in its breaking break him likewise. He grinned at it and went to report for duty.

The morning saw them clearing and standing down before a high wind to which royals were set—beautiful patches of sail, light angel wings. The Golden Gate melted abaft the starboard quarter. Like clockwork the crew responded. With the watches chosen, Captain Loman strolled down the windward rail. A sound greeted him from the galley. Japes was chanting of Jonah, the father of whalers:

> "This ambergris portion's my lay an' my fortune;
> I'll build me a home by the sea——"

The captain bore down upon the source of the singing—the men paused in their labors to grin and watch. He flung open the door unceremoniously.

"You will stop that noise, cook," he stated. "This is no boarding-house."

A silence superseded this; then came Japes' nasal, high-pitched reply:

"'Scuse me, sir, but would ye be wishful I'd be tellin' the hens under the long boat thet 'ere? An' 'bliged tuh say, sir, the galley b'longs tuh the cook."

From this moment dated a very real enmity between Captain Loman and Japes. More words followed, words of thunder, a tempest before which the little Yankee's head did not bow. When the violence had subsided, he ventured cheerfully—

"Singin' doos be a sight o' help, sir, tuh chirk the sperits."

Captain Loman, seeking to find a reason later for the actions of his crew, laid their disrespect for authority at the door of Japes' independence. But Japes had no more to do with it than the buffeting of the sea has to do with the storm.

Arnie had taken his turn below. He came on deck to see a fellow of his own watch standing beside the mainmast, one hand stretched out holding up his tin pannikin for the captain's inspection, one hand and arm flung upward to guard his face. And Captain Loman confronted the forecastle emissary in a fine frenzy, not primitive, not uncouth, but fiery and eaten with a sense of gross insult—as a man of some culture alone can show himself. The canvas and rigging of the *Samson* seemed to bellow and shriek with him, pride for pride.

"Sour is it? Bad, you miserable hound? What's to be next from you beggars? Weevils in the bread! Why, why, have I got to stand this?" *Sa-aa-ah!* hissed the stays. "Do you think the meat smells as foul as you? You —— rat! Whining over the meat, whining over the bread, whining over the grog——"

"No fault 'ith the grog, sir, on'y we don't never see——"

"That'll do!" *Hhr-rr-rh! Zzz-zing* affirmed the reefed courses. "You'll become acquainted with me before long, my man!" Ish-*sha!* Ish-*sha!* the bows applauded, nodding. "Get forward now! Mr. Sondheim, you will give the crew a warning at once."

This development so astonished Arnie that he had no reply ready. The captain marched away. There was nothing left but to obey orders.

Arnie clumped down the forecastle ladder and faced the men of his watch staring at their rations. Expressionlessly he fell to flaying them, and they lifted their eyes and stared at him. One handed up his pannikin. Arnie sniffed its contents and gave it back. The meat was plainly bad; the bread was moldy and sour.

He went on as if he had noted nothing awry; he outlined the crime of mutiny—all very doggedly, for his heart was not in the work. They nodded—also very doggedly—that they understood. Indeed, they appeared to understand unusually well.

After that he stopped in at the galley. He mentioned the food.

"Food! Would ye name it so?" Japes spoke low-toned. "'Tis swill, Mr. Sondheim. Smell it a-b'ilin'! 'Ogs wouldn't never tech it. Them's the dead flies I be pickin' from it. 'Pears like currants—what say? Not but what I kin eat it muself, bein' as how I've knowed life ez a husky whaler an' got me a proper-lined stomick. But this 'ere crew ain't a whalin' crew. Sho! It doos ketch 'em tur'ble."

Again Arnie had no reply. And aft by the mizzen-shrouds Captain Loman delivered him a sincere man's oration on the subject of the modern jack-tar's decadence. Every new crew he shipped, he complained, acted in just this manner.

"Don't you ever sign on an old crew again, sir?" Arnie was moved to ask.

"Never. I'd not have them. What's sailing coming to, do you think?"

"Money," said Arnie. "Profits."

He said it without thinking.

"Ah, but there'll be no profits with finical crews," hastened the captain. "Selfish as rats they are, the lot of them. No pride in the ship; no *esprit de corps*. They sulk; they answer back; they handle sheets half-heartedly. Why, see now. There's the Sound to make in a week or primage cut in half. That's my lookout and yours. Money stolen out of our pockets because these devils won't have pride about them. How do you like that now? The mate shares too, you know."

"I'd as lief my share went into better food for'ard, sir," Arnie stated.

This suggestion he spilled on impulse and quite without mature consideration. It was the ex-forecastle-hand in him crying for justice and a captain's sympathy. Had he stopped to reason, he must have found himself still sadly out of tune with the demands of the calculating world, with the creed Lelona so clearly showed him.

And Captain Loman gaped until his jaw sagged and his eyes popped.

BUT the *Samson*, pursued by a favorable wind, swept northward like a gull. The beauty of her whispered to Arnie's soul; the grace of her supple heeling was a glory unspeakable. He had known ships that chattered and grunted and groaned; not one that mused sibilantly and purred and sang in a vibrant ecstasy.

In four days they had made eight hundred miles—and never a studding sail in sight. Then the breeze freshened and came on at half a gale. A sailor left some rigging uncoiled on the deck, whereupon the captain fell victim to a fury of nervous vexation and knocked the offender cold.

The crew received a jorum of stinking skouse and in a body flung it over the rail. Arnie's own watch, having waited two days for a tot of grog, tumbled up at the call of eight bells of the morning watch and, ignoring the order to furl topsails, lined up cups in hand and waited. The captain had instituted a program of punishment for the crew's grumbling. No grog, he said.

To Arnie came with grim irony the thought of his possession of a quart of the whisky he detested, and the poverty of these fellows who craved a habitual indulgence. Rules of shipboard stirred him to motion. Inwardly revolting, he strode forward and administered the heavy hand of authority. His lacerating words and bruising blows they accepted alike with no whit of animosity. Afterward he retired to the poop-rail trembling and gulping.

And the *Samson* skipped before the half-gale like a white-robed cherub and picked sweet harps and sang melodiously.

Hard days for Arnie; the hardest of his life. Mantled in austere authority, he knew the hurt of forcing obedience. It stung him to think how he charged on to extra money, from extra money to the dream's end; while these undreaming drudges asked of the world fresh food and a swig of rum—and got curses and enraged blows. He could not get out of his mind the remembrance of that thrill of satisfaction vouchsafed to him in the hand-grip of ten men just such as these.

With what earnest inner ear he listened once more to Lelona's convincing voice:

"Yo' mek beeg *hombre*—gre't maunay—beeg sheep—an' me. Yo' get him; be heppy. Odders do sam' t'ing."

He knew she was right and that, being right, she would not wait long over his stupid forecastle habits that in more than seventeen years had yielded him nothing, absolutely nothing. Unhappiness born of lonesome speculation—that was his portion. The sour taste of the burning whisky lifting him into —— He had put all that aside. He had something to fight for; he had Lelona, companionship, a goal.

And here, with the weapons of his fighting keen-edged and powerful in his grip, he gulped and trembled when he used them.

Perhaps he was not equal to it after all. Perhaps he was—as Captain Loman's gaping surveyal of him intimated—as crude and ridiculous and impossible as these dregs of humanity that never dreamed at all. He had been disgusted with the little minds of the officers under whom he had sailed; they seemed to know so little and remember nothing. Yet he could not measure even to their stature.

Then why did he hunger and dream so?

He heard Japes singing. Japes had the voice of a falsetto crow; he sang songs with no sense to them; he sweated and slaved in his stifling box and found the world immensely cheery, often joyful. He had known others like him—in the forecastle.

In the long run Arnie, though, was no fool, and sailoring had not managed to make him one. If he could not figure out his problem, he could at least adapt himself to any condition. The theme was money; with money one regulated the world's manners. His instincts might fight against this as an illogical doctrine, but he was preeminently of those who survive. True, he did not understand the world he was in, but he comprehended its habits, and eventually he concluded that he had better be illogical and happy than reasonable and—what he had been for seventeen years.

Taken all in all, the run to Victoria produced no impossible situations. The crew did not, of course, thrive on the fare distressfully served to them by Japes, and gained no strength by pitching it over the rail—although something they did gain from these days, from the captain's plantation methods, from the lesson of his vituperation and his frantic blows, from the reaction of their stomachs, from the proud sweep of the vessel and her imperious aloofness to the winds that fought her, from Japes' singing about tough-skinned whalers who laughed at every buffet of fortune.

Not even they could have told what it was they gained, or perhaps that they had gained anything, but more and more they looked straight into Captain Loman's face when he spoke to them, rather than down at the deck.

They broke their silence to sing grim, short-barked chanteys when the spirit moved them, taking their cue from the *Samson's* soaring voice and from Japes' nasal tenor; they copied the captain and cursed; they pulled at the ropes in a time and a fashion dictated by the moment's impulse. Thus the *Samson* and its little world came into port and discharged.

THE intention was to load at once and lay a straight course for Frisco. Captain Loman, however, got news of a shipment of cargo billed up the Sound about a day's sailing and went to make inquiries. He returned jubilantly.

To Arnie he said:

"A notable opportunity, Mr. Sondheim. Two days ahead of schedule, and money for the two of us lying on the decks. A few hundred dollars won't go amiss, eh? We have our way to make in the world. A little excursion."

"Will the men do it?" Arnie queried, his instinct still unmolded to the new view of things.

Immediately he saw his error; his keen mind leaped to the proper perspective of what he had to win. Lelona's round, delicate arms shook him; her soft voice—so like the ardent, unruffled, unquestioning voice of the *Samson*—catechized him. Came his amendment:

"Are the owners willing, sir? . . . It suits me then."

The captain's reply as to the owners was indistinct enough but characteristically assured. The trip was made—an easy one. But easy as it was, it required four and a half days instead of two, and before it was done with, the crew was pressed into the service of unloading.

At the captain's direction Arnie stood over them and held them at it, became a bucko mate and drove them at it. Silent they were at the hateful labor; only by the look in their eyes, which they bent strangely upon him, did their protest voice itself.

As on another occasion, Arnie wished to Heaven there might be harsh retorts, even refusal of orders. For him, it appeared, there was only this hardest enemy to fight, this muteness that got under the skin. But why should it get under his skin? Their quarrel was with the captain.

Loaded with boxes of fish, the *Samson* took the ocean swell and headed southward. A head-wind was blowing strongly. They were three days behind-hand. Of this latter fact the captain would not let any of them be for one minute ignorant. Arnie, with two hundred and fifty dollars thrift-money in his pocket, suggested longer tacks so that the watches might be spared. With dignity Captain Loman vetoed the idea.

"Longer tacks, sir, longer run. As straight a course as we can lay with this devilish blow in our eyes—that's navigating. Three days behind. My luck!"

Every hour the braces were let go and brought around; every hour slacking and filling away; every hour the weary tramp,

tramp of feet. The *Samson* hummed in fine fettle, laughed angelically and breasted the heavily running seas like the spirit of Puck mocking mortals. And under this heavy work the crew must needs eat or succumb, no matter if the food, already bad, grew worse and worse from standing.

Japes alternately roared his song and was silent. Something had got into him. When the men came for their stinking food he pointed to it and yelled:

"All they is fer my makin's, boys. Wash it down 'ith sea water, is my sayin's tuh you. Poke it down 'ith a stick. I doos be sorrowful. I doos be." Tears choked his voice. "More ner a score o' years cookin'—no, ye wouldn't believe it."

"Th'ow us some biscut! I'll eat biscut sooner. Trade yuh fer biscut!"

"Ain't on'y one biscut aroun', boys. . . . I can't help it, boys! Cuss me, boys, if yer a mind. I doosn't blame ye. . . . Ain't no cook? Thet's hard speechin' now!"

Captain Loman's voice:

"All hands walk the braces! . . . Hard down the helm!"

The matter grew as the men scuffled to their places. The little Yankee cook cried after them:

" 'Tain't right ye sh'd say thet, boys! A whalin' cook nine cruises, boys!"

He even followed them out, red-faced from his intense desire to convince them.

"Tell me now: would ye be jokin'? A bit o' fresh flour—Try me fair!"

"Silence!" commanded the captain.

His face was darkly incensed. When the ship stood away again he strode to the galley. There in the doorway he shouted for the ears of every man aboard:

"They're quite right, my man; and not all your loud denial will change it. A physic with each meal I have had to come to. Cook of the try-works was your experience on whalers, I'm thinking."

It was a bold, crafty stroke, this of the captain's. Rather to his own surprize, he got a laugh. Japes heard it, and turned white—or as white as his steam-greased countenance permitted.

Arnie heard it, heard the captain and heard the crew. The crew he understood; their laugh meant nothing.

The captain, though, had pronounced the veriest untruth. There was no physic, and no need of any. Out of poor materials Japes had contrived uncommon dishes for the captain's table—because Arnie Sondheim ate at the table. Surrounded by the mist of that boiling stench he had labored in the pride of his art. This was the effect of it.

Arnie confronted this statement in a daze that slowly lifted. Why had Loman said that? What had Japes done to deserve it; what indeed but refuse the blame for condemned food?

And why was such food bought? Was there any question as to the why of that? Because it was cheap; because it saved money. They had made this whole voyage on that basis; they were poisoning the crew on that basis; they were working them at the braces and stays and halyards until it seemed brutal—to save money!

And there was another reason—no, not another. Three days behind; that was the other reason. And that was because the captain was set upon lining his own pockets.

Money! By money alone one reached the goal of life, came to the dream's end, knew happiness. Then he hoped to God that the goal was reached soon, for he could not stand much more of this. First the crew—and now Japes——

The money in his pocket seemed in a moment to swell and stand out upon his side like a boil that all might see. He gritted his teeth and fought, fought, fought the old and barren instinct that here in this situation seemed so amply borne out. He fought that old instinct because he knew he must fight it and conquer it or it would conquer him.

He felt its power gripping him, riding him. If it conquered him, the very purpose that but lately had come was lost; the world's opinion was lost; Lelona was lost, Lelona and happiness! He gritted his teeth and subdued it.

When he could, he went to the galley and slapped Japes on the back and grinned over the little cook's bewildered expression.

"The skipper's a poor hand at a joke, Japes," he said. "The jacks—they'd have to laugh. No better cook on the coast. What do you care what they think?"

"Ain't I cooked all my life in sech hopin's? Wouldn't no man be fool 'nough ter not care what's thinked of 'em. . . . Well, ain't no standin' roundabout."

In a trice Japes had the coffee-pot in one hand and a fistful of coffee in the other and was pouring the latter on to the floor because his misted gaze played him false. Arnie waited outside the door until "Jonah" burst forth within; whereupon he grinned.

But Japes' singing was likely to imply something else than one thought. The worse he felt, the more he roared out his verses, as if they were a sort of "Rock of Ages." As to his cooking, he redoubled his efforts, exercised all his skill, sweated, strained and trusted—with exactly the same result he had obtained before.

The crew, on the other hand, driven to the braces too often, halved their effort and renounced their skill and acquired a very different pride. Yet it was pride of a sort, and it seemed so similar a pride to that of the ship that as the men gained pride, the *Samson* lost it. Her badly set braces marked a clumsy motion in the vessel and a crude music in her tophamper; her canvas shivered and spilled the wind; her head became unsteady. They were sucking the majesty out of her.

Captain Loman saw with uncomprehending frenzy the degeneracy of his ship, the increasing loss of time, the horrid, uprearing head of disrespect whence mutiny springs. He railed and thundered and drove the crew until his hands bled. The crew laughed; they had taken too much to care, and their pride, ridiculously, showed greatest when it was of no use.

Some, struck down, were satisfied to lie and curse; some who would have risen and rendered other answer could not get upon their feet. Arnie dropped down beside one such and pinched his flesh and examined his mouth. To the captain who waited, boiling over with wrath, he reported in one word, "Scurvy!"

SCURVY, that terror of the sea! Scurvy that seizes upon a man from his stomach and makes his flesh like potter's clay!

At the word bunk-mates and comrades backed away as from a leper. Captain Loman dropped his fists and fell to trembling and licking his lips and staring at his bleeding hands that had taken toll so freely. He stared at them in fear, in repudiation—as if he would cut them off. Out of his blessed silence he muttered, he gabbled, he flung oaths, he roared imprecation. His tumult drowned the *Samson's* spasmodic pleas for a helping hand to her canvas.

Arnie rose from beside the stricken sailor and said to him quietly:

"All you can do for us, sir, is to keep still. There's —— enough."

As the captain had left him previously, so he left the captain and went at the task of carrrying the sick forward into the forecastle and breaking open the medicine-chest.

By night-time three of the crew were down. Wabbling on their legs, they tumbled into hammocks and bore their distress in mute wonderment. Their ship-mates gave them elbow-room, backing into corners whence they glared out defensively. Only Arnie drew near; he it was who mixed them potions—out of his infallible memory—and bathed their faces and their arms.

In the cabin Captain Loman treated his raw knuckles with antiseptic and called Arnie a fool and raved about the four days of lost time that were becoming five and everlastingly anathematized the crew.

"It's their lack of pride, upon my soul," he declared, his eyes flaming. "No decency, no cleanliness—there's the root of it. They've done it now."

Arnie impressed Japes into service. Together they ransacked the lazaret.

"Broth's the wellin' food," Japes mumbled.

His voice sounded weak; his awkwardness seemed amazing, for he banged into everything.

"What 'd there be fer brothin' up? No cook, they says. Why, sir, the Lord guide me an' I'll——"

"Take the cabin provisions—anything, all you find; no time for questions."

Kindled with new inspiration, Japes pried open cartons and boxes and kept his fires going all through the night. The next morning he was still contriving.

"Get to bed!" Arnie ordered.

The little man had rings under his eyes and a feverish face.

"We'll have no overdoing. You're done in, Japes."

"Yuh wouldn't be insultin' me, would ye?" he was answered. "Husky whaler's man, ye'd mind. Ain't we labored conjinglin'? Let's we be standin' together now."

So they toiled without stint, without rest, without aid. They made some headway; but others came down in the mean time. And the bark shivered and shouted and lost

her faith in herself and shied off before the booming wind and roused sea.

Loman complained:

"They don't keep her into it. They laugh and talk back. What will we come to, Sondheim? . . . By gracious, I've a chill! I do believe this thing has touched me. Perhaps a hot sling— You have a bottle of whisky——"

"Excuse me, sir! That bottle goes back where it came from. There'll be no using that. A physic's the right thing for a chill. Give it a try once."

Seven men gaunt and ridden with sickness; seven pairs of legs swollen to twice their natural size; seven mouths so bloated in the gums that speech was agony and eating an impossibility; seven pairs of eyes cast hauntingly at Arnie!

No more mate than any man aboard, abandoning the blundering *Samson* and her pathetic humility, Arnie Sondheim wrestled against seven men's surrender of effort and taught them strength to meet physical weakness, taught them pride of life, nursed and fed and cajoled, and took his rest in cat naps. Between hours in the forecastle his gaze scanned the sea for the saving sight of a vessel with fresh provisions aboard her. A bushel or two of potatoes—what would they not mean here and now?

But no vessel hove in sight; they plunged on in the wind's eye and barely held headway; at times they lost it—and yet in such a blow the haughty *Samson* should have skipped like a yacht and whipped out red-blooded music in her stays.

Captain Loman, avoiding the sick-bay, threatened the short-handed watches and made a frightened terror of Grover, the second mate. He came down in a tempest upon Arnie.

"Your duty's to the ship, Sondheim. Stop this and get busy, do you hear?"

Arnie had never in eighteen years disobeyed orders. He met the captain's will grimly. He answered:

"Bad food and three days in the Sound wouldn't be duty to the ship. I'll be tending to that duty, sir, first. It's duty to humans I mean."

Thereupon the captain reviled him and announced he would write such impudence into the log. Arnie shrugged. At the galley door he called for more broth.

He called twice before he comprehended what had happened. A mumbling voice proceeded from the floor; something was squirming and panting there.

"Dunno why my pesky legs— Downright queer— In a spell— One secunt——"

A thud and a groan. The voice ceased. Arnie leaped in. Japes lay staring up.

Then indeed the world laughed at Arnie. The little Yankee cook taken! Red spots of anger swam before his eyes. He knew at once what he would do; this settled it in his mind. He got Japes into his bunk and strode down the companion.

He was just in time. Captain Loman, pallid and shaking, had dethroned the precious whisky bottle and was engaged in trying to uncork it. Arnie wrested it away, fighting angry, worn to the limit. Loman sank back and collapsed.

A thrill of relief something akin to joy seized Arnie as he perceived the proud gold seal still resting on the bottle's mouth. He shouted; Loman only shook his head. Bearing off his treasure, Arnie bawled for the crew. They came running—all who could. He ordered the sail trimmed and reshaped the course. Instruments and chart he scorned; he knew they were off Cape Blanco, and just south lay Crescent City. He had money in his pocket. He was running the *Samson* in for provisions.

In that wild race shoreward he dared not let his mind stray from the thing he had set himself to do. A voice in the rigging shrieked at him, and to harken was to know that it was Lelona's voice demanding what he meant by this. It was not reasonable; it was not life; it was a yielding to the old and barren instinct. But he set his jaw and steered on.

Standing by Japes' side, he let himself think just once of what he was doing. Money slipping through his hands. Money! Ah, Japes had twelve thousand dollars awaiting him in San Francisco—and life was a handful of potatoes!

Painfully the little Yankee moved his lips; his words were distorted.

"Never 'll b'lieve it— Husky whaler nine cruises. Would ye be speechin' to 'em how I *hev* cooked?"

This was the burden of his effort.

The rapidity of his going under confounded Arnie. Room for that other thought there was none; only how to bring Japes through. He bathed him and tried to make some broth; this he had to give up; but one man aboard the *Samson* could

concoct broth out of that miserable larder.

He invaded the cabin where Captain Loman lay shivering in his berth without the least vestige of sickness perceptible. Thence he took some chocolates and melted them; this he fed to Japes. He noted in surprize and dismay that no whit of strength came of this stimulant.

"You won't give up, Japes. We'll be ashore in a jiffy. Stick up!"

"Great howdy-do— No wantin's tuh bother— Conjingle along o' ye——"

But unless help came soon he would not "conjingle" long. This fact Arnie was forced to recognize after a few administrations of the simple medicines available; they had utterly no effect upon this worn-out organism.

The nerveless men of the crew might hold out indefinitely and, driven along by Arnie's crude magnetism as they had been regretfully driven to desperate labor by his commanded harshness, might even manage to throw off considerable of their malady without other succor. Japes was not of their sort and less of their draft-horse constitution. Arnie sprang to the deck and bawled for the royals, for the studding-sails.

"Steady!" he cried to the helmsman. "Let 'er fight!"

Defiantly he glared about upon this haughty ship, this gentlewoman of the sea; lashed her as her legitimate master would never have done; hurled his madness of challenge full at her head. Let her snap her yards and tear her gossamer wings!

For her aristocratic beauty and her captain's purse-lining, human souls lay in jeopardy at this moment. Japes, shorn of *his* pride, ticked out his life aboard her. Speed—speed—speed!

But the *Samson* gave no sign of fighting back, balked not al all, sang indeed in all her timbers like joy grown immortal, sang throbbingly in the language of Olympus, strove for him as she had never striven for Loman.

Snatching precious moments from Japes' bunk, he sallied into the forecastle with his word of cheer—so hard, so forced in his dread for the little Yankee comrade—told them he was taking the vessel in, that in two days they would be wading in fresh vegetables. Lastly he stimulated their hearts with doses of strychnine.

They rolled their heads and twisted about to watch him as he hurried up the ladder; a mute look too deep to fathom. In this look of theirs the curse of their stare as he drove them on the wharf was smudged and turned to blessing.

His heart welled up in this interchange of gaze. He knew why satisfaction had been his in the plain, honest hand-grasp of the *Jessica's* rescued ten; he knew—trembling in the chill comprehension—that the world he served and the world whose opinion he yearned for was no larger a planet than this poor, wretched forecastle. He learned—he began to learn—the answer to the problem that had baffled him for upward of seventeen years.

He stood at Japes' side and tried to tell this thing.

"It's two days, Japes. A doctor to make you fit! Trying does it—a whaler, Japes! You'd be understanding how Jonah felt— I need you with me——"

A faded light flickered in those gaunt eyes, a proud light.

"So be—so be. I'd not be—be makin' my quittin's, sir." Arnie bent to catch a mumbled refrain. "We doos be rejoiced—" That was all.

"No worrying, Japes. Mind now. The crew meant no harm in their speech."

"Would ye cal'late— A weazly mite— They was jokin' now? Would ye?"

Here spoke the deeps of the little man's heart. The agony of talking—it was nothing.

"Cu'd ye tell 'em, sir, so—so they'd sense it proper—times I cooked genuwine?"

His throat choking him, Arnie went to fetch an answer. To those of the crew he found on watch he said gruffly:

"Low he is; hard put. It's cankering to 'im—what you said. It would be a great favor. I'd thank you, boys——"

And after him they shuffled, rude, rawboned, awkward men. They squeezed in at the door and one after another had their say. Red of face they stumbled out, hushed.

"Now, I declare!" Japes mumbled painfully.

Perceiving Arnie's gaze on him, he tried to grin. "'Course it ain't no 'count— Reckon we git in a cacaxy—'bout— Pesky little— What say?"

Silence followed. The puffed mouth strove again.

"Like my thinkin'—trawlin' off—the banks—was much, an' buildin' a home— Sho'!"

Arnie's gaze burned into the bulkhead beyond the bunk. It was coming to him, creeping in at every pore. Slowly, slowly his sterling memory painted each picture of Japes' dream, of his dream's end—happiness. He felt the air of the place changing with the minutes.

He groped for Japes' wrist. Faintly, like a spent passion, beat the pulse. It could not last—could not last. The strychnine—no, not Japes! He must find something. Ah, the grog-barrel!

Out he charged, stopping a bare moment to see and feel the gay, festive swiftness of the vessel's gait. Then on to the grog-barrel. A hand and an arm plunged down—down to the bottom and rattled there. Dry. Dry!

SENSATIONS crowding pell-mell were alone responsible for his hesitation. The rigging plucked a shameless medley and laughed high overhead at its sheer conceit. He was unaware of this, although he smiled.

Arnie Sondheim had a smile such as the trawdry women in Jake's place were wont to fight over. It was a smile that renounced care and fortune alike. He knew how to laugh grimly; but when he smiled, he smiled in the manner of a small boy, single-heartedly.

His expression grew thoughtful as he strode down the companion steps. That was his mind reasoning clearly and accurately the inevitable result of what he was about. But he continued to smile. That result was a small thing—a small thing.

Captain Loman sought to stay him with some disgustingly moaned inquiry. But Arnie gave him no notice. In his hand as he came forth was the whisky bottle, gold-leaf sealed and gracefully molded in arch pride.

The vessel ran a high scale for his benefit; the vessel was his servant, his dog, his adoring friend.

He came down the steps to hear a feeble, inchoate sound that never in fullest health had been singing. Arnie did not ask whether or not it was music. It was more and it was less than music; it was "Jonah;" it was the chantey of the courageous whaler scorning hardship and disaster.

A flick of Arnie's knife rent the gold-leaf. Jab upon jab mangled the cork. In the doorway he halted and poured the golden fluid into the tin cup; it gurgled; it all but talked. Japes ceased his apology for song and vainly struggled to get to his elbow. A quavering protest soared upward! Arnie thrust out the drink.

"Saved it for you—steady, man! A proper-lined stomach, Japes."

"I can't," whimpered Japes. "I ain't able! Don'—be askin' of me——"

He fell back, panting.

"All ye'd hev— I ain't worth it——"

"Worth it!" echoed Arnie.

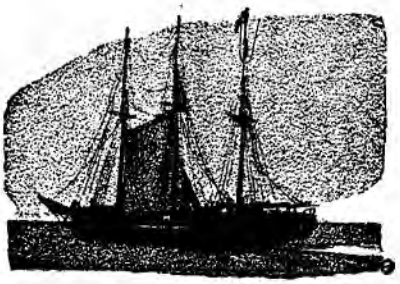
He had caught the joy of the *Samson*, all her pride and glory. Life was big, and the world was little; but not too little—no, not too little.

"Here! Stick up your head, matie! It'll get you home!"

"Home——"

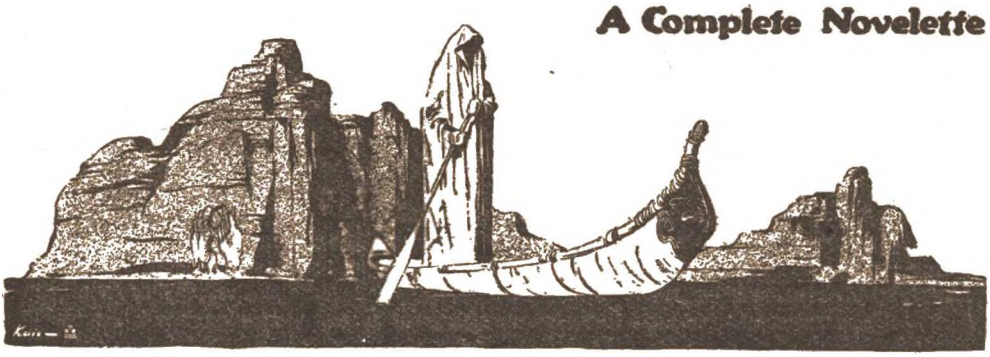
All that frail body sagged where it lay. Arnie bolstered it with his arm. A sigh of wonderment, and then a gentle collapse. Arnie did not see what had happened. He continued to smile, boyishly, foolishly, happily.

And the bottle, overturned on the floor, ran out its contents with a quaint prattle, like a tale that is told.



THE TEMPLE OF THE TEN

A Complete Novelette



by H. Bedford-Jones and W. C. Robertson

Author of "The Messenger," "Other Men's Shoes," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE PROFESSOR JOINS

SEVERN fired again. This time a crinkle of grim amusement drew down the wrinkles about his stark blue eyes. He had dropped one of the filthy Mongolian guides who had led him into the trap. His sun-blackened face was leathery, harsh, very keen. He seemed to ignore the stench of the rotting camel whose body served him as a breastwork. On the hairy fore-shoulder were laid three cartridges—his last three.

This is an age of specialization, as folk are apt at saying without comprehending their own words. Severn was a specialist in Chinese ethnic and lingual affairs. His work on Irano-Sinica was a classic of research. His monograph of six hundred pages on the admirable Chinese system of transcribing foreign words was a monument of philology. He had proved that the anthropomorphic conceptions in ancient Chinese religion were not really anthropomorphic at all.

His specialization led him to spend a year in Chinese Turkestan, working up gradually across the Shamo Desert toward Mongolia, and studying the dialects. This was now the tag-end of the year—a year of ethnic triumph, a year of personal disaster. His wife had died in his arms and lay buried in the Gobi. A collection of Indo-Scythian documents had been burned by lazy camelmen. Severn himself had been partially frozen during a storm on the Hu-shan gravel steppes. A drowned camel had carried down all his instruments and personal belongings excepting a rifle.

Through all this and much more Severn had come unembittered, gravely silent, with the same kindly, searching blue eyes and the same gentle deftness that made men love him. And now, at the year's end, he had come to life's end also.

Severn fired again, and his smile vanished. A miss; he did not like to miss. He had been ten hours without food or water, excepting such as he could get from the humps of the rotting Bactrian. Now he put his remaining cartridges into the magazine and waited. His last day on earth! A bullet snicked through the camel's fore-shoulder, spatted on a boulder and whanged off into space.

Behind Severn lay a frightful Odyssey, begun in the Chinese Turkestan deserts. Now he was somewhere at the edge of the Khangai plateau. At the back was the Gobi, or as the Chinese term it, the Shamo; ahead lay the Sajan range and Lake Baikal. Eastward lay Karakorum, the desolate ruins of the capital of Genghis Khan. Clad in Mongol skins, bearded and haggard, Severn was scarce recognizable as a white man.

He lay in a little hollow among ancient boulders, rising ground all around. It was not a good position, but he had not chosen it. About him rose the rim of the hollow, a circular horizon perhaps a quarter-mile in

diameter. Half-way down from the rim, on all sides, were the Mongols into whose trap his treacherous guides had led him. They numbered a dozen.

A strange ending for a man learned in ancient lores and forgotten tongues, a scholar revered by Sinologues and ethnic students alike. Here he lay in a little gray rocky bowl, all his world shrunk down to this; the man of wisdom had become a primitive barbarian who sought only to slay before he himself was slain. Ignorant of the huge riches within his brain, they would murder him for the trifle of worldly pelf he had left, and would leave that brain to the birds. Sheer wasteful destruction—the young world's way.

From here and there about the indrawing circle of death muskets and rifles banged, bullets or slugs whirred above the central figure. Severn lay motionless, waiting until his final two cartridges might tell most effectually. And as he waited he lifted bloodshot blue eyes to the rim of his little horizon.

Now he saw what he deemed a mirage, a hallucination. For, limned there against the blazing sky, sharp and distinct in every detail, he saw a group of six men who stood and watched him. Five of them were bearded men in khaki, topped by rakish turbans; those turbans gave back a sun-glitter of steel, and Severn knew the steel for the turban-rings of Sikh troopers. Sikh troopers—here! The sixth man was a white man, also in khaki, and all six were calmly gazing down as if awaiting the end of this butchery.

A croaking laugh broke from Severn. The laugh died out in a gasp of startled surprize.

The white man had raised his hand in a gesture of command. At this gesture the Sikhs lifted their rifles and fired. Real men, real rifles! More than this, from other quarters came an answering crackle of rifle-fire. Severn turned his head and saw other parties of men at the rim of the sunken basin, firing downward.

A reechoing swirl of frantic yells broke up from the bouldered waste. Here and there leaped out Mongols, filthy, skin-clad figures. They scurried from here and yon, all trying to reach the cluster of tethered ponies. Some dropped. The rifle-fire from the rim of the bowl was an irregular but continuous crackle.

Severn rose to his feet, trembling a little. He lifted his rifle, forced his hands into steadiness and fired twice; the last brace of his treacherous guides fell to the bullets. Then Severn took out his pipe, took out the pinch of tobacco wrapped in a squill of silk that he had preserved for two weeks, and filled his pipe.

He watched, sucking the unlighted pipe, for he had no light. Three of the Mongols reached the ponies; the others were dead. These three made a frantic effort to escape out of the bowl, but for them there was no escape. Bullets brought down their horses. Bullets killed them as they came to their feet again. That party was wiped out to the last man, mercilessly, efficiently, with a cold precision which startled Severn.

Who were these rescuers? Had he gone suddenly mad, or was this reality?

He sat down on the fore-shoulder of the camel. The three parties of men were coming down from the rim of this little world, but the closest was that which he had first seen. He stared at the white man who strode ahead of the Sikhs—a tall, ruggedly handsome type with the chopped-off angular jaw that bespoke south-of-England blood. Recognition dawned in the eyes of Severn; he had met this man somewhere in the past. Ah, yes! At the Naval Club in Weihaiwei a year or so ago; it seemed centuries. He remembered the chap now.

"Hullo, Kilgore!" he exclaimed as his rescuer came up. "You haven't a match, have you?"

"Upon my word—it's Severn!" Kilgore's hand shot out. "Man, I didn't recognize you! Where's the rest of your crowd?"

Kilgore produced a match-box. Severn lighted his pipe and answered curtly—

"Dead."

"No, not these chaps." Kilgore frowned slightly. "I mean the party you went up-country with; Mrs. Severn, the Jansen brothers and old Tom Fellows the botanist. No word has come through from any of you for months. I never dreamed you were up this way. At last reports your expedition was around Kashgar."

Severn met the warm smile of Kilgore with impassive features. Then he kicked at the rotting camel twice.

"This," he said reflectively, "is what's left. And me."

Kilgore started. The profound melancholy of those words affrighted him. He

guessed that Severn was going to pieces inside, breaking up fast; it was a crucial moment. The wrong word, the wrong tone, and Severn would go mad, shoot himself, snap somewhere. Only such a man as Kilgore would have guessed this, for Severn appeared quite steady.

The Canadian—for such Kilgore really was—snapped out an order and his five Sikhs went on to join their advancing fellows. Then he produced a cigaret and lighted it. His words came fast, but not too fast, getting swift impact on Severn's brain.

"Our scouts heard the firing this morning, and we came ahead. Surrounded the place, of course; if any of these chaps had gotten away, would have been bad for us. Confounded lucky thing we've met you, Severn. You're the one man I know who might solve the enigma we're up against—the Temple of the Ten Dromedaries. We'll seize it, of course, but none of us are in your class, and we'd only waste the greatest opportunity an ethnologist could have. If you could come along with us, now—oh, hello! Here are my companions in crime."

Severn looked up. Curiosity was already rising in his brain; he was steady now, in control again, and the critical instant was past. To join the two men came two others; Severn saw that there were a score of Sikhs engaged in rounding up the horses of the Mongol raiders, and all had been led by Kilgore and his two companions.

Severn was introduced to Day, a huge, cheerful American, and to Sir Fandi Singh, a Rajput gentleman, bearded and swart. An odd company, he thought. And before much speech had passed among them, Severn spoke his curiosity. Kilgore was handing about a canteen of lukewarm water as if he were quite unaware that Severn was perishing of thirst.

"How on earth did you fellows come to be here—with these Sikhs?"

There was a general smile, and Kilgore made off-hand response.

"Oh, we expect to reach the Temple of the Ten in a day or so. Let's get out of this devilish hot bowl and back to the horses. We can talk then in some peace."

THEY walked back toward the rim by the way Kilgore had come, and in silence. Severn, safely over that tremendous shock of meeting white men in his present circumstances, was already afire at thought of Kilgore's words and their implications. Why not? He had heard of the Temple of the Ten Dromedaries; every one in Mongolia had heard of it, a place fabulous as the palace of Kubla Khan. The tales about it would have done credit to the Arabian romancers; singing fishes, purple grass, magic and wonders innumerable! Severn, like other men of fact, had ignored the tales, taking them for fiction pure and simple.

Day produced some chocolate and Severn seized it eagerly.

"Do you mean to say," he demanded between bites, "that this place does exist?"

Kilgore gave him a sidelong glance and smiled in satisfaction.

"We've been there—at least, Fandi Singh and I have. We're going back. These chaps who tried to pot you were members of the temple tribe. Their own name for the place, by the way, is Darkan."

At this word a singular light blazed up in the eyes of Severn.

"Darkan!" he murmured. "That is extraordinary!"

Kilgore smiled again, as if he had calculated the effect of this word.

The four men went on in silence. At the crest of the depression they sighted the horses, waiting at a little distance. Day placed a whistle at his lips and blew a shrill blast. The horse-guards brought forward the animals, while the Sikhs began the ascent from the basin.

Severn glanced around, his eyes sparkling.

"Where is your baggage train?" he demanded. "Your camels and——"

"They come to meet us at Darkan," said Kilgore. "They are in charge of Sheng Wu, a Chinese political agent and a most efficient man; he has an escort of fifty Manchu horsemen. We pushed ahead for a surprize stroke. Now, we'll camp here until night; do you want to clean up first and sleep afterward?"

"By all means," rejoined Severn.

The Sikhs assembled, and Severn *sahib* was introduced; they were delighted at having rescued him, grinned and jested like boys, proud of their work. The last four to arrive bore two Mongol bodies, which they laid down. Kilgore beckoned to Severn.

"Here's a surprize for you! Did you ever see Mongols like these?"

Severn stood over the two bodies, astonished. They were totally unlike the usual

men of the steppes, except in the common denominator of dirt. The complexions were clear, the death-fixed eyes were gray, almost without obliquity. The frontal measure was very wide.

"Broad, high brow—benevolent-looking ducks!" said Day. "But it's all in looks. They are large men, eh? No bow-legged little Tatars!"

"I think their language is a compound of Russian and Mongol," added Kilgore. "Can you make anything of their race, Severn?"

The latter nodded thoughtfully.

"It's quite clear," he observed. "The type has turned up before—descendants of the Russian sect of Starovertsi, or 'old believers,' who came here from Russia in the eighteenth century and were swallowed up by the Mongol Kirgiz hordes. Quite clear."

Day stared hard at him for a moment, then clapped him lustily on the shoulder.

"You win, professor! I take off my hat to you. Come along, now—Fandi has raided our haversacks for a shirt and pants, and we'll spare you enough water for a shave——"

In effect, camp had been made while they examined the two bodies. It was a simple camp; no fires, since "they hadn't *de quoi*," little water, no shelter. It was the camp of men who are staking everything on one swift, sure stroke.

Severn was aided to bathe and shave, none grudging him the precious water. Enough odd garments were found to clothe him. When the job was finished, he was staggering with mental and physical weariness and reaction—but he looked and felt like a new man.

"You'd better eat no more until after you've slept, old man," said Kilgore. "Here you are; curl up in this hollow and I'll fling a coat over you. I presume you'll throw in with us, what?"

Severn lifted his face to the clean sky, and uttered his first sane laugh in months.

"With all my heart!"

CHAPTER II

SEVERN UNDERSTANDS

IN THIS *sai*, this driven waste of glacial gravel, there was no timber. The three friends sat about a burner of solidified alcohol, brewing tea; Severn slept near by; the Sikhs were making their evening meal from emergency rations.

"That chap," and Day nodded his head toward the sleeping Severn, "is a fine man, Kilgore. Wonderful! If I'd been in his place—well, I'd have gone off my head long ago."

"He's lost everything in life," said Kilgore thoughtfully. "If he pulls out sane, and has something given him to live for, he'll still be a great man in the world. We'll give him the something—additions to his science."

Fandi Singh frowned slightly and fingered his curly beard.

"What was that you told him about Darkan?" he questioned. "Why did it affect him, and what mystery is there in it?"

Kilgore smiled.

"He'll tell you himself—he's stirring now. It's a philological puzzle, that's all. Exactly the thing he needed to buck him up."

Severn came to his feet and joined them. Sleep had made a new man of him. He stood gazing at the three, a shadowy, gentle smile on his lips.

"I don't believe I've thanked you fellows," he observed. "I am grateful, you know——"

"Oh, sit down and forget everything," said Day in his roughly genial way. "Say, Fandi Singh wants to know about that Darkan stuff! What is there about it so blamed queer? I don't see anything curious in a filthy Mongolian name."

Severn chuckled, sat down, took the cigaret Kilgore handed him, and inhaled the smoke with avid delight.

"It's an Old-Turkish word, not Mongol," he said. "Perhaps it was derived from Uigur. It's been carried all over Asia and Europe—Astrakan, or Hajji Tarkan, is a sample. You chaps staggered me with the news that this temple really exists, and that word may give a clue to its origin. For years there has been a philologic battle over it. It means, in effect, 'endowed with authority.'"

"Any connection with the Chinese word *ta-kan?*" queried Kilgore.

"The same word. The ancient Chinese pronunciation was *dar-kan*. It's often written with an x, like the name of the last Ming general, Koxinga; but the letter is always intended for the spirant surd. Some cheerful fool put out that *ta-kan* stood for Great Khan, yet the old pronunciation, as

well as the transcription, shows its real meaning."

Kilgore winked slyly at Sir Fandi. It was evident that Severn was himself again.

"The water's hot," he announced. "Tea, Day! Can't give you much to eat, Severn; we're on emergency rations. Make the best of things as they are. By the way, what do you know about the Darkan temple?"

"Rumor only. Nothing definite."

"We'll sketch things for you, and then be on our way, eh?"

"Good. Call these emergency rations, do you? If you'd been eating what I have for the past few months, you'd say this was a Lucullan feast! Now I know how that old Roman ambassador from Antoninus Pius must have felt, when he had wandered over Tibet and Tartary and finally came to the outposts of Chinese civilization. Let's have your tale."

While eating, Severn listened to the facts related by Kilgore.

FIRST, Darkan existed; both Kilgore and Fandi Singh had been there. They were now returning—partly with governmental authority, partly for loot, and partly for humanitarian reasons. Twenty-odd Sikhs had been recruited from discharged Indian army men. Also, Kilgore had with him a machine gun of his own invention.

"Poor Mac was half-inventor, also," he said, "but we left Mac in Kalgan—bad case of septic poisoning from an infected razor. He's safe enough, but in no shape for hard work. And I can tell you we've had hard work getting here! Now for the Darkan material.

"The temple has ten priests, who in turn have ten novitiates. They absolutely rule the tribe who supports 'em, but they're located at some distance from the tribe. The Mongols have a tremendous respect for the temple and won't come near it except on order, and once a year for worship. The novitiates are what might be called outside priests. Ten times a year they send in ten girls to the temple; a nasty business all around, Severn."

Severn nodded.

"I can imagine so. A brutal crowd, heritors of some ancient glory."

"Quite so. But behind the temple and the priests is some unknown person who rules the lot. They call him Esrun. He is highly mysterious, lives apart from the temple at the sacred lake, issues all orders by telepathy, and so forth. Telepathy plays a large part in the whole affair. When the priests need money, they send a telepathic message to this Esrun, who returns orders when and where to go. They go, and find money and jewels waiting for them. Mysterious, what?"

"I don't believe half of that, in spite of you all," said Day cheerfully. "It's a fairy-tale! But I know the priests exist. Money and jewels—bosh! Jewels, particularly Central Asian jewels, aren't worth half what romancers claim. I know!"

Severn's blue eyes were sparkling.

"I suppose you know about this Esrun?" he asked.

Kilgore shook his head.

"No. What do you mean?"

"Esrun is the Mongol designation of Brahma, derived from Uigur Zarua, in turn taken from the Sogdian form *'zrwa*, the equivalent of the Avestan *'zrvan*. Remarkable!"

Fandi Singh chuckled in his beard.

"You are thinking fifteen centuries away; we are thinking in the present," he said calmly. "These priests of Darkan are degenerate brutes, and very dangerous. If we surprize the temple, we can hold it against all assaults until Sheng Wu comes up with our baggage, camels and assistance. Then we mean to locate this Esrun and clean him out. I think," he added reflectively, "that he is some old Mongol shaman who has found the tomb of Genghis Khan—perhaps the hereditary guardian of the tomb. Who knows? There are some who say that Genghis Khan was no other than Yoshitsune, prince of the Gengi, a Japanese general——"

Day came to his feet.

"With all due respect," he said dryly, "we can sit here and drivel all night about myths and legends. Me, I'm for action! It's getting dark, two of our scouts are already in and waiting to report, and we'd better can the talk. I don't care who these fellows with Bible names are descended from, so long as I get the drop on 'em. Let's go."

There was a general laugh and immediate assent. Day shrilled on his whistle, and two stalwart Sikhs came up and saluted.

Severn took the reins of the little Mongol

horse brought to him and watched in the semi-darkness as Kilgore received reports and issued orders. He had long ago decided that he liked these three marvelous men—the American, the Canadian, the Rajput. They were straight, clean men doing big things. And why? What gods did they serve? He could not be sure about this. He judged for himself that they had little reverence for money; this expedition must have cost more than could be recouped financially.

Not science had drawn them into this dreary section of earth, these weary leagues of stone and sand where indigenous man was lower than most animals. They were not scientists in any sense. The hint came to him with memory of Kilgore's tone in speaking of the periodical convoys of virgins sent to Darkan by the novitiate priests.

Severn, because he was essentially the same type of man himself, saw suddenly with the eyes of Kilgore—and comprehended. There was more to this Temple of the Ten Dromedaries than he knew, more than the rumored tales could furnish. It was a survival of some ancient culture, now an infected plague-sore that poisoned everything around. It was a thing from which the clean mind of a civilized man recoiled, as from some loathsome insect.

To this intuitive feeling Severn reacted instinctively. For a year he had been engaged in a constant struggle against disaster, a constantly failing effort to escape from the overwhelming tide of a remorseless fate. His friends and companions had gone down. His wife had gone down. His painfully gathered scientific materials had gone down. Reduced to the bone and sinew of his own body, everything else destroyed, he found himself suddenly plucked up and thrown into the company of men who had fought through a wilderness outpost of hell—for what? For nothing selfish.

Severn caught his breath. Now he perceived why those Mongols had been exterminated, pitilessly—as one crushes out the loathsome insect in fear and horror. Darkan must be worse even than rumor pictured the place.

Day saluted at an order from Kilgore, blew three sharp blasts on his whistle and turned to Severn.

"We're off, professor! You'd better ride with me. Bad going before morning—we'll strike the sands again."

Sir Fandi Singh, in the saddle of a beautiful white stallion, turned and shouted a cheery farewell and trotted away. After him went fifteen of the Sikh troopers, leaving a bare dozen to follow Kilgore. Severn, already in the saddle, reined in beside Day.

"Where are they off to? We don't seem to be following them——"

Day chuckled.

"Blamed good thing we're not! Anybody following Fandi Singh this night has some job ahead! We've timed our arrival, you see, to coincide with that of the caravan from Urga—the caravan which the novitiate priests bring in every thirty-six days. We're striking Darkan from the south; the caravan comes in from the northeast. So Fandi is going ahead to catch that caravan as it enters the temple valley. He has fifteen men to do the work of fifty, and to ride like —— doing it. If any of the Mongols get away on the back trail, they'll raise the tribe. If any of 'em get through, they'll warn the temple priests. Yes, sir, if you want to know what real work is like, you stick with Fandi Singh!"

Severn was silent for a space. Kilgore drew in at his left; the dozen Sikhs came after them, all unhurried, progressing steadily and surely. Presently Severn spoke.

"You have done this with your imagination at work."

Kilgore understood, and assented.

"We've had to look ahead, yes. The priests have a general slaughter of the women every month—clearing the way for the newcomers. As I said, it's a nasty affair, Severn; won't do to dwell on. If we can strike that temple tomorrow night, we'll find only the priests there. Fandi Singh has to halt the Urga caravan and rescue the girls it is bringing."

"Suppose you've miscalculated dates?" asked Severn.

"We haven't miscalculated." The answer was swift, curt, decisive.

"By gad, I like you chaps!" exclaimed the scientist impulsively. "If you've been here before and learned the ropes, good enough; we may get away with it! A lot I care what the end is—you're good company to stick with! But is there any truth in the stories of telepathic control?"

"More than you'd believe," said Day dourly. "More than I believed—at first."

"Then," said Severn, "don't you imagine that the priests will be already forewarned? Give the mystics due credit; they know a lot we don't. Isn't it more than probable that they have received telepathic warnings of your projected expedition?"

Then Kilgore did a singular thing. He made no answer for a moment, but presently lifted his arm and pointed to the blazing stars in the night-sky above them. When he spoke, his voice held a hushed but profound emotion—an emotion strange in so poised a man.

"Can you realize what those twinkling dots are—and not believe in God?" he said softly.

Severn made no response. Perhaps those words went deeply into him.

CHAPTER III

THE CITY OF THE WHIRLING SANDS

SEVERN lay flat at the mouth of the defile and watched an extraordinary scene from beneath the curving rim of a great boulder.

Before dawn they had arrived at the valley of Darkan. This valley had two entrances, and this southern entrance was guarded by a single Mongol. As Kilgore had explained, the office of guardian was hereditary. Except for this one man, those of the tribe never ventured into the valley of the whirling sands.

Severn stared as a lone Sikh advanced, unarmed and openly, in the new light of day. The Sikh held his turban-ring over one wrist. Ahead of him appeared nothing but rock.

"A play for primitive curiosity," said Kilgore, low-voiced, from his position beside Severn. "If it wins—we win. Few men have seen a Sikh turban-ring at work. Watch."

The Sikh came to a pause, stared around vacantly. Among the rocks ahead a single skin-clad figure stood up; the dull glint of a rifle-barrel was visible. The Sikh seemed not to observe it, but stooped and fumbled at the laces of a shoe.

The Mongol stepped forward, rifle held loosely. The Sikh picked up a stone and threw it at some invisible snake or scorpion near by. The Mongol jumped, saw that his fear was groundless, came forward again.

Then for the second time the Sikh stooped to throw. The motion appeared awkward and ungainly. The steel ring left his hand, whirled out in a wide arc, and the Mongol stared at it in astonishment. The ring curved through the air, as a flat stone curves from the hand of a boy; it shot upward—and suddenly gave one terrible swoop downward. A cry burst from the Mongol. The razor-edge of that steel ring struck him between neck and body. He vanished from sight.

Day's whistle shrilled. The Sikhs leaped up, ran for the defile. Severn found himself running with them. They came to the lone Sikh rising from above the body of the Mongol, wiping his ring. He saluted Kilgore and smiled.

"*Sahib*, he was alone."

Day picked up a long tube of bronze which the Mongol had dropped. It was some sort of horn or trumpet. That its note could cover the ten miles of valley to the Darkan temple was an incredible conjecture; yet here was the man, here was the trumpet—naught beside.

"I guess," said Day, "we won't try the thing, eh? Come on."

The horses were brought up, and the fifteen men rode through the defile. This, presently, widened before them, broadened out into a great valley of sand—a yellow waste in the morning sunlight, with yellow mountains to the left, purple-shadowed hills to the right. They halted to make camp beside a pool of clear, cold water in a hollow of the defile.

"Three hours for sleep," said Kilgore calmly. "Then on."

No fires were made. The Sikhs squatted, ate, talked in low eager tones. Severn and Day, who was also seeing this place for the first time, sat and listened to Kilgore, who had an excellent idea of how the land lay.

"Imagine a great Y," said the Canadian, "at the bottom of which we now stand. This lower portion is ten miles in length. Once it was a fertile valley, like those buried cities of Khotan which you have seen, Severn. Under that sand ahead of us lies a city——"

"This is the valley of whirling sands, that the legends tell about?"

"Exactly. At the upper end stands the Darkan temple, the last remnant of that lost city. The right fork of the Y is short, only a few miles in length, and ends in a blank

valley—what would be called a box cañon in the States. That is where the magic lake of singing fishes and purple grass lies, the home of Esrun himself.

"The left fork of the Y, to the left of those central hills ahead, is a defile like this one, but it opens into a series of valleys which support the Darkan tribe. Fandi Singh is now at that defile, I trust, waiting to cut off the caravan. He is to join us at the temple two hours after dark. There will be only the ten priests to fear. They have a number of Mongol women who attend to the housekeeping. We'll handle them easily."

Severn gave his companions a reflective glance.

"The whole procedure sounds like a very simple thing, after all."

Kilgore smiled.

"It would be simple to capture —— if one had a plan of the place! Let's get some sleep. Guards out, Day?"

The latter nodded.

"No forage for the horses, though. They're in bad shape."

"There's forage to be had in plenty—at the temple."

Day grinned and settled himself for sleep in the hollows he had dug for hips and shoulder-blades. Severn followed suit and was asleep almost instantly.

When he wakened, it was to hear a low murmur of wonder from the bearded Sikhs, who were one and all staring at the sand-valley before them. Severn sat up and looked at the valley; he remained thus, propped up on his hands, staring blankly.

There was something—a score of things—moving there, far down the valley. At first glance they looked like water-spouts, some of huge size, some very small. They were, of course, whirlwinds of sand; but the odd thing was that they retained their shape and moved in almost regular lines back and forth.

Smiling, Kilgore thrust a pair of field-glasses into the hand of Severn. The latter looked again. Miles away in that clear atmosphere, he saw strange things. Those whirling sands were, in the central portion of the valley, marching in incredible numbers. As they came and went, Severn saw a black mass disclosed for a moment—the ruin of some uncovered house or palace. It vanished again. He saw great toghrak-trees laid bare, and then disappear. He saw buildings come into shape; one looked like the *tope* of some low-built temple.

A stalwart Sikh came up and saluted Kilgore.

"*Sahib*, this is the place of whirling sands, of which you told us? Good. Do these sands swallow up men?"

"Like flies," said Kilgore grimly. "We march by the eastern rim of the valley, *risaldar*. If we have luck we shall get through."

"*Wah, Guru!*" exclaimed the Sikh. "Then we wet our turbans here."

He gave an order. The Sikhs sprang into activity, tearing from their long turbans strips of cloth for the noses of men and animals—the leather head-bags had been left with the camels. The wet cloths would substitute. Kilgore turned to Severn.

"You see why no Mongols venture into this valley, except at such times as the priests indicate?"

Severn nodded.

"Wind-currents, atmospheric conditions, heat and altitude," he said curtly. "When do we march?"

"Now," answered Day, and shrilled on his whistle.

The fifteen set out. There was but one lead-pony, which bore Kilgore's machine gun. Following the Canadian, they headed diagonally for the eastern edge of the valley, where comparatively few of the sand-spouts were dancing.

It was wearisome going, for the sands were loose and shifting, so that the animals sank fetlock-deep at each step; Severn perceived that they would be most of the day in traversing this ten-mile valley. He had had his fill of this monotonous sand-marching long since. The menace of the whirling pillars of sand did not worry him, nor the gusty winds that filled the air with flying particles. He was inured to all this and as he rode on his thoughts wandered to Kilgore's separation of forces.

That Kilgore had left his camels and baggage to follow under guard of Sheng Wu and the Manchu riders, less from choice than from necessity, was plain enough. Yet Severn did not like it. Such men as the Darkan priests, who kept in full touch with the outside world by means of their novitiates, might easily have heard of the projected expedition; all magic aside, they might have learned of it through natural sources of information. A conviction oppressed Severn's mind that Kilgore had committed a fatal error—but it was not his to speak of it now.

Time dragged. The party made slow progress along the eastern edge of the valley and presently even Severn was eying the sand-spouts uneasily. Large and small, those whirling vortices moved with an incredible speed. Noses of men and animals were muffled in the wet cloths. When one of the smallest pillars shot toward them, a tiny vortex no higher than a mounted man, the riders eyed it grimly and awaited its coming without fear.

It burst upon them. Severn, no less than the others, was profoundly startled by the frightful force of this tiny sand-spout. It was a perfect maelstrom of wind and sand that whirled on them, buffeted and wrenched them, nearly tore them from their saddles. The sand cut through clothes and hairy pelts to the skin. When they emerged from it, they were gasping, staggered, stricken. The captured Mongol ponies broke away and fled, screaming shrilly.

"My ——!" croaked Day in dismay. "If one of those big fellows lands on us, good night! That was sample enough for me——"

Kilgore held up his hand and gave a sharp command.

"Forward! At the whistle from Day *sahib*, break ranks and seek shelter along the rock-ledges. Forward."

They rode on, men and beasts sorely shaken by realization of the danger. To their right stretched abrupt ledges of the red Khangai granite. Kilgore explained to Severn that, although there were no sand-spouts in the valley at night, precisely for that reason had he chosen to attack by day. The priests would be caught completely off guard at dark.

"You have planned boldly," said Severn. The eyes of Kilgore bored into him.

"But not well?"

Severn parried with his gentle smile.

"My dear chap, I certainly am no competent critic. No two generals adopt the same tactics. Let us await the event——"

Day's whistle shrilled; a great whirling pillar had swerved and was sweeping straight toward them as if guided by some infernal intelligence. The horses snorted, broke in panic. Severn, like the others, dismounted and gripped his bridle, clinging close in against the rocky wall that would break the blow.

But not all gained that wall. Two of the horses got the bits between their teeth and with their riders bolted straight ahead, frantic with terror. As if they were standing still, Severn saw the whirling pillar rush for them—then the maelstrom was shattered along the precipice; he found himself engulfed by a dun cloud of stifling sand and gripped hard at the nostrils of his trembling horse. The two fleeing men vanished. Sand covered everything.

It was over presently. Buried to the waist, the men emerged. The pack-horse with the gun was safe. All sign of those two men was gone; blotted out as if they had never been, even the place where they had gone down could not be discerned. The sand-waves, in level wind-riffled billows, had covered them over and were smooth again. To search for the lost men were folly; delay in this place were madness.

"Mount," ordered Day, and the staring men obeyed.

"By the right hand of the Lion," spoke out the stalwart *risaldar*, stroking sand from his beard, "I think there are devils in this place!"

"So there are, *risaldar*," said Kilgore coolly. "Are we to fear devils, then?"

The *risaldar* laughed fiercely, and after him the other nine. They spurred forward again; and as they passed through that vast city, buried under the sands of forgotten centuries, they beheld strange things laid bare by the floating sands. Yet they paused not.

Severn, as he rode, wondered what would happen to them if Sheng Wu and the supporting force did not show up.

CHAPTER IV

THE HUNTING OF THE RATS

TWO miles from the junction of the Y-arms at the upper end of the valley of whirling sands the party halted at mid-afternoon. Here, sheltered by a long rock-ledge jutting into the valley, was their last cover. Between them and the temple lay open sand, which Kilgore dared not cross until darkness came to shield them from sight.

With his two companions Severn stretched out on the rocky ledge and trained the glasses upon the Darkan temple. Off to the left diverged the left arm of the Y, a narrowing continuation of the sandy valley. The right arm was hidden from their sight. In between lay a craggy wall of red granite running into the high hills behind. A long

green niche in this wall showed the position of the temple.

"It's a grassy spot watered by springs," explained Kilgore. "They keep racing dromedaries and a few horses and sheep there—you'll pick up the wall in a minute. Found it, have you? It's walled, of course. Look to the right end of the green spot for the temple—a low *tope*. The valley has been filled with sand since it was built, so that the dome is now almost below the level of the sands. Those rocky knuckles out in front have kept the sand from encroaching. In ancient times the temple had a view of the whole valley; now they can barely see this two-mile strip of sand—unless they have watchers posted on the hillside behind. They're too lazy for that, I fancy. They trust to the Mongolian watchman at the southern end, the chap we attended to at dawn."

Severn had picked up the temple, a mass of granite melting into the hill behind. It appeared deserted; but moving specks in the walled pasture indicated habitation.

In the scene was nothing startling. Everything was prosaic, drab, stark mountains and yellow sand, and this abode of man was repellent in its primitive ugliness. Only when one turned to view the marching pillars of whirling sand did the impression come of strangely sinister forces at work. Only when one looked to the far green peaks of the higher Khangais was this impression strengthened by the memory that somewhere hereabouts had been the throne of Prester John, whence the Mongol blast had gone forth to burn half the world.*

The three returned, joined the Sikhs again, and at sunset the evening meal was made ready; it was a good meal, finishing up the last of the rations. The horses, on their last legs for lack of fodder, were given the last of the water.

"It's a case of root hog or die!" exclaimed Day cheerfully. "Everything we lack is over yonder behind a wall—and we have to get it. So we'll probably get it."

"Exactly." Kilgore produced a cherished English cigaret and lighted it. "Luxuries tomorrow—if we win! Those chaps bring in all sorts of stuff from the outside world. Two to one we find a phonograph in the main temple hall! If they were not a lazy outfit, and if they had put their brains to work, they could have made this place the center of a Mongol horde which might sweep Asia! Tell you what, this place has an influence that's felt as far south as Tibet; but these brutes lacked initiative. The mysterious Esrun——"

Kilgore checked himself and fell into silence. Now, as on one or two previous occasions, Severn was conscious of things left unsaid—hints at unguessed influence behind this expedition. The British ruled in Tibet. These Sikhs were ex-Indian army men. Kilgore's invention of the machine gun had been given to China. Was this one of the numberless outflung protecting arms of the British Empire—not in any sense official, yet none the less with far-reaching political effect—which had been carried into distant places by adventurous men since the days of the East India Company? Severn could find no answer, except in his own imagination. The speculation was interesting, but unsatisfying.

"You're going to wait for some word from Fandi Singh?" he asked.

"No." Kilgore shook his head. The man was perfectly poised as always, yet he was inwardly aflame with a nervous excitement. "We have enough men here to win or lose—and if we fail to surprize the ten priests, we lose. If we win, Fandi joins us and we can hold the temple indefinitely against the tribe—until Sheng Wu arrives."

Once again Severn felt that singular uneasiness over the way in which Kilgore's ultimate plans depended on the arrival of Sheng Wu. But he thrust the thought from his mind.

The sun slipped away and was gone. In the valley the whirling sands had died down and the wind ceased. Rifles were cleaned and loaded. The machine gun was not unpacked, as its chief value was for defense. When the long twilight was merging into night Kilgore gave the word to mount.

To Severn this final two miles presented a choking tedium, for eagerness was dragging at his soul. No word was spoken; the orders had been given and understood beforehand. Presently the horses sniffed the green oasis ahead and their pace quickened. Mounting a sharp rise in the sand, a light appeared ahead—rather, a glow of soft radiance marking the low rounded dome of the temple.

"Luminous paint in the *tope*," whispered Kilgore. "A lot of tricks like this inside. Come ahead!"

* Ghenghis Khan was a minor chief, later son-in-law, of Prester John, according to Marco Polo.

He and Severn quickened their advance, followed by the *risaldar*. Day halted the others and deployed some of them—for all egress from the place was to be shut off.

The mass of the temple was now clearly visible in the dim starlight; Severn perceived that it was a long, low building of stone, seemingly of massive strength. There was no indication of any watch being kept. Indeed, the central gates stood open and unguarded.

"Got 'em!" murmured Kilgore, and dismounted. "This is the hour when they meet to communicate with Esrun. If we're lucky we'll see things."

Handing their reins to the *risaldar*, Kilgore and Severn advanced on foot. They were in the gateway, and through. Pistol in hand, Kilgore led the way as if he had a perfect familiarity with the temple. Starbeams lighted their advance.

Inside the gates, a courtyard, small and backed by the temple proper. Somewhere afar a Mongol woman's voice rose in shrill, reedy song, followed by a banging of copper pots. This prosaic note drew a smile from Severn; then he followed Kilgore into darkness. A stone passage walled them in.

Kilgore had provided himself with a tiny pocket flashlight, probably for this very need. He flashed the pencil-beam ahead and Severn discerned only stone walls. An occasional door showed itself; then came a flight of descending steps. The Canadian halted.

"We've passed the entrance to the main hall," he breathed. "Nobody there now. Steps wind down, come out directly on council chamber. Not a sound, now!"

In darkness again, Severn followed down the stone steps. His nostrils caught the indescribable reek of temple candles, loose cotton wicks burning but unconsumed. The stairs went on interminably—twenty-five, thirty of them. Then a soft glow of light, and a curtain of some frayed material through which came the light.

To Severn this unhindered access was incredible. Now came the explanation, as Kilgore halted him with a touch—a high, shrill voice, vibrant with excitement, that rose from behind the curtain and spoke a Mongol readily understood by Severn.

"We have obeyed the orders of our lord Esrun. It is three weeks and more since the men of Darkan went forth, led by five novices, to the destruction of the impious white men and their followers. Let us ask our lord if the novices have made report to him."

Severn's eyes widened. Kilgore was glancing at him interrogatively; evidently the Canadian knew little of this language. But Severn dared say nothing. He held up a hand for silence and leaned forward, tensed, awaiting what might come next.

No further sound—blank silence from behind the curtain. Kilgore moved forward and Severn cautiously joined him. They stood at the curtain and looked through the frayed holes therein. And now, for a moment, Severn could not believe the scene before him. He even forgot that frightful news which had just come to his ears.

He gazed upon a company of ten men seated about a table, and on the table were four huge temple candles of soft, painted wax, smoking unheeded. The table was of ancient stone, but neither table nor candles held the stupefied gaze of Severn; it was the men themselves, the ten priests of Darkan, who sat in ungainly temple chairs of cracked lacquer and hugely curving mastodons' tusks, fossil ivory from the northern glaciers.

Each of those barbaric chairs framed a picture of brutish splendor. Red lamas were these men; their robes and hats were of dusky red, highly embroidered and glittering with an abundance of rich jewels—not the usual Tibetan ornaments of coral and turquoise, but blazing stones, cut and polished, set in antique fashion and throwing back the yellow candle-light in a flashing stream of fire. The men themselves were obese, bestial figures of lust and license unchecked. They sat in silence, staring at the candles. Their hair and mustaches and straggly beards were heavily gilded; their finger-nails were long and encased in quills of gold after the old Chinese fashion.

Now Severn saw the brutal faces crossed by a wave of startled emotion, as if into each man's brain had come some perturbing thought—yet no word had been spoken. After an instant one of them spoke, uneasily, as if to affirm the message he had caught.

"Our lord tells me that the men of Darkan have destroyed that caravan, and that our novices report there was no trace of white men. Is this correct, brethren?"

The others assented. Their breathing was heavy, rapid, tense. Severn, who saw that Kilgore understood nothing of what was said, went sick at heart.

The scheme of this infernal Esrun was plain to him now. Esrun had sent out the tribe under five novices, directing them by telepathy to destroy Kilgore's caravan, yet not knowing that Kilgore had left that caravan. The other five novices, no doubt, were bringing the virgin tribute from Urga. And Sheng Wu had been destroyed!

In his agitation, Severn touched the curtain before him. It waved. From one of the Ten broke a cry—and the cry was lost in the crack of Kilgore's pistol.

What came afterward was a mad frenzy of destruction. The priests were armed—and were armed with automatic pistols. They dashed down the candles and scattered. The chamber had other doors. Kilgore's little flashlight was of small avail.

Severn yielded to the lust of the man-hunt—running after fleeing figures, shooting, pursuing blindly with sobbing breath and emptied pistol. Dark passages, shots stabbing the obscurity, the stifling stink of smoldering candle-wicks, the tumultuous shouts and screams of fighting men—everything was pandemonium, sheer madness! Of what he did or where he went Severn could afterward remember little.

He emerged into the open night, staggering, gasping for breath, and found himself standing in the temple courtyard. The stone building behind was reverberating to shots, shouts, poundings. There welled up the same wild Sikh battle-yell that sounded when the foundations of Mogul mosques were washed in the blood of swine by the hillmen.

"*Wah, Guru!*"

With swish of torn silk, a figure leaped out past Severn, darted across the open sand. Behind it, in the darkness of some doorway, clanged the echoing breath of a rifle; the figure spun about, tottered, went down.

"*Wah, Guru!*"

The *risaldar* came forth, joined Severn and laughed wildly. "Ha, *sahib!* There was the last of the rats—we have hunted them down well, eh? By the brood of the Lion, this was good work! The women are under guard, unhurt; they were all old cattle, those women. And only two of our men wounded!"

Severn felt suddenly sickened with himself.

"Do not rejoice too soon," he returned harshly. "Sheng Wu and the caravan have been destroyed."

The *risaldar* uttered one astonished ejaculation, then fell silent.

CHAPTER V

"UNG-KHAN, THAT IS TO SAY, PRESTER JOHN."
—*M. Polo*

TWENTY minutes after the last shot was fired, Sir Fandi Singh and five men came riding in at top speed, to find the temple already taken.

The ten priests had fallen to the last man; stripped of their jeweled insignia, they were consigned to a burial party at once, and a swift search of the temple was made. The half-dozen Mongolian hags who did the work of the place were confined closely in one of the rear chambers, for they could not be trusted. Except for these the temple was empty.

Traces of other inhabitants were found—gorgeous clothes and jewels of women, for example; one of the hags confessed that these women had been taken to the lake of singing fish the previous night. What this meant was clear enough. Many rifles of Russian and German make were found, with ammunition; and the store-room was filled with luxurious supplies of all descriptions. The main hall of the temple, the place of worship of the tribe, was gaudy with Buddhistic images, many of them the fine jeweled brasswork of Tibet.

"Where's Severn?" asked Kilgore suddenly, missing the scientist.

"Down below," said Day. "Said he wanted to see the dromedaries. There's nothing else to see in that place."

"Very well—post sentries and join us there, immediately."

With Fandi Singh, Kilgore went to the lower chamber in which they had surprized the ten priests. Both men were calm enough. They had no doubt that what Severn had told them was correct—that the caravan had been destroyed by the Darkan tribe. They knew that the telepathic powers of the priests were remarkable, and it was true that only five novices had been with the caravan ambushed by Sir Fandi.

They found Severn standing over that singular stone table about which the ten priests had been assembled. He had lighted more candles, and the chamber was dimly illuminated. It seemed some ancient place

of worship abandoned in favor of the upper hall, Chinese fashion; except for the table and chairs it contained only ten pillars spaced at intervals. But these pillars were remarkable.

The lower portions of these pillars were shaped in the form of dromedaries or camels, nearly full size; from the humps ascended stone columns to support the roof. Each pillar had obviously been carved from the living rock, as had the chamber itself.

Severn glanced up excitedly as the two men entered, and raised his hand.

"Look! I want you to notice something—this table! It's been hewn out of the bare stone, you see? And note its position, here at one end of the place. Does that suggest anything to you?"

Kilgore and Sir Fandi shook their heads.

"Not a thing," said the Canadian.

He produced half a dozen packets of English cigarets, procured from the storeroom, and tossed them wearily on the table. Severn brushed them aside with a gesture of swift irritation.

"But look again—can't you see that this room is like a church? That this table stands in place of the altar—what was anciently a table indeed? And now look at the under side of it——"

Severn lighted one of the candles, whose soft, pigmented wax stained his fingers a vivid scarlet. Unheeding, he lowered it to the floor. Kilgore, catching a spark of his ardor, came to his knees and looked up at the under side of the table. Sir Fandi, a grim smile under his beard, dropped into a chair and lighted a cigaret.

"Inscription," grunted the Canadian, and rose. "Looks like Manchu and Chinese, what?"

"Mongol, also Chinese," corrected Severn, a flush of excitement in his face. "The Mongol is well preserved—I've been copying it. I can read nearly all of it. Listen!"

Kilgore opened a box of cigarets and flung himself into a chair. Sir Fandi watched the American, still smiling, yet mildly curious despite himself. Severn clutched at the tabletop, reading there what he had copied and written on the stone with red wax:

"The period name is gone, but we don't need it—this thing was built by Ung-khan in the sixth year, a year of the Yellow Rat, and was dedicated on the first day of the eleventh month, a day of the White Cock. Understand what that means? Do you understand? It's the most ancient Mongol inscription we have, of course, but the name Ung-khan and the titles! Here is the significant title, from the Chinese text—the word *ngu-se-tal* It's a representation of the Persian *ustad*, which in turn rendered the Hebrew *rab* or rabbi.

"Now wait! Here Ung-khan calls himself *ngu-se-ta*, or teacher, of God, and also beloved of Buddha. He was a lama, but also a Christian—a not uncommon circumstance among the Tatars."

"What of it?" demanded Kilgore, smiling at the earnestness of Severn.

"What of it? Good ——, man! It confirms the old supposition—this Ung-khan was not only a hereditary lama of the form of Buddhism then extant here, but he was also the teacher of God! The Nestorian monks, finding him a lama or priest, reported that John Presbuteros——"

"Prester John!" exclaimed Kilgore, snapping to his feet. "D'you mean——"

"We're in the church of Prester John this minute—and——"

Day appeared in the doorway with a cool interruption.

"And we're likely to stay there a —— of a long time," he cut in. "Gentlemen, we've found mighty little loot in this place. I don't like to cut in upon a scientific discussion, but two things interest me a —— sight more than relics; first is loot, and second is the getaway. Do you chaps know what we're up against?"

Obviously Day had been doing some thinking. He went on stubbornly:

"Esrun, whoever he is, seems to have all the loot—let it pass. But this same Esrun, blast him, is going to signal the five novices who jumped poor Sheng Wu to get here and go up against us with the tribe. We can't hold out here indefinitely. Our one best bet is to find this chap Esrun and find him quick! Get me?"

Sir Fandi assented mildly.

"Quite right, gentlemen. I propose we abandon archeology in favor of defense——"

"Very well," snapped Kilgore, sitting down. "Sir Fandi, your report?"

"All went off excellently," returned the Rajput. "We bagged the caravan complete—it will arrive here before daylight. I rode on with five men, leaving six to bring the camels——"

"Lost four men, eh? Dashed good work you lost no more, Fandi," said Kilgore.

"That gives us a total force of twenty-one Sikhs. But go ahead—pardon me."

"We found ten girls with the caravan—fifteen camels in all. We shot every man in the crowd; the girls were all Mongol or Chinese. No one escaped. But we saw no sign of any flocks or herds or villages in the farther valleys. Beyond doubt, the tribe has gone bodily upon some such errand——"

"As the destruction of Sheng Wu and the caravan," added Day bluntly.

Severn dropped into a chair and took a cigaret. He was badly shaken by the supreme excitement of his recent discovery—and yet he realized they must forget the past and face the future. Kilgore glanced around, his face grave.

"Day has hit the mark, lads! We broke off a seance here; therefore Esrun will guess at what's happened—whether he can pick our brains or not, I can't say. Odds are he will instruct the novices with the tribe to come here and finish us off. If he directs the campaign, we're in for it, should we stay here!

"I'll take first shot; then you fellows speak your minds. We have two courses open. We can take the supplies here, load up the camels in the caravan and those behind the temple, and we may get clear away. Or else we may remain. In that case we'll have first to fight the Darkan tribe, then all the Mongols within a hundred miles—and we'll have no hope of succor or aid. Question—fight or run, Sir Fandi?"

"By the sin of the sack of Chitor!" swore the lordly Rajput angrily. "Am I a thief to come and strike in the night, and then run? I stay!"

"Same here," said Day. "Besides, we haven't any loot to speak of, yet."

Severn nodded. Kilgore lighted a fresh cigaret and also nodded.

"Unanimous. We stay! Having decided to remain, shall we strike out in the morning, leaving this citadel of defense unguarded, to polish off Esrun?"

Severn spoke up.

"You know where this Esrun is?"

"No. Somewhere about the lake in the box cañon. We'll have to find him. Both Sir Fandi and I have seen the lake, but we've not explored it."

"You think he is one man, alone?"

"We think so. We really know very little; but that is the supposition."

"Very well." Severn, now quite cool, smiled in his gentle fashion. "I am not a fighter. I am an investigator, an explorer. I will go to the lake and find Esrun——"

"Accepted, but you shan't go alone," snapped Kilgore. "It's a damnable place; the night mist off the lake is anesthetic in effect, and there are rifts among the rocks that go down to smoke and fire in the earth's heart. I suggest——"

"I go," said Sir Fandi, stroking at his beard complacently. "If Mr. Severn will accept me, I can guide him to the lake."

"Gladly!" assented Severn.

"So proposed and carried," hurried on Kilgore. "Now, what about these ten girls who'll get here at dawn? What can we do with 'em?"

"Give them rooms to themselves," spoke up Day, "explain matters, and supply 'em with guns. Believe me, these yellow women can *fight!* I know."

So the matter was arranged, and in five minutes the comrades-in-arms were seeking rest for the remainder of the night.

Severn slept fitfully; indeed, his brain was too excited by what he had discovered to readily admit of slumber. He was anxious to make an exact copy of that bilingual inscription in the table or altar. He admitted that his theory had been hasty and presented certain difficulties; yet it carried out the statements of Polo, Rubruk and the invariably authentic Abu'lfaraj.

In his mind's eye he could see the wandering Nestorians converting the Mongol chief, baptizing him Yuhanna, consenting to his retaining the dual rôle of Christian and lamaistic priest, and reporting to their Bagdad metropolitan that this John the presbyter—for so they would translate the word lama—was a convert. A sound theory, for the Nestorians had metropolitans through China and Turkestan, and so strong a church that the plan had even been put forward of the Christian Mongols coming from the east to join the Crusaders in the recovery of Palestine.

And this, then, was the church of Prester John! Severn fairly ached to go over every inch of the place, get measurements and rubbings, confirm his hasty theory by sound investigation—but now time pressed. There was other and more immediate work to his hand, and he must do it first. Personal safety came ahead of theories.

So gradually his riotous brain quieted,

and he slept. Yet in his slumber came dreams—begotten, as Freud might declare, of the eager impulses so firmly checked and denied. He saw a strange withered figure, its face as the face of some ancient mummy, white locks ragged about the sunken eyes, and across the breast, in letters of fire, the Mongol name of Esrun. The figure reached one skinny hand and gripped him by the shoulder——

"All out!" came the voice of Day. "Up, Severn! Breakfast and daybreak!"

CHAPTER VI

THE ABODE OF ESRUN

AS HE rode away from the temple beside Sir Fandi Singh, in the early light of dawn, Severn fully understood that their errand was to be a scouting expedition as much as a blow at Esrun. The unknown Esrun must be destroyed, yes; but there remained the question of his fabulous wealth—which, according to Kilgore, supported the priests.

The members of the expedition had suffered a sea change; more correctly, a desert change. Severn recognized this, admitted it in himself, but dared not speak the thought. Twenty-four hours previously he, like the others, had been buoyed up by the idea of destroying a tremendously evil thing. They had looked forward to it as a labor of Hercules which would employ every atom of energy and strength.

Instead, the Ten had been wiped out almost in a moment. Their jeweled trappings remained as symbols of loot—these, and Severn's discovery of the inscription.

What a power lay in the name of Prester John! Imaginations were inflamed. Thoughts arose of some huge store of gems and gold, ancient treasures over which squatted the loathsome spider Esrun. If Severn and Fandi Singh discovered Esrun and the treasure——

"It was the gold of Fafnir that doomed Sigurd," said Severn moodily.

"Eh?" The Rajput glanced at him curiously, not catching his train of thought. "Well, one can always use gold! If we are lucky, we shall find some fine dromedaries today. When we were here before, the priests kept fine stock in the valley by the lake—none of your shaggy Bactrians, but blooded racers, clipped and limbed like race-horses."

They drew up on a sand-crest and glanced back, waving to those who stood in the temple gateway. The camels of the capturned caravan had just arrived and were crowded into the courtyard; the five-barred flag of China had been mounted above the gate; the scene was one of activity and bustle.

Then the horses went on. The two men rode in silence under the craggy cliffs, toward the right-hand fork of the great Y which formed the valleys. Armed and provisioned, they had only Esrun to fear—for in the place to which they went no man but the priests had ever ventured.

Before them the sands lessened. Ere an hour had passed they were riding in a narrow defile enclosed by high rock walls; a winding, forbidding gorge which appeared to lead on interminably. Two hours later they were still following its windings, and according to Fandi Singh they would not sight their objective until nearly noon.

"There are no buildings at the lake, no ruins?" asked Severn.

"None," returned the Rajput. "It is no place where men would willingly live. Near by are the hell-pits into which the accursed priests throw the women ten times a year. We will come upon a sulfur spring before long."

Severn eyed the gorge without great liking.

"A strange combination of natural wonders!" he observed. "And a stranger combination of human wonders. Think of those Russians, absorbed into some Mongol tribe, settling here! And according to the inscription it might have been the same tribe of Krits, or Christians, which Ungkhan ruled. Perhaps this Esrun is the last of some forgotten race of lamas—well, no use wasting words in speculation."

Sir Fandi Singh shrugged his wide shoulders in assent to this last.

"There are strange things in these hills," he said thoughtfully. "Stranger than we have seen, stranger than we shall see. That is, Severn, if one can trust legend."

Severn laughed shortly.

"It seems that legend has led us aright so far."

"Aye, true enough. And yet I have heard tales." The Rajput plucked at his beard. "It is said that the Darkan tribe

and others, employ such vapors as this lake gives off; draw them into huge bellows and seal them, for future use in warfare."

"What? A primitive gas?"

"Exactly. But who knows? There is the sulfur spring—the water is good."

The gorge was widening They rode up to a huge jet of water which leaped from the rock, discoloring everything around, and was gone again within twenty feet. The water was strongly impregnated, highly charged, but was excellent in taste.

The two rode on again, the oppressing walls of rock growing imperceptibly wider. Here was no great erosion, as Severn could perceive; in this bowl among the hills the elements had been futile. The place was primitive, volcanic. The way became strewn with blocks of shiny black obsidian fallen from the high cliffs. The walls were stratified with garish streaks of color from molten metals, intermingled ores. Presently another wayside spring appeared, this time of streaming water that jetted and hissed over the rocks.

Forward again. About them reigned a terrible and unearthly silence. There was no other token of human presence. The click of the horses' hoofs fled out upon the windless air and returned again from the high walls; a volley of echoes accompanied them, rose all about them, until it seemed that upon their heels marched a cavalry of thousands, a ghostly company of shadows. When they spoke, the walls threwback the words in a storm of sibilant whisperings which smote them into silence.

How long a time passed, Severn did not remember; but it was long enough. Presently a burst of sunlight, and they were riding in the undiluted glory of midday—and now Fandi Singh drew rein and pointed ahead.

"The purple grass, the lake. The abode of Esrun."

Severn looked, and ahead of him, on a gentle declivity, made out stunted brush and the green of grass. Yet it was not the livid green of true chlorophyl, but a strange purplish-sheened green. Several dromedaries were in sight, grazing quietly; they inspected the two horsemen without fear. Toward the lake appeared low trees. The entire opening was truly a bowl among the mountains, walled in by inhospitable peaks and shut out of the world.

Beyond the trees came the shimmering glint of water. As he rode nearer Severn made out to the left a long flat overgrown with parasitic reeds which bore flowers of that very intense scarlet which nature often associates with danger.

"I think those reeds have something to do with the poisonous mists," said Sir Fandi. "The flowers are oddly marked with a cross in black."

"So? It is a botanical fact," answered Severn thoughtfully, "that no plant bearing a cross is injurious to man. Obviously the lake is receding from that flat. The mist may come from the mud, or from minute animalculæ. What's the program?"

"Camp among the trees, turn the horses loose and await what happens."

Now, to the right and on the opposite side, Severn perceived that the lake was enclosed by walls of rock. It hardly deserved the name of lake, being a scant quarter-mile in diameter. The crags which arose straight out of the water were tortuous, twisted in mad shapes, and seemed to have been poured from molten stone. So, indeed, they had.

"This was once the maw of a volcano," said Severn when they dismounted. "A minor outlet, perhaps, of some ancient cone farther up in the peaks. Where are the steamy fissures you mentioned as being used for—er—burials?"

Fandi Singh, busy with his saddle-girths, waved his hand toward the right.

"Over there among the rocks."

The air was windless, hot, unstirred. When the horses were turned free to crop at the grass Severn strode down to the lake-side. Here were no shallows nor reeds, but a sandy shore and quick depth; the water was clear, cold, entirely innocuous.

Severn rejoined his companion. They lunched beneath the low trees, and Sir Fandi, who was still feeling the effects of his long and hard ride to catch the caravan, proposed that one watch and one sleep. Severn was in no mood for sleep and gladly chose the first watch. The Rajput was lustily snoring within five minutes.

Pipe alight, Severn strolled along the shore to the right. There had been no attempt to conceal their presence. Hiding-places there were none; they must chance the possibility that Esrun was on guard and would see them. Yet in all this place was no hint of habitation, no token or evidence of any human presence besides their own.

If Esrun were indeed here, he must himself be well concealed.

Severn realized suddenly that he was walking past an ordered series of plants. He halted, staring down. A little plot had been fenced about with boulders, and in this plot were growing leafless shoots to a height of six inches. Each shoot held half a dozen buds, none of which were open. Severn stooped and broke off one of the shoots. Studying it, he saw suddenly what it was.

"*Crocus sativus*—the saffron flower!" he exclaimed when he had opened one of the buds and found the three yellow stigmas. "Why is this being grown here, and nothing else?"

He passed on, wondering not a little.

After a little he found himself in a path, lightly beaten amid the purplish grass, and he followed it. This scarcely discernible trail led him to rocky ground, away from the lake and to the right. Suddenly, unexpectedly, he started back; a step farther and he would have gone into an orifice in the earth—a hole six feet wide, extending across the path in a long crack. Then he saw that the path ended here.

He peered down over the edge and saw nothing. A choking sulfur-fume filled his nostrils and he stepped hastily backward. Then he stooped and from a rock where it clung picked up a wisp of torn silk. He understood now—he understood why that recently made path had led him here, and the manner in which the Ten disposed of their wives. He had not credited all Kilgore's tale, but now he credited everything.

The hours passed. Through the afternoon Severn sat beside the sleeping Rajput or strolled about. He found no indication of any human presence in the valley. Everything was deserted, empty, utterly ignoring the intrusion of man. The dromedaries were tame, and they were fine beasts, as Fandi Singh had said—blooded creatures such as were rarely seen in this part of Central Asia, racers of a fine breed.

The afternoon was waning when the Rajput wakened.

"Nothing has happened." Severn extended the saffron buds he had plucked. "You know what this is?"

The dark features of Sir Fandi lightened.

"Ah—the saffron fields of Pampur! I have not seen this outside Kashmir; you say it is growing here?"

Severn told of finding the bed of saffron roots. The Rajput frowned.

"That is singular! Well——"

"I have a plan," said Severn quietly. "We can not stay here indefinitely, waiting for something to happen. We know that Esrun communicates with his followers by telepathy; well, then let us communicate with him by the same means. We must bring him out to a meeting, as I understand the priests always did. In other words, *will* him here to us!"

"But he will know it is fradulent——"

"I think not. He is some primitive creature like the rest, who has fallen heir to a power greater than his control or knowledge. He will not be able to read our minds. If we get the message to him, he will come."

"But I can not think in Mongol!" and the Rajput smiled. "I do not know the tongue."

"I do. Besides," added Severn, "this is a matter of thought-impulse, not of words. If we reach him with the impulse, I believe we can effect something. Remember, he's waiting for word from his priests. He'll think we are——"

"I think it is all folly," said Sir Fandi with an air of resignation. "But let us try, by all means. *En avant!* Forward, my thoughts—charge!"

Severn smiled, and they sat silent.

CHAPTER VII

"NEITHER A FOREIGNER, NOR A CANTONESE."

THE waters of the little lake were unruffled. In the intense peace, the absolute silence of that bowl amid the hills, pierced a thin reedy sound. Sir Fandi stirred and spoke under his breath.

"A fish. This is the lake of singing fishes——"

"Quiet!" snapped Severn.

The Rajput scowled and obeyed. Severn was putting all his concentration of will into the effort he was making. Backed by the thought-impulse of Sir Fandi Singh, he was formulating in Mongol the message bidding Esrun come forth.

"The white men have seized the temple. Bring us gold for them, and they will go."

Suddenly he became conscious of the impact of another thought beating at his brain. He was utterly relaxed in every nerve and

muscle, and it was a moment before he realized the import of this attacking thought. It was an assent, a bidding to be at peace. Under its compellant force Severn reached out and touched the arm of Sir Fandi.

"Be ready," he said quietly. "He is coming."

The Rajput gazed at him in startled wonder, not unmixed with awe. This transference of thought was something outside the cosmos of Sir Fandi; indeed, Severn himself was by no means sure of it. He had spoken on impulse, by intuition.

The two men came to their feet, pistol in hand. They did not know what to look for. Indeed, they were prepared for some eery and unearthly demonstration as they watched that unruffled lake where no wind ever touched. Upon them was a strange sense of awed expectation, of something about to happen beyond the ordinary.

Yet, when it came, it was simple.

Sir Fandi was first to perceive it and touched the American's arm. Severn looked, and from among the rocks to the right saw a rude canoe shoving out into the lake. He marked the spot, and fancied that the craft came from around some projecting corner of the cliff which must mask an opening.

A single figure stood erect in the canoe. It was a figure muffled from head to foot in a faded winding of yellow cloths. The canoe and paddle seemed rude and rough.

Sir Fandi threw up his automatic, but Severn checked him, laid finger to lips in a gesture of silent caution. That singular figure in the canoe was turning the craft toward shore; it seemed perfectly sentient, yet quite unaware that enemies were waiting. Severn could perceive no eye-holes in the mask of yellow cloth, and an odd fear came upon him. There was something uncanny in this slow but unfaltering approach, in this blind automaton! Yet he knew the explanation must be simple enough.

The two men stared. If Esrun had eyes in his head, he could see that they were not his priests but the dreaded white men. Still he swept the canoe in straight for the shore, silent and unswerving. Suddenly Esrun bent down, caught the gunnel, waited. The high bow of the rude craft floated forward and grated upon the shore. The saffron figure straightened, stepped into the water, pulled up the craft.

Now, bending above his canoe, Esrun brought into sight a heavy bundle, wrapped in a skin. Staggering with its weight, he dropped this on the shore, then stood erect and made a gesture as if inviting approach. Sir Fandi looked at Severn, but the latter shook his head in negation.

For a moment Esrun waited, then turned. Slowly that yellow figure made its way along the shore to the little bed of crocus. There it paused, and put forth a hand to touch the fence of boulders. At this gesture a light broke upon Severn; he could barely repress an ejaculation.

Esrun was blind!

The Rajput had seen it also. He gave Severn a startled glance of inquiry, and Severn nodded. Esrun knelt and touched the unopened buds of the saffron flowers with brown fingers. Then, together, the two men ran forward.

At their approach Esrun came erect, facing toward them inquiringly. They gave him no chance to escape; at the first movement Severn caught an upflung arm, while Sir Fandi tore away that muffling yellow cloth. Under his hand, Severn felt no attempt at escape, no bulge of muscle; the arm in his hands was withered, wooden, horrible to the touch.

The yellow cloths were half torn away. Esrun stood there before them half-naked—and the two men took a backward step with horror in their eyes. For the thing which they had captured was a leper, grimacing and leering frightfully toward them—and further, this leprous Esrun was, or had been, a woman!

Severn dropped an oath. An old woman, she was, a hag in all truth, ravaged by the fearful disease, and she stood there without attempting to evade them. None the less, the two men knew that in this frightful body dwelt a perilous brain which threatened to engulf them and their comrades unless it were killed.

But—a woman!

"Do it, Rajput," said Severn curtly, half-turning away.

Sir Fandi flung him a look of wild scorn and fury. "Do it, American!" he snapped back. "The honor of a Rajput is as a sword-blade, and I do not choose to sully nine with the blood of a leprous Kashmiri woman! Do it!"

But Severn knew that he could not do it. The unreality of the scene was maddening—this ancient scarred remnant of humanity grimacing at them, the two of them standing

there armed yet helpless, and the lives of better men hanging upon the extinguishment of that rotten brain! Yet, because this was a woman, Severn could not lift his hand to pistol.

In that instant of silence and thwarted endeavor Severn perceived what the words of Sir Fandi implied. This woman had come from the far south, from Kashmir in India—no doubt a leper who had fled from British jurisdiction. She had brought into the waste places the sacred saffron bulbs, the memory of her lost ways and blood and tradition. By what means she had found this place, there was no telling; but she had found it, and had taken the name of Brahma, or Esrun, and——

From the creature broke a wild laugh, a laugh that sickened Severn, and then she spoke in broken English.

"Aye, do it! Do it, *sahibs—burra sahibs*, do it!"

"Peace, unclean thing," growled Sir Fandi.

At this, without warning, the hideous being whipped a pistol from her half-removed cloths and fired pointblank. The Rajput staggered, threw out his hands, fell without a cry. Esrun fired again, this time at Severn, and the bullet almost touched his head.

Something broke in him and before he knew what happened he found himself standing with a smoking pistol in his hand, the nameless creature sprawled dead upon the saffron flowers, horror and fury boiling in his brain. He flung aside his weapon and knelt above Sir Fandi Singh, who had been shot through the body. The Rajput was unconscious.

A swift examination showed Severn that the bullet had gone clean through, missing any vital part, and that with care Sir Fandi would make recovery. With care! How was he to find care in this place—where, with night, would come the mists that produced sleep and death—where there was no shelter, no help, nothing?

Severn darted up and went to their camping-place, where he procured some material for bandages. Returning, he halted beside the boat, scanning the cliffs. No, that was out of the question; whether the abode of Esrun were the tomb of Genghis Khan or not, it had been the home of a leper—and Severn dared not take the chance of infecting the Rajput's wound.

He glanced down at the bundle Esrun had brought ashore. The skin had burst open, for it was some ancient and rotted hide; a stream of gold-pieces poured forth upon the sand. Severn stooped, thrust a few of the broad gold disks into his pocket, then leaped up and ran to his companion, cursing his own folly.

As he bandaged the wounded man, his thoughts raced ahead. To stay in this place were madness; to attempt to reach the temple and get help were equal madness, until Sir Fandi recovered his senses, at least. Another man might have left the Rajput, and spurred out to bring help—but something held back Severn. Some premonition, some acute sense of danger, held him here. Perhaps it was his own strong instinct of self-dependence.

He decided upon a middle course. Within a few moments he had caught and saddled the horses and led the white stallion back to the Rajput. As he bent to raise the senseless body, a blade of the purplish grass drew across his left thumb, cutting into the skin. The sharp sting of the pain made him start; then he smiled at the occurrence. To pass through what he had met, and then to flinch at the cut of a grass-blade!

Presently Severn got his companion limply into the saddle, intent upon getting out of this hell-pit before night brought the deathly mist from the water. He bound the drooping figure in place, knowing that he dared not take Sir Fandi far in this wise, since the motion of the horse would hold open the wound and drain the body of blood; but it would serve.

Getting into his own saddle, he took the bridle of the stallion and set forth. Already the sun had gone from sight in the sky above, although in the outer world it would not yet be sunset. Severn directed the horses at a fast walk for the entrance defile.

HOURS later, it seemed, Severn found himself in a makeshift camp beside the hot spring in the defile. He had set out canteens of the water to cool. They had food enough to last for days. Farther than this he had not dared to come, for the jolting was too severe on the wounded Rajput, who had lost much blood. Severn himself felt a singular lightheadedness, and he was bitterly conscious of that slight slit in his left thumb, which caused much annoyance as such small things will.

When morning came Severn found that a swirling fever was getting a grip upon him, and the thumb was swollen and painful. Alarmed, he tried to open it up and alleviate the inflammation, but without much result. Sir Fandi had gone into a deep coma of exhaustion, and Severn did not disturb him. He could see that the Rajput's wound was looking in bad shape.

With noon Severn prepared some food and forced the Rajput to eat. Sir Fandi wakened but seemed like a drunken man, and fell asleep again immediately after eating. Severn, who now perceived clearly that he himself was growing hourly worse and that he must have been given some septic infection from that purplish grass, was intensely alarmed.

When the afternoon drew on toward evening, Sir Fandi Singh wakened in great weakness, but with a clear head. Severn, flushed and almost incoherent, related to him all that had taken place. The Rajput raised himself to his elbow and smiled.

"To the temple, Severn! I'm in a bad way, but you're in worse. We must get there at all costs. Place me in the saddle, and I'll stick there—born to it. You're the one to be tied on. If we start at once, we'll get to the temple some time tonight—possibly not until morning. But we must get there. Kilgore had drugs and medicines."

Severn assented. They made another meal, and then got into the saddle. The effort of saddling and of helping Sir Fandi up almost finished Severn, but he clambered aboard and they were off by dark. There was no losing the way in this defile.

To Severn, that night was a purgatory of swirling torment and mad visions. Before his fevered brain danced the horrible figure of Esrun, the Kashmiri woman; Sir Fandi stated that she was beyond doubt a Rajput of some high blood, but Severn was past reasoning the thing out. The hours dragged in terror and frightful agony.

With the dawn the horses were picking their own way toward the temple. Sir Fandi was riding in grim silence, saying nothing of the broken clots that let his wound bleed afresh. Severn saw the flag waving over the gateway of the temple and in a mad fantasy put spurs to his horse and went ahead at a gallop. The Rajput followed slowly, silently.

Severn reined up in the courtyard. His fevered brain was astonished by the silence which greeted him—no shout of welcome, no sound at all! On the walls he could see the figures of the Sikhs. In the courtyard he could see the machine gun trained on the gateway, with three Sikhs seated beside it. Yet they did not rise at his approach.

He dismounted.

When Sir Fandi rode into that courtyard he saw Severn lying senseless on the sand. And down upon them looked the Sikhs from the walls, with dead eyes that saw not. The Rajput painfully got out of the saddle, staggered, fell, came to his feet again. He drew his pistol and fired twice in the air.

There was no response.

CHAPTER VIII

"STEEL BODY NEEDS IRON FOOD."
—Proverb.

SHENG WU was a little Chinaman with Oxford and Glasgow degrees, a Croix de Guerre and a bland smile that concealed a bull-dog jaw. Behind him, to the Temple of the Ten Dromedaries, rode thirty stalwart Manchu camelmen.

Out in the desert Sheng Wu had been attacked. He ordered his men to scatter in the dusk of evening and gave up the caravan to the raiders. In the dusk of dawn he had fallen upon those raiders, occupied with their loot, and had smitten them hip and thigh. Then, with thirty men remaining, he had consulted his maps and ridden forward. And now he was riding up to that open and unguarded temple, where a torn five-barred flag floated over the gateway.

Dead men lined the walls. Sheng Wu rode forward alone, with one Manchu officer, and dismounted inside the open gateway. When he turned from his kneeling camel, he saw that this temple was an abode of the dead, and that these dead had been Sikh troopers.

He called forward his men and ordered them to search. He went with the foremost and they discovered no living creature. At last they came to a rear chamber of the temple and when they opened the door a great gaunt figure rose before them. Sheng Wu looked twice at it and then saluted.

"I am here, Sir Fandi," he said.

The Rajput uttered a frightful laugh. Torn bandages, blood-rusted, encased his body; his proud features were haggard, his

eyes were flaming things. He pointed to a brick bed in the corner, upon which lay the tossing body of Severn.

"Glad you showed up," he returned. The words came from him almost mechanically. He spoke as a man in a dream. "You'll have to attend to Severn. Septic poisoning—take off his left arm at the elbow, I fancy."

"What had happened here? How did the Sikhs die? They appear unwounded——"

"I don't know." The Rajput made a gesture of futility, of fearful ignorance. "We came back—found things like this—no sleep—wounded—lost blood—took care of Severn——"

He staggered, reeled slightly, recovered.

"Kilgore and Day?" queried Sheng Wu.

"Not here. Gone. No message. Vanished, that's all. Glad you showed up—in time——"

The words died. Sir Fandi Singh jerked twice through his whole body, then collapsed in a limp heap.

Sheng Wu examined him, then went to the brick bed and examined Severn. He had the two men carried into a clean room, then produced a case of surgical instruments from his baggage.

These things happened in the morning. At noon Sheng Wu left the operating-room, bathed himself and spent an hour examining such of the bodies on the walls as were in condition to tell him anything. When he had finished he summoned his thirty Manchus into the courtyard and calmly addressed them.

"This place is an abode of devils."

They assented in silence—it was something they already knew.

"These soldiers died and no shot was fired. They were suffocated or killed with gas. Two of their leaders have vanished utterly. If we remain here, the same fate will befall us, for we know not whence it comes. Therefore, we shall not remain here."

To this the Manchus assented very eagerly. Sheng Wu lighted his tobacco-pipe and resumed, when the tiny pinch of tobacco had gone, his explanations.

"Sir Fandi Singh is wounded and the wound is much inflamed. He has lost much blood and he will not walk or speak for many days. His friend, the strange white man, has lost an arm through poisoned blood and is in fever. Each of these men must ride in a sling between two camels. Make ready the slings at once. We leave here at sunset, in order to pass through the valley by night, when there will be no whirling sands."

"The baggage that we have saved?" questioned the Manchu officer.

"Abandon what is not needed. We shall not go the way we came, but strike direct for Urga."

Thus it was done. As a matter of fact, Sheng Wu was horribly frightened. These white men, for whom he had intense respect and admiration, had succumbed to some unknown enemy. He dared not linger lest he and his men succumb also; in fact, even had he lingered, he knew that the Manchus would not have remained. Panic had them in its grip.

Sheng Wu tarried only to pack up the unused machine gun and a few objects collected for removal by Kilgore. He found no indication of the fate met by Day and the Canadian. They had vanished, that was all—and Sheng Wu was of the opinion that they really had vanished, perhaps carried away by devils. Under the veneer of education the old blood of Han still burned hot and cold in him, and the man feared exceedingly.

Three weeks later Severn sat beside a stinking fire of camel's dung and talked with the gaunt shadow that had been Fandi Singh the Rajput. Severn himself was little more than shadow, and his left arm was gone at the elbow; yet he lived.

"Tomorrow we shall reach Urga," he was saying hopelessly. "And what then?"

"Faith," said the voice of Sir Fandi.

The Rajput was still a very sick man. Severn laughed bitterly.

"Faith—how? Shall we go back to look for them?"

"If we live."

"Then, how? We can not do it without money. I have none."

The other did not answer for a while. When he spoke, it was of the place they had left.

"Our fate was upon us, Severn. If you and I had gone to the temple, we would have perished with the others—I think they died from that accursed gas. Perhaps some of the hill people came to the temple by stealth and loosed the gas."

"Yet there was no sign of Kilgore and Day." Severn turned as, out of the shadows, the little figure of Sheng Wu came and

joined them at the fire. "Are you quite sure, Sheng Wu, that you found no indication of Kilgore and Day? You haven't lied for the sake of lending us hope?"

"They were not there," answered the son of Han. "Nor was there any sign of them."

"Then they are alive, and we shall go back to find them," said Sir Fandi Singh, his voice ringing more firm.

"But how?" questioned Severn. "One must have supplies, camels, men, money and——"

The white teeth of the Rajput flashed in the shadows. Sheng Wu smiled blandly.

"I think," said the latter, "that we shall find Shansi bankers in Urga. And any Shansi banker in China will honor the check of Sir Fandi Singh in any amount."

"They had better," said the Rajput grimly.

Severn struggled for readjustment. He had not known that the Rajput was wealthy —had never thought about it, in fact. Presently he nodded, for his heart was with the two men who had vanished so completely.

"Good," he said. "Then we shall go. I'm sorry you were so frank to own your fear of that place, Sheng Wu. You're a fine leader, and these Manchus certainly respect you—and both Fandi and I owe you a lot. I wish you would go back with us; but there's no use asking you, I suppose."

Sheng Wu had been very frank, indeed, in expressing his fear of that place. Now he produced his long tobacco-pipe, stuffed black tobacco into the tiny steel bowl, lighted it at the fire and smoked until the few puffs were gone. Then he smiled.

"Well," he observed, "I do rather wish you fellows would ask me, you know!"

There was an instant of silence; then the voice of Sir Fandi Singh rang out like a trumpet.

"By the sin of the sack of Chitor—we three are men! Then it's settled."

And Severn nodded, almost happily.

CHAPTER IX

THE CAPTIVES

SOME weeks after the conquering yet conquered caravan of Sheng Wu had turned its face toward Urga, a party of five Mongol horsemen came riding through the defile to the lake of singing fishes—the lake presided over by the mysterious Esrun.

These five had a companion, a captive, whose wrists were firmly bound behind his back. This captive had suffered a horrible fate. Over his body to the waist had been loosely bound a fresh hide, in which had been cut three holes; two, to permit the passage of his arms, the third, opposite his mouth, to permit his eating and drinking.

The sun had dried and shriveled this skin until it had become, as it were, an outer epidermis. Beneath it the unfortunate man was blind, deaf, insensible to any outward change. Sometimes a wretched victim has been known to be sewn into a fresh skin and left in the desert sun until the shrinking skin killed him. This captive, however, had not been granted so merciful a fate.

These six riders came in silence. They were filthy with all the dirt of unwashed Mongols, yet certain of them possessed gray or blue eyes, and on one the hair was decidedly tawny. They were members of the Darkan tribe which Sheng Wu had scattered afar. Obviously they were frightened of this place; they rode in fear, their eyes searching grass and lake and crags with swift glances. Yet they rode on toward the lake, not pausing until they drew rein at the shore.

There, as one man, they watched their horses. These sturdy Mongol ponies had no fear, but sniffed the water, strained eagerly toward it. The five riders glanced at one another, exchanged a quick nod of satisfaction and dismounted. The captive, who perceived nothing of what passed around him, remained in his saddle as his mount leaned down to the water. Nor did his captors pay him any regard.

Heedless of their beasts, likewise, the five Mongols seated themselves on the bank, produced dirty pipes of various kinds, and smoked. At length one of them spoke. He did not address his comrades. Instead, he looked out at the lake and spoke to the invisible Esrun.

"We have obeyed your orders, sublime ancestor!"

He checked himself abruptly, upon his brutish face an expression of intense astonishment, while he stared at the lake. After a moment he turned to his companions.

"Esrun commands us to make our report without speaking. Can any of you do this?"

One after another shook their heads. With some terror now mingled into the astonishment of his visage, the leader looked again at the lake.

"We do not know how to do this, Esrun," he said.

There was something terrible in the simplicity of his utterance—in the confession of this man who could receive thoughts without sending them. Here was a child playing with vast forces of the intellect; a primitive barbarian who infringed upon secret things before which civilized science stood hesitant!

"Very well." Suddenly his face cleared. He glanced at his companions, who nodded assent. They, too, had caught the message. "Esrun commands us to speak. I obey!"

"We have cleared the temple of the bodies of the barbarians who were destroyed by the sacred vapors. We have taken their weapons, such as remained. We have preserved the life of this white man who led them. According to your orders, we have brought him here unharmed. We await your orders."

He remained silent, gazing at the lake. One would have said that the mysterious Esrun was now reduced to dire straits; the temple priests and novices having perished, telepathic communication was established with bestial creatures such as these, incapable of sending forth a thought!

At this instant, however, was afforded an instance of the remarkable powers of that terrible being who dwelt in a cavern of the lake. One of the five men rose to his feet, while the others darted at him glances of surprize.

"Very well," he said. "I obey."

He advanced to the group of horses, now cropping at the purplish-green grass, and unlashed the figure of the captive. Seizing the latter's arm, he drew the helpless man from the saddle and left him sitting in the grass. He then rejoined his companions.

After an instant the leader again turned to his four comrades.

"Esrun commands us to return home. You have heard?"

"We have heard," was the mutter.

The five rose. They gave a last curious look at the grass, at the saffron beds, at the water and the gloomy crags which rose from it. Then they went to the horses. With grunts and savage exclamations they hurled themselves into their saddles, lashed the unwilling brutes fiercely and rode rapidly away, delighted to be gone. With them went the horse which the captive had ridden.

The captive himself remained sitting in the grass.

Before the five riders had gained the mouth of the long and tortuous defile which gave access to the outer world, they drew rein swiftly and bunched together. Leaving the defile and advancing to the lake had appeared a second group of horsemen—again five in number, a captive in the center of the group.

This captive, unlike the first, was not shrouded; not, at first sight, did he appear to be bound. Upon closer view, however, it proved that from each hand, from each foot, and from about his neck, ran a cord which connected him to one of the five Mongols around him. Thus he was more securely bound than with chains, for, with one simultaneous movement of their ponies, these five Mongols could disjoint his entire body.

This man was Day, the American. Naked to the waist, sun-blackened, bearded, his torso showed plain evidences of privation, suffering, torture. Yet from his haggard features, his eyes gleamed out boldly as ever; and his enormous frame, instead of being depleted and weakened by his experiences, appeared to be hardened into the consistency of iron.

These five Mongols saluted the five who had brought the first captive. They belonged to a different branch of the Darkan tribe, but they too were among the number of those who had exterminated Kilgore's band at one stroke. Gases from the subterranean rifts at the eastern side of the lake, confined in hide bags and loosened downwind, had wiped out the Sikhs to a man. Yet these barbarians of the white steppes were not the first to make use of such weapons.

The Mongols among whom Day rode did not pause to speak with their fellows, but pursued their course toward the lake. At sight of the other party their fears had vanished altogether. They stared about them curiously, discussed the half-dozen hobbled racing dromedaries who were grazing in the valley, became more at their ease. Once, when Day made an abrupt movement, the five made their horses suddenly jump away, his arms and legs extended horribly, his head jerked forward, Day uttered a groan. The five grinned and loosened the cords. He settled again in the saddle, motionless.

When the party approached the lake shore, Day eyed that silent hooded figure without other thought than that it might be Esrun, perhaps. He had long since given up Kilgore and his companions for dead—ever since that frightful night when he and Kilgore had discovered all their Sikhs dead, and when skin-clad figures had leaped on them out of the darkness. Ah, that had been a night to remember!

He had not seen Kilgore since that night.

Near the bound and hooded figure, which did not move as they approached, the five dismounted and spread out. They signed to Day and he painfully climbed out of the saddle, glaring about him. The five, grinning, drew the cords taut and sat down. Day, for want of anything better to do, followed suit.

Although the Mongols examined the hooded figure curiously, they perhaps knew what it was, for they paid it little heed after the first arrival. Their leader evidently was uncertain as to Esrun's abode, for he looked up into the sky and spoke.

"We have obeyed your orders, sublime ancestor! Can you hear my voice?"

To any one who had heard the rather skilful communication established by the first party, this present speech would have appeared laughable. The Mongol, obviously, was none too certain of himself or Esrun, for he bellowed his words at the sky as if trusting they would pierce to heaven by sheer weight.

Yet they must have reached Esrun. After a moment the Mongol turned astonished eyes to his comrades. They nodded vigorously and one of them spoke.

"Esrun says to proceed! Then do so!"

"Good!" exclaimed the leader. "It is evident that I am not a khan for nothing, since I can make my words pierce to heaven. Esrun, do you hear? We have arrived. We have brought this unspeakable dog of a white barbarian, and we have not hurt him much. We are glad to be rid of him. If you had not ordered us to spare him, we would have killed him long ago, for he has killed three of our men since we captured him."

At this the features of Day were overspread with a gloomy satisfaction.

"Shall we sacrifice him here to you, Esrun?" shouted the Mongol, and waited hopefully.

After a short interval his countenance expressed a brutish resignation and he gave Day a glance and a shrug. He looked at his companions.

"Is this right? Does Esrun say to leave him here and depart?"

The others nodded.

"To leave him unharmed," added one with emphasis.

The leader sprang to his feet.

"Then cut the cords and go!" he cried, setting the example by severing the cord which bound Day's neck to his wrist.

For an instant Day sat staring at them in dazed stupefaction, unable to credit their actions. Four of the Mongols caught their horses, leaped into the saddle and went dashing away hastily. The fifth delayed a moment to catch the horse which had carried the American.

This moment of delay destroyed him.

Day came to his feet as if set on steel springs. The long severed cords trailed after him. He made one leap, and from the remaining Mongols burst a cry of terror; a second leap, and Day was at the man's saddle.

Two minutes later Day stood at the edge of the lake, holding between his huge hands the shaken and broken Mongol. He seized the man's knife, then cast it down—and with one hand hurled the wretched man headlong into the water.

"You're the one who held a hot iron to my back, eh?" he exclaimed. "Well, there's a present for you—water for iron, cold for heat! How do you like it, you devil?"

The Mongol did not reappear to make answer. After an instant Day turned away, his eye following the two horses who were running after the four Mongols. Then he observed the hooded and bound figure sitting in the grass.

For a little space Day studied that figure suspiciously, intently. Then he picked up the knife torn from the Mongol and approached the silent figure.

"By the Lord!" he cried suddenly. "White feet!"

CHAPTER X

"So to front death, as men might judge us past it." —*Jonson.*

WHEN Day had cut the bound wrists and ankles and was carefully slitting the skin hood of that silent figure, his hand trembling as he worked, a voice issued from

beneath the skin. This voice was calm, cool, imperturbable.

"Thanks very much," it said.

"Oh, the devil!" exclaimed Day.

"Not at all," returned the voice. "Kilgore."

With a violent movement Kilgore flung off the stiffly clinging skin. Then, swiftly, he clapped both hands to his face. The brilliant sunlight was blinding.

"Quite all right in a moment or so," he murmured.

Dav stared at him with fallen jaw. The change in Kilgore was terrible beyond words; the trim Canadian was scarcely recognizable. Not by reason of the bearded face alone, but by the frightful pallor of the entire torso. Hooded from all touch of light and air, the man's skin had become livid, a dead and colorless white.

"That you, Day?" asked Kilgore, attempting to peep between his fingers. "I say, what's happened? Where are we?"

"Dashed if I know," answered the American. "Somewhere near Esrun, I guess. Here, get up and take my arm! You get out of this sunlight, or you'll be parboiled in ten minutes."

Kilgore nodded and rose. Day led him beneath the trees and halted in the shade. By degrees Kilgore was able to perceive their situation and to observe Day.

"You are a rum-looking beggar!" he said drvly. "I imagine I'm equally handsome, what? Hello, are we free?"

"Free among the dead," grunted the other.

"Don't quote from Scripture—just yet," and Kilgore chuckled. "You hit it right, old man—this is the lake of singing fishes, where Esrun lives. See here, what's become of Severn and Fandi Singh?"

"Ask Esrun, not me," returned Day. "My late entertainers rode up and left me here beside you. I got one of 'em, at least! They had orders not to injure us."

Kilgore rose to his feet, a trifle unsteadily.

"Come along," he said, removing the few rags that clothed him and blinking at the water. "May as well die clean, eh?"

"Die?" exclaimed Day. "Why, they've turned us loose, man!"

The visage of Kilgore broke into a pallid caricature of his old smile.

"Come, come, my dear fellow!' he said gaily. "We're perfectly helpless and have been left here as a sacrifice to Esrun. We shall probably be tortured scientifically, and then dropped into a rift among the rocks—fire and brimstone and so forth."

Day swore angrily and his eyes bit around the valley. Already the strong soul of him was revived by this touch of freedom, this contact with Kilgore; his unquenchable spirit was surging pugnaciously.

"We're not lost!" he exclaimed. "There are dromedaries—we can——"

Kilgore clapped him on the shoulder with a ringing laugh.

"Guards at the entrance, and probably a rifle or two trained on us this moment! No, we must preserve our dignity, old chap——"

"—— dignity! I'd sooner preserve our lives!"

Kilgore burst out laughing.

"Come along, Yank! Let's bathe."

Day followed him to the water's edge, comprehending, yet stubbornly contesting, the fact that there was no hope for them.

When they had bathed and returned to the shade of the trees, Kilgore was something more like himself again. He had noted the beds of saffron, which now were in full bloom, and he sent Day for a blossom. He examined the petal with keen interest.

"Saffron," he said, a retrospective look in his sunken eyes. "Comes from Kashmir—I was there as a child. My father was stationed there."

"That's where you first knew Fandi Singh?" queried Day shrewdly.

Kilgore nodded.

"Quite so. He's a rajah, you know. We grew up together in the palace. My uncle, Sir Cecil Kilgore, had quite a bit to do with the Government in the old days. Ho, hum! It's a far cry to the waters of Kashmir!"

"There's a boat," observed Day abruptly.

They fell silent, watching the lake. A few words from his companion had apprized Kilgore of the manner in which the Mongols had communed with Esrun. Knowing that he had destroyed the ten priests, that Fandi Singh had destroyed five of the novices, he could only conjecture why none of the remaining five were on hand. They had, in effect, been destroyed by Sheng Wu; but of this Kilgore knew nothing. Since the Mongols had communicated with Esrun, however, it was evident that Esrun still existed. Ergo, Severn had failed to kill the master of mystery.

The rude craft, with its single erect figure shrouded in faded yellow cloths, was an eery thing. It stole toward them in silence, and that silence was oppressive, awesome. To neither of the two white men did it occur that this figure was Esrun.

They both were keyed up to thoughts of torture, death, violence. Therefore, the appearance of this shrouded figure peacefully creeping to them was a decided shock; it shattered their initiative, left them hesitant and perplexed.

The boat touched the shore, halted. The erect figure stretched forth a shrouded, beckoning arm, and uttered a single word in English.

"Come!"

The two men looked at each other.

"Say the word," growled Day, "and——"

Kilgore shook his head, shrugged slightly and walked to the boat. Day followed him, eying the saffron figure with suspicion. They entered the boat, sitting on a wide forward thwart. Without a word the shrouded figure shoved off, moving with a mechanical precision which impressed Kilgore as singular. He could not fathom the reason for this oddity, since he did not know that their guide was blind. Now Day touched his arm, and both men stared at the place to which they were going.

The opening among the crags on the right, into which the boat was slowly heading, gave access to a long and narrow cleft. At the head of this cleft appeared a sandy beach twenty feet wide and as many deep, ending in an ancient portal of stone, built against the solid cliff. This portal framed the black opening of a cavern.

When the prow of the boat touched the sand an inarticulate word came from the guide. Kilgore turned, to perceive something held out to him in a fold of the yellow cloth. It was a box of vestas. He took them mechanically—and was then handed his own cigaret-case.

"Upon my word!" he murmured, then collected himself.

He opened the case.

"I say, Day, look here! After you."

"Come!" growled the American, his face lighting up. "This doesn't look much like torture!"

Kilgore held a match with trembling fingers. They lighted cigarets and stepped from the boat. The shrouded figure followed them, advanced to the black portal and beckoned.

"Come!"

The crafty gift of cigarets had been well calculated. Neither man knew what to fear, what to expect; their fears were lessened, their expectations were increased. They advanced and stood in the dark doorway. Their guide turned and spoke again.

"Catch my robe, *sahibs*, and follow closely."

At those words, which for the first time clearly defined the voice of this figure, Kilgore gave a slight start. One would have said that it was a start of recognition; and in truth that low, musical voice held a peculiar note, a singular throbbing vibrancy, which when once heard could never be forgotten.

"A woman!" muttered Day, catching a fold of the yellow cloth in one hand.

The unearthly pallor of Kilgore passed into a violent flush.

"Impossible!" he murmured, and set his hand against the shoulder of Day.

Their guide laughed—a low, vibrantly throbbing note of woman's music which faded into the darkness of the cavern. The three went forward and vanished; only the glowing tips of the lighted cigarets stood out from the darkness, paling and reddening again.

For some distance they advanced with impenetrable darkness shutting in on all sides. The cavern turned and twisted, the floor remaining level and sandy. Presently their guide turned a corner and halted. A light appeared.

They stood in a narrow throat of rock that rose to a roof twelve feet above. This narrow throat widened out rapidly into a great chamber which, at the rear, was a good thirty feet in width. The walls were of rock. Set against the long rear wall were two huge vessels with narrow lips, lighted wicks in the lips; lamps, these, which illumined this chamber.

It was less at the rock chamber, however, than at the things it held, that the two men stared in wonder. A number of great porcelanous jars, containing water, stood about. Near them, packets of food, which Kilgore recognized as taken from his own mess supplies. To the right hand, against the rear wall, were packs—the personal belongings of Day. To the left, at the other end of the chamber, were those of Kilgore.

"This is most amazing—extraordinary!" said Kilgore astoundedly.

"Our own stuff!" cried Day, starting forward.

The voice of their guide filled the cavern with its richly throbbing note.

"Wash," it said. "Eat. Shave. Dress. Then—talk."

The yellow figure vanished from sight.

Struck beyond speech, Kilgore walked forward to examine his own belongings, while Day strode toward the other side of that long chamber with the same intent. The feelings of the two men were unutterable. Kilgore knelt and tore open the nearest pack and stared down at the toilet kit which fell out at his knee. Tears sprang to his haggard, bearded cheeks at sight of the well-remembered thing.

"It's true, all right!" came the voice of Day, no longer sullen and growling. "By Heaven, it's true! This is our own stuff, Kilgore!"

At this instant came a most singular sound, which drew the attention of both men.

It appeared to come from overhead, in a queer squeaking and protesting of iron rubbed against iron. The stone roof of the chamber was rugged and uneven and badly lighted; they could make out little. But from this roof glided an object suddenly, shooting downward with incredible speed, until it plunged into the sanded floor with a loud clang.

This object was a grill of heavy iron, which began at the rear wall, separated the chamber into two parts, and protruded at a distance of ten feet from the wall.

While the two men were still staring open-mouthed at this apparition, a second grill came down with a shriek and a clash. This grill met the outer end of the first one at right angles, and then ran to the wall on one side. Before the noise of its fall had died, a third appeared, opposite the second, and came clanging to the floor. Each of these grills extended fully to the ceiling, and were formed of closely twisted iron.

Day and Kilgore were now separated and enclosed in iron cages.

"You are welcome, *sahibs!*" floated that peculiar voice, in queerly clipped English. "Be comfortable. Be happy, honorable nephew of Sir Cecil Kilgore!"

There was silence. Kilgore stood petrified, his face fixed into lines of spasmodic horror. A cold sweat had sprung out on his whole body.

He recognized the voice—too late.

CHAPTER XI

"NO MATTER WHERE YOU HIDE THE EGG, THE CHICKEN WILL HATCH."—*Chinese proverb.*

DAY calmly dropped the glowing butt of his cigaret. He did not perceive the peculiar emotion which had gripped his companion.

"This is more like it!" he exclaimed heartily. "The devil has trapped us—a neat business, too! I've seen affairs like this in some of the western hill temples; they got the idea from India, probably, and kept wild animals in the cages. Well, let's get shaved and dressed, Kilgore. This part of it seems too good to be true."

Kilgore made no response; he appeared sunk in a stupor of despair. When Day set about unpacking his stuff, however, the Canadian roused himself to follow suit.

"Here's my spare pipe!" cried Day suddenly. "Bully for Esrun! Never mind the iron bars now—we're a lot better off than we were five hours ago, Kilgore. Perhaps Severn and Sir Fandi are alive after all."

At the name of the Rajput, Kilgore shivered. He lifted his eyes for a moment, and in them was a fearful look.

"If we had only guessed!" he murmured.

"Guessed what?" queried Day.

Kilgore caught himself up with an effort, straightened his shoulders.

"Tell you later," he said. "Any weapons in your kit?"

"Not a sign of one. You?"

"The same. Unless you call safety razors weapons! I don't."

Silence ensued. The two men, each in his own barred partition of the chamber, were occupied in removing their rags, in shaving, in searching for articles of clothing. To Day, this singular reception appeared quite encouraging; to Kilgore, it was terrible.

Half an hour effected a huge transformation in the looks of each man. Kilgore remained pallid, his eyes sunken, the square chin projecting more than usual; but he was nearly his old self. Day was more gaunt—he had become a man of iron, refined and hardened in the fire of torture and suffering.

His haggard features were harsh, almost brutal, in their betrayal of his aggressive character.

Shirted, trousered, booted, the two came to the grating that separated them and surveyed each other, cigaret and pipe alight.

"My word, you look fit!" said Kilgore.

"Same to you, old man. How about some grub? That solidified alcohol stove of yours is over here. Got anything to cook?"

"No end; here, I'll pass some stuff through the grating."

They set about the preparation of a meal. Another half-hour effected a further transformation in appearance and looks. The only difference was that as Day became more cheerful and confident, Kilgore became more silent. The two sat side by side at the grating for their meal. When the last drop of tea was gone, Kilgore spoke up.

"I say, have you any open scratches or cuts?"

"A few," rejoined the American. "Why?"

Kilgore passed him a bottle of iodine. "Fill up. Here's plaster—cover them."

"Not much! You have to leave a cut open to drain——"

"Cover them!" snapped Kilgore, a snap of steel to his voice.

Day obeyed the mandate, then refilled and lighted his pipe, and stretched out.

"Spill it," he ordered briefly. "What's on your mind?"

Kilgore tossed away his cigaret, clasped both hands about his knees and stared at his companion fixedly.

"Listen, old chap. We're up against a worse proposition than I ever dreamed," he said, a note of dreadful calm in his voice that gained Day's instant attention. "If I had known outside there what I now know, we would never have entered."

"I'm a better looking corpse than I was," said Day whimsically. "But have it your own way. Go on."

"You remember that I told you Fandi and I were boys together? Long before my *pater* came out to Canada, of course. Well, I mentioned having an uncle high up in Government——"

"The chap that woman's voice referred to, of course!" exclaimed Day. "How did she know so much? Thought transference?"

Kilgore smiled.

"Not at all. Cecil Kilgore and the father of Sir Fandi were good friends. Don't mind sayin' that my uncle was a bit of a wild 'un at times. So was the rajah—Fandi's father. They went shootin' together and that sort of thing. Before my time, it was. Thirty years ago a chap could stir up considerable excitement in India, you know!"

"Thirty years ago? I'm surprized at you," intervened Day judicially. "I've had a taste or two myself of Indian nights, and if you think India has changed——"

He fell silent at a gesture from Kilgore, who pursued his subject quickly.

"No use blinkin' the fact, Day; my avuncular relative did run a bit wild. Well, it seems that on one occasion they went to Kashmir together to look up some ruins, and they met a girl. She was a pure-blooded Rajput of the royal blood. Her name I don't know; I always heard her referred to as the Rani. She was very beautiful."

"They all are," said Day.

Kilgore made a gesture of irritation.

"When I say that my uncle wanted to marry her," he said sharply, "you will understand that she was more than beautiful. Englishmen don't marry native girls, you know; not even queens. It isn't done. The hitch was that the rajah wanted to marry her also."

"Ah!" said Day with interest. "A duel? The poor girl committed suicide? Broken hearts and the thrill of tragedy!"

"Not yet," returned Kilgore. "As a matter of fact, she was in love with some native and turned up her nose at white men and rajahs. Well, one day her lover showed up with a knife in his side, dead. Whether the rajah was behind it, I can't say; at all events, the Rani swore that he and my uncle had murdered her man. Now, it seems that she had a most extraordinary voice—remarkably musical, with a vibrant thrill to it that a man could not forget."

"And in that voice she swore vengeance?" asked the irreverent Day.

"Yes. Some months later, the rajah's coffee was poisoned; so was the rajah. He died. My uncle, meantime, had returned to England. He got my father and me and went back to India with a knighthood and a seat on the woolsack.

"One day I was in court, a bit of a lad, hearing my great uncle try cases. They brought in a veiled woman who was accused of being a leper and evading restraint—I fancy she had stabbed some one, or somethin' of the sort. At the first word she said,

my uncle rose out of his seat like a man daft and commanded her to unveil. She did so. I can remember her face to this day—the most beautiful native woman I ever saw in my life!"

Kilgore paused for a moment, then continued.

"She was sentenced and taken away, but not before I had heard her speak a good deal; she threatened my uncle in a mild way. Ever since, her voice haunted me. It came to me in my dreams, in the midst of a musical concert, in the harmonies of an orchestra—that singular, thrilling timbre such as no other human throat has ever known!"

Day entertained a conviction that his friend was maundering. He should have known better; perhaps it was because he was actually drunken with this sudden return to physical comfort—this abrupt reversion to his former self. At all events, he had been listening in a perfunctory manner, his gaze fixed upon the iron grating which cut off his escape from the chamber.

Now he rose with a sudden movement and advanced to this grating.

"'A touch o' sun, a touch o' sun,' the color-sergeant said!" he hummed. "Excuse me, most venerable Canuck, but I have an idea. They are rare with me; I can't afford to lose one." He stopped and examined the grating, tested the iron and rose. Without a word, but with a sudden brilliancy in his eye, he returned to his place. "Now, proceed! You were speaking of the haunting voice. Did the lady die of leprosy?"

"I have always thought so until today," said Kilgore. "You heard me spoken of as the nephew of Sir Cecil Kilgore? That was her voice."

He sat staring at his clasped hands.

Day regarded him for a space in stupefied disbelief and only gradually comprehended that Kilgore was speaking in dead earnest. Then he swore softly.

"Old man, what's come over you? My ——, you can't be ass enough to believe that this Esrun is the same woman!"

Kilgore lifted his head, looked his friend in the eye for a moment.

"You saw that bed of saffron flowers? You saw the yellow robes of our guide? Only a Kashmiri would affect such things in this place. I don't say that Esrun is the woman, of course; but I do say the woman is here! I would know that voice again in ——."

Day looked at Kilgore, shook his head sadly and rose.

"You believe it, all right—poor chap! You can't make *me* believe it. So let's respect each other's convictions and be happy. Me, I'm going to bust out of this cage in two minutes. Quit repining, and watch Mr. Day exert his manly muscle, old sport!"

So saying, the American returned to the iron grating which formed the front of his prison chamber. Kilgore watched him frowningly.

Day went to the center of the long grill and attempted to shake it. It gave slightly. The lattice-work of iron had openings of not more than six inches across. After examining these, Day uttered a low grunt of satisfaction. He seated himself upon the floor, planted his feet apart and against the iron grill, then seized one of the rusty segments of the lattice in both hands.

In effect, he transformed himself into a crossbow, a human fulcrum. He was pitting the strength of his legs and thighs against the strength of his arms and shoulders—and both of these against the slender bars of wrought iron.

His arms drew taut. His legs, still bent at the knee, shoved in a steady pressure against the grill. The curve of his back, the bowed curve of his shoulders and bent-over head, settled into rigidity as absolute as that of the iron segments before him. Inch by inch his legs straightened.

His face became suffused with blood, purple; the eyes bulged terribly. From his lips came a sound that was half a gasp of effort, half an oath of rage. Kilgore stared—it was impossible for flesh and blood to endure such a frightful effort without being torn asunder! Yet, inch by inch, the bent legs continued to straighten. The man had lifted himself from the floor by this time.

Crack! Day fell backward.

"Told you so!" he panted as he scrambled to his feet. His hands, dripping blood, held out a segment of the iron. "Rusted——"

"Quit it!" said Kilgore. "It's insane—useless——"

For answer, Day uttered a joyous laugh and sat down again before the grill. Once more he planted his feet in position. Once more he gripped the iron, a segment adjoining that which had given way. Once

more his body settled into lines of frightful tension. He expended his strength with reckless abandon.

Kilgore, drawn out of his apathy by his prodigious exhibition, came to his feet. He saw Day once again lift himself from the ground, his body bent nearly double, the leg muscles expanding inch by inch. It was too much; he uttered a sharp cry of protest. His cry was lost in the sound of Day falling, the dull crack of iron. It was not the man which had given way, but the metal.

This time Day did not scramble up at once, but slowly staggered to his feet. Triumph had blazoned its mark in his bloodshot, staring eyes. This time a section of the iron had come away, leaving a hole in the grating a foot square.

"Next—time—wins!" gasped Day exultantly.

He wrapped about his bleeding palms some of his discarded rags. For a moment he stood eying the grating with a vast satisfaction, puffing mightily. Then with a final deep breath of resolution he again sat down. Kilgore watched in silence; he no longer cherished any doubt that the grating would give way—he only hoped that the man's body would not give way likewise.

For the third time Day strained. But on this occasion, instead of taking a single bit of iron between both hands, he grasped two separate strands of the lattice! Again he was bent double, again a violent rush of blood suffused his face and neck, while his rigid hands clamped upon the iron—*crack!* Weakened by the previous breakage, the grill sundered. A yawning hole answered the efforts of the man.

Day did not rise, but sat where he had fallen. For an instant he was incapable of speech. Then he dragged himself to one knee and shook the broken fragment of iron at the grill before him.

"Beat you!" he cried savagely. "Beat you—muscle over iron! Now——"

He paused abruptly as another voice floated upon the cavern chamber, a voice whose thrilling timbre was by this time haunting Day himself.

"Good!" it cried. "Good! Try again, *burra sahib!*"

From the roof came a sudden creaking and grind of iron. Sudden and swift, an object rushed downward, came to the floor with a clangor and strident ring of iron. This object was a second grating, six inches inside the first one!

"Try again, *burra sahib!*" echoed that haunting voice.

Day uttered a despairing gasp and dropped again to the floor. He was beaten.

CHAPTER XII

"MENCIUS SAID 'THAT WAS ONE TIME; THIS IS ANOTHER.' "—*Kung-sun Ch'ou.*

FOR a time Day sat in gloomy silence. At length he picked up his pipe and lighted it.

"I am beginning to be converted to your belief," he said in a changed voice. "If this Rani woman of yours were here, Kilgore—you think she would squeeze us?"

Kilgore nodded.

"The cards are stacked," he answered briefly.

Both men lifted their heads and looked toward the entrance of the chamber. The grate of footsteps on the sanded floor reached them. They saw, flitting into the circle of light from their lamps, the yellow-shrouded figure of their guide.

This figure came toward the grill that prisoned them, halted a yard from it and felt with extended hand. Touching the iron, the figure recoiled a pace and then sat down. At this gesture, at this entire action, the two captives for the first time perceived that the figure was blind.

"Now we shall talk, *sahibs*," said that same vibrant voice.

"Who are you?" demanded Kilgore, staring.

"I am Esrun," came the answer, with a laugh that rang eerily from the rock walls. "But once you knew me by another name, *sahib*. Would you recognize me again?"

It was here that Esrun abandoned her broken English and spoke in Hindustani. Kilgore made answer in the same tongue, which Day understood fairly well.

"If you are the Rani—" and Kilgore's voice shook a trifle—"then I would remember you indeed!"

For response, Esrun drew the yellow cloths from her figure.

Kilgore stiffened with horror; Day uttered a low, choked gasp. The thing before them had once been a woman—this much was certain. More, it was hard to say. Leprosy had wrought its frightful vengeance on the

human flesh. The creature appeared to be an old hag, yet Kilgore knew that if this were indeed the Rani, she could be not yet fifty years. Thirty years since, his uncle had loved the Rani, and women ripen young in Kashmir.

"There is nothing left of the Rani," said Esrun, a mournful note in her tone, "except the voice. But you, who heard that voice only once, still remember it. Sir Fandi Singh had forgotten it—but perhaps he was not to blame. I was frightened that day. Nor did I give him any chance to recognize my voice."

Kilgore strained forward.

"Fandi—and Severn! They were here?"

"They were here," repeated Esrun.

"And now——"

"Let us talk of them later." The answer came with a tinge of mockery. The hag again shrouded herself in the yellow cloths. "It will be more interesting now if we talk of you, *sahib!* Or shall we speak first of the days that are dead — of Kashmiri days?"

In the mocking voice of this blinded, ravaged atom of humanity there lay a dreadful significance. Kilgore comprehended this and straightened up. He was master of himself now, and he lighted a cigaret with steady fingers.

"As you please," he said coolly. "Then the Rani and Esrun are one?"

"They are one, *sahib*. Do you remember the day when you sat in the courtroom by the side of your uncle? Do you remember that I threatened him and his on that day?"

"Quite well," said Kilgore.

"The threat was well meant. Listen, *sahib!* My lover was murdered by your uncle and the rajah. That deed changed the entire course of my life. In striving to avenge it, I became a leper. Later, your uncle sent me to a leper's prison. I escaped. I took jewels and fled, with two faithful men who served me. We fled far, into the north, into this land. And here we came to rest."

Day intervened.

"Tell her she's away off the mark!" he said roughly. "Tell her that your uncle never had anything to do—"

"Oh, I say!" said Kilgore languidly. "Why bother, old chap? We can't demean ourselves to argue with this creature, you know."

Esrun laughed, and her laughter rang acidly in their ears. The words had stung.

"This creature was a princess of the Rajputs!" she returned. "And she has made herself strong, powerful, feared! And rich, also. What is better, after the lapse of many years she is about to avenge her ruined life upon the rajah's son, and the nephew of Sir Cecil Kilgore, the proud *sahib!*"

To this Kilgore returned no answer.

"Your two friends were here — they trapped me," went on Esrun after a moment. "I shot Fandi Singh. His companion shot me and left me for dead. But I was not dead. I was badly hurt—so badly that I was unable to prevent the escape of the two men. They joined the party of the Chinaman who came to aid you."

"Sheng Wu!" exclaimed Kilgore sharply. "Then Sheng Wu was at the temple?"

"Yes. He found Fandi Singh, who did not die, and Severn, who lost one arm from blood-poisoning. They could find no trace of you, and they returned."

"Ah! And they got away?"

"They got away. They reached Urga safely. My followers at Urga so informed me."

Day drew a deep breath and relaxed. He had been sitting under tension.

"Then it's all right!" he exclaimed loudly. "They'll come back to look for us!"

"They will come back," repeated this deathly Echo. In those words was a note so sinister, so pregnant with meaning, that Kilgore shivered despite himself. "In fact, they are nearly here!"

There was a moment of silence.

"If you mean to kill us," said Kilgore suddenly, "why not do it and put an end to this waste of words?"

Esrun laughed—a delicious peal of girlish mirth that was frightful to hear, so bitter was its contrast with realities.

"I have thirty years of suffering to make up," she answered. "Do you think that this can be repaid in a moment—in a day—in a year? Do you think it can be repaid by the destruction of the body alone? No, *sahib!* The gods have been kind, by sending me you and Fandi Singh. Why should I hurry? I am not yet near death."

Day watched the creature in a species of horrified fascination. Kilgore remained cool; the more definitely their position became pronounced, in fact, the cooler he grew.

"You have suffered slightly," she continued. "Now I have returned to you your razors and the things that make you happy. Why? Because presently you shall lose them again, and suffer the more. I could have ordered my followers at Urga to kill Sir Fandi Singh, but I chose to let him return here. Let your strong comrade break all the iron he wishes—when he has finished, another grill will descend!"

The two captives began dimly to perceive what frightful refinements of cruelty this loathsome hag was capable of applying to them. The iron grating over which Day had triumphed, only to have a second descend in his face at the moment of victory, was only a slight instance; a symbol. Their return from slavery and torture to all the comforts afforded by their own food and personal effects, was another symbol. Realities would come later.

"Now, *sahib*, let us have an understanding. I have little quarrel with your friends; it is with you and Fandi Singh the Rajput that I wish to deal. Of course, if you make it necessary to kill your friends, as the Sikhs were killed at the temple, so much the worse for them!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Kilgore. "Then instead of being an execution, this is a parley!"

"Neither; it is a choice. And the choice remains with you. Your friends in Urga, Severn, Sheng Wu and the Rajput, have proceeded cleverly. They interviewed the Hutuktu and obtained his authority to act, also a hundred horsemen. With these men, and a strong party of Manchu soldiers, they have crossed the desert and are now close at hand. They have taken every precaution. They mean to search out these caverns and discover your fate. They think me dead. They do not know that in their company are two of my men who communicate daily with me and inform me of their doings."

Esrun laughed—this time a chuckle of malicious amusement. Day, thinking of the unsuspecting band of men, began to perspire freely.

"All very well," said Kilgore in a calm voice. "What of it? Your spies will be discovered. Your telepathic communications will be discovered. This place will be found out. What then?"

"If the thought makes you happy, cherish it!" was the sardonic response. "But I would advise you to be cautious. I shall let this strong friend of yours, this American, go free. He shall be found by your friends. Let Fandi Singh hear his tale, then give himself up to me, join you here. The others may return home to Urga unhurt."

Kilgore laughed a little.

"You do not know my friends! If Day joined them, he would bring them here to my rescue."

"The word of a *sahib* is as the word of a Rajput," came the response. "And if the promise is broken, what matter? Your friends are powerless before me. The race of priests who once inhabited this place had many secrets, which I have discovered. They had much treasure, which I have used. Shall I set this friend of yours at liberty?"

"Let him return his own answer," said Kilgore curtly. "Speak up, Day!"

The American wet his lips with his tongue. In this moment, he was swiftly weighing the chances pro and con—not of his own safety, but of rescuing Kilgore. He perceived the one great danger. Knowing Fandi Singh as he did, and the highly chivalrous nature of the Rajput, he did not doubt that if he gave a promise, it would be kept by Fandi. He did not doubt that Fandi would return here in his place and trust the others to rescue them. And he dared not risk this.

"May the lowermost —— swallow you!" said Day. "I'll stay here."

Without a word, the figure in yellow rose and flitted away into the darkness.

For a space, the two white men regarded each other in silence, each of them oppressed by what had just taken place.

"Would you have kept your word to her?" asked Kilgore suddenly.

"Not by a —— sight!" Day said frankly. "But Fandi would have kept it for me."

Kilgore nodded, relaxed his cramped limbs and rose. He yawned and stretched himself.

"Well, I'm for a bit of sleep, old chap. What say?"

"Suits me," was the response.

Neither man cared to discuss the recent conversation; it was too fresh in their minds.

Kilgore found his blankets, spread them out and rolled up. He was at the point of bodily and mental exhaustion, and in two minutes he was fast asleep. The conversational duel with Esrun had been so terrific a drain upon his inner self that the reaction was swift and sure. He slept like a man drugged.

When awakened he knew that he must have slept the clock around. The two lamps still burned, softly illumining the cavern chamber. Kilgore yawned and sat up. Somewhere on the other side of that dividing partition of iron Day must be asleep still. Kilgore put out his hand to seize the grating and rise——

An exclamation broke from him. He leaped to his feet, staring. The central grating had disappeared—lifted again to whence it came! The others were still in place.

"Day!" cried Kilgore sharply. "Look here—wake up!"

The American did not answer. With the entire chamber to himself Kilgore strode forward. Half a minute later he realized that he was alone in this place. Day had absolutely vanished.

CHAPTER XIII

"THIS PAPER CURRENCY IS CIRCULATED IN EVERY PART OF THE GRAND KHAN'S DOMINIONS."—*M. Polo.*

ESRUN the leper had told the exact truth. A hundred horsemen of the Living Buddha, with fifty Manchus, were encamped under the orders of Severn, Sheng Wu and Fandi Singh. In addition they had Kilgore's machine gun, which Sheng Wu had removed from the Temple of the Ten.

It was the singular fate of this weapon to remain untried amid a thousand chances.

The camp was made nearly at the entrance to the long and tortuous defile which gave access to the lake of singing fishes and the abode of Esrun. To proceed to the temple was out of the question. Sheng Wu considered it the abode of devils. Severn and Sir Fandi were convinced that it contained secret passages through which had come the gas-bearers who destroyed the Sikhs.

In making camp near the entrance to the lake and valley, which they intended to explore thoroughly, the three companions effected a compromise. From here they could search all the hills and valleys roundabout for the scattered skin-houses of the Darkan tribe. As a first step, Sir Fandi and Sheng Wu had ridden on with the Manchus to search the temple anew and to bring back fresh water.

Severn remained in charge of the camp.

The savant had become a changed man. His own sorrows lay behind him; he had embarked upon those of his friends. The kindliness of his eyes had deepened. A new strength to endure had uprisen in his soul, and he was reconciled to living out his life to its fullness; the peril of cynicism had been lifted from him.

He was unpacking his things when there arose a sudden tumult of alarm. Sentries cried out. A rifle was discharged. Horses were mounted in haste. Severn rushed from his shelter-tent to ascertain the cause, and beheld a man mounted upon a dromedary issuing from the mouth of the defile.

Under his sharp orders the horsemen of the Hutuktu lost their confusion and became orderly. Three of them detached themselves and galloped away to summon Sir Fandi's party. It grew evident that the single man on the dromedary was approaching the camp, and that he was alone.

Examining this single rider through his field-glasses, Severn uttered a cry of amazed recognition.

"Day!" he exclaimed.

In this moment, however, he kept his head. This might be some ruse; he dared take no chances of a surprize attack. He remained beside the machine gun and dispatched a dozen of the horsemen to bring in the lone rider without harm. They dashed forth on the errand.

Watching narrowly, Severn perceived that Day was not a free agent by any means. The dromedary was unsaddled, without bridle. Day was merely tied in between the two humps which distinguished the Bactrian breed, and he appeared to be unconscious. At the approach of the horsemen the dromedary flung up his head, swerved in his course and tried to flee. A rifle barked and the animal fell. The horsemen closed in about him.

The Mongols cut Day loose, mounted him behind a saddle and returned. It was close to sunset, but there remained an hour or more of daylight.

Severn received the body of Day in his arms, and made a hasty examination. So far as he could tell, Day was unhurt save for a bump on the back of the head—a slight matter. His unconsciousness had not come from this hurt; his stertorous breathing, his deep stupor of slumber, had been caused by some drug.

"Carry him to my tent," ordered Severn. "What is this?"

One of the Mongols put a sheaf of black papers into his hand. The papers were tied about with a strip of torn cotton.

"It was hanging about his neck. There was nothing else."

Severn examined the papers. They were of varying sizes, from six inches in length and four in width to three times as much. They were nearly black in color. Upon each was imprinted a series of ideographs in vermilion; the papers were clear as if fresh from the press.

When he saw the ideographs, Severn barely repressed a cry of incredulous wonder.

"Mulberry paper—bank-notes!" he said, staring at them. He glanced again at the red imprints. "Issued by Kublai Khan—impossible! These must be imitations——"

They were not imitations; he was convinced of this, even while he uttered the words. His false arm told him nothing; but the fingers of his remaining hand were too sensitive to feel for deception to answer here. He had the instinct of the archeologist for delicate perceptions of patina and fiber. He knew that he was holding genuine bank-notes of the Yuan dynasty, issued in the thirteenth century, yet preserved perfectly!

With an effort, he thrust the papers into his pocket and hurried to the side of his rescued comrade. As he gained the tent he halted abruptly, lifting his head. From the direction of the Temple of the Ten had come a sustained burst of firing. It ended as suddenly as it had begun.

Severn ordered out scouts and sentinels, then examined Day.

He was not long in determining what drug held his friend unconscious. It was *cannabis Indica*, that Indian hemp about which so much misinformation is spread abroad. This drug when given internally throws a man into a slumber which lasts for hours or days, an intense and deep slumber. Upon awakening, the victim is in something akin to a subconscious mental state; all power of concentration is gone for a time, and his brain is horribly relaxed. He can repeat, but he can not think. His initiative is destroyed. Then, literally, he can not tell a lie.

Severn guessed that Day's slumber had nearly run its course, but it was no time for delay. Kilgore might be somewhere near at hand, and in danger. Sheng Wu and Fandi had obviously fallen upon enemies. The need for action was imperative.

Without hesitation Severn procured a hypodermic, melted a stiff restorative solution and injected it into Day's arm. Then he awaited results in an agony of impatience.

He was still waiting when, with the sunlight gone, Sheng Wu and a dozen Manchus came riding into the camp. The Chinaman's report was brief. They had found a score of Darkan tribesmen encamped at the temple and had fallen upon them instantly.

"Where is Sir Fandi?" demanded Severn. "Did you get my message about Day?"

Sheng Wu assented.

"That was why I returned," and he blinked a little. "Sir Fandi Singh remained with the rest of our men. Some of the barbarians were being pursued and others had been captured. My Manchus undertook to make them talk. I did not care to witness the proceedings."

At this Severn's lips clenched for an instant. He comprehended that Sir Fandi would stop at nothing to get news of Kilgore.

He took Sheng Wu to the side of Day. The latter's eyelids were fluttering. He gazed up at them vacantly, then his lips formed the name of Severn.

He was conscious again.

For half an hour the two men remained sitting beside Day. The latter told a rambling but perfectly coherent story. He had been hit on the head while he slept and knew nothing more. Of the Yuan bank-notes he could tell nothing.

Of himself and Kilgore and Esrun he could tell everything, and he did so. Before his story was half-finished, Sheng Wu arose and summoned the officer of his Manchu troops.

"You will order the Mongol barbarians to remove their camp to a distance of a hundred yards. Place three of our own men as sentries about this spot, and shoot any one who comes near."

The officer departed. Severn glanced up in surprize.

"You heard what he said," explained Sheng Wu blandly. "Esrun has spies among our men; those spies will be among the barbarians, not among my Manchus. That is all."

"Esrun—still alive!" murmured Severn.

"Trapped!" came the hollow voice of Day, who was dimly conscious of why he had been allowed to join his friends. "All she wants—Sir Fandi. No hatred to others."

He rambled along, giving vaguely jointed fragments of Esrun's conversation with himself and Kilgore. Severn might have discounted it as a mad dream, but Sheng Wu, who was an oriental, knew better. He gave a brief and correct exegesis of Day's remarks as the latter went on. Little by little they uncovered the whole affair.

When half an hour had passed the two listeners comprehended everything. Day lay with closed eyes, conscious but drowsy and without animation.

"Here is what has happened," said Sheng Wu softly, blinking at the darkness which closed them in. "Esrun wanted no trouble with us, but desired greatly to have Sir Fandi in her power. She sent Day to us. When Sir Fandi hears this story, what will he do? He will refuse to jeopardize us and will go to join Kilgore—not meekly as a victim, but trusting in himself to effect a rescue."

Severn nodded thoughtfully.

"That seems correct. Well?"

"Esrun's spies have doubtless already reported by telepathy that Day is here," went on the bland yellow man. "We can not discover who they are; no matter! If our force attempts to reach the lake, Esrun will summon her barbarians to overwhelm us in the defile. Therefore, we must leave most of them camped here. Remember, whatever we do will be at once reported to her!"

"I see." Severn frowned deeply. "If we are to rescue Kilgore, we must take Esrun by surprize. But to surprize her is impossible. She expects Sir Fandi to come alone to the lake, and there she will be prepared to ensnare him. Why, it's absurd—yet true! To think of a blind old leper woman doing this——"

"Nothing is absurd," said Sheng Wu, and then added, "And nothing is impossible."

"What do you mean?"

"She will expect Sir Fandi. She knows him for a Rajput—a man of honor, a man of high chivalry, a man who would readily sacrifice his life for his friends. She is blind, however, and can not see him. She will speak with him in Hindustani to convince herself that he is the right man and to confirm the report of her spies here. Unfortunately, I do not speak Hindustani——"

Severn started.

"I do!" he said, and remained for a space in thought.

Sheng Wu waited, patient and quite comprehending Severn's thoughts.

At length the American lifted his head.

"We must prevent Sir Fandi's hearing Day's story," he said, speaking slowly.

"I will answer for that," replied the other. "I will put him to sleep again."

"We must make our Mongols believe that Sir Fandi has gone to the lake, alone. In fact he must go, so that they will believe it."

"I will answer for that, Mr. Severn. He can go—and then return to the temple. In the darkness, that will be very easy."

"Yet Sir Fandi must not realize the truth."

"I will answer for that."

"And," concluded Severn, "the Mongols must not know that I have gone to the lake."

"Right. I will send you off now with my Manchus, ostensibly to the temple. You will ride part way, then send them on to join Sir Fandi, and strike off by yourself."

Severn nodded.

"Good enough. And how will you answer to Sir Fandi for my absence?"

Sheng Wu was silent for a space. Then he smiled.

"I am afraid," he said, "that I must tell our friend a few lies. Well! That is quite all right. It is one of the duties of universal obligation belonging to the intercourse of friends, as set forth in the twentieth chapter Tsze-sze's 'Doctrine of the Mean.' There is only one thing that troubles me."

"And what is that?" queried Severn.

"Your fate."

Severn laughed softly.

"Don't worry about that, Sheng. Give me three days. If Kilgore and I don't return in that time——"

"Then we shall come and avenge your death. You are a person of great virtue, my friend. You are risking much."

"No; I have not much to risk," said Severn "What remains to me is little enough to place at the service of my friends. Now, I want two horses, a supply of food,

one of our electric torches and my revolver. I think that will be all."

Half an hour afterward Severn and six Manchu riders set off in the direction of the temple. One of the Manchus bore a note to Sir Fandi Singh.

Under the fine starlight Severn had no difficulty in ascertaining his position perfectly. When the camp was a mile away he drew rein and sent the Manchus onward. He watched them ride from sight toward the temple.

"I hope Sheng Wu can accomplish his part of the work," he thought. "It's more difficult than mine. I have only to fool a poor blind leper—while he has to deceive both Sir Fandi and the Mongols!"

And he rode toward the defile, trying to assure himself that he would this time be able to shoot down Esrun on sight. In his heart of hearts he knew that he could not do it, at least, without provocation. He had never forgotten the horror that had seized him when, as he thought, he had shot the woman to death—even in the moment when he thought she had murdered Sir Fandi.

After all sometimes these little things count big with the right sort of man. Day could have shot the woman without a scruple. Severn, although he knew that the life of Kilgore might hang in the balance, tried to persuade himself to do it, and could not.

"We'll see when the time comes," he reflected, and spurred his horses onward. "After all, it may not be necessary—she is only a blind woman, a helpless creature."

This was a mistake.

CHAPTER XIV

"THERE IS HEAVEN SO HIGH, AND THE STARS SO DISTANT?"—*Li Low.*

SEVERN stood at the shore of the mysterious little lake, whose surface no wind ever ruffled, and wondered why Day had been given those bank-notes to carry.

"It was an ironic jest, more than likely," he concluded. "Probably Esrun guessed that he was looking for treasure—and gave it to him."

Noon had come and gone. He had waited here an hour, and nothing had happened. The two horses, hobbled, grazed among the lush grasses to the left. Everything was peaceful, hot, still as death itself. By dawn, at the latest, Esrun must have known that Sir Fandi had started for the lake; she would be so informed by her spies among the horsemen of the Hutuktu. How would she receive the expected Rajput?

Severn had not slept for twenty-four hours. He reclined under the trees and vowed that he would doze only for an hour. He needed sleep, and he could afford to risk that. He glanced at his watch, set the waking-time in his head and slept.

When he wakened, he looked again at his watch; he was correct, almost to the minute. With a breath of relief that he had not overslept, he came to his feet. His eyes fell upon the boat of Esrun, drawn up on shore.

With a start of astonishment Severn whirled about, searching the shore. There was no sign of Esrun—yet the boat had come here while he slept! Had his presence passed unnoted? Very likely. Where, then, was Esrun?

Severn slowly approached the boat, suspecting some trick until he perceived that the rude craft was indeed empty, its paddle lying across the thwarts. He saw something else also—a paper on the forward thwart, weighted down with a stone. Concluding there was nothing to fear, Severn pocketed his automatic, leaned forward and picked up the paper.

Upon this paper was written in flowing Hindustani:

> Come in the boat to the cliff-opening. I will wait you.

Severn crumpled the paper into a ball, tossed it away and stepped into the boat. He pushed off from shore.

"That message was intended for the Rajput—she won't dream that others could read it!" he reflected. "Therefore, my appearance in the boat will be sufficient guarantee that I am Sir Fandi. Excellent!"

Standing erect in the stern, he paddled the boat toward the crags on the right. He had a good idea of where to seek the opening in the cliffs, since he had seen Esrun come out on the occasion of his former visit to the spot.

He asked himself no useless questions about the matter. He understood perfectly that while he slept Esrun had brought out the boat and had left the message for Sir Fandi. How she had regained the cavern did not matter. Could she pick his brain

with her accursed telepathic power? He thought not. Had she been able to do so, she would never have been expecting the Rajput to arrive. This was comforting.

The cleft in the high rocks opened out before him. He beheld the sandy strip, the rock portal of the cavern, as Day had described; and standing on the sand, the yellow figure of Esrun, shrouded, blind.

Severn made rather difficult work of the paddling, inasmuch as his mechanical arm could offer little assistance. As he slowly drew in toward the sand, he perceived that Esrun had heard his approach. The hooded head came up and her voice sounded in Hindustani.

"Is it you, Fandi Singh?"

Severn imitated the accents of the Rajput as best he could; he dared take no chances.

"It is I, woman."

The prow of the boat touched the sand. Severn stepped out, pulled up the boat. Esrun lifted a hand as if in warning. Mockery rang in her voice.

"Welcome, son of the sun, lord of Rajputana, ruler of the blood of Mewar! Do not think to slay me, or you will never see your friend alive. Throw down your revolver at my feet."

Severn hesitated only an instant. He knew that he could not pistol this creature in cold blood. Only cowards can seek in sudden death, whether for others or for themselves, a resolvent for the problems of existence; and Severn, facing the fact, shrank. Besides, if need were, he could throttle this leprous creature in his one hand.

He threw down the pistol and Esrun picked it up.

"Come!" she said, and moved toward the cavern portal.

Severn followed.

Knowing that to this being both night and day were the same, Severn produced his electric torch as he stepped into the darkness after his guide. He feared some trap designed to lay him by the heels, since Esrun worked not with force, but with cunning. The light showed him little. The passage was wide and high and was intersected by other but smaller passages at intervals.

"Where is Kilgore *sahib?*" demanded Severn.

"You shall see him presently, lord of the Rajputs! First I will show you some of the wonders of this place——"

"I did not come here to see wonders."

"You shall see what I desire you to see, none the less."

Severn made no response. He reflected that, lacking a guide, he could hardly hope to discover Kilgore—the mountain appeared to be honeycombed with passages. He would of course chance it, in extremity, but the time was not yet.

"Turn here," said the voice. "Follow me closely, to the right!"

Severn swept his light around, suspicious of pitfalls or gins. He discovered nothing and followed into a passage leading off to the right. This proved to be short, and opened out in a large chamber. Here was burning a dim light in one of the ancient massive reservoirs of oil.

"I lighted the lamp in honor of you," said Esrun. "You came to this country desiring treasure. Well, look around! Take what you will, although I have used most of the gold. When you have seen enough, come and join me, and we will go to your friend, Fandi *sahib!* Here is the treasure-chamber of the ancient priests, O lion of the Rajputs!"

Severn examined the roof—there appeared to be no grills such as Day had told of, and he advanced toward the burning lamp. Then he paused.

Before him, scattered about the floor, were a few heaps of glinting gold-pieces. He knew what they were, since he had obtained a few from his first meeting with Esrun—they were broad, flat pieces of early Ming minting. This chamber and cavern, then, were not so very ancient!

There appeared to be little of the gold, nor could he perceive other treasure, until he advanced to the burning lamp. Then he beheld a great heap of packets bound in hide. One of these had been torn open. Severn stooped, and picked up a handful of the black paper bank-notes of Kublai Khan, known to the Chinese as *Shih-tsu.*

Severn choked down a laugh of bitter irony as he glanced around. Here was the vast treasure of which Day had dreamed—the treasure of Genghis Khan, perhaps! Instead, it was some hoard laid by under the Mings; a hoard of bank-notes stored away six hundred years since. A mighty treasure then, it was today not worth the effort of carrying away!

Impatience surged up in Severn. He cared nothing about all this—he wanted

only to find Kilgore and get clear. He turned to Esrun with an angry word.

"Enough of this! Where is my friend?"

"Come," Esrun laughed softly as she turned. "There is another chamber that you must visit, first. There I have prepared a gift for you, Rajput lion!"

Severn followed her closely. These words evoked a swift alarm in him. In the next chamber the trap would be sprung!

His light showed him that they returned to the main passage, then crossed this and entered another transverse branch. As before, this was short and opened into a chamber of some size.

"Is the lamp burning?" asked Esrun.

"There is only darkness," growled Severn.

No lamp was lighted in the chamber.

"Then it has gone out! But wait—there may be some oil left in it."

Esrun stepped forward, quite ignorant of the electric torch that played upon her. Severn glanced about the place, and saw that in some far day it had served as an armory. Here were fantastic weapons of all sorts, and armor; dust-covered, rust-frayed, useless.

"Have you any matches?" demanded Esrun, turning.

"No."

"Then come! Give me your arm—I will guide you."

Severn threw the beam of light about the yellow figure. He saw that she stood by the wall, and made fast to a great ring in the wall there was a set of huge manacles. At this, a laugh rose in him—laughter, not unmixed with pity for the blind creature who was playing out her little treachery.

He stepped forward and touched the figure with his left arm. Her fingers seized his arm—swift as light, the rusted manacles clamped about the wrist. They had been oiled and made ready for this task.

"The lion is snared!" Esrun stepped quickly away and from her burst one wild laugh of triumph that reechoed dizzily in the cavern. "The Rajput lion is netted! And here is a gift for you, Rajput, a gift dyed with my own hands! Wait!"

She caught up a pile of yellow cloths and thrust them at Severn. Then a match flamed in her hand and she held it up so that her captive might see the gift.

"Turban cloth and robe for the royal Rajput!" she shrilled. "Saffron-dyed, the yellow robes of death! Take them and wear them, great rajah, lion of Rajputana!"

The match flickered down from her hand.

Severn was examining the manacles. He saw that he had no hope of getting free from them; so quietly he began to unfasten the mechanical arm which was bound fast. He could no longer hesitate. The moment for action was at hand. He must stake everything——

"And here is another gift for you, rajah's son!" cried the woman's voice. "A gift of leprosy, a gift of death and disease——"

Under the flashlight, Severn saw her leap forward. Horror seized upon him as her hands fell upon his false arm and her shroud was brushed aside. Her teeth closed upon the false hand—she was deliberately endeavoring to bite Fandi Singh, to infect him with the dread living rot that had blinded her.

Severn stepped back. He laid down the torch with the beam still playing. From the woman burst a frightful shriek as she perceived the trick—the false arm dangling loose in the manacle.

In desperation, Severn caught up the yellow cloths and flung himself upon the creature. He looped the cloth about her throat, about her upper arms; the shrouding robe fell away, revealing all her ghastly death-in-life. One hand flashed up a revolver—Severn tore it away and wound the cloths more tightly.

Try as he might, he could not avoid contact with the awful thing that flung itself about in his arms. Shriek after shriek echoed through the cavern. Esrun struggled and twisted like a mad thing. Hampered by having but one hand, Severn managed none the less to get fresh windings of the yellow cloth about the creature.

He was sickened by the very touch. A mad panic upgrew within him—as when a man touches some repulsive creeping thing in the dark and goes mad with a frantic horror, a desperate frenzy to kill the loathsome thing! Severn cried out incoherently, as a man cries when fighting. He struggled with the creature, wound the cloths tighter, fought back the insane impulse to strike and slay with the first weapon to hand.

Before he finished, he saw that it was in sober truth a madwoman with whom he was dealing. The shock of finding herself so tricked, perhaps, had finished that diseased brain. When the creature sank down at last amid her mufflings, her voice never

ceased to pour forth a storm of raving.

It was horrible. Severn found himself shaken to the very soul, as if passing through some brain-searing nightmare of terror. He was not made for such work as this. A violent nausea seized upon him.

The shrieks of the maddened creature had now become low, shuddering groans. Each one of them went through Severn like a knife. He fell to his knees, sick with horror in both soul and body.

At this instant the sound of an explosion roared through the cavern.

CHAPTER XV

"A HUNTED TIGER WILL LEAP THE WALL."
—*Proverb.*

KILGORE, finding himself alone in his prison chamber, investigated his belongings.

Since all weapons had been removed, with everything that might serve as a weapon, he had small hope of finding the thing he sought. It was something he had prepared before the expedition started, in the vague anticipation of emergencies.

Presently, as he searched, an exclamation broke from him. With trembling fingers he brought forth from his pack a bundle of bamboo segments, tied together and wrapped in red paper marked with large ideographs. These characters proclaimed that the bundle held temple candles.

Such candles, made of very soft wax or animal fat, and painted, can not be touched without smearing the hands with color. Accordingly, they are carried in bamboo segments, split asunder and joined about the candle, the bamboo joint at each end holding the prongs of the candles. Feverishly Kilgore tore open the bundle to let the individual candles come loose.

These candles were remarkable for one thing. The ordinary temple candle melts with heat. These had crossed the Gobi, yet they had not melted.

Kilgore laid them down and rose.

"By gad, I don't dare chance it!" he exclaimed, taking a cigaret and lighting it. "If there's no other way I'll try it—but it's madness. Let's have a look at that grill."

He went to the iron grating that enclosed his end of the chamber. It was out of the question for him to break away, as Day had done, although he found one point where the iron was badly eaten by rust. The idea came to him, however, that he could slide the grill upward again.

He fell to work.

Lifting the iron grating was beyond his power. He attempted to pry it with whatever he found to hand. After working an hour, he had it up two inches from the floor, resting now upon two fragments of a great water-jar that he smashed. This jar was neither of pottery nor of porcelain; it was of the intermediate period partaking of the qualities of each material and was extremely hard.

Another hour passed—an hour of minute and incessant labor. At the end of this period, the grating had been raised to a height of four inches. Kilgore was setting pieces of the jar in place to hold it up, when the props gave way suddenly. The grating clanged again on the floor.

Kilgore sank down, exhausted.

"No go," he said calmly. "I'll have to take the chance after all!"

When he was rested, he went to the bundle of bamboo segments and sat down. He worked loose the fastenings of the first segment. When the bamboo fell apart, he took out the temple candle, gaudily painted in red and gold and black. Under his hands a miracle took place; what had seemed a candle, became a stick of dynamite.

Kilgore was cool now, cold as death, absolutely deliberate. He opened the other bamboo segments. He stuffed the front of his shirt with sticks of dynamite, fuse, caps. Everything was here with which to work. He fitted a broken stick with cap and fuse.

"The stuff works downward—I must make it work otherwise," he murmured. "If it doesn't kill me, it'll bring down the roof. If it doesn't bring down the roof, it will close up the entrance. If it fails to close the entrance, it will blow aside the grill. And if it does that—I have a chance. At least, I'll enjoy a last cigaret."

He lighted the cigaret. His fingers were steady now. He was perfectly calm.

Going to the center of the caging grill, where the two sections came together, he worked with such materials as he could find to build up a platform that might direct the force of the explosive against the iron

grating. When he had finished he inspected the work with a shrug of doubt.

"It may—and it mayn't," he said, and smiled.

He placed the broken stick of explosive, its fuse ready. With water and sand from the floor he tamped it in place as well as possible. Then he drew out his box of vestas and lighted one of the wax splinters.

"Well," he said, "here's how!"

He lighted the fuse, dropped the match, and ran to the far corner of the chamber. There he flung himself down, careful of the explosives in his shirt.

The half-minute that he waited dragged into an eternity of suspense.

Suddenly it came—a flash, a stunning roar, a blast that extinguished the lamps. Objects came hurtling, smashing, against the walls. Momentarily deafened, half-stunned, Kilgore dragged himself erect, coughing the choking fumes from his lungs as he groped a way forward.

He dared not strike a vesta, lest he behold failure.

At length he came to the grating, and his hands groped at it. A sobbing cry burst from him as he found the iron wrenched and twisted outward in a gaping hole large enough to admit his body. Without hesitation, he dropped and crawled through.

When he rose, he was shaking with excitement. Had the entrance to the chamber been closed? He struck a vesta and held it up.

"Thank Heaven!"

He started forward. Before the light burned his fingers and died, he had reached the main passage outside. For a moment he stood there in darkness—then, at some little distance, he saw a dancing ray of light.

"Kilgore!" cried a voice. "Kilgore!"

"Here!" Kilgore leaped forward toward the light.

It struck upon his figure and came to a halt. Then it dropped to the floor, and by good luck continued to burn.

Kilgore stared at Severn, a frightful shape. The American staggered and clutched at him.

"Out of this!" cried Severn in a wild voice. "Out of this hell-hole——"

"You're alone?" snapped Kilgore, wondering.

"Yes."

"Day?"

"Safe—get out, get out!" Hysteria shrilled in Severn's tone. "You've no idea what I've done—out of here, I tell you! Pick up the light——"

Kilgore obeyed. He had no idea what Severn had done; that was true. Nothing, in fact, but to tie up a leprous woman—and yet this absurdly simple thing had unstrung and shaken Severn to the very soul. He was still nauseated.

The two men ran. When they gained the cavern entrance, Severn flung himself forward with an inarticulate cry of thanksgiving on his lips. He threw himself into the warm sand and lay there, clutching at it.

Kilgore dropped the electric torch and looked about. He saw the boat there at the shore below, the blue sky above. He looked at Severn and perceived that the man was sick.

Then, with a queer smile twisting at his lips, Kilgore stepped back into the darkness.

Five minutes afterward he rejoined Severn, who by this time was sitting up and looking about. The American glanced up at his friend.

"I'm a fool," he said, his voice still uncertain. "It was a horrible thing—you can't imagine how horrible! To any one else it might not have mattered a bit."

Kilgore touched him on the shoulder and pointed to the boat.

"Never mind talking about it. Let's go."

Severn drew a deep breath and came to his feet.

They got into the boat. Severn sat on the forward thwart. Kilgore took the paddle and urged the rude craft outward along the narrow water-way into the lake. Once or twice he glanced back at the black portal of the cavern. At length they emerged from the cleft in the rocks, and were heading for the shore beyond. Kilgore saw the two horses there.

At length Severn raised his head.

"I want only to get out of here forever!" he said. "I've had enough. I'm done——"

"Buck up, old chap, we're on our way," said Kilgore kindly. "Where's Day?"

"Out there." Severn waved his hand vaguely. "With the others. I——"

A tremor passed through the boat—a shivering convulsion imparted from the water. It was followed by a dull sound, a thudding smash. Severn leaped to his feet in alarm, nearly overturning the craft.

"Good ——! What was that?".

Kilgore smiled and glanced over his shoulder. Above the crags to the right was rising a little cloud of dust.

"Dynamite," he said curtly. "I blew in the entrance to that damnable place."

Severn stared at him for a moment, wide-eyed.

"But—but Esrun was there——"

"I should jolly well hope she was!" exploded Kilgore. For the first time, Severn heard an oath fall from his lips. In a sudden passion Kilgore shook his fist at the crags. "And let her stay there to eternity!"

Severn sat down, dropped his head into his hands, sat motionless.

Five minutes later the two men stepped ashore. Kilgore ran to catch the horses. He unhobbled them, led them back to Severn.

"Up with you!" he cried exultantly. "Free, man—free! Let's go!"

"Yes—let's go!" echoed Severn in a firm voice.

The two mounted and rode.

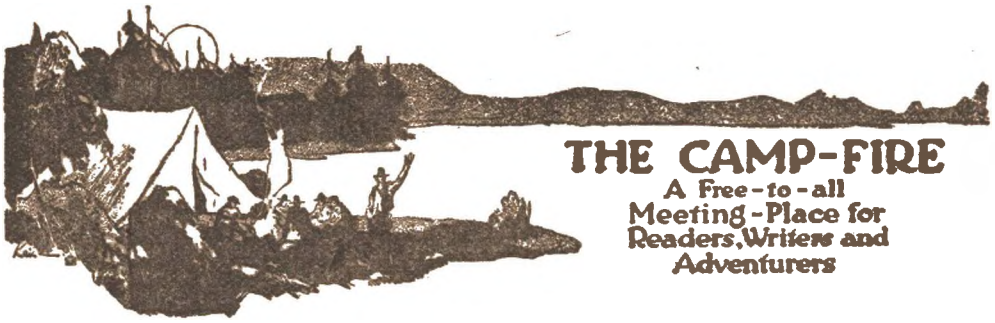
THE TRAIL TO TONOPAH

by Lydia M. D. O'Neil

FOLLOW the trail, the overland trail!
Out where the coyotes whimper and wail;
Out where the wild canary trills
Over the piñon-girded hills;
Out where the cry of the western jay
Rings through the valleys and far away;
There you shall find her, a long, lone land—
Nevada, gracious and great and grand,
Rich of raiment and snowy of crown—
Out in the land where the sun goes down!

Follow the trail, the overland trail,
Out to the land where the vultures sail;
Where the whir of wings in the purple dark
Bespeaks the flight of the desert lark;
Out to the land where the sagebrush grows
Over the plains and the broad plateaus;
Out to the lakes where the curlews call,
And gulls and willets and wild geese brawl;
Where the great owl hoots and the tall cliffs frown—
Out to the land where the sun goes down!

Follow the trail, the overland trail,
Over the deserts wide and pale;
Alkali-flat and mountains old,
Aglow with silver, agleam with gold;
Old as the world is, with strange, sweet charms,
She shall fold you close in her mighty arms;
You shall learn to know her and love her best
Of all the daughters of all the West—
Far Nevada, of fair renown—
The long, lone land where the sun goes down!



THE CAMP-FIRE

A Free-to-all Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

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.

THIS is a lucky coincidence connected with our Camp-Fire button:

Keyport, N. J.

The numeral "71" on your button signifies in the telegram game "Compliments" and is used on the wire at the end of a "confab" to express friendship.

JOHN B. BOZARTH.

A YOUNG Camp-Fire comrade speaks in defense of General Custer. I think I can say that the intent of those who have spoken to Camp-Fire on this subject has not been to attack Custer but merely to dig out the facts concerning the massacre of his command. Certainly a great many things in his praise have been spoken at our meetings.

After reading letters published in *Adventure*, I felt it my duty to at least say a few words in defense of a man who was as much of a gentleman and officer and heroic to a degree that merged on reckless.

As to his being in bad at Washington, Custer was at all times a man of plain and honest dealings, and the only reason that he ever got mixed up in that deplorable affair was that he believed the words of other men and that by assisting them in bringing the matter to light he would be helping to clear up something which to him looked crooked.

Of course, we all know that when the trial came off it was found that these men had no grounds on which to base their statements and in this way a reflection and cloud was thrown on Custer. No right-minded man would blame him for doing what he thought was the right thing.

NOW as to his disobeying orders. I do not agree on this point with the writers of the articles in the other issues. In my opinion the order, which I have read time and again, is conflicting in itself. I never in any book of military science or tactics or any of our wars read an order which can compare with the one given Custer. In one place it states that he should meet the author at a given place, and then it states that since reports are so scarce it is practically up to his own judgment.

Now in the first place in Custer's other engagements with the Indians you will find that he always applied the tactical method of splitting his command and in each instance met with complete success.

True, a lot of old-time Indian fighters will give you as a Golden Rule, "Never split your force when you're fighting Indians," but it worked successfully against them each time that Custer tried it. Of course his other engagements were always against a number of Redskins nearer his own strength. But is he to be blamed for not knowing the number of his opponents when you consider that the Department Commander himself confessed to the lack of reliable information concerning the Indians?

ANOTHER thing, and this quotation I take from Chief Joseph, one of the most intelligent Indians that ever dug up the hatchet against the whites, and that is: "Cursed be the hand that scalps the reputation of the dead."

In other words, gentlemen, if you can't say good about General George Armstrong Custer, one of the greatest cavalrymen, in my estimation, that ever lived, don't say bad about him.

Will wind up this rather lengthy letter (for the first time) with the old three rules of a cavalryman.

1. Audacity
2. Audacity
3. Audacity

And, gentlemen, if Custer didn't have all three rules down pat the drinks are on me.

PERHAPS I am rather young, at least among these old heads who are handing out the Custer line-up. But in my few years of life have hit the following organizations: 3rd U. S. Cavalry, Philippine Islands; Instruction of Military Tactics, St. Charles School for Boys, "2 hitches"; Commissioned Colonel on Governor's Staff, State of Ill., time of Mexican trouble resigned and hit the Border with the 7th Ill. Inf.; World War, with the 132nd Infantry Shoulder smashed up at Camp Logan and assigned as instructor to 7th Texas Cavalry.—"KING OF THE BORDER."

HERE is a letter from H. Bedford-Jones concerning the story in this issue by him and Dr. Robertson. Among other things, it brings up a question of yaks *versus* dromedaries. Can any one contribute an argument?

Lakeport, California.

In the belief that you might care to use it in connection with the "Temple of The Ten," I am copying below, verbatim, a portion of a letter just received from Doctor Robertson:

"I hasten to condemn absolutely your delicate insinuation of perverted vision. I am a hard-headed Scot with a strong underlie of logic, and in things mechanical a trained observer. I may easily be off in ethnic theory, but when it comes to the actual form of the pillars, I take water from no man. Yaks they decidedly were not; they resembled nothing on earth as yet brought to sight but dromedaries. You and the rest of the guild can thrash the matter out. So yak me no more yaks.

"True, these pillars were badly blemished, and a fair impression of the general contour could only be got by taking them all into consideration, yet enough of their surface was left to establish an outline. The dromedary stood on a massive plinth, of which the legs formed the corners; the neck was turned back, bringing the head about the middle of the column, which rose from the back. The ten pillars had five heads to the right and five to the left, all looking inwards toward the altar.

"The temple was wrought in freestone of a dark brown color and a coarse grit. I found the same material in a bluff farther on at the entrance of the pass to the hills. Its appearance would warrant the supposition that it had been worked out considerably; to a far greater extent than the ruins we saw would warrant. In all probability there is much more to be discovered.

"My trip was made at Government instigation, and the cause thereof must remain hidden like the archives of the ancient cult of the dromedaries. This must be my excuse for not going into particulars. The location I have set down as 97-40-5 E. Long. by 47-10-12 N. Lat., which is not entirely accurate, but would be satisfactory should the ruins be unburied by the whirling sands.

"Again let me insist that they are dromedaries and not figments of a vision brought to pass by bacchanalian orgies. The gang was strictly T. T., not D. T. Furthermore, this doctor does not hold his word lightly. What in that tale is true, is very true—and what lies, are awful. Let the *cognoscenti* separate them, and the laymen air their erudition. One thing you can bank on—that I relate what I actually saw, or thought I saw.

"Noo, ma guid man
Caa canny wi'
Ye're dootin's of ma tale,
And dinna think
It's aa' a lee,
A booser's beery wail.
The fact is that
I like a drap
O' whusky tinged wi' reeks,
But frae a Scot,
Freen writer chap,
Ye canna tak' the breeks.
Nor can ye drink
Unless ye've got
A drappie in the bottle,
And watter'll never
Mak' a sot
Nor lubricate his throttle.
Ye're oot yr pew—
The Temple's true
And so's the dromedaries;
It micht be bunk
Gin I were drunk—
Or aiblins wark o' fairies!"

—*W. C. R.*

Which sounds like that happy phrase in one of the Gilbert & Sullivan operas—"Yes, but you *don't* know!" It's true, I don't. All I can say is, If they were dromedaries, then why were they? Perhaps H. A. Lamb can answer; he knows more about the Mongols than most of us, and these things are certainly Mongol rather than Chinese—H. BEDFORD-JONES.

And here is another bit from a letter to Mr. Bedford-Jones from Dr. Robertson:

"The tale is founded on truth; that is, there is a thread of truth in it. The priests did exist and did carry off girls as said. No use my describing Gobi; no two tales of it tally, for the excellent reason that

no two spots of it are alike. I have set down the main facts of the matter, without exaggeration. Melodrama was carefully excised. Were I to set down the strict truth of the matter, you would cast me out as a liar.

"The tale is not purely imagination; in fact it is not imagination at all. I can only speak of what came under my own observation. I saw several of the sand storms at the City of Whirling Sands. There would be from two or three to an incredible number of the whirling pillars. They changed the contour of the locality in half a jiffy, and a man caught in their orbit would have had less chance than the traditional snowball.

"The priests looked more like Tatars than Chinese. Slight obliquity; very high cheek-bones; clear complexion; grayish eyes. Broader in frontal measure than others I saw in that airt. Benevolent looking ducks, but the quintessence of evil. Far above the average in size; the smallest of the bunch was a large man.

"I was a young fool at the time, so things I should have noticed passed me by. Call me a liar for what I have set down, if you will; can't be helped. *Nota bene*—this gun is fact. I had the automatic gun with celluloid shell fired by battery, long before the invention of the automatic was on the market. Used it successfully my own self, and that knocks into a cocked hat all remarks as to its possibility. It was done."

ONCE more our friend the Gila monster comes to the Camp-Fire blaze.

I have read so much in "Camp-Fire" concerning the Gila Monster that I have at last decided to "horn in."

HERE is an article or rather the main part of an article published in the San Francisco *Sunday Examiner*, August 1, 1920. This article was written upon the results of a scientific research conducted by Professor Loeb of the Carnegie Institute and Professor Vorhies of the University of Arizona.

First, they have exploded the theory of the monster receiving its poison from decaying food by proving that it has a good outfit of teeth and a good stomach which functions regularly and in a normal way.

Second, that the poison glands of the lizard are located in the lower instead of the upper jaw, as they are in snakes.

The poison oozes out in part of the teeth instead of coming from behind and above as is the case in other reptiles. The poison finds its way up a groove in front of the first teeth and this groove does not extend to the tips as is the case in snakes' teeth or fangs.

Third, that the bite of the Gila Monster while it is a thing to be avoided is not as dangerous as the bite of a rattlesnake. The bite was fatal to mice and guinea-pigs, but not to dogs and cats. In fact it took about nine thimblefuls to kill a medium-sized cat.

Fourth and last, that the poison caused death by suffocation and not to the stoppage of heart action as has been believed. The animal shows weakness and falls down and frequently, though not as a rule, has convulsions. The hind legs hang as if paralyzed and finally the fore legs also appear paralyzed. The eye-balls protrude and become opaque. Finally, that according to the injection of the poison (that is whether it was strong or heavy) the animal died or recovered.

The most interesting fact was that the monster enjoyed absolute immunity from its own poison even in large quantities but succumbed to the same amount of snake poison that would kill a rat.

I hope this will help on the question. This is not just my say-so but the results of study by men versed in such things.

All kinds of success to Camp-Fire and its circle of readers.—THE GRIZZLY.

HERE is some news about descendants of Daniel Boone. Let's hope Mr. Chamberlain sends us more, as he suggests.

Springfield, Missouri.

I was out the other day to see the grave of the youngest son of Daniel Boone, that pioneer of Kentucky, sir. It lies within a short distance of Ash Grove, Mo., and is neglected and unmarked save by a stone that is very small. The Boone graveyard is part of the estate of 1,200 acres which Nathan Boone secured in 1837, but is now owned by Mrs. Buckner.

A DOZEN graves occupy the ground. There are the graves of Nathan Boone who died in 1856, his wife who died in 1858. Of all these graves the only ones marked are those of the children of Howard Boone, one of Nathan's fourteen children.

He was prosperous and had a large number of slaves working his land. Remarkable it is that the log cabin built by Nathan Boone when he first came to Greene County still stands. It was a large double one. The floor-boards, held to the joists with wooden pegs, are still doing service. Has withstood the winds and rains of seventy-five years, and is occupied by John Stevens, a tenant.

The Boones were all Democrats and, when the political upheaval of 1861 came, the greater number of them went farther south, their personal fortunes being swept away by the war. But Daniel Boone's granddaughter is living on a part of the original tract. She is over 100 years old.

Will have some more dope soon as I have time.—M. CHARLES CHAMBERLAIN.

SOME interesting dope on some of the historical characters who figured in J. Allan Dunn's "The Long Trail":

Taft, California.

The scout *Godey* in your story "The Long Trail" lived in Bakersfield, Kern County, California, several years, died there about 1888, buried in the cemetery there. Spoke broken English; Frenchman, I believe. Didn't talk very much, married Mexican woman, settled on place about forty miles south of Bakerfield, sold it to the Haggin & Feris interest. Always went by name of Godey Ranch but now part of San Emedeo Ranch. When he came up-town always wore ornamented mocassins with leather soles. Must have been seventy when he died.

His home must have had many gruesome relics in it—don't know what became of them when he died. His widow moved and I think the house burned down afterwards.

The *Walker* mentioned:—We have "Walker Pass" in Kern County, and *Kern* mentioned—Kern River and Kern County (the river and county in his state) was named after him. A few old pioneers here knew Godey, but only few left now.—B. C.

IN CONNECTION with his story in this issue L. Patrick Greene brings up the question of whether the African elephant has lately become extinct.

South Ashburnham, Massachusetts.

For the Camp-Fire comrades the following may be of interest: The "head shot" by which the Major gets the first elephant, is taken in a straight line between the eye and the ear, and just in front of the latter. This shot kills the animal stone-dead. The "knee halter" is a crippling shot used a great deal by the old Boer hunters. The first shot was directed at the animal's knee or leg; and when an elephant's leg is broken or the bone badly injured he is able to move but very slowly. This enabled the hunters, who were mounted, to go after the rest of the herd, returning to finish the maimed animals when the chase was over.

At one time there seemed to be a danger of the African elephant being exterminated, so ruthlessly were they slaughtered. In 1908 it is estimated that no less than 15,000 were killed. In that same year twenty full-grown elephants were killed by one party in one day! The various African governments put a stop to this slaughter and elephants were protected, but it is sure that it will be many years, if ever, before they can recover from the ravages of past years. The elephant takes many years to come to maturity and the breeding rate is extremely slow. I have read somewhere that the British Government suspended the protection during the war and that, as a consequence, the African elephant is "no more." I am loath to believe this. Has Mr. Beadle any information regarding this?—L. PATRICK GREENE.

FIRST thing you know, fights on board ship will take rank with Bill Hickok, the Gila monster and other favorite Camp-Fire subjects. Here's a good one:

Jennings, Oklahoma.

Three bells in the last dog watch. I'm bos'n aboard this lime-juicer, mind you, and it's my watch below after a hard day handling gusher oil wells on deck.

I HAVE been reading "Camp-Fire" and have just finished Captain James Moorhead's narrative of an old-time free fair set-to aboard the lime-juicer *Lammergeir*. Your "Mule-Skinner, Dynamite" by C. M. Cosby brings old memories to the Captain and the Captain's letter busts my old salt-rusted sea-chest open again. I can see Captain Moorhead (he states he was young at the time) seven ratlings up the port mainmast rigging wanting to keel-haul the time-keeper for bawling belay after each round.

I also witnessed a set-to what was a fight from keel to trucks. I "signed on" the tramp *Port Caroline* of London, Oct. 25, 1911, in Melbourne, Australia, for Hull, England, *via* Dunkirk, France, loaded in wool. The outward bound bully of the foc's'le was a German (his name slips my memory) and was not liked by any of the crew. His fine qualities made him the foc's'le boss, but in Melbourne Captain J. D. Hindmarsh also signed on a naturalized Australian born in Holland and bound for Holland to raise funds to buy more land in the upper Murray River country.

NOW Dutch (as we called him) was liked by all from the start except the bully who ignored him openly, but it did not bother Dutch. From the first few days out we knew they would come together sooner or later; as days passed the sailors and firemen would stop and listen whenever conversation passed between the two. They were both A. B.'s of the A-1 class and I never during the passage saw Dutch out of humor. If I remember aright we had cleared Port Said and were not far off of the straits of Gibraltar when they came together.

The squarehead had a habit of laying in his bunk until eight bells, then muster aft and slip back and eat with the watch below. I was in the port watch, also Dutch, and the German in the starboard. This morning of the fight, the port watch went below at eight bells for breakfast. We had a large kid of hash and the German came down as usual, reaching for the kid at the same time Dutch did and the outcome was they both got ahold together. Dutch was sitting down on one side of the table and the German standing on the other. They just pulled and looked each other in the eye. Finally the German let go all at once and kid, hash and all flopped bottomside up in Dutch's lap. He just got up, cleaned his clothes as best he could and says "Come on deck!" and up they went, sailors all following. Then up came all the stokers and coal passers.

IT WAS a fine morning with the snow-capped Spanish mountains laying to starboard with the rising sun shining on them. Captain Hindmarsh and the first and second officers were taking a turn on the bridge with their cigars, an apprentice beat it to the engine-room and stoke-hold and spread the news, and in two minutes the ship's full crew were lined from the bridge to the anchor winch ready for the fight. And then Dutch says "Strip!" and stripping himself to singlet, trousers and socks, and then as if to the drop of a cap they set to with no time-keeper or seconds.

Man, dear, it was a bloody fight but fair. Dutch would not foul and we would not let the squarehead. The punishment they took was awful. It was a fight to the finish. Dutch was the best man, but whenever he sent a good one home no one cheered; we knew it was to the finish.

Finally after the best part of an hour the German commenced to hit the deck pretty hard, but, man, he was game. Neither one could hardly see for swollen eyes and the blood was commencing to drip on the deck. The last three times the German was knocked to the deck it looked to me like a breath would tip him over. Again Dutch would say "Are you through?" and he could not speak but shake his head in the negative. Then *thud* and Dutch's powerful right would nearly break his neck or double him up again.

Then the finish. The German raised to a sitting position with his eyes swollen shut and held up his hand to Dutch who clamped his own right over it with a real heartfelt shake and tried to help him up but we had to help them both below.

In Dunkirk Dutch was paid off to go to his native land in search of money but he came back aboard with two quarts of good old Scotch or black rum and we all drank his health, including the German.—E. C. WEBER.

HERE is word, sent in during 1920, concerning "Gentlemen Jack" Horn, T. T. T.

Fort Wayne, Indiana.

For the benefit of those wishing to know, I met "Gentlemen Jack" Horn (one of the three original T. T. T.) in Paranagua, Brazil, in January this year. I was paid off of the schooner *Daylite* in Rio de Janeiro and made the trip on a wild goose chase in which I was very nicely played for a sucker. However, each dog has his day. (May mine come soon.)

I met Mr. Horn first after he had finished making the trip overland from Lima, Peru.

I do this merely for the benefit of his friends who may be desirous of knowledge as to his whereabouts. He was then headed south for Buenos Aires and spoke of trying to get out from there. Hoping this will be of some benefit.—C. A. L. BAER.

P. S. I met him on the eighth and was with him until the fifteenth.

THE old Santa Fé Trail. Here are some interesting facts about it from a comrade of our writers' brigade,

New Albany, Indiana.

Coincidental with the appearance in *Adventure* of J. Allan Dunn's splendid story, "The Long Trail," I happened to be reading a very interesting book published in 1897. The name of the book is "The Old Sante Fé Trail," and it was written by Colonel Henry Inman, late assistant quartermaster of the United States Army.

COL. INMAN was the intimate of such men as Uncle John Smith, Kit Carson, Jim Bridger, James Beckwourth, Jim Baker, Lucien B. Maxwell, Tom Tobin, James Hobbs, "Buffalo Bill," and Uncle Dick Wooten, the last named being the gentleman who built the turnpike through Raton Pass in what is now Colfax County, New Mexico, and established the toll-gate.

The men named above, as most readers of the history of our country know, were vitally concerned with pushing back the Western border and making it possible for civilization to expand in that direction. Col. Inman, therefore, got much of his material first hand, and a very valuable book he produced.

MR. DUNN mentions a Chouteau Island and no doubt it is the same place told about in the Inman book. As near as I can make out, the location of this island was at or near where Cimarron, Gray County, Kansas, now lies. The place seems to have played a rather important part during the early days of the Santa Fé Trail. From all accounts of it it served as a sort of oasis in the desert along the Trail. A road-house without either road or house, so to speak.

It was about 1815 that Auguste P. Chouteau, with numerous trappers and hunters, established a post on the island for the purpose of trading with the Indians, many thousands of whom swarmed the plains and mountains thereabouts at the time. Shortly after settling there the traders were attacked by a band of about three hundred Pawnees, and some thirty of the redskins passed to the Happy Hunting Grounds. It is said that, proportionately, that battle was the most disastrous ever experienced by Indians in the West. It was at that battle, also, that the Indian was introduced to the American gun.

IN 1822 Chouteau Island turns up again as a haven of refuge when gentlemen of the name of McKnight, Beard and Chambers, with others, started with a caravan from St. Louis bound to Santa Fé to trade with the Mexicans, the country west and southwest of Chouteau Island being at that time Mexican territory.

When the caravan arrived in the vicinity of the Island it was halted by a violent snowstorm. It sought refuge on Chouteau Island and was forced to remain there for three months. There was no shelter or food for the animals, except the cottonwoods, and most of them died from exposure and starvation. The men themselves had a hard time of it.

When the weather moderated and permitted travel the traders were without the necessary motive power to transport their goods, and it was decided to cache them and travel light to Santa Fé where other animals could be obtained. For some time after that the place was called "The Caches." Col. Inman relates that about 1864 he made a trip throught that country and, stopping at the island, found several large holes in the ground indicating the spots where the caches had been made.

IN 1829 the Indians became such a terror to the caravans crossing the desert to Santa Fé that the United States Government, at the request of the traders, ordered four companies of soldiers to act as escort for the annual caravan, which that year started from Franklin, Mo., then the eastern terminus of the Santa Fé Trail. The soldiers were to accompany the caravan as far west as Chouteau Island, which marked the boundary between the United States and Mexico.

In 1828 a Mr. Bryant and several other young men of Franklin determined to reap some of the harvest in trade with the Mexicans, and for that purpose organized a caravan for Santa Fé. The journey to the Mexican town was made in about three months without mishap, although they saw many Indians on the way. It was supposed that the Indians knew that the traders would later return that way with live stock, which was of greater value to the Indian than boots and shoes and dry goods, thus the caravan was not molested westbound.

THE trading was finished and the caravan started homeward on the first day of September, taking along one hundred and fifty horses and mules, four wagons and a great quantity of silver coin. It reached the Upper Cimarron Springs safely, and there it was attacked by a large band of Comanches. The loose stock was stampeded and the traders whipped up their mules and made a run for it right through the Indian village. They fought all the rest of that day and all that night. It was unusual for the Indians to fight at night, their favorite time for attack being about dawn or near twilight.

The next day the caravan made but five miles, fighting continually. It was seen that but two courses were open to them. They could remain where they were and fight, with the promise of certain death, or they could make an attempt to escape by abandoning their wagons. The latter course was decided upon, so, taking as much food and silver as they could carry, they slipped away under cover of darkness. Finally, becoming so weak from constant travel and loss of sleep, they were forced to cache their silver on an island in the Arkansas River. This was Chouteau Island. After hardships which we soft-skinned folks of to-day can scarcely imagine, the traders came at last to civilization, nothing but skin and bones.

COL. INMAN mentions other instances wherein Chouteau Island played a big part, but these are sufficient to show that it was indeed a port in a storm to the traders who braved the dangers of the old Santa Fé Trail to trade with the Mexicans.

BENT'S Fort is another place mentioned in Mr. Dunn's story. The four Bent brothers were French-Canadian trappers and hunters. They, with Ceran St. Vrain, a man closely identified with the Santa Fé Trail, established their first fort, or post, at a point on the Arkansas River about midway between what are now Pueblo and Cañon City, Colorado.

This fort was abandoned and another built near Las Animas, Colo. This fort was called Fort William, after Col. William Bent, head and moving factor of the Bent family. Later the Government offered the Bents $12,000 for the fort. Col. Bent demanded $15,000, and because his demand was not met he deliberately destroyed the fort with a few kegs of gunpowder.

The third fort built by the Bents was located at what was known as Big Timbers. It was first called Fort Wise, after the Virginia governor, but in 1861 the name was changed to Fort Lyon, in honor of General Lyon, killed at the battle of Wilson Creek, Mo. In 1866 the Arkansas River overflowed its banks and played such havoc with the fort that it was rendered unfit for use. A new Fort Lyon was built twenty miles down the river.

The old fort was later repaired, however, and was for several years used as a station by Barlow, Sanderson and Company, who operated a stage line from Kansas City to Santa Fé.

The fort has long since disappeared, but if any one wishes the exact location it lay in latitude thirty-eight degrees, two minutes north; one hundred and three degrees, two minutes west.

IN CONNECTION with the Bents it might be of interest to relate that one of the brothers, Colonel William, brought forth a son by a Cheyenne mother who was destined to spread terror throughout his particular neighborhood.

When he was a youngster Charles, the son, was packed away to St. Louis to attend school and receive the blessings of an education, of which his father had little. He was not permitted to return to his home until he was twenty-one years of age, the idea being to transform a half-breed savage into an élite gentleman. When he returned to his father's home at his majority he could speak nothing but English.

But if his doting father thought an education would wean the boy from his savage instincts he was vastly mistaken. No sooner had Charles set foot in the old home town than he shed his civilization and began to plot deviltry. He found enough young Indian bucks and renegade whites who were of his mind, and a formidable band was formed. Under Charles Bent's leadership the band took the bloody trail.

THEY attacked ranches, wagon-trains, stage coaches, and even army caravans carrying supplies to the scattered army posts, murdering indiscriminately and wantonly. Lifting the scalps of the army scouts seems to have been a mania with Bent; he was determined to wipe the breed out of existence. He got them into his power by treachery, pretending friendship, only to catch them off their guard and slaughter them. At times, as a diversion, he spared their lives and turned them over to his Indian followers to be tortured after the methods of the Indians.

Charles Bent was one of the most ferocious outlaws that ever struck terror to the West, and the Government offered $5,000 for his capture, dead or alive. The most authentic accounts say that he evaded capture and eventually died a lingering death induced by a wound he received in a battle with the Kaw Indians.

I THINK I will risk boring you in order to mention another man mentioned by Mr. Dunn. No doubt the Maxwell mentioned by Mr. Dunn and also by Col. Inman are one and the same. Lucien B. Maxwell was at one time said to be the largest landowner in the country, owning what was called Maxwell's ranch, a tract of land comprising about two million acres. Even to this day complete maps of Colfax County, New Mexico, show a section called Maxwell Grant. This land caused a good deal of litigation in after years and was eventually settled by the Supreme Court of the United States.

Maxwell lived like a prince, his ranch-house being a veritable palace with hardwood floors and fitted with many luxuries one would not expect to find in such a wild country. He was a great entertainer, as open-hearted as was wide the land in which he lived. Every day his table was set for not less than thirty guests, and at times there were a hundred and more. Hundreds of Indians could always be found encamped near the ranch-house, for Maxwell had contracts with the Government to furnish the Indians with beef.

SPEAKING of what was termed the Baronial Hall at the Maxwell ranch, a large room almost devoid of furniture, Col. Inman says:

"I have slept on its hardwood floor, rolled up in my blanket, with the mighty men of the Ute nation lying all round me, as close as they could possibly crowd. I have sat there in long Winter evenings when the great room was lighted only by the cheerful blaze of the crackling logs roaring up the huge throats of its two fireplaces built diagonally across opposite corners, watching Maxwell, Kit Carson and half a dozen chiefs silently interchange ideas in the wonderful sign language until the advent of another day."

Maxwell was a demon horseman, and mounted on the boot of his Concord coach drawn by six horses would dash along at a breakneck pace along

mountain trails and through fords with a recklessness that scared the daylights out of his passengers. Kit Carson seems to have been a regular visitor at the Maxwell place, and often the two men would sit at a table all night long playing poker or old sledge.

BUT those days are gone never to return. As an old Government trailer down in Oklahoma once said to me: "Civilization has jest complete ruint this yere country." He was about right. The line of the Santa Fé railroad follows the Old Santa Fé Trail approximately, and one can now ride almost its entire length by train.

Unless one is familiar with the old Trail he would never suspect that just before the trains gets into Great Bend, Barton County, Kansas, it crossed Walnut Creek, and in that neighborhood was perhaps the most dangerous locality on the entire Santa Fé Trail. The caravans and stages forded the creek at the spot where the train now crosses, and it was here that the Indians used to lie in ambush.

About fifteen years ago I was over parts of the Santa Fé Trail, but of course there are now very few landmarks to show where it ran. Let me say in passing that, being somewhat familiar with the Fremont history, I was surprised to see with what accuracy a fiction writer can follow historical fact, as demonstrated by Mr. Dunn.—G. A. WELLS.

SINCE his letter came too late to reach you along with the story in the First January issue, Roger Daniels follows Camp-Fire custom by rising and introducing himself, though the occasion is his second, not his first, story in our magazine:

New York City.

I am asked to make my bow before the Camp-Fire. As far back as 1913 I began looking forward to the time when I would be asked to do just that. And now I haven't a thing in the world to say.

Adventures? I haven't had any except that one which you all have had, the adventure of living. True, I've poked in and out of quite a few places, was born in Wales and have been called "Limey," "Yankee" and "Canuck" by turn. Along about 1908 an ambitious shotgun took away a goodly bit of my left arm. So that has kept me tamed down considerably. Add to that the fact that at least a dozen city editors will vouch that I am a rotten reporter and you have most of the evidence. Just now I am writing religious publicity for the Protestant Episcopal Church.

The rescue of the light-keepers in the story "In His Prime" actually took place near Sault Ste. Marie in the late Fall of 1904 or 1905. I have taken a few liberties with the manner of it, however. Also I wrote up *Donovan* in half a dozen different versions in as many years. The reference that "Old Superior was kind and let sleeping things lie," is to a frequent tragedy around the "Soo." The water is always cold, being fed by underground springs, and once a body goes down, it stays down.

I might add that *Donovan's* idea of retirement coincides very much with my own and I hope I am as lucky as he was.

So having made my bow I must hang on to my modesty and, like the young lady in the show, reiterate "That's all there is, there isn't any more."—ROGER DANIELS.

YES, this comrade is young, but he's managed to be about quite a little:

Post Hospital, Fort Mills, Corregidor Island, P. I.

This is my first time at writing to Camp-Fire, but I am a steady reader of it and am very much interested. I thought I would try to write a few lines in the spirit with which the others are written. I guess you won't be able to read this, my mainstay, the typewriter, not being available for use tonight, but I'll try my best. This scribbling doesn't suggest "junior" in college, does it? It shows what interest I took in it.

I'm not an old roamer or adventurer, haven't seen extra much, haven't done anything, as a good many of the letter writers seem to have, but for a lad of my age I believe I have seen a little. I won't say how old I am, but it's taken me three months to grow a small decoration on my upper lip. All I have done and seen has been in the Army, too, in going on five years' service in the Regulars. I'll tell you about it.

UP TILL 1916 I hadn't gone anywhere by myself except to small towns around Western Tennessee, where I'm from, but in April, 1916, I enlisted and was sent to the Mexican Border, Douglas, Arizona, with the 18th U. S. inf. I did a little doughboy duty, such as is spoken of by Alex. McLaren in Camp-Fire; most of my time has been done in the orderly room and battalion headquarters, becoming in the later part of 1917 battalion sergeant major.

I went to France with my regiment in June, 1917, and we were the first over, first in the trench, first in everything. But March 1, 1918, I got mine—an explosion of H. C. blew a trench over me and when I woke up I had broken feet and a bruised up body. Also, I still possessed a canteen of sweet champagne which I had been lucky to get back at Marnes. That was about all I did have, having no clothes but a pair of breeches, shoes, overcoat, two gas masks and a helmet, also belt and pistol which I left for salvage.

LIFE was a bed of roses for me after that. I went to Paris with the *Stars and Stripes*, and stayed with them for thirteen months until they broke up, drifting around that part of Europe open to us, France, Germany, Belgium, England and Italy. After the *Stars and Stripes* broke up I couldn't see myself going back to the States, nothing there for a regular as the war was over, so I signed up for more service. No, I wasn't behind barbed wire and with Marine guards, as a dear young thing asked me when I got back. I wasn't compelled to stay over, but was compelled to leave in October, 1919. Our whole transport hated to leave, we all had fine little girls in France, or something, we liked the country and everything. In fact, there was one in Paris I expected to hitch up with but couldn't.

I GOT back to the U. S., took one look and sound of things and got permission to re-enlist for Siberia, there being nothing but Bolsheviks, Reds, Anarchists, Communists, Zemstvos, Soviets and Extremists and Cossacks there. Got over in December, struck it out to Verkna Udivsk, 2700 miles inland, saw the Revolution in Vladivostok January

31st., then came down here in April, finally winding up on Corregidor Island, well known in old Army circles as "Suicide Rocks." However, it's known as a soldier's love now, there's everything here a soldier might want or need, everything but drinks, and at that we have a good soda-fountain and a two-and-half per cent. "Spiff" canteen we try to drink dry every night.

That's all I've ever seen or done, nothing much, but being of a pretty observing nature I've picked up quite a bit wherever I've bummed around. I guess I've seen some things that very few others have in the short period of time I've been around, especially in my twenty-eight months in France.

Despite the fact I've done little actual fighting at the front, I've been with the whole thing from Ypres down to Boccant, both before and after the armistice.—T. W. S.

THE following letter reached me in the late Summer or Fall, written July 17, 1920. I'm sorry I couldn't pass it on to you sooner, as news to those of Comrade Allison's friends who had not learned of his death.

India.

Will you kindly announce my leaving India and that my address will now be care of Henry S. King & Company, 65 Cornhill, London, England. If you have room in your corral, I wish to announce that I have just buried my cowboy pardner Buckshot Allison, who died May the 29th, 1920, in Peshawar, Afghanistan frontier, of pneumonia. He has a lot of friends who read *Adventure* and was well liked by all his friends, who will be grieved to hear that he has gone on a very long trail.— CAPT. GEO. ASH.

SOMETHING from Kenneth Gilbert in connection with his story in this issue. Who knows anything about this Eskimo tribe? And what about the intelligence and imagination of Eskimos in general?

Seattle, Washington.

Just a word about the Eskimo tribe whose religion figures in "Lights of Peace." My first information regarding them came from an old whaling skipper, Capt. N., who is now comfortably berthed ashore at Portland, Ore. Capt. N. never saw any of the tribesmen, but merely passed on to me in a casual way the legend as it had been passed on to him. I have woven into my story the facts almost exactly as he gave them to me.

FROM an educated young Eskimo, David Neuyak, who is the son of the head man of the village on King Island in the Bering Sea, I obtained partial corroboration of Capt. N.'s story. David had just completed two years of study in the States, and I met him while he was on his way north. The gist of what he told me is as follows:

That one Eskimo village knows but little about others. The barrier of sea and ice, or almost impassable tundra, separating them, are too great for continuous social interchange. Yet men do penetrate to other villages at times, and thus is news passed on.

He had heard of such a tribe, but never saw any of its members. His understanding was that they were somewhere in the vicinity of Herschel Island; perhaps were part of the blonde race described by the explorer Stefansson. (I have not found in Stefansson's writings any reference to such a religion, although he has been criticised so freely regarding what he says he did find, that the absence of mention of such a tribe would not seem to eliminate them.)

David's tribe does not worship the Northern Lights in the same manner as did *Atoonyak* in "Lights of Peace," but believes the aurora to be the spirits of animals, dancing. The hissing that accompanies the phenomenon is thought to be the paws or hoofs of the animals striking the loose, powdery snow. Yet David was quite positive there is such a tribe, as *Atoonyak's*, but had no real proof to offer.

THEN I talked with an official of the Alaska Bureau of Education, a man who had spent nearly twenty years in the vicinity of Point Barrow as a missionary. He recalled having heard of such a legend, but did not remember much detail, as he said he did not pay attention to such things. Eskimos, he averred, are remarkable romancers, the greatest story-tellers he had ever known. Contrary to the belief that they are stupid, dull creatures of abysmally low intellect, he asserted that they had vivid imaginations, and that some of the old men could weave fanciful tales for hours on end, without pause.

A newspaper man, who spent two years in the Lake Athabasca country with a geological surveying party of the Canadian Government, told me he had heard of such Eskimos from the Northwest Mounted Police, who, in turn, had obtained the story, possibly, from outlaws that had been chased into the Arctic and had returned to be captured.

But whether the tribe exists or not, no man may authoritatively say it does not, until the last Arctic approach where humanity exists has been explored. Amundsen is now on his way to make the Northwest passage, having made the Northeast passage. When the ice gives up his ship in the North Atlantic he may have new stories of hitherto unknown Eskimo peoples.—KENNETH GILBERT.

SPEAKING of the stories in our magazine, this comrade writes:

Can close my eyes and see Hurricane Williams. He sure was a man. I can smell rubber every time I read one of A. O. Friel's yarns. Am soon to hit the trail and may have something to say later. Will head for the northwest and then? When I hear the call. Who knows?

Then he goes on to tell us something that has peculiar interest. This is the second "library" of our magazine established in a place where reading-matter is scarce. Why not make it a regular custom? You who roam know how very much a magazine can mean in certain places. When you've finished one somewhere on the trail, why not sign your name and make some simple

provision so that the next comrade who happens along, hungry for something to read, can find that magazine, read it, sign his name, and pass it on to the next wanderer? An easy way to do a real good turn. And a chance for all kinds of originality and fun in your method of doing it.

The stay-at-homes may regard all this as only a sort of joke. Those who travel the far places will take it seriously, for they know what a bit of reading matter can mean.

OF COURSE such "libraries" shouldn't be limited to our magazine alone. This isn't an advertising scheme. Give the "next fellows" any magazine, book or paper you happen to have. If it interested you, it will probably interest them. If you want to honor our own magazine above the other "books" in the library, make it the registry book. Or use the Camp-Fire number "71," or the button design or even our "coat of arms."

The intrinsic value of such a library will not greatly tempt thieves. And anyhow, if there's honor among thieves, there's a darned sight more among adventurers. Also there's considerable good-fellowship and comradeship.

How about it? Why not establish the informal custom of informal "libraries" in out-of-the-way places? Some of you have already invented the scheme and begun carrying it out of your own accord. Why shouldn't all of us get the habit? If we did, those "libraries" would soon be scattered all over the world.

The poem in the following case serves its purpose excellently. Come across with other suggestions. Maybe some one of you can produce something that we could use as a sort of standard.

THE "monicker" Comrade Pierce drew in his letter is as follows: Draw a rather sprawly capital M; inside the lower part of the letter print the letters "cree;" starting at top and at bottom of left side of M, draw two parallel lines to the right, ending them and bringing them together in a loop; inside this loop and to the right of the M, print the date—7.21.20; through the whole design draw an arrow, head on the right, and a ? just in front of the head; under the whole design print "D. Mcree."

If you are present, Dan Mcree, speak up. And have any others of you seen his "library" and signed your names? And where is Comrade Pierce when he reads this?

Incidentally, here is a time when I'm printing praise of our magazine. Couldn't very well help myself this trip.

Berea, Ohio.

Was in Alabama working on the Nitrate Plant at Muscle Shoals. Having a day off walked several miles up the river, sat down to eat a sandwich, saw a bottle with a note in it and read same. Here it is:

"Listen to wisdom from old Dan Mcree,
'Twill be a wonderful day, and happy you'll be.
Look on the rafters of yonder mill
A magazine you'll find, read your fill,
Place it back when you're done, and your name next to mine,
Place the note in the bottle and all will be fine.
Some day I'll be back. There I hope it will be
With a big row of names, headed by old Dan Mcree.
Let's hope there's no man so low or so mean
That will destroy an *Adventure*, the best magazine."

Here is his monicker.....D. Mcree

Who has seen it?—R. E. PIERCE.

HERE are six jobs for the ethnologists, archeologists and historians among us. It ought to result in some interesting information.

Manhattan, Kansas.

To Camp-Fire: I flatter myself that I am one of your old friends. No further introduction is necessary in that case.

My particular mental obsession is "historical mysteries." Here are some that have been in my mind for some time and I would like to get some one else's opinion about them. There is no "catch" or "jolly" business about this; I am asking for information.

1. Is it possible that the Aztec God, Quetzalcoatl, the "fair God, with hair like the sun," was some shipwrecked Norseman? The Norsemen, Normans or "Hommes du Nord" first began to be really troublesome about 800 A.D., in the time of Charlemagne. Were the Aztecs established in Mexico by the eighth century? All their legends tell that they "came down from the North" from somewhere.

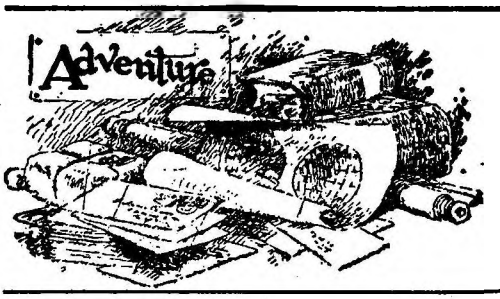
2. Where did the Basques, or Iberians, come from? They are at present in or near the Pyrenees Mountains, but in appearance, language, customs, etc., they are radically different from either the Spanish or French. Are they a branch of the Aryan race?

3. Who was the "Man in the Iron Mask?" All French histories are very vague on this point.

4. Has any explanation ever been offered as to who constructed the strange monolithic images on Easter Island, South Pacific?

5. Who was Kubla Khan?

6. The swastica cross. . . . has been used as a decoration for a long time by various tribes of American Indians. I am informed that it also appears on old Buddhist temples in China, Tibet, and is also used by various tribes in Central Asia. Is there any explanation of this?—JAMES C. MCKAY.



VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 *Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply* Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL BUY: Back issues of *Adventure* from the beginning of 1918. State price before sending.—Address RUTH BROWN, Room 222, 30 Huntington Ave., Boston, Mass.

WILL SELL: Dec. 1916. All 1917, 1918, 1919. 1920 to date. Seventeen cents each: postage paid.—Address GEORGE J. WILSON, 1403 North Bouvier St., Philadelphia, Pa.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 519 Citizens Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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 department 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 will probably 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 departments 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 for 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 stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. 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 department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. Ask *Adventure* covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1305 Fifth Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, freshwater pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, 6 W. Concord Ave., Orlando, Florida. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. Early history of Missouri Valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and 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.

9. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
LARRY ST. JOHN, Melbourne Beach, Fla. Covering Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

10. Western U. S. Part 1
E. B. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

11. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 20 Ashland Blvd., Chicago, Ill. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

12. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, 381 Broadway Street, San Francisco, Cal. Covering Lower California and that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce, business and general conditions.

★(*Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached*)
Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada.

13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 1
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 2
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont. Covering southeastern Ontario and the lower Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Covering southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 4
T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minnesota. Covering Hunters Island and English River district. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel. *The shortest, quickest and cheapest way to get into this north country.*

17. North American Snow Countries Part 5
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

18. North American Snow Countries Part 6
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, Carmel, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

19. North American Snow Countries. Part 7
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

20. North American Snow Countries Part 8
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Richmond, Quebec. Covering New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper and wood-pulp industries, land grants, water-power.

21. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

22. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure* magazine, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

23. South America. Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure* magazine, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile; geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

24. South America Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

25. Asia, Southern
GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

26. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, 1555 Wilcox Ave., Hollywood, Calif. Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports, manufacturing.

27. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan; Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

28. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province: Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing, explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

29. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

30. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

31. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

32. ★ Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, care Society of Authors and Composers, Central Building, Tothill St., Westminster, London, England. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

33. Africa Part 5. Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, The Adventurers' Club, 8 South Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois. Climatic conditions, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, mines and minerals, opportunities for employment, direct shipping routes from United States of America, general information covering living conditions, travel and opportunities.

34. ★ New Zealand and the South Sea Islands
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

35. South Sea Islands of French Oceania
CHARLES BROWN, Jr., 213 E Street, San Rafael, California. Covering Tahiti and the Society Islands, the Paumotu or Pearl Islands, and the Marquesas. Geography, natives, history, language, customs, travel, equipment, climate, produce, trading, pearl-diving, living conditions and expenses; sports, vanilla and coconut culture.

36. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (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 in question.)

A.—All Shotguns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, 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, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. 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., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S. its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents—in Mr. Mills' case 8 cents—in stamps NOT attached)*

The White Man's Life in India

GORDON MAC CREAGH is one of those who lived it and came out cussing:

Question:—"Recently I have been offered a position in India. I appreciate that India is a large country and subject to much diversification, but I desire to know what the relative value of United States gold would be in India, with reference to living conditions here.

In other words, what would a salary of $5,000 a year in India mean? Are foodstuffs cheaper or more expensive, concerning the list of necessities?

I enclose a stamped, special-delivery envelope, and would request that, if this is the policy of your foreign department, I be advised, as I know no other way to secure the desired information."—F. K. SMITH, Fort Worth, Tex.

Answer, by Mr. Mac Creagh:—It is quite a pleasant job to reply to so sensible and explicit an inquiry. Most of the letters that come to me demand something like, "Tell me all about India, and whether a young man of adventurous tendencies could find some excitement there." It is refreshing to find a man who knows just what he wants to know.

Now, since I don't know whether you are married or still happy I shall tell you the reasonable minimum on which a bachelor can get along decently. You can add about 75 per cent. for a wife on account of the more elaborate establishment required and clothes

A happy bachelor man in India—I am assuming that you have a commercial job in an office and will live in one of the big cities—can live in one of two ways. He can go to one of the recognized "gentlemen's boarding-houses"—strictly censored and hidebound with all the British conventions; or he can get in with a few other free men in a "chummery"—which is even more strictly censored, because all the dowagers in the city have their eye on it.

The cost is about the same in both cases—about two hundred rupees a month for food and board; to which you must add the incidentals of laundry, a servant—one is a necessity; better two—and petty thievery; which will bring the total up to another fifty rupees.

After that it will be up to you. You will find probably that you will want to join one of the clubs—life in India is nothing but club life. You may think you need a conveyance to drive to and from your office and keep pace with the other young sports. And in these things you can stretch yourself to the limit; but they are not absolute necessities.

You can figure actual living cost at, say, three hundred rupees. But as a white man, you *must* keep up the white man's prestige; you *must* live in certain restricted neighborhood, and you must mix in to a certain extent with the social doings of your fellow exiles.

Taking these things reasonably, without making a splurge, you can do it on six hundred rupees a month—three rupees to the American dollar, approximately.

If by any chance your job is a "moffussil" appointment—with a mill or a plantation in a small district station—your expenses will be about half of the city expenses; for you will find rent much cheaper, swell clothes less necessary, and servants less exorbitant. On the other hand, in a district station you will probably feel the necessity of keeping a polo pony or a race-horse or some such thing; for moffussil life consists entirely of horsey stuff.

You ask about foodstuffs. They are of course very much cheaper. All market produce is seventy or eighty per cent. cheaper than in this country; and it will possibly surprize you to find that American canned food is cheaper in India—after ten thousand miles of shipping and all the incidental handling—than in li'l old N'Yawk City. The reason has something to do with democracy and votes and inspired tariffs; but I don't understand it all very well—though I have just fought a war to help it along.

Whether you will like the life or whether you will hate it more than ——, I can't say. Some people like it—or claim that they like it. Yet I have never met any one who does not babble about exile and speak wistfully about the last time that he was "home" and came in contact with real people and real shows and real meals. It is, of course, a matter of personal taste. To some people the club and social life compensates for what they have lost—and they have lost everything else that they have ever been accustomed to. To others nothing can compensate for the life in a white man's country.

If you take this job I would very much like to know—after a year or so—whether you are sitting up nights and cursing the day that you signed your contract.

Don't Homestead in Ontario!

NOT the least valuable feature of this A. A. department is the "don't-do-it" type of advice, which, if heeded, can save the inquirer much heart-burning and lost motion:

Question:—"I am a fellow of about twenty years of age, very fond of hunting and fishing. I am at the present in the United States Marine Corps, and would like to ask your advice about homesteading some land in your section of country. I have a partner of the same age as I, and we want to get just as far from civilization as possible. We had not thought much about making big money, but just live.

How much would it cost to start out from Detroit, Michigan? And what route would you advise us to take? Tell me about the kind of equipment and dunnage we would need. What means of transportation is best? How thickly settled is your country? We do not want a place that is too thickly settled."—Private W. H. MCCOLLUM, Hdq. Co., 5th Regt. U. S. M. C., Quantico, Va.

Answer, by Mr. Moore:—Just got back from my annual deer hunt, consequently answer to your inquiry will be considerably delayed.

Your chances of homesteading in Ontario are very slim. Ontario, with the possible exception of the north, is fairly well settled.

True, there are tracts that are not deeded lands, but no white man could eke out much of a living on them. Winters are most severe. Insects are almost unbearable in Summer. Such districts are

either marshy, rocky or sandy regions with little fertility of soil.

Game there is in most of these districts, but rapidly decreasing. Fish are plentiful, but—the motor-car has made an awful inroad into the angler's and hunter's sanctuaries.

No, you can not homestead very well in this section of Ontario and be very far from civilization. Civilization over here has a habit of motoring right up to one's shack, even though that shack be built in the hills.

I wouldn't advise you to go into such a venture anyway. You would be put to a lot of expense; you would be up against mountains of hard work; you would put out more than you would take in. The struggle for existence in the Ontario backwoods is one long never-to-be-forgotten battle against great odds of climate and environment.

Play safe! If you really must homestead, try the prairie country of western Canada.

Origin of Name of Battle Lake, Minn.

MR. ST. JOHN seems to have answered satisfactorily this inquirer's first question. Who can supply the answer to the second?

Question:—"I write to ask for information concerning the Indian battles that gave its name to Battle Lake, Minnesota. Any other information about the history of that lake would be appreciated. Also, can you tell me the purpose of the tower on Inspiration Peak to the southward of Clitherall, Ottertail Co., Minn.?"—E. S. JANSSEN, Hillsdown, Canada.

Answer, by Mr. St. John:—Tradition is that Battle Lake got its name from battles, or rather skirmishes, between rival fur-buyers and later between white fur men and Indians caught stealing furs.

I am unable to get any data on the tower on Inspiration Peak. Perhaps the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, could help you on this.

South Sea Island Life

INTRODUCING "the Paris of the Pacific":

Question:—"I am a middle-aged man in perfect health, at present working on a fruit ranch in California. I have saved several thousand dollars and would like to ask you what the chances would be to go to Tahiti or the Cook Islands and purchase a small plantation of some kind. I know considerable about the fruit business and am also a good poultry man.

You may think it curious why I do not make a start here, but the man with small capital does not stand much chance here. I do not want to try to get rich; all I wish for the remaining days of my life is a good living. I have heard that the Islands are places where things can be raised easily, and living expenses are cheap.

Please tell me something about it, about the climate conditions and what in your opinion would be the best thing to do for a man who went there with a few thousand to invest and intended to remain there for the remainder of his life."—WM. FRAZER, Palo Alto, Cal.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—I think you are right to a degree about having better chances with your small capital in the Islands than in California, although even in your own country large trees from little saplings grow, and I have my doubts about transplantations of the human kind in the Islands at your age. However, that is your choice and it is your own money with which you are about to adventure. But please do be very careful how and where you settle down in the Pacific.

There is a wide range of choice—many beautiful islands that offer the easy life. Most of the land in the Islands is owned by the natives, who lease it. There are some freeholds, but they will take looking for. In the Cook group the land is leased from the natives through their land courts. The Cook group, which is one of the most happily circumstanced in the Pacific, is British, and is governed from New Zealand. The conditions are very pleasant there, and you have New Zealand for the market for the produce—oranges, tomatoes, bananas, with copra for the American market.

Tahiti, the largest island in the historic Society group, is a French possession, and if you were after a plantation there you would not only have to treat with the natives but with the French authorities as well. Tahiti is probably the most beautiful island in the whole wide world. It is called the Paradise of the Pacific, and its capital, Papeete, is so gay that it has the name of being the Paris of the Pacific.

There are neighboring islands that are not as populous as Tahiti, and where you could probably make the choice for settling down. But be very careful in your investigation—before committing yourself.

Or you would find life very enjoyable in the Fijis, which are a very busy and developing set of islands, growing sugar and spice and all that's nice and offering those seductive conditions of a land where it is always afternoon. Your knowledge of fruit will stand you in good stead in the Pacific, but in the islands you will find that Nature does the work, if only man will keep the weeds down and out. *Kia Ora!*

Wants Excitement

ARMY life, as *Private Mulvaney* says somewhere, is like shag tobacco; it's crude and rough, but spoils a man's taste for anything "moilder":

Question:—I would like to get an outdoor job in some foreign country, preferably Africa.

Do you think there is a chance to hook up with some trading company? Have had no experience in the business. Am an excellent shot, and served in France.

Would like something exciting. I don't enjoy living comfortably after the war. Capital very limited."—JAMES E. KAY, Lewistown, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Miller:—I sympathize with your yearning for outdoor life and something doing. You are in the position of many thousands, particularly since the war, which unsettled so many for office and routine life.

But that is the point. There are so many looking for outdoor jobs, and it often happens that if you get foreign employment you do not get out of doors; for the world over it is the same—mechanics and bookkeepers and shop-clerks.

What I would do in your case would be to get West or Middle West, to the lumber-camps, mines, big ranches. Here in Carmel we live out of doors. A couple of fellows I know run a small launch and supply the town with fish; in the Summer take out fishing-parties. Others are cutting timber for cord-wood; some are getting out ties on contract, and so on.

As for excitement, that is a craving, and it is very hard to satisfy it. When one goes adventuring after excitement he is apt to get more than he wants of it, of the wrong kind.

It is almost impossible to advise a man what to do. So much depends on himself—his make-up, sense, adaptability.

There are hosts of young fellows in the West who follow the fruit-picking, from the apple-orchards of Wenatchee to the orange-groves of southern California, which gives them change, but not much excitement.

As a matter of fact one can get as much or more excitement in any large city than in the wilds. Break away from routine, take lodgings in some poor, foreign quarter of your town, and you would be surprized at the interests you would find.

Why don't you try the U. S. A. civil service for the Philippines or Panama? Or the Standard Oil Company have stations all over the world; are developing oil-fields in far countries.

A man wants to rough it. He gets sick of four walls and bed and three square meals a day and car to and from work. We all feel that. Editors are tied to their desks, factory workers to the shop, and all are yearning for freedom and contact with the primeval. It is a hard problem.

P. S.—A man blew in on me last week from Alaska, where he had gone in the Spring with the salmon ships that sail from San Francisco. He tells of excitements enough. He says any one can get a job with the salmon packers, shipping out of Frisco in the early Spring.

The "Parkey"

ONCE inside this simple garment Jack Frost himself would keep warm:

Question:—"Several weeks ago I addressed a query to you concerning the Alaskan parka. To date I have received no answer. I will reiterate my questions.

I wish to have a description of a parka sufficiently minute and exact to make it possible to have one made as I feel sure that a parka or some modification thereof would be suitable for my outdoors work here in Maine in the Winter.

An early reply is requested, and postage is enclosed for registering letter."—HENRY D. JOHNSON, JR., Auburn, Me.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—I failed to receive your first communication, and am answering your second immediately. I have moved—accounting for delay.

I could perhaps draw you a pattern of a parka, but it would be unnecessary, as the pattern is obvious upon mere description.

A parka—or parkey, as it is invariably pronounced in Alaska and the Yukon—is merely a loose blouse provided with a hood which should possess certain features which I shall try to describe.

It is loose because more or less other clothes go under it—in white men's use at least. These usually include the undershirt or shirts, and an overshirt with perhaps a sweater or similar garment. Also, aside from the need of accommodating these undergarments looseness is necessary for ease of movement and circulation.

The skirt of the parka, however, should be no wider than necessary for the ordinary angle of the stride, otherwise it might admit an up-current of air more than necessary. In length it usually comes to or slightly above the knee.

In the breast is a pouch entered from either side by the hands and intended both as a pocket—the bottom of the pouch under the entrances—and as a warm rest for the mittened hands when these are not employed. Otherwise the body of the parka is simply a blouse, as stated, conforming loosely to the body and shoulders. The bottom edge is sometimes fringed with fur—always if the garment is of fur.

The sleeves are ample except at the wrists. Here they are constricted so as to barely admit the hand. The best way is to have them so they will not admit the heavily mittened hand, and the mitt should be a gauntlet mitt and slip over the parka sleeve at the wrist. Then the wind doesn't get up your sleeve.

The edge of the sleeve at the wrist is invariably edged with a bit of soft fur—thin, of course. This makes a nice "packing of the valve" between the mitt and the parkey sleeve. Air-tightness, you see is the principle of the parka, which therefore is made either of fur or air-tight cotton drill or ticking.

Now the hood, which is sewed on to the neck of the blouse, is the strategic point of this wonderful, or rather marvelous, garment, which no human being living in cold countries, including the northern United States, should be without. The neck of the blouse should end low down on the human neck, in fact well at the lower end of the neck, or where the shoulder begins to curve up to the neck.

At this point—and here is the reason—the circumference will be a little greater than that of the head itself, so that the hood when sewed on will be as large at its base as the head. Thus, when you are getting into the parkey, which is done as the old-style closed sweater was donned—arms in first and head last—the head will pass easily up into the hood. The hood should be loosely fitting, so that a cloth or fur cap can be worn within it if desired.

Now the point is that a hood large enough to admit the head in that way, and with the front opening large enough moreover to slide back over the head and lie about the neck and shoulders, does not fit tightly enough around the face and the front part of the neck. To slip back, leaving the head out, the front opening of the hood comes down at least to the Adam's apple, if the opening is in the ordinary drill parka. With the heavier fur parkas, the same thing is accomplished by drawing in or puckering the neck portion of the hood horizontally, which draws into a closer circumference the disk of the face opening.

In the case of the fur parka, this is facilitated

by having a long, triangular insert of lighter, pliable fur set in the front of the neck of the blouse. This is the thing that puckers as the sides of the hood opening are drawn together and the neck tightened by the pull of the cords. These are fastened at either side of the hood, inside. They do not usually go around. The lower edges of the hood-opening end at either side of the top line of the triangle, and these lower edges are drawn together by the cord, puckering the triangle, and completing the circle of fringe of the hood-edge around the face. The cords are set well in, so that in case of stormy weather the opening can be drawn up still more snugly, so that only the features are exposed.

Now the hood should project—in the case of the fur garment—well out beyond the face, like a sunbonnet of the old style. It is stiff enough to hold out, but a drill parkey is not stiff enough and the hood does not project to speak of, though it has a little lining sewed to the inside of the edge, but it does not project much beyond the edge. The snugness of the drill parkey is usually gained by a puckering cord around the face edge of the parkey through a tunnel, like any drawing-string, and just back of the sewing-on of the fur edging.

In moderate weather the hood is commonly thrown back and the head covered merely with a wool cap (stocking cap or other). In more severe weather in Alaska we wear a fur cap, which is fur around the forehead and the ear flaps, but the head is never fur lined. This cap is worn on the head and the parka hood still thrown back except in stormy weather or if one is standing still for a long time out of doors.

With this fur cap and the parka hood covering it and drawn snug by the cords you have a head and neck covering proof against any weather known on this planet, and the body is of course equally protected. A man so rigged is as much out of the weather as if he were inside a brick house reading near the fireplace. The fur, contacting the face at all points softly, clings there no matter what his head motions, and he is warm and comfortable, where the best devices on the best of other garments like sweaters, overcoats and the like merely keep him warm, or too warm, in the body, on neck or scalp, but he is cold at his throat or cheeks or the back of his head or somewhere, and in order to protect himself as well as possible he crouches or shuffles stiffly with a certain head posture. With the parka properly adjusted he can turn somersaults or handsprings or engage in any work or activity, no matter what postures it requires.

I should have added that the lining at the hood-edge is usually dual—a shorter-haired one to lie against the face and a longer fringe to jut out a little.

The fur parka is too warm for heavy work except in an arctic country or during a blizzard elsewhere. The thing is the drill parka worn over ordinarily heavy clothes. But for driving or any comparatively motionless work the fur is the thing. For cold *and wind* there is nothing that can begin to take the place of the parka.

Any questions further will be gladly answered.

Tarpon and Tuna Fishing

FLORIDA, Texas, and the Catalina Islands look good these days to the deep-sea angler:

Question:—"Will you kindly send me all your dope on tarpon and tuna fishing? Also send me any and all catalogs if you sell tackle and rods."—LAWRENCE D. BURLINGAME, Springfield, Mass.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—Your letter to hand. Beg to advise you that my favorite place for tarpon has been Mosquito Inlet, Fla., and Aransas Pass, Texas. An excellent tarpon or tuna rod is of split bamboo, 6′ 2″. Also the wood rods in greenheart and betharbara and lancewood are used.

I do not sell or have any interest in the marketing of fishing-tackle. Fred Devine Co., Utica, N. Y., can furnish you a good rod at a reasonable price; also the Thomas Rod Co., Bangor, Me., at a little higher figure; also a good reasonable-price rod is made by Shakespeare Co., Kalamazoo, Mich.

Tarpon and tuna reels are made by the Shakespeare Co., with capacity from 150 to 400 yds. The best are equipped with the Rabbeth handle drag. The Catalina Cuttyhunk lines, testing from 22 to 40 lbs., are the right lines in linen lines, and they can be reduced in size according to how light tackle you may want to use. Some are now taking these big game fish with light bait-casting rods made for bass-fishing and the wooden wabbling lures.

You can get a good consumer's catalog of equipment by writing to Edw. Wilbur, Abercrombie & Fitch, New York, or Chas. Antoine, Von Lengerke & Antoine, Chicago, Ill. The prices of the Chicago firm are a little cheaper.

For tuna nothing has been found better than the vicinity of the Catalina Islands, Cal.

Make Your Questions Specific

AGAIN it is necessary to caution inquirers to have something in mind when they apply to an Ask *Adventure* expert for information. Tell him who you are and what you want to do. And don't ask for facts that you can find out for yourself in any encyclopedia. The aim of this department is to give information not to be found in books:

Question:—"Would you kindly give me some information on southeastern Ungava and northern Quebec?

1. Big game, fish and fur.
2. Equipment for Summer, Autumn and Winter.
3. Canal routes.
4. Indian life and habits. Tribes.
5. Hudson Bay posts.
6. Minerals, timber.
7. Customs regulations."—LESTER STEWART, Grande Prairie, Alta., Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Sangster:—Impossible to cover your inquiry. Big game includes moose, black bear, deer and some caribou, depending on particular section. Fishing covers speckled and lake trout, bass, musky, G. N. pike, etc. Fur as usual in north.

Indians are Ojibway, mostly on preserves. Some Crees. Minerals gold, silver, molybdenite, copper. H. B. posts all through this region. Canoe trips so countless it is only a choice of time available.

More concrete details of what you want, and more limited, and I'll gladly take them up specifically.

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.

CARLEW, GEORGE STEPHENSON. Age thirty-eight, height six feet. Weight at time of disappearance 140 pounds. Hair, fair; blue eyes, and wore glasses. Left Burley, Idaho, November 13, 1913, arriving in Ogden, Utah, the following morning. No trace of him since. Any information will be appreciated by his wife.—MRS. ELIZABETH CARLEW, 6707 Glenwood Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SMITH, CHARLEY. (Blue) With me at Camp Travis Remount, San Antonio from December 1919 to February 1920. May be married and living in Wyoming. Write to your old pal Frenchy.—Address JACK MCKINNEY, Room 10, Coulson Bldg., care of Texas Sand and Gravel Co., Fort Worth, Texas.

HAROLD, J. S. Won't you let us hear from you? Everything will be forgiven and forgotten. Your wife—MAE.

CULLINAN, MICHAEL. Last heard from in 1900. About thirty-seven years of age. Any information will be appreciated.—ADDRESS L. T. 413, care of *Adventure.*

HEIGELMANN, EDWARD H. Ex U. S. N. Last heard of in U. S. Merchant Marine. Any information will be appreciated.—Address GEORGE A. HEIGELMANN, 20 Alton St., New Haven, Conn.

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.

MAYNARD, CECIL D. Write to your old pal Joe from the S. S. *Lake Conway.*—Address PRIVATE 1ST. CLASS JOSEPH D. PALACIOS, 2nd Military Police Co. 2nd Division, Camp Travis, Texas.

MCFARLAND, HARRY. Please write your old shipmate. Have something important. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address PVT. LEONARD MEYER, Troop L. 4th U. S. Cavalry, Sam Fordyce, Texas.

MCCAFFERTY, FRANK. Lived in Victor, Colo., in 1903 with his family. Any one knowing his whereabout please write.—R. S. KELLER, Chief Quartermaster, 16 Reg., Camp Luce, Great Lakes, Ill.

WILL COLLIS. Last heard of in California. Any one knowing his whereabouts please communicate with D. W. JARROLD, 414 Swanston St., Melbourne, Australia.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

FOWLE, DR. FAIRFAX T. Until about August 1919 practised medicine in Dr. R. T. Robbins' offices, Miami, Fla. Left presumably to join me at Duluth, Minn. Gave forwarding address as Merchants Hotel, St. Paul, Minn. Heard he was ill in a Chicago hospital for several weeks about that time. Any information regarding either will be gratefully received. L. B., 801 Rockland St., Calumet, Mich.

LEONARD, MRS. LOUISE and VAN CAMP, MRS. GERTRUDE. Last heard of in Port Byron, N. Y. Left there for some place in California after their father died. Mrs. Louise Leonard's husband was then a minister. Their brother Charles Halcombe would like to hear from them. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. GLADYS HALCOMBE JORDEN, 1564 Indiana Ave., Salt Lake City, Utah.

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.

RIDDELL, EDWARD. Alias Eddie Sweeney. Last heard of in Lowell, Mass., about thirteen years ago. Boarded with Mrs. Keyes on Middlesex St., Lowell, Mass. Your brother would like to hear from you.—Address JOHN RIDDELL, Bryantville, Mass.

PECHIN, MISS CAMILLE. Last heard from going to Chicago, Ill. Send any information to her brother. ROBERT A. PECHIN, 317 Ave. L., Miami, Fla.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

GORDON, J. C. "Doc." Foreman on State Aid Roads, near Paris and Danville, Ill., in 1916 or 1917. Last heard of in Arkansas. Heard he died in 1919, but if he is still living have important news for him—Address C. J. NOBLE, care of *Adventure.*

GAUGH, CHARLES. Formerly with U. S. Navy. Stationed at Cape May, N. J. in 1919. Last heard of in Kansas City, Mo. May be in Canada. Your old pal "Red" wants to hear from you.—Address C. J. NOBLE, care of *Adventure.*

BLANCHARD, FRED JOSEPH. Thirty-seven years old, five feet seven inches tall, 145 pounds, black hair, brown eyes, occupation, grinder or polisher. Left Bridgeport two years ago. Any one having information concerning him please communicate with W. E. BURTON, Washington and Madison Aves., Bridgeport, Conn.

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.

THOMAS, R. S. Your brother is very anxious to hear from you. Any one having any information please address—JACK THOMAS, Gen. Del. San Francisco, Cal.

CLARK, JOE. Last heard of in Port Arthur, Texas. Please write to your old pal who sailed with you on the tug *S. B.* on the Gulf.—Address JACK MYERS, care of Eddie Heffman, 1301 Ave. F., Galveston, Texas.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

MCWILLIAMS, WALTER. Age seventeen years. Last heard of in Dallas, Texas. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address JAMES MCWILLIAMS, care of *Adventure.*

THE following have been inquired for in either the First February or Mid-February issues of Adventure. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine:

BENTLEY, MILTON REYNOLDS; Greely, Pearl Adam; Hammons, Albert; Hayes, John M.; Hestvan, Casterea (Harry Clark); Hickey, Frank; Ingels, Dr. Anson B.; Jones, Homer; Keyes, Fayette E.; Kuhn, Herman; Lewis, Evelyn A.; Lovers, Jimmy and Cooper H. Leslie; MacMahon, Harold; Martin, Eugene L.; Miller, Harry; Myers, William X.; O'Connor, Jeremiah; Page, W. A.; Pemiman, Jane; Racine, Jon; Sievert, Otto Charles; Smith, William J.; Solan, Joe; Steen, William F.; Swenson, N. A.; Van Zile, Ralph; Vosburgh, Edward; White, Emory; Wilson, G. Harry; Wood, Elmer.

MISCELLANEOUS—A. E. S.; C. L. W.; De Cisare, Florence; Annunciata, Mrs. Rosie; Montague, Lena; Dennison, Mabel; Stiles, Elizabeth, and other friends; Tours, 2nd Ai C. France—Members of Photo Section and Members of 5th Casuals at St. Louis de Montferrand.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; Lieutenant Wm. S. Hilles; G. H. Bennett; Byron Chisholm; A. B. Paradis; E. E. S. Atkins; G. E. Hungerford; A. Gaylord; E. J. Moran; F. S. Emerson; E. Murphy; J. Higmon; J. E. Warner; L. E. Patten; L. T. Bennett; Sinn Cardie; James Mosse; C. E. Wilson; R. W. Kimsey; C. H. Huntington; D. Polowe.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity.

ALDRIDGE, F. P.; Allen, Paul; Beaton, G. M.; Mr. and Mrs. Bennett; Benson, E. N.; Bertsch, Miss Elizabeth; Blighton, Frank; Bonner, J. S.; Brownell, Mr.; Buckley, Ray; Campbell, Maurice Viele; Carpenter, Robert S.; Carr, John; Chisholm, D. F. K.; Clark, Ernest S.; Cleve, Jim; Clingham, Charles; Coles, Bobby; Connor, A. M.; Cook, Elliot D.; Cook, William N.; Corbett, Fred P.; Crosby, Arthur F.; Curtis, D. A.; Courtlandt, Victor; Fisher, 1st Sgt. R.; Hale, Robert E.; Harris, Walter J.; Hoffman, J. M.; Howard, Charlie; Hughes, Frank E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Irving, Thos. L.; Jackson, Robert R.; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kutcher, Sgt. Harry; Lafler, Mrs. Harry; Lanahan, Robert; Lancaster, C. E.; Lander, Harry Larisey, Jack; Lee, Capt. Harry; Lee, Wm. R., M. D.; Lonely Jock; Lovett, Harold S.; McAdams, W. B., MacDonald, Tony; Mackintosh, D. T. A.; Mendelson, Aleck; Nelson, Frank Lovell; O'Hara, Jack; Olmstead, Harry E.; Parker, Dr. M.; Parker, G. A.; Parrott, Pvt. D. C.; Phillips, Buffington; Phipps, Corbett C.; Pigeon, A. H.; Raines, Wm. L.; Raphaelson, Sampson; Rich, Wagoner Bob; Rogan, Chas. B.; Rundle, Merrill G.; St. Clair, Fred; Schmidt, G.; Scott, James F.; Sloan, George L.; Smith, C. O.; Starr, Ted.; Soloway, Jack M.; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Gelucke, Byron; Ward, Frank B.; Wiley, Floyd; Williams, Capt. W. P.; J. C. H.; W. W. T.; S. 177284; L. T. 4439; WS-XV.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address L. B. BARRETTO, care of *Adventure*.

"Stop! Stop, I say— I'll talk!

Let the world know what I have kept until my heart caked. That cruel, cold, lying, crafty devil—seeking his own lusts, denying his own flesh and blood....."

But that denial doesn't prevent his father's wild blood from surging through the veins of their son. And years after—in the dead of night—it breaks loose in

"Smuggler's House"

a powerful mystery story, by the ever-popular J. Allan Dunn.

In the FEBRUARY

You will also enjoy in this number:

"The Singer of the Night"
Charles Saxby
"Lil' Ol' Red Stockings"
Gerald Beaumont
"The Boy"
Frank Swinnerton
"The Dark Secret"
Lucian Cary
"The Silent Art of Joe Jackson"
Robert C. Benchley
"If Winter Comes"
A. S. M. Hutchinson
"It Can Be Done"
Dorothy L. Field
"Settled Down"
Edwin Balmer
"An Emergency Master"
Alexander Woollcott
"In Red and Gold"
Samuel Merwin
"As Handsome Does"
Willett Stockard

Everybody's Magazine

Now On Sale

With acknowledgments to K. C. B.

No wonder the fat man chuckled

I SWELLED with pride.
THE FAT man next to me.
WAS READING one.
* * *
OF MY cigarette ads.
AND I felt him chuckle.
* * *
NOW NO one had ever.
* * *
PRAISED THAT ad.
* * *
SO I had to ask.
* * *
IF HE liked it.
* * *
AND HE said, "Sure."
* * *
AND LAUGHED some more.
* * *
THEN HE said.
* * *
"LOOK HERE" and pointed.
* * *
AND WHERE I'd written.
* * *
"PURE TOBACCO."
* * *
THE PRINTER had set.
* * *
"PURE TABASCO."
* * *
AND THAT'S why the man.
* * *
THOUGHT MY ad.
* * *
WAS HOT stuff.
* * *
BUT THEN he said.
* * *
"FORGET THE ads.
* * *
I NEVER read 'em.
* * *
BUT LEMME tell you.
SOMETHING DIFFERENT.
* * *
THEY OUGHT to say.
* * *
ABOUT THAT cigarette.
* * *
AND THAT is this.
* * *
THEY SATISFY."
* * *
AND DARNED if I don't think.
* * *
HE REALLY believed.
* * *
HE WAS giving me.
* * *
SOMETHING NEW!
* * *

YOU can blame it on the printer if you don't see "They Satisfy" in a Chesterfield advertisement. But be sure of this—you'll find it in the cigarette every time. Wonderful Turkish and Domestic tobaccos, wonderfully blended—it sounds easy. But you'll find nothing else like Chesterfield. *That blend can't be copied.*

They Satisfy

Chesterfield

CIGARETTES

Liggett & Myers Tobacco Co.