

TWICE - A - MONTH

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The Popular Magazine

JUNE TWENTIETH 1920

A Serial of Mystery

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

A Novel of Detroit

BY

L. H. ROBBINS

An Unusual Baseball Tale
And Other Stories



Henry C. Rowland

is the author of the complete novel, "The Annex," in the next issue, and the new serial is "The Man-Killer" by

Dane Coolidge



Vol. LVI. No. 5

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Watch the news stands for the next POPULAR

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LVI.

JUNE 20, 1920.

No. 5

The Detour

By L. H. Robbins

Author of "Wild Fire," "Lights Out," Etc.

A story of the automobile industry in Detroit, and more than that. It is a picture of the origin, development, and present state of one of the most potent influences in the making of modern civilization, through which runs a drama in which some of the builders of that industry play leading parts. Detroit citizens will doubtless recognize some of the characters, but it will hardly detract from the interest of other readers not to know the prototypes of the actors in the play. The story's the thing.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

THE DETROITER.

THE gentleman on the bench and the marble pillar behind the bench had this quality in common, that they both looked exceedingly solid.

There was the further likeness between them, that as the pillar upheld a part of the roof of the Michigan Central station at Detroit, so the gentleman upheld a considerable share of the moral and material welfare of the city in which that station stood.

When the industry, the integrity, and the prosperity of Detroit were mentioned at Board of Commerce dinners, some of the banqueters were sure to think of William Dallon, president of the Dallon Motor Car Company.

As he sat on the bench William Dallon seemed to be looking over the top-of-column headlines of an evening newspaper. Actually he was looking over the upper edge of the paper and watching a little crowd of travelers slowly collecting around train gate number seven. He saw the hands of the clock on the wall reach the hour of six. He saw the gate opened, and heard the heavy voice of the announcer calling:

"Number Forty-eight! Buffalo, Syracuse, Utica, Albany, AND New York! Pullman cars only! Aboard!"

The crowd trickled through the grille and down the incline to the train stairs. Still the gentleman watched the gate.

For some minutes a little old trampish-looking man lugging a large and dilapidated leather suit case had walked up and down past him, eying him from every point of view. Now this person sat down beside him and spoke:

"Ain't you William Dallon?"

"Yes, sir."

"My name's Bray—Felix Bray," said the seedy-looking stranger. "I've wrote you letters. Maybe you never got 'em. About my motor."

In the quick glance the gentleman turned upon him there was curiosity and a twinkle of humor.

"So you are Felix Bray, are you? Well! well! How is the world-beating motor coming, Mr. Bray?"

"It ain't coming at all, William Dallon. Nobody'll listen to me. I'm still peddling it around." The little man laid a trembling hand on the worn suit case. "When I seen

you setting here I thought maybe you'd give me a minute."

"I can't give you more, so you'd better talk fast," Dallon replied, with his eye on the clock.

"Talk fast! That's what they all say—and I ain't a talker. But I've got a motor here, William Dallon, that will kill your motor and every other gasoline motor on the market. You laugh to hear me say that. They all do. I'm only Bray, the poor old crank. They never give me a chance."

"But you never give them a chance, either, Mr. Bray. You ask people to investigate your motor, and then you four-flush. You promise demonstrations that never come off."

"And why?" cried the little man fiercely. "It ain't that I'm afraid of my motor. It's that I'm afraid of sharpers. I don't know who to trust. There's people in this town —" He paused, for William Dallon had ceased to listen.

Across the station concourse came a noisy party of five young men. One of the five showed a handful of tickets to the gateman, and they passed through the gate in the wake of the earlier passengers.

William Dallon put aside his newspaper and took up a light hand bag from the floor.

"Bray," he said, rising, "you can't interest me, I'm afraid. As you know, I've got inventions of my own that give me all the trouble I can handle. But don't you be downhearted." He spoke encouragingly, as to a child. "You just keep trying and you'll land somewhere yet. Glad to've seen you—and good luck to you."

He followed the five young men down the subway and up the stairs to the platform. When he had seen them board a Pullman ahead, he entered a drawing-room car just forward of the diner at the rear. There he locked himself in a stateroom, lit a cigar, and settled down in solitude.

In flannel pajamas, with wool bed socks on his feet, and with a handkerchief tied over his bald spot as a nightcap, he lay thinking as the train drove through the dark. Compared with the youngsters who had gone aboard ahead of him, William Dallon was an oldster, yet to-night was the first time in his life that the approach of old age had entered his consciousness. The cause of this novel feeling in him was one of those young men up forward.

"Dad, you don't understand," the young

man had said to him that day. "You're old-fashioned. You forget that this is not nineteen hundred; this is nineteen-twenty!" In conclusion, the young man had called his father a back number, if not a fossil.

"I wonder if I am," William Dallon mused as he lay in his berth.

He thought back through the years to a certain summer morning in the new-born century. He saw himself climb into a queer little vehicle standing at the door of a plain little house in Sherman Street. He saw a smiling young wife and a chubby-cheeked boy waving good-by to him. It seemed only yesterday.

A decade and most of another had passed since the morning when Bill Dallon, machinist, rode away from Sherman Street to help inaugurate a mighty epoch in the industrial history of the world. Now that chubby-cheeked boy was taller than his dad. Now he ran with the swiftest and called his father a back number.

What a fateful day that day had been! Dallon saw again the young wife smiling; he heard again the jollyings of the neighbor men as they tarried, on the way to their day's work, to cheer him off.

"Won't it be a good idea, Bill," asked one, "to take along a pair of shafts?"

"I'll come home under my own power, never you worry," Bill Dallon bragged.

He remembered crossing the Campus Martius and striking west, out Michigan Avenue, the little motor coughing and banging under his feet, the pedestrians answering from the sidewalk with catcalls and jeers and laughter. In a few years those unbelievers would shout, "Get a horse!" But that witticism had not yet been invented.

Slowly as his one-cylinder horseless buggy traveled, it carried him into the country in only ten minutes or so, for Detroit was not such a great city then—it was a comfortable, overgrown town with the fields and pastures close in.

The cows in those pastures stopped grazing to stare at the strange contraption snorting past. Cyclists dismounted from their wheels and took the roadside to give Bill Dallon room, and they yelled abusive jests which he was too busy to answer, his "broomstick" tiller needing his whole attention. Wagoners slanged him when their teams reared and shied at sight of the amazing machine that ran without horse muscle.

By nightfall he made Battle Creek after

an astonishing day's run of one hundred and nineteen miles. Even the century-riding bicyclists of the period could scarcely do better than that. Sunset next day found him at St. Joe, straightening a bent axle in the shop of a friendly blacksmith. That blacksmith, by the way, toils no longer at forge and bellows. He sells Dallon cars and has a summer home at Pawpaw Lake.

At Benton Harbor, on the third day, the captain of the Chicago steamer had to be reasoned with for half an hour before he would let Bill Dallon take the little car on board. No fires at sea for that fresh-water skipper!

Then in Chicago—William Dallon smiled when he recalled this incident—an indignant policeman arrested him and a choleric judge rebuked him for driving in Lincoln Park and frightening the carriage horses of the local aristocracy. Some of these aristocrats themselves possessed automobiles, though none of them had a car like Dallon's.

To-night it startled him a little to discover how many years had rolled by. He had been too busy to stop to reckon time.

On the day when he came home from Chicago in his noisy little naphtha knockabout, with enough orders to justify organizing a company and opening a factory, Detroit had about three hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants. To-day it had more than a million, and people called it the fourth city in the land. On that day there may have been a few thousand automobiles in all America, many of them run by steam and electricity. Now it was boasted that Detroit manufactured a million and a quarter of gasoline cars a year, or eighty-five per cent of all the cars made on earth. And Bill Dallon was one of the half dozen men whose brains and enterprise had started the city to running in high.

The train slowed down, stopped. He turned off the electric light in his berth and raised the window shade. Outside were the midnight lights and shadows of Buffalo. One of the lights shone full upon a billboard bearing this legend in purple and white:

DALLON CARS

DALLON TRUCKS

"MADE GOOD TO MAKE GOOD."

From Maine to Oregon those billboard signs by thousands told the story, and the story was a true one—true of the queer lit-

tle rope-tired horseless buggy that "steered with a broomstick," and equally true of any one of the four hundred cars turned out by his factory in the day just ended. Inventiveness, diligence, courage, patience, faith—all these had played their part in the working of the Dallon miracle; but the ingredient that counted most was honesty.

And now, because William Dallon declined to be led into an alluring reorganization scheme that promised ten millions for one, the cherub-checked boy called him a has-been.

"I guess not!" Bill Dallon growled.

Having settled the question of his antiquity to his mind's satisfaction, he pulled down the window shade, drew his improvised nightcap over his ears, and went to sleep.

When he awoke, the train was running along the Harlem River and the porter was thumping on his door.

CHAPTER II.

PICTURES IN THE FIRE.

The January wind blew as it can blow in any lakeside city, sending thin ribbons of snow stringing and singing across the icy pavement, hunting the sleet out of its hiding places and whisking it away, policemanlike, as if snow and sleet had no business in that select neighborhood. Lights from the windows of handsome homes shone out into the night, beacons of warmth and comfort. The man with the suit case clutched his coat collar about his throat as he plodded on, peering through the gloom.

Before a lordly house that required a quarter of a block of ground for its setting he came to a halt. From under the carriage porch the lamps of a limousine looked down the driveway at him. He moved aside out of their glare and saw a pair of young women in colorful array descend the steps and enter the car. The motor whirred, the car rolled into the boulevard and away.

In the library of that lordly home, when a few minutes had gone, a servant spoke to the master of the house, drowsing before the open fire. "Mr. Banniston, sir, there's a man at the door who keeps ringing the bell and won't go away. He says you will see him if I tell you his name. It's Bray."

From the depths of his big leather chair the master of the house replied: "Let him in. Show him in here."

To the eye Mr. Banniston was big and

soft, like the chair in which he rested. His softness might not have been conceded by his fellows in the financial world of Griswold Street; but to-night, replete with dinner and basking in the warmth of the fire, he had relaxed to the point where a critic of manly beauty might have been tempted to call him flabby.

He turned his head toward the shivering caller.

"Pull up a chair, Bray. What's on your mind?"

Bent and shrunken and old, the newcomer drew a stool to a corner of the fireplace and sat down. He was shaking in a nervous chill.

"Sharp night out?" asked his host.

"Bitter. I ain't got no right outdoors a night like this. But I had to see you. I'm just about done up."

"Done up? What's the matter?"

"I don't know. I'm sick—so sick I can't work any more."

"You haven't got the flu, I hope?" queried Banniston in alarm.

"No, no, it ain't that. It's something wrong in here." The little man touched his side. "Engine trouble, like. And my nerves are gone. I take nerve medicine reg'lar and I only get worse."

He rubbed his cold hands until the knuckle bones stood out through the skin.

"So I came to see you, Mr. Banniston. I thought maybe you could give me a little better answer than last time."

"About your motor, you mean. Well, Bray, to get the agony over I'll tell you, as I told you before, there's nothing doing. I've made you a fair proposition. I'll pay you five thousand dollars any time you get ready to take it. But as for organizing a company to manufacture your motor, and paying you twenty thousand for a minority interest, that's absurd, you know. If you care to sell me your model and your claims outright for five thousand spot cash, I'll pay you that price. I'll do this partly to show my sympathy for you and partly to be rid of you, but not because I want your engine. I don't believe in it. An interesting toy, that's all."

"Toy!" cried Felix Bray, stung to indignation. "And you've seen it work!"

"Oh, now, don't let's have any pyrotechnics," Banniston replied. "I've seen it work, you say. Well, yes, I have gone to your house and sat where you put me. I have

watched your machine running on a workbench across the room. I have heard you explain what made it run—water disintegrating, or something like that—the old Keely motor rigamarole of thirty years ago. But have you ever let me lay my hands on it? Have you ever taken it apart and let me look inside? How do I know that it wasn't connected with a compressed-air tank in the cellar, the way Keely's was? You can't catch an old bird with chaff like that, Bray."

The little inventor had forgotten his chill. His eyes blazed as he stood up before the rich man.

"Don't put me in a class with that faker," he cried. "You twisted what I told you. I told you that Keely had the right idea and didn't know it. He claimed he could break up a drop of water into hydrogen and oxygen—exploding it, like—with sound waves from a bunch of tuning forks; and he claimed he used the explosion to drive his machine. It listened good, and a lot of suckers bit. But all he wanted was their money. The tuning fork part was a trick, and the motor was run with compressed air, as was found out after he died."

Mr. Banniston stroked his bulbous nose and scowled. He had had to hear all this before.

"I told you," Bray railed on, "that he could have made his idea work if he'd gone about it right. If he had turned his drop of water into gas first with an electric current instead of the tuning forks, the way I've discovered how to do—well, there wouldn't be a steam engine or a gasoline engine in the world to-day, except in the museums. There'd be nothing but Keely motors. And some day"—the irate little man raised his voice and his fist together—"some day there won't be nothing running the machinery of the world but this little hydromotor, this 'toy' of mine that you ask me to sell outright for five thousand dirty dollars!"

Banniston pulled himself up out of his chair and towered above his visitor.

"Bray, I let you in here to-night so you could get warm. Now you've gotten too warm to stay. Good-by."

For a moment Bray glared. Then his wrath collapsed. He took up his suit case. His host followed him to the hall and saw the street door close.

When the master of the house returned to the library to resume his doze before the

fire, he found Mrs. Banniston waiting for him. Mr. Banniston's wife was of the type called magnificent. Upon her black dinner gown hung hung quarts of jet beads, sparkling in the firelight.

"What was all the shouting?" she queried.

"Old Bray was here—the fellow with the freak machine he calls a hydromotor. I offered him five thousand cash for it and got a tongue lashing for my kindness."

"If you have so much money to give away," said Mrs. Banniston, "I wish you would put it where it would bring us some return. There is the Home for Indigent Gentlewomen, for example."

"Mrs. Westbrook's pet charity?"

"Yes. For five thousand dollars she would wrap her skinny arms around my neck. As it is now, she can't remember my name."

"Five thousand to Bray would bring better returns than that."

"But if his invention is no good, why do you want it?"

"My dear, almost any piece of machinery nowadays is good for something. I have been thinking for quite a while of pulling off a bear raid on Amalgamated Motors. With Shigar and Copper handling the Wall Street end, I believe I can use Bray's mysterious motor to clean up millions. Again, if I prefer to let go of the machine at a reasonable profit of, say, a thousand per cent, I can sell it to some ambitious young capitalist who is cursed with more money than is good for him. There is enlightened selfishness in my philanthropy, you see."

His wife was reminded of a piece of selfishness of another sort that had been perpetrated in her household that evening. Her son Harry had promised to escort her daughters to the theater and had failed to keep his engagement, as usual. The girls had had to go alone.

"I forgot to mention," said Banniston, "Harry has gone to New York."

"What takes him to New York?"

"Wally Dallon."

"Oh!" There was understanding in her voice.

"Barney," she said, "I wonder if it is safe to let Harry run around with Wally Dallon this way."

"Safe for whom?" he asked.

"For Harry. It's done for a purpose, I know. But are you sure that Harry is strong-natured enough to keep his head—to resist—to——"

"To push Wally off the walk and keep from stepping into the mud himself?" Mr. Banniston finished for her, and smiled in enjoyment of his metaphor. "Well, my dear, the Banniston family's plan of campaign calls for establishing a connection with the Dallon millions somehow, doesn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"And we can't get next to Papa Dallon any way we try. I've talked the reorganization scheme to him till I'm hoarse, and still the ignorant old fool won't bite."

Mrs. Banniston sighed until her jet beads gave off a shower of flashes. "Isn't it pathetic," she said, "that people who know so little should have so much! They say William Dallon eats with his knife, and Mrs. Dallon drinks tea with her spoon in her cup. And yet——" Another glittering sigh.

"Since I can't reach old Bill," Mr. Banniston continued, "and since Mrs. Bill won't talk about anything but soap and servants and tomato pickles when you go to see her, and never returns your calls, it remains for us to try what we can do with their impetuous young son and heir. I hoped we could get him interested in one of the girls—but he won't look at 'em."

"Hazel could attract him, I'm sure," said Mrs. Banniston, with motherly spunk, "if it wasn't for that Marion Shelby. Homely little black-haired thing!"

"So you see, my dear, the duty of throwing a hook into gay young Wally devolves upon the menfolk of your family. Well, we are going about our work in the most time-honored and reliable he-male manner. I am doing my bit in Griswold Street. I have taken Walter up into a high mountain and shown him the world at his feet, and he is keen for the expansion project, though his father hates it. My propaganda may not bear fruit while Papa Dallon remains around, but the seed that I have sown has fallen in good ground. Meanwhile, your dutiful son Harry is helping Walter to have a grand good time in life. Some day, perhaps, we shall remind Walter of the good time we helped him have."

"But I am afraid Harry is having a better time than Walter," the anxious mother lamented. "The poor boy has gained thirty pounds since last September. His complexion is worse than when the draft board doctors rejected him, and he can hardly ever eat his breakfast. But Walter looks as trim and healthy as the marble athlete in the art

museum. I saw him in Elliott-Taylor's yesterday with the Shelby girl; they made a striking pair, black though she is."

"I wish Harry could have had some of that army training," Mr. Banniston observed. "He could stand this game better. As for his morals, trust your son, my dear, to be too infernally lazy to get into any trouble more serious than dyspepsia."

Three miles away, Felix Bray plodded homeward through the January night, lugging his worn old suit case at his side, clutching his coat collar tight around his throat.

CHAPTER III.

AT GROSSE POINT.

"Dallondale" was the name the Dallons had bestowed upon their great new gray-stone mansion at Grosse Point, although Dallons were more numerous than dales in that flat lakeside vicinity.

On an afternoon soon after William Dallon's departure for the East, a light sedan car entered the Dallondale gateway nearest to the city and stopped before the door. From the car a young woman ran lightly up the steps.

A "homely little black thing" Miss Marion Shelby may have seemed in the eyes of another Detroit woman. But as she turned to look across the wide and wintry lawn at the icy lake gleaming white in the sunlight, she fulfilled Mrs. Banniston's description in no particular.

One more thing to be said to the credit of Miss Shelby is that she practiced altruism to the despair of her father, Peter Shelby, president of the Midlakes Motors Corporation, who had to provide the funds for her altruistic uses, and to the delight of everybody else in Detroit, particularly those upon whom her altruism descended.

Admitted to Dallondale, she had scarcely asked for its mistress when a motherly voice called to her from somewhere above.

"Here I am, dear. Won't you come up?"

*Motherly was Mrs. Dallon, like her voice. A little plump, too, as mothers of tall-grown sons should be. She took Marion's hands in hers and kissed the girl on both brown cheeks.

"Lay off your wraps, child, and sit down with me here by the window where we can watch the ice boats skimming around out there in the cold. I never get tired of seeing them."

They sat down at a wide, bright window with the lake before their eyes.

"When you telephoned, dear, I thought your voice sounded anxious. Is anything wrong?"

"Then you haven't heard the gossip?" Marion replied.

"No. Why, child? Is it about Walter?"

"Yes, about Walter. They say—I don't know who says, but papa heard it—that something happened between Walter and his father in New York night before last—a quarrel over something Walter did."

Impulsively the girl bent forward. "I'm sorry to be the one to tell you, Mother Dallon. I thought you would know the facts and we might talk them over together, and perhaps we could find a way to make things right. I have been afraid, too."

"What else did your father hear, Marion?"

"That Mr. Dallon had publicly reprimanded Walter and disinherited him. But it may be only a story. There have been stories like it before."

"My dear, this time the story may be true. On the day they went away they had a disagreement. I know that William felt very angry. When he learned, later in the day, that Walter intended to go east he packed a grip and followed him without telling me why."

"And you haven't heard from them?"

"Not in four days. It is the first time either of them has ever been away from home without sending me a message every day."

"We must believe that no news is good news," said Marion. Her tone was not very hopeful. "You say they had a disagreement. Was it over the old subject?"

The woman nodded.

"But," the girl persisted, "would Mr. Dallon disinherit him just because Walter wants to reorganize the Dallon Motor Car Company? Walter may be wrong in his idea, but surely it is only a mistake of judgment."

"It goes deeper than that," Mrs. Dallon replied. "Walter has let shrewd people talk to him until he has come to think of his father as a slow old ignoramus. And that isn't all."

She hesitated, the girl watching keenly, then left the rest of her thought unspoken.

"I know what you mean, Mother Dallon. You mean that Wally is in the influence of people who flatter him and pander to him and will certainly do him harm."

"You are very young to have to know about such things, Marion."

"But I have the right to know about them if—he means what he says when he asks me to be——"

"To be my daughter," said Mrs. Dallon, with a sad little smile. "Yes, you have a right to know, and I think we should be frank with each other. I am his mother and want him to be happy; but I would not let him marry you unless I knew he was all that your husband should be."

There followed an awkward silence, broken when the girl declared, with eyes flashing: "They may talk all they please, Mrs. Dallon, but I don't believe them."

"You hear, then?"

"Oh, indeed, I do. My well-meaning friends have established a rapid-intelligence service between town and Bloomfield Hills. Sometimes I think the whole of Detroit is in league to save me from Walter Dallon. But I don't want to be saved—at least, I feel perfectly capable of saving myself, if any real need occurs."

She looked capable, too, as she rose and stood beside the older woman's chair. There was more than mere beauty in her firm little chin.

"Mother Dallon, dear, whatever has happened in New York will make no difference between you and me, will it?"

"Of course not, honey. You will always seem a daughter to me."

With a kiss and a squeeze the girl went to gather up her cloak and gloves.

"What I have said about any difference between you and me, Mother Dallon, applies to Walter also. That's why I came here to-day—to tell you that whatever has occurred will not affect—will not change anything, unless, of course, the facts in the case are too outrageous to be ignored."

It was well for her blushes that the corner of the room from which she made this little speech was in shadow.

"That's my really truly message, Mother Dallon. There's no use pretending it's an afterthought, is there?"

CHAPTER IV.

TEMPERING THE LAMB.

"Hello, mother!"

William Dallon's shout filled the house. Strange that he should have used the boy's name for her!

The answer that came down the stairs to him sounded closely like a sob.

He found her in her sun window.

"Now, what's the matter, mother? Has another cook quit?"

He kissed her in the rough and hearty fashion of a husband who has either no load at all upon his mind, or else a heavy one.

Included among the thousand things of which the citizens of Detroit liked to boast was the domestic life of the Dallons. "The same wife he had when he was a machinist in Sherman Street is still good enough for him," they said. There were men not a thousand miles from the Windsor ferry who, when swift fortune smiled upon them, considered themselves promoted, so to speak, from one class of helpmeet to another. But not Bill Dallon.

"What's wrong, mother?" Dallon insisted. "Crying because I've come back to you?"

"You know why I'm crying—I've heard—about Wally."

"Marion Shelby drove out as I drove in. She tell you?"

"Yes, William."

"Seem cut up about it, did she?"

"She told me," Mrs. Dallon replied, "that nothing you may have done to Walter will make any difference with her. But William, what have you done, and what has Wally done? And where is he?"

"Where he is I don't know, and I don't care a brass washer."

"William!"

"Now, Sally, don't go judging a man till you hear the testimony." He planted a chair beside hers and sat down. The ordeal had arrived.

"You ask me what he has done. He has played the fool, that's what."

"But has he done anything bad or shameful?"

"Isn't it shameful to be a fool?"

"You know what I mean, William."

"Yes, I know." The father was ill at ease. "He hasn't exactly *done* anything that would make him ashamed to look us in the face. No, Sally. But he came so darn near it in New York the other night that he might as well have gone the limit."

Mrs. Dallon gasped.

"Oh, it's that bunch he travels with," her husband went on quickly. "I don't blame him entirely. In fact, I don't blame him very much. He's young and healthy, and he has had things awful easy, mother. He

has had too many darned blessings for his good."

"Who gave him those darned blessings, William?"

"Yes, Sally, if he has run too free in the last ten years, I suppose it comes back to us—to me. But at last I have done the one thing in my power that may straighten him up. Maybe I'm too late. If so—well, mother, I'm a failure in life, that's all."

She saw a new look in his face. It was not the old look of impatience that he had worn so often in months then recent when his son crossed his will. There was heart-ache in his air to-day. But his face grew hard as his thought took a new turn.

"It's the Banniston crowd," he continued. "I can see what they are after, though Walt can't. He won't open his eyes. He thinks Harry Banniston is a good fellow—a prince, he calls him. Gosh! The only kind of good fellow Harry is, if I'm any judge, is one to tie a half-ton steel casting to and heave off the D. and C. dock. And then he wouldn't sink. He'd float, like a sperm whale."

"William Dallon! How can you talk so?"

Unabashed by the wifely rebuke, the father went on. "Behind Harry and setting him after Walt is Barney Banniston. That crook! And Walter sitting at his feet studying high finance when he ought to be at the factory with me, learning how to make honest motor cars!"

"Are you sure of what you say about Mr. Banniston?" asked Mrs. Dallon. A good and simple soul, she trusted every one.

"Sure I'm sure," said Dallon. "Twenty years that spider has been at work in this town, spinning his web for flies like Walter. What was he before he came here? A mining-stock swindler. They ran him out of New York after his work got too coarse, and he came out here to look us over. He liked our looks and stayed. He liked Tom Wheelan's looks so well that he relieved him of his Dallon Motor Company holdings—good old Tom Wheelan, who was our first subscriber when we organized. They say it was a straight business deal, I know, and Wheelan's heirs have never been able to undo it in the courts. But it was theft."

"You have warned Wally often enough, I'm sure," Mrs. Dallon sighed.

"A boy would rather listen to a stranger than to his own father, any day," said Dallon. "Those Bannistons are slick as cup

grease. They've made him think they are the best friends he has. And he is loyal to them; I'll say that for him. Let him find out now how loyal they are to him."

"Then you haven't actually turned him out? You haven't really disowned him, as Marion heard?"

"I've told him I have," Dallon answered gruffly.

"It was a mean thing to have to do, Sally. But I brought it upon myself, letting him go so long. It was the only way left to put some chromium into that soft iron of his. It may harden him. I don't know."

She went and stood beside him, taking his arm.

"Do you have to be so extreme with him? Can't you send for him now, after this last warning, and be content just to put him on probation? The Bible says something about tempering the wind to the shorn lamb, you know."

"Does it? Well, Sally, here's where the lamb gets tempered before the shearing commences."

She made a second effort.

"William, dear, I was thinking just now of the day when you went away for your long trip in the first little car. I can see it all again. I can see even the spare can of naphtha that you took along. It stood on the floor of the car, and you tied it with a piece of rope to keep it from tipping out."

"I remember," he confessed. "I haven't thought of much else these last four days."

"Walter was five years old then. Do you remember how he ran to the corner after you? And when you had gone, and I couldn't hear the noise of the little car any more, I went indoors and said a prayer. I wasn't afraid you would fail; you were so full of plans and hopes and all. But I wondered if your dreams would take you away from me—and from him—as the little car took you away from us that morning."

She paused. Her head touched his shoulder.

"They haven't taken you away from me, William. I thank the good Lord every day for that. But they have taken you away from the boy. Haven't they, now? And it isn't all his fault, is it?"

"No," he answered. "It is nobody's fault but mine. I've been awful busy. I've been the busiest man in Detroit. I took pride in thinking I was building up something fine for the boy. I ought to have been building

up the boy instead. But there's a chance yet, mother, if he has anything in him."

"He is you over again, William, if you only knew it. You fret over his restless ways. Dear man, at his age you were just as restless as Wally. You couldn't sit down and let things drift, any more than he can. You had to be stirring. The only difference between you and him is that you had to hustle, while he——"

"He will have to hustle now," said Bill Dallon.

"And when he has made good——"

"I'll put my arm around him, like this." He drew her close. "But Walt mustn't know that. More important still, Banniston mustn't know it. You're not to tell any one, not even his best girl. Understand?"

"Very well," said Mrs. Dallon softly. "But I wish—I wish I knew where he was."

"So you could go and look after his socks, I suppose," said her husband.

CHAPTER V.

THE UNHEROIC HERO.

The cause of all this commotion stood at a wind-blown corner of Grand Circus Park. He had in his hand an alligator-skin traveling bag, and on his face the perplexed look of a stranger in a strange city.

The athletic club lifted its ornate roof invitingly a couple of squares away. Beneath it he would ordinarily have taken shelter. But the circumstances to-day were extraordinary. In the D. A. C. there would be curious stares to face. The best of friends will "rubber."

A hundred miles out, two hours before, he had bought a green-tinted newspaper and read on the first page the story of his fall from grace. The headlines were frank.

"I AM DONE WITH YOU,"

**WILLIAM DALLON TELLS SPEEDY SON
AND HEIR.**

**Walter Dallon Cast Adrift by Angry Father in
Sensational Scene in New York Hotel.
Joy Trip Ends in Smash.**

Equally candid was the story that followed the headlines. It would give Detroit something to talk about for weeks. Its statement of fact could not be denied. There had been what the newspaper called an "orgy;" and the courts would doubtless de-

cide, in event of a libel-suit, that "orgy" was a proper word enough.

Into the "orgy," when the "revelry" ran highest, William Dallon had walked, with consequences disastrous to his "speedy son and heir." The account was a true one, Walter had to admit. How true were the inferences that would surely be drawn from it was another matter. There in black and white were the indisputable facts, and all Detroit would know them by night.

A pair of pedestrians turned to gaze at him. He caught the tail end of a smile of amusement. Think not that the headstrong and high-stepping son of a multimillionaire can stand at a prominent corner without being recognized, even in a city of a million.

He fled for refuge to the Stuller, near at hand. In the book he wrote, "J. J. Doe." Appreciative travelers have noted that hotel clerks of class make a practice of causing the newly arrived guests to feel at home by addressing him by name. "Yes, Mr. Wilkinson, I think we can accommodate you nicely," says the hospitable hotel man; and Mr. Wilkinson, just in from Boston or Muskogee or Cheyenne, hearing his name spoken, feels grateful and begins instantly to like the city.

The clerk at the Stuller read the name on the register. As he reached for a room key he glanced oddly at the young man across the desk.

"Three-thirteen, Mr.—ah—Mr. Doe," said he. "Front! Show Mr. Doe to Three-thirteen."

Later the clerk drew the bookkeeper's attention to the signature. "J. J. Doe is Wally Dallon," he muttered.

The bookkeeper was a punster, which may explain why he had not risen very high in his profession.

"No more dough for him," said he. "J. J. Broke would be more like. How's he looking?"

"Sore as a carbuncle."

"Well, he had it coming to him. Serves him right."

Thus the bookkeeper and many other virtuous ones who had never been harmed by Walter Dallon pronounced judgment upon the young man that day; and not the mildest in condemnation was the young man himself.

He was just as sore as he looked to the hotel clerk. He was sore with the soreness

of a boy who has collided with a swarm of hornets. Yet it was not entirely with himself that he was provoked. His father, he recalled, had given him no chance to explain things. There had been a party—not an “orgy” at all, but a party—in an upper room at the Annexley Hotel, where all live-wire Detroiters stay when they visit New York. It began as a stag party. By three o’clock, when Bill Dallon walked in, it had become a mixed party, the late guests having arrived after finishing their work at a near-by midnight roof entertainment.

But Dallon, senior, had no excuse for the conclusions which he had drawn from finding his son in that hectic company. He had purposely and deliberately misconstrued the affair in order to hand over the paternal knockout.

From his hotel window he looked out over the little park, with always a hundred or so of his fellow Detroiters in sight—shoppers, theatergoers, taxi men, messengers, all apparently occupied with business and contented with life. He could readily guess what every one of them would say about him. His name would be mentioned in the D. A. C. beyond the trees, in the Y. M. C. A. down Adams Avenue, in the Log Cabin cars scooting northward yonder with their crowded trailers. Beside thousands of radiators that evening his name would be spoken. And, confound it all! he didn’t deserve the “panning” he would get. His father had put him in the pillory and made him a town joke. What kind of a father was that?

He stepped to the phone on his bedroom wall and presently was talking with Harry Banniston.

“Harry, this is Walt.”

“Hello, Walt!” The reply was indistinct, as if Harry had turned his head quickly to look over his shoulder.

“Can I see you, Harry?”

“Why—I guess so.” It was not like young Banniston to hesitate like this.

“If you’ll be there a while, I’ll run out.”

“Say, Walt, listen. I don’t know that you’d better. This fool scandal, you know is——”

“I see,” said Dallon, and very clearly he saw in the new light that broke upon him. “I see; you don’t want to be compromised before the neighbors.”

Of the five young Detroiters who had figured in the New York episode, Dallon was

the only one whose name the green-tinted paper had printed.

“Where are you now, Walt?”

“Room Three-thirteen at the Stuller.”

“Suppose I drop in there after supper.”

“Will you?”

“Sure! After dark. How are you?”

The question came as an afterthought. It sounded so insincere that Dallon let it go unanswered, and hung up as if he had not heard.

The prodigal thought it over. Being still charitably disposed in his judgment of his fellow creatures, he decided that Harry’s desire to safeguard the respectability of the Banniston family was probably warranted by the facts in the case. Even so, he had to smile at this sudden regard on his friend’s part for a good name.

Already a nebulous plan was forming in Dallon’s mind. He had come back to Detroit an outcast from any interest of his father’s. But the Bannistons were his good friends. Big, bluff, hearty Barney Banniston, the father of Harry, was never too busy to drop his work and talk with his son’s chum about the stupendous opportunities that still remained in the city for a wise young man who had the imagination to perceive and the enterprise to seize them.

Walter planned his course of action. If his father remained stubborn, he would go to Barney Banniston, the man his father detested, and he would place himself in the great man’s hands. Banniston would have good advice to give him; he was full of it. Banniston would find for his young friend one of those countless opportunities that he could see everywhere.

Walter looked at his watch. There might still be time to find Mr. Banniston at his desk in Griswold Street that day. Then he bethought him of the reluctant Harry. Perhaps, to save Harry possible embarrassment, he had better discuss things with the son before he talked with the father.

At this point in the history of our not very heroic hero it shall be adduced in his favor that his next thought was of his mother.

CHAPTER VI.

DETOURED.

His car and driving togs were waiting at a garage in Washington Boulevard, close by. In the early winter twilight he joined the procession of homeward-bound motorists in

Jefferson Avenue and so came to Dallondale, with its half mile of concrete wall and its gray stone towers.

Many of the houses in the neighborhood were closed at this time of year, their owners taking up winter quarters in the city or migrating to warmer climes than the cold shores of Lake St. Clair. Dallondale remained open the year round, for its mistress was not of the migratory kind. When she felt the need of tropical air and vegetation, there was always the steamy greenhouse on the side lawn, where ferns and palms and orchids thrived luxuriantly and oranges came to the golden stage, if not to ripeness.

"Shall I have your car put up, Mr. Walter?" queried the man who opened the door.

"No, Burns. I'll be going right back."

"Your father has just come home from New York, sir," the servant gossiped, taking his coat.

"So?" the young man replied. "Where's my mother?"

She was on the stairs before he started up to seek her. Her first look told him that she knew what an abandoned wretch he was.

The mother sank upon a couch and drew her son down beside her. "You have come to see your father?" she asked hopefully.

"Be hanged to him!" her son answered.

"Walter! For shame!"

"Excuse my pirate language, mother. You see, I lead such a desperate life——"

"Walter Dallon!"

He yielded to her maternal authority and laughed.

"No, mother, I've come just to see you."

"But, Wally, I think he would listen to you, if you went to him in the proper spirit."

"I don't want him to listen to me, though. He had his chance in New York and wouldn't, and now I've nothing to say to him."

"Aren't you just trying to make yourself angry?"

"I don't need to try."

"Walter, I want to ask you one question: Have you a better friend in the world than your father?"

"He takes a poor way of showing his friendship, mother. Have you read the stuff in the paper?"

"No."

"Well, the rest of the town has, and the whole town thinks I'm a rotter. If he hadn't been so bullheaded—if he had given me half a show—but he didn't. No, mother, it's all

off, and I'm glad it is. I can't tell you how—how relieved I feel. Let him go his way and I'll go mine. We never can get along together, never in a million years. So why should we try?"

The mother's clear eyes could see through these heroics. It was plain to her that his bravado concealed admiration and affection for his father, and more heartache than the young man cared to admit. Hopeful still, she renewed her attack.

"You speak of going your own way. Are you sure that you have a way of your own to go? He has worked dreadfully hard, Walter, to make his way smooth and easy for you. Can't you be content to follow after him?"

"But, mother, I didn't leave it of my own accord. He flagged me off the road and hung a 'Detour' sign in my face. It's his doings, not mine."

A step sounded outside. William Dallon, comfortable in housecoat and slippers, stood at the door, holding a green-tinted newspaper in his hand and looking in at the pair on the couch.

"Oh, you here?" he growled. He would have turned away if the son had not sprung up and checked him with a tragic gesture.

"I'm here to say good-by. You don't object to that, I hope?"

"Not at all," replied William Dallon in a tone that made his double meaning perfectly clear. This time he turned away without challenge.

"You see, mother?" said the young man helplessly. "It's no use! No use!"

"Let me hear from you every day, won't you, Wally?"

Her words consummated his dismissal. He kissed her and went away from Dallondale in his car, and was strongly impelled to drive down the lane to the shore, out upon the frozen lake, and on into the first large body of open water that appeared.

Conquering the impulse in time, he steered for the Stuller. Jefferson Avenue needed all its "Safety First" signs that evening.

In the library Mrs. Dallon discovered her husband in the act of burning the last sheets of a green-hued newspaper in the fireplace.

"What did the paper say about him?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing much," he answered carelessly.

"Was it—like what he said it was?"

"I don't know what he said it was. But it was."

"What will you do about it?" she asked. "Will you make them say it isn't so? Will you let people think he is worse than he is?"

"Sally, did you ever hear about the fellow who emptied the pillowful of feathers out of the third-story window?"

"No."

"Well," said William Dallon, "he never got 'em back."

CHAPTER VII.

LOST CASTE.

Whatever people said of the manner of Bernard Banniston's start on the road to fortune, they agreed that the home office of the Banniston interests, in Griswold Street, was one of the show places of Detroit, to be mentioned not far down the list below Belle Isle.

Here the Banniston Petroleum Wells development project, the Banniston California Vineyards Association, the Banniston Rio Grande Land and Irrigation concern, and several Banniston enterprises of less importance had their headquarters. Here also was lodged the real control of the Banniston-Olin Motor Company, manufacturers of the Olin car, sometimes called a roller skate.

Through the plate-glass windows of the Banniston interests much solid mahogany furniture might be seen. Through those same windows Walter Dalton was also visible on the morning after his lugubrious farewell at Grosse Point.

It had been his recent privilege and custom to drop in upon Mr. Banniston without ceremony. This morning he had thought it better to send in his card, and Mr. Banniston had sent out word asking him to sit down outside and wait. To sit and wait, even in the best of solid mahogany, was out of the young man's line. He preferred to stand before an oil painting on the wall and make believe to be interested in the handsome lake steamer there represented.

But he was not thinking of lake steamers. He was putting two thoughts together. One of these thoughts was that Mr. Banniston had asked him to wait. The other had to do with Harry Banniston's failure to drop in at the Stuller "after dark" on the previous evening. To these two disconcerting matters a third was now added.

Out from the sanctuary came Hazel, Harry's sister, the elder of the Banniston daughters, tall, pale, lilylike. Her big eyes widened as he stepped toward her. Then with a quick "Oh, how do you do, Mr. Dallon," in a high society voice, she hastened past him to the street door, gathering her fur wraps about her. Through the plate glass he watched her enter her electric car and saw her send a look at him—a look of cautious curiosity and maidenly derision.

An office girl spoke at his elbow. "Mr. Banniston is ready for you, sir." Still polite to him was the Banniston office help, at any rate.

Big and bluff was Barney Banniston this morning, but not hearty. "Sit down, Dallon," he said, and gave his attention to a document in his hand, which looked like a mortgage bond.

The silence that followed had reached the point of insult before the financier remembered his caller.

"Well, Dallon?"

The young man had expected some such uncomfortable beginning. But he had also expected a smile, and there was no smile that the naked eye could discern.

"I read what the paper said about you. Too bad, too bad! I suppose it's true?"

"The facts were exaggerated, sir. There may have been a gay hour or two and considerable noise, but the affair was no worse than some doings I've attended in the best homes in Detroit."

"Is that an aspersion on our society life?"

"Not at all. What I mean to say is that the New York racket was nothing like the newspaper made out."

"Yes, yes, no doubt," said Banniston, scratching his nose. "I'm not asking you about that. I'm asking if it is true that your father has thrown you overboard."

"I'm afraid it's true."

"Too bad, too bad," said Banniston again.

The air of the office was thick with the odor of sanctity.

"I've watched you a long while, Dallon; I've been worried about you, not only for your sake but also for my boy Harry's. More times than once I've been warned that you were a bad influence for him. But I thought you would straighten up. I tried to turn your interest to serious things. I talked to you about your responsibilities. I guess I wasted my breath."

Mr. Banniston sighed as he thought of all his good breath gone for nothing.

"Is it definitely settled that you are not William Dallon's son any more? Isn't there a chance that the old gentleman is bluffing?"

If we may judge from the direction of his look, Mr. Banniston asked the question of a piece of mahogany office furniture on the other side of the room.

"My father never bluffs," the young man answered. "He is not that kind."

Banniston gave him a sharp glance to see if anything personal was meant. Then once more he fixed his eyes on the mahogany.

"You have had your last word from him?"

"Yes."

"What about your mother? Has she no voice in the matter?"

"I said good-by to my mother last night."

"Then it's final." Mr. Banniston stroked his nose. "Well, now that you have to scratch for a living, what are you going to do? Where do you think of scratching?"

"I have no plans," Dallon confessed. "I haven't a thing in sight. I thought that you might suggest something. We have talked, if you remember, about business opportunities here in Detroit."

"There are always opportunities for men with capital," returned Mr. Banniston judicially, "and for men with good reputations. But your case, of course, is different. You have no means, have you? Your father has never settled any great amount of money on you?"

Dallon shook his head.

"Then, too, you have rather lost caste, you know. You would be more of a liability than an asset to anybody who might take you on. The business world is a moral world, Walter, and the way of the transgressor is mighty hard in it, you'll find. Still, I'll keep you in mind. Have you ever taken a business course? Do you know bookkeeping or stenography or anything like that?"

The young man admitted that his education in those subjects had been neglected.

"Even so," said Banniston, "I may be able to think of some way to use you. Suppose we leave it like this; suppose you drop in again in, say, a week."

"In a week," Dallon agreed.

As fast as a man can walk without incurring suspicion of having picked a pocket, Dallon went away from there. Raging in heart, he jaywalked through the traffic of

the busy city center and set out at six miles an hour in the general direction of Toledo, Ohio.

In Lafayette Boulevard a brisk young man bolted out of the Board of Commerce Building and, looking neither first to the left nor then to the right, as the traffic signs of that swift city advise, collided with the hurrying Esau.

"I beg your pardon," said the brisk young man, on the rebound. Then, recognizing his victim, he added, laughing: "Oh, it's you, Wally Dallon. Where you going? I'll walk along with you. You're the very chap I'm looking for."

"How's Jimmy Laird?" asked Dallon. To that name, it seemed, the brisk young man answered. Dallon had known him at Ann Arbor as a student working his way. Since those days Laird had not ceased to work, and was now become a member of the Detroit bar and an ornament to his profession.

"I was actually on my way to hunt you down," said Laird, taking Dallon's arm.

His look was serious and intense, with a boyish smile just underneath. When he turned his head to address his companion, the point of his chin reached quite out to the point of his shoulder.

"Walt, I want you to take on a troop of my Boy Scouts."

"What!" Halting, Dallon stared at him.

"It will be the biggest thing that ever came into your life, Wally, old man; and you will be the biggest thing in theirs."

"Good night!" Dallon exclaimed. "Me? Me lead a bunch of honest, clean-faced little boys?"

"Why not? Who is better fitted than you? You're an all-around sportsman. You fish and hunt, and you play all the games Spalding ever heard of. You sail a boat and drive a car, and I reckon you could swim from here to Duluth if you had to. You know the woods and woodcraft. You can tell a polecat from a catamount. You understand wild life——"

"Yes; I know all about wild life," Dallon groaned. "I think you must be loony, Jimmy Laird."

"I don't get you," Laird answered.

"Then you didn't read the *Leader-Ledger* last night."

"When do I have time to read the papers? What do you mean, Wally?"

Dallon told him as they walked on. When they arrived, presently, in front of a stately

old family mansion that had been converted into a club for busy people, Laird drew him inside and put him on a divan in a corner of the smoking room and made him tell the story over again. At the end he grasped the story-teller's hand.

"Then all the more, Dallon, I want you on that job."

"Like hell you do!" Dallon responded.

"You will have to censor your language, of course," said Laird critically.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE FACTORY.

Dallon's ambition to walk to Toledo before sundown had evaporated, giving place to one more worthy though, perhaps, less easy of attainment. Like the hero of the finest short story in the world, he said: "I will arise and go unto my father." Further, he told himself, with a smile: "Overalls at last."

From his remark we may infer that the desirability of his going into the factory and learning the business was a subject not infrequently mentioned in the conversations of the Dallons, father and son.

A trolley car put him down, after a half hour's journey, in a region of the town which, twenty years before, had consisted chiefly of market gardens. There were markets today in place of the market gardens; there were the bustling stores and the thronging sidewalks of a thriving municipality; there was a vast district of new streets and comfortable homes. Around all these and beyond for miles the greater city spread; and in the heart of this new-grown community stood the Dallon factory.

Familiar to the young man's eyes were the four gigantic smokestacks of the power house, upholding their huge sign, in letters twenty feet high:

DALLON CARS

"MADE GOOD TO MAKE GOOD."

Beside the power house was the administration building; behind that for half a mile the glass-walled structures where thousands of men labored at bench and anvil and furnace, at punch and press and drill, in stock room and tool room and paint room, making well a car that should make good. A regiment of these toilers poured out at the side gate and another regiment poured in as young Dallon stood looking.

Down a private street between factory buildings was a row of brand-new touring cars, sixty or eighty of them, identical in design, their engines all running, their gleaming hoods wearing bright red tickets, the line ready to be driven away to market. That market was insatiable. It kept the factory running all day and all night. It kept the company supplied with orders a year in advance of delivery. It exhausted the capability of the railroads, so that thousands of Dallon cars went away under their own power to far distant sales points, even to Kansas City, to Birmingham, to Boston.

The lobby of the administration building was a busy place this day. A score of salesmen waited to see purchasing agents and heads of departments. A score of sightseers waited for a guide to lead them through the mechanical mazes and marvels of the shops. While waiting they had ample opportunity to inspect the shining Dallon sedan at one end of the long room and the sturdy Dallon three-ton truck at the other end. They had a chance also to witness a curious scene.

A well-dressed and high-powered young man had started up the broad stairs leading to the offices above. The clerk at the reception desk had sprung to intercept him.

"Mr. Dallon, please."

Walter halted.

"Sorry, sir, but you're not to go up. That's the order."

"Who gave you the order?"

"Mr. Wickersham."

"Is my father here to-day?"

"I think so."

While Dallon hesitated, reinforcements reached the clerk's side in the person of a uniformed watchman.

"Send my name up, will you?" said Walter.

On an ordinary carbon slip such as served for the visiting salesmen Walter Dallon's name was carried upstairs by a messenger, who returned in the course of time and whispered something to the desk clerk.

Said the clerk to Dallon: "Your father is engaged and can't be disturbed." He tore up the pass on which he had written Dallon, junior's, name.

"Is that all the message?"

"That's all."

"Then I'd like to see Mr. Wickersham."

Up went the messenger again. Back he came to report that Mr. Wickersham would be down presently.

It was half an hour before Mr. Wickersham appeared. William Dallon's private secretary was a substantial-looking business man who bore a strong resemblance to the late Chester A. Arthur. He was accompanied by a sharp-eyed old gentleman with a brief bag in his hand, who squinted hard at Walter before passing out to a motor car waiting at the door.

"That was Perry Squires," said the young man to Mr. Wickersham. "What's he doing here?"

Squires had been the Dallon attorney from the day of the organization of the Dallon company. For preparing the articles of incorporation he had reluctantly accepted ten shares of the stock. "He would much rather have had twenty-five dollars in cash," William Dallon delighted to relate. To this day Perry Squires continued to practice law just as if those ten shares had not made him opulent.

"Why is my father seeing a lawyer?" Walter demanded.

"I am not at liberty to disclose your father's affairs, you know," Wickersham replied. His tone was firm though not unfriendly. "What can I do for you, Walter?"

"I suppose dad has been making a new will," said the young man, courageously enough. "I don't care about that; but I do want to see him a minute. Can't you——"

The secretary shook his head. "I'll speak to him if you like; but I doubt if it will do you any good. His order this morning was positive. Perhaps I can take a message to him."

"Thanks. I won't trouble you."

"I don't need to tell you that I am sorry," said Wickersham. "If I can ever serve you in any way compatible with my duty to your father, let me know."

A commotion at the visitors' desk drew their attention. The clerk and the watchman were tusseling with a scrappy little man whose hair was long and whose eyes were wild.

Swiftly they took him by the arms and slid him across the lobby floor to the outer door, where they projected him bodily down the steps. In their train followed an office boy carrying a battered leather suit case, which he tossed out after the wild-eyed caller.

"Another crank, I presume," Wickersham observed.

"This is no place for cranks and prodigal sons," said Walter. "Good-by, sir."

The watchman was still waving the wild-eyed person off the premises.

Along the walk by the power house went Dallon to avoid passing underneath his father's window. Two blocks up the street, where the private railway spurs of the Dallon company begin, he boarded a city-bound trolley car.

At the factory gate the long-haired crank came on board, lugging his old suit case, and sat down at Dallon's side.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CRANK.

He was a frowsy old codger. He needed a shave, and he needed to take lessons in the art of chewing tobacco inconspicuously. There was tobacco juice around the corners of his mouth, on his stubble-covered chin, and on the collarless shirt underneath his dusty coat.

"Danged capitalists!" he exploded.

"Who?" queried the young man at his side.

"Them Dallons. Old one a profiteer, young one a rake, while honest men starve."

"Oh, I don't know," said Walter Dallon. "I hear the old gentleman is a pretty good citizen."

The crank uttered a better bark than many a dog could render. "But I'll show him," he added. "Him with his silly gas engine! I'll show him."

Dallon saw that the man, for all his vehemence, was trembling in every muscle, as if ill.

"Throw me out, will he? I'll throw him out when my time comes. Turn around, young feller, and look back at them four whopping chimneys. Look at them acres of workshops. Then travel around this city and look at the other automobile factories—thirty in all, most of 'em bigger than Dallon's. I tell you I can close every one of 'em."

There had been talk of anarchist activities in Detroit—not much, but enough to draw comments from men like William Dallon and Bernard Banniston. Within a few days a party of Reds had been rounded up and shipped East. It occurred to Walter that it might be well to gain the acquaintance of this long-haired hater of capitalists.

"A million and a half cars a year they

make," the fire eater went on, "and I can close 'em down like that." He clapped his gnarly hands together. "Six hundred millions they've got invested in 'em. A hundred thousand men they hire. And I can break 'em to-morrow!"

"To-morrow?"

"Well, maybe not to-morrow. In ten years."

He patted the big suit case that stood on end between his knees.

"It's in here," he chuckled, while Dallon thought of bombs. "In here—the biggest thing in the world—twenty years of my life. Before Olds and Maxwell and Winton and those fellers started I was working on it, in Philadelphia. Before Bill Dallon and Henry Ford ever thought of a motor I was making mine. They got the jump on me. They used a fuel that cost ten cents then, twenty-five cents now. I wanted an engine that would run on—on——"

He checked his wild speech and glanced at his companion in alarm.

"On what?" asked Dallon.

"Anyway, I've got it," said the crank, ignoring the question. "I've finished my engine, and now they won't even look at it."

"Who won't look at it?"

"The Dallons, the people like that. I write to 'em. I wrote to Bill Dallon. I said to him, 'I've got an engine that will make your car look like a pushcart. I'll let you manufacture it. I'll go shares with you. We will own it between us and put the other fellows out of business.' That's the letter I wrote him, and he didn't answer it. And when I met him and talked to him the other night in the railway station, he said he had troubles enough already."

"Then you call at his factory and he throws you out, eh? I can sympathize with you," said Walter. "I was thrown out of there just now, myself."

"Are you an inventor, too?" the old fellow asked sharply.

"No. I was hunting for a job."

"Your clothes don't look like you needed a job."

"Perhaps not. You see, I wanted to learn the automobile industry."

"Don't waste your time, young feller. There won't be any such industry after ten years—not like it is now, anyhow. The only cars on the market will have my engines in 'em. There won't be a gas engine

between here and Halifax. I'll even kill the electric."

The long-haired man fell silent. When the trolley had turned into Gratiot Avenue, Dallon spoke.

"What's the idea in your engine?"

"You'd like to know, wouldn't you? They all would."

"How much backing do you need?"

"I don't ask for much," the inventor replied, "and I think that's where I make my mistake. If I had twenty thousand dollars to open a little shop somewhere and turn out just one complete full-size car——"

He made it clear that he was not satisfied with his engine yet. It needed a year or so of road testing to be perfect.

"You are more of an artist than a business man," said Dallon. "What you want to do is to think large. Ask for twenty million, jump right into production, and let the public do your testing for you."

He said it to please the old fellow. Then, too, he may have echoed the instruction he had lately absorbed at the feet of the large-thinking Barney Banniston. He was to have an instance of Mr. Banniston's large-mindedness sooner than he expected.

"Maybe if I asked for twenty millions they would listen to me, that's true," said the inventor. "But five thousand is the best offer I've had—and that feller wants me to sell outright. Think of working all your life for five thousand dollars, inventing a thing worth billions to somebody else!"

His excitement following his fracas with the watchman at the factory had subsided by now. His tone had become merely plaintive, his look pathetic.

A flash of memory came to the young man at his side, whose interest up to this point had been little more than idle. To talk of the disappointments of this old eccentric had kept his mind off troubles of his own.

"You don't happen to be Felix Bray, do you?"

"Why? How do you know?"

"I've heard about you," said Dallon. "Also I can tell you the name of the lavish philanthropist who wants to buy your invention for five thousand dollars. It's Barney Banniston."

Bray's look of surprise was verification enough.

One of Banniston's recent confidences came to Dallon's mind. It was on a day when the big, bluff, hearty financier was

discussing the golden opportunities that lay all around.

"For example," he said, "I know where, for fifty thousand dollars, I can get absolute control of a new sort of automobile engine that may send gasoline engines tumbling down to nothing. Mind you, Walter, I don't say it will; but it may; and the man who puts up the fifty thousand to-day may find himself the owner of a regular Klondike to-morrow. You may feel like looking into it some time. If so, let me know."

Said Dallon to Felix Bray, as their trolley car reached the city hall: "Are you sure you heard Mr. Banniston right? Wasn't it fifty thousand he offered you, instead of five?"

"Don't I tell you," Bray returned, "that all I asked him for was twenty?"

Here was a new light on Dallon's great and good friend of Griswold Street. For five thousand he had tried to buy an invention which he was willing to sell to his admiring young disciple for ten times that amount. Truly there were golden opportunities around—for opportunity brokers, at least.

"Has Banniston seen your engine in action, Mr. Bray?"

"Twice he seen it run."

"You convinced him, then?"

"Didn't he want it? Don't he still want it?"

"Has he renewed his offer lately?"

"Just this week. It's a standing one. But I don't know," said Bray, "why I'm telling you all this, or how you come to know so much. Are you a reporter?"

"No, I'm not," Dallon answered. "You don't have much use for reporters, do you?" He was remembering many half-forgotten things about Bray now.

"They stand in with the automobile makers," Bray answered bitterly. "Being my name is Bray, they call my engine a donkey engine. But I'll have a horse laugh on them before I get through. You just keep your ears open."

Mumbling his discontent, he rose presently to leave the car. When he had stepped down to the street he frowned to see the young man drop off beside him.

"I think I'll stick along and find out some more about your engine," Dallon explained. "I may want to invest some money in it."

2B P.

"You?" cried Bray. "Why, you're looking for a job."

"I told you I wanted to learn the automobile industry. If that industry is going to be revolutionized in ten years I'd better do my studying under a revolutionist. See?"

Suspicion gleamed from Bray's eyes. "I guess you're a spy working for them Dallons," he said, and turned away.

But Dallon kept at his side. They were somewhere between Navin Field and the river, in a neighborhood of small factories, railway tracks, and old-fashioned dwellings.

"That bag looks heavy; it pulls your shoulder down," said Dallon. "Let me tote it for you."

For answer, the inventor turned aside through a rickety gate into the mean yard of a mean little house flanked closely, with other little houses of like pattern. Fumbling in his pocket for a key, he opened the door and entered, then slammed the door in his unwelcome companion's face.

CHAPTER X.

THE SHELBSYS.

To have doors slammed in his face was becoming an old story to Dallon. First it was his father's door, then Banniston's, next the factory door, and now the queer inventor's. There remained one more to try. He had saved it until the last, as a small boy saves his hardest example in arithmetic.

With the feeling of driving to his own funeral, he put his car out Woodward Avenue late in the afternoon, past the humming Ford plant and Palmer Park and the Fair Grounds, past miles of streets of new homes and miles of other streets boasting water and gas and sewers and parked driveways, and lacking only the houses that would follow in a year or so.

When the flat country had given place to a region of hills and woods and glinting lakes, he swung aside into a private driveway that wound through acres of birches and evergreens, bringing him to the door that had been most in his mind since his ignominious return to Michigan.

He needed resolution to mount the steps and press the bell button, and courage to stand waiting in the reception hall. Then Marion Shelby appeared and he could resume respiration, for though her face was grave, her hand was held out in welcome.

She led him to a glass-inclosed veranda

where a log fire blazing in an outside fireplace supplied a very good imitation of summer weather.

"I heard you were in town," she began, when they were seated in front of the fender. "Hazel Banniston phoned me this afternoon."

"What did she report?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Usually," he explained, "when she turns those deer's eyes of hers in my direction, I wish she would use her dimmer. But when we met this morning she could hardly see me. She was not interested."

"She was interested enough to phone me, at least."

"What did she say?"

"Does it matter what Hazel Banniston says?"

"Not a particle. It's what you say that counts."

"Excuse a little ruthlessness," Marion returned; "but what I might say didn't count enough to keep you out of trouble, did it?"

"I'm sorry if any of that trouble has reached you," he answered simply, and bent forward with the tongs to mend the fire. Perhaps it was the warmth of the blaze that brought out the moisture and the color on his neck.

"At any rate," the ruthless young woman went on, after watching him broil for a minute, "I had the satisfaction of reminding Hazel that the Fatted Calf was as deep in the disreputable affair as the Prodigal Son, according to the stories that papa heard. Is it so? It seemed to be news to her."

Dallon put down the tongs and sat back with a grateful heart. Marion had spoken a good word for him. A good fellow was Marion.

"Is it so?" she repeated. "Was Harry in it?"

"I can't discuss Harry's sins," he said. "My own are paramount. I've come to hear your verdict."

"Before I utter judgment I shall have to hear the testimony, you know."

"But you have read what the paper said; and your father has heard things."

"That was the prosecution. Now for the defense."

Marion settled herself with the air of a judge to listen to the accused in his own behalf.

He told her humbly and contritely, with such remorse in his aspect as the facts in

the case demanded. When the testimony was in and the defense had rested, she reserved her decision. She would need a little time by herself to look up the law. Meanwhile, she perceived her father's car coming up the drive. Perhaps the prisoner at the bar would have a talk with him.

"I'll talk to him fast enough," Dallon answered. "The question is, will he talk to me?"

"Try him," said Marion.

The big blue Midlakes limousine let a tall and eminent-looking gentleman out at the door. Marion met him with a daughterly embrace and drew him to the veranda.

"Well, well, here's Walter!"

There had been three great Peter Shelbys in the history of Detroit. The first built the family fortune on a foundation of good Michigan lumber. The second improved that fortune by wise investments in real estate; the outlying farms that he bought were now populous residence districts. The third Peter Shelby, warming his hands at the fire, was the greatest of the line.

Like William Dallon, he had entered the automobile game early. As president of the Midlakes company he introduced mudguards to a bespattered motoring world. His was the first horseless carriage that employed a steering wheel in place of a broomstick and a horn instead of a bell. W. D. Todd, the inventor of the Midlakes car, had now gone to a better world, leaving his family well fixed in this, but the Midlakes car, under Peter Shelby's zealous management, went rolling in wherever fine people demanded luxury in travel. William Dallon's car was for modest folk; the Midlakes car was only for people who paid a surtax to the internal revenue collector.

Some one asked Peter Shelby once: "Why do you spend your life in an automobile factory?" Peter's reply was often quoted.

"To build up something so everlastingly good that it will supply thousands of high-grade workmen with perpetual jobs and make prosperity for thousands of households. I suppose I might spend my days at Bloomfield Hills, raising fancy roses or batting a rubber pill around a pasture; but I like this better."

People declared that he never sold a car until he himself had tried it out. His workmen talked in thousandths of inches.

"Well, Walter, you're in trouble, I hear." Peter Shelby said it with a smile. "I'm sorry

—sorry for you and your father both. The thing to do now is to pitch in and show him that you can swallow your medicine and recover and make good. Is that the way you feel about it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Want a job?"

"What doing? I don't know very much."

"Neither did I, at the start. That first year in Mack Avenue when the only factory the Midlakes company had was a tent, I didn't know a monkey wrench from a man-hole. W. D. Todd could tell you, if he were alive, that I thought a gasket was a tank for the gasoline."

To-day this born millionaire who had gone into the game solely for the love of working was classed as one of the world's great automobile engineers. In the mechanical problems of a national government burdened with war he had been a final expert.

"Have you done any looking around?" he queried.

"I asked a man for a job this morning," said Dallan. "He didn't seem enthusiastic."

"Was it Barney Banniston? I thought so. I heard him bragging about it at the club."

"I like his nerve!" the young man exclaimed.

"His nerve is good," Mr. Shelby admitted. "I wonder, Walter, that you ever got so thick there."

Gloomily Dallan opined that he was plenty thin there now.

"Are you sure of that? From the drift of his remarks at the club I gathered that he had taken you on—that, figuratively speaking, he had rescued you from the gutter and intended to see that you had a fair chance in life."

"He's a liar, sir. He told me to come again in a week, that was all. If I thought he was trying to rub it in on my father like——"

"That's how it struck me," said Shelby. "Take my advice and get yourself a job at smuggling booze over from Canada in an ice boat, or something respectable like that, before you tie up with your father's enemy."

"I've never heard him called that before," said Dallan, "except by dad himself."

"You haven't done your listening in the right lane, perhaps. The whole city knows of his plan to save his toppling Olin interests by leaning them up against the Dallan interests."

"I knew that he had a scheme to merge the two companies and use them as the foundation for a billion-dollar consolidation like Amalgamated Motors," said Walter, "and I was for it strong."

"You were for letting him burn your paws," said Shelby grimly. "But now, of course, that pretty plan is punctured—at considerable cost, I'm afraid, to the happiness of certain people at Grosse Point, eh, Walter?"

At this painful stage Marion interrupted the conversation to order her father upstairs to dress for dinner. She herself had changed from an outing suit to something so silky and dainty that her young man's eyes danced at sight of her.

"You will stay, won't you?" she asked him when her father had left.

"That depends on the verdict."

"Do you know," she replied soberly, "that after the testimony is in, there is usually a fervid argument to the court? And do you know that you have not argued your case at all? Don't you care which way the verdict goes?"

"I am a poor hand at special pleading," he told her. "But will this do?"

An old gardener came trundling a wheelbarrow across the lawn in the twilight. He had been wrapping straw around some of the Shelby rosebushes, for the bitter half of the winter was near at hand. He saw the scene on the glassed veranda and sighed to be young again.

"Does that prove anything to you, judge?" asked Dallan, as the wordless argument ended.

"It proves," Marion replied, smoothing out a rumpled sleeve, "that you are a rough and mussy bear. But I suppose I must be kind to bears if I am to be a consistent altruist. So come indoors, Mr. Bear, and be fed."

CHAPTER XI.

THE WHIMS OF FORTUNE.

It pleased Peter Shelby, at the dinner table, to discourse on a subject dear to the hearts of most Detroiters. That subject was the luck of the automobile game. His daughter and Dallan listened as attentively as is becoming in young people when their elders indulge in reminiscence, although they both had heard his stories many times.

"An Eastern banker was asking me today," said Mr. Shelby, "how this town came

to be the automobile center of the universe. I told him it was because, down in his country one day, a certain man got homesick for Lansing, Michigan."

With much enjoyment Mr. Shelby explained the paradox, relating how the inventor of the first practical gasoline motor car journeyed from Lansing to New York in search of capital; how he met there a man of wealth who promised to raise the needed funds; how the financier sent the inventor across the river to Newark, New Jersey, to pick out a site for the factory; how the inventor chose a suitable plot of ground and roved around Newark for ten days thereafter, getting acquainted with the lay of the land while waiting for his backer to make good the promise; how, despairing at last of his backer's ability to land the money, and yearning for his home town out West, he journeyed back toward Lansing as far as Detroit, and in the railway station in that city met a Detroitier with money to venture, who heard his tale of disappointed hopes and said to him: "You stay right here."

"And R. E. Olds stayed here," Mr. Shelby concluded, "long enough to establish Detroit as the metropolis of motordom. Out of his factory, Walter, went your father and W. D. Todd and a dozen other men, to invent cars and start factories of their own. To-day this city employs more men in her automobile factories than the total adult male population of the city that might have been the motor capital—and Newark is no village, either."

He had stories, too, of priceless inventions gone begging there in Detroit, in the city that should best have known their value; and of men who would brood to their dying day over the chance they missed to grubstake a certain earnest young mechanic whose company now did a business of one million dollars a day, whose factory now produced one-half of all the motor cars made in America.

"The human race, even the Detroit sector of it," said Mr. Shelby, philosophical over his coffee, "is by nature conservative, which is a pleasant word for lazy-minded. Start something in Griswold Street even in this swift age—something that may be worth a billion to-morrow—and nine men out of ten will tell you it won't work and it can't be done. Take aeroplanes, now——" and off he went for another flight.

When he came down, Walter Dallon was waiting for him with a question.

Had Mr. Shelby ever looked into a motor said to have been invented by a queer old character around town named Felix Bray?

"I have seen the motor," Shelby replied. "But seeing Bray's motor and looking into it are two different things. I doubt if anybody has ever looked into it except Bray himself."

Dallon narrated his trolley-car adventure with the long-haired little crank. When the account ended in the incident of the slamming of Bray's house door, Shelby chuckled.

"Before America entered the World War," said he, "in the days when those of us who had been called in to help were overlooking no patent or suggestion in mechanics that might become of use to the government, we went to Bray and coaxed him into agreeing to demonstrate his motor.

"For five years he had tried to interest people without showing his goods. Nobody will listen to a man who won't lay his cards on the table, so Bray had become a joke. He was afraid of bankers and lawyers, afraid of every man who came near him and of every man he approached. I found out at Washington that he had never patented his idea, being afraid of the government. And he was still afraid of the government in 1916, as we were to discover.

"We arranged for him to give his exhibition in a room in a machine shop down by the river—a place of his own selecting. At the appointed time we arrived. We found the windows of the room curtained with tar paper. The only light came from an electric bulb above a table. On the table stood Bray's model. The part of it that we were allowed to see looked like a simple four-cylinder gasoline motor. The rest of it was inclosed in a wooden box.

"Bray was there and as fidgety as a cat on a hot griddle. He gave us orders that we were to sit around the sides of the room and remain seated. If we tried to examine the motor at close range he would call the show off. That was the way the notorious Keely mystified the scientists in Philadelphia years ago. But such methods didn't go down with us; we were Missourian, and we told Bray so.

"Well, he balked as hard as we, and the séance ended before it began. When we saw him last he was standing guard over the boxed part of his motor like a tax dodger

over his income. And that," said Mr. Shelby, "is the nearest that any one has ever come to looking into Bray's motor, so far as I know. Either the machine is a fake that can't stand daylight, or else its inventor is a fool."

Dallon recalled Bray's confidences. "I can tell you one man who has looked into it," said he. "Unless Bray lies, Bernard Banniston has seen its wheels go round and has made him a standing offer of five thousand dollars for it."

Peter Shelby showed surprise.

"He must see possibilities in the thing," Dallon remarked.

"Financial possibilities, at least," returned Mr. Shelby thoughtfully. "People are dazzled by the fortunes made in the auto industry. He could start a company to manufacture Bray's motor, open subscription books and clean up millions. Whether the motor is any good or not, it would be good enough to pull in the bank savings of thousands of suckers."

Peter Shelby pushed back his chair and cast a contemplative glance toward his humidor. Then spoke Marion, whose voice had not been heard in this exchange of worldly wisdom:

"If this invention is such a dangerous thing to leave lying around, shouldn't somebody get control of it to keep it out of certain people's hands?"

"That," replied her father, smiling, "would be altruism."

CHAPTER XII.

THE DALLON NAME.

"Oh, Wally!"

Young Dallon, entering the breakfast room at the Stuller, heard his name called by a familiar voice. Across the hotel lobby came the Fatted Calf, otherwise Harry Banniston, with a glad smile on his round face.

Dallon stiffened a little and waited.

"I couldn't remember the number of your room," said Harry, "so I asked at the desk. They swore you were not stopping here, but I told 'em I knew better, and here you are."

"Had breakfast?"

"Yes, but I'll sit down with you."

They found a table for two at a window overlooking the park. While Dallon ordered food, the companion of his recent pleasures lit a cigarette and blew smoke rings at the waiter's head. If Harry's smoke rings had,

been piston rings, he would have been able to retire at the age of twenty-five with an independent fortune.

"The governor says you went to see him yesterday."

"I did. But why haven't you come to see me?"

"Laid up—bad cold—all shot to pieces," Harry answered sadly.

"You ought to brace up, Harry. Really you ought. If you would follow my example and lead a moral and abstemious life you wouldn't have colds and things."

"I'm sorry I didn't get here that night. But I'm here now. As I say, you went to see my esteemed parent. And I guess he was kind of cool toward you, eh?"

"He made me think of the Washington Boulevard Ice Tower," Dallon admitted.

"That was all a mistake, Walt, old chap. The fact is, the governor believed some gossip he heard, and thought you had been leading me astray. But I had a heart-to-heart talk with him last night and made him see things in a new light."

"That's kind of you, Harry; that's mighty handsome and charitable."

"Don't be sarcastic, Wally; don't be sore—though I don't blame you a lot. The governor had no call to rub it in on you, when you—"

"When you are as deep in the mud as I am in the mire," Dallon finished for him. "I thought something of the sort myself."

"But that's all past and, I hope, forgotten," young Banniston persisted. "I've made him see that it is up to us to stand by you, now that you need friends. I have fixed things all right for you, and all that you need do is go to him again. He wants to see you at ten this morning. Will you go?"

"Beggars can't be choosers," Dallon replied.

"Fine!" exclaimed Harry, rising to leave. "And don't lay up a grudge against him. He's a rough customer at times, but his heart's as kind as a woman's. I'll hunt you up later in the day and see how you have made out with him."

At ten o'clock Dallon stood again in the outer office of the Banniston interests. This time he was admitted without delay; this time Bernard Banniston was all smiles and cordiality, and he shook his caller's hand for fully half a minute. Having thawed so suddenly, he may have been a bit sloppy.

"Harry found you, then?"

"As you see."

"I wish I had talked with him before you came to me yesterday. He says you are more sinned against than sinning. He thinks your father has handed you a pretty raw deal. Under those circumstances, I guess we had better wipe off the slate and start fresh. Have a chair, Walter. Take this one."

He placed the best of his solid mahogany for the mistreated young man and settled down behind his desk. No mortgage bond distracted his attention this morning.

"My boy, I think I have discovered a way to use you."

"I don't understand stenography, remember."

"Ha! ha! ha!" Like a good fellow Mr. Banniston took the dig. "That's one on me," he acknowledged. "But let us forget yesterday. You won't need to know hooks and crooks in the job I have in mind for you."

Dallon felt especially grateful to be able to sidestep the crooks.

"You won't need to do anything much except to dress well—which you always do—and to look the part of a successful man of affairs. You may also have to sign checks occasionally, appear at public banquets, and mingle generally with the top notchers. And your duties won't be so exacting that you can't run away for frequent vacations to Daytona, to Santa Barbara, to almost any gay spot where your fancy may lead you, always excepting gay New York. I don't recommend New York for you, Walter."

At the young man's quick scowl he laughed with great enjoyment.

"That's the time I landed on you, my boy. Now the score is even and we won't jolly each other any more. Let's be serious."

He bent forward with his stout elbow on the desk blotter, his plump fingers supporting his wide and well-filled forehead.

"Seriously, I can see a chance for you to amount to a great deal in this city, and in the country generally as well, with no other assets that you have already at hand."

"Amounting to something is my main concern just now," Dallon replied.

"Here is your situation at present," said Banniston. "Your father has disinherited you—legally, I understand—new will and everything. I hear that you tried to see him

at the factory yesterday and couldn't get past the office boy. He is done with you. Let's look the fact squarely in the teeth."

"It has teeth, all right," the young man observed, while Mr. Banniston took a breath for his next point.

"The money he had piled up for you will go elsewhere—to charities and colleges and such—and you won't be able to touch a cent of it. He has started to give it away already. Yesterday, for instance, he handed the Near East Relief people a check for one hundred thousand."

"I hadn't heard of that," said Dallon.

"You'll find it in the papers. It emphasizes what I am getting at, that you can't hope for anything from him in the money way. But, my boy, you have something else of his that he can never withhold from you."

"What is that?"

"The name of Dallon and all the sound business reputation that goes with it."

"At last," thought Walter.

"He can keep you out of his money, but not out of his name; and that name can be made worth millions to you if you are willing to be advised and guided."

Dallon's air was gratefully attentive.

"Now let me say a word about myself," Banniston pursued. "I speak to you in strict confidence, as I would to my own son. A few years ago I was foolish enough to put a good deal of money into the Olin Motor Company. In that investment I was led like a sheep to the slaughter. The Olin car was a poor car, to start with——"

"So I've heard," Dallon remarked, with a straight face. His patron hurried on.

"It was a poor car at the start. It infringed certain patents, which made a reconstruction of the engine necessary. We have fooled along with the thing for years and never got satisfactory results. We have had trouble with our labor, and difficulty in getting the proper grades of steel and other material. All this while the car has suffered in reputation until it is now on the ragged edge of being a failure, although it has made a lot of money for us."

Dallon thought of the growing custom of calling the car the "All-in" car. He wished that his father could listen in on Banniston's lamentation.

"Well, Walter, I'm going to pull out of the Olin company and make a new beginning. This is strictly under your hat. I

have my hands on a new engine operating on an entirely new principle in mechanics. I have spent a couple of hundred thousands toward perfecting it. In two years, maybe in a year, it will be ready to put on the market. In ten years it will send the Olin motor, the Dallon motor, and all the rest of them to the scrap heap. That's why I am willing to pocket my Olin losses and step out of that fiasco. I have a new thing that will go beyond anybody's craziest dreams, and I want you to come in and help me manufacture it."

"It sounds good, and I certainly seem to be in luck," Dallon replied. "But what do I contribute?"

"Your name."

"You mean my father's name, I think."

"I expected you to say that, and I honor you for saying it," Banniston returned. "But let's put sentiment aside and be coldly practical. Since your father has publicly disowned you, you owe him nothing. Henceforth you've got to stand on your own feet and make your own way, and your first obligation is to yourself. Isn't that so?"

"I suppose it is."

"Your name is your own, and nobody will dispute your right to use it for all it is worth. You are lucky, of course, in inheriting it, just as another man would be lucky in coming into a vast property. But you have as much right to capitalize your luck as the other chap. You will show less common sense than I give you credit for having if you don't."

"This is a pretty heavy proposition, Mr. Banniston. I'll have to think it over."

"Take all the time you want, my boy, so long as you bear these two points in mind: First, you are lending your name to a legitimate and useful enterprise; and, second, if our invention makes good, you will keep the name of Dallon brightly shining in the world long after your father's gasoline cars have gone the way of the old high-wheel bicycle and the stagecoach. I rather think your father will be proud to own you yet. I rather think so, indeed."

Mr. Banniston breathed hard in his zeal for the unjustly treated son of old Bill Dallon.

"Just how will you use my name?" the young man inquired. "You can't call the new company the Dallon Motor Car Company."

"We'll call it Dallon Motors, or the Dal-

lon-Detroit Corporation, or any one of a thousand names I can think of. Your father may howl, but that's all the good it will do him. Your name is Dallon, isn't it?"

"What about the new engine we are going to make? Who invented it? What's the principle?"

"Come and see me to-morrow, Walter, my boy. When you have made your decision, then I'll tell you more. Perhaps we shall have the model here to look at together, and maybe we will talk salaries and such minor details."

"Thanks very much. Let me ask you one question more. Suppose this new motor is all that you believe it is. What will it do to the present order in the automobile industry?"

"The gasoline car," Banniston replied impressively, "will have to go where the horse car went. The survival of the fittest, my boy, the survival of the fittest."

Still Dallon lingered. "There is an inventor in town named Bray. Is it his motor you have in mind?"

"Bray, you say? Bray? Never heard of him."

From the sidewalk Dallon looked back through the plate glass. In the middle of the outer office stood Bernard Banniston, scratching his nose in profound and puzzled thought.

Of a sudden the great man wheeled about and ran to the door.

"Walter!"

But his recent visitor did not look back.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OPTION.

So self-deluded was Banniston as to believe that his preposterous suggestion would find a ready listener in the outcast son of William Dallon. As to the large-thinking speculator's real intention—whether the proposed new Dallon corporation was to engage in honest business or was to perpetuate a swindle on the innocent public—the young man had yet to learn.

Dallon admitted that his own motives in going to see Banniston that morning and in calling at Felix Bray's house three times that afternoon were complex and not at all clear.

It is characteristic of our easy-going hero that he blamed no one but himself for his fall from his father's good graces. But the snubbing he had received from the Bannis-

tons, father, daughter, and son, followed so soon by the insult of Banniston's outrageous proposal, may have stung him into a desire for retaliation. Stronger still was his desire to avenge his father for Banniston's boast of having rescued William Dallon's son from the gutter.

Then, too, he may have been impelled somewhat by curiosity regarding the fitful and evasive Felix Bray, as well as by the memory of a certain altruistic remark made by a brown-eyed girl at Bloomfield Hills.

Thrice that day Dallon knocked at Felix Bray's door without response. After night-fall he went for a fourth try, but deferred his errand long enough to hunt up Jim Laird. He found that rising young attorney installing a new scout master over a troop of khaki-clad boys in the basement of the John R. Street Baptist Church.

"You've come to enlist. Bully for you!" said Jim Laird. "It's the grandest work in the—— Hey! Schmittel, cut that out!"

The concluding half of his remark was addressed to a scout who had turned a bench over on top of three of his comrades.

"I want you to draw up a legal paper for me," Dallon explained. "'For blank dollars, cash in hand, I, Blank Blank, do hereby contract, and so forth, not to sell any share or shares in my invention hereinafter described, unless to Walter Dallon, Esquire, and this agreement is to hold good for blank days from date, so help me Moses.' Something like that—and make it air-tight."

Said Laird: "I guess I know what you mean by your illegal phraseology. You want an option."

On a sheet of church stationery he wrote out the form desired, which, he declared, would be upheld as binding by all the courts between Detroit and Washington. Then Dallon drove across town toward Navin Field and the dingy neighborhood where Felix Bray dwelt.

Half a square from Bray's house he left his car and proceeded on foot, considering this precaution justified by Bray's well-known fear of people who could afford to ride in automobiles.

The air was cold, the hour nine; the street was silent. When within a few paces of the inventor's house he saw the door open and a thin stream of light shine out upon the steps. In the doorway stood two figures, one little and bent, the other large and burly.

"Barney Banniston!" thought Dallon, and looked up the street and down. His own car was the only one in sight. Banniston, then, had come to the house on foot, which was an action out of keeping with his luxurious habits.

While the pair stood talking at the door he walked past, looking round only when he heard the door close. He saw Banniston making heavy and rapid headway toward the nearest trolley line. When the coast was cleared he went back to the house and knocked.

Perhaps Felix Bray thought it was his first caller returning, for he opened the door readily. Before he could close it the second caller was inside and striving in the narrow and half-lighted hall to quiet his sudden noisy burst of anger.

"Get out of here! Get out of my house!" screamed the frowsy little inventor, alternately shaking his fists in Dallon's face and snatching for the doorknob. But Dallon planted his back against the door and stayed.

"You're that spy again," said Bray.

The resolutely friendly caller handed over a card from his pocketbook. Bray held it up to the light of a gas jet in the room just off the hall, squinted at it with watery eyes, then stared at its owner.

"You're Bill Dallon's son!"

"I am. That is to say, I was. Yesterday you called me a reprobate, but that's all right. Yesterday you tried to see my father and were put out of the factory, so it's natural that you don't love the Dallons. Do you know that I was put out at almost the same moment? We came out together. That ought to make us friends, don't you think?"

From somewhere in the darkness at the top of the hall stairs a querulous voice called:

"What's the trouble down there?"

"It's all right, Hennessy. Go on back to bed," Bray answered. With a fretful gesture he beckoned Dallon to enter the room, explaining, as he closed the hall door: "That's my lodger. He works hard and needs his rest. We better do our talking in here." There was a new note, a note of gentleness, in his words.

The room was in character with its unkempt occupant. An unmade bed occupied a corner. A table with a spotted cloth and many dirty dishes stood in the middle of a carpetless floor that was littered with cloth-

ing, shoes, saucepans, and books. There were two chairs, only one of which had a back.

"I take back what I called you yesterday," said Bray, twisting the card in shaking fingers. His voice had become peppery again. "But I still call you a spy. You came here for your father."

Dallon helped himself to the chair without a back. "You may as well sit down, Mr. Bray, because we are going to talk this thing out before I go."

Bray slid warily into the other chair and looked on in resentful wonder while Dallon filled his pipe.

"Will you smoke a cigar, Mr. Bray?"

"I don't smoke."

"Then I'll not, either," and the visitor returned his pipe to his pocket. "Now, Mr. Bray, you have something to sell, haven't you? Yet when a possible customer comes along, you call him a spy and try to mash the gizzard out of him in the door. Is it any wonder you never find a market?"

"I don't trust the sons of motor-car makers," Bray snarled.

"That's right; they're a bad lot," Dallon agreed. "Luckily for me, your description doesn't apply in my case. I've had the grand bounce from my father. I'm out of the Dallon company and as much alone in the world as you are. You'll find it all in the *Leader-Ledger* of night before last. So you can safely trust me, Mr. Bray, as far as you like."

"I've read about you," Bray conceded.

"But I don't ask you to take my word for anything. They say money talks. Will you listen to money?"

"Let's hear some of it," Bray suggested.

Dallon's pocketbook came out.

"How much of an interest in your motor are you willing to sell for twenty thousand dollars?"

"Forty-nine shares out of a hundred," the inventor answered promptly.

"Make it fifty-one."

"Do you take me for a sucker?"

"Will you sell me forty-nine shares within sixty days?"

"Not till I know you better," said Bray.

"Will you sell me an option on those shares for that length of time and agree to hang on to the others yourself while we get acquainted and I figure out a plan for going ahead?"

"I won't give an option for sixty days,"

Bray answered. "I might for thirty. How much will you pay?"

"How much do you want?"

Bray considered. Dallon could see that he was painfully excited, though struggling to appear indifferent.

"Would you pay a hundred dollars?" The question came faintly.

"You see," said Dallon, "you are a poor business man, though you may be a great inventor. You need a side partner with nerve, like me. I was ready to offer you five hundred."

Bray's jaw dropped.

"But I'll split the difference with you and say three hundred," the young business man added. "Will you take it?"

"And maybe then you will put up the twenty thousand, and we can manufacture a road car?"

"You'll have to show me first, Mr. Bray. If the engine works, I'll come across. If there's any promise in it, I shall know where to raise more money still. What do you say?"

Now occurred a strange thing. Bray bent forward from his chair and fell with head and arms upon the table. Dallon thought of a paralytic stroke and sprang to the man's side, to discover that Bray was sobbing heartbrokenly.

"Brace up, man, brace up," he said, resting a hand on the old fellow's heaving shoulder.

When Bray looked up at last, his face was still twitching, but the wildness had gone out of his eyes.

"Maybe you're only stringing me, like the others."

"Does this look like it?" Dallon tossed down upon the table three new treasury notes.

Bray took them up, looked at them, studied the letter C that constituted the chief theme in their decoration.

"My Lord! how bad I need 'em!" he cried. "And that bloated bamboozler that just went out of here"—he shook his fist toward the street—"he was for letting me stay broke and sick and hungry till he had the machine locked up in his safe! Not even a five-dollar bill when I asked him for it, though he said he was buying because he was sorry for me."

"Who is this liberal person you mention?"

"Barney Banniston. He was here tonight just before you. You must have

passed him. He came and made me his offer again. He said it was the last time. I says to him if I could go on working odd hours in the machine shops for money to keep soul and body together, I'd tell him to get out. But I'm sick, Mr. Dallon. My hands won't hold the tools any more. I'm at the place where I've got to have help or—or maybe die."

Dallon dropped another bill on the table. Bray brushed it aside.

"I told him I would let him have my final answer at his office to-morrow afternoon. He knew it meant surrender. But when I said I could use five dollars to-night he gave me the laugh. He said I would go somewhere and jag up and get my nerve back, and then the deal would be off. 'I guess you'll live till to-morrow at three o'clock,' he says. 'After that you can go to Battle Creek and stop at the swellest hotel and fill up on breakfast food,' he says, 'and take various fancy kinds of baths and own the world. I strongly recommend the baths,' he says. 'Half a dozen or so will do you a heap of good.' Drat him! He thought I didn't know what he meant."

"Then no money passed between you?"

"Not a nickel."

"All you did was promise to give him your final answer to-morrow?"

"That's all."

"Will you sign this?" asked Dallon, and laid down the option form Laird had written.

"What has the John R. Street Baptist Church got to do with it?" Bray demanded.

"It makes the document more solemn."

With his pocket pen Dallon began to fill in the blank spaces.

"If you want sixty days——" Bray hinted.

"Sixty days it is. I'm new in business, remember. To organize our company may take longer than I think. Now for a description of the motor."

There they struck the snag that had wrecked Bray's prospects times without number in his pathetic career. His jealousy and suspicion returned in full force.

"I'll be telling you my secret for three hundred dollars," he objected.

Men like Peter Shelby and William Dallon would have abandoned the deal instantly. But Walter said: "Never mind. Just give me the patent numbers."

It was as Peter Shelby had found out in

Washington four years before. Felix Bray had never taken out patents.

"Without them you are left at the mercy of any common thief. You certainly need a business manager," said Dallon, and was content to describe the invention as "The Bray Hydromotor, the sole model of which is now in the possession of Felix Bray."

Word by word, then, they read the agreement through, and Bray wrote his signature. "We ought to have a witness," Dallon suggested. The inventor stepped into the hall and lifted his voice. "Hennessy! Come down a minute."

Down the stairs came a tottery old man, barefoot and wearing only a pair of shabby trousers and a red flannel undershirt. Having blinked at the light and made his mark on the paper, he went back upstairs.

"I doubt if he's awake," Dallon remarked.

"He works pretty hard," said Bray. "He works at the roundhouse. If it wasn't for him and what he pays me for his room I'd 'a' give up long ago."

"You look as if you needed sleep yourself," said Dallon, "so I won't keep you any longer. When do you want me to see the motor?"

Felix Bray's face darkened with the old caution.

"There's no hurry," the other hastened to add. "Wait till we get better acquainted, eh? To-morrow, if it's a pleasant day and you feel able, I'll take you for a buzz to Ann Arbor and back. Eighty miles of fresh air will do you more good than medicine."

When he had passed the rickety gate, Bray called him back. In the open doorway they stood, as Bray and Banniston had stood an hour earlier.

"I think you mean to be honest with me, young feller; and so I've got to be honest with you. To-night, before you came, when Banniston was here, he—he made me show him the secret. He knows what makes the motor go. I think I ought to tell you."

The young man on the doorstep was quick to sense that the little old inventor held some disclosure still in reserve. And it was so.

"Listen," Bray went on, putting his face close to Dallon's and speaking in a husky whisper. "He made me show him the secret. He knows what makes the motor go. But what he knows won't do him no good while I've got the model. We will fool him, you and me. Yes!"

"Then see that you take good care of the model," Dallon replied, and went away smiling. To him the evening had been only an adventure in comedy. If he had succeeded in accomplishing any annoyance to Bernard Banniston he would feel well rewarded for his outlay.

From the Stuller that night he mailed the option agreement to Marion Shelby at Bloomfield Hills as a present to that young woman and a token of his respect for her altruism.

CHAPTER XIV.

A GOLDEN DREAM.

Never had Detroit looked more golden to Bernard Banniston than it seemed next morning. Golden sunlight flooded the streets, especially those thronged with thousands of city toilers, most of whom bore signs of having accounts at the savings banks. Golden rays glinted from the windows of the towering skyscrapers. There was a golden gleam even in Mr. Banniston's eyes as he arrived at his office half an hour ahead of his usual time.

To his office girl he gave three rapid commands. "If young Walter Dallon comes in, say to him that I have gone to Chicago. Get busy on the phone and find my son Harry, and tell him I want to see him. Kales will be here in a minute. Pass him in."

Scarcely had he closed himself in his sanctum when a thin and hungry-looking person in shiny black, with a thin and oily black mustache under his beaklike nose, entered from the street.

"He is waiting for you, Mr. Kales," she said, and felt glad when the crow's gaze removed itself from her fresh morning cheeks.

By the time Mr. Kales came out of the inner office, Harry Banniston had arrived, bilious in complexion as ever, and ill at ease in manner.

"Here is where you get yours, Mr. Sport," thought the office girl, as Harry braved his father's presence.

But the sounds that came out to her ears in the succeeding half hour were not those of paternal reproof. They were sounds of jubilation, in which Mr. Banniston's voice carried the air.

Now, since the best of office girls are only human, and since Mr. Banniston's rosy-cheeked secretary had to look up several addresses in a filing cabinet that stood con-

venient to Mr. Banniston's door, it was only natural that she should overhear a fragment or two of the excited conversation going on behind that door.

"Water for motor power! My gosh! Harry, think of it!"

"And you never knew till last night?"

"I never dreamed of such a thing. I always thought he was a faker. We can understand now why he is so cagy. He has to be. The thing's so simple, the very first hint would set other people to working along the same line. I could almost build a hydromotor of my own after what I saw last night."

"Water for motor power sounds like a pipe," Harry observed. "Burn water? It can't be done. Why, look here, governor, water is only burned hydrogen. You might as well talk of burning cinders."

"Don't be so educated," his sire came back. "What's the matter with extracting the hydrogen out of the water and burning it over again as fuel in your engine cylinders, the same as you burn gasoline vapor?"

"Is that what Bray does?"

"Nothing less."

"My grief!" cried the Fatted Calf. "Think of all the fuel flowing past Detroit!"

"Think of the rivers, the lakes, the oceans of it—an explosion in every drop! And the Banniston Hydromotor Corporation holding exclusive patents on the only motor in the world that can use it! Think of the Standard Oil Company on its knees, and Amalgamated Motors on its face in the dust, and the little independents like Peter Shelby and Bill Dallon begging for mercy!"

Judging from the sounds that came out to the office girl, Mr. Banniston was romping the floor in his exultation.

"So you have changed the name of your company since yesterday," said Harry. "It isn't Dallon Motors any more. Where does Wally come in?"

"He goes out before he comes in. To hell with him!"

"But you promised him a job."

"Did I? Rot! I shall tell him that I made him my proposition yesterday to test his honesty, and he fell for it and, therefore, I am through with him. Or why can't you go to him as his friend and warn him not to come around here any more? Tip him off that there never was any such invention as I described to him. Jump on him, talk

to him like a Dutch uncle, and ask him why in the name of common sense he was such an easy mark."

"It's a wise son that knows his own father," Harry quoted. "Do you think I'm going to walk into a beating that belongs to you? Tell him yourself."

Again when the office girl consulted the filing cabinet she heard further exchange of thought on the other side of the mahogany partition.

"But the motor isn't yours yet, governor."

"It will be, after three o'clock."

"He can change his mind between now and then. He may find a better offer. He can get cold feet and disappear. Is it good business to leave him loose all this while?"

"It is the best kind of good business," Banniston, senior, answered. "It is pure psychology. By the middle of this afternoon he will be glad to come down to twenty-five hundred. I've got him where I want him. I had his house watched last night from midnight on, and Kales has his eagle eye glued to it now. Bray was sick last night, so he won't swim far. If I pull in the line too fast I'll lose my fish. I gave him too hard a yank last time, not knowing what a goldfish he was, and it set me back six months."

All of these speeches and others of like nature the office girl jotted down at leisure moments through the day. Her notes are now in the possession of a person not unconnected with the United States government, who was then in Detroit investigating certain schemes to defraud distant investors by mail.

It came to her attention also that twice in the day the crowlike person named Kales reported to Mr. Banniston by telephone, saying that Bray was at home and keeping indoors.

About two o'clock in the afternoon another message arrived. She took it herself, her employer having gone out to lunch, and delivered it to him when he returned. Bray had received a caller, a young man driving a Dallon roadster. But the young man had departed alone in his car within a minute.

Banniston pondered the message and thoughtfully observed the time of day. "Ring for a taxi," he commanded.

"One moment, sir. Here's Mr. Kales again," said the girl.

Her master took the instrument.

"The guy in the roadster has come back," announced Kales. "He's in the house now. It's Bill Dallon's son. He's got a doctor-looking guy with him."

Mr. Banniston dropped the receiver and rushed into the street, where the office girl saw him commandeer a passing taxicab.

Within the hour he returned, looking dark and ominous.

"Has a little old runt named Bray come in since I left?"

"No, sir."

"You sure?"

"Yes, sir."

Banniston snapped his watch with an alarming pop and walked to the plate-glass window, through which he regarded Griswold Street scowlingly. Somehow the street had lost its golden tinge since morning.

CHAPTER XV.

BASE INGRATITUDE.

A challenge from the daughter of a man like Peter Shelby to a round of golf at Bloomfield Hills is not one to be ignored. Such a challenge had reached young Dallon in the morning mail. But he excused himself by telephone and went to keep his promise to Felix Bray.

"He's sick," was Hennessy's greeting.

The scanty sunlight that penetrated the dust on the front-room windowpanes showed the bed still unmade and the table and the floor still littered with the odds and ends of an untidy bachelor's housekeeping. In the chair with the back sat Felix Bray, partly dressed, his looks bearing out Hennessy's brief statement.

"Hello, partner; where do you feel bad?" spoke the newcomer breezily.

"Here," Bray replied, lifting his left hand feebly to his side. "And I keel over when I try to stand up."

"He is better than he was this morning," Hennessy volunteered. "I stayed home from the roundhouse to look after him."

"And that's why I'm better," said Bray gratefully.

"Has he had a doctor?"

"I tell him he ought to have one. But he won't. He's all for doctoring himself with stuff he buys at the drug store."

"Well," said Dallon, "I'll go and fetch somebody to look him over. I'll be back, Hennessy, before you can get that bed made."

He was, in fact, and Hennessy stood holding a bed quilt while the physician examined the patient and listened to his heart.

"You've got a knock in there, my friend," the doctor told Bray, putting away the stethoscope. "You're in bad shape generally. Worst of all, you're undernourished. What do you eat?"

"All I need," said Bray.

"'Tis a dom lie," spoke Hennessy. "He don't eat but once a day, and then he makes out on what was left from the day before."

In the hall the doctor gave his judgment to Dallon.

"Angina pectoris or intercostal neuralgia. He can't do well in a hole like this."

"Can he stand a trip in my car to Mount Clemens?" Dallon asked. "I know people in a sanitarium there. If he needs to be free from disturbance there are reasons why he ought to leave town."

"If you drive carefully and get him there before another attack comes on, I don't think the ride will harm him."

The sick man, when the proposal was laid before him, shook his head. "I should be leaving Hennessy alone," said he.

"You do what the doctor tells ye," cried Hennessy. "Don't worry about me. I ain't anybody to consider. Away with you!"

Bray drew his lodger near and whispered with him, then Hennessy went into the back room and brought out the battered leather suit case.

"He says if he can take his invintion along with him he will go."

They made the patient comfortable among robes and coats in Dallon's roadster, and they buttoned on the side curtains to keep the wind out. At the first corner away from the house Dallon uttered an exclamation as a taxicab tore past.

Through the glass of the cab he had recognized its passenger. Bray had not seen. If the passenger had been Beelzebub himself, the worn-out inventor was too ill to have cared.

On the smooth Shore Drive in Grosse Point Dallon slowed speed to send a long look toward Dallondale. He fancied he could see his mother at her favorite window.

A run of half an hour, with the frozen lake always at their right, brought them into the quaint and quiet town of Mount Clemens and up to the entrance of an imposing-looking and old-fashioned sanitarium in the midst of a private park.

Sanitarium executives are of two kinds; those who look at the patient in cold calculation, figuring where they can operate upon him or upon his pocketbook, or upon both; and those who greet him with a warm and reassuring smile, as one who has come to be a guest at a house party.

Doctor Fuller belonged in the second class. Between him and Dallon there had been a strong mutual regard since a day, before the war, when they upset from the same canoe in an icy Canadian river.

After ten minutes of Doctor Fuller's cheery talk there was no mistrust or hesitation left in Bray. To this good effect a remark of Dallon's contributed. "My partner will rest easier in his mind," said Dallon, "if he is allowed to keep his suit case under his bed."

"We can arrange that," replied Fuller.

Leaving the sick man in a comfortable private room, with good nursing promised, Dallon sped back toward the city down Gratiot Avenue to execute a last commission for his protégé.

"Tell Hennessy I'm all right," Felix Bray had said.

In front of Bray's house, as Dallon drove up in the twilight of the winter day, stood another car—a car too princely for that plebeian neighborhood. Dallon knew its owner even before he saw the double B on the door panel.

Hennessy, looking frightened, admitted him. From the room off the little hall the big bluff cause of Hennessy's fright glowered at the newcomer.

"So, Walter," said Bernard Banniston severely, "you're a double-crosser, are you? I might have known it."

"A what?" replied Dallon.

"I guess you understand. Where have you taken Bray?"

"What do you mean—a double-crosser? Let's clear up that point first."

"This Irishman tells me that you came here last night and bought an invention of Bray's. Is that so?"

"In a way, yes; I bought a sixty-day option on his hydromotor. What's the harm? I still fail to see where I have double-crossed anybody, much less you, sir. You told me only yesterday morning that you never had heard of Bray. Perhaps you'll explain."

"Didn't you know I was dickering for the machine?"

"I heard that you had made Bray an

offer for it. But he seems to have liked my offer better."

"You knew I was after it, yet you played the sneak. If that's the way you treat the only friend you've got in the world, I'm glad I've found you out in time."

"But, listen, Mr. Banniston," said Dallon innocently. "If this invention is the wonderful new motor that you and I are going to manufacture together, we still have it, haven't we? And if it isn't, why, then, you are not out anything. In fact, you're in five thousand dollars. You told Bray it was no good, he says. You told him it was a mere toy."

"So it is—a toy, a curiosity for a museum, that's all. You thought I was buying it as a speculation. You saw a chance, you thought, to corner it and charge me your own price for it. Well, you're a deluded ass. I've had enough of you. I'm through. When you were down and out and the whole town was against you, I gave you a chance to come back, and you couldn't stay straight long enough to take it. Your own people knew you better than I did. I was a fool to try to be kind to you. I'm never a fool twice in the same place."

With all his rapid thinking, Mr. Banniston could not help being a bit incoherent. Breathing hard through his bulbous nose and glaring at the object of his scorn, he strode to the door, while the tottery old lodger ducked out of his path in the manner of a hapless pedestrian crossing a busy street in the rush hour.

"You're stung, young man—stung! I shall watch with great interest to see you get rich out of your—your plaything."

"It was only for a plaything that I put my money into it," said Dallon. "I'm having a fine time with it so far. Shall I tell you why I bought the option?"

"Why?"

"The other day I went to you expecting a little help and advice, thinking you were my friend. You wiped your feet on me. Well, all right; I have no hard feelings about that. But before the day was over you were bragging around town that Bill Dallon's son had come crawling to you for a job."

Barney Banniston forgot, in his surprise, to look angry.

"It was a piece of pure luck that gave me a line on your standing offer to Bray," continued Bill Dallon's son. "I think you wanted Bray's motor. I think it is the in-

vention you had in mind when you sent for me to have another talk. Why you wanted it I can't understand, if it is no good, as you say—unless you had a scheme to use it in swindling a lot of poor suckers out of their money, at the same time using my name, or, rather, my father's name, to make your game look respectable."

The big man's face went as red as a Jacqueminot rose—which it resembled in no other particular.

"I guess Bill Dallon is square with you now, Mr. Banniston, though he doesn't know it."

"You—you—I won't talk to you!" the financier spluttered. The street door closed with a bang. From outside came the whir of a starter and the clank of gear shifting. Hennessy gaped at the young man in wonder.

"I had a message for you, Mr. Hennessy. Your friend sends word that he is in good hands and you are not to worry about him. I will drop around every day or so and find out how you're coming along; and when Bray is better, you are to run up to Mount Clemens with me and see him."

"'Tis a kind heart you have, young gentleman," the grateful Hennessy responded. "Now, listen while I tell you something for your own good. Don't be believing what that noisy, big man says about the motor. A hundred times I've seen it work—and Bray, the poor divil, a-scared to show it to anybody else. Don't ever believe it's any silly toy, Mr. Dallon."

The new partner in the ownership of the silly toy winked solemnly, whereat Hennessy became suddenly filled with an old man's petulance.

"Believe anything you like, then," said he, "and don't blame me for your state of ignorance."

He was still feeling grieved when the unbeliever drove away.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SLANDER.

Within a few days a rumor went abroad throughout Detroit, spreading with the vivacity of quicksilver spilled on a polished hardwood floor. In comparison with it the dispatch from New York exposing the wickedness of Walter Dallon and the ire of William Dallon shrank to the insignificance of a police item.

How the rumor started would be hard to say. Paul Shelby, brother of Marion, heard it first in the athletic club from Higby Cass, heir apparent to vast soda interests.

"Blake Richardson told me he heard Harry Banniston say it to a crowd in the billiard room," Cass reported. "Blake warned him it was libel. We thought you ought to know, you having a sort of family interest in Dallon."

"Thanks for the tip," replied Paul Shelby.

"By the way, when you see Dallon, ask him to hunt me up, will you? Tell him I've been looking for him all week."

"I will," Shelby replied, understanding what Cass meant. Cass had jobs at his disposal in the big soda plant down the river.

Failing to discover Dallon's libeler at the club, Shelby phoned the Banniston home and got him there.

"What's this tale you're circulating about. Wally Dallon?" he demanded.

"Me circulating it?" the Fatted Calf answered. "My dear fellow, it's all over town."

"Is it fair to repeat it behind his back?"

"I spoke only to friends of his as a friend of his," Harry retorted. "What I said was that if the story is a lie, Wally ought to come out and face it down. But where is he? Do you know?"

"No, I don't."

"Nobody does," said Harry. "My private opinion is that he has skipped out. I've hunted for him high and low."

Paul Shelby was reminded of the traveler who said: "Egypt is full of fleas. I've been there." To be hunted high and low by Harry Banniston might account for any man's disappearance.

When Paul tried to tell the rumor to his father at Bloomfield Hills that evening he learned that Peter Shelby had already heard it in the city from numerous informants.

"Of course it's a lie," young Shelby declared. "Why, he gave the option to Marion as a present. I'd like to have a talk with him about it. But where to reach him?"

"Marion will know," said Peter Shelby, and called to his daughter.

She came into the den where her father and her brother were defending her young man's good name.

"You haven't played my nocturne for me to-night," said Peter Shelby. Paul drew her to him with a brotherly hand.

"What's the matter, sister? Why so solemnly?"

"I've been eavesdropping on you," she answered. "Besides, I met Molly Harris at the Westbrooks to-day, and she told me just what you've been saying. And I don't know where to reach Walter. He was staying at the Stuller, in Room Three-thirteen, under a stage name. But when I called his room on the phone just now I got a perfectly strange man who sounded like a drummer for a sausage factory."

"Why the stage name?" asked her father.

"So people wouldn't stare at him."

"He had better stick to it," Mr. Shelby averred. "With this new story out on him, the sightseers will follow him around in mobs."

Paul inquired, "Who was it that told you about him at the Westbrooks'?"

"Molly Harris."

"Is Molly a friend of the Bannistons'?"

"Indeed she is not. But she is a friend of Kate Herndie's, and Kate is a friend of Olga Slane's, and Olga Slane and Hazel Banniston are thicker than thieves."

A maid appeared at the door. Would Miss Marion talk with Mr. Walter Dallon on the telephone?

"Will I!" Miss Marion left the cigar smoke whirling. Her laughter came back to the den from the telephone in the library. When she returned she was beaming.

"Walter has a job," she announced. "He makes six dollars a day and wears overalls. He has been at it three days, and has only one thumb and three fingers in good condition and is proud of his wounds. He says the foreman praised him twice to-day in rapid succession."

"Two people can live on six dollars a day, all right," her brother assured her. "But there won't be much left over for altruism."

"What is he doing, and where is he doing it?" her father queried.

"He is operating an electric screw driver," Marion boasted. "He won't say where."

"Have you taken him on at the plant, dad?" asked Paul. Mr. Shelby shook his head.

"We are to guard his secret," said the happy young woman. "He is afraid if it gets to his foreman's ears that he is a sporting character, the foreman will fire him. The foreman has lent him a copy of the *Christian Herald* to read and invited him to church next Sunday."

"Then he isn't in the Midlakes plant. My foremen all read the *Christian Advocate*," Peter Shelby chuckled. "Did he mention the new talk that's going the rounds about him?"

"No. I'm sure he hasn't heard it."

"Let's hope he won't hear it while his hands are in bad shape," said Shelby, junior. "A man needs two sound fists to answer a rumor like that."

The new slander found its way into the acres of shops where the Dallon cars were manufactured. Workmen who had grown gray in the service of Bill Dallon spat in disgust when they heard it. Among them was Dave Cumnock, foreman of the engine-assembling department. In a lull in the day's work Mr. Cumnock expressed his opinion to a group of older men.

"If it is the truth, then it is an offense to every man of us that has worked alongside William Dallon to build up the good repute of the Dallon name. But maybe it isn't true. I shouldna go repeating it and adding to the old man's burden."

A young man in overalls, lingering near the group—a new hand on the electric screw driver—overheard the discussion and wondered what it was all about.

In at least one other place the rumor was discounted. In the smoky roundhouse of the Wabash Railroad it found a challenger in the person of a tottery old wiper of engines, who called upon the saints to witness that it was a lie. Hennessy spoke from first-hand knowledge; but nobody interviews roundhouse helpers regarding the high-financial sins of the sons of automobile manufacturers.

In some quarters the rumor found a better reception. The respectable newspapers let it alone, but the virtuous *Evening Leader-Ledger* took it as the text for an editorial broadside against the selfishness of spoiled young men—mentioning no names, be sure, but making the identity of the spoiled young man in question clear enough to most readers residing between Hamtramck Township and River Rouge. "Shame on him!" said the righteous editors.

William Dallon missed hearing the juicy story in the city, thanks to the considerateness of his friends. But at home he read the editorial and guessed what was meant; and after he had burned the green newspaper in the fireplace he called up his secretary.

"Wickersham, what the dickens is the *Evening Verdegris* driving at in their 'Spare

the Rod' editorial? I suppose they mean my son. But what is behind it all?"

The secretary had not held his place in his employer's confidence by side-stepping when unpleasant truth had to be told. Your soft-soaper only greases the skids by which he will sooner or later be shot into outer darkness.

This, briefly, was the tale that William Dallon heard: His son, having been sacked, and desiring to be revenged, had somehow secured control of a fake motor which the half-witted Felix Bray had peddled around town for years. With this his sole asset, he had approached bankers in Griswold Street, proposing to organize a stock company that should bear the Dallon name and trade upon the Dallon reputation. The stock was to be sold to widows and orphans in distant parts. Only the sterling honesty of the bankers approached by him had prevented him from launching his infamous plot. Becoming alarmed at last by certain things that were said to him, the young man had left town. Bray also had disappeared.

William Dallon rose from the telephone and went seeking his helpmeet. He found her in her favorite rocking-chair, between her sewing stand and a basket of mending.

"When did you hear from Walter last?" he asked.

"This evening. Why, William?"

"Where is he?"

"You are the fifth person to ask me that question to-day," said Mrs. Dallon. "First it was Mrs. Banniston. She paid me a lovely call this morning and was very solicitous about him. She said her husband had a fine position for Walter if they could find him. Then Marion Shelby phoned, and afterward her brother Paul, and they both wanted to know where he was. And all afternoon Walter's friend, Doctor Fuller, has been calling up from Mount Clemens."

"What does Fuller want of him?"

Mrs. Dallon's eyes sparkled with motherly pride and triumph.

"It seems that our boy has been playing the good Samaritan," she made answer. "He has been taking care of a poor old sick man he ran across—a man named Bray. He found him in need and took him to Doctor Fuller's sanitarium, and now——"

"Say that name again," William Dallon broke in.

"Bray—why, William, what's the matter?"

He had suddenly swung around on his heel and gone to the window, there to stare out into the night.

"What is it, William? Do you see something?"

One night, looking from that window, they had seen a lake vessel afire. This night it was something else that William Dallon saw, and the sight left him sick at heart.

CHAPTER XVII.

FATHER AND SON.

On the day when "J. J. Doe" checked out at the Stuller and drove away with his hand luggage and his leather trunk, a young man with similar baggage registered at the Travelers, an old-fashioned and less important hotel near the University, writing himself down as "W. D. Allen."

Within twenty-four hours he had established a routine of living. At seven in the morning he went away, returning after five in the evening. Upon his return he entered a telephone booth in the lobby and remained therein for ten minutes. After dinner he stayed in his room, his light burning late.

The only person in the hotel whose curiosity he aroused at first was the matronly chambermaid on his floor, who wondered at the row of new books on mechanical engineering that stood upon his dresser, also at the bottles of liniment that cluttered his washstand.

But one evening after his telephoning he left the hotel hurriedly and did not reappear until the silent hour of three in the morning. With him he brought a large and badly worn leather suit case that proved to be heavy when the night clerk took it across the desk, at his request, and deposited it in the hotel vault.

From the let-down in law and order that followed the World War, Detroit suffered in common with most cities. Holdups and burglaries were so numerous that newspapers spoke of the "crime wave" and scolded the police.

When W. D. Allen left the hotel next morning he was accompanied, without his knowledge, by a quiet-moving person who kept him in sight until he passed in at the workmen's gate at the Dallon factory.

Later in the day the quiet-moving person made his report in Farmer Street. W. D. Allen was employed in the engine-assembling department of the Dallon Motor Car Com-

pany. His reference, given to the company at the time of his employment, was James Laird, of Mathison, Wilkinson, Hurley, Kester & Laird, attorneys. When interviewed, Mr. Laird spoke in high praise of the young man under observation and guaranteed to the police that he was no burglar. The detective bureau was busy enough to be glad to take Jimmy Laird's word for it.

In this history we need make no mystery of the errand that kept "W. D. Allen" out so late on the night in question. His visit over the telephone with his mother that evening had brought him unexpected news.

"Doctor Fuller has called me three times to-day from Mount Clemens," said Mrs. Dallon. "He wants me to tell you that a Mr. Bray, one of his patients, is dying."

"Poor old Bray!" her son exclaimed, in quick regret. "I've neglected him. I'll run out there to-night."

"Who is Mr. Bray, Walter?"

"Just a poverty-stricken old codger I've taken an interest in," he answered.

After midnight he stood looking down with Doctor Fuller at the bed where Felix Bray lay dead. The old man seemed to sleep. The fear, the pain, the disappointment were gone from his face. His fight was done.

"I had no idea he was so near the end," said Dallon, when the ordeal was over.

"There was no chance to save him," the physician replied. "The best we could do was to make his last days as easy as we could. He has been under morphia most of the time since you left him here, and he has suffered, at that. It was only this morning that his mind cleared up and he asked for you. We tried to reach you and couldn't. He must have known that his time was short, for he insisted upon seeing you. At last he called for pen and paper and made a will."

"I wish I had known how bad off he was," said Dallon, awed by the quiet face on the pillow. "I've been so busy all week, I almost forgot him."

"He thought a heap of you," the physician replied, and placed a paper in Dallon's hands:

I, Felix Bray, being of sound mind, make this will. I give all my belongings to my next friend, Michael Hennessy, except only my motor known as the Bray Hydromotor. This invention and all rights to its use, with all plans, specifications, and models, I give to Walter Dallon, of Detroit, provided said Dallon will agree upon his word of honor to pay to Michael Hennessy the sum

of twenty thousand dollars within six months of the time when the Hydromotor is proved to have a market value. And I appoint said Walter Dallon my sole executor without bond.

Three signatures followed, those of Bray, the doctor, and the nurse.

"Perhaps a lawyer could tear it apart," said Fuller, "but I think it will hold. What shall be done with the property he brought here with him?"

The "property" consisted of the leather suit case, which had lain under the inventor's bed during his week in the sanitarium, and a package of papers in a pocket-worn envelope. Dallon undertook the custodianship and, when the doctor asked for directions regarding the burial, said: "Give the old chap a first-class send-off and send me the bill." They agreed that the funeral should be held on the following Sunday.

With the suit case beside his feet, Dallon drove slowly back to the city through the night, taking the Shore Road in order that he might pass Dallondale. As the car rolled along the smooth and deserted highway he meditated upon the uncertainties of earthly fortune.

Within only a few years his father's position in life had been that which Felix Bray had just relinquished—the position of a man with a consuming idea in which other people found it hard to believe. In another environment, yes, even in Detroit, William Dallon might have led such a weary, hopeless, futile life as Bray's, if the luck of the game had not been kind to him.

"Poor chap," thought the son of William Dallon.

He was thinking not of the old inventor whose death he had witnessed, but of his father. In his eyes, since his earliest recollection, his father had always been a man of affairs, established and successful. Bray had unwittingly given him a glimpse of a side of his father's life which he had never considered—a glimpse of a plucky American tackling the game against odds and alone.

The pale roof and the dark shadows of the Dallon palace loomed in his view under the winter stars. Late as the hour was, there was a light in his father's room. At the upper gate he checked the pace of the car and on the impulse of half a second he drove into the grounds. At a distance from the house he stepped the engine and blanketed the hood.

His latchkey was still on the ring. Softly

he unlocked the great door and went in. His hand found the wall button and made the hall light. From the wall above the stair landing a life-size portrait of his father looked down at him, done by a famous artist imported from Boston especially for the task. The artist had made a noble-looking figure of the man in the picture; but then, thought Walter, he had a fine model.

He reached the head of the stairs and saw his father's door ajar. From the lighted room the rustle of a book page came to his ears. He knew what it meant. When burdened with cares and unable to sleep, William Dallon sat up and read.

Now another sound issued from the room. "Come on in."

It was his father's voice, raised the least degree above a conversational tone.

"Come on in. Why do you stand out there?"

For a moment the prowler wondered to whom his father might be speaking. Comprehending at last, he went in.

"Close the door," said William Dallon, showing no surprise. Wrapped in a bath robe, he sat in an easy-chair under a reading light with the encyclopedia volume open on his knees. Over the top of his spectacles he conned the intruder coolly.

"I thought it was you," said he. "I knew it was one of our cars, anyway. What do you want?"

"Seeing your windows lighted as I passed," replied the son, undaunted by the not very encouraging beginning, "I ran in."

"What are you doing on the road at this time of night?"

There was a note in the question that brought a retort in kind.

"May I remind you that I don't answer to you for my conduct any more?"

"You left off doing that years ago," retorted the father. "This is still my house, however. What are you doing in it?"

The young man had thought of sitting down with his sire in a homelike and familiar manner. He thought again and remained standing.

"I came in," he said, "to tell you that I am sorry for the things that have happened—sorry, I mean, for being a killjoy in your life. I owe you better treatment. But you will only think I am trying to pull your leg, so I may as well save my breath. Good night to you."

"Yesterday I might have been glad to hear

you," Mr. Dallon replied. "But to-night I have discovered things. I guess you are quite right about the leg-pulling. I guess that's the calling you were cut out for, Walter."

He tried not to raise his voice; but sarcastic accusation cannot very well be uttered in a modulated undertone.

"I'd be glad to be put wise to what you're driving at," Walter answered. "Whose leg am I pulling?"

"At first I didn't believe it of you," said William Dallon. "Even if you were a fool, I gave you credit for being an honest one. And you have as good a right to the name of Dallon as I have. I don't deny that. But when you propose to exploit the business reputation of the Dallon Motor Car Company you're a common thief."

"Who says I propose such a thing? Dad, it's a black lie."

Disregarding the son's savage earnestness, the father went on scornfully.

"I'm not worried over your pretty scheme. Understand that. In the first place, nobody will have the gall to go in with you, and in the second place, I'll fight you off the earth if you try it. What I worry about is that a son of mine, bearing a name without a shadow of shame, should suggest such a low-down piece of—— I don't know a vile enough name to call it!"

"Will you listen to me tell you that I'm not guilty?"

"That's what I said about you—at first. When they hinted that you had bought a crazy machine from a loon named Bray and planned to bleed the public with it, I said it couldn't be true. But I discover to-night that you are actually in some kind of deal with Bray. Otherwise, why has Bray called this house by phone all day, trying to reach you? Why is he lying low at your expense in Mount Clemens? And why have you sneaked away and hidden from the sight of your friends? I guess the story is straight goods, after all."

"Who tells it?" Walter cried.

Well enough he knew that such a fabrication could have only one source. Why Baniston had put it out he could not imagine.

"I don't know who started it," his father answered. "But it must be common talk, for Wickersham heard it and there's a piece about it in the paper to-night. Everybody knows it, apparently, yet you stand here and claim it's news to you."

"I claim nothing of the sort."

"Oh! then you know something about it, after all. Who set it going? Come on! Talk!"

"All I care to say is that it's a lie."

"Who's the liar, then? Who is the banker who says you approached him?"

To confess unfilial conduct is an easy matter. To acknowledge miserable judgment in the choosing of one's friends is harder, especially when one's father's eyes have an expectant and tigerish "I-told-you-so" gleam in them.

"Is it a certain friend of yours who has me slated for the Old Folk's Home?"

Still the young man stood silent.

"Evidently his friendship for you ain't as strong as his devotion to truth and his passion for honest dealing. How about it?"

The son boiled over at last.

"Since you are so keen to believe the lie, you may go to—you may go on believing it and be—and be convinced!"

"Punch out the hall light as you leave," said his father.

When the outer door had closed and the buzz of the motor died away, William Dallon put aside his encyclopedia and stood up.

In the cleared space in the middle of the room he went through a series of curious motions, while the cord of his bath robe twitched and wriggled on the rug behind him like a very lively serpent.

First he planted his left foot well in front of his right. Next he raised his left arm before his face and drew back the other arm, both fists clenched. Then he shot his right fist with terrific force at a point in the air and followed with his left, continuing with a furious burst of swings, jabs, uppercuts, and slaughterhouse wallops until he had beaten the point in air to an imaginary pulp and had no breath left, except enough to say:

"Take that, you big danged tarantula!"

Unseen by him, his wife observed these gymnastics from the door of her bedroom.

"William, man, what in the name of goodness!"

He faced her, looking sheepish.

"Sally," said he, still puffing, "if you were a man and a father—and you'd been thinking your son was as crooked as a crank shaft—and you suddenly discovered that there was a chance—that he was as square as a die—I reckon you'd take a little exercise, too."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE "CAMEL" TANK.

Felix Bray's funeral was in keeping with his life. Two mourners and two only followed the body from the sanitarium chapel to its next-to-last resting place, the receiving vault of the wintry cemetery at the edge of Mount Clemens. Hat in hand, Hennessy saw the iron doors close. On the way back to the city in Dallon's car he spoke no word, but from his moving lips Dallon knew that he was praying that the soul of his friend might be at peace.

The Sunday afternoon crowds were flocking around the theaters as Bray's mourners drove through the heart of the city toward Hennessy's smoky neighborhood. In the car now was the leather suit case, reclaimed from the safe at the Travelers' Hotel.

Dallon had no interest this day in legacies and inventions. He was concerned with other matters—his latest clash with his father, the editorial in the newspaper, and a talk he had held on the telephone with Peter Shelby, who assured him in kindly candor that the world believed him to be going up and down Griswold Street with a perpetual-motion machine, seeking whom he might devour. He had resolved to go to the Bannistons for an accounting. Why had they circulated the outrageous story? Was it meant to be a back-fire to protect them against things he might tell on Barney B., or was it a piece of sheer spite? For the life of him he could not see why his double-hearted friends had spread the libel or what they had gained by it.

But a trust had been placed in his hands—a trust for Hennessy. That business, he reflected, would have to come before the pleasure of bearding liars.

In the work room of the little house they opened the suit case. Dallon's sensation in the next few moments was that of the come-on who examines the parcel left in his care by the confiding stranger and finds it to contain a gilded paving brick. For Bray's suit case held little except a queer-shaped brass tank.

The body of the tank was oval in cross-section, and filled the leather case from end to end. What gave the object its odd look was a pair of domelike protuberances that grew out of its upper surface, one near either end, leaving room in the case only for a small cardboard box that lay between them.

Dallon thumped the tank and got back a dull, dead sound, not the brassy ring he expected. He looked at the two bulging domes.

"We call this the 'camel' tank for short," said Hennessy, "on account of the humps."

"But a tank is all it is. Where's the motor?"

Hennessy stepped to a cupboard and opened the doors, and Dallon saw the diminutive model that Peter Shelby had described to him—the model that had stood in sight on the table at Bray's "demonstration" four years before. At first glance it resembled an ordinary four-cylinder internal-explosion engine.

"He made it himself, every part but the plugs," Hennessy declared.

The spark plugs were of a common commercial kind and looked uncouth and overgrown in the heads of the four little cylinders. Dallon observed also that the carburetor was something new in its line.

"But wait," spoke Hennessy, "wait till you see what makes this engine go. Did you ever hear of a gas engine that ran on water, like a pro-hy-bitonist?"

He set the camel tank in a rack on the floor so that it was held firmly in place, its domes pointing upward. From corners of the room he brought two steel spheres, bigger than basket balls, two small electric air pumps, and odd lengths of steel tubing with neat brass connecting joints at the ends. Then with hands that worked slowly but assuredly he began the process of assembling this miscellany.

"You seem to understand it," Dallon remarked, his interest quickened by the confident air of the old Irishman.

"Don't I tell you I've seen him run it a hundred times?" Hennessy replied. "I know all about it except one thing, and that is what makes it go. Be dommed if I could ever see that."

The air pumps, it seemed, fitted into holes in the tops of the domes, and were to be connected by means of steel tubes with the steel spheres.

"I will go no further in that direction now," said Hennessy. "But I can tell you that there is nothing more to do but to join up these here round tanks with this here dooflicker at the side of the motor"—he indicated the carburetor.

"We come now to the heart of the matter.

Will you hand me the two little doodads in the pasteboard box?"

The "two little doodads" proved to be plugs that screwed into openings in the ends of the camel tank. The inner face of each plug was studded with tiny points of brightly shining silvery metal. On the outer face of each was a screw clamp for a wire.

"Handle with care," said Hennessy. "He was a whole year saving the money to buy the material for them two bits of jewelry. Platinum, they are."

"Electrodes," thought Dallon.

"Now, if you will look under his workbench you will find his storage batthry," Hennessy commanded. "We will connect up the doodads with the batthry, and then our job of plumbing will be done."

The battery produced and the connections made, he sat down on a stool and rested from his labors.

"I will tell you what he used to do," he said. "Do you see this cap?" He touched a filling plug at the top of the camel tank. "Yes, I see."

"Well, he would take that off and pour in a spoonful of the acid in the blue bottle on the shelf yonder. Then he would put in a funnel and run the tank full of water and screw the cap on again. Next he would switch on the batthry and give her a little time, then he would turn the crank a couple of spins, and off the motor would go as smooth as a lady's gold watch, till the water in the ginerator was used up. I never could see why he called it the 'gin-erator' when it consumed water; but that was the name he give it."

Dallon took down the blue bottle from the shelf and held the glass stopper to his nose.

"Oil of vitriol," said he. "How long would his brass tank last with this stuff eating the insides out of it?"

"I've heard him say it had lead insides," Hennessy replied. "There is also what he calls a die-phragm in it, which he used to say is to keep the operator from dying a sudden death. He didn't have a die-phragm in the tank that blew up on him."

"Was he blown up?"

"He was that, sir, and the house with him, and seven months in the hospital he was. It happened before he came to Detroit."

Dallon tried to recall the details of a chemical experiment of his school days, a

simple experiment designed to show the composition of water. As he remembered it, the water was acidified, then subjected to the action of an electric current, with the result that oxygen bubbles collected above one electrode and hydrogen bubbles above the other. But that process was a slow one.

"How long," he asked, "could Bray run the motor on one filling of the tank?"

"I've known it to run an hour at a stretch."

No more the lodger could tell, except pathetic tales of the weary months in which Bray, toiling at night, had struggled with his problems.

"It was the two little doodads that gave him the most bother," said Hennessy.

Evening had come when Dallon went away from the house.

"This stuff can stay here, if you don't mind looking after it," he told the old man. "I'll be back to-morrow."

Within a block he had forgotten the motor and let his thoughts return to the more personal and pressing matter of the bone that he had to pick with Barney Banniston. At the hotel he was to forget that vexatious subject also, for Paul Shelby awaited him, having come to perform a bit of altruism at his sister's behest.

"I am commissioned to drag you to Bloomfield Hills for supper," said Paul. "Dad and Marion think you need to be cheered up."

In his Midlakes roadster they left the city and its troubles behind. Not all its troubles, either, for Dallon discovered that he had in his pocket the envelope, bulky and worn, containing the private papers of Felix Bray.

"They may amuse Peter Shelby," he thought.

He himself had lost all curiosity regarding Bray's secret. "A job of plumbing," Michael Hennessy had called it, and a job of plumbing it was. Life thenceforth for our young man looked too serious to contain time for absurdities.

CHAPTER XIX.

INSIDE THE FAMILY.

Bray's death, occurring on Friday night, was mentioned by the Mount Clemens correspondents in their Saturday morning grist to the Detroit papers. The suburban editor of the *News* saw in the three-line item a

city story. The city editor passed the note along to a rewrite man, who, with the aid of clippings from a filing envelope in the "morgue," produced a quarter-column sketch of Felix Bray's career in Detroit.

Bernard Banniston gripped the newspaper with tense hands as he recognized the significance of the lines under his eye. When he had devoured the article the second time he left his leather chair and went softly upstairs to his son's room. He found the young man in front of a mirror, doctoring a boil on his chin.

"Bray is dead," said Banniston. "While we hunted him here in town he was lying up at a sanitarium in Mount Clemens."

"So that's where Wally Dallon hid him, is it? Too bad, governor. Another bright dream fades away. But, then, you're good at dreaming. You can easily dream another."

"I wish you would quit admiring your beauty in that glass and pay attention to me," said the father.

Thoughtfully he closed the door.

"The bright dream you mention is brighter than ever. Old Bray is dead, but his secret has not died with him. It is still in the world for anybody who can corner it. By rights it is mine. I offered him good money for it, and my offer was practically accepted. The deal went so far that he told me the central idea of the invention, which is more than he ever told anybody else. I've been defrauded."

Accustomed to fooling himself as he fooled others, Barney Banniston had lashed himself into full belief that he had been injured. Those who observed him in the week just ended say that he seemed to have aged ten years. His flaccid urbanity had given place to an air of exasperation, and all about him suffered, including his office girl in Griswold Street, to whose daily reports to the postmaster general's secret-service agent in Detroit we are indebted for much of our information.

"It's my invention now," he stormed on. "I know so much about it that I could go into court and prove that Bray and I were working together on it. I can produce witnesses to testify that I have hinted at something of the sort for months."

"But Wally Dallon holds an option on the thing," Harry objected.

"How do I know he does? Let him produce his option and we'll fight over it. I'll

show him up for a sneak who stole my project after I confided it to him. But dash the option! We can handle this affair without publicity, if we have any brains at all."

For some minutes Mr. Banniston expounded his brainy plan while his son listened doubtfully. At the end Harry offered two criticisms.

"It's criminal, governor, therefore dangerous. Besides, what about the patents?"

"Bray never took out patents, I tell you. The thing will belong to whoever gets to Washington with it first. As to the crime we shall commit, aren't we only recovering what is really our own? Of course, as you say, there may be a little personal danger. I suppose I shouldn't have asked you. I should have asked Hazel."

"Oh, I'll tackle it," said Harry sulkily, and soon left the house. Returning in a little while, he found his father glooming before the fireplace.

"I called the sanitarium. I told the doctor I was a friend of Bray's and asked if there was anything I could do. He said everything had been attended to, and the funeral set for noon to-morrow. I told him I owed Bray a little money for some work Bray did for me, and he referred me to Wally Dallon."

"Did you tell the doctor who you were?"

"Yes; I said I was Paul Shelby."

"Probably the model is there at the sanitarium," Banniston mused, aloud. "It isn't in Bray's house, I know. The engine is there, but not the generator."

"How do you know that, governor?"

"Do you think I've been asleep all this week?"

"If you have a burglar on your staff," said Harry, "I wish you'd assign him to this job and let me out."

"Unfortunately, my burglar has been nabbed by the police. Poor Kales! I sent him out to Grosse Pointe day before yesterday to nose around among the Dallon help and try to locate Walter, and the detectives took him in. They think he did the Grand River jewelry job of last week. Likely he did. Anyway, Harry, I think we had better keep our next move inside the family."

The young man's mournful look showed how well he liked a life of danger.

"I don't see what your hurry is, governor. Wally can't do a thing with his stolen goods, now that you've attended to his credit so thoroughly. He couldn't sell even a tin

whistle in this town, much less a new motor. You've got him where you want him."

"Be not slothful in business, my son," replied Bernard Banniston. "You can at least do this. You can happen to be in Mount Clemens at noon to-morrow, in time for the funeral. Likely young Dallon will be there, too, and you will have a chance to track him home and put a chalk mark on his door, wherever that may be. Perhaps you can make some inquiries that will help us. Most important of all, you may catch sight of an old leather suit case which is not at present in Bray's house. Tell me where that suit case is, Harry, my boy, and I'll give you a month at Palm Beach."

Thus the feet of reluctant youth were led along the path of filial duty.

CHAPTER XX.

HENNESSY JUMPS.

Michael Hennessy had spent his Sunday evening in putting in order the scanty possessions of his late friend and landlord. They were now his, but all told they added little to his wealth. An unbroken package of chewing tobacco that he found on a shelf gave him more satisfaction than anything else in his inheritance.

There came a knock at the front door. A stout young man in an automobile cap and a bear-skin coat thrust himself in as the door opened. The visor of his cap was pulled down over his eyes, the collar of his coat was turned up, so that little of his face except a boil was visible. But his voice was reassuring.

"I'm a friend of Walter Dallon's."

"Are ye, now?" said Hennessy.

"He is having a meeting at his hotel to-night—about the motor, you know. I've come in my car to get it."

"The motor?"

"Bray's motor, you understand. We want to have a look at the business end of it—the double-humped tank. Dallon can't very well leave his friends, so I'm here in his place. He sends his card so you'll know it's all right."

"I suppose if he wants it, he wants it," replied the old man, holding the card close to his eyes. "He says to let Mr. Shelby have what he asks for. Are you Mr. Shelby?"

"Yes—Paul Shelby. If I had a card of my own I could prove it to you, couldn't

I? But I'm afraid I haven't. No, sir, my card case is empty."

"I guess it is all right," said Hennessy, "but I should not like a mistake to be made, for Mr. Dallon is a kind young gentleman."

"Kind as a woman," agreed the caller. "Never makes a show of his kindness, either. It was only by accident to-night that we found out what he did for poor old Bray."

Passing Hennessy, the stranger entered the front room and looked quickly left and right.

"I'll bet you miss your friend, eh? You and he kept house here alone? Just the two of you?"

Farther he went and reached the work-room.

"Here's the tank with the humps, sure enough," said he. "This is the part Dallon wants."

"Hands off," Hennessy warned him. "Let us have everything clear and understood first. Where might the young gentleman be, now?"

"At the Travelers' Hotel. Didn't I explain? He's rather in a hurry, you know. If you'll just cast off these attachments and let me have it——"

"Be dommed if I will let ye have it," Hennessy made answer. "If the young gentleman wants the tank, I will take it to him meself."

"There's no use putting yourself to all that trouble, no use at all. I have my car outside and——"

"Then I'll ride with ye. I want to see him, annyhow, about another matter." Hennessy thought of the broken window lock.

The stranger smote his driving gloves together impatiently. "You'll have to come back alone, you know. I shall have to stay with Dallon and the others."

"Well, and the Baker Street cars run every so often, now, don't they?"

The caller having no reply to meet this suggestion, the old man began to dismantle the machine. He glanced up to see his guest scowling at a very good-looking gold watch.

"If ye don't want to wait," said Hennessy, "then go ahead to Mr. Dallon and say to him that I will be bringing the tank along in half an hour."

"Oh, I'll wait. But shake it up, please."

The motorist lit a cigarette and paced the front-room floor. He had time to do a good many turns and consume two additional cigarettes before the old man's task was finished.

"I will now go upstairs for me hat and

coat," said Hennessy. "Then I'll be with you."

Hopefully the other reached for the leather suit case.

"I said I would take it to him meself"—and Hennessy lugged the heavy case up the stairs.

When he came down again he found the front door wide open. In the street he saw his guest spring into a roadster and heard the roar of the starter.

"'Tis in a great hurry ye are, bedad," said the old fellow, appearing at the side of the car as the engine began to hum.

The person at the wheel growled a disgusted oath as his passenger climbed in beside him.

"I might think ye was trying to run away without me," Hennessy remarked. To this criticism of manners the driver made no response, but sent his car away with a jerk.

By back streets they reached Michigan Avenue. At Washington Boulevard they they swung abruptly left.

"This is not the way to Mr. Dallon's hotel," Hennessy protested. "That's up by the college."

No reply came from the depths of the fur coat.

Before the passenger knew, they had passed Grand Circus Park and were pushing northward in Woodward Avenue at an amazing rate of speed, even for that swift thoroughfare.

"Where are ye going now, I want to know?" Hennessy cried.

"Shut your face," was the answer, "or I'll hit you a crack with this."

In the young man's hand on the wheel Hennessy saw a wrench with ugly jaws.

It took him a mile to gather his old wits together. Then he felt for and found the door latch. "By and by we shall come to a trolley car crowd and have to slow up," he thought.

The luck was the other way. Traffic on that cold Sunday night was light, and they had no occasion for slacking pace.

They overtook trolley cars, but all were moving. Twice Hennessy gasped for breath and crossed himself as they missed collisions with other motorists at street intersections.

The shops of the avenue gave place to a district of homes, then came shops again as the car bored through the main street of Highland Park.

"Will ye answer me a civil question?"

spoke Hennessy, when the Ford plant had dropped behind.

The driver kept silent as he crouched over the wheel. At the rate of speed they traveled, he had enough to do to hold his car in the roadway.

At the left lay Palmer Park. When that was past, Hennessy formed a great resolve.

His right hand pressed back the door catch, his left grasped the suit-case handle. Far ahead, where the road stretched away toward the wintry country, the car lights picked out two slim boyish figures trudging townward with packs on their backs.

When the car had come up to them, Hennessy stepped down upon the running board and jumped.

At a not very late hour that evening Paul Shelby left Bloomfield Hills for the city, with Dallon on the other side and Marion snug between them.

For two reasons Dallon's visit at the Shelby home had been brief. First, Mr. Shelby, after spending an hour examining Bray's papers, had exhibited a degree of excitement unusual in him.

"I'd like to have a look at those platinum electrodes," he declared. "Where are they?" When he heard the truth he became more excited still. "The very platinum in them is worth too much to leave them lying around like that," said he. "You'd better drive in with Walter, Paul, and bring them out here for safe-keeping."

The other reason why Dallon went back to the city early was, to his way of thinking, a more important one. He had to get in a good night's sleep in order to show up at the Dallon Motor Car Company's factory at eight o'clock sharp in the morning to operate an electric screw driver.

At the city line young Shelby uttered a cry and grasped the brake lever. His lights showed a car standing dark in the road. Beside it two tall lads in boy-scout uniforms, with packs on their shoulders, held up their hands to warn the approaching machine.

"Some one has had an accident," said Marion.

Beside the dark car her brother stopped. One of the scouts hopped upon the running-board.

"Can you take a man to the hospital?"

"Sure. What's the matter?"

"He jumped out of that car," said the scout, "while it was running forty miles an

hour. My pal and I, we were hiking home from the Stevens' farm and we saw him fall. The car stopped—you can smell the burned rubber yet—and the fellow driving it got out and came back. When he saw us he ran back to the car and tried to start it up, and it went dead on him. Something broke; you could hear it half a mile. The last we saw of him, he was beating it over the Fair Ground fence. A heavy-set guy he was, in a fur overcoat."

"It's an Olin car," said Paul Shelby, leaning out to look.

But Marion was more concerned about the man who had jumped. "Where is he?" she asked.

"Down the road fifty yards," replied the scout. He pointed the way as Shelby drove slowly to the spot where the second scout bent over a dark figure on the ground.

The rays of Shelby's searchlight fell upon the upturned face of Hennessy.

"Are you hurt, old fellow?" Dallon had knelt beside him.

"'Tis the young gentleman! The saints be praised!" Hennessy answered feebly yet fervently. "No, thank ye, sir, I am not bad hurt at all. Am I not an old railroader that has dropped off moving trains all me life? I'd have lit right-side up with care, and no trouble to anybody, only for me baggage."

He felt around over the ground until his hand found the suit case.

"You sent for it, Mr. Dallon, and I was bringing it to you. Here it is."

CHAPTER XXI.

SHORT BUT SWEET.

The winter drew to its close. Work-weary people began to send longing thoughts up the river to Belle Isle and the Flats and down the river to Sugar Island and Bob Lo. There was the good smell of fresh paint around the idle excursion steamers, tied at their piers.

It was not often that William Dallon's secretary had occasion to enter the big shops behind the administration building. But one day he passed through the engine-assembling department. At the door he turned around.

"Morning, Mr. Wickersham," spoke the foreman.

"Morning, Cumnock."

They had to shout to make themselves heard above the rattle of the machinery.

"That's a good-looking workman there on the screw driver," said the secretary.

The workman held in his hand what looked like a length of garden hose suspended from the ceiling. Deftly, as the clanking conveyor drew an engine body past his station, he jabbed the end of the implement at the cold iron mass, touching it here and there, reaching over to touch it again, walking beside it to give it a parting jab as it trundled by to the next worker in the long line. With every jab of his machine a screw went as tight into the iron as if it had been welded there. Mechanics in distant parts would groan when they came to take those screws out.

"He is a hustler," said the foreman. "Nobody on that job before could ever keep up with the procession. But there is no slacking in this lad."

"What's his name?" asked Wickersham.

"Allen. A moral lad he is, too. He is doing a grand work in my church on Friday nights with a gang of young hoodlums that nobody else could ever handle. He is making good citizens of them."

"Allen, you say?"

"Yes, sir. We have had him about three months."

Strange it seemed for the president's secretary to show such interest. But the foreman had greater cause to wonder when the president himself came, half an hour later, and from the doorway fixed his sharp eyes on the workman in question.

What Wickersham said to William Dallon, and what William Dallon said to his secretary are things not known to this historian. But a circumstance that occurred in the staid old Detroit club around two o'clock on the afternoon of that day is common knowledge.

At the hour when that urbane institution was filled with leaders of the Detroit business world, William Dallon and Bernard Banniston were seen to meet, and this exchange of words was heard:

"Oh, Dallon."

"Well?"

"Pardon the familiarity—friendly interest you know. Do you hear anything from Walter nowadays? Is he——"

"I never do. What do you hear from your son Harry? Does he like Havana? I understand he intends to make a long stay there."

Certainly there was nothing in the words

themselves to cause Bernard Banniston to square off in a pugilistic attitude and thrust his pudgy fist at Mr. Dallon's face. It must have been Mr. Dallon's tone or manner, therefore, that stirred him up.

And Mr. Dallon's manner continued to be anything but conciliatory. He planted his left foot well in front of his right. He raised his left arm before his face and drew back the other arm, both fists clenched. Then he shot his right fist with terrific force at the end of Mr. Banniston's bulbous nose and followed with his left.

Scandalized clubmen lifted Mr. Banniston up from the floor and dusted his clothes while other startled gentlemen rushed Mr. Dallon out of sight. When last reported, Mr. Dallon was talking somewhat noisily about tarantulas.

CHAPTER XXII.

MR. SHELBY'S PARTY.

The old gardener at the Shelby place in Bloomfield Hills beheld an unusual sight as he came up the hill toward the house on the evening of the April day when he set out the pansy plants.

He saw the driveway lined with many handsome cars, and he saw more cars standing on the lawn—a circumstance that gave him pain, for the sod was too soft for parking purposes so early in the spring.

"It might be a wedding," he thought, then remembered that Miss Marion had promised him never to be married unless in June, when his roses were out in bloom. "If it is a dinner party," he reflected, "it is the first one we have had since Mrs. Shelby took sick and died, poor lady."

A dinner party it was that filled the mansion with guests that evening, but it was not an affair for the society columns. The invitations had gone out by word of mouth from Peter Shelby, and the guests had arrived in business garb.

If the old gardener had not been thinking of poor Mrs. Shelby, whose love for his flowers was quite as tender as Miss Marion's, he might have observed that the cars represented most of the automobile factories in Detroit. There were cars, too, a little dusty and mud-spattered but quite as handsome as the others, from Jackson and Toledo and Lansing and Flint.

Now it is unnecessary to say that great men of the business world do not motor to

Detroit from those distant places nor travel by train from such far-away cities as Indianapolis and Cleveland for merely festal purposes.

At Peter Shelby's direction the dinner was Hooverian. His guests were glad to have it so, especially Amos Rathbun, of the Mocar company, who suffered from dyspepsia.

From the dining room the assembly moved into the library and settled down on divans and window seats, and the air of the big room took on quickly a rich Key West blue, while Amos Rathbun began to cough violently. Rathbun did not smoke. Neither did the prim and dapper little gentleman who sat beside him. The prim little gentleman was Samuel Tibbles, whose address in lower Broadway, New York City, is a household word throughout the oil-burning world.

But William Dallon smoked. In the corner just behind them, where he sat partly in shadow, he had consumed half of his cigar before the others got theirs fairly going; and he had more cigars in his pocket. It did Amos Rathbun no good to turn around and glower at him.

"Gentlemen," spoke Peter Shelby, tall and dignified and smiling, "at the urgent suggestion of a few of you, I have asked all of you to come here to-night, principally to hear a story. It is a long story, so I will sit down to it."

He placed a chair in the middle of the room, beside a long table covered with a tarpaulin, and sat down at ease.

"I read a speech the other day," said he, "delivered by a banker somewhere. He said if I recall his precise words, that 'Civilization must slow down soon, because so many things have been invented that only a few are left to invent in the future.' I have forgotten that banker's name. Forgetting it is a good thing, perhaps, for his reputation as a prophet. After what I have seen in the last few weeks, I should hate like the devil to be quoted to the same effect."

In businesslike diction, then, Mr. Shelby told his audience the story of Felix Bray, of his extravagant claims, of his fears, of his demonstrations that never came off, and of his death. Silently and thoughtfully the others listened until he reached his conclusion.

"I said it could not be done. I said it looked too much like a perpetual-motion proposition—a dream of getting something

for nothing—a lifting oneself by the bootstraps. But I should like you gentlemen to see what we have since discovered.”

He rose and beckoned. At the signal two men appeared and began to remove the table covering.

“Two of my safest workmen from the Midlakes plant,” he explained. “Some of you seem to know that there have been mysterious doings here lately. Well, it’s true. Even with armed guards around the house at night we haven’t been able to keep our mystery from leaking out.”

William Dallon put a question point-blank. “Shelby,” said he, with mischief in his eye, “why isn’t Barney Banniston here?”

“Banniston was invited,” the host replied, “but had to decline at the last moment on account of a sore throat.”

“A sore nose, you mean,” some one suggested, whereupon Mr. Dallon modestly concealed himself in a cloud, after the manner of the marine creature called the squid.

The hydromotor stood revealed, its generator and engine joined, its other parts properly assembled. Shelby pointed out changes that his workmen had made in the original model. The hydrogen pressure tank had been increased to twice the volume of the oxygen tank. New and delicate pressure pumps had been installed in place of the clumsier pumps that Bray had used. New batteries had been provided, and the first “camel” tank supplanted with a larger container built along similar lines. Otherwise the motor remained as the old inventor had left it.

When Shelby would have taken time to show the working of the valves that regulated the flow of gases from the pressure tanks to the carburetor, he was checked by a general and impatient demand to “start her up.”

“To demonstrate that there is no hocus-pocus, we will first do a little table lifting,” he said, in the manner of a showman. His helpers raised the table clear of the rug. “There is no deception whatsoever, gentlemen. There are no concealed wires, as you can make sure for yourselves. There is no compressed-air pipe running up the inside of a table leg. What we do is entirely open and aboveboard. We pour in the water, we turn the crank, and off she goes.”

Off she went before their eyes, as they crowded close around to see. The cylinder valves clicked softly. From the muffler came

a pur as gentle and regular as that from the finest product of the Midlakes factory. A workman’s hand pressed the throttle lever down, and the table quivered under the increased action. Amos Rathbun, who had put his nose close to the exhaust, declared in great disgust:

“From the smell, you’d think it was a steam radiator.”

“Speaking of radiators reminds me,” said Shelby, “that we shall have to improve Bray’s cooling system. The heat of these explosions is tremendous. There are many other problems to solve, but none greater than we had before us twenty years ago. The greatest of all has been solved for us by the man who died last winter—who literally starved to death to work it out.”

He touched the electrodes in the ends of the dome-crowned tank.

“These two plugs introduce rapid electrolysis to the world. With a twelve-volt battery behind them they will produce enough gas in one hour to drive the motor for three hours. The battery is recharged as in a gasoline car, and the depreciation is slight. What the hydromotor promises to do for the motorist is to eliminate his fuel expense and save him two or four or five dollars each hundred miles.

“You all are men of imagination, so I don’t need to harp on what this discovery opens up. I believe that we have found the engine of the future—the engine that burns hydrogen, the perfect fuel, and prepares the fuel for itself from a source almost as common and free as the air.”

Up spoke a keen-eyed gentleman from Jefferson Avenue.

“Won’t an ordinary motor burn hydrogen?”

“No more than an old-fashioned wood stove will burn hard coal,” Shelby answered. “That is the pity of it. For hydrogen explosions our cylinders will have to be reduced in bore and stroke and the quality of steel altered, and new cooling and oiling systems will have to be devised. It means complete new engines.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

A PIECE OF ALTRUISM.

One by one the guests returned to their places and sat down to think. Some of them looked skeptical, but in the main they were a sober-faced company when Shelby stopped the motor and waited to hear discussion.

From Amos Rathbun came the first comment.

"My gosh! It will ruin us all!"

"Not so bad as that," spoke McCurdy, of Cleveland. "But it will mean junking a large part of the machinery in our shops, throwing thousands of men out of jobs for months and upsetting our plans for years to come. I am assuming," he added, "that Shelby will let us in on it for a price, just as our association shared the Selden patents with him years ago."

"It will throw the whole industry out of gear," said the man from Indianapolis. "Who will buy gasoline cars, and who will go ahead making such cars, knowing that the hydrogen car is just around the corner?"

"Why borrow trouble?" queried the man from Toledo. "How long will it take to put that machine in shape for practical use? Maybe twenty years."

"How long," Shelby replied, "did it take your company to perfect the first Yocum motor and launch it on the market? Six months from the day the plans were drawn."

"May I be permitted to enter my lamentation at this juncture?"

It was the dapper little Samuel Tibbles who asked the question. Be sure that no ordinary alarm would have brought him so far away from his office with the famous address in lower Broadway. He stood up to speak.

"You gentlemen represent the automobile industry and the welfare of the hundreds of thousands of people engaged in it. Let me say a word for the hundreds of thousands of good folk who derive their prosperity from the drilling of oil wells, the refining of petroleum, the production and distribution and sale of gasoline. With this invention loose in the world, your army can make shift to keep going. But what about mine? What about the fellow at the red pump by the roadside? What about the hundreds of millions of capital invested in red pumps, in tank cars and wagons and trucks, in gasoline production plants? Will you ask us to scrap all that? We should be worse off than the brewers."

He sat down and immediately stood up again.

"I am prepared," he said, "in the interests of humanity, to pay any price in reason for this invention and the patents that cover it. My object is obvious."

"The interests of humanity are not in dan-

ger," Mr. Shelby answered, smiling. "Gentlemen, I did not call you here to throw a scare into you. Neither am I to be blamed for the scare that has been thrown into you in recent days. I know what you have heard. You have been told that the Midlakes company had a new motor that would kill every gasoline motor in the world. You have been led to suspect that some of us had it in our power and in our hearts to ruin you all."

He held out his hand. In to the light came Walter Dallon from the adjoining room where he and Marion had watched and listened.

"This young man," said Shelby, "is Felix Bray's heir and the sole owner of the hydromotor. I may add that he thinks so little of his treasure that he persists in trying to make a present of it to a young woman whom you met at dinner to-night."

"Who the dickens is he?" piped Amos Rathbun.

"My son," barked William Dallon, so sharply that Rathbun jumped.

"Some misapprehension has gone out regarding this young man and his ambitions," Mr. Shelby informed the gathering. "Perhaps this will be as good a place as any to set him right in the eyes of the industry in which he expects to spend the rest of his life. Walter, make us a speech."

Young Dallon put his hands into his pockets and began, with a grin.

"I suppose the hydromotor would be a good thing for the public," the young man went on. "In time it would build up a great industry on the wreckage of the present one. But it would certainly disturb the present industry for years, and it would raise the dickens with the red pump by the roadside in favor of the old oaken bucket that hangs in the well, as a gentleman here to-night has hinted."

Samuel Tibbles looked cheerful for the first time since his arrival from New York.

"As I figure it out," Dallon, junior, went on, "the Bray hydromotor has been invented before the human race needs it. I don't mean to say that, either. I mean, before the human race is ready for it. When I try to think of the changes it will make in the mechanical world and the losses it will cause wherever money is sunk in machinery of a thousand and one kinds, I get dizzy. The question is too big for me. I want a congress of the world's best scientists and economists to decide how and when the hy-

dromotor can be introduced so that it will never do harm to a soul on earth.

"I want to be an altruist in this matter and think of the other fellow. So I am going to put the motor in cold storage until the wise men have had their say; and I expect to keep it in abeyance at least until the petroleum wells run dry, or"—he looked at Mr. Tibbles—"until the oil interests are no longer able to hold down the price of gas to a figure that a poor man can afford to pay. I guess that's all I have to say, gentlemen, except thank you."

As he moved toward Marion's side again, some one caught him by the sleeve. Father and son faced each other for the first time since the night of Felix Bray's death.

"If the young man is through, may I have the floor?" asked the father.

"Help yourself," said Peter Shelby, his eyes twinkling.

"This young man who has just talked to you," said William Dallon, still holding Walter by the sleeve, "is the son that I disowned. What do you think of a father whose life hasn't got room in it for a son who can make a speech like that? What do you think of a man whose head is so full of machinery and markets and mud that he can't remember that he was once young himself? I know what your answer is, though you're too polite to say it. You think that father is a dang fool. Well, I think so, too."

Here the son attempted to be heard.

"Keep quiet," his father told him. "You were going to claim that the fault was yours. That's not true. When it comes to the blame, I've got monopolistic rights. I want to say to you gentlemen, about this son of mine, that I sent him on a detour a while ago, and now I wish he would come back into the turnpike again. I disowned him. Well, I'll be proud to own him any time he wants me to ask his forgiveness."

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSIONS.

Somewhere in Detroit the Bray hydromotor awaits its time, and safe in the United States patent office at Washington are the records that will protect not only its owners but also the world at large. Men of wisdom and learning are already taking counsel and laying plans to insure that the economic revo-

lution which it will bring in its train shall cause no privation—for the hydromotor idea, unless properly guided, will mean a revolution in industry as destructive as the political revolution that has lately swept Russia.

Pending the arrival of the great time for tapping the almost limitless source of fuel which nature through billions of years has stored up in the seas, the clouds, and the wellsprings of this earth, our friends in Detroit go on living their lives as if nothing unusual had occurred. Peter Shelby, in fact, has drifted back to the state of doubt in which we found him on the day when he first discussed Bray's invention with young Dallon, and he says, as of old: "Walter, I still maintain the thing can't be done."

"You forget the electrodes," says Walter.

There is no happier woman in southeastern Michigan these days than Mrs. William Dallon, as she sits at her sun window looking out over the lake, unless we count Mrs. Walter Dallon, whose wedding at Bloomfield Hills recently was well reported in the newspapers. Certainly there is no happier man than William Dallon, unless possibly it is his son.

Bill Dallon whistles at his work for the first time in a good many years, and always the tune is the one that he whistled to keep up his spirits on the day when he started for Chicago in the one-cylinder horseless buggy that "steered with a broomstick."

Walter Dallon has been transferred from the electric screw driver in the engine-assembling shop to the assistant manager's desk in the raw materials' department, where he is acquiring a large amount of knowledge that will be useful to him in carrying on the manufacture of cars and trucks "made good to make good" when the distant time comes for his father to grow old and retire.

Michael Hennessy goes frequently, on pleasant Sundays, to Mount Clemens and visits a grave there. On weekdays Hennessy still works at the roundhouse—not because he needs to, with twenty thousand dollars distributed among a score of savings banks, but because, as he says: "A man is happier doing something useful than when he is loafing. He feels more like a gentleman, bedad!"

If a moral is needed to end our tale, let Hennessy's words supply it.

"The Annex," by Henry C. Rowland, will be our next complete novel.

Poor Joe

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "The Comeback of Kid Small," "The Silent Watcher," Etc.

It is an unusual departure for Knibbs to write a detective story, but he does it as well as he tells of life in Arizona. And those who love dogs will find an additional charm in the account of Sheila's aid in solving the mystery

IN spite of the mass of evidence accumulated in the unearthing of criminals, in spite of electricity, gasoline, and science, highly trained specialists, photography, and the newspaper, a problem occasionally confronts the police authorities that baffles their utmost endeavor, upsets all theories and precedent, and remains unsolved until, perhaps, some trifle of evidence, some lucky accident, some blunder of either criminal or detective leads to a solution that amazes by its sheer simplicity. One successful detective will tell you that you cannot pay too much attention to detail in working out a problem. Another, equally successful, will scoff at detail, cutting directly across the web and woof of logic and imagination straight to the solution, somewhat in the manner of a lightning calculator in mathematics. There are hunting dogs that run by scent, and hunting dogs that run by sight. And as I have mentioned dogs, I might add that my fondness for them led to the discovery of the murderer of Poor Joe, an old Jewish peddler who used to sell his trinkets up and down the Massachusetts coast, walking from isolated home to home along the shore, accepting a bed in a haymow here, and a meal there, and when charity did not offer, paying grudgingly for such shelter and food as he could get. No one knew his name. Because of his constant reiteration of poverty and his apparent destitution, he was known as "Poor Joe."

It was the old peddler's custom to spend one Sunday of each month in the village of Bourne-mouth. Monday morning he invariably set out on his long and lonely tramp up the coast, trying to sell his wares, whining his story of hard luck, and moving along, eventually to return to the village toward the end of the month, replenish his stock, and start out again.

Poor Joe had become a sort of habit with

the residents along the shore. They had known him for years. Like the seasons, he was taken for granted—until he suddenly disappeared. A month passed and finally the sleepy folk of the coast woke up to the fact that Poor Joe had not made his usual pilgrimage. Just why rumor had it that Poor Joe had been murdered for his money, is a question still unanswered. Joe, in common with many penny-savers who manage to live, or at least exist, had suddenly become invested with wealth, possibly because folk like to imagine romance in extremes, and possibly because no one could prove that he had not had much money with him when he disappeared. This rumor swelled and increased until the local authorities were almost forced to make a search for the missing man. It was a half-hearted search and the coming of winter put an end to it, but the newspapers made a story of the disappearance, and with the return of spring the rumor gained headway again. The strangest angle of the whole affair is that no one actually knew what had happened to Poor Joe. Why folk said he had been murdered is one of those inexplicable things that no sensible person tries to explain. Poor Joe had the reputation of being inoffensive, honest, and temperate in his habits. One or two hard-headed citizens suggested that the old peddler might have died along the road somewhere, or back in the woods along the shore; but the rumor that he had been murdered was peculiarly insistent, so insistent, in fact, that my chief detailed a man to make a search that spring. It seemed strange that the chief should do this, and we, in the office, were puzzled; but the chief had a reason for his action, a reason thrust upon him by an outsider whom he could hardly ignore.

I happened to be off duty when Cullen, the man detailed on the case, returned. Cul-

len had found out that the coast natives were close-fisted, close-mouthed folk perennially hard up and exceedingly suspicious of strangers. But he had discovered no clew that might lead to a confirmation of the popular belief. By a process of elimination, Cullen did, however, ascertain that the old peddler had last been seen in the vicinity of The Pines, a rambling, old-fashioned mansion a few miles north of Bournemouth, and the summer home of Mr. Sperry, a well-to-do manufacturer of hunting boots and shoe-pacs. When Cullen had left the office the chief called me to the desk. "Spencer," he said, in that brusque way of his, "have you kept up your dues in the carpenters' union?"

"No, sir. I dropped the union when I joined the force here."

"You've been here a year. Pay your back dues and get your card renewed. Get a kit of tools and go over to Mr. Sperry's office and report to him. He will have some repair work for you to do at The Pines. He will give you a note to his housekeeper. You are in his employ until I send for you. Take your time with the job. You needn't report to me. Just forget you ever had anything to do with this office. But while you are working on the house I want you to drop your union card where some one will find it."

The chief swung round in his chair and picked up a letter. I swung round on my heel and marched out of the office.

I almost felt that I had been dismissed from the service—but not quite. And after I had thought it over, I felt better. The chief had evidently put me "on my own," to find out what I could about the disappearance of Poor Joe. Cullen was old in the service, and he had failed to turn up anything. I was young, new to the service, and keen to make a showing. I felt rather glad that I had not asked the chief any questions. But I did feel as though some one had tied a handkerchief over my eyes and told me to sit still and wait until I found out why I had been blindfolded.

Mr. Sperry had evidently talked with the chief, for, two days later, upon my arrival at the manufacturer's office with my kit, Sperry said nothing about my real mission—as I understood it—but gave me detailed instructions as to the repairs he wanted made. The lumber for the new flooring and stair treads had been sent up to The Pines. I was to be paid according

to the union scale. I was to use my own judgment as to the extent of the work; in fact, I was simply a carpenter hired to do some odd jobs about the old house. Mr. Sperry did, however, ask me a rather peculiar question just before I left his office.

"Do you like dogs?" he queried, peering over his glasses.

"Yes, sir. I've bred some bulls, Airedales, and fox terriers. One of my Airedales took the blue ribbon in his class at the Boston show, two years ago."

Mr. Sperry smiled. "Yes. 'Blarney Boy,' wasn't it?"

"Yes, sir. Did you see him?"

Mr. Sperry nodded. "I have an Irish setter up at The Pines. She was raised there. She seems to think a lot of the place, and of my caretaker, Stark. I'd like to have you look her over and tell me what you think of her. Last time I was up, she acted queer—didn't seem overglad to see me and didn't want to leave the house, which is rather strange for a setter." And he hesitated as though expecting me to say something.

"I'll look her over," I said.

"And make friends with her, eh?" And Mr. Sperry smiled and nodded.

"No. I'll let her make friends with me, if she wants to."

Mr. Sperry rose and shook hands with me, much to my surprise. I did not realize, then, how fond he was of dogs, and especially of the setter. And as I shouldered my kit and made my way to the station I began to surmise that the chief and Mr. Sperry had had a pretty extensive talk about the man who was to do the carpenter work on the old summer home. I had been detailed to repair flooring and stairs and watch an Irish setter that seemed to be out of sorts. A rather tame assignment, I thought.

I caught the six-forty-five and in half an hour I had arrived at the abandoned quarry siding, a stop that the local made for the accommodation of the few natives who lived in the neighborhood of The Pines. The sky was cloudy and a storm threatened.

Mr. Sperry had told me how to get to the house, and he had given me a note to his housekeeper. With my box on my shoulder I plodded through the loose sand of the winding road that finally entered a park-like forest of pines. The wind boomed through the treetops and I could hear the distant pounding of the sea, toward the East.

For some reason, perhaps because of the somber silence of the way, a silence accentuated by the overhead drone of the wind and the roar of the surf, I took a dislike to the locality, and my dislike increased as I drew nearer my destination, a big, irregular-shaped mansion, shadowy and strange in the fading light, with something funereal about its dim, white front and long, unlighted windows that seemed to peer from dark recesses of the overshadowing veranda roof.

I caught myself stepping gingerly as though wishing to arrive unheard. So I whistled and strode up the wide, creaking steps, dumped my kit of tools on the veranda, and pulled the old-fashioned bell knob. From somewhere far back in the depths of the dark building came the faint jangle of a bell. No one answered my summons, so I pulled the knob again. The wire screeched in the guides. The distant bell tinkled. I heard no footsteps, but presently the lock of the front door clacked and a wizened face peered at me from the interior gloom: the face of a woman who might have been anywhere from fifty to seventy years of age. Her skin was yellow and wrinkled, her eyes sunken but exceedingly bright. Her hair was neither gray nor black, but streaked in a way that suggested unpleasant memories of a certain class inhabiting the tenements. Even in the half light of the fading day I could see that she was neat in her person. She glanced sharply at my tool box, then at me, but she asked no question.

"You are Miss Stark? Here is a note from Mr. Sperry. I am the carpenter."

She read the note and tucked it in her apron pocket. Then she grudgingly opened the door, waited until I had stepped in, and then closed and locked it.

I followed her through the interior dusk from room to room—five in all—and we were in the kitchen. An oil lamp burned on the table. The kitchen was large, clean-scrubbed, and neat; but it was very old-fashioned. The woodwork was painted a dull yellow. The doors were high and heavy, with white porcelain knobs. As I grew accustomed to the light I noticed that the kitchen had been repainted many times.

There was something cooking on the stove. The old woman gestured toward a chair and then busied herself with the cooking.

She had not spoken a word. But occasionally she paused and listened, her head

turned sideways and her deep-set eyes blinking. At first I imagined she suspected me of being an officer in disguise, but I found out that I was mistaken. She had no idea that I was other than the expected carpenter. Her peculiar attitude was natural to her, since she was that kind of person who resents as an intrusion the appearance of any stranger. And I think she had resented my calling at the front door.

As I sat watching her I wondered that she could stay in this dismal spot alone, yet, when I recalled Mr. Sperry's conversation, there was a John Stark, who was caretaker of the place. And there was the Irish setter. Neither seemed to be about just then. I had made up my mind to begin some sort of conversation when she turned quickly, as though she had anticipated my thought. "You'll have to wait till John comes," she said, and turned again to the stove, poking at something in the skillet and peering at it nervously. With peculiar regularity she turned her head and listened, never glancing toward me and never speaking. The distant drone of the sea ebbed and swelled with the wind and the trees kept up a continual dirge.

Then, although I had heard nothing, she nodded to herself and began to place the food on the table. The lamp flickered as the kitchen door swung open, and a beautiful Irish setter frisked in, stopped with foreleg crooked, sniffed, and gazed curiously at me. The door closed and a big, swarthy man in corduroys and carrying a shotgun questioned my presence with a keen glance and a quick shifting of his eyes to the woman.

"It's the carpenter," she explained. I saw that her hand trembled as she fumbled in her apron pocket for the note. I had risen with some sort of idea of introducing myself. The setter was sniffing at my legs.

"He's my brother," quavered the old woman. She hesitated and blinked as though trying to recall my name. The man read the note, holding it close to the lamp. Then, "Glad to meet you, Mr. Spencer," and he shook hands with me. He set his gun in the corner, drew a rabbit from the hunting pocket of his coat, told the dog to lie down, and then he stepped out. When he returned he got a towel and indicated the washbasin in the kitchen sink. I washed and sat down opposite him at the table.

That the woman was afraid of him was only too apparent; yet he seemed to pay no attention to her other than to ask for food. When he spoke it was in an ordinary tone. I was puzzled. I studied his face, heavily bearded, keen-eyed, and swarthy. He was a big man with long, bony hands and broad shoulders. His hair and beard were glossy black. He had the appearance of one who spent much of his time outdoors and alone.

After supper he grew more affable, or, rather, less taciturn. He told me that his family had once owned the place and had sold it to the Sperry's when he was a boy; that he was caretaker and gardener, and that his sister was housekeeper and that the Sperry's were fine folks. He said there was some hunting back in the brush—rabbits and grouse. He also informed me that Mr. Sperry's father had built the present house and that Mr. Sperry had often talked of remodeling it, or tearing it down and building a modern home. I gathered that the Starks were, in reality, pensioners, retained through the kindness of Mr. Sperry simply because they had once owned the land, and not because of any special fitness for their respective tasks.

Meanwhile, the sister had cleared away the supper things, washed them, and she now sat reading a huge, metal-clasped old Bible, rocking back and forth in a wide-armed porch rocker. The setter lay in the middle of the kitchen, drowsing. The dog had been fed and seemed contented. The wind increased, bringing with it an occasional loud note of the distant sea.

Then, without preamble, the brother asked me if I had heard the local gossip about the old peddler, Poor Joe. I was looking at him when he spoke, but out of the corner of my eye I saw his sister glance up quickly from her reading. I noticed that she rocked faster and turned the pages quickly as I replied to his question. Yes, I had heard some idle talk about an old peddler that had disappeared, but I had paid no attention to it. I changed the subject, asking Stark about the condition of the flooring and stairways, and how long it would take, in his estimation, to do the work. I tried to make my manner convey the impression that I was anxious to get the job done and get back to town. But when he had told me what he could about the floors and stairways, he again reverted to the subject of the peddler's disappearance. Stark

told me that for twelve years the old peddler had been going up and down the coast, offering his wares, and that he always stopped at the Sperry house, although he seldom sold anything there. I was more than surprised when he told me that Poor Joe had slept in the cabin back of the house the night before he disappeared. He had often slept there, Stark explained, as the cabin was not used in summer except as a sort of playhouse for the Sperry children; that he—Stark—and his sister had rooms in the rear of the main building.

I wondered how Stark knew so definitely that Poor Joe had actually disappeared the day following his last visit to The Pines. That was drawing it pretty fine, I thought. But I asked no questions, simply nodding as he talked to me, and expressing mild surprise at the story. At first I did not realize that the dog had risen and was watching us curiously. Presently she came and laid her long, silky muzzle on my knee and gazed up at me with troubled eyes. I was startled by their almost human expression. I wondered why she had not gone to Stark, her natural master. But I hid my feelings by stroking her head and admiring her fine coat and her excellent points. She was really a wonderful animal, both as a hunting dog and unofficially, so to speak. It was plain that the dog wanted to tell me something but I could not believe, then, that she understood that Stark was talking about Poor Joe. And even had I realized that she knew that we were talking about the peddler, I would not have given a second thought to her having shown interest in his name—which Stark had mentioned several times—because dogs remember names and know to whom they belong, as a rule. But her eyes had in them something unusual; something more than mere curiosity or eagerness. Time and again I had proven to myself and to incredulous friends that dogs could reason—and this highly sensitive and intelligent animal's endeavor to convey some message to me was significant in that she had selected me, a comparative stranger, as being worthy of her confidence. She did not act as though Stark had been beating her, but rather as though he had been bullying her beyond the limits of reasonable discipline.

Whether or not Stark suspected her intent, is a question. He sent her back to her place on the floor. She obeyed unhesitat-

ingly, but with a superb dignity that was in itself a rebuke, although there was nothing brutal in Stark's manner or inflection. All the more reason, I thought, to find out why she was acting queer.

At the time I did not associate the caretaker with the mystery of Poor Joe's disappearance. Stark had spoken naturally and frankly about the old peddler. However, I was a bit curious as to Stark's habits and manner of life. It was evident that he was not a drinking man. In fact, there was a stern wholesomeness about him—a touch of the puritanical, a dark intensity, that suggested religious fanaticism and the old law: an eye for an eye.

Stark was not at all interested in the current news of the day, which I offered sketchily in order to keep the conversation going and give myself a chance to study him without seeming to do so; to catch some tell-tale expression of eye or mouth or gesture. I was relieved when he took a pipe from the clockshelf, lighted it, and smoked. I had wanted to smoke, but I did not wish to suggest it and possibly offend the old lady. I lighted my pipe and smoked and watched the embers in the hearth of the wood stove redden and wane as the wind drove past and whimpered in the pines. Meanwhile Stark's sister read on and on, almost feverishly, it seemed. Stark smoked and gazed at the dog on the floor. The dog's ears twitched and she whined in her sleep. Her hind legs jerked and she barked in that muffled way that told of dreams. I glanced up and caught Stark's gaze fixed on me. I smiled and nodded toward the dog. He nodded as though he understood. For the first time that evening we were on a sort of common ground. Presently the setter awakened, raised her head, and gazed at us in that curious, half-ashamed manner common to dogs that have been afar in dreams. She yawned, rubbed her sleek muzzle with her paws and stood up, shaking herself wide awake. Then she paced slowly to me and again laid her muzzle on my knee and questioned me with her softly glowing eyes. I could feel that Stark was watching us closely. I patted the dog's head and told her that her master would be coming down from town soon, and to ease my growing embarrassment I turned to Stark and asked him if the Sperrys would not be coming down to The Pines in June. He nodded and told the dog to go and lie down.

Presently Stark's sister closed her Bible and carried it into the next room. Then she spoke from the darkness. "The bed in the cabin is made, John." Again I was surprised by the timidity in her voice, and I surmised that there was something decidedly peculiar about the Starks.

"All right, Martha," said Stark. Then he turned to me. "You can sleep in the cabin at the back of the house."

I rose. "That will suit me," I said, and I felt rather relieved that I was not to sleep in the great, empty mansion, even though the Starks slept there, somewhere upstairs at the back. I had been accustomed to sleeping in all sorts of queer places with all sorts of queer companions, yet even while Stark lighted a lantern to show me to my bedroom, some unaccountable sense of impending danger set my nerves on edge. I did not like the country down there, nor the house. The only living thing that seemed companionable was the dog, who followed us out into the night down a path among the pines. We came abruptly upon a small log cabin, weathered and forlorn looking and evidently very old. I learned later that it was the Starks' original home. Stark entered and set the lantern on a chair. The logs and rafters were dark with age. The floor sagged badly in the middle. The door, I noticed, had no lock, but simply an old-style iron latch. The loose, warped shingles chattered as a gust of wind swept past. I could hear the light brushing of branches against the roof and occasionally the deep, melancholy drone of the sea.

"I guess you'll be all right and comfortable here," said Stark. "I'll call you to breakfast."

I thanked him and bade him good night. He stalked out, closing the door. The room was damp and chilly in contrast to the warm kitchen. I undressed hurriedly. As I did so I again told myself that there was something about the place I did not like. And then that other self, the argumentative self, told me that I was foolish to give the matter a second thought—that the folk in charge of the Sperry home were undoubtedly honest, that they had been there for years and, though a bit peculiar, were no more so than many of the folk along the coast. But my imagination, for some reason, was working overtime. I was about to blow out the light and turn in when I happened to glance at the door. The latch was old and sagged.

The wind might blow the door open in the night. I made that an excuse to look for something to brace against it. I had my hand on the chair when I saw a stick of split cordwood on the floor near the head of the bed. I braced the stick against the door, blew out the lantern, and turned in, shivering beneath the rough blankets.

I was almost asleep when a burst of wind shook the shingles and a loose pane of glass rattled in the cabin window. I turned over, realized where I was, and promptly went to sleep.

No dreams disturbed my rest, although once or twice I vaguely recalled having heard the wind and the branches whispering across the roof. Then, for no apparent reason, I was sitting up, listening. It seemed to me that some one had spoken. I was sure of it. I knew that I was not dreaming—the chill of the night was only too real. The wind had died down. A bright star was framed in the cabin window. I told myself that the sound I had heard was that of the branches across the cabin roof. The night was intensely quiet—so quiet that I could hear my watch ticking beneath my pillow. I lay down again.

I had made up my mind to go to sleep, when, from the immediate darkness, apparently within the room, and softly as though spoken with regret, a voice said: "Poor Joel Poor Joel Poor Joel!"

In a flash I was sitting up and feeling for the gun beneath my pillow. I tingled with a hot flush and shivered with a prickling chill. Was there some one in the room trying to frighten me? The voice had been very near, so near that I thought I must have been dreaming. I dug my thumb nail into my finger. I was wide awake. I could hear my watch ticking. I could see the star framed in the cabin window. The wind was not blowing. I tried to bully myself into forgetting that voice and the words. Then it suddenly occurred to me that the old peddler's name had been Joe. "Who is it?" I asked. Then I forced myself to lie down again. "Now," I said, "I'll stay awake and listen. If I hear it again—" Scarcely had I shaped the thought when some one chuckled softly, and then, "Poor Joel Poor Joel Poor Joel!"

I thought of striking a light, of challenging that eerie voice, of doing several things at once, but what I did do was to leap from the bed. As I did so, it shot across the room

and bumped against the farther wall. I sprawled on the floor, jumped to my feet, and tried to open the door. Some one was holding it from the outside. It gave slightly but would not come open. I tugged frantically and shouted. I don't know what I said, but presently I heard a distant voice calling: "What's the matter down there! I'll be down right away."

I hallooed again and tugged at the door. Then I ran back, pawed about until I found the bed, and with my gun in my hand, I backed against the farther wall. Some one was coming with a light. I could see its long rays wavering against the tree trunks that loomed close to the window. I began to realize that I had been making a fool of myself. Stark was asking me why I had called out and, as he spoke, he tried to push the door open. "There's no lock," he said. "You must have put something against it. What's the matter, anyway?"

I stepped over and hid my gun beneath the bedclothes. Then I recalled the stick of cordwood. That explained the fastened door. I pushed the stick aside. Stark, gaunt in a long overcoat, entered and peered round as he held the lantern above his head. He noticed the bed across the room and gestured toward it questioningly. I told him that I had heard some one speak several times, and apparently in the room; that I had started to jump up when the bed shot across the floor and spilled me out. Then, that I had tried the door and found it fastened and that the combination of events had startled me.

Stark set the lantern on the chair, gazed round, and then pointed to the cordwood stick. "The floor sags," he said. "We put that stick in front of the casters to keep the bed from rolling. When you jumped up the bed slid across the room. As for some one talking in here—there is no one around but my sister and me. And you fastened the door yourself."

"That's all right, Mr. Stark, but that doesn't explain the voice. I'm sorry I called you, but now that you are here, just listen a few minutes. If you don't hear some one or something—" And as I spoke again came that eerie voice, plaintive, soft, yet distinct: "Poor Joel Poor Joel Poor Joel!" followed by a faint, indescribable, chuckling sound. Stark was startled himself for an instant, then he nodded casually. "The pigeons," he said gesturing toward the

roof. "There's a dove cote on the roof of this cabin."

Again we listened. After a brief interval we heard the soft cooing of a dove. I do not know how Stark interpreted the sound, but to me it was as before: "Poor Joe!" reiterated with a gently rising inflection, singularly uncanny because of its mild insistence.

Stark picked up the lantern and, bidding me good night, stalked out, the long overcoat flapping about his lean legs. I made no attempt to shove the bed back but crawled beneath the blankets and shivered to sleep. I was awakened by the morning sunlight slanting through the window.

After breakfast I was shown over the house by Stark. Wishing to be agreeable, and not a little ashamed of myself because of my midnight performance in the cabin, I asked his advice about the repairs, intimating that he was familiar with the wishes of Mr. Sperry in regard to them. By noon I had pretty well planned my work which I estimated would keep me there at least a week. The lumber for the new flooring and stair treads had been sent up. I placed it and began taking up some of the dry-rotted flooring. Stark and his sister helped move such furniture as would be in my way, took up the carpets, and did all they could to help me. By evening I had everything placed to suit me, and I was prepared to begin work in earnest the following morning. I had arrived Tuesday evening. Saturday night found me pretty well along with the work, but more still to do than I had anticipated. Sunday I spent strolling along the coast with the setter for my companion. That morning Stark and his sister drove to church. Before they left I asked the old lady to put me up a sandwich or two as I might not return until evening.

It was about four in the afternoon when the dog and I turned back from our tramp up the beach. I had enjoyed the exercise and the companionship of the setter. We were about halfway back on our return journey and going briskly when my hat blew off and sailed into some scrub pines. I started to run after it, but the dog got ahead of me, retrieved my hat and fetched it to me. "You're a great doggie!" I told her. She wagged her tail and gazed up at me, and again I caught that peculiar, questioning expression in her soft-brown eyes.

"What is it?" I asked, and I sat on a

rock and patted my knee. She came to me and laid her sleek muzzle against my hand. She seemed to want to tell me something—or, at least, that is what I thought then. I am positive of it now. But I was not to know at that time, for, even as she gazed at me her expression changed. Her glossy ears lifted slightly. She turned her head. I was sitting with my back toward the scrub pines. She was facing them. She could see that which had interrupted our little visit, but I could not.

It was about to glance round when some instinct warned me to maintain my attitude, so I spoke to the dog. "Rabbit?" I queried, although I knew that she had seen or heard something else. She whined and seemed to hesitate. I laughed and, getting to my feet, strode on down the beach as though expecting her to follow me. I imagined that she would not.

I had gone, perhaps, two or three hundred yards when I turned casually and whistled. The dog had disappeared. That was the first intimation that I had had that I was being watched.

The dog had not left me to hunt rabbits. She was too well trained to do that. Nor had she left me willingly. That was evident in her manner as she whimpered and raised her ears. She left me because she had either seen or scented John Stark somewhere along the road back in the pines. Without reasoning it out, I decided that there was something more than peculiar about Stark—and I recalled the chief's directions as to letting my union card fall where it would be picked up by one or the other of the Starks. And it also occurred to me that the chief had not sent me up to the Sperry home simply to repair floors and stairways. Without telling me to do so, he had sent me to The Pines to watch John Stark, and, as I learned later, at the request of Mr. Sperry.

In the meantime, John Stark had been watching me, a fact which was proven when, as I neared the house, I saw Stark in the distance, striding along rapidly, the dog at his heels. When I came in he was in the kitchen, his coat off, and he was smoking his pipe. His sister was preparing supper. The dog was lying on the floor, her nose between her paws. She made no sign of recognition as I came in, and her attitude told me plainly that she was doing just what she had been commanded to do. Even then I could not

understand why Stark disliked the dog's natural attitude toward me.

"Well," I said, speaking to her, "Sheila, you beat me home and you didn't get that rabbit, after all."

"We walked clear to the Point," I told Stark. "I guess Sheila grew tired of the beach and decided to make a hunt on her own account. She left me somewhere back there and dashed off into the brush."

Stark nodded and puffed at his pipe. In spite of myself, I had to admire his naturalness of manner. And as I watched his sister prepare supper I wondered that she never spoke to the dog when Stark was present. Once I had heard her talking to Sheila when Stark was out working about the grounds. At that time I was driving some tongue-and-groove flooring into place and making plenty of noise, when I stopped hammering suddenly. I heard the old lady talking to the dog in the next room.

"You won't tell, will you, Sheila?" she said. I had paid no special attention to this at the time. I was busy. But now I recalled it as something more than a playful remark to a dog. I knew that Sheila had something to tell, and I wanted to have a talk with the dog, alone, and in the open. I knew what I would say to her, and I thought I knew what she would do. As I sat resting that Sunday evening I recalled the old lady's question: "You won't tell, will you, Sheila?"

Monday I went to work on the main stairway. I found that I had enough lumber for the treads, but that the beams of the first landing were badly rotted and unsafe. I called Stark and showed them to him. He said they had no lumber of that size about the place. I told him I would have to have the lumber, and I expected him to suggest that I go to town and order it, but to my surprise he offered to go if I would make a memorandum of what I needed. Tuesday morning he left for town, telling us at breakfast that he would take the evening train home. That morning I purposely dropped my union card in the kitchen where he would be apt to see it. I did not want him to suspect me of being anything but a carpenter, now that I was assured he was covertly watching my movements.

About an hour after he had gone I came down to the kitchen, where I expected to find the old lady. I made a pretense of looking for my level which I had loaned to

Stark the day before for a few minutes. The old lady said she had not seen it but that John had been using it somewhere about the outbuildings. I had expected to find Sheila in the kitchen. She was not there. I knew that she had not gone to town with Stark. I stepped out and up the path toward the cabin.

As I passed the stables I heard Sheila whine. I crossed to the stables. Sheila was tied in a stall. She cringed as I came to her and untied her. Then I cut across to the cabin, got my gun, put on my coat, and gesturing to the dog, I made my way to a little opening in the pines back of the buildings. Here I sat down and Sheila came up to me, half crouching as though fearful of a beating. I talked to her, rubbed her ears, and stroked her head.

"I know there's something wrong," I said. "What is it?"

She raised her head and gazed at me with mournful, timid eyes. "Go find it!" I whispered quickly. "Go find it!"

She drew up her foreleg as though pointing a bird and then, turning her head and plainly asking me to follow, she trotted off toward the west, not hurriedly, but deliberately. Once or twice she stopped to make sure that I was following. I encouraged her gently. In a few minutes we were out of the pines and in the brush country about a half mile back of the Sperry home. Sheila sniffed the ground as she padded along. Finally she stopped, stiffened and froze tense. I pushed the low branches of a bush aside, stepped over a sharp-edged rock, and saw a pile of stones in a brushy inclosure. Sheila would not come a step nearer, but crouched and bristled. Even then I hardly realized what I would find beneath that pile of stones. Mechanically I began to throw them aside.

My spine went cold as I saw a shoe, and then another. I lifted a stone. The sun was shining. The day was mild, the air still. Behind me Sheila growled. I whirled round, but there was nothing. I replaced the stones and, turning, broke from that ghastly cairn and all but ran to the cabin. I had found Poor Joe.

I tied Sheila in the stall and returned to the house. The old lady glanced up as I came in. "Did you find it?" she asked.

"Yes, I found it," I answered, trying to make my voice sound natural.

Sheila had told.

Thursday afternoon, while I was working on the narrow stairway at the back of the house, a stairway which led to a sort of back attic or upper storeroom, I dropped my hammer through an opening where I had taken out a worn tread. I scrambled down and pawed about on the moldy ground. Then I lit a match and found my hammer and near it a bright green piece of cardboard, evidently new and punched full of holes about a half inch in diameter. The match went out, so I climbed up and sat on the edge of the stairway, wondering how a new bit of cardboard happened to be stowed away in such a place. The Starks were orderly and threw nothing away.

Then I realized that the piece of cardboard had been hidden for some reason or other. Even then I did not realize that the holes were those made by a wad cutter such as is used in loading ammunition by hand. But presently I recalled having seen Stark use brass shells in his shotgun when he went out after rabbits and grouse. Some one had slid the bit of cardboard under the house on the side where the back stairs went up. Just then Stark came to the door, and I let the cardboard drop back. He had not seen it, apparently. He watched me for a while as I fitted and nailed a new tread in place.

"That's about the last of it," I said, and I imagined his eyes expressed a shade of relief.

Next morning he helped me carry my kit to the railroad and he waited with me until the train came. He seemed natural enough and even more kind to Sheila than usual, for he allowed her to come with us.

As the train pulled out I glanced back and waved my hand. I hated to do it. I felt that it was almost treachery—and yet as I saw the man and the dog standing there watching the departing train, I felt a kind of sympathy for each of them. Something in their attitudes hit me hard—the gaunt loneliness of the man and the curious sensitiveness of the dog, obeying him because he was her master, and yet burdened with a secret that was evidently trying her loyalty to the utmost. Stark knew, Sheila knew, and the poor old lady knew. She had asked Sheila not to tell.

The chief himself came down with me on the noon train. What we did out there in the brush before we went to the house is on record in the office, and I shall not write it down here. We identified Poor Joe. His pack—even his money, a small amount all

told—had been buried with him. We found some number four shot in the clothing, and with the scattered shot, a green, faded, cardboard gun wad.

We came at the house from the rear, avoiding the path. Stark was working in the garden when he saw us. He knew that it was too late to do anything other than to give himself up. But we took no chances.

Stark kept silent until I got an ax and pried up the new tread in the back stairway. Then his expression changed and he spoke one word—"Sheila!" The chief was watching him closely for more than one reason.

When we fitted the faded green gun wad in one of the holes in the cardboard, Stark gave in. "Yes, I did it," he asserted.

"Why?" said the chief. Stark told us, without putting in a word in his own defense or asking for mercy, that Poor Joe, the year before, had made his usual call at the house and had asked to sleep in the cabin that night. The old peddler had been accustomed to stopping at the Sperrys' overnight, but at that time the family happened to be away—and Stark told the peddler that he could not stay there. There had been some argument and finally Joe had left and had camped back on the grounds in the brush. While hunting next morning, Stark had come upon him cooking a chicken over a stick fire. Stark accused Joe of having stolen the chicken from the Sperry place. Evidently terror-stricken, for Stark had a hot temper, the old peddler had snatched up a club and made for Stark, who asserted to us that he had not even anticipated a move from the old man and that he had actually shot Poor Joe down in self-defense, and before he realized what he had done.

We questioned Stark in the kitchen. We had asked his sister to step into the front room, but Sheila was there, standing near him and watching us with intelligent eyes. Suddenly Stark struck at her with his manacled hands. "The bitch told!" he said. Then came that which was to me the bitterest moment of the whole squalid tragedy.

The dog, Sheila, instead of turning and cringing, leaped in and ripped a red streak down Stark's hand. I jumped and grabbed her. When I looked up the old lady was standing in the kitchen doorway. From the dove cote came faintly, softly, the mournful cadence: "Poor Joe! Poor Joe! Poor Joe!"

Half Wild and Half House Cat

By J. E. Grinstead

Author of "A Controlling Interest," "The Case of Bill Barstow," Etc.

More about Judge Higginbotham, who is again the object of solicitous attentions by promoters in the wonderful oil region of Texas. The judge is strong on county rights

YOU'VE probably known all along what a cat was. Ever since you pulled the kitten's tail, even before you could speak, with candy on your hands, and gurgled in ghoulish glee because the hair tickled your nose.

Being thus familiar, and on friendly terms with the common house cat, or *Felis Domestica*, you probably never looked the word up in the dictionary. If you will do so, you will discover that, though a small word of only three letters, c-a-t has one of the longest definitions in the book, and doesn't get you anywhere much, either.

All authorities, when they come to the word "wild cat," simply say, *Felis Catus*, in Latin, in the evident hope that the ungentle feline won't know they are calling him names, and just let it go at that. If any one asked you: "Why is a wild cat?" you'd probably say:

"Why, neighbor, a wild cat, is just a cat that has gone wolf wild and took to the woods, and that's all there is to it," and you'd be wrong.

When it is all boiled down to the tabloid form of magazine fiction, the eight pages of fine print, in the encyclopedia, and the long definition in the dictionary, together with certain unrecorded experiences of the proletariat, sums up about like this.

A house cat, is just a cat. He steals cream, and catches canary birds and little chickens. When you twist his ears and rub his back, he purrs, goes to sleep in your lap, and sheds hair on your Sunday clothes. A wild cat is different from a house cat, in a whole lot of various and sundry ways, besides having a short tail, instead of a long one. If you twist his ears and rub his back, he won't purr. You hunt for the arnica bottle, and say things about him even more insulting than *felis catus damarinus!* The only sane advice in regard to the handling of wild cats is: "Don't monkey with a wild

cat! Let the other fellow do it, while you look on and tell him how."

In a private room over the Shellfields National Bank sat three men, at a small table. Playing poker? No, dear, it was a wickeder game than that. They were setting a sucker trap, and training a wild cat to look gentle and do business.

The chief spokesman of the party was a rather large, florid gentlemen, with pale-blue eyes and a look of confidence. His name was Ned Hines. Mr. Hines had once been a mule buyer, but when the oil boom started he got in right, and became vulgarly rich. There had been a time when a hundred thousand dollars represented an immense fortune to Mr. Hines, but he had outgrown that estimate. Getting the coin easy had become a habit with him, and he couldn't quit.

Of the other two gentlemen, one was Mr. Rice Martin, cashier of the Shellfields National. Mr. Martin was a sort of mechanism man that Mr. Hines, the principal stockholder of the bank, had made of an under bookkeeper. Martin had possibilities. Hines saw them and improved them. Martin was a gimlet-eyed, shrewd-faced man of about thirty. He spoke in low, soft tones, as if the lodge had sent him to lay a floral offering on the bier of a deceased brother. His mind rarely acted, except when suggestion was made by Mr. Hines.

The third gentleman was Mr. Templeton Raidley, a very shrewd young business man from St. Louis, who had come uninvited to the oil fields. It was his intention to break into the game, and teach the rude, unpolished operators the ethics of modern finance. Soon after his arrival at Shellfields, Mr. Raidley had been trimmed for a considerable bunch of kale by an illiterate justice of the peace, Judge Henry Higginbotham, commonly called Old Higg.

Templeton Raidley had taken his trimming with such good grace that Hines, the

king-pin of the Shellfields' oil world, had warned toward him, opened the gates, and let him into the inner mysteries of oildom, where he could play the game from the inside, as had been his original purpose.

Hines spread his fat hands, one of them adorned by a five-carat diamond, on a blue print that lay on the little table, and regarded his two satellites soberly.

"How much did Old Higg clean you up for, Temp?" he asked.

"Only a hundred and fifteen thousand dollars," replied Raidley modestly.

"What do you suppose he's done with it?"

"He put a hundred thousand in the bank, on deposit," interrupted Martin, a part of whose duties it was to keep his creator informed on local finances.

"Oh, he did! Well, that was about his clean-up on the deal, and it ought to be taken away from him. But as long as the old miser keeps it in the bank, we can at least keep an eye on it, and see that it don't do any mischief. If anybody else tries to take it away from him, I want to know about it. It would be wrong to allow unscrupulous persons to flimflam Judge Higganbotham, right here in his home town. We ought to get most of it, in this deal we are on. I'll appoint you a committee of one, Temp, to handle Higg when the time comes," and Hines gave Raidley a teasing smirk.

"Nothing would afford me greater pleasure," replied Raidley, "if that eminent jurist will only fall for the touch."

"Oh, he'll fall for anything! I know it's humiliating to be trimmed by the biggest sucker in the whole works, but you'll get it all back. Anyway, it got you on the inside, and that's what you came here for. The entrance fee was a little high, but there are possibilities. Just watch Higg, Mr. Martin, and don't let him buy a county right for an electric fan that winds with a key, and runs like a clock, or something of that kind," and Hines lit a corpulent cigar, rolled it in the corner of his mouth a few times, and went on:

"Now, gents, let's get down to the real business of the evening. Here is a blue print of the new oil proposition—the Great Plumthicket Prospect. I finally secured leases on four sections, the south line of which is just twelve miles north of Shellfields. The plan is to——"

"What's that shaded square at the northeast corner of the southwest section, and

near the center of our holdings?" interrupted Martin, in such a tone as he would say, "Don't you think the wreath would look better a little nearer the head of the casket?"

"That," said Hines, with a frown, "is a hundred acres that belongs to an old hog thief by the name of Bent Mullens, who refuses to lease. His little patch is not important to us, and I'll tell you why.

"I've had them four sections gone over carefully, by the best geologists in America. They made two reports. One covers half a page, and says there is not a chance in a million of a drop of oil on that land, even if we drill clean through the earth's crust. That report is—or rather was—marked private, confidential. I didn't think much of it, so I burned it.

"The other report covers fourteen pages, mostly technical terms and Latin. The only thing in it that the lay brother can make out is something like this: 'The topography, general contour, and geological formation of the Plumthicket Prospect is almost identically the same as that of the famous Oil Creek country, near Titusville, Pennsylvania, which is the oldest and one of the richest oilfields in America, and is still producing.' I put that in myself, after I got the report. It seems a shame to expect people to read a report that long, and not understand any of it.

"Now, we want that report published in full, in every prospectus, and——"

"Beg pardon, Mr. Hines. You say you are positive that there is no oil on the land, or, rather, under it. If that is true, how then can we hope to make anything on the deal?" asked Raidley.

"Son," said Hines, "the oil actually produced wouldn't furnish cigarette money for the people engaged in the business, any more than the wheat harvested in the wheat pit would make the world's bread, or the pokers produced in a poker joint, would poke the world's fires. It is the people who are willing to take a chance, that money is made off of in the oil game.

"This," he continued, "is the prettiest proposition I've ever had a hand in, and I've promoted some peaches. We organize four companies, and drill four test wells—when we have sold stock for the money, and they won't bite any longer without we make a showing. I want five hundred thousand dollars for the leases, and promotion fees, out of the first trimmings. After that the

net velvet will be split four ways. I get a fourth, each of you gets a fourth, and Raidley's banker friend in St. Louis, who is president of our Banker's Choice Company, gets a fourth.

"The other three companies are, the Bookkeepers' Bonus, with Raidley as president; the Home Harvest Association, with Martin at its head; and the Stenographers' Oil Guild, which I shall take charge of personally. The banker will take care of St. Louis, Raidley will arrange for the Bookkeepers' Bonus to be worked principally in Chicago. I shall go to New York, where practically all the stenographers in the world are in telephone call, and put a gang of shrewd salesmen to work. Martin can't leave the bank, so he will reluctantly accept what is brought here to Shellfields, and at the same time interest the home folks in the Home Harvest Association.

"Now, everything is set. Raidley and me leave in the morning. We'll be back in a month, and by that time all the machinery will be in working order, and ready for business. All the companies will have offices in the Shellfields National Building. It sounds so much closer to the oil. I'll wire you, Martin, when to get the four jim-crow rigs set up on the outside corners of the four sections, so our salesmen can say we are drilling, without being caught, and then—we're off in a bunch!"

"We'll have to have literature, won't we?" asked Raidley.

"Sure we've got to have literature. Each company must have a separate prospectus, and we want to fight one another for business, or the public will get wise. On that stuff you use up there in the Middle West, Raidley, there must be this, in red letters: 'Stay At Home One Summer, and Save a Million! The money spent on one vacation may, if judiciously invested in oil stock, bring you great riches!'

"Don't forget that one. I thought it out last night. It's a shame the way the American people waste money running around in the summertime. That one war cry, properly worked, ought to bring us in a million. We'd as well have it as the railroads and hotels. What woman wouldn't stay at home one summer, in the hope of having her own limousine and driver in brass buttons, for the next summer? That's bound to be a winner."

Thus the plans were outlined, and the big

enterprise, generated by Hines, whose schemes never failed to make money—for Hines, and his associates—was launched on the tempestuous seas that no oil would ever calm.

The following morning Hines and Raidley set out on their respective missions, which included the establishment of offices in St. Louis, Chicago, and New York, the preparation of printed matter and talking points for salesmen, and general detail work. Each of the four companies was to have a prospectus of the highest printorial art, with pictures of derricks, gushers, and what not. There was no chance of failure. They were putting up nothing, and millions of people were waiting to take a chance!

Along toward noon, on the day that Hines and Raidley left Shellfields, Judge Henry Higganbotham sat at his old desk figuring. He had received a beautiful circular in red and gold and black, setting forth the merits of a sure winner, and a letter offering him the county right. Buying county rights was a mania with which Old Higg was afflicted. Anybody could soak him. All his ventures had been failures. He was a keen mathematician, and he figured close, but his figures had all been wrong up to that time.

Judge Higganbotham had never had any money worth mentioning to be fleeced for. He had made a precarious living off notary's fees, and writing an occasional paper for some person too poor to employ a higher-priced lawyer. Trimming Raidley for a hundred thousand had been an inadvertence. Raidley had virtually brought the money to him, and made him a present of it, by commissioning Higg to buy a controlling interest of the stock in a certain company. He had simply bought the stock at ten cents, and below, and sold to Raidley at par. Higg had money, now, and skimmers would swarm around him like bees around a honey pot.

But this new county right was not like any of the rest. The machine was a necessity. He had figured the whole thing carefully. Certainly he had failed before, but Euclid probably failed several times, before he solved the ninth problem. It was his money, and he was going to try this thing out. It had been his lifework to find a county right that would come up to his calculations.

When it is known that a man has considerable money, and also that he is easy,

the trade is apt to be more than he can wait on promptly, at times. As Higg sat at his ancient desk, his six feet two of bent-shouldered, raw-boned ponderosity draped over a chair, one hand plying the pencil, while the other nestled in his curly gray hair, a voice hailed him from the door:

"Mawnin' jedge!"

Judge Higganbotham looked up, then rose to his feet, and peered at the visitor. The light of recognition came into his sunken eyes, and he said:

"Why, howdy, Bent! Haven't seen you for a long time!"

"No, I ain't been to town. We been waiting for it to quit raining. We got out'n ever'thing but water, and had to come to town, or starve, so me and the old woman just piled in and come on in the rain. She's so in the habit of comin' to town to take me home, afore the saloons closed, that she never thought, and just come on when she wa'n't needed! He, he, he!" and the visitor's quavering laugh at his own joke climbed to high C.

Mr. Benton Mullens would probably have been five feet five and a half, if he were straightened out, but he was bent at every joint, and bowed between joints. He weighed approximately one hundred and fifteen pounds, at least three pounds of which was whiskers. Above the jungle protruded a hawk nose, and two black eyes resembling shoe buttons, crowded as close together as the nasal bone would permit. His age might have been anywhere from sixty to ninety years.

The judge stepped gallantly forward and greeted Mrs. Mullens, who stood behind her husband, dutifully waiting for him to finish his little welcoming speech.

Mrs. Mullens was not a reigning belle. She was about six inches taller than her liege lord, and perhaps a few years younger, but time had worked its devastating will with such beauty as she may have possessed in youth. The tip of her muddy gray hair had escaped from the little coil at the back of her head, and bobbed about frantically as she nodded greeting to the judge.

These delightful visitors took the two chairs, and Judge Higganbotham sat down on an empty box. The judge was a dull man, seemingly, but such mental processes as he was capable of were busy wondering what these people wanted. Neither of them had ever been in the dingy little office.

The county court of Mustang County had jurisdiction in all cases worth while. Still, there was hope of taking an acknowledgment, or something of that kind, for the justice of the peace, so Higg waited patiently for them to come to the point.

"Higg, I reck'n you'd be called a old-timer in this country," said old Bent Mullens. "The fust time I recollect seein' you was the day we hung them two fellows over on Dogwood Holler, for brandin' Winder Spivey's milk calves."

"Yes, I believe that was when we got acquainted," admitted the judge gravely.

"Well, now, I ain't got nary bit of patience ner conference in these here newcomers. We want something, and I just tells Letty we'll come to you, and git the right kind of treatment. Didn't I, Letty?"

"Shore did," murmured Mrs. Mullens, as she freshened her snuff stick with a dip from a little tin box.

"I'll be mighty glad to do anything I can for old neighbors," said the judge, remembering that his last experience with the conservative element of Mustang County had brought him in a tidy sum of money.

"You know we got a hundred acres right in the middle of the Plumthicket country. It used to be the best blamed hawg country in Texas, but they ain't been a crop of plums ner shin-oak acorns for four year. We've just about starved out, and something's got to be did. Ain't it so, Letty?"

"Shore is," admitted the lady.

Judge Higganbotham moved uneasily on his box. This sounded very much like leading up to a touch for a small loan. Old Higg had never loaned any money in his life; never had any before. Now that he had a few dollars, he didn't want to take a chance on losing it that way.

"As I says," continued Mr. Mullens, "we got this hundred acres, and it ain't makin' us nothin'. Ned Hines, he comes to me some time back, and wants to lease it, but I won't have nothin' to do with Hines. He skin't hell out'n me in a mule trade onct. Didn't he, Letty?"

"He shore did! I ricollect the day. Had fried chicken and sweet 'tater pie for dinner. He mighty nigh split hisself eatin', and then wope the gravy off'n his fingers onto my new blue an' white tablecloth. Drat him!" and there was a vengeful gleam in Letty's eyes.

"Well, atter that Hines sent his strikers to me, to try to lease it, but I knowed him, blame his tricky soul. He couldn't fool me twict. When I sold him that little Spanish mule—let's see—Beck wer her name, warn't it, Letty?"

"Shore wer!" quoth the raven.

"As I says, when I sell him that Beck mule he tells me on his honor that he knows the market, and that air mule ain't worth but seventy-two fifty. I take his word, sell him the mule, and the very next day I come to town, and see him sell that mule for eighty-five. That settles it between me and Ned Hines. Mr. Hines and his outfit won't skin me again," and Mr. Mullens carefully parted his hair mask in the neighborhood of his mouth, and expectorated a flood of tobacco juice into the old stove.

"What makes me so blamed mad," and Old Bent's eyes glared in anger, "is that all of 'em talks about leasing, and none of 'em don't ever mention buying. It looks blamed suspicious to me. Letty and me knows it's agin' the law to mawgidge our homestid—we tried it, and nobody wouldn't take the mawgidge. We ain't got no way of knowin' that this lease business ain't a way Ned Hines is fixin' to get us into trouble.

"We been wantin' to go back to East Texas for twenty year, but Letty, she won't go onless we kin go in style. We 'low the land ain't much 'count, and if we could get enough for it to buy one of them jitneys, so's't we could go back yander in style, why we'd sell."

It was out at last. Old Bent and his estimable wife had heard that Higg had some money, and they had come in to soak him. The good judge moved on his box as if a splinter was bothering him, and then Old Bent went on:

"Now, what we want to know is, don't you reckon you could find a buyer of some sort for them hundred acres. Ned Hines has got everything leased for five mile around, and'll put a lot of chicken-thievin' drillers on it, but you don't have to tell the buyer that."

Old Higg sat in silence for a full minute. He advertised "real estate" on his shingle, but in all his long career he had never sold so much as a burial lot. At last he roused from his reverie, and said:

"Reck'n that land wouldn't be worth much, not bein' farm land, and the plum crop and the mast failin' regular that way."

"No, I reckon not, but we ought to be

able to get about as close to the market on it, as Hines got on that mule. Letty and me has done made up our minds that we won't take a cent less than a thousand dollars for that land. We know if we deal with Hines, we'll shore get skint. Can't you handle the deal for us?"

At last, Mr. Mullens had reached the point and pith of his lengthy discourse. Higg saw what he was driving at, but for once he wasn't easy to trim. Mullens and his wife stayed on in the dingy office, made Higg late for his dinner, but went away, finally, apparently well pleased with the time spent.

When his visitors were gone Old Higg returned to his desk and his figures. Anyway, if he lost again, the money was his own. It came pretty easy, and he had no family to suffer if he went broke. It was the biggest thing he had ever tackled, but he was going to try it.

Night came on, and Higg lighted a two-inch candle, and went on with his figuring, and studying certain blue prints and documents that lay on the desk. Finally, he seemed satisfied, locked all the papers in his big safe, and went to supper.

There was little stirring in oil circles in Shellfields. Mr. Hines was away, and in the absence of the king, the gimlet-eyed Mr. Martin, acting vice regent, had only to watch and report suspicious things. Judging others by himself, Mr. Martin looked on the whole world with suspicion. He knew Hines had tried to lease the Mullens tract, and had failed. It would be a feather in his cap if he could do something that the king-pin had been unable to do, so he sent agents to try to close the lease. Several went, without success. Then one of them came back wild-eyed and trembling. Old Bent had told him he was tired of the annoyance, and would shoot the next man that came about his place. The agent foolishly tried to protest, and Mullens had run him ragged with a double-barreled shotgun. This definitely closed the negotiations, and left Mr. Martin idle for the time. Two weeks passed. Old Higg's hundred thousand still rested securely in the Shellfields National. So far, there had been no patent-right salesman in town, and Mr. Martin's mind was at rest on that score. Higg had shown no alarming symptoms. Mr. Martin didn't know that the judge was merely taking time to make sure on this problem, before he closed the deal.

One afternoon, Higg was standing in the door of his dingy little office, in the middle of the block, south side of the main plaza. The sun was shining. There had been no rain for almost two days. A man came along the street who walked as if he were made of spring steel. He was apparently about forty, and there was a look in his keen, gray eyes that indicated that he "so lived each day that he could look the world in the eye, and tell it where to head in."

"Howdy, Steve, come in," greeted Higg. "Been wanting to see you."

They turned into the office, and sat down, Mr. Steven Steele looking about with an amused smile on his smooth-shaven lips.

"Workin' now, Steve?" asked the judge.

"No. Ain't got no job, and can't get one. I cussed Ned Hines out for wanting me to lie about a well I was working on, and he fired me. He'll see to it that I don't get another job in this field."

"Yes, I reck'n so. They say Ned's right vengeful that way. I been thinking I might give you a job, if we could come to some kind of an agreement," said the judge speculatively.

"What's the job?" asked Steve, with wonder in his eyes. Old Higg had never hired a man in his life, that any one knew of.

"It's like this. I've just about closed the deal for a county right, and—"

"I don't know anything about county rights. All I know is oil drilling. I couldn't even—"

"Well, now wait a minute. This is a machine, and it'd be right in yo' line. All I want is a man that knows something about machinery. The only other requirement is to keep his mouth shut, and tend to his own business, and I know you'll fill the bill there."

"Well, I ain't doing anything. I could try it a while. What's it pay?"

"Same pay as a boss driller gets, while the job lasts. I want you to study this machine, then dee-mon-strate it. If it won't do what's claimed, why, I'm skinned again, and you lose yo' job."

There was a shrewd leer in Steve Steele's gray eyes as he left the little office two hours later, with a hundred dollars advance wages in his pocket, and complete instructions.

Mr. Hines and Mr. Raidley returned to Shellfields in due time, highly elated over the outlook for the Great Plumthicket Prospect,

and the four companies they had perfected in this new field.

They, together with Mr. Martin, sat around the little table in the private room again. Hines beamed on his companions, as he said:

"Boys, this is the wildest wildcat that ever roamed the Texas woods, and nobody knows it but us. When she gets going good, you can hear her scream from New York to San Francisco. The people where this stock is offered for sale will cripple one another trying to get to it. The name 'Shellfields' means lakes and rivers of oil, to them. If Saint Paul was here on earth he couldn't make one of them believe he was going to lose, if he preached to him an hour.

"All our companies give the Shellfields National Bank Building as an office address. They don't know it's all one office, and they don't care. There is ten bushels of letters stacked in the corner of that room, now, waiting to be opened, and every one of them contains drafts, checks, or request for a chance to get in on this biggest of all oil deals. We've got the best gang of stock salesmen in America, and nothing can stop us from making the biggest clean-up in the history of the oil game. I let my interest go too cheap. I ought to have had more than half a million, but I had no idea it would be as big a thing as it is. Oh, well. Live and let live. You fellows will come in for a good roll, and when I'm helping my friends I am helping myself," and Hines bit off the end of a fresh cigar, struck a match, and stretched out his legs to enjoy himself.

"About those drills, Mr. Hines," said Martin. "They are all on the ground, at the outside corners of the four sections, and ready to start as soon as they get instructions."

"Good! We'll start 'em when we have to. Scarcity of cars to ship material is a good excuse to hold 'em up for a month. No use drilling as long as it comes easy. When the sales begin to slack up we can go down a ways, and then have some indiscreet driller to let out the old story about the first oil sands. Then more stock can be sold to those who have already bought," said Hines.

"I tried again to lease that Mullens tract while you were gone. Old Bent Mullens ran the last man I sent off the place with a shotgun," said Martin apologetically.

"What the devil did you want to fool with him for. I told you his land didn't matter. We are all around him, and the worst thing that could happen would be to strike oil, and make the old thief rich. That won't happen, so we should worry. I am just ahead the amount that it would have taken to get his land. No, there has not been a hitch in this deal. Never saw anything run as smooth in my life."

"Another thing," said Martin. "Old Higg drew five thousand in cash a few days ago, and took it away in his pocket."

"Bought the county right for the key-wind electric fan, I guess. They let him down mighty light. Never mind, Temp, we'll get the other ninety-five thousand. It's going to come in so fast now that we won't have time to count it. They can't stop us. We are inside the law. Millions of people are rearing for an opportunity to take a chance. We control the land for miles around, and there you are. This is the most beautiful cinch I ever saw," and Hines got up and took a few turns around the room, so pleased he could hardly contain himself.

Three days passed, and nothing like the returns from stock sales in the rival companies had ever been seen in Shellfields.

"A month of this, and I'll have my half million. After that it's clean velvet to the gang, as long as they want to work it. If there was no income tax we'd own the government in a year. Have you tried Old Higg yet, Raidley?" said Hines.

"No, I've been too busy, and then I thought I'd wait until the home gang began falling over one another to get in on the ground floor," said Temp.

Hines and Raidley were standing in front of the bank one afternoon, talking, when one of Hines' henchmen came up with an anxious look on his face.

"What is it?" snapped Hines.

"It's an important matter, and I'd like to talk to you privately," said the man.

"What's it about?"

"The Plumthicket Prospect."

"Come on upstairs. Come along, Raidley, you are interested in that, same as I am," said Hines.

They called Martin, and the three went to the private room. When they were seated, Hines turned to his henchman, and said:

"Out with it! What's on the place where your mind ought to be? Don't keep us waiting!"

"Why, about that Mullen tract, I——"

"Confound you, for a chuckle-headed fool! I've told you fellows to let that Mullens tract alone! What do I care about it! The next man that mentions it to me gets fired, bodily. My time is too valuable to be frittered away with such stuff!" snorted Hines.

"Yes, but——"

"But what? Spit it out, before you choke! You are black in the face now!"

"Why, why, there's a Mastodon drill on it, running night and day!" blurted the spy.

"What!"

"I say there's a Mastodon drill on it, running night and day."

"I heard you the first time, but you're crazy. There is not one of those drills in this field!" roared Hines.

"No, but there's one in that field. It was unloaded over at Wild Hog Siding, and brought in from the other side. It's a spanking new one, big as a steamboat, and the way it's going into the ground would make a four-year-old gopher quit in disgust."

"Who told you?"

"Nobody. I saw it myself."

"Whose outfit is it?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know!" and Hines almost choked with rage. "What the hell are we paying you for? Why didn't you find out?"

Hines raged and swore, while Martin cringed in his chair, and the cool, level-eyed Raidley listened to the dialogue between Hines and his striker. It was all Greek to Raidley, and he said:

"Why, Mr. Hines, I don't see anything to worry about, or get excited over in that."

"The hell you don't. I knew you wasn't an oil man, but I didn't think you were a damned fool! Don't you know that if that drill ain't stopped, they'll bore a hole four thousand feet deep, right in the middle of the best wildcat skin game the world ever saw, and the hole will be dry as a prohibition town in August? They'll be bringing up ashes from Tophet, about the time we ought to be going good!" and Hines fairly frothed at the mouth.

"How much money did you say Old Higg drew from the bank?" Hines shot at Martin, in a tone that made the cashier jump.

"Five thousand."

Then Hines exploded: "Come on, Temp! Let's go and see the old idiot, and bluff the story out of him, if he is in it. I can't be-

lieve yet he's that big a fool, but I can't think of any one else on earth that is, and it must be him."

Judge Higganbotham was sitting at his desk, figuring industriously, when his visitors entered. There was no trace of the storm of rage seething in Hines' soul, when he slapped Higg on the back, kicked the empty box toward Raidley, and sat down in the other chair. Hines was in no humor to parley. He was on the point of killing somebody, so he came to the point at once.

"Higg, do you know anything about an outfit drilling for oil on the Bent Mullens tract?" he asked.

"No," said the judge innocently.

"Well, there's one out there. Right on the northeast corner, and the well's within forty feet of the center of our holdings," said Hines.

The judge wrinkled his brow and looked puzzled. Then he brightened up, and said:

"Oh, I know about that outfit, but they ain't drilling for oil. No! Nothing like that!"

Hines almost had a fit: "What in the Holy Kingdom are they drilling for, then?"

"Why, I bought the county right for the Mastodon Drill and Derrick Company's machinery, and am making a dee-mon-stration out there," said the judge blandly.

"Come clean, Higg. You know that won't go down. What kind of a wildcat scheme have you got out there?"

"Well, she's just a kitten, yet, and I can't tell. She looks like she might be about half house—and half wild cat, with a tech of b'ar and a leetle pant'er, from the way she's bringing up dirt. Steve, he was in here this morning, and he said they went a hundred foot, to the cap rock, the first day. He 'lowed they'd go kinder slow through the rock, which is most generally about thirty foot. He said after they got through the rock, she'd eat it plum' up, and he'd have a half hitch with his drill cable on the dog irons in hell, in two weeks," said the judge.

"What kind of a crazy idea have you got about that outfit, Higg? Don't you know enough about the oil game to know it won't pay?"

"I ain't got no crazy idea about nothin'. I don't know a thing about the oil game, and I don't want to. I know it's crooked, and that's enough for me. Folks has always

said I was a fool for monkeying with county rights, and that none of 'em ever paid. I've got one this time that's going to come up to my figgers. If I can dee-mon-strate that the Mastodon will cut drilling expense in half, I'll sell all the machinery in this county, and that's as good a thing as I want."

"What kind of lease have you got on the Mullens land?" asked Hines, sparring for another opening, after almost losing his breath.

"Oh, I got a sort of a title. Bent, he got a patent from the State about twenty year ago, and I reck'n it's still good. Then I got a warranty deed from Bent and his wife," said the judge.

Hines caved in. He had been in the oil game too long, not to know when he was up against the real thing. He pulled himself together, and got down to cases.

"We can't afford to have that well go down right now, Higg. We'll buy. What's the price, and let's have it over with," he said, with as good grace as he could.

"Well, I hadn't thought of selling, Mr. Hines, but I want to be fair. I wouldn't want to disfurnish no neighbor, and I understand you got some holdings out that way. I never 'lowed it would pester anybody for a man to dee-mon-strate a machine on his own land that-away. At the same time, I know you wouldn't want that a man that's just about to win the game he's been playin' all his life, should lose on yo' account. I been figgering on this, and 'lowed it would make me a little something for my old age, and——"

"Go on! State yo' price!"

"As I was saying, I figured that my commissions on these machines would amount to two hundred thousand dollars, and——"

The judge went on at some length, but after hearing the total sum he was to be skinned for, or else have his own gigantic robbing scheme ruined, Hines went blind, deaf, and crazy with rage. Templeton Raidley roared with laughter.

The next day, after the deal was closed, Martin said:

"You told me to keep you informed about Judge Higganbotham's money, Mr. Hines. He has three hundred and forty-five thousand on deposit in the bank, now."

"Yes, the old blood sucker," grated Hines. "His day of reckoning will come."

More stories by Grinstead about the oil game are coming.

The Gray Room

By Eden Phillpotts

Author of "Down Dartmoor Way," "The Human Boy and the War," Etc.

A few years ago a noted critic said that since Thomas Hardy had ceased to write fiction, Eden Phillpotts was the greatest novelist writing in England. His tales of Dartmoor are known wherever the English language is read. But he is not merely a chronicler of life on the moors. His novels take a wide range, and, possibly because he was for a time an actor, they always have dramatic merit. This story of a tragic mystery in an old English manor house will be found surprising by even the most jaded reader. It would be safe to offer a prize to any one guessing the ending after reading the first or even the second installment of this three-part novel.

...

(A *Three-Part Story—Part I*)

CHAPTER I.

THE HOUSE PARTY.

THE piers of the main entrance of Chadlands were of red brick, and upon each reposed a mighty sphere of gray granite. Behind them stretched away the park, where forest trees, nearly shorn of their leaves at the edge of winter, still answered the setting sun with fires of thinning foliage. They sank away through stretches of russet brake fern, and already amid their trunks arose a thin, blue haze—breath of earth made visible by coming cold. There was frost in the air and the sickle of a new moon hung where dusk of evening dimmed the pure green of the western sky.

The guns were returning and eight men with three women arrived at the lofty gates. One of the party rode a gray pony and a woman walked on each side of him. They chattered together and the little company of tweed-clad people passed into Chadlands Park and trudged forward, where the manor house rose half a mile ahead.

Then an old man emerged from a lodge, hidden behind a grove of laurel and bay within the entrance, and shut the great gates of scroll iron. The gates were of a flamboyant Italian period and more arrestive than distinguished. Paneled upon them and belonging to a later date than they, had

been imposed two iron coats of arms with crest above and motto beneath—the heraldic bearings of the present owner of Chadlands. He set store upon such things, but was not responsible for the work. A survival himself and steeped in ancient opinions, his coat, won in a forgotten age, interested him only less than his Mutiny medal—his sole personal claim to public honor. He had served in youth as a soldier, but was still a subaltern when his father died and he came into the kingdom.

Now, Sir Walter Lennox, fifth baronet, had grown old and his invisible kindness of heart, his archaic principles, his great wealth and the limited experiences of reality, for which such wealth was responsible, left him a popular and respected man. Yet he aroused much exasperation in local landowners from his generosity and scorn of all economic principles; and while his tenants held him the very exemplar of a landlord, and his servants worshiped him for the best possible reasons, his friends, weary of remonstrance, were forced to forgive his bad precedents and a mistaken liberality quite beyond the power of the average unfortunate who lives by his land. But he managed his great manor in his own lavish way and marveled that other men declared such difficulties with problems he so readily solved.

That night, after a little music, the Chadlands house party drifted to the billiard

room, and while most of the men, after a heavy day far afield, were content to lounge by a great open hearth whereon a wood fire burned, Sir Walter, who had been on a pony most of the time, declared himself unwearied, and demanded a game.

"No excuses, Henry," he said, and turned to a young man lounging in an easy-chair outside the fireside circle.

The youth started. His eyes had been fixed on a woman sitting beside the fire with her hand in a man's hand. It was such an attitude as sophisticated lovers would assume only in private; but the pair were not sophisticated and lovers still, though married. They lacked self-consciousness. After all, a thing impossible until you are married may be quite seemly afterward, and none of their amiable elders regarded their devotion with cynicism.

"All right, uncle!" said Henry Lennox. He rose—a big fellow with heavy shoulders, a clean-shaven, youthful face, and flaxen hair. He had been handsome, save for a nose with a broken bridge, but his pale-brown eyes were fine and his large mouth and chin well modeled. Imagination and reflection marked his countenance.

Sir Walter claimed thirty points on his scoring board and gave a miss with the spot ball.

"I win to-night," he said.

He was a small, very upright man with a face that seemed to belong to his generation, and an expression seldom to be seen on a man younger than seventy. Life had not puzzled him; his moderate intellect had taken it as he found it, and through the magic glasses of good health, good temper, and great wealth, judged it a very desirable thing and quite easy to conduct with credit. "You only want patience and a good brain," he always declared. Sir Walter wore an eyeglass. He was growing bald, but preserved a pair of gray whiskers still of respectable size. His face, indeed, belied him, for it was molded in a stern pattern. One had guessed him a martinet until his amiable opinions and easy-going personality were manifested. The old man was not vain: he knew that a world very different from his own extended round about him. But he was puzzle-headed and had never been shaken from his life-long complacency by circumstances. He had been disappointed in love as a young man, and married late in life. He had no son and was a widower—

facts that, to his mind, quite dwarfed his good fortune in every other respect. He held the comfortable doctrine that things are always leveled up, and he honestly believed that he had suffered as much sorrow and disappointment as any Lennox in the history of the race.

His only child and her cousin, Henry Lennox, had been brought up together and were of an age—both now twenty-six. The lad was his uncle's heir and would succeed to Chadlands and the title; and it had been Sir Walter's hope that he and Mary might marry. Nor had the youth any objection to such a plan. Indeed, he loved Mary well enough: there was even thought to be a tacit understanding between them and they grew up in a friendship which gradually became ardent on the man's part, though it never ripened upon hers. But she knew that her father desired this marriage and supposed that it would happen some day—not knowing love as yet. They were, however, not betrothed when the war burst upon Europe, and Henry, then one and twenty, went from the Officers' Training Corps to the Fifth Devons, while his cousin became attached to the Red Cross and nursed at Plymouth. The accident terminated their shadowy romance and brought real love into the woman's life, while the man found his hopes at an end. He was drafted to Mesopotamia, speedily fell sick of jaundice, was invalided to India and, on returning to the front, saw service against the Turks. But chance willed that he won no distinction. He did his duty under dreary circumstances, while to his hatred of war was added the weight of his loss when he heard that Mary had fallen in love. He was an ingenuous, kindly youth—a typical Lennox who had developed an accomplishment at Harrow and suffered for it by getting his nose broken when winning the heavyweight championship of the public schools in his nineteenth year. In the East he still boxed, and after his love story was ended, the epidemic of poetry-making took Henry also and he wrote a volume of respectable verse, to the undying amazement of his family.

For Mary Lennox the war had brought a sailor husband. Captain Thomas May, wounded rather severely at Jutland, lost his heart to the plain but attractive young woman with a fine figure who nursed him back to strength, and, as he vowed, had saved his life. He was an impulsive man of

thirty, brown-bearded, black-eyed, and hot-tempered. He came from a little Somerset vicarage and was the only son of a clergyman, the Reverend Septimus May. Knowing the lady as 'Nurse Mary' only and falling passionately in love for the first time in his life, he proposed on the day he was allowed to sit up, and since Mary Lennox shared his emotions, also for the first time, he proposed and was accepted before he even knew her name.

It is impossible to describe the force of love's advent for Mary Lennox. She had come to believe herself as vaguely committed to her cousin and imagined that her affection for Henry amounted to as much as she was ever likely to feel for a man. But reality awakened her, and its glory did not make her selfish, since her nature was not constructed so to be: it only taught her what love meant and convinced her that she could never marry anybody on earth but the stricken sailor. And this she knew long before he was well enough to give a sign that he even appreciated her ministry. The very whisper of his voice sent a thrill through her before he had gained strength to speak aloud. And his deep tones, when she heard them, were like no voice that had fallen on her ear till then. The first thing that indicated restoring health was his request that his beard might be trimmed; and he was making love to her three days after he had been declared out of danger. Then did Mary begin to live and, looking back, she marveled how horses and dogs and a fishing rod had been her life till now. The revelation bewildered her and she wrote her emotions in many long pages to her cousin. The causes of such mighty changes she did not, indeed, specify; but he read between the lines and knew it was a man and not the war that had so altered and deepened her outlook.

He was not surprised, therefore, when news of her engagement reached him from herself. He wrote the letter of his life in reply and was at pains to laugh at their boy and girl attachment, to lessen any regret she might feel on his account. Her father took it somewhat hardly at first, for he held that more than sufficient misfortunes, to correct the balance of prosperity in his favor, had already befallen him. But he was deeply attached to his daughter and her magical change under the new and radiant revelation convinced him that she had now awakened to an emotional fullness of life

which could only be the outward sign of love. That she was in love for the first time also seemed clear; but he would not give his consent until he had seen her lover and heard all there was to know about him.

And now they had been wedded for six months and Mary sat by the great log fire with her hand in Tom's. The young man was on leave but expected to return to his ship at Plymouth in a day or two. Then his father-in-law had promised to visit the great cruiser, for the navy was a service of which he knew little. Lennoxes had all been soldiers or clergymen since a great lawyer founded the race.

The game of billiards proceeded, and Henry caught his uncle in the eighties and ran out with an unfinished fifteen. Then Ernest Travers and his wife—old and dear friends of Sir Walter—played a hundred up, the lady receiving half the game. Mr. Travers was a Suffolk man and had fagged for Sir Walter at Eton. Their comradeship had lasted a lifetime and no year passed without reciprocal visits. Travers also looked at life with the eyes of a wealthy man. He was sixty-five, pompous, large, and rubicund—"backwoodsman" of a pattern obsolescent. His wife, ten years younger than himself, loved pleasure; but she had done more than her duty in her opinion and borne him two sons and a daughter. They were colorless, kind-hearted people who lived in a circle of others like themselves. The war had sobered them, and at an early stage robbed them of their younger boy.

Nelly Travers won her game amid congratulations, and Tom May challenged another woman, a Diana, who lived for sport and had joined the house party with her uncle, Mr. Felix Fayre-Michell. But Millicent Fayre-Michell refused.

"I've shot six partridges, a hare, and two pheasants to-day," said the girl, "and I'm half asleep."

And now upon the lives of these everyday folks was destined to break an event unique and extraordinary. Existence, that had meandered without personal incident save of a description common to them all, was, within twelve hours, to confront men and women alike with reality. They were destined to endure at close quarters an occurrence so astounding and unparalleled that, for once in their lives, they would find themselves interesting to the wider world beyond their own limited circuit and, for their friends

and acquaintances, the center of a nine-days' wonder. Most of them, indeed, merely touched the hem of the mystery and were not involved therein, but even for them a reflected glory shone. They were at least objects of attraction elsewhere, and for many months furnished conversation of a more interesting and exciting character than any could ever claim to have provided before.

A very trivial and innocent remark was prelude to the disaster, and had the speaker guessed what his jest must presently mean in terms of human misery, grief, and horror, it is certain enough that he would not have spoken. The women were gone to bed and the men sat round the fire smoking and admiring Sir Walter's ancient blend of whisky. He himself had just flung away the stump of his cigar and was admonishing his son-in-law.

"Church to-morrow, Tom. None of your larks. When first you came to see me, remember, you went to church twice on Sunday like a lamb. I'll have no backsliding."

"Mary will see to that, governor."

"Will anybody have another whisky?" asked Sir Walter, rising. It was the signal for departure and invariably followed the stroke of a deep-mouthed grandfather's clock in the hall. When eleven sounded, the master rose; but to-night he was delayed.

Tom May spoke.

"Fayre-Michell has never heard the ghost story, governor," he said, "and Mr. Travers badly wants another drink. If he doesn't have one, he won't sleep all night. He's done ten men's work to-day."

Mr. Fayre-Michell spoke:

"I didn't know you had a ghost, Sir Walter. I'm tremendously interested in psychical research and so on. If it's not bothering you and keeping you up——"

"A ghost at Chadlands, Walter?" asked Ernest Travers. "You never told me."

"Ghosts are all humbug," declared another speaker—a youthful colonel of the war.

"I deprecate that attitude, Vane. It may certainly be that our ghost is a humbug, or, rather, that we have no such thing as a ghost at all. And that is my own impression. But an idle generality is always futile—indeed any generality usually is. You have, at least, no right to say 'Ghosts are all humbug.' Because you cannot prove they are. The weight of evidence is very much on the other side."

"Sorry," said Colonel Vane, a man with-

out pride. "I didn't know you believed in 'em, Sir Walter."

"Most emphatically I believe in them."

"So do I," declared Ernest Travers. "Nay, so does my wife—for the best possible reason. A friend of hers actually saw one."

Mr. Fayre-Michell spoke.

"Spiritualism and spirits are two quite different things," he said. "A man may discredit the whole business of spiritualism and yet firmly believe in spirits."

Ernest Travers agreed with him. Indeed, they all agreed. Sir Walter himself summed up.

"If you're a Christian, you must believe in the spirits of the dead," he declared, "but to go out of your way to summon these spirits—to call them from the next world back to ours and to consult people who profess to be able to do so—extremely doubtful characters as a rule—that, I think, is much to be condemned. I deny that there are any living mediums of communication between the spirit world and this one, and I should always judge the man or woman who claimed such power to be a charlatan. But that spirits of the departed have appeared and been recognized by the living, who shall deny? My son-in-law has a striking case in his own recent experience. He actually knows a man who was going to sail in the *Lusitania*, and his greatest friend on earth, a soldier who fell on the Marne, appeared to him and advised him not to do so. Tom's acquaintance could not say that he heard words uttered, but he certainly recognized his dead friend as he stood by his bedside, and he received into his mind a clear warning before the vision disappeared. Is that so, Tom?"

"Exactly so, sir. And Jack Thwaites—that was the name of the man in New York—told four others about it, and three took his tip and didn't sail. The fourth went; but he wasn't drowned. He came out all right."

"But your own ghost, Sir Walter?" asked Fayre-Michell. "It is a curious fact that most really ancient houses have some such an addition. Is it a family specter? Is it fairly well authenticated? Does it reign in a particular spot of house or garden? I ask from no idle curiosity. It is a very interesting subject if approached in a proper spirit, as the Psychical Research Society, of which I am a member, does approach it."

"I am unprepared to admit that we have

a ghost at all," repeated Sir Walter. "Ancient houses, as you say, often get some legend tacked on to them, and here a garden walk, or there a room or passage, is associated with something uncanny and contrary to experience. This is an old Tudor place and has been tinkered and altered in successive generations. We have one room at the eastern end of the great corridor which always suffered from a bad reputation. Nobody has ever seen anything in our time, and neither my father nor grandfather ever handed down any story of a personal experience. It is a bedroom, which you shall see if you care to do so. One very unfortunate and melancholy thing happened in it. That was some twelve years ago, when Mary was still a child—two years after my dear wife died."

"Tell us nothing that can cause you any pain, Walter," said Ernest Travers.

"It caused me very acute pain at the time. Now it is old history and mercifully one can look back with nothing but regret. One must, however, mention an incident in my father's time first, though it has nothing to do with my own painful experience. However, that is part of the story—if story it can be called. A death occurred in the gray room when I was a child. Owing to the general vague feeling entertained against it, we never put guests there, and so long ago as my father's day it was relegated to a store place and lumber room. But one Christmas, when we were very full, there came quite unexpectedly on Christmas Eve an aunt of my father—an extraordinary old character who never did anything that might be foreseen. She had never come to the family reunion before, yet appeared on this occasion and declared that, as this was going to be her last Christmas on earth, she had felt it right to join the clan—my father being the head of the family. Her sudden advent strained our resources I suppose, but she herself reminded us of the gray room and, on hearing that it was empty, insisted on occupying it. The place is a bedroom, and my father, who personally entertained no dislike or dread of it, raised not the least objection to the strong-minded old lady's proposal. She retired and was found dead on Christmas morning. She had not gone to bed, but was just about to do so, apparently, when she had fallen down and died. She was eighty-eight, had undergone a lengthy coach journey from Exeter,

and had eaten a remarkably good dinner before going to bed. Her maid was not suspected, and the doctor held her end in no way unusual. It was certainly never associated with anything but natural causes. Indeed, only events of much later date served to remind me of the matter.—Then one remembered the spoiled Christmas festivities and the callous and selfish anger of myself and various other young people, that our rejoicings should be spoiled and Christmas shorn of all its usual delights.

"But twelve years ago Mary fell ill of pneumonia—dangerously—and a nurse had to be summoned in haste, since her own faithful attendant, Jane Bond, who is still with us, could not attend her both day and night. A telegram to the Nurses' Institute brought Mrs. Gilbert Forrester—'Nurse Forrester,' as she preferred to be called. She was a little bit of a thing, but most attractive and capable. She had been a nurse before she married a young medical man, and upon his unfortunate death, she returned to her profession. She desired her bedroom to be as near the patient as possible, and objected when she found it arranged at the end of the corridor. 'Why not the next room?' she inquired, and I had to tell her that the next room suffered from a bad name and was not used. 'A bad name—is it unwholesome?' she asked, and I explained that traditions credited it with a sinister influence. 'In fact,' I said, 'it is supposed to be haunted. Not,' I added, 'that anything has ever been seen, or heard in my lifetime; but nervous people do not like that sort of room, and I should never take the responsibility of putting anybody into it without telling them.' She laughed. 'I'm not in the least afraid of ghosts, Sir Walter,' she said, 'and that must obviously be my room, if you please. It is necessary I should be as near my patient as possible, so that I can be called at once if her own nurse is anxious when I am not on duty.'

"Well, we saw, of course, that she was perfectly right. She was a fearless little woman and chaffed masters and the maids, while they lighted a fire and made the room comfortable. As a matter of fact it is an exceedingly pleasant room in every respect. Yet I hesitated and could not say that I was easy about it. I felt conscious of a discomfort, which even her indifference did not entirely banish. I attributed it to my acute anxiety over Mary, also to a shadow of—

what? It may have been irritation at Nurse Forrester's unconcealed contempt for my superstition. The gray room is large and commodious with a rather fine oriel window above our eastern porch. She was delighted and rated me very amusingly for my doubts. 'I hope you'll never call such a lovely room haunted again after I have gone,' said she.

"Night fell; the child was sleeping and Jane Bond arrived to relieve the other about ten o'clock. Then the lady retired, directed that she should be called at seven o'clock, or at any moment sooner if Jane wanted her. I sat with Jane I remember until two, and then turned in myself. I was worn out and, despite my anxiety, fell into deep sleep and did not wake until my man called me half an hour earlier than usual. What he told me brought me quickly to my senses and out of bed. Nurse Forrester had been called at seven o'clock, but had not responded. Nor could the maid open the door, for it was locked. A quarter of an hour later the housekeeper and Jane Bond had loudly summoned her without receiving any reply. Then they called me.

"I could only direct that the door should be forced open as speedily as possible, and we were engaged in this task when Mannering, my medical man, who shot with us today, arrived to see Mary. I told him what had happened. He went in to look at my girl and felt satisfied that she was holding her own well—indeed, he thought her stronger; and just as he told me so, the door into the gray room yielded. Mannering and my housekeeper, Mrs. Forbes, entered the room, while Masters and Fred Caunter, my footman, who had broken down the lock, and I, remained outside.

"The doctor presently called me and I went in. Nurse Forrester was apparently lying awake in bed; but she was not awake. She slept the sleep of death. Her eyes were open, but glazed, and she was already cold. Mannering declared, that she had been dead for a good many hours. Yet, save for a slight but hardly unnatural pallor, not a trace of death marked the poor little creature. An expression of wonder seemed to sit on her features, but otherwise she was looking much as I had last seen her, when she said 'good night.' Everything appeared to be orderly in the room. It was now flooded with the first light of a sunny morning, for she had drawn her blind up and thrown her window wide open. The poor

lady passed out of life without a sound or signal to indicate trouble, for in the silence of night, Jane Bond must have heard any alarm had she raised one.

"There were held a post-mortem examination and an inquest, of course; and Mannering, who felt deep professional interest, asked a friend from Plymouth to conduct the examination. Their report astounded all concerned and crowned the mystery, for not a trace of any physical trouble could be discovered. Nurse Forrester was thin, but organically sound in every particular, nor could the faintest trace of poison be reported. Life had simply left her without any physical reason. Search proved that she had brought no drugs or any sort of physic with her, and no information to cast the least light came from the institution for which she worked. She was a favorite there, and the news of her sudden death brought sorrow to her many personal friends.

Sir Walter became pensive and did not proceed for the space of a minute. None, however, spoke, and he resumed:

"That is the story of what is called our haunted room, so far as this generation is concerned. What grounds for its sinister reputation existed in the far past I know not—only a vague, oral tradition came to my father from his, and it is certain that neither of them attached any personal importance to it. But after such a peculiar and unfortunate tragedy, you will not be surprised that I regarded the chamber as ruled out from my domiciliary scheme and denied it to any future guests."

"Do you really associate the lady's death with the room, Walter?" asked Mr. Travers.

"Honestly I do not, Ernest. And for this reason. I deny that any malignant, spiritual personality would ever be permitted by the Creator to exercise physical powers over the living, or destroy human beings without reason or justice. The horror of such a possibility to the normal mind is sufficient argument against it. Causes beyond our apparent knowledge were responsible for the death of Nurse Forrester; but who shall presume to say that was really so? Why imagine anything so irregular? I prefer to think that, had the post-mortem been conducted by somebody else, subtle reasons for her death might have appeared. Science is fallible, and even specialists make outrageous mistakes."

"You believe she died from natural causes

beyond the skill of those particular surgeons to discover?" asked Colonel Vane.

"That is my opinion. Needless to say, I should not tell Mannering so. But to what other conclusion can a reasonable man come? I do not, of course, deny the supernatural, but it is weak-minded to fall back upon it as the line of least resistance."

Then Fayre-Michell repeated his question. He had listened with interest to the story.

"Would you deny that ghosts, so to call them, can be associated with one particular spot, to the discomfort and even loss of reason, or life, of those that may be in that spot at the psychological moment, Sir Walter?"

"Emphatically I would deny it," declared the elder. "However tragic the circumstances that might have befallen an unfortunate being in life at any particular place, it is, in my opinion, monstrous to suppose his disembodied spirit will hereafter be associated with the place. We must be reasonable, Felix. Shall the God who gave us reason, be Himself unreasonable?"

"Do let them see the room, governor," urged Tom May. "Mary showed it to me the first time I came here, and I thought it about the jolliest spot in the house."

"So it is, Tom," said Henry. "Mary says it should be called the rose room, not the gray one."

"All who care to do so can see it," answered Sir Walter, rising. "We will look in on our way to bed. Get the key from my key cabinet in the study, Henry. It's labeled 'Gray Room.'"

CHAPTER II.

AN EXPERIMENT.

Ernest Travers, Felix Fayre-Michell, Tom May, and Colonel Vane followed Sir Walter upstairs to a great corridor, which ran the length of the main front and upon which opened a dozen bedrooms and dressing rooms. They proceeded to the eastern extremity. It was lighted throughout, and now their leader took off an electric bulb from a sconce on the wall outside the room they had come to visit.

"There is none in there," he explained, "though the light was installed in the gray room as elsewhere when I started my own plant twenty years ago. My father never

would have it. He disliked it exceedingly and believed it aged the eyes."

Henry arrived with the key. The door was unlocked and the light established. The party entered a large and lofty chamber with ceiling of elaborate plaster work and silver-gray walls, the paper on which was somewhat tarnished. A pattern of dim pink roses as large as cabbages ran riot over it. A great oriel window looked east, while a smaller one opened upon the south. Round the curve of the oriel ran a cushioned seat eighteen inches above the ground, while on the western side of the room, set in the internal wall, was a modern fireplace with a white Adams fire mantel above it. Some old, carved chairs stood round the walls, and in one corner, stacked together, lay half a dozen old oil portraits, grimy and faded. They called for the restorer, but were doubtfully worth his labors. Two large chests of drawers, with rounded bellies, and a very beautiful washing stand also occupied places round the room, and against the inner wall rose a single, four-poster bed of Spanish chestnut, also carved. A gray carpet covered the floor, and on one of the chests stood a miniature bronze copy of the Faun of Praxiteles.

The apartment was bright and cheerful of aspect. Nothing gloomy or depressing marked it, not a suggestion of the sinister.

"Could one wish for a more amiable-looking room?" asked Fayre-Michell.

They gazed round them and Ernest Travers expressed admiration at the old furniture.

"My dear Walter, why hide these things here?" he asked. "They are beautiful and may be valuable, too."

"I've been asked the same question before," answered the owner. "And they are valuable. Lord Bolsover offered me a thousand guineas for those two chairs; but the things are heirlooms in a sort of way, and I shouldn't feel justified in parting with them. My grandfather was furniture mad—spent half his time collecting old stuff on the Continent. Spain was his happy hunting ground."

Then Tom May brought their thoughts back to the reason of the visit.

"Look here, governor," he said. "It's a scandal to give a champion room like this a bad name and shut it up. You've fallen into the habit, but you know it's all nonsense. Mary loves this room. I'll make

you a sporting offer. Let me sleep in it to-night and then, when I report a clean bill to-morrow, you can throw it open again and announce it is forgiven without a stain on its character. You've just said you don't believe spooks have the power to hurt anybody. Then let me turn in here."

Sir Walter, however, refused.

"No, Tom, most certainly not. It's far too late to go over the ground again and explain why, but I don't wish it."

He turned and the rest followed him.

Henry removed the electric bulb and restored it to its place outside. Then his uncle gave him the key.

"Put it back in the cabinet," he said. "I won't go down again."

The party broke up and all save Lennox and the sailor went to their rooms. The two younger men descended together and, when out of earshot of his uncle, Henry spoke.

"Look here, Tom," he said. "You've given me a tip. I'm going to camp out in the gray room to-night. Then in the morning, I'll tell uncle Walter I have done so, and the ghost's number will be up."

"Quite all right, old man—only the plan must be modified. I'll sleep there. I'm death on it, and the brilliant inspiration was mine, remember."

"You can't. He refused to let you."

"I didn't hear him."

"Oh, yes, you did—everybody did. Besides this is fairly my task—you won't deny that. Chadlands will be mine some day, so it's up to me to knock this musty yarn on the head once and for all. Could anything be more absurd than shutting up a fine room like that? I'm really rather ashamed of uncle Walter."

"Of course it's absurd; but, honestly, I'm rather keen about this. I'd dearly love to add a medieval phantom to my experience and only wish I thought anything would show up. I beg you'll raise no objection. It was my idea, and I very much wish to make the experiment. Of course, I don't believe in anything supernatural."

They went back to the billiard room, dismissed Fred Caunter, the footman, who was waiting to put out the lights, and continued their discussion. The argument began to grow strenuous, for each proved determined, and who owned the stronger will seemed a doubtful question.

For a time, since no conclusion could satisfy both, they abandoned the center of con-

tention and debated, as their elders had done, on the general question. Henry declared himself not wholly convinced. He adopted an agnostic attitude, while Tom frankly disbelieved. The one preserved an open mind, the other scoffed at apparitions in general."

"It's humbug to say sailors are superstitious now," he asserted. "They might have been, but my experience is that they are no more credulous than other people in these days. Anyway, I'm not. Life is a matter of chemistry. There's no mumbo-jumbo about it in my opinion. Chemical analysis has reached down to hormones and enzymes and all manner of subtle secretions discovered by this generation of inquirers; but it's all organic. Nobody has ever found anything that isn't. Existence depends on matter, and when the chemical process breaks down, the organism perishes and leaves nothing. When a man can't go on breathing, he's dead and there's an end of him."

But Henry had read modern science also.

"What about the vital spark then? Biologists don't turn down the theory of vitalism, do they?"

"Most of them do, who count, my dear chap. The presence of a vital spark—a spark that cannot be put out—is merely a theory with nothing to prove it. When he dies, the animating principle doesn't leave a man and go off on its own. It dies, too. It was part of the man as much as his heart or brain."

"That's only an opinion. Nobody can be positive. We don't know anything about what life really means, and we haven't got the machinery to find out."

"By analogy we can," argued Tom. "Where are you going to draw the line? Life is life, and a sponge is just as much alive as a herring; a nettle is just as much alive as an oak tree; and an oak tree is just as much alive as you are. When you eat an oyster what becomes of its vital spark?"

"You wouldn't believe in a future life at all then?"

"It's a pure assumption, Henry. I'd like to believe in it—who wouldn't—because if you honestly did, it would transform this life into something infinitely different from what it is."

Lennox brought him back to the present difference.

"Well, seeing you laugh at ghosts and I

remain doubtful, it's only fair that I sleep in the gray room. You must see that. Ghosts hate people who don't believe in them. They'd cold shoulder you; but in my case they might feel I was good material, worth convincing. They might show up for me in a friendly spirit. If they show for you, it will probably be to bully you."

Tom laughed.

"That's what I want. I'd like to have it out and talk sense to a spook and show him what an ass he's making of himself. The governor was right about that. When Fayre-Michell asked if he believed in them loafing about a place, where they'd been murdered or otherwise maltreated, he rejected the idea."

"Yet a woman certainly died there and without a shadow of reason."

"She probably died for a very good reason, only we don't happen to know it."

Henry tried a different argument.

"You're married and you matter; I'm not married and don't matter to anybody."

"Humbug."

"Mary wouldn't like it, anyway—you know that."

"True—she'd hate it. But she won't know anything about it till to-morrow. She always sleeps in her old nursery when she comes here, and I'm down the corridor at the far end. She'd have a fit if she knew I'd turned in next door to her and was snoozing in the gray room; but she won't know till I tell her of my rash act to-morrow. Don't think I'm a fool. Nobody loves life better than I do, and nobody has better reason to. But I'm positive that this is all rank nonsense, and so are you, really. We know there's nothing in the room with a shadow of supernatural danger about it. Besides you wouldn't want to sleep there so badly if you believed anything wicked was waiting for you. You're tons cleverer than I am—so you must agree about that."

Lennox was bound to confess that he entertained no personal fear. They still argued and the clock struck midnight. Then the sailor made a suggestion.

"Since you're so damned obstinate, I'll do this. We'll toss up and the winner can have the fun. That's fair to both."

The other agreed to this; he tossed a coin and May called "tails" and won.

He was jubilant, while Henry showed a measure of annoyance. The other consoled him.

"It's better so, old man. You're highly strung and nervy and a poet and all that sort of thing. I'm no better than a prize ox and don't know what nerves mean. I can sleep anywhere, anyhow. If you can sleep in a submarine, you bet you can in a nice, airy, Elizabethan room, even if it is haunted. But it's not—that's the whole point. There's not a haunted room in the world. Get me your service revolver like a good chap."

Henry was silent and Tom rose to make ready for his vigil.

"I'm dog tired, anyhow," he said. "Nothing less than Queen Elizabeth herself will keep me awake, if it does appear."

Then the other surprised him.

"Don't think I want to go back on it. You've won the right to make the experiment—if we ignore uncle Walter. But—well, you'll laugh, yet on my honor, Tom, I've got a feeling I'd rather you didn't. It isn't nerves. I'm not nervy any more than you are. I'm not suggesting that I go now, of course. But I do ask you to think better of it and chuck the thing."

"Why?"

"Well, one can't help one's feelings. I do feel a rum sort of conviction at the bottom of my mind that it's not good enough. I can't explain—there are no words for it that I know, but it's growing on me. Intuition, perhaps."

"Intuition of what?"

"I can't tell you. But I ask you not to go."

"You were going if you'd won the toss?"

"I know."

"Then your growing intuition is only because I won it. Damned if I don't think you want to funk me, old man!"

"I couldn't do that. But it's different me going and you going. I've got nothing to live for. Don't think I'm maudlin or any rot of that sort; but you know all about the past. I've never mentioned it to you, and, of course, you haven't to me; and I never should have; but I will now. I loved Mary with all my heart and soul, Tom. She didn't know how much, and probably I didn't, either. But that's done, and no man on earth rejoices in her great happiness more than I do. And no man on earth is going to be a better or a truer friend to you and her than, please God, I shall be. But that being so, can't you see the rest? My life ended in a way when the dream of

my life ended. I attach no importance to living for itself, and if anything final happened to me, it wouldn't leave a blank anywhere. You're different. In sober honesty you oughtn't to run into any needless danger—real or imaginary. I'm thinking of Mary only when I say that—not you."

"But I deny the danger."

"Yes—only you might listen. So did I, but I deny it no longer. The case is altered when I tell you in all seriousness—when I take my oath if you like—that I do believe now there is something in this. I don't say it's supernatural, and I don't say it isn't; but I do feel deeply impressed in my mind now, and it's growing stronger every minute, that there's something here out of the common and really infernally dangerous."

The other looked at him in astonishment.

"What bee has got into your bonnet?"

"Don't call it that. It's a conviction, Tom. Do be guided by me, old chap."

The sailor flushed a little, emptied his glass, and rose.

"If you really wanted to choke me off, you chose a funny way to do so. Surely it only needed this to determine anybody. If you, as a sane person, honestly believe there's a pinch of danger in that blessed place, then I certainly sleep there to-night, or else wake there."

"Let me come, too, then, Tom."

"Ghosts don't show up for two people—haven't got pluck enough. If I have any sport, I'll be quite straight about it, and you shall try your luck to-morrow."

"I can only make it a favor and not for your own sake, either."

"I know. Mary will be sleeping the sleep of the just in the next room. How little she'll guess! Perhaps, if I see anything worthy of the Golden Age, I'll call her up."

The other in his turn grew a little warm.

"All right. I've spoken. I think you're rather a fool to be so obstinate. It isn't as if a nervous old woman was talking to you. But you'll go your own way. It doesn't matter a button to me, and I only made it a favor for somebody else's sake."

"We'll leave it at that, then. May I trouble you for the key? And your revolver, too. I haven't got mine here."

Henry hesitated. The key was in the pocket of his jacket.

"I'll get the revolver," he said, and handed over the key.

He returned in a minute or two with the revolver.

"Good night," he said.

"Good night, old boy. Thank you. Loaded?"

"In all the chambers. Funny you should want it."

"Take it back then."

But Henry did not answer, and they parted. Each sought his own bedroom, and while Lennox retired at once and might have been expected to pass a night more mentally peaceful than the other, now strung up to some excitement by such opinions as Henry had uttered, in reality it was not so. The younger slept ill, while May soon suffered no emotion but annoyance. He was contemptuous of the other. It seemed to him that he had taken a rather mean and unsporting line, nor did he believe for a moment that Henry was honest. Lennox had a modern mind; he had been through the furnace of war; he had received a first-class education. It seemed impossible to imagine that he spoke the truth, or that his sudden suspicion of real perils, beyond human power to combat, could be anything but a spiteful attempt to put May off, after he himself had lost the toss. Yet that seemed unlike a gentleman. Then the allusion to Mary perturbed the sailor. He could not quarrel with the words; but he resented the advice, seeing what it was based upon.

His anger lessened swiftly, however, and before he started his adventure he had dismissed Henry from his mind. He put on pajamas and a dressing gown, took a candle, a railway rug, his watch, and the loaded weapon. Then he walked quietly down the corridor to the gray room. On reaching it his usual good temper returned and he found himself entirely happy and contented. He unlocked the forbidden entrance, set his candle by the bed, and locked the door again from inside. He rolled up his dressing gown for a pillow, and placed his watch and revolver and candle at his hand on a chair. A few broken reflections drifted through his mind as he yawned and prepared to sleep. His brain brought up events of the day—a missed shot, a good shot, lunch under a haystack with Mary and Faye-Michell's niece. She was smart and showy and slangy—cheap every way compared with Mary. What would his wife think if she knew he was so near? Come to him, for certain. He cordially hoped that he might not be recalled

to his ship; but there was a possibility of it. It would be rather a lark to show the governor over the *Indomitable*. She was a "hush-hush" ship—one of the wonders of the navy still. Funny that the Italian roof looked like a dome, though it was really flat. A cunning trick of perspective.

It was a still and silent night, moonless, very dark, and very tranquil. He went to the window to throw it open.

Only a solitary being waked long that night at Chadlands, and only a solitary mind suffered tribulation. But into the small hours Henry Lennox endured the companionship of disquiet thoughts. He could not sleep, and his brain, clear enough, retraced no passage from the past day. Indeed the events of the day had sunk into remote time. He was only concerned with the present, and he wondered, while he worried, that he should be worrying. Yet a proleptic instinct made him look forward. He had neither lied nor exaggerated to May. From the moment of losing the toss, he honestly experienced a strong, subjective impression of danger arising out of the proposed attack on the mysteries of the gray room. It was indeed that consciousness, of greater possibilities in the adventure than May admitted or imagined, which made Lennox so insistent. Looking back he perceived many things, and chiefly that he had taken a wrong line and approached Mary's husband from a fatal angle. Too late he recognized his fatuity. He considered what might happen and, putting aside any lesser disaster, tried to imagine what the morning would bring if May actually succumbed.

For the moment the size of such an imaginary disaster served curiously to lessen his uneasiness. Moreover, Henry told himself that if the threat of a disaster so absolute could really be felt by him, it was his duty to rise at once, intervene, and, if necessary, summon his uncle and force May to leave the gray room immediately.

This idea amused him again and offered another jest. The tragedy really resolved into jests. He found himself smiling at the picture of May being treated like a disobedient schoolboy. But if that happened and Tom was proclaimed the sinner, what must be Henry's own fate? He broke off there, rose, drank a glass of water, and lighted a cigarette. He shook himself into wakefulness, condemned himself for this debauch of weak-minded thinking, found the time

to be three o'clock, and brushed the whole cobweb tangle from his mind. He knew that sudden warmth after cold will often induce sleep—a fact proved by incidents of his campaigns—so he trudged up and down and opened his window and let the cool breath of the night chill his forehead and breast for five minutes.

This action calmed him, and he headed himself off from returning to the subject. He knew that mental dread and discomfort were only waiting to break out again; but he smothered them, returned to bed and succeeded in keeping his mind on neutral-tinted matter, until he fell asleep.

He woke again before he was called, rose and went to his bath. He took it cold, and it refreshed him and cleared his head, for he had a headache. Everything was changed and the phantoms of his imagination remained only as memories to be laughed at. He no longer felt alarm or anxiety. He dressed presently, and guessing that Tom, always the first to rise, might already be out of doors, he strolled on to the terrace presently to meet him there.

Already he speculated whether an apology was due from him to May, or whether he might himself expect one. It didn't matter. He knew perfectly well that Tom was all right now, and that was the only thing that signified.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE ORIEL.

Chadlands sprang into existence when the manor houses of England—save for the persistence of occasional embattled parapets and other warlike survivals of unrestful days now past—had obeyed the laws of architectural evolution, and began to approach a future of cleanliness and comfort, rising to luxury, hitherto unknown. The development of this ancient mass was displayed in plan as much as in elevation, and, at its date, the great mansion had stood as the last word of perfection, when men thought on large lines and the conditions of labor made possible achievements now seldom within the power of a private purse. Much had since been done, but the main architectural features were preserved, though the interior of the great house was transformed.

The manor of Chadlands extended to some fifty thousand acres lying in a river valley between the heights of Haldon on the east

and the frontiers of Dartmoor westerly. The little township was connected by a branch with the Great Western Railway and the station lay five miles from the manor house.

A great terrace stretched between the south front and a balustrade and a wall of granite, that separated it from the gardens spreading at a lower level. Here walked Henry Lennox and sought Tom May. It was now past eight o'clock on Sunday morning and he found himself alone. The sun, breaking through heaviness of morning clouds, had risen clear of Haldon hills and cast a radiance, still dimmed by vapor, over the glow of the autumn trees. Subdued sound of birds came from the glades below, and far distant, from the scrub at the edge of the woods, pheasants were crowing. The morning sparkled and, in a scene so fair, Henry found his spirits rise. Already the interview with Mary's husband on the preceding night seemed remote and unreal. He was, however, conscious that he had made an ass of himself; but he did not much mind; for it could not be said that May had shone either.

He called him, and, for reply, an old spaniel emerged from beneath, climbed a flight of broad steps that ascended to the terrace, and paddled up to Henry, wagging his tail. He was a very ancient hero, whose record among the wild duck still remained a worthy memory and won him honor in his declining days. The age of "Prince" remained doubtful, but he was decrepit now—gone in the hams and suffering from cataract of both eyes—a disease to which it is impossible to minister in a dog. But his life was good to him; he still got about, slept in the sun, and shared the best his master's dish could offer. Sir Walter adored him and immediately felt uneasy if the creature did not appear when summoned. Often, had he been invisible too long, his master would wander whistling round his haunts. Then he would find him, or be himself found and feel easy again.

Prince went in to the open window of the breakfast room, while Henry, moved by a thought, walked round the eastern angle of the house, and looked up at the oriel window of the gray room, where it hung aloft on the side of the wall, like a brilliant bubble, and flashed with the sunshine that now irradiated the casement. To his surprise he saw the window was thrown open and that May, still in his pajamas, knelt on the cush-

ioned recess within and looked out at the morning.

"Good Lord, old chap!" he cried. "Needn't ask you if you have slept. It's nearly nine o'clock."

But the other made no response whatever. He continued to gaze far away over Henry's head at the sunrise, while the morning breeze moved his dark hair.

"Tom! Wake up!" shouted Lennox again; but still the other did not move a muscle. Then Henry noticed that he was unusually pale and something about his unwinking eyes also seemed foreign to an intelligent expression. They were set and no movement of light played upon them. It seemed that the watcher was in a trance. Henry felt his heart jump, and a sensation of alarm sharpened his thought. For him the morning was suddenly transformed, and, fearing an evil thing had indeed befallen the other, he turned to the terrace and entered the breakfast room from it. The time was now five minutes to nine, and, as un-failing punctuality had ever been a foible of Sir Walter, his guests usually respected it. Most of them were already assembled, and Mary May, who was just stepping into the garden, asked Henry if he had seen her husband.

"He's always the first to get up and the last to go to bed," she said.

Bidding her good morning, but not answering her question, the young man hastened through the room and ascended to the corridor.

Beneath, Ernest Travers, a being of fussy temperament with a heart of gold, spoke to Colonel Vane. Travers was clad in Sunday black, for he respected tradition.

"Forgive me, won't you; but this is your first visit and you don't look much like church."

"Must we go to church, too?" asked the colonel blankly. He was still a year under forty, but had achieved distinction in the war.

"There is no 'must' about it, but Sir Walter would appreciate the effort on your part."

Overhead Henry had tried the door of the gray room and found it locked. As he did so, the gong sounded for breakfast. Masters always performed upon it. First he woke a preliminary whisper of the great bronze disk, then deepened the note to a genial and mellow roar, and finally calmed

it down again until it faded gently into silence. He spoke of the gong as a musical instrument and declared the art of sounding it was a gift that few men could acquire.

Neither movement nor response rewarded the summons of Lennox, and now in genuine alarm he went below again, stopped Fred Caunter, the footman, and asked him to call out Sir Walter.

Fred waited until his master had said a brief grace before meat; then he stepped to his side and explained that his nephew desired to see him.

"Good patience! What's the matter?" asked the old man as he rose and joined Henry in the hall.

Then his nephew spoke and indicated his alarm. He stammered a little but strove to keep calm and state facts clearly.

"It's like this. I'm afraid you'll be rather savage, but I can't talk now. Tom and I had a yarn, when you'd gone to bed, and he was awfully keen to spend the night in the gray room."

"I did not wish it."

"I know—we were wrong—but we were both death on it and we tossed up and he won."

"Where is he?"

"Up there now—looking out of the window. I've called him and made a row at the door, but he doesn't answer. He's locked himself in, apparently."

"Good God! What have you done? We must get to him instantly. Tell Caunter—no, I will. Don't breathe a syllable of this to anybody unless necessity arises. Don't tell Mary."

Sir Walter beckoned the footman, bade him get some tools, and ascend quickly to the gray room. He then went up beside Henry, while, Fred, bristling with excitement, hastened to the tool room. He was a handy man, had been at sea during the war, and now returned to his old employment.

Lennox spoke to his uncle as they approached the locked door.

"It was only a lark—just to clear the room of its bad character and have a laugh at your expense this morning. But I'm afraid he's ill—fainted or something. He turned in about one o'clock. I was rather bothered and couldn't explain to myself why—but—"

"Don't chatter," answered the other. "You have both done a very wrong thing and should have respected my wishes."

At the door he called loudly.

"Let us in at once, Tom, please. I am much annoyed. If this is a jest it has gone far enough—and too far. I blame you severely."

But none replied. Absolute silence held the gray room.

Then came Caunter with a frail of tools. The task could not be performed in a moment and Sir Walter, desirous above all things to create no uneasiness at the breakfast table, determined to go down again. But he was too late, for his daughter had already suspected something. She was not anxious but puzzled that her husband tarried. She came up the stairs with a letter.

"I'm going to find Tom," she said. "It's not like him to be so lazy. Here's a letter from the ship, and I'm awfully afraid he may have to go back."

"Mary," said her father, "come here a moment."

He drew her under a great window which threw light into the corridor.

"You must summon your nerve and pluck, my girl. I'm very much afraid that something has gone amiss—with Tom. I know nothing yet; but last night it seems, after we had gone to bed, he and Henry determined that one of them should sleep in the gray room."

"Father! Was he there—and I so near him?"

"He was there—and is there. He is not well. Henry saw him looking out of the window five minutes ago. But he was, I fear, unconscious."

"Let me go to him," she said.

"I will do so first. It will be wiser. Run down and ask Ernest to join me. Do not be alarmed. I dare say it is nothing at all."

Her habit of obedience prompted her to do as he desired instantly. But she descended like lightning, called Travers, and returned with him.

"I will ask you to come in with me, Ernest," explained Sir Walter. "My son-in-law slept in the gray room last night and he does not respond to our calls this morning. The door is locked, and we are breaking it open."

"But you expressly refused him permission to do so, Walter."

"I did—you heard me. Let sleeping dogs lie is a very good motto. But young men will be young men. I hope, however, nothing serious——"

He stopped, for Caunter had forced the door and burst it inward with a crash. During the moment's silence that followed, they heard the key spring into the room and strike the wainscot. The place was flooded with sunshine and seemed to welcome them with genial light and attractive art. The furniture revealed its rich grain and beautiful modeling; the cherubs carved on the great chairs seemed to dance, where the light flashed on their little, rounded limbs; the silvery walls were bright and the huge roses that tumbled over them appeared to revive and display their original color at the touch of the sun. On a chair beside the bed stood an extinguished candle, Tom's watch and Henry's revolver. The sailor's dressing gown was still folded where he had placed it; his rug was at the foot of the bed. He himself knelt in the recess at the open window, upon the settee that ran beneath. His position was natural, one arm held the window ledge and steadied him, and his back was turned to Sir Walter and Travers, who first entered the room. Henry held Mary back and implored her to wait a moment; but she shook off his hand and followed her father.

Sir Walter it was who approached Tom and grasped his arm. In so doing he disturbed the balance of the body, which fell back and was caught by the two men. Its weight bore Ernest Travers to the ground, but Henry was in time to save both the quick and the dead. For Tom May had expired many hours before. His face was of an ivory whiteness, his mouth closed. No sign of fear, but rather a profound astonishment sat upon his features. His eyes were opened and dim. In them, too, was frozen a sort of speechless amazement. How long he had been dead they knew not, but none were in doubt of the fact. His wife, too, perceived it. She went to where he now lay, put her arms around his neck, and fainted.

Others were moving outside and the murmur of voices reached the gray room. It was one of those tragic situations, when everybody desires to be of service and when well-meaning and small-minded people are often hurt unintentionally and never forget it—putting fancied affronts before the incidents that caused them.

The man lay dead and his wife unconscious upon his body.

Sir Walter rose to the occasion as best he might, issued orders, and begged all who

heard him to obey without question. He and his friend, Travers, lifted Mary and carried her to her room. It was her nursery of old. Here they put her on her bed and sent Caunter for Mrs. Travers and Mary's old servant, Jane Bond. She had recovered consciousness before the women reached her. Then they returned to the dead, and the master of Chadlands urged those standing on the stairs and in the corridor to go back to their breakfast and their duties.

"You can do no good," he said. "I will only ask Vane to help us."

Henry Lennox started as swiftly as possible for the house of the physician, four miles off. He took a small motor car, did the journey along empty roads in twelve minutes and was back again with Doctor Mannering in less than half an hour.

The people, whose visit of pleasure was thus painfully brought to a close, moved about whispering on the terrace. They had as yet heard no details and were considering whether it would be possible to get off at once, or necessary to wait until the morrow.

Then Ernest Travers joined them. He was important, but could only tell them that May had disobeyed his father-in-law, slept in the gray room, and died there. He gave them details and declared that in his opinion it would be unseemly to attempt to leave until the following day.

"Can we do anything on earth for them?" asked Millicent Fayre-Michell.

"Nothing—nothing. If I may advise, I think we had all better go to church. By so doing we get out of the way for a time and please dear Sir Walter. I shall certainly go."

They greeted the suggestion—indeed clutched at it. Their bewildered minds welcomed action. They were hushed and perturbed. Death, crashing in upon them thus, left them more than uncomfortable. Some, at the bottom of their souls, felt almost indignant that an event so horrible should have disturbed the level tenor of their lives. They shared the most profound sympathy for the sufferers as well as for themselves. Some discovered that their own physical bodies were upset, too, and felt surprised at the depth of their emotions.

"It isn't as if it was natural," Felix Fayre-Michell persisted. "Don't imagine that for a moment."

"We're so *out* of it," said Mr. Miles Handford, a stout man from Yorkshire—a wealthy

landowner and sportsman. He was unaccustomed to be out of anything in his environment, and he showed actual irritation.

Ernest Travers joined them presently. He had put on a black tie and wore black gloves and a silk hat.

"If you accompany me," he said, "I can show you the short way by a field path. It cuts off half a mile. I have told Sir Walter we all go to church, and he asked if we would like the motors; but I felt, the day being fine, you would agree with me that we might walk. He is terribly crushed, but taking it like the man he is."

Miles Handford and Fayre-Michell followed the church party in the rear and relieved their minds by criticizing Mr. Travers.

"Officious ass!" said the stout man. "A typical touch that black tie! A decent-minded person would have felt this appalling tragedy far too much to think of such a trifle. I hope I shall never see the brute again."

"It seems too grotesque marching to church like a lot of children, because he tells us to do so," murmured Fayre-Michell.

"I don't want to go. I only want distraction. In fact, I don't think I shall go," added Mr. Handford. But a woman urged him to do so.

"Well, I'm not going to church, anyway. I must smoke for my nerves. I'm a psychic myself, and I react to a thing of this sort," replied Fayre-Michell.

From a distant stile between two fields, Mr. Travers, some hundred yards ahead, was waving directions and pointing to the left.

"Go to Jericho!" snapped Mr. Handford, but not loud enough for Ernest Travers to hear him. A little ring of bells throbbed thin music. It rose and fell on the easterly breeze and a squat gray tower, over which floated a white ensign on a flagstaff, appeared upon a little knoll of trees in the midst of the village of Chadlands.

Presently the bells stopped and the flag was brought down to half mast. Mr. Travers had reached the church.

"A maddening sort of man," said Miles Handford, who marked these phenomena. "Be sure Sir Walter never told him to do anything of that sort. He has taken it upon himself—a theatrical mind. If I were the vicar——"

Elsewhere Doctor Mannering heard what Henry Lennox could tell him as they re-

turned to the manor house together. He displayed very deep concern combined with professional interest. He recalled the story that Sir Walter had related on the previous night.

"Not a shadow of evidence—a perfectly healthy little woman; and it will be the same here as sure as I'm alive," he said. "To think—we shot side by side yesterday, and I remarked his fine physique and wonderful high spirits—a big, tough fellow. How's poor Mary?"

"She is pretty bad, but keeping her nerve, as she would be sure to do," declared the other.

Sir Walter was with his daughter when Mannering arrived. The doctor had been a crony of the elder for many years. He was above the average of a country physician—a hard-bitten, practical man who loved his profession, loved sport, and professed conservative principles. Experience stood in place of high qualifications, but he kept in touch with medical progress, to the extent of reading about it and availing himself of improved methods and preparations when opportunity offered. He examined the dead man very carefully, indicated how his posture might be rendered more normal, and satisfied himself that human power was incapable of restoring the vanished life. He could discover no visible indication of violence and no apparent excuse for Tom May's sudden end. He listened with attention to the little that Henry Lennox could tell him and then went to see Mary May and her father.

The young wife had grown more collected, but she was dazed rather than reconciled to her fate; her mind had not yet absorbed the full extent of her sorrow. She talked incessantly and dwelt on trivialities, as people will under a weight of events too large to measure or discuss.

"I am going to write to Tom's father," she said. "This will be an awful blow to him. He was wrapped up in Tom. And to think that I was troubling about his letter! He will never see the sea he loved so much again. He always hated that verse in the Bible that says there will be no more sea. I was asleep so near him last night. Yet I never heard him cry out, or anything."

Mannering talked gently to her.

"Be sure he did not cry out. He felt no pain, no shock—I am sure of that. To die is no hardship to the dead, remember. He

is at peace, Mary. You must come and see him presently. Your father will call you soon. There is just a look of wonder in his face—no fear, no suffering. Keep that in mind.”

“He could not have felt fear. He knew of nothing that a brave man might fear, except doing wrong. Nobody knows how good he was but me. His father loved him fiercely, passionately; but he never knew how good he was, because Tom did not think quite like old Mr. May. I must write and say that Tom is dangerously ill and cannot recover. That will break it to him. Tom was the only earthly affection he had. It will be terrible when he comes.”

After they left her, Sir Walter and Doctor Mannering had entered the gray room for a moment and standing there, spoke together.

“I have a strange consciousness that I am living over the past again,” declared the physician. “Things were just so when that poor woman, Nurse Forrester—you remember.”

“Yes—I felt the same when Caunter was breaking open the door. I faced the worst from the beginning, for the moment I heard what he had done, I somehow knew that my unfortunate son-in-law was dead. I directly negated his suggestion last night and never dreamed that he would have gone on with it when he knew my wish.”

“You must let me spare you all I can, my friend. There will be an inquest, of course, and an inquiry. Also a post-mortem. Shall I communicate with Doctor Mordred to-day, or would you prefer that somebody else—”

“Somebody else—the most famous man you know. From no disrespect to Doctor Mordred or to you, Mannering. You understand that. But I should like an independent examination by some great authority—some one who knew nothing of the former case. This is an appalling thing to happen. I don’t know where to begin thinking.”

“Do not put too great a strain upon yourself. Leave it to those who will come to the matter with all their wits and without your personal sorrow. An independent inquirer is certainly best—one who, as you say, knows nothing about the former case.”

“I don’t know where to begin thinking,” repeated the other. “Such a thing upsets one’s preconceived opinions. I had always regarded my aversion to this room as a human weakness—a thing to be conquered.

Look round you. Would it be possible to imagine an apartment with less of evil suggestion?”

The other made a prefatory examination, went into every corner, tapped the walls and stared at the ceiling. The clean morning light showed its intricate pattern of interwoven circles converging from the walls to the center and so creating a sense of a lofty dome instead of a flat surface. In the center was a boss of a conventional lily flower opening its petals.

“The room should not be touched till after the inquest, I think—indeed, if I may advise, you will do well to leave it just as it is for the police to see.”

“They will want to see it, I imagine?”

“Unless you communicate direct with Scotland Yard, ask for a special inquiry and beg that the local men are not employed. There is reason in that, for it is quite certain that nobody here would be any greater use to you.”

“Act for me then, please. Explain that money is no object and ask them to send the most accomplished and experienced men in the service. But they are only concerned with crime. This may be outside their scope.”

“We cannot say as to that. We cannot even assert that this is not a crime. We know nothing.”

“A crime needs a criminal, Mannering.”

“That is so; but what would be criminal, if human agency were responsible for it, might, nevertheless, be the work of forces to which the word criminal cannot be applied.”

Sir Walter stared at him.

“Is it possible you suggest a supernatural cause for this?”

The doctor shook his head.

“Emphatically not, though I am not a materialist, as you are aware. My generation of practitioners has little difficulty in reconciling our creed with our cult, though few of the younger men are able to do so, I admit. But science is science, and not for a moment do I imagine anything supernatural here. I think, however, there are unconscious forces at work, and those responsible for setting those forces in action would be criminals without a doubt, if they knew what they were doing. The man who fires a rifle at an animal, if he hits and kills it, is the destroyer, though he may operate from half a mile away. On the other hand,

the agents may be unconscious of what they are doing."

"There is no human being in this house for whom I would not answer."

"I know it. We beat the wind. It will be time enough to consider presently. Indeed, I should rather that you strove to relieve your mind of the problem. You have enough to do without that. Leave it to those professionally trained in such mysteries. If a man is responsible for this atrocious thing, then it should be within the reach of man's wits to find him. We failed before; but this time no casual examination of this place, or the antecedents of your son-in-law's life, will serve the purpose. We must go to the bottom, or rather, skilled minds, trained to do so, must go to the bottom. They will approach the subject from a different angle. They will come unprejudiced and unperturbed. If there has been foul play, they will find it out. It is incredible that they will be baffled."

"The best men engaged in such work must come to help us. I cannot bring myself to believe the room is haunted and that this is the operation of an evil force outside nature, yet permitted by the Creator to destroy human life. The idea is too horrible—it revolts me, Mannering."

"Well it may. Banish any such irrational thought from your mind. It is not worthy of you. I must go now. I will telegraph to London—to Sir Howard Fellowes—also, I think, to the government authorities on forensic medicine. A government analyst must do his part. Shall I communicate with Scotland Yard to-day?"

"Leave that until the evening. You will come again to see Mary, please."

"Most certainly I shall. At three o'clock I should have a reply to my messages. I will go into Newton Abbot and telephone from there."

"I thank you, Mannering. I wish it were possible to do more myself."

Sir Walter said that he intended to lunch with his party. "I am an old soldier. It shall not be thought I evade my obligations for personal sorrow. As for this room, it is accursed, and I am in a mind to destroy it utterly."

"Wait—wait. We shall see what our fellow men can find out for us. Do not think because I am practical and businesslike, I am not feeling this. Seldom have I had such a shock in nearly forty years' work.

I hope Travers may stay. He is a comfort to you, is he not?"

"Nobody can be a comfort just now. I shall not ask him to stay. Fortunately Henry is here. He will stop for the present. Mary is all that matters. I shall take her away as quickly as possible and devote my every thought to her."

He went his way and Sir Walter returned to his child again. With her he visited the dead, when told that he could do so. She was now very self-controlled. She stopped a little while only beside her husband.

"How beautiful and happy he looks," she said. "But what I loved is gone; and, going, it has changed all the rest. This is not Tom—only the least part of him."

Her father bowed his head.

Then she knelt down and put her hand on the hand of the dead man and prayed. Her father knelt beside her and it was he, not the young widow, who wept.

She rose presently.

"I can think of him better away from him now," she said. "I will not see him again."

They returned to her old nursery, and he told her that he was going to face life and take the head of his table at luncheon.

"I do not wish you to sleep in this room to-night, my darling," he said.

"Jane has begged me not to. I am going to sleep with her," she answered.

CHAPTER IV.

"BY THE HAND OF GOD."

Sir Walter always remembered that Sunday luncheon and declared that it reminded him of a very painful experience in his early life. When big-game shooting in South Africa, he had once been tossed by a wounded buffalo bull. By good chance the creature threw him into a gully some feet lower than the surrounding bush. Thus it lost him and he was safe from destruction. There, however, he remained with a broken leg for some hours until rescued; and during that time the mosquitoes caused him unspeakable torments.

To-day the terrible disaster of the morning became temporarily overshadowed by the necessity of enduring his friends' comments upon it. The worst phase of the ordeal was their pity. Sir Walter had never been pitied in his life and detested the experience. This stream of sympathy and the chastened voices much oppressed him. He

was angry with himself also for a guilty conviction that, in truth, the interest of the visitors exceeded their grief. He felt it base to suspect them of any such thing; but the buzz of their polite expressions combined with their cautious questions and evident thirst for knowledge caused him exquisite uneasiness.

They all wanted to know everything he could tell them concerning Tom May. Had he enemies? Was it conceivable that he might have even bitter and unscrupulous enemies?

Henry assisted his uncle to the best of his power. It was he who went into the question of the Sunday service from the neighboring market town and proved, to the relief of Colonel Vane and Mr. Miles Handford, that they might leave in comfort before nightfall and catch a train to London.

"A car is going in later, to meet poor Tom's father," he said, "and if it's any convenience, it would take you both."

The pair thankfully agreed.

Then Colonel Vane interested Sir Walter in spite of himself. The latter had spoken of an inquiry and Vane urged a distinguished name upon him.

"Do get Peter Hardcastle if you can," he said. "He's absolutely top hole at this sort of thing at present—an amazing beggar."

"I seem to have heard the name."

"Who hasn't? It was he who got to the bottom of that weird murder in Yorkshire."

"It was weird," said Handford. "I knew intimate friends of the murdered man."

"A crime for which no logical reason existed," continued the colonel. "It puzzled everybody, till Hardcastle succeeded, where his superior officer at Scotland Yard had failed. I believe he's still young. But that was less amazing than the German spy—you remember now, Sir Walter? The spy had been too clever for England and France—thanks to a woman who helped him. Peter Hardcastle got to know her; then he actually disguised himself as the woman—of course, without her knowledge—arrested her and kept an appointment that she had made with the spy. What was the spy called? I forget."

"Wundt," said Felix Fayre-Michell.

"No, I don't think so. Hardt or Hardt-felt, or something like that."

Sir Walter let the chatter flow past him; but he concentrated on the name of Peter

Hardcastle. He remembered the story of the spy and the sensation it had aroused.

Millicent Fayre-Michell also remembered it.

"Mr. Hardcastle declined to let his photograph be published in the half-penny papers, I remember," she said. "That struck me as so wonderful. There was a reason given—that he did not wish the public to know him by sight. I believe he is never seen as himself, and that he makes up just as easily to look like a woman as a man."

"Some people believe he is a woman."

"No! You don't say that?"

"To have made up as that German's mistress and so actually reached his presence—nay, secured him! It is certainly one of the most remarkable pages in the annals of crime," said Ernest Travers.

"Is he attached to Scotland Yard still, or does he work independently?" asked Miles Handford.

"I don't know yet. Mannerling has already urged me to consult Scotland Yard at once. Indeed, he was going to approach them to-day. Mr. Hardcastle shall certainly be invited to do what he can. I shall leave no stone unturned to reach the truth. Yet what even such a man can do is difficult to see. The walls of the gray room are solid; the floor is of sound oak; the ceiling is nine or ten inches thick and supported by immense beams. The hearth is modern and the chimney not large enough to admit a human being. This was proved twelve years ago."

"Give him a free hand all the same—with servants and everybody. I should ask him to come as your guest, then nobody need know who he is, and he can pursue his investigations the more freely."

Felix Fayre-Michell made this suggestion after luncheon was ended and Masters and Fred Caunter had left the room. Then the conversation showed signs of drifting back to sentimentality. Sir Walter saw it coming in their eyes and sought to head them off by inquiring concerning their own movements.

"Can I be of any service to simplify your plans? I fear this terrible event has put you all to great inconvenience."

"Our inconvenience is nothing beside your sorrow, dear Walter," said Nelly Travers.

"Yes, yes—I shall live for her, be sure of that."

He left them and presently spoke to his nephew alone in his study.

"Do what you can for them. Handford and Vane are getting off this afternoon—the rest early to-morrow. I don't think I shall be able to dine with them to-night. Tom's father will be here—I fear he is likely to be prostrated when he knows that all is over."

"No, he's not that kind of man, uncle. Mary tells me he will want to get to the bottom of this in his own way. He's one of the fighting sort; but he believes in a lot of queer things. I'm going in to Newton with Colonel Vane and shall meet Mannering there, about—about Sir Howard Fellowes. He'll come down to-morrow, no doubt—perhaps to-night. Mannering will know."

"And tell Mannering to insist on a detective called Peter Hardcastle for the inquiry. If he's left Scotland Yard and acting independently, none the less engage him. I shall, of course, thankfully pay anything to get this tragedy explained."

"Yes, uncle."

"Are you equal to telling the clergyman at the station that his son is dead, or can't you trust yourself to do it?"

"I expect he'll know it well enough; but I'll tell him everything there is to tell. I remember long ago, after the wedding, that he was interested in haunted rooms and said he believed in such things on scriptural grounds."

Sir Walter took pause at this statement.

"That is news to me. Supposing he—However, we need not trouble ourselves with him yet. He will, of course, be as deeply concerned to get to the bottom of this as I am, though we must not interfere, or make the inquiry harder for Hardcastle than he is bound to find it."

"Certainly nobody must interfere. I only hope we can get Peter Hardcastle."

Sir Walter visited his daughter. They stopped together alone till the dusk came down and Mannering returned. He stayed but a few minutes, and presently they heard his car start again, while that containing the departing guests and Henry Lennox immediately followed it.

In due course Septimus May returned to Chadlands with him. The clergyman had learned of his son's end and went immediately to see the dead man. There Mary joined him. He was thin, clean shaven—a

gray man with smoldering eyes and an expression of endurance. A fanatic in faith, by virtue of certain asperities of mind and a critical temperament he had never made friends, won his parish into close ties, or advanced the cause of his religion as he had yearned to do. With the zeal of a reformer, he had entered the ministry in youth; but while commanding respect for his own high rule of conduct and the example he set his little flock, their affection he never won. The people feared him, and dreaded his stern criticism. Once certain spirits, smarting under pulpit censure, had sought to be rid of him; but no grounds existed on which they could eject the reverend gentleman, or challenge his status. He remained, therefore, as many like him remain, embedded in his parish and unknown beyond it. He was a poor student of human nature, and life had dimmed his old ambitions, soured his hopes; but it had not clouded his faith. With a passionate fervor he believed all that he tried to teach and held that an almighty, all-loving and all-merciful God controlled every destiny, ordered existence for the greatest and least, and allowed nothing to happen upon earth that was not the best that could happen for the immortal beings He had created in His own Image. Upon this assurance fell the greatest, almost the only, blow that life could deal Septimus May. He was stricken suddenly, fearfully with his unutterable loss; but his agony turned into prayer while he knelt beside his son. He prayed with a fiery intensity and a resonant vibration of voice, that scorched rather than comforted the woman who knelt beside him.

Mr. May, learning that most of the house party could not depart until the following morning, absented himself from dinner; indeed, he spent his time almost entirely with his boy and, when night came, kept vigil beside him. Something of the strange possession of his mind already appeared in curious hints that puzzled Sir Walter; but it was not until after the post-mortem examination and inquest that his extraordinary views were elaborated.

When Mr. and Mrs. Travers departed Sir Walter bade them farewell. The lady wept and her tears fell on his hand as he held it. She was hysterical.

"For God's sake don't let Mary be haunted by that dreadful priest," she said. "There is something terrible about him. He has no bowels of compassion. I tried to console

him for the loss of his son, and he turned upon me as if I was weak-minded."

"I had to tell him he was being rude and forgetting that he spoke to a lady," said Ernest Travers. "One makes every allowance for a father's sufferings; but they should not take the form of abrupt and harsh speech to a sympathetic fellow creature—nay, to any one, let alone a woman. His sacred calling ought to—"

"A man's profession can't alter his manners, my dear Ernest; they come from defects of temperament, no doubt. May must not be judged. His faith would move mountains."

"So would mine," said Ernest Travers, "and so would yours, Walter. But it is perfectly possible to be a Christian and a gentleman. To imply that our faith was weak, because we expressed ordinary human emotions and pitied him unfeignedly for the loss of his only child—"

"Good-by, good-by, my dear friends," answered the other. "I cannot say how I esteem your kindly offices in this affliction. God bless and keep you both."

The post-mortem examination revealed no physical reason why Thomas May should have ceased to breathe. Neither did the subsequent investigations of a government analytical chemist throw any light upon the sailor's sudden death. No cause existed and, therefore, none could be reported at the inquest held a day later.

The coroner's jury brought in a verdict rarely heard, but none dissented from it. They held that May had received his death "By the hand of God."

"All men receive death from the hand of God," said Septimus May when the judicial inquiry was ended. "They receive life from the hand of God also. But, while bowing to that, there is a great deal more we are called to do, when God's hand falls, as it has fallen upon my son. To-night I shall pray beside his dust and presently, when he is at peace, I shall be guided. There is a grave duty beside me, Sir Walter, and none must come between me and that duty."

"There is a duty before all of us, and be sure nobody will shrink from it. I have done what is right so far. We have secured a famous detective—the most famous in England, they tell me. He is called Peter Hardcastle, and he will, I hope, be able to arrive here immediately."

The clergyman shook his head.

"I will say nothing at present," he answered. "But, believe me, a thousand detectives cannot explain my son's death. I shall return to this subject after the funeral, Sir Walter. But my conviction grows that the reason of these things will never be revealed to the eye of science. To the eye of faith alone we must trust the explanation of what has happened. There are things concealed from the wise and prudent—to be revealed unto babes."

That night the master of Chadlands, his nephew and the priest dined together, and Henry Lennox implored a privilege.

"I feel I owe it to poor Tom in a way," he said. "I beg that you will let me spend the night in the gray room, uncle Walter. I would give my soul to clear this."

But his uncle refused with a curt shake of the head and the clergyman uttered a reproof.

"Do not speak so lightly," he said. "You use a common phrase and a very objectionable phrase, young man. Do you rate your soul so low that you would surrender it for the satisfaction of a morbid craving? For that is all this amounts to. Not to such an inquirer will my son's death reveal its secret."

"I have already received half a dozen letters from people offering and wishing to spend a night in that accursed room," said Sir Walter.

"Do not call it 'accursed' until you know more," urged Septimus May.

He left them after dinner and returned to his daughter-in-law. She had determined not to attend the funeral, but Mr. May argued with her, examined her reasons, found them in his opinion not sufficient and prevailed with her to change her mind.

Men will go far to look upon the coffin of one whose end happens to be mysterious, or terrible. The death of Sir Walter's son-in-law had made much matter for the newspapers, and not only Chadlands, but the countryside converged upon the naval funeral, lined the route to the grave and crowded the little burying ground, where the dead man would lie. Cameras pointed their eyes at the gun carriage and the mourners behind it. The photographers worked for a sort of illustrated paper that tramples with a swine's hoofs and routs up with a swine's nose, the matter its clients best love to purchase. Mary, supported by her father and

her cousin, preserved a brave composure. The chaplain of Tom's ship assisted at the service, but Septimus May conducted it. Not a few old messmates attended, for the death brought genuine grief to many men. Under a pile of flowers the coffin was carried to the grave. Rare and precious blossoms came from Sir Walter's friends, and H. M. S. *Indomitable* sent a mighty anchor of purple violets. Mr. May read the service without a tremor, but his eyes blazed out of his lean head and there lacked not other signs to indicate the depth of emotion he concealed. Then the bluejackets, who had drawn the gun carriage, fired a volley, and the rattle of their musketry echoed sharply from the church tower.

Upon the evening of the day that followed, Septimus May resumed the subject concerning which he had already fitfully spoken. His ideas were now in order and he brought a formidable argument to support a strange request. Indeed, it amounted to a demand, and for a time it seemed doubtful whether Sir Walter would deny him. The priest, indeed, declared that he could take no denial, and his host was thankful that other and stronger arguments than his own were at hand to argue the other side. For Doctor Mannerling stayed at the manor house after the funeral, and the Reverend Noel Prodgers, the vicar of Chadlands, a distant connection of the Lennoxes, was also dining there. Until now Mannerling could not well speak, but he invited himself to dinner on the day after the funeral, that he might press a course of action upon those who had suffered so severely. He wished Sir Walter to take his daughter away at once, for her health's sake, and while advancing this advice, considered the elder also, for these things had upset the master of Chadlands in mind and body, and Mannerling was aware of it.

On the morrow Peter Hardcastle would arrive, and he had urgently directed that his coming should be in a private capacity unknown to the local police, or neighborhood. Neither did he wish the staff of Chadlands to associate him with the tragedy. An official examination of the room had been made by the local constabulary, as upon the occasion of Nurse Forrester's death, but it was a perfunctory matter, and those responsible for it understood that special attention would presently be paid to the problem by the supreme authority.

"After this man has been and gone, I do earnestly beg you to leave England and get abroad, Sir Walter," said Mannerling. "I think it your duty, not only for your girl's sake, but your own."

"I must do my duty," answered the other, "and that remains to be seen. If Hardcastle should find out anything, there may be a call upon me."

It was then that Septimus May spoke and astounded his hearers.

"You give me the opportunity to introduce my subject," he said, "for it bears directly on Sir Walter's intentions, and it is in my power, as I devoutly believe, to free him swiftly of any further need to remain here. I am, of course, prepared to argue for my purpose, but would rather not do so. Briefly I hold it a vital obligation to spend this night in the gray room, and I ask that no obstacle of any kind be raised to prevent my doing so. The wisdom of man is foolishness before the wit of God, and what I desire to do is God's will and wish, impressed upon me while I knelt for long hours and prayed to know it."

The doctor spoke.

"Is it possible, sir, that you attribute your son's death to anything but natural physical forces?" he asked.

"Is it possible to do otherwise? How can you, of all men, ask? Science has spoken or, rather, science has been struck dumb. No natural, physical force is responsible for his end. One of God's immortal souls, for reasons we cannot tell, may be chained in that room, waiting its liberation at human hands. We are challenged and I accept the challenge; being impelled thereto by the sacred message that has been put into my heart."

Even his fellow priest stared in bewilderment at Septimus May's extraordinary opinions, while to the physician, this was the chatter of a lunatic.

"I will take my Bible into that haunted room to-night," concluded the clergyman; "and I will pray to God, who sits above both quick and dead, to protect me, guide me, and lead me to my duty."

"And shall not my inspiration—to employ the cleverest detective in England—be also of good?" asked Sir Walter.

"Emphatically not. Because the thing is in another category than that of human crime. It is lifted upon a plane where the knowledge of man avails nothing. You are

a Christian and you should understand this as well as I do."

"Consider how limited human knowledge is," said Mannering, "and grant that we have not exhausted its possibilities yet. There may be some physical peculiarity about the room, some deadly but perfectly natural chemical accident, some volatile stuff, in roof or walls, that reacts to the lowered temperatures of night. A thousand, rare, chance combinations of matter may occur, which are capable of examination and which, under skilled experiment, will resolve their secret. Nothing is more bewildering than a good conjuring trick till we know how it is done, and Nature is the supreme conjurer. We have not found out all her tricks and never do so, but we very well know that a solution to all of them exists."

"A material outlook and arrogant," said the priest; whereupon Mannering grew a little warm.

"You must consider others a little," he said.

"No, Doctor Mannering; they must consider me. Providence sends me a message, denied to the rest of you, because I am a fit recipient; you are not."

"Then I can only hope that Sir Walter will exercise his rights and responsibilities and deny you what you wish."

"He has faith, and I am sorry that you lack it."

Mannering spoke to the Vicar of Chadlands.

"What do you think, Prodgers? You are a parson, too, yet may be able to see with our eyes. Surely common sense shouldn't be left out of our calculations, even if they concern the next world?"

"I respect Mr. May's faith," answered the younger priest, "and assuredly I believe, that if we eliminate all physical and natural causes from poor Captain May's death, then no member of our sacred calling should fear to spend the night alone in that room. Jacob wrestled with the angel of light. Shall the servants of God fear to oppose a dark angel?"

"Well spoken," said Mr. May.

"But I would venture most earnestly to beg you to desist, at least until much more has been done and this famous professional

man has made such researches as his genius suggests. That is only reasonable, and reason, after all, is a mighty gift of God—a gift, no doubt, often abused by finite beings, who actually use it to defy the Giver; yet, nonetheless, in its proper place, the handmaid of faith and the light of true progress."

But Septimus May argued against him.

Sir Walter, now determined, was as obstinate as the clergyman. Mannering bluntly declared that it would be suicide on May's part, and a conniving at the same by any who permitted him to attempt his vigil.

"I, too, must do my duty as I see it," summed up the master of Chadlands, "and after I have done so, then we may be in a position to admit the case is altered."

The other suddenly rose and lifted his hands. He was trembling with emotion.

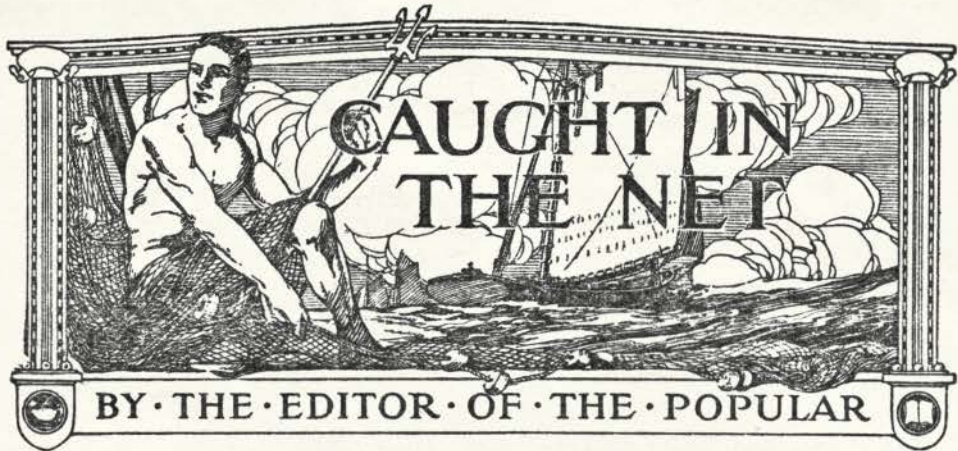
"May my God give a sign then!" he cried. They were silent a moment, for courtesy or astonishment. Nothing happened, and presently Sir Walter spoke:

"You must bear with me. You are upset and scarcely know the gravity of the things you say. To-morrow the physical and material investigation that I consider proper and the world has a right to demand, will be made—in a spirit, I hope, as earnest and devout as your own. And if, after that, no shadow of explanation is forthcoming and no peril to life can be discovered, then I should feel disposed to consider your views more seriously—with many reserves, however. At any rate, it will be your turn then, if you still adhere to your opinions; and I am sure all just persons who hear of your purpose would join their prayers with you."

"Your faith is weak, though you believe it strong," answered the other, and he was equally curt when the physician advised him to take a sleeping draft before retiring. He bade them "good night" without more words, and went to his room, while after further conversation, Doctor Mannering and Mr. Prodgers took their leave.

The former strongly urged Sir Walter to set some sort of guard outside the door of the gray room.

"That man's not wholly sane to-night," he said, "and he appears to glory in the fact that he isn't. He must surely be aware that much he said was superstitious bosh. Look after him. Guard his own apartment. That will be the simplest plan."



THE BLACK-COATED WORKERS

THEY are not pallbearers or undertakers or gravediggers, the new union formally named the Federation of Black-coated Workers, but office employees—"us Algernons in alpaca coats," as Don Marquis, the newspaper humorist, would say. They have formed an organization in Great Britain, and such a union is already being talked of in the United States; and as practically every labor organization in the British Isles has been duplicated here, it seems not improbable that the "Algernons" will organize here, sooner or later.

The title first chosen for the union, though it was wisely dropped for the briefer one, gives the best idea of just what kind of workers compose it. The Federation of Professional, Technical, Administrative, and Supervisory Workers, it was called. But while they call themselves workers, the members of the new federation do not, as a whole, wish to affiliate with the regular labor organizations. Rather, those who dub themselves technical workers have already withdrawn from the federation to prevent being affiliated against their will, and are forming a new organization on the basis of complete independence. They claim that it was generally understood that an entirely new trade union, holding a position between the manual worker and the employer, was to be formed, but was to have no affiliation with either. The promoters, however, threw open the new organization to such unions as the Railway Clerks, the National Association of Clerks, and the Shop Assistants, all of which are members of the Trade Union Congress.

The situation is similar to that among the actors in this country before their union affiliated with the American Federation of Labor. The actors found, eventually, that the support of labor as a body was a tremendous help to them, particularly in their struggle with the theatrical managers last autumn. The debate among members of the Authors' League of America as to whether they would affiliate with the great central labor body is also recalled. The authors decided to stay out, though many of the best-known of those who frankly write for a living wanted to join. In England, authors have not even discussed such affiliation, in spite of the fact that Bernard Shaw, in his biography in "Who's Who," writes: "Trade union, British Society of Authors." The whole movement in England is only a part of the tendency of labor to enlarge its borders and lose its class character.

THE HOUSING PROBLEM IS NATIONAL

NO more constructive bit of legislation has been proposed for a long while than the bill of Congressman Tinkham, of Massachusetts, for the creation of a Federal bureau of housing and living conditions. It would make available to municipalities the valuable data on housing gathered by the United States housing corporation and the shipping board during the war. The new bureau would also serve as a clearing house for information on after-war housing developments.

Mr. Tinkham's idea is that the bureau investigate housing and living conditions of the industrial population of the entire country. His aim is to make economically practicable the elimination of the slums, improvement of living conditions, reduction of the cost of the construction of dwellings, and the financing of extensive home-building operations by Federal appropriations. Canada has appropriated twenty-five million dollars for loans at five per cent to home builders, and Australia has set aside a hundred millions for that purpose. The American government spent a hundred and ten millions to build homes for industrial workers during the war, and acquired a vast fund of information, which should now be made available to every community in the United States.

Federal aid would include the planning of entire towns, provision of municipal utilities on a wholesale scale, design of large groups of houses in such form as to permit standardization of construction without monotony of external style, provision of open space in the form of gardens and playgrounds, street improvements for whole sections instead of spasmodic development, and provision for the transport of schools, stores, and other buildings necessary to community life. At present no government has power even to make this information, gathered at tremendous expense, available to the public.

The urban population is now increasing at a rate three times faster than the rural. In 1910 the people living in towns constituted forty-six per cent of the total; the census of 1920 will probably show more than fifty per cent of us are urban dwellers. Already there is a shortage of one million homes, and the need for such a bureau as proposed can be understood when it is known that the normal peace-time expenditure for industrial workers' homes amounts to a billion dollars annually. The United States is almost the only country of importance which figured in the war and which has not since taken definite steps to relieve the vital housing situation.

KEEPING FIT

THERE is a tendency on the part of State lawmakers and of educators to assure that physical excellence which is necessary to produce a good soldiery, whether or not Congress shall favor universal military training as a permanent policy. The large proportion of physically defective shown by the examination of draft boards during the war, and the genuine benefit derived by the young men who went into the army, seems to have impressed the legislators and the teachers with the need of maintaining what the late Colonel Roosevelt called "the fighting edge."

Twelve States have passed laws requiring physical training in all schools. Five State universities and one large denominational college will require a physical as well as a mental education from all students beginning in the autumn of 1920. Seven universities were already making obligatory physical training from all male students, and four others will require it of all but seniors; beginning this year. In some of these institutions, forty to sixty minutes of daily exercise will be the rule, in others seventy to ninety minutes. Students have generally expressed themselves as being in favor of such drills if they are given credit for the excellences they display, and credits will be given in most of the schools.

Not long ago it was pessimistically stated on the public platform that "we are much concerned about mental illiteracy, but we have not yet waked up to our physical illiteracy, which is far more extensive." At the rate that interest in physical training is growing, this slur will no longer be applicable to the United States as a nation. And this happy result is one of the most important of the beneficial influences of the Great War. Although as a people we were not inferior to the British physically but were in some respects superior, we were in danger of becoming too active in ways that used up nerve force, and too lazy in exercises that might rebuild the physical system. We took our national sports by proxy, watching baseball and football athletes exert themselves for our amusement, and only rising at the end of the seventh inning or the first half to stretch our own lazy muscles.

Great Britain could not have maintained her eminence in the world in the way in which she has done without the general interest of her people in outdoor sports. And that general interest, strangely enough, dates mostly from the transformation of the country from an agricultural to a manufacturing land. Begun as a means of recreation, athletics have become the country's salvation. The playing of cricket is indulged in there by

legions for the fun of playing it, and tennis and golf are also games for the people to play rather than merely to look at. In schools, athletics have long held a more important place than with us. Since she became a great power, Britain's troops have invaded almost every part of the world, but no hostile troops have set foot on the British Isles since the time of William the Conqueror.

COÖPERATIVE BUYING

THE tremendous growth of coöperative buying is one of the signs of the expansion of industrial democracy. In the United States the movement is comparatively new, but the high cost of living has given it a great impetus. Coöperative societies have been established in all parts of the country, and banks are being projected and public markets acquired. The railroad brotherhoods, with Warren S. Stone and Frederick C. Howe leading the movement, are considering the establishment of a huge coöperative bank, with fifty millions of assets, and the United Mine Workers are planning one with fifteen millions. Seattle is one of the cities where public markets have been taken over. There the local society, backed by labor organizations, conducts a market where the meat trade alone amounts to seventy thousand dollars a month.

When the Allies decided to reopen trade with Russia through the medium of coöperative societies they gave the first important recognition to the system as an international political power. This system, beginning in a humble way a half century ago in England, has grown until many countries have organizations modeled on the original. These societies have given a prime minister to Austria, and cabinet members and numerous parliamentary officers in other European countries.

Organizations other than labor in the United States have indorsed the coöperative idea, including the Catholic Church and the Community Council of New York. The Interchurch World Movement has recently passed resolutions pledging assistance. This is an encouraging sign to many who believe that this is not only the road to lower living costs, but to industrial democratization in which workers shall control more and more of their affairs on a collective basis. Advocates of coöperation say that if the movement is slow, it is because it recognizes the necessity of going ahead no faster than the working people can be trained in coöperative management and principles.

The origin of coöperative buying, like the origin of many other things that have helped to make history, was small and of seemingly no significance. A group of humble weavers in Rochdale, near Manchester, England, were defeated in a strike, and in trying to devise a means whereby they could make their meager wages reach further, they hit upon a scheme of putting their money together until they had accumulated a modest sum, which they used in purchasing necessities direct from the wholesalers, thus saving retailers' profits. The plan succeeded beyond their expectations. Then wholesalers' societies of buyers were formed, followed by the purchase and building of manufacturing plants, and now these organizations, in some instances, go direct to the soil, for they grow tea in Ceylon and India, and wheat in Canada. The English Wholesale Society's trade with its own members is now at the rate of three hundred and fifty million dollars a year.

PROTECTING THE BUYER

ALMOST everybody has heard of the famous legal doctrine of *caveat emptor*, the words composing which are Latin, meaning "let the buyer beware." It is generally applied in decisions affecting trade, when a dissatisfied buyer brings a foolish suit to recover the price he paid. Actual intent to defraud must be proved before a seller can be made to refund any part of the price agreed upon. But this doctrine has been overridden by the Nebraska State government in a remarkable law that decrees tests for every type of automobile farm tractor before it is sold, and which is being complied with by manufacturers more or less cheerfully, because none of them wants to admit that he fears an official test of his machine.

A rating station has been established for the making of tests, and reports of these tests are placed at the disposal of prospective purchasers, and there is no danger of their buying inferior cars, for none of any untested type will be allowed within the State boun-

daries. The necessary buildings, machinery, officials, and testing field have been provided. There is a searching examination, which includes nine particular tests. First, the brake horsepower is determined, at rated speed and with corresponding fuel consumption, in the test building, after a run of two hours. The drawbar-horsepower test, at rated load, will be run for ten hours over a half mile cinder track; this will show whether the tractor can stand up under a continuous load. Then there is a "maximum drawbar-horsepower test," consisting of a series of fifty-foot runs, the load being increased each time until the engine is palpably overloaded.

For the performance of the outdoor tests the State has laid out a large field, with a cinder track, and for indoor tests an immense brick building has been erected, where a dynamometer is among the machinery installed. During tests, the dynamometer is connected by a belt to the tractor engine for the brake-horsepower tests. Drawbar tests on the field are given by means of a tractor chassis, upon which is mounted an electric generator, which replaces the engine and is driven by the chassis wheels. Experts are on hand to record every good and bad point, and there seems to be no chance for a poor tractor to be accepted.

Manufacturers of pleasure cars have begun to wonder if the legislature, which is controlled by the Republicans and not by the Nonpartisan League, which rules North Dakota, will decide that all automobiles must be tested. And if it can be made legal to provide official tests for motor cars before sale, why not for all other carriages and wagons—and horses—not to speak of airplanes and sewing machines and all other kinds of machines?

"I wish we'd had official tests for some of them lightning rods they used to put over on us years ago," said one farmer lately. And thousands of farmers all over the country will echo the wish.



POPULAR TOPICS

DURING the next few months we will probably hear a great deal about bimetalism on account of the increasing value of silver. Because of this paramount question we wish to give our readers a few basic facts. The total gold supply of the world amounts to a little more than nine billion dollars, of which we possess about one-third. Inasmuch as the currency inflation during and following the World War reached an essential increase of one hundred billion dollars, it will be easily seen that all the gold in the world would provide gold redemption for only about nine per cent of this aggregate. Our Federal reserve banks are required to maintain forty per cent gold against their notes; hence it is apparent that the increase of currency in the world has effectively destroyed the gold basis in every country except our own. There are only two remedies compatible with the continuance of metal redemption, and these are deflation and bimetalism.



WE have spoken of large things, now let us talk of something small. A friend of ours during a casual inspection of one of our leading watch-making companies was shown a screw machine which turned out the tiniest screw in the world. With the naked eye the screws thus manufactured looked like particles of dust. Through a powerful microscope, however, they were seen to be perfect screws with the usual threads and usual slit across the top. A small thimble would hold forty-five thousand of them.



OWNSHIP of American railroad securities is more widely distributed than most people think. An expert summarizes it thus: Individuals numbering over one million own outright about ten billion dollars' worth of such stocks and bonds, and more than six hundred thousand are stockholders with an average of thirteen thousand nine hundred and fifty-six dollars; life insurance companies, with fifty-three million policyholders, own

nearly two billion; savings banks, with ten million depositors, own eight hundred and forty-seven million; other insurance companies than life, six hundred and fifty million; benevolent associations and institutions of learning, three hundred and fifty million; trust companies and State and national banks, eight hundred and sixty-five million.



GOOD news for everybody but profiteers: Reports to the Federal Reserve Board in Washington from all parts of the country announce that a gradual recession from the peak in high-price levels in all commodities is "definitely noted." Diminution in speculation in commodities is also reported. The "spending spree" is abating.



TALKING of the amount of gold in the world leads us to think of diamonds. From an authentic source we learn that there are about ten and a half tons of diamonds decorating our persons and held in reserve by the "diamond kings." They are valued at approximately thirteen billion dollars, and in a mass would occupy the same space as an ordinary truckload of coal.



WE rejoice with Georgia that the department of agriculture has at last found a mixture fatal to the boll weevil. It has been officially announced that the South can now rid itself of this long-standing, destructive plague. Ten years ago the government experts began their experiments and tried many poisonous substances, but what they hit on which has given the final results is a limelike powder called calcium arsenate.



OF course, everybody knows that the United States ranks first in the production, per capita ownership, and use of automobiles, and there's no use in reprinting the figures. But just how far ahead we are is indicated by the fact that there are now two hundred and twenty-five thousand automobiles in England and Wales—seventy-five thousand fewer than there are in New York City alone.



CANADA now ranks second in autos, outdistancing the mother country, which is third—and this indicates how far behind the United States the rest of the world lags. The latest figures show three hundred and fifty thousand motor vehicles in operation throughout the Dominion, or one car to every twenty-three persons. The rich wheat belt of the western provinces is the source of much of the wealth thus represented.



MEANWHILE, Canadian railway companies announce a ten per cent fare increase to points in the United States. The head tax on Canadians entering this country is advanced fifteen per cent to nine dollars and twenty cents, on account of the exchange rate. Therefore, Canadians are five per cent more valuable to their country as citizens than as travelers only.



STRONG support for the cigarette, in case of the growth of the movement to abolish what reformers call the "coffin nail," is anticipated from former service men. From 1909 to 1918 the production of cigarettes increased from seven billions to almost forty-seven billions annually in the United States, the largest increase being in the last year, when several billions were sent to the soldiers in camps and at the front. During the same decade the production of cigars remained stationary, at about seven billions a year.



THE United States shipping board has fifty-one tank steamers, of 461,240 deadweight tons, in operation. When its program is completed, the board will be operating nearly one hundred tankers, with a tonnage of almost one million, or slightly more than forty per cent of the world's steam tonnage in 1914.

The Bat of Hankow Blue

By Michael J. Phillips

You haven't read a story by this author before, but you will want to—as anxiously as Motor City waits for the return of Hankow Blue and his wonderful bat. There was a magic in the bat just as there was in King Arthur's sword. So the fans believed, and anyhow all will be forgiven if Hankow will return—with his bat

HERE, boy, page Mr. Blue—Mr. H. Blue—B-l-u-e, Blue. First name's Hankow. I don't know where you'll find him. He may be in the downstairs bar, in Australia, or in the sun parlor in Cuba, or enjoying a fruit cocktail in the South Sea Islands. You might look out the back door, down by Cape Horn, or at the Bible study class in London. It may pay to take a turn through the ice carnival on the roof in Alaska. Or he may be sitting right in the lobby in Paris or loitering over by the cashier's window in New York.

But the main thing is to find him. Who wants him? Well, you can say that "Wish" McGuire of the Old Guard, and sixty-three million eight hundred and seventy-nine thousand two hundred and thirteen others—that being the number, according to the last census, who are interested in big-league ball—would like to hear from him.

And say—boy: Be sure to tell him all is forgiven. Don't forget that. If he'll just come back—make it strong, will you? Those three words: All is forgiven.

Motor City was diversely represented in the big league. It had the best-hated owner, the best-liked manager, and the most colorless and uninteresting baseball team on the circuit. To take them in reverse order, the team didn't have an outstanding feature. With so picturesque a nickname as the Old Guard, one expected many things—aged veterans, miraculously preserving their youth and playing great ball, for instance. But the Old Guard averaged up rather young. They went ahead and manufactured a plodding, plugging game. Their pitchers were moderately effective. The team behind them gave the bring-home-your-pay-every-Saturday-night support. When the infield quartet cut off hard chances, they almost always did so with two hands instead of one.

When a long fly was hit to the outfield, there weren't any stabs for it over the left shoulder. The proper fielder just seemed to be in the proper place to catch the ball as it fell, in a conventional sort of way. The catchers threw to bases well, but not noticeably so.

Their uniforms didn't attract attention for dashing style. In fact, critics said they were the homeliest suits in the two big leagues. They reminded one of the conservative, thick-waisted dark-blue suits of every-day clothes that lie on the shelves of every clothing store in the land—serviceable, honest-wearing, and about as exciting as fifty cents' worth of potatoes. The Old Guard "unies" were muddy gray, with a faded blue stripe running through the goods. The caps were a sort of throwback to the days when baseball players wore long trousers as they cavorted about the diamond, for they were square-visored and square-topped. In fact, they looked much like the uniform cap issued in some prisons, the stockings were the same muddy gray, with a blue encircling stripe just too narrow to be effective. Some declared that the bolts of cloth composing the uniforms had failed to sell for anything else, and Sam Groesbeck had bought them cheap. So much for the baseball team and its habiliments.

But Wish McGuire—christened Aloysius Xavier—was something else again. He was red-haired, freckled as to face, and boyish, despite his forty-odd years. He was slender and springy, whereas most of the other managers were all of a piece, like a large oak fence post. Off the field he was shy, and rather unassertive. In uniform, he was a roaring terror who flashed into a boiling rage one minute and laughed at himself and everybody else the next. Opposition pitchers longed to crown him with a bat when they were not laughing, inwardly or out-

wardly, at some quip of his ever-ready tongue. Wish McGuire epigrammed the Old Guard in quite a number of ball games during the course of a season.

Being a natural leader, he won the others that graced the right side of the percentage column by good, honest baseball. While McGuire did not despise a star and would have built an attack about him had there been one on his roster, he got along comfortably without any of the higher lights. He had serviceable, hardworking baseball players who were not torn with jealousy because one of their number was leading the league in batting, or another was after the base-stealing championship. Their records were all so mediocre that they could give undivided attention to team play. When out on the field their sole idea was to keep the other fellow from getting any runs and to make a few for their pitcher. And a starless team that plays ball all the time with the same unemotionalism that a plow turns a furrow wins a surprising number of jousts.

They did have one outstanding quality—courage. They played the same even, undismayed brand of baseball, no matter what the score. No Old Guard ever dreamed of quitting. Perhaps they imbibed their high courage from Wish McGuire. It was a tradition in Motor City that, when he had taken hold of the team three years before; when the score was four to one against the Old Guard and two were out and nobody on, in the ninth, he struck Oscar Sweitzer, the big catcher, because Sweitzer had put on his sweater and packed his bat. That it was not impulse was proven when Sweitzer, who was rated a useful backstop, was sold "down the river" to the Three-Eye league a week later. "Never say die till the daisies are growin' over your grave," Wish would howl on the coaching lines in a tight game. And the Old Guard never said it—or thought it.

Just now it was mid-season, the team was in second place, and Wish was putting it through morning batting practice. For he knew that, without more hitting, the pennant belonged to the Meadowlarks. He had everything to bring home the bunting except a little horsepower with the ash. A hundred more points distributed among four of his men would do it—would save a majority of the games he was now dropping by one run. So, under the guise of trying out a couple of husky young sand-lot pitchers, he was sending his regulars up again and again to

dump it, to place it, to hit it out—mostly to hit it out. For Wish was old-timer enough to believe that a line smash is more conducive to markers on the scoreboard than scientifically placed bunts.

But even against the youngsters they weren't doing much. There were too many loopy flies and high fouls and trickling grounders to suit him. They were trying, quietly and unpicturesquely, as they always tried, but they fell short. "If I had just a three hundred hitter in place of old Sam Crow," mourned Wish, even as he smiled encouragingly when Sam hit a harmless one toward short.

"Let me bat some." The manager turned at the voice. A man as tall and as hard physically and as lean as himself looked him in the eye. Wish had never been trained in the scientific school which tells you whether a man will make a good bond salesman or an honest farm hand by the shape of his head. But he could read men and motives, nevertheless: he had to, in order to keep his job. As he traded glances with the other, something like this was going through his mind: "Wants to get on the team. Doesn't look like a ball player, but you never can tell. Black eyes, too close together; one idea and set in his ways. Long burnsides; that shows he thinks pretty well of himself—well enough, any way, to look more or less like a freak in order to attract attention. Might be a preacher, from the pious way he presses his lips together. If he is, there's stuff in his sermons you could put your teeth into; wouldn't coddle the rich fellows in his congregation. But, of course, he can't be a sky pilot. Proud rooster, wrong-headed and set in his ways—but honest. You could depend on what he tells you. If he thinks he can play ball, he can play, I'd say. No fool; knows what's going on. He'd be hard to manage—but so's a left-handed pitcher, and I've been handling left-handers all my life. Maybe he's got something. We'll see."

He turned on his heel and beckoned to Jim McNeese, who came as near being a star pitcher as anything the Old Guard possessed. "Go in and ease over a few, Jim," he suggested.

Fielding practice was about to begin and the regulars were in their places. They were tossing the ball about, more or less half-heartedly, for baseball players are as curious as schoolboys and the queer stranger

attracted their attention. As the man divested himself of coat and vest, revealing powerful shoulders and a deep, strong chest, their curiosity was given another fillip. Out from the runway under the grand stand trotted a queer little figure—a colored boy of fifteen or sixteen. He was not a negro, for his features were not negroid, but straight and rather classical. His complexion was clear brown. His dark hair was long and wavy. It curled up about the edge of his bizarre headgear—a scarlet fez with a yellow tassel. He wore a plum-colored jacket, a yellow silk shirt, a black sash, and baggy Souave trousers of deep blue. Pointed brown slippers completed his equipment. Approaching the stranger he unbuckled the bat bag he carried and with a bow that spoke of savage lands, handed to his master the bat which he drew forth.

It was a formidable war club, crowding the legal limit in size and length. In color it was an intense and shiny black. Obviously it was painted, but the deep luster which it wore seemed to shine forth from the wood itself.

The team was highly diverted. "Look at the barber pole!" crowed "Bunty" Priesker, from short. The little colored boy grinned good-naturedly, proving that he understood English. But his master's grave, rather arrogant expression did not change. He stepped to the plate, tapped the rubber with his bat, and faced the pitcher. McNeese floated up an easy one, and the stranger promptly hit it into right field, a good, solid smack. McNeese put more on the next one, but it was a little outside. Most inexperienced hitters, and not a few big leaguers as well, would have swung. But the dark man refused to raise his bat from his shoulder. "He's got an eye, that bird," commented Wish appreciatively to himself.

Over came the next one, zipping, with a quick, baffling break to it. Again the big black club flashed round and the ball betook itself elsewhere, toward center field in a low, plunging line fly, the hardest sort to gauge and catch. A snicker ran round the infield and McNeese flushed under his tan. He studied the unconcerned batter for several long moments, contempt in his pose. That assumption of sneering superiority was an asset; it frequently made the batter angry and overanxious. But it had no effect to-day. Two balls, one low and wide, the other a close hook, went by unheeded and

plunked into Paddy Craven's mitt. When a good one, unintentionally grooved, came plateward, the stranger advanced his left foot and lunged forward to meet the sphere. This time a left-field drive, good for three bases and possibly a home run, caromed from the cement base of the far bleachers.

Laughter and good-natured jeers greeted McNeese's efforts. "Atta boy, Jim!" "Give him the old bench ball!" "All right, old-timer; show him you can miss that old bat once!" These and similar cries from the frolicking Old Guard echoed through the park. McNeese, now thoroughly roused, gave the unmoved batter the pet of his collection, the harpoon—an underhand out-curve which rolled up in a sweeping arc. Just before it reached the plate, the ball broke sharply down. This fooled most batters who believed that the sphere, from McNeese's position when he delivered it, would continue upward.

It fooled the stranger—almost. He swung swiftly and a foul over the grand stand was the best he could do. The next one was the harpoon again, thrown from a little different angle. But the uncanny batter had solved it and a drive zipped over first base and on to the right-field fence at the foul line as straight as though a surveyor had laid the course. Jim McNeese saw red with that: Why, this crow was hitting 'em to each of the team in order—right field, center field, left field, first base! He was placing them as accurately as though batting fungoes. He was making a monkey out of Jim McNeese, who had turned back Ty Cobb with a strike-out, the winning run on third.

Jim stuttered the balance of it deep within him, and slammed the ball at the stranger's ribs. The latter lay down hurriedly in the dust. He got up, his eyes blazing, and toed the plate with a lift of the left shoulder that said: "So that's the game, eh? All right; but watch out for yourself." The team quieted; comedy had given way to drama. Ashamed of his uncurbed anger, Jim bent a fast one, shoulder high, across the plate—and dropped in his tracks. For there was a smack like an exploding tire as the ball kissed the surface of the big, black bat and with infinitely more speed than it had left his hand, it came flashing back at his head. He had barely time to dodge, and it was well that the fraction of a wink was his, for the ball would have cracked his skull like an eggshell.

The batter stood unmoved. But as his eye met that of the wrathful McNeese, he showed plainly that he had meant every kilowatt of compressed lightning in the hurrying horsehide. "Two can play at that game," his attitude said, though he said never a word. Bob Moran, on second, knocked down a two-hop grounder by a circus play and fielded the ball to first on Jim's next offering. "It's about time, boys, about time," murmured Wish to himself, as he squatted near the third-base coaching line, no move of play or byplay evading him. "He's human, after all. But holy saints, how he can hit!"

Bunty Priesker raised both hands above his head. "All right, Whiskers," he shouted. "My turn now; let's go!" A flicker of a smile crossed the dark countenance; maliciously, Jim grooved the pellet. Bunty had scarce time to pull his hands down before it was upon him. There was a single hop, midway of the diamond, that seemed to add to its fiendish speed; there was no time to dodge. The ball broke through his braced hands and rapped him sharply on the chest. He picked it up, threw with a flourish to first, and strutted about in his position in imitation of a certain custard exponent of the screen. Jim obliged again with a fast ball, belt high. This was manufactured into a sizzling liner which Bunty attempted to stop with his left hand: He merely deflected it. With great deliberation he pulled off his glove and felt each individual finger, as if for possible fracture. Then he replaced the glove, moved back to the farther edge of the grass, and settled his attention on the batter. The time for comedy had passed with him, too. Another grounder was his portion, a low-lying grasscutter. There was too much power behind it to permit of clean fielding, though he tried gamely and drew a bump on the shin. He recovered the ball, rolled it to Jim, and removed his cap to bow low to the batter. "I've had mine, thanks," he said. "And I take back the 'Whiskers.'"

Pete Dill, on third, smothered his grounder, though it whirled him half round. He was a better fielder than Bunty, for he did not fight the ball: he seemed to yield to it. Yet his finished artistry was strained by the smoking progress of the stranger's offering. Soon thereafter the exhibition ended abruptly. The big bat remained immovable on the square shoulder until three balls went by. But the man stepped into

the fourth one, just above his knees, and flailed it high and far away. To the accompaniment of awe-stricken stares the hit cleared the center-field bleachers by a goodly margin and disappeared in Cherry Street beyond. It was the third time in the years of history of Old Guard park that the feat had been accomplished.

The stranger handed the bat to the waiting brown boy, who had trotted up wearing his placid smile. The youngster dropped the shiny club carefully into the canvas bag, buckled it, and stood to heel like a well-trained setter, awaiting the next move of his master. The latter walked quickly to where Wish McGuire chewed grass reflectively by third. "I suppose you're ready to talk business?" he asked briefly.

"I am. Come into the office," replied the manager, raising his hand as a signal to Paddy Craven to take the team.

"Well, what can I do for you?" queried Wish, when they were seated in his own little office, the brown boy squatted grinning in a corner.

"You can do quite a lot for yourself," was the ungracious retort. "You can sign me up to play ball with your team."

"Um." Wish considered this judicially for a few minutes, to cover the quivering eagerness he felt to get this man's name to a contract. "You're free to sign, I suppose; no other team has a claim on you?"

"None whatever."

"Where'd you play?"

The man hesitated. "Played a good deal when I was a boy," he said slowly. "Since then, not so much until recently. Gave all my time to it, practically, for the past couple of years. Played for fun, and to become a good hitter. Practiced batting, mostly, though I'm a pretty fair outfielder. I'm reasonably fast. What I don't know about big-league fielding you could soon show me."

"I think you'd make an outfielder," conceded Wish. "We could play you in right, alongside of Gilstrap; he covers a lot of territory. Uh—ah—how much money do you think you'd ought to have?"

"I'm going to get," returned the other calmly, but meaningly, "fifty dollars for every hit I make, with a bonus of an extra hundred for each home run."

"You're crazy," was the kindly reply of the dispassionate Wish.

"Why?" demanded the stranger, bristling.

"Well, we don't know what you can do or

how you can do it. You're worth a beginner's pay—about fifteen hundred dollars for the three months that are left. That's high; we start 'em at two thousand, usually, for the season."

"You can't get me for that," snapped the man.

"But see here," went on Wish persuasively. "I haven't seen you field. You might lose more games out in right than you could win with the old wallop. To stick in the big show, a man has to have pretty nearly everything, these days."

"You can't fool me, McGuire," retorted the stranger angrily. "If I were on crutches and couldn't catch a fly with a clothes basket, any manager living would sign me for my hitting. You need me and the Meadowlarks need me. You must have me to win the pennant; you're short on hitting. The Larks could use me to cinch their lead, and keep you from getting me. How long would Foley hesitate about signing me?"

Foley was president of the Larks and the free spender of the circuit. Wish knew that after the exhibition this man had given, Foley would have signed him unhesitatingly at his own terms. But Sam Groesbeck, the Old Guard president and majority stockholder, loved a dollar well: There was a battle in prospect to put this stranger of the big black bat into the Old Guard uniform, even at the most favorable terms.

"Why didn't you go to Foley first?" he asked.

The moody stranger scowled. "He was interviewed a few days ago by a newspaper man. He said he'd rather have a baseball player chew tobacco, swear, and bat three hundred, than to go to church every Sunday and only hit two-fifty."

"Oh; uh-huh. I see. You're a church member."

"I trust I'm a Christian," replied the other, with a sort of hostile humility. "I'll play with him if I have to, but——"

"Well, come down to earth and let's do business," broke in Wish briskly. "I'll stretch a point and give you twenty-five hundred for the half season that's left. There are a lot of stars who don't——"

The man raised his hand: "You have my last word, McGuire," he broke in. "You'll pay me fifty dollars a hit, and a bonus of a hundred dollars for each home run, or I go to the Larks. Let's stop wasting time. Do you want me—or don't you?"

Wish knew that further argument was useless. "Sit still a minute," he returned shortly, and entered the office of President Groesbeck. The fat and well-clad Sam was seated at his desk, his brows wrinkled. He was in ill humor, for several reasons: The team was drawing none too well; he was signing the fortnightly pay checks, and giving up money came near to being physical anguish to him; and he was annoyed at himself for a bit of shortsightedness into which stinginess had betrayed him. Wally Reeder, sporting writer on the *Motor City Sun*, the town's best newspaper, had telephoned for a pass for a friend to that day's game. Groesbeck hesitated and sought to refuse, tempering the negative as much as he could, when Reeder cut him off with: "Aw, never mind; Sample can pay his own way. He's editor of the *Wallaceville Daily Tribune*. You know the booster his sheet has always been for the Old Guard. He won't like this, and I'd just as soon you'd know I don't like it." Reeder hung up with a bang. When, a few minutes later, Sam had swallowed his pride sufficiently and overcome his stinginess to call the *Sun* office and ask for Reeder, he was informed on giving his name that "Mr. Reeder is busy."

"Well?" he growled, when Wish entered.

"Nothing much," returned the manager easily. "Except that I've got the pennant all wrapped up in my office, and addressed to the Old Guard."

"What's the riddle?" snarled Sam, tugging at the stubby end of his black mustache.

Wish related briefly the happenings of the morning. "This bird will hit about six hundred," he concluded. "And if we can't run wild in this league and take the world's series rag, too, with one more three-hundred hitter even, I'll quit baseball and go to dock-wallopin', that's all."

"But the guy's crazy," snapped Groesbeck impatiently. "How many games left—seventy-six? Suppose he gets three hits a game: That's better than eleven thousand dollars. If he can do that, he'd ought to get a homer one game out of three—twenty-five hundred more. Thirteen thousand, five hundred dollars!" Sam raised his fat, bediamonded hands. "Tell him you'll pay him twenty-five hundred, and not a cent more."

"Tell him yourself, and see how far you'll get," returned the freckle-faced manager,

rising. There was a bite in his tones. "I've told him, and he don't hear me." He crossed the room, opened the door, and beckoned the dark young man in with a backward jerk of his head.

"See here," began Sam abruptly, as the stranger stood before him. Such social amenities as waiting for an introduction to a ball player, a busher at that, or asking him to be seated, were beyond the magnate: "You got to get over them fool ideas if you play in the big league. I been doing a little figuring. Why, if you get three hits a game and twenty-five home runs for the balance of the season, we'd have to pay you nearly fourteen thousand dollars! We'll pay you twenty-five hundred, with a bonus of say five hundred if you hit six hundred or better for the season. Then if we win the pennant, and she looks easy, that puts you into the world's series. That's at least four thousand more——"

The stranger interrupted. He was as insolently unmindful of Sam's importance as the president had been of his: "You'll pay me fifty dollars a hit and a hundred extra for each home run, or I sign with Foley. Furthermore, you have just three minutes to make up your mind." He turned on his heel and slammed the door behind him.

"He's—he's bluffing," sputtered the flushed and angry Groesbeck.

Wish leaned back in his chair until his head touched the wall. His hands were in his pockets and he surveyed the ceiling as he replied lazily, but with something in his voice that Groesbeck had learned to know as a danger signal: "No, he isn't. He'll get what he says, or he'll go to Foley. You'll have to dig, Mr. Groesbeck. But you can't lose. If he hits like a house afire, and I think he will, he'll draw enough extra people to the games every week to pay his salary for the season. He'll be worth a hundred thousand dollars to you. We'll go into the world's series, sure, and that's a hundred thousand more. And if he doesn't hit, he doesn't get anything."

"I won't pay him that much, I tell you!"

McGuire lowered the front legs of his chair softly to the floor. "All right. You better look around for another manager. Foley knows my contract with you is up this season, and I get Kelly's place if I want it, no matter where the Larks finish. You kept me out of the world's series cut last year because you wouldn't loosen up for

players. You got the cheapest team in the league, Mr. Groesbeck. But I've been a cheap manager long enough. You hire this bird, or you hire a manager. What's it goin' to be?"

"Aw, go on out and sign him," snarled Groesbeck. So great was his mental un-equilibrium at so outrageous a potential expense that he drove his pen through the next check he signed.

"We reserve the right to can you any time you drop below three hundred and stay there," warned Wish, ten minutes later.

"That's all right," nodded Blue.

"I'll have the contract drawn. What did you say your name was?"

"Blue—Hankow Blue."

"Rather a queer one," the manager couldn't help but remark.

"No queerer than McGuire, in my estimation," was the acidulous reply.

So Hankow Blue and Bodo, his brown boy, and his shiny bat which was never out of the possession of one or the other of them, joined the Old Guard. Their first appearance in fast company was not propitious. "Rowdy" Reagan, of the Sandpipers, handed Hankow a laugh, a nasty insult, and a spitball when the newcomer tapped the plate next day. Hankow's effort was a mile-high foul which Rowdy himself ran over and caught. As the new outfielder was batting fifth, he did not come up again until the waist of the game, when there were two on and two out. Rowdy repeated the insult—and threw up his left hand just in time. The spitball hadn't broken quite so well and Hankow sent it back, humming like a ten-penny nail, straight at Rowdy's head. Somehow the ball stuck in Reagan's glove, and that chance to score vanished.

The vendetta was still on when he was due to hit again. The Sandpipers were a smart team who always attempted something besides the old army game. They noted how Blue could be badgered, and how uncannily he placed his hits. The second baseman and shortstop played almost directly behind the pitcher's box. Rowdy sneered—and dodged. The ball, whistling back at him, was knocked down by one of the pair, while the other recovered it and threw him out. It was the first time the saturnine youth had a chance to show his speed and he got down to first in creditable fashion. In the field, thanks to a long morn-

ing's coaching by Wish, he caught three flies and dropped one. The muff was a hard chance, and was excusable. Decidedly, Wish summed up, he would do, providing——

"Thought you had brains, or I wouldn't have signed you," he remarked mildly, as he sauntered across the deserted field with Wish after the game.

"What do you mean?" was the scowling question. "If I don't know as much as any ball player——"

"You don't. Never saw first base, did you?"

"No."

"So it wasn't a profitable day for you or the team. You worked for nothing, and we lost. You did just what Rowdy Reagan wanted you to do."

"He can't abuse me! I'll get him if he keeps it up."

"You were so busy hitting the ball where Rowdy wanted it that we lost a game we need in our business. You can't hurt him that way."

"How can I hurt him?"

"By grinning when he roasts you. Keep your head and get some hits. He's won six straight games. It would have hurt him a lot less to break a rib than it would to lose the game. He played you for a sucker, and you bit."

Hankow was silent while this idea struggled for lodgment in his one-track brain. He scowled, then smiled; then scowled again. "But—but he insulted me," he burst out.

"Aw, forget it," advised Wish. "He didn't mean it; that stuff's all part of the game. Just plug your ears and batter the old pill."

Hankow performed well, but not brilliantly, in the next two games. But it was in the fourth contest, in which Rowdy, who was poison ivy to the Old Guard, came back in an attempt to add to his string of victories, that the recruit became a national celebrity. The first time up, a fixed smile on his face, he burned a single over first; the second, smart work in the outfield kept his low hopper to a double. The last two times he faced Rowdy, who was incandescent with anger, he connected for home runs—one into the left-field bleachers and the other to the flagpole in far center. The Old Guard won, of course. Sam Groesbeck paced the floor of his office for an hour that afternoon, muttering at irregular intervals: "Four hits!

Two homers! Four hundred dollars! I can't stand that."

There were ground rules next day and many a day thereafter. For the world loves a winner and the Old Guard had started to win consistently. In striking their stride they had acquired a picturesque character. Photographers snapped Hankow Blue, Boodo, the black bat. Staff men interviewed Hankow, and got short answers; Boodo, and got grins; tried to heft the shiny war clubs, and earned refusals. Columns, pages, libraries, were written about this tanned and glum youth who had descended into Motor City as mysteriously as though he had been dropped from an airplane.

As the season wore on, the Old Guard gained on the Larks, who were playing up to their stride and beyond; hung even with them for a time; and then slowly drew ahead. The pennant and the world's series flag both seemed certain to Wish. And just about the time his major worries in a baseball way were over, major worries in a personal way began to intrude themselves. The man who had cleared up one set was intimately connected with the other. That man, of course, was Blue.

There was a young woman in Wish's life—Maisie Dawes, who was clerk in a candy store adjoining Hotel Occidental, the baseball fraternity's hangout. Wish had been squire to Maisie for two years now, and fully expected to marry her. Only, though he fought the feeling nobly, Wish at times would have been better satisfied had life not been so ordained. For Maisie was a nice girl and a pretty girl; but she was also a creature of high and indiscriminate enthusiasms. She gushed over something all the time. As his wife, Wish in pessimistic moments doubted not that she would enthuse with the same wholeheartedness and with practically the same adjectives, over a new flavor of chewing gum as she would over a new baby. Wish despised himself when that thought intruded, but he could not drive it away, just the same.

A month from the time that Hankow Blue had dropped into town and established himself as a Motor City personage and a baseball celebrity, Wish went to the candy store after the game, concerning the matter of a picture show that evening. He was surprised, disagreeably so, to see Maisie talking with Hankow Blue. Furthermore, the demon hitter was talking back, much more

volubly and animatedly than he had ever discoursed in the manager's sight or hearing before. His dark face had lighted up and he was actually smiling in friendly fashion.

Wish heard all about it that evening, between reels and after the show. "I think Mr. Blue is the strangest fellow!" said Maisie. "And so fascinating! He has traveled so much. And when a person has traveled, it sort of broadens them, don't you think?"

"Uh-huh," replied Wish, good-humoredly. "Old Hankow been telling you the story of his life?"

"He has told me quite a good deal," returned Maisie primly. "His little batboy, Boodo, is fond of candy, and he has been dropping in frequently, you know, to buy him some." Wish didn't know, and jealousy stung him severely, but he held his peace. "Do you know how he happened to become such a wonderful batter?"

"No, I didn't."

"Well, nearly three years ago he was going to the Southern Ocean—no, that doesn't sound like it—to the—the South Sea Islands to act as an assistant to a missionary—a lay secretary, I think he said he was. They struck a typhoon—the awfulest storm!—and the ship was wrecked. Mr. Blue was the only one who was saved. He dragged himself up the beach of a little island, all covered with woods, nearly. Just a few things were washed ashore. What do you suppose one of the boxes had in it?"

"I'll bite: What?"

"Well, you needn't be so sarcastic, Wish McGuire, because I think it was just too perfectly wonderful. It had a lot of baseball outfits which were going to Australia—dozen after dozen of balls and those catchers' things they wear and masks and everything except bats. He wanted to convert the natives, but he couldn't do much with them because they liked their little gods, and Mr. Blue was at his wit's end. But he chose up two baseball teams and taught them to play, and then evenings they would listen to him when he told them about our religion around their camp fires."

"But you said he had no bats," objected Wish.

"He didn't. But he made some—out of a funny, dark, shiny wood that the natives called 'leper wood.' That one he uses he made himself down there. He stayed

there nearly three years, because ships didn't come that way. There was nothing to do but play ball all day and talk evenings. He didn't really preach, that is—he just told them about things and got them to do as he said."

"Yes, he'd want his own way," grunted Wish.

"What's the matter with you to-night?" queried Miss Dawes pertly. "I think it's simply astounding and remarkable that he should have such a powerful influence over those natives. Of course, he got to be a pretty good player from practicing all the time, and a perfectly marvelous batter. He, said he enjoyed traveling—he'd always wanted to see wild places and he tried to get to Alaska, or away down to the end of South America before he'd been appointed to this place. When a ship was blown into their harbor by another big storm he came back home to earn enough money to study and become a real preacher and go back there—or maybe up to Alaska. He's curious to see those blond Eskimos, you know."

"I'm learning a lot. Go on."

"Well, that's all, 'Snippy' McGuire, except that little Boodo, who was his house servant, would not be separated from him and Mr. Blue brought him along. I think it's just immense that a man should be playing baseball and have such high ideals."

"Ain't it so!" agreed Wish, laughing mirthlessly. "Most of us have no ideals except to pay our debts and look after our folks. Say, Maisie, from the yarn he told you this guy bats a thousand in the Old Story-teller's League."

"I think he is just a splendid man, and I'm proud he's my friend," was Maisie's emphatic retort. Wish's experience as a baseball strategist should have taught him this was no time for quarreling, yet quarrel he did, and went home in dudgeon. His past doubts and misgivings had disappeared concerning Maisie's never-ending and indiscriminate enthusiasm. Now that she seemed desirable to Hankow Blue, he was sure that he wanted her for himself—more sure and more anxious than ever before. But each evening they were together, she gushed of the outfielder, purposely, it seemed to Wish, to annoy him. If that was her object, she was successful; and the nightly quarrel became a fixture.

Wish studied Blue closely and discovered several puzzling things. The more he mulled

over them, the more deeply did he sink into puzzlement. There was the curious fact that Hankow Blue never missed a ball he swung at. No pitcher had ever witnessed the satisfactory spectacle of the saturnine outfielder taking a healthy cut at one of his offerings and combating only thin air. Strikes were called on him, but not often, for he had a good eye. And he did not hit every ball squarely. He fouled some, perhaps not a third as many as the average batter. But when he lunged, whether the ball be high or low or far away, that wicked black bat always connected.

As for the bat, he and Boodo guarded it literally as they did their eyes. The little brown lad handed it out as Hankow stepped to the plate. Then he squatted, as close as the umpire would permit, until his master hit the ball and dropped the bat. On the instant he was up to retrieve it. No umpire had to sign for that stick to be taken off the field; no catcher kicked it out of the way. It was Boodo's task to secure it, buckle it in the canvas case, and keep it there until Hankow wanted it again. When they left the park after the game, the outfielder carried the case himself.

The team went away on a road trip, during which Wish had time for reflection. He saw how foolish he had been by losing his temper with Maisie, and resolved to urge marriage at once. There had been a sort of understanding that they were to "step off" at the end of the season, but there really was no reason for waiting. He had a comfortable nest egg saved up, and Maisie's people were not dependent upon her earnings. So, after the opening game of the long home series, he called at the candy store, only to find that Maisie had changed her hours and was working evenings. "So she can go to the ball games," volunteered one of the other girls.

So Hankow was taking her to the games! As Wish ruefully remarked as he left the place, the outfielder was also clouting in big figures in the old Courtship League. And then Hankow Blue furnished the newspapers with another sensation. His work with the black bat had been marvelous: .834 was the unbelievable figure which his average boasted. Besides, he had hit an average of one home run per game. And now, for a straight week, he literally failed to hit his weight. Day after day he strode up to the rubber and gave miserable exhibitions. He

fanned; he trickled weak grounders; he popped easy flies. It was rare, indeed, that he hit the ball in the middle with the old solid smack which had hammered the team to the top of the percentage column. His eye was good; he chased few bad ones, but he could not hit the good ones. Still, he showed no evidence of being downhearted. On the contrary, he smiled fatuously at the box seat where Maisie sat with her mother. And she smiled back.

Jealousy and baseball lore enabled Wish to work it out—not all the way, though he went a long distance on the right road. The fellow was not using that mankiller of a war club! To be sure, the bat which was guarded carefully by Boodo was big and black and shiny. But to Wish's keen eye, it was slightly different. This bat did not glow as if from an energy seemingly generated within itself. It was a twin, resembling the other as closely as might be and fooling everybody but Wish, but it was not the original. "So it's not all Mr. Hankow Blue," mused Wish. "That bat has something to do with it, too." The manager held his peace for seven days. Then, when Hankow had lost a game by fanning twice with men on the sacks, he spoke to the outfielder.

"What's the big idea?" he asked with his usual off-field mild pointedness. "You're swinging like a schoolboy at a picnic. You've made just one measly little hit this week—fifty dollars. You can do better black-smithing, Blue. And the team's slipping. First thing you know we'll be down, looking up."

The big outfielder grinned radiantly. "Trying out an idea," he said, surprisingly jovial. "Thought I had to earn a certain thing. But what you get you earn, one way and another. Watch me to-morrow, Mc-Guire."

Wish smoked two cigars in a secluded chair in the Occidental lobby before he solved that. "He's stuck on Maisie; a cinch. There's something about that shiny black bat that helps him get hits. He thought she fell for him under false pretenses because he was such a whale of a hitter when he knew without that bat he isn't. So he took an ordinary bat because his conscience hurt him. He's honest, anyway. It made no difference to her—it never does with a woman. It isn't what you do, with them. And he's just found that out, and it's back to the old pile driver again. And I think

I've lost my girl, for that smile of his meant something. Anyway, I'll find out about it, right now." He met Maisie in the door of the candy store, a package under her arm. Something told him she was leaving the place for good. She stopped at sight of him, tossed her head, made as if to pass, and then thought better of it. "Guess we'd better part friends, Wish," she said. "No use quarreling any longer. I'm—I'm going to marry Hankow."

McGuire's gameness stood him in good stead now. He smiled and shook her hand cordially. "I wish you all the luck, Maisie," he said. "You deserve a good man, and I guess Blue's all right. Just keep him in baseball three or four years and you won't have to worry about bread and butter." Perhaps the girl sensed the relief in his voice, unconscious though it was, for she answered resentfully: "Thanks. I guess Hankow'll do what's right for both of us."

Hankow Blue was rather a changed young man thereafter. He condescended to exchange banter with the other members of the team, and to overlook their profanity. If his labored attempts at cordiality did not meet a hearty response: and if the quips that were flung back at him had a sting to them, he was too self-satisfied to notice it. He had never been popular on the team. The insistence with which he had kept every one at arm's length; his stinginess with his bat, that no other player had so much as touched; his arrogance; his persistent grouchiness—all made him disliked where he was not actually hated. But the baseball player has a keen knowledge of how and where his bread is buttered. This man was hitting them into the league pennant, the world's series; and much money. His batting percentage was actually as large as that of the three next best hitters combined. He had developed so that he was better than passable as a base runner and fielder. So, while his personal popularity was nonexistent, they yielded him grudging deference. "You gotta hand it to the big stiff," they said among themselves.

Encouraged by the star's new geniality, "Pilot" Hickie, the team jester, plotted a joke on Hankow. A few days after the hitting slump had been forgotten under a perfect hail of terrific wallops, that had helped to cash a string of five victories, and had set Sam Groesbeck to walking the floor and

pulling his mustache as he figured Hankow's earnings, the Pilot loitered near home plate as Hankow came up to bat. Apparently, he was crossing to first base; but as the outfielder sent a long, hard liner screeching to center, dropping his bat as he sprinted to first, Pilot cut in ahead of the surprised Boodo. Catching up the bat, he ran to the Old Guard bench, swinging it above his head and chuckling. "Lemme see how she hits," he said. "Throw me a ball, Jim."

At his heels, the frantic Boodo, sobbing and imploring in a strange tongue, tried to reach the bat. He eluded the youngster while McNeese, nothing loath to help the joke along, rummaged in the dugout for a ball. Meanwhile Hankow was running hard, intent on adding a hundred dollars more to his mounting string. He beat the throw to the plate by a creditable slide, rose to his feet, and broke into a run again just as McNeese found a ball and tossed it toward the Pilot. The throw was wide, but by some legerdemain Hickie managed to reach the sphere with the shiny black bat and hit it sharply. He followed it; and as he was stooping over to retrieve it, the galloping Blue crashed into him from behind. The comedian promptly rooted his nose in the dirt, while the bat was torn from his hands and thrust into those of the waiting Boodo, who cowered away from the harsh sentences in his own uncouth jargon. And then, apparently, the incident was over.

There were only two vacant places on the bench. They were at the right end next to Wish. The Pilot came up, smiling. His roll in the dirt he accepted as part of the joke. The outfielder was black with passion. He threw himself into the remaining space and looked fixedly out across the field, elbows on knees, his hands supporting his chin. The game had long since been won, which accounted for Wish's being on the bench and substitutes on the coaching lines. He was wondering about this latest link in the long chain of curious things that his star hitter was uncoiling when the Pilot said: "Nice bat you got there, Blue, but there's something funny——" The sentence ended in a gurgle. The long, sinewy fingers of the outfielder had closed about the poor old Pilot's throat. Hickie's eyes were starting from his head when Wish took in the situation.

There were two angry men on the bench then, and the manager was the angrier. His

fingers were also long and strong and sinewy. They proceeded to sink into the muscles of Blue's left arm as though they would pluck it out. The outfielder released his hold on the Pilot's throat with a sharp gasp of pain. Wish's narrowed blue eyes glittered and his fighting red hair seemed to bristle in sympathy. "What the hell do you mean?" he demanded savagely, his chin out-thrust. "Don't you try any of your heathen-killing tricks around here or I'll break every bone in your body."

"You will?" Blue tried to make his voice sneeringly contemptuous.

"Yes, I will! I can lick you. You learn to take a joke or I'll do it, too. If you got any doubts, come out back of the clubhouse after the game."

"Make 'em leave my things alone," snarled Hankow, though obviously cowed by the thirst for battle Wish showed so plainly.

"That's all right, but if there's any disciplining to be done on this ball team, I'll do it. Nobody cares about you or your bat, except to have a little fun with you."

"What did you say about that bat?" queried Hankow, turning suddenly on the trembling Pilot.

"Nothing—nothing," Hickie assured his questioner, still rubbing his throat. "I said it was a nice one."

The whole incident had passed unnoticed. They had not raised their voices. The team was interested in a brisk diamond play; and the dugout sheltered them from observation from the stands. The inning ended just then, and the players trotted out to their positions, leaving Wish, the Pilot, and a few substitutes on the bench. "All the same, Wish, there's something funny about that bat," declared the Pilot, in a half whisper. But he would say no more.

A full two weeks before the season closed, the Old Guard cinched the pennant to a mathematical certainty. After the deciding game, Sam Groesbeck, loitering in the run-way that connected the offices with the playing field, waylaid Wish McGuire. He led the way into his office and said abruptly: "Mac, you bench this Blue to-morrow."

"Why?"

"Why—why?" His voice rose to soprano heights on the question. "Do you know how much money he's taken from this club for ten weeks of play? Do you, hey?"

"No, but I suppose it's quite a bundle."

"Nineteen thousand four hundred and

fifty dollars!" chanted the lacerated president, in a voice dripping tears. "I want to save a little something to see me through the winter. So you lay him off till the world's series begins."

"If there's any laying off done for that bird, you'll do it," returned the auburn-haired one determinedly. "I'm not pulling such a boner at my time of life."

"Boner? What do you mean—boner?"

"This Blue goes out and hits us into a pennant. There's no discount on that: You know it, he knows it, the world knows it. He lives up to his contract and delivers the goods. If you're square, you live up to your side of the contract, specially as he made about a hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the club while he was making twenty thousand for himself. I'm not taking his part on his account, understand, for I hate him like a snake. He's a crab and he's swelled in the head and—there's other reasons besides. But if you lay him off, you're running out on him. And this league hates a welsker, Mr. Groesbeck."

The president flushed at the imputation, but he went on stubbornly: "We play fourteen more games that means nothing at all but a little change. If he's in there, he'll average his four hits a game, and he'll pole out about twelve home runs. That's four thousand dollars absolutely thrown away. I save that, no matter what they say."

"All right, but remember, I warned you. I wash my hands of the whole business."

"Oh, if you're afraid, I'll tell him," sneered Groesbeck, pulling at his stubby mustache.

"I'm not afraid, but I want to play fair with a guy that played fair with us. You got to hand it to him: He's done all he said he'd do, and more."

So Groesbeck, more intent on saving four thousand dollars than counting the future cost, hunted up Blue and laid him off with some solicitous phrases about having him in tiptop shape for the world's series. The outfielder listened in glowering silence. He had never liked the president, who mourned loudly his bargain whenever they met; and this trick aroused all his latent ugliness. That evening he started out to visit the newspaper offices to acquaint the sporting editors with Groesbeck's shabby action. Like Groesbeck himself, when his mind was made up he disregarded consequences.

His first essay guided him to the *Sun* office and straight to the desk of Wally

Reeder, to whom he told the story of his contract and its peculiar terms, and all the other features of the whole affair. Reeder listened to the story with kindling eyes. "Say, Blue," he pronounced, pounding his desk to give emphasis to his words, "it's about time this Groesbeck person was chased out of the big league. He's too mean to draw a full breath. Why, you made his team! They didn't have a Chinaman's chance at the rag till they signed you. And now, the minute it's sewed up, he puts you on the bench to save a few dollars of the fortune you've brought in. Your hitting has drawn an average of two thousand people a day more than the Old Guard were drawing all season. If you haven't put two hundred thousand dollars on the right side of the ledger, then I can't add. Wish McGuire didn't have anything to do with this?"

"He didn't say anything to me," conceded Hankow.

"Sure he didn't; old Wish is right all the way. I'll bet he fought to keep you on. But I smelled something when this pelican telephoned in himself that he was 'saving you up' for the big series. He told all the others the same thing, of course. Say, Blue, you——"

"Yes?"

"Keep your story to yourself to-night and I'll put you back in the line-up in two days. Let me spring it to-morrow morning. I'll run his alleged reasons in a box and give the real one right below. And I'll set the woods afire about an outlaw league here that has kept Groesbeck awake nights the last couple of years. Will you do it?"

Blue readily promised to tell his story to no other newspaper man, since Reeder was making his case a labor of love—love to put Groesbeck in a hole. Wally touched off the mine next morning. He used the box, as he had promised. Also, he demanded Groesbeck's managerial head on a platter; organized a Stay Away club with a pledge printed on the sporting page, in which the signer agreed to attend no more games while Blue was out of the line-up; and launched his outlaw league club, with a formidable list of backers, in opposition to the Old Guard team. The other papers had to take up the crusade, because public indignation rose to a high pitch over the shoddy treatment accorded Blue.

The third morning, Groesbeck announced that the outfielder's knee had been examined

by the club physician and pronounced strong enough to withstand the wear and tear of the next dozen games and still be in prime shape for the big series. There had never been anything wrong with Blue's knee, but Groesbeck had to save his face, somehow.

It was really the happenings of the next six days that drove Groesbeck out of organized baseball that winter. A man may be hated and despised; but so long as he is not laughed at, he can survive quite comfortably as a magnate. There is something about a guffaw, though, before which he withers. It was the Bluebirds that sent Samuel far down the road to ruin.

The runners-up were in Motor City for the last four-game series of the season, and to play off a pair of postponed contests on a couple of open dates. Attendance had suffered because of Wally Reeder's crusade on the two previous days. But the announcement that morning that Hankow Blue was coming back brought out a big crowd. When he came to bat, he received a tremendous ovation that lighted the depths of his surly soul. Maybe the fact that he had taken advantage of his enforced vacation to marry Maisie Dawes had something to do with it. At any rate, he was smiling and happy as he teed the platter.

Dan Mullaney, who was pitching for the Bluebirds, contemplated him for a moment before sending up the ball. The Bluebirds were secure in second place; the games meant absolutely nothing to either team. Dan Mullaney had a reputation for being quick on the trigger. As he stood facing Blue, a mischievous smile crossed his face, and he called: "Here's a wedding present for you, Hank."

A few in the stands heard him, but to the thousands that could not hear, his action was eloquent. He aimed the ball over in the groove, with absolutely nothing on it. Blue hit it a mile a minute out to left field. Hughie Bell was in left. The idea which had brought a smile and a groove ball from Mullaney caused Hughie to fall down, needlessly and obviously, before he could reach the hit. Technically, it went as a home run. The significance of the thing burst on the spectators as Hankow crossed the plate with another hundred and fifty dollars to his credit and a great gale of laughter swept the park. A wedding present for the star, and a rebuke to sear the stingy soul of Sam

Groesbeck, all in one! Each time that Hankow came up the farce was repeated to the same uproarious outburst. Dan grooved it and the willing Hankow plastered it to far pastures. The smiling outfielders ran just fast enough to keep out of the way of the ball, when the precaution was necessary. At the same time, they were careful not to overplay the joke. The whole thing was given a semblance of regularity that would fool a person not in the know—had there been any such. Each of the Bluebird pitchers obliged in similar fashion each day, and Hankow's total of twenty-three home runs for the six games will, of course, stand as a record for all time.

Groesbeck bore it until the Bluebirds left town. Then he pulled out his entire crew of regulars, Hankow among the rest, and played out the season with subs, broken-down pitchers, and disabled veterans. Even Wally Reeder was satisfied with that. He knew when a jest had gone far enough.

The season closed on the thirtieth of September; the world's series with the Bearcats, the elder-league champions, was scheduled to start on October 2d. Groesbeck had won the toss and the first two games were booked for Motor City. On the morning of October 1st, the Old Guard gathered at the baseball office at ten o'clock for "skull practice" and to draw their pay checks for the preceding two weeks' work. When the conference on the Bearcats' strength and weaknesses was over, Blue took Wish McGuire aside. "Better have Gilkey ready to go out in my place, McGuire," he said. "I'm through."

The outfielder had rather gotten on the nerves of Wish, who had not forgiven the winning of Maisie Dawes, the choking of the Pilot and the sulkiness and superior airs that he had endured all season from Hankow. Besides, loyalty to the club had made him resent the holdup which the star had practiced by connivance with the Lark pitchers. So, he surveyed Hankow with a cold and unbelieving eye. "You pass up a chance to grab off four or five thousand bucks?" he queried contemptuously. "Well, something may keep me awake to-night, but that won't be it."

And yet, strangely enough, that was the thing which made him toss on a sleepless pillow. For, at the final practice that afternoon Blue did not appear. He had always been faithful heretofore. The more Wish

thought of his absence in connection with his remark about being through, the more worried he became. But it was good strategy not to appear anxious. So he stayed away until after ten o'clock next morning. Then he called a taxi and drove to Blue's flat on the West Side.

Maisie, in a stunning negligee, answered the bell; and the malice of the woman for the man she had flouted caused her to say, barb buried neath layers of honey: "Well, Wish McGuire! Who'd think of seeing you up here? But you're welcome to my home, just the same."

Perhaps the manager's eyes had been opened to his lucky escape, for he answered with perfect good humor: "That's all right, Maisie; and while I am here, I'll just wish you all the happiness in the world. But I really came to see your husband." Maisie felt that the barb had failed to penetrate, and she said shortly: "I'll call him."

Blue appeared in a new braided smoking jacket. There was a thin smile on his lips. "Still a chance to get him, maybe, by going in head down," thought Wish. "I'll treat him rough—stampede him." Aloud he said abruptly: "Why weren't you at practice yesterday afternoon? That's going to cost you just fifty bucks."

"That'll cost me nothing at all," was the prompt retort. "I've drawn every cent your ball team owes me; and I'm through playing. I'd like to see you collect it."

"You mean you won't be in the world's series?"

"That's just what I mean."

"But, man, see the money you're throwing away!"

"I have enough. I've rolled up something over twenty-two thousand dollars for the season."

"But how about loyalty to the team? They stood behind you; they helped win games as well as you did. And I gave you your chance. I let you hit, that first day, when many a manager would have chased you out of the park as a plain bug."

"The team never did any more for me than they had to," growled Blue, though he look uncomfortable. "And as for your giving me a chance, you thought I was a poor half-wit you could have some fun with, I suppose."

"Blue, ordinary decency ought to make you glad to play in this series. It's the

part of a yellow dog to run out now, and you know it."

"Is that so, Mr. Wish McGuire?" It was Maisie who asked the question, her eyes blazing. "Well, who played the yellow dog first? Who put my husband out of the game to save a few dirty dollars for himself? It was Sam Groesbeck, that's who it was! Hankow isn't going to play. I hope it costs Mr. Sam Groesbeck a lot more money than he tried to beat us out of, and I hope it costs your team the pennant!" she concluded venomously.

So he was forced at last to give it up. "You're doing the wrong thing, Maisie," he said as he rose. "Your husband's in Dutch after this if he ever wants to play ball again. He'd be blacklisted."

"I don't expect to play ball again," remarked Hankow complacently. "I have funds enough now to prepare me for my lifework."

"We're coming to the park to see the series, too," chimed in Maisie maliciously.

Blue and his wife came into the crowded grand stand just before the first ball was pitched that eventful opening day. There was a buzz at once, not friendly but curious, as he was recognized. There was another buzz, this time unfriendly, in the first inning when the Old Guard had two men on and Gilkey, substituting in Blue's place, fanned. There was an angry growl in the fourth inning when almost the same situation was repeated. In the seventh, when the break came and the score was five to one against the home team, some one yelled "Quitter!" Others took it up: They tossed in "yellow cur" and other epithets, less choice. Blue got up, his eyes flashing, and faced them out, turning about to blaze defiance to every corner of the stand. But he had scarcely seated himself when a whizzing cushion knocked his straw hat far down the stand. They disdained all concealment when he leaped up again, fighting mad. Other cushions fairly rained on him; a wide one crushed the new confection that Maisie was wearing, over her eyes. Probably the thrower didn't care that it represented the value of one base hit to her husband.

Blue was having his first experience with the fickleness of baseball crowds, and it was a bitter one. Yesterday he was a hero—a public idol. To-day he was less than the bat boy, less even than an umpire, in their

estimation. The full force of their disappointment over the foreshadowed loss of the opening game was expended on him and overwhelmed him. He could have fought two or three or five; but he could not face the contempt and wrath of thousands. As he stumbled out of the stands, Maisie at his heels, a man struck him in the face. And Blue, overcome with bewilderment and a burning sense of shame at the construction placed upon his defection from the team in its hour of need, did not resent or return the blow. He saw himself for the first time in the public mirror, stripped of arrogance and pride, and the spectacle was a humbling one.

Wish McGuire went to the Blue flat that evening. He had to have the outfielder to win, and he was willing to humble himself still more in order to get the slugger back. But the flat was deserted; no one answered his ring. He sought the janitor, a garrulous, paunchy chap with a big mustache, belowstairs. "Mr. Blue?" he repeated. "He and his wife and the little black kid moved out this afternoon, bag and baggage. Took some hustling; I helped 'em pack three trunks and a couple of suit cases. He'd fell down and got hurt, he said. Face was all bunged up. But I've seen to-night's paper and I know the answer." He leered.

"Where'd they go? Darned if I know. But I heard 'em tell the taxicab man to take 'em to the Union Station. Said a while ago he might go 'way down south to some ungodly place near Australia, or Patagonia. Guess he's on his way."

Wish McGuire hurried west on a hunting trip when the disastrous series was over and tried to forget baseball. He succeeded reasonably well for several months. But late January found him back in town again, making ready for the trek to the training camp, planning for exhibitions, for the season's grind, worrying about the hole in the infield, speculating on Jim McNeese's arm—in short, breathing, dreaming, living baseball. Thoughts of baseball brought thoughts of Hankow Blue. And thoughts of the eccentric outfielder were followed inevitably by memories of the mysterious black bat.

"If I could get my hands on it, I could mighty soon tell whether it was Hankow Blue or the war club," he mused in the Old Guard downtown office one afternoon. "The Pilot said there was something about it—I know myself there must have been.

See how his average fell off the week he was trying to get Maisie on his merits! It sounded like the percentage of kick in legal beer. If I could get my hands on it——" Wish, struck by an idea, rose and slipped into his overcoat. "Poor fish!" he chided. "I'll bet I can get hold of it."

He went to the flat building where the Blues had set up housekeeping. The same janitor was on the job, and he was flattered when the manager of the Old Guard seemed inclined to chat with him in the warm dimness of the sub-basement boiler room. "By the way, did he give you a bat, or anything?" queried Wish carelessly, when Hankow Blue as a topic was pretty well exhausted and the janitor had started on the second cigar which Wish had given him.

"Ayah—two of 'em," returned the janitor cheerfully. "The very bats he used to knock the ball out o' the park with. He had three and only took one away; wasn't room to pack 'em. I kept 'em as souvenirs. Like to see 'em?"

Wish admitted carelessly that he would and the janitor shuffled away. He came back presently with two somber clubs, crowding the legal limit in size and weight—both black, both shiny, but one blacker and shinier than the other, seemingly taking its luster from the wood itself rather than from any varnish or polish. With beating heart, Wish bought them both for twenty-five dollars. The next week, they started for the Texas training ground with him.

He could hardly wait for Jim McNeese to get the winter's kinks out of his salary arm by a little easy lobbying before he sauntered to the plate with the least shiny of the two bats. "As he expected, it was merely a good, honest implement, with which a three-hundred hitter could hit three hundred, but which would never cajole a dub into accumulating eight hits out of ten tries. Then he changed bats, and tried again.

Jim's arm had loosened by now, and the first one was grooved, waist-high, at fair speed. Wish took a healthy cut at it; and the hair on his neck rose in superstitious fear when the great black bat leaped in his hands like a living thing to meet the flying sphere. It was a square, satisfying impact, and under it the shiny war club broke squarely in two. The bat had been sawn across until but a shred remained whole. Then the cut had been puttied and varnished with artful

care, so that all trace was concealed. Hankow Blue had spent a loving halfday on that!

Wish took the mangled bat to the scientists of three universities. They scraped it, pulverized it, analyzed it. Seven experts were frankly skeptical when he told his story of the dynamic thrust as the horsehide approached. The eighth, when he was alone with Wish, spoke indefinitely of affinitive electricity which might have coursed through the wood from the grip of a man's hands. He had traveled in the South Seas, he said, in clipped, cautious sentences, and had heard of boomerangs which never missed their aim when thrown at any animal. He had never seen such boomerangs; remote island tribes, just below the horizon, always a little farther on, were said to possess the secrets of these boomerangs, which were made out of a curious growth called leper wood. The theory, curious but entirely unsubstantiated, was that animal electricity followed the wooden weapon from the thrower—rather, guided it—to his prey. The baseball cover was horsehide, wasn't it?

"Well, what do you think is the real answer?" broke in Wish.

The scientist replied dryly, with a flash of unexpected humor: "As the facts at our disposal are entirely inadequate for the formulating of a theory, what I think is interesting but not conclusive."

The Old Guard are on their toes, about ready to start the season. The team is more popular than ever before: Sam Groesbeck doesn't run it now. Public sentiment, carefully engineered by Wally Reeder, fastened on Groesbeck as being to blame for the loss of the title in the world's series joust. The clamor forced him to sell his stock and get out—that is, the clamor, aided by a united push by the other magnates and the league president, did it. Sam wasn't regarded by his associates as an asset to the game. Everybody is pulling for the team to go out and win, but Wish McGuire fears they lack just a little batting strength of being able to put it over.

See here, boy: When you page Mr. Hankow Blue, be sure to mention that all is forgiven; make that part strong. Motor City wants him on his own terms. So does Wish McGuire, with a mental reservation— if he still has the bat he took away.

The complete novel in the next number will be by Francis Lynde.

A Man of Iron

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

Author of "The Gold Trail," "The Beach of Dreams," Etc.

V—THE STORY OF A BEARD

IF a man swears to do a thing and keeps his mind fixed on the compass card, he'll do it—bar accidents," said Captain Tom.

"Chaps swear they'll do this and that, and they don't do it because they forget to keep on swearing. Give them a month, as a general rule, and they'll go mush on their purpose.

"Now, when that chap Sigurdson I was telling you of found himself on the quay side of Valparaiso without a cent in his pocket, robbed and done in by Bezley, he swore to be even with him, and what do you think he swore by? His beard.

"Being a Dane and sticking to old-fashioned customs, he swore he'd shave his beard and never let it grow again till he'd done Bezley in.

"It was a big oath for he was a big man and his beard was near half of him; hung down to his belt, a crow could have built her nest in it; it was yella as corn and bright as brilliantine. Girls used to run after that chap's beard more than after him, and children always used to be yammering to have a tug at it.

"I'm not given to face fans, but if I could raise a thing like that myself and stick it on a figure like Sigurdson's and get inside the lot, I'm not saying I wouldn't.

"Well, he swore to abolish it and keep shaved till the day he scragged Bezley, and since Bezley had taken his hook and nobody could tell whether he'd gone to China or Yurru, it looked as if Sig would be using a lot of shaving soap.

"The bother was he hadn't the price of a shave, but he borrowed it from Horn, the captain of the *Haliotis*, same ship that had brought him to Valparaiso, and in he goes to a Spanish barber's and has his trimmings done. Then he saw himself in the glass, and he could have cut the barber's throat, not that it was the barber's fault.

"Anyhow, with the beard he was a fine-looking chap and without it durned ugly, and

when he came back to show himself to Horn, Horn didn't reckonise him.

"I'm as set on your murdering Bezley as you are,' says Horn, 'but, for the love of Mike, grow it again, and do the killing after; get some hair restorer and take a month off and grow it again,' says he; but Sig had sworn his oath and he wasn't the man to turn back.

"He got work on the wharves to get a little money together and, being a chap with a long eye for the future, he bought a safety razor, so that he'd always be able to have a clean shave whether he had money or not or wherever he might be.

"Then from Valparaiso he went up the coast as fireman in the *Pegwackett*, an old tramp, owned and run by Preston Sellers, a chap you've never heard of, maybe, but well known all along that coast right up to Frisco. She'd been sold out of the Ming Shu line for old iron, and he bought her for about ten cents and filled her holes with putty and got Spaniards to trust him, somehow or 'nother, and ran cargo of sorts with a mix-up crew and a drunk Scotch engineer.

"Sig didn't mind, for the work was easy; there being no forced draft—she was rigged with beam engines—and he had no fear of losing his life, seeing he had it clear in his mind that nothing would kill him till he'd fixed Bezley.

"D'you ever read your Bible? Well, you'll remember what it says about a chap being able to move mountains if he has faith enough. That's truth. And Sigurdson kept his faith going with that patent razor which held him to his course same as a rudder, always reminding him not to forget Bezley.

"They got to Lima and discharged cargo, and from there they went to Central 'Merican ports, the old *Pegwackett* holding herself together, somehow, with her putty; then she clawed along up to Frisco, her pumps going, and I reckon she emptied half

the Pacific out of herself before she got through the Gate.

"She sank in Frisco bay, peaceable, notwithstanding the lighters on either side trying to hold her up like a dying Christian in the arms of his friends. How she hadn't sunk a dozen times from Lima up was a miracle only to be 'counted for by the fact that Sigurdson was aboard shaving himself regular and swearing his big oath to reach Beazley and scragg him, every time he shaved.

"However that may be, she hadn't more than reached Black Point when she pulled her plugs out—them that wasn't gone—and the holds filled and the bay came up through the lazarette.

II.

"Sigurdson spent that night at a lodging house where most of the chaps were white and drunk, and the balance black and drunker. It was that low-down; and then he started hunting for a job, picking up this, picking up that, not wishing to go to sea again and not much chance of doing it unless he'd shipped in a whaler or a Cork packet.

"There were times when he had no food and nothing to sell or pawn but his safety razor and stick of shaving soap. He could have got half a dollar for the razor, which was worth four, but he stuck to it, and the more difficult times were and the harder he found it to shave—having to use cold water pretty often—the harder he swore that he'd be even yet with Beazley.

"Beazley was somewhere in the world, and he knew in the heart of his mind that if he stuck to it, the other chap would be drawn to him at last like a bit of iron to a magnet.

"One night he was in the 'Fore and Aft,' a saloon down on Rafferty's Wharf run by a chap of the name of Bone. Jack Bone was his name, and he had a trap-door from the place behind the bar, leading down to a boat slip convenient for shanghaiing sailor men.

"And 'Hallo, my beauty,' says Bone to him; 'you're looking down in your mouth to-night,' says he. 'Have a drink,' he says, standing there behind the counter with a cigar as long as his leg in his mouth, and his sleeves rolled up and an Oafer diamond as big as a decanter stopper in his shirt front.

"A black-whiskered man he was, with hair all over his arms, but a sociable-looking chap

when he wasn't disputing prices or firing parties out by the scruffs of their necks.

"'I don't mind,' says Sig.

"'Haven't you no friends?' asks Bone as he handed over a whisky.

"'No,' says Sig. 'I've no friends in Frisco, no work, nothing.'

"'Try a ship?' says Bone.

"'Not me,' says Sig. 'I'd sooner hang on in the chance of something turning up. I manage to get jobs of a sort and, though I'm out of work to-night, maybe it'll be different to-morrow.'

"'Well,' says Bone, 'I've somehow taken a liking to you and may be able to help. How'd you like to be manager of a restaurant—sailors' place. Ten dollars a week and all found. A friend of mine is looking out for a likely man and, seems to me, you'd fill the bill.'

"'I'm on,' says Sig.

"Then they had more drinks together, Bone standing, and at last he hands over a whisky with a cough drop in it.

"It didn't seem more than ten minutes after to Sig, when he woke up with the dope still half blinding him. It was next day, and he was in the fo'c's'le of a thundering great Cape Horner just clearing the Gate, and a chap was booting him out of his bunk to handle topsails.

"And the first thing he did was to put his hand in his pocket to feel if the razor was there. It was.

"Then he knew that things would come right somehow, and he didn't kick nor carry on, but fell into the work and took his gruel and his pay till he reached an English port where he dropped the Cape Horner and fell in with a chap who put him on a new lay.

"Being cuts above the ordinary sailor man, he got hold of a job as understeward on a big India boat carrying passengers. This suited him well, being easier to shave and keep clean than rolling round the world in a fo'c's'le, and he was in it near a year and a half, till a chance came to him to change to a Pacific boat.

III.

"He'd been near two years on the job now, with his eye on the compass card; but it didn't seem that he was any closer to meeting Beazley. The Pacific boat he was on, she was a Royal Mail steamer, hit a reef or something and did it so bad that they had to beach her at Palmyra away down

south of Hawaii; from that they were taken off and brought to Frisco, and there he was again after all his travels and as far off as ever, you'd say, from his mark.

"But that wasn't so, for, the day after he landed, a mail boat was due out to Sydney, taking Honolulu on the way, and one of the stewards having fallen sick, he was offered the berth and took it. Then the passengers came aboard, and the last of them to come up the gangplank was Beazley."

The captain paused for a drink.

"Beazley. The same old Beazley, only grown two years older and without his mustache, prosperous looking and wearing a traveling cap and smoking a cigar and followed by a hotel chap with a big portmanteau and traveling bag.

"Drop a needle in Fifth Avenue, somewhere, you don't know where, and find it by accident next day. That seems as likely a proposition as these two meeting, same as I'm telling you. Rum coincidence, you'd say. It wasn't coincidence or nothing of the sort, nor accident, neither. It was mind fixing. If Beazley had gone to the S'ara Desert and stuck his head in the sand, Sig would have fetched up to him at last, pulling himself along by his will, same as a man pulls himself along a rope in the dark. You see, he'd never left hold of that rope for a day. I reckon if he'd let go for a single day he wouldn't have done it, but his shaving practices kept him up to it.

"Well, there was more coming. Sig had always run under the name of Jones aboard ship, and the minute his eye had lit on Beazley he goes to the head steward, Anderson. He hadn't known Anderson more than a few hours, but had made friends with him, and says he: 'Who's looking after that chap in number-ten cabin?' says he.

"'You are,' says Anderson.

"Sig had intended faking up some reason to ask to be given the job, but the thing was done. Then he knew that it was all right and no mistake, and that he hadn't shaved off all those miles of beard in vain.

"Then he set to to wait on Beazley, and the first thing he found out was that Beazley wasn't sailing under his own name. Rogers was the name he gave the purser, and he no more imagined that his stateroom steward was Sigurdson than he could have imagined himself an honest man. Sig being as unlike his old self as a boiled monkey's unlike a bird of paradise.

"At first sight of Beazley, Sigurdson had been near scragging him right off, but he had kept a clutch on himself. He had him sure, like a cat a mouse, and there was plenty of time before him.

"At nights he lay awake thinking of ways and means. He could have killed him easy enough if he'd done it sudden, and, the port-holes being big on those boats, he could have stuffed him through, but he wasn't a chap to do murder, as I've said before. He wanted to settle the chap in fair fight, somehow or another, and he knew the chance would come.

"Meanwhile, he was mighty attentive to him, and presently it began to appear to him that Beazley wasn't easy in his mind, always walking about on deck alone when he wasn't shut in his cabin, and lowering more whisky than was good for him. That, taken with the fact that he wasn't using his own name but had changed it for Rogers, made Sig come to the conclusion that he'd been running crooked in Frisco and was maybe running from the law.

"Once he came into the cabin without knocking, and Beazley was sitting with a cash box open on his knees, which he shut with a snap and, by the look of him, Sigurdson knew there was stuff in that box he was mighty fearful of losing or having seen.

"They stopped at Honolulu, and Beazley went ashore for a day, but before going he left the cash box in care of the purser. He'd put a tape round it with a seal so that no one could open it without breaking the seal, and that made Sigurdson sure that all the boodle he had was in that box.

"He tried to figure out what it could be; thought of the pearls, but put that aside, making sure that he'd turned them into money long ago; he put gold aside, the box not being big enough, and bank notes, because they were traceable. Then he gave up thinking, sure in his mind that he'd find out soon.

"They left Honolulu after they'd taken mails and passengers aboard, and struck out on the run to Suva. Ten days is the time it takes from port to port, and another nine days takes you to Sydney.

IV.

"Now, a month before that time an old tin-pot schooner had turned turtle somewhere in the latitude of Washington Island,

and was going about the seas just there bottom up, with the gulls roosting on her keel and feeding on the barnacles; she'd been sighted and reported, and it was believed she'd sunk, but she hadn't. She was still afloat and waiting for the *Lima*, that was the name of Sigurdson's ship, and four days out of Honolulu, one night, going eighteen knots under a full moon and with the band playing and all, they smashed into her.

"Sigurdson was in the main saloon when the big smash came, and he heard some one cry out, 'My diamonds,' and turned and saw Beazley making for his cabin. Next minute out he came with his cash box under his arm and did a bolt for the deck up the main companionway, Sig after him.

"On deck, Sig had to take his place with the others of the crew, so he couldn't keep an eye on Beazley, but he didn't worry; he knew it would come out all right, somehow, and he waited with the others while the boats were got ready in case they were needed, listening to the centrifugal bilge pumps baling the sea out of the forehold, and the orders of the officers and the clucking of the passengers.

"Some guy went into the music room and started playing the piano to cheer the others up and show he wasn't frightened, till an officer went in and told him to stop his dam' noise. After that there was quiet till the order came for the boats to be got away.

"The foreplates were smashed, and she was down by the head with the holes getting bigger, and the boats were got away none too soon, for the bulkheads went between the main and forehatches just as the last boatload was off, and they didn't see the end of her, for a squall was coming up and blotted out the moon.

"Sig, in the confusion, had managed to nip into the boat that held Beazley; he'd no right there, and he might have been shot for pushing another chap aside to get in, but he risked that; he wasn't going to be separated from his one treasure in life, not if he knew it, and, when he was in, no one bothered—they were all too much taken up thinking of their souls and their chances against perdition.

"But Sigurdson had forgotten one thing. He'd forgotten his razor. Clean forgot it, the thing he'd carried for years, and there was no chance of finding a razor among that crowd of passengers and hands. But he

didn't bother. He took it as an indication that Beazley was his sure, now, and he needn't trouble no more to shave.

V.

"Ever hear of Fortuna?" suddenly broke off the captain.

"No, not that I remember."

"It's a bit of an island somewhere north of Howland Island between the Marshalls and Palmyra. It's a picture, nothing else; there's not enough copra to carry trade nor *bêche-de-mer* nor turtle nor shell. It would be a fine place for spooning, only there's no girls; only a few old kanakas left over from a tribe that's died out from laziness. Gower Island was the name given to it by the captain of a British man-of-war who found it first and annexed it. He'd been born in Gower Street, London, they say, and wished the fact known; but the name didn't stick, somehow, for a Spaniard or Portugee or some one lebeled it Fortuna. It runs under both names, but Fortuna holds, fits it like a plaster, somehow. Anyhow, there it is, a bit of a hill of a place with a reef holding off the sea from it and gulls fishing off the reef.

"Well, the *Lima* boats, driven before that squall and a big sea that came after it, ran in the dark for fifty miles or so, the chaps bailing and praying alternate till they were right on to Fortuna. They'd got spread. The boats to north and south managed to give the island the go-by, for there seemed no landing, with the last of the moon showing nothing but surf.

"Sigurdson's boat, however, had to bull along and take its chances; the stuff was right ahead and by good luck and straight steering they hit the break.

"But that break in the reef at Fortuna was made by Jim Satan, it sure was, for if you don't hit it in the center the coral hits you. It's a big break, and at the flood it looks all right, but with the ebb you see the water churning and spouting on either side the center passage, and it was quarter ebb and full dawn when they tried to run it, which they would, only for a coral spike that took the boat like a bull's horn and ripped the bottom out of her. The tide, so I was saying, was running out of the lagoon, and those chaps began to drown same as if they'd been training for it all their lives, drowned like cats in a barrel, they did, being unable to fight the tide and the balance being

unable to swim. Beazley could swim, but he had his cash box with him, and he'd have gone under with it only for Sigurdson, who held him up and swam for them both.

"Sig didn't want to see the chap drown unless he drowned him himself, and he didn't want to see that cash box drown, neither, and he knew to get it away from him would be like trying to get a pitch plaster off a kicking zebra, so he held him by the scruff and managed to beach him at last, him and his box, and, just as they touched the sand, the sun came rising over the reef.

"First set off Beazley was mighty grateful, then some kanakas came out from among the trees and brought them green coconuts and truck like that, and the sun got strong and Beazley seemed to forget he ought to have been lying in the belly of a shark—chaps forget the rough pretty quick when they come to the smooth, and it was smooth enough on that beach to suit yours truly, Beazley, esquire.

"For that chap had sucked up fine ways in two years of soft living in big hotels, and by the way he cut and carried on on board the *Lima*, when he wasn't thinking of his sins or fencing the devil off with drink, you'd have thought he'd been born in a boiled shirt with a diamond tie pin. And his ways didn't leave him on the beach; he'd forgot he'd been once a socialist, maybe; anyhow he wanted a lot of attention and let the kanakas know it; not rude, he wasn't, but just masterful.

"They'd built a grass hut for Beazley; but an old canoe house was good enough for Sig, and Beazley, like the first-class passenger he was, fed alone and had the best. Sig didn't grumble. Didn't grumble when Beazley called him Jones and asked him to fetch things and talked of what he would do for him when they got back to civilized parts.

"The kanakas made palm toddy fine, and Beazley, when he'd had his fill, forgot his first-class passengership and talked free with Sig. He'd used to do that on the other island where he robbed him of the pearls; but in those days he hadn't swallowed money in lumps. Now it was different, and he swelled himself and talked of the fine doings he'd had here and there, as if he'd had money all his life.

"'You know that cash box I have with me?' says he one night; 'and how mighty careful I am of it. Know the reason why? Well, it's got in it my title deeds to a big

estate, no use to any one but me, but if I lost them I'd lose the estate.'

"'And where's the estate?' asks Sig.

"'England,' says he.

"Now, when a chap remembers to tell lies when drunk, he's a bad un, take it from me, but Sig didn't want any extra proof of that. He just sat there swallowing the chap's lies. He didn't care, he knew where to put his hand on the cash box, and he had Beazley in his fist safe; he could close his fingers any time to squash him, but he didn't want to do that yet. He had his plan, and, besides that, he wanted his gloat. It was better than champagne and cigars to sit in the sun and gloat, and back of that was the feeling that a cat has when she lets a mouse run about and play within reach of her claws.

"A ship coming in wouldn't have saved Beazley, for well Sigurdson knew the chap had been playing crooked in Frisco by the way he'd given a wrong name on the *Lima* and carried on when on board. He couldn't call the law to help him, you see.

"Sig was no ordinary chap. An ordinary chap would have clapped the other on the shoulder, and said: 'You're my meat.' That wasn't Sig's way. He wanted a high old time, and he looked to his beard to supply it.

"It had been penned up for a matter of two years, dammed, so to say, same as if you put a dam across Niagara. All the same, the first few days after he'd let up with the razor it hung back, seemed shy, so to speak; then it took heart, turned up its sleeves in a manner of speaking, tucked up its pants, and waded in.

"It didn't ask for no eight-hour days with double salary and free booze. Night and day shifts, with never a let-up, was the order, and in a week that chap's mug was the sight of the island. He looked like a baboon that'd taken to growing barley on its face, yella barley, coming up as stubble instead of green end first.

"The hairs stood out straight, and against the sun he looked like one of them saints you see in the Spanish church pictures with the halo slipped down round his jaws. With the sun full on him he looked as I've said.

"Then, in a few days more, the hairs began to take a bend and look softer, and so did he. Like a young chicken just out of the shell his face looked, from the nose down. Beazley was pretty bristly for want of shav-

ing, but somehow it didn't show much; he wasn't a hairy man, besides being mouse-colored, turning gray.

"But he didn't bother about himself; being a tidy chap, he took exception to the other going about like that. 'It's a pity you can't shave,' said he.

"'Maybe it is,' replies Sig. 'I've been clean shaved for two years, and it's taking its revenge. I can hear the durned thing growing at night, seems to me. Then again,' says he, 'maybe it's not a pity.'

"'Which way?' asks Beazley.

"'Well,' says Sig, 'it seems to me I'll be stronger with it grown.'

"'How so?' asks Beazley.

"'You remember that chap in the scriptures,' replied the other, 'that pulled down the house? Samson by name. Well, when his hair was cut off, his strength was gone, and when it grew again, he could have put Sandow in his waistcoat pocket. Same here, maybe.'

"Beazley began to get a bit silent and off-color and looking like a chap that's puzzled, and his eyes were always after Sig. One day he says to him, 'Jones,' says he, 'where were you born?'

"'England,' says Sig.

"'Ever had a brother in these parts?' asks Beazley.

"'No,' says Sig, 'I'm an orphan.'

"Beazley believes him and gives a sigh of relief; but there was more of that beard coming, and in another week or two Beazley falls into his thoughtful ways again, puzzling over the thing like a monkey with a wooden coconut, shaking it at his ear, turning it over and then sitting with it in its lap, thinking what the devil was up with it anyway.

"Then he began to quiet himself with palm toddy. It's the only thing they make at Fortuna, but they make it well. How they make it—well, search me. They get it out of the treetops somehow or 'nother, and the treetops just then began to be filled with old kanakas making the stuff for Beazley.

"At the same time Sig began to draw off from him and live alone, only promenading the beach same as a girl in a Paris hat does to show herself, and Beazley would sit at the door of his hut watching the sight and pretendin' not to look, same as pious folk in the theater when balley girls are dancing.

such, but it's a lot worse to be done so by day.

"And to watch Sigurdson before his eyes come to life out of another chap, so to speak, was more than he could stand, and he had to stand it. If he'd been dead sure it was Sigurdson, he wouldn't have minded so much, it was the hanging off and on that was doing him in, and he daren't ask, for he had the feeling at the back of his mind that, if it *was* Sigurdson, a word on the subject would be like firing a dynamite cartridge. He was maybe right on that.

"Meanwhile, the palm toddy was laying him out. His nerves were gone and he began to keep mostly to his hut.

"One day Sig looked in, but the chap couldn't face him. Just turned on his other It's bad to be ha'nted at night by ghosts and side and said he wasn't feeling well.

"A ship drops into Fortuna about once in three months or so, not more, and one day a schooner came into the lagoon; she was bound for Rarotonga or somewhere, and Sigurdson concluded to take her. She only stopped four hours for water and fruit, and the skipper coming ashore, he arranged for a passage, telling his tale of the loss of the *Lima*.

"'Any one else saved?' asks the skipper.

"'No,' says Sigurdson, 'there's only one other white chap on the island, and he's a fixture.'

"'Where is he?' asks the skipper.

"'Drunk in that shack, over there,' says the other.

"'And there he can stick,' says the skipper.

"Sig goes to the hut where Beazley was lying and there was the beauty, snoring on his side with a bundle of dried stuff for a pillow. He put his hand under the pillow and howked out the cash box.

"Beazley snorts and half wakes and says, 'Maria,' and goes to sleep again, Maria being, maybe, some female he had deluded, not that Sig cared. He'd had his revenge and now he'd got the diamonds, and, leaving Beazley to dream of his Maria, off he goes aboard the hooker and out she puts.

"A lot cleaner job than braining the chap, though his brains wouldn't have made much of a mess, not in the condition Sig had brought him to."

Stories by George Randolph Chester, Dane Coolidge, Clarence L. Cullen, Raymond J. Brown and other top liners in our next number.

One Good Turn

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "A Jack and Two Jills," "Ten Thousand Bucks," Etc.

Many a tragedy is concealed by the seemingly unpopulated woods of our great Northwest. This tale of Sinclair's pictures the result of one, and the strange consequences, developing in later years in a way to confound more than one actor in the drama

GOODRICH propped himself up on one elbow. Among the thickets below there sounded the muffled clumping of an animal's feet, the faint intermittent crack of dry twigs trodden upon. Goodrich rose from the blankets upon which he had lain down to gaze at stars peeping through the lofty tops of the sugar pine. He expected his hunting partner, and that partner would be hungry—almost as hungry for food as he, Bill Goodrich, was for the tobacco his partner was bringing. While he poked up the dying fire, laid on fresh wood, and hung a kettle of water to boil for coffee, the sounds of approach drew nearer.

But when the man and loaded burro should have passed from the thicket on the slope into the open grass under the big pines, the faint sounds ceased altogether, and they did not appear. For five minutes Goodrich watched and listened impatiently. Then as he began to think his ears might have deceived him, a man, leading a burro, came slowly into the circle of firelight. Goodrich stifled a grunt of disappointment. The wayfarer was not his expected partner.

Goodrich, however, was an outdoor man, habituated to camps and the easy hospitality of lonely places.

"Hello," he greeted, "I thought you were another fellow when I heard you coming, and I've got the kettle on. But you're just as welcome, especially if you happen to have any tobacco that isn't working."

The man was a young fellow about Goodrich's age. He carried a carbine in his hand. A stout gray burro, heavily packed, trailed at his heels.

"I've got some pipe tobacco," he replied.

"Like manna from heaven, that sounds," Goodrich returned. "I haven't had a smoke all day. My partner hiked out to the stage road yesterday to try and rustle some tobacco and grub. Well, the coffee will boil

in a minute. Stake your mule over there by mine. There's good feed."

The stranger passed Goodrich a sack of tobacco. He undid his pack lashings and laid off the load and saw-buck saddle, watered his beast at the small, cold spring which bubbled from under the roots of the pine by which Goodrich had his camp, and picketed him among tall grass and pea vine. When he came back Goodrich had the breast of a grouse frying. The stranger produced bread from his pack. They ate and smoked, talking a little.

"Going to hunt up here in the pines?" Goodrich asked at length.

"I'm hunting—a job," the other said. "Heading for a logging camp at the mouth of Slate Creek. Short cut across the divide."

Goodrich turned into his blankets. He wanted to be out in the morning before sunrise sent the deer back to inaccessible thickets. The stranger gathered ferns and grass for a mattress and likewise spread his blankets. In a matter of minutes both men were asleep.

Until an hour before dawn Goodrich slept soundly. Then he sat up, rubbed his eyes, and reached for his boots. Even in California four thousand feet in the air brings a chill before dawn, any month in the year. Goodrich had a brown shooting coat at the head of his bed. When he pawed around in the dark he could not find it, only a woollen something where his coat should have been. Impatiently he struck a match. His coat was gone. A red sweater lay in its place.

He held the match above his head. In the still air it burned steadily, showing him a vacant pile of ferns and grass where the other man had made his bed.

"Huh," Goodrich grunted. He sat on his haunches a second, thinking, listening, until

the match burned to a charred stub. Then he lit his fire. In the halo that cast he began to look about him, to take stock.

Goodrich had a black burro picketed in the grass. He had a .25-.35 Winchester standing against a tree. He had laid a tattered old gray felt hat near the brown shooting coat when he went to bed.

All these things were gone. But he had not been robbed. Far from it. In the place of his black mule, an indifferent sort of beast, he had a stout young gray burro. In lieu of his old .25-.35 a nearly new .30-.30 carbine leaned against the tree, a well-filled cartridge belt beside—and hooked by the string to the lever hung a sack of tobacco and a book of brown papers. In the hat exchange he had come by a new black Stetson.

"They say a fair exchange is no robbery," Goodrich muttered. "I'm all to the good on the trade, but I'll be hanged if I sabe why. I wonder what's the idea?"

He got an insight upon the idea at noon. He did not sit about his camp puzzling about what had happened in the night, but took the .30-.30 and pursued his business along a ridge to the west. But luck was against him as it had been for a week. He failed to catch the wise old buck deer in the open, and he failed also to get a shot at any of those he stirred up in the heavy brush. So he trudged into his camp under the tall, solemn pines about twelve o'clock.

And as he sat whittling shavings to start a fire two men stepped out from behind separate trees with rifles trained on him and ordered him to put up his hands. Goodrich promptly obeyed. One possessed himself of Goodrich's rifle, felt the prisoner carefully for concealed weapons, stepped back, and remarked to his companion.

"S him, all right."

"I don't get you," Goodrich snapped.

"Well, we've got you, Baker," the man with the rifle drawled. "No use making the innocent-stranger play."

"Baker, eh?" Goodrich remarked. "Are you officers?"

"You've guessed it, first shot," one answered sarcastically.

Goodrich dropped his hands.

"I'm tired pawing the sky," he said bluntly. "You got the wrong man. My name's not Baker. It's Bill Goodrich. I'm from Monterey. I've been up here camping for two months, nursing a bad lung.

I've been hunting deer off and on for two weeks with an old fellow called Sam Hayes."

The man, with the rifle still pointed unwaveringly at Goodrich's middle, smiled.

"About five foot ten," said he. "Fair. Grayish eyes. Pretty husky about the shoulders. Twenty-five or so. Thirty-thirty Winchester carbine. Black Stetson hat, nearly new. Red sweater. Brown laced boots. Gray mule. Hell, Baker, what's the use of stalling? It won't get you anything. Anyway, you're under arrest. Don't make any breaks because we don't aim to lose you. This ain't no joke, Baker. Your man died in the hospital two hours after you lit out."

Goodrich saw it in a flash while the man was speaking, understood that swapping of goods in the night. This man Baker knew he was being trailed, pressed close. Goodrich opened his mouth to recount the experience, to put the officers on the right trail. But he refrained. He could see they were quite sure he was their man. They would only laugh at his story. They would take him out to the county seat—and dozens of men could identify him there. And somehow or other the man hadn't struck him as a criminal. Goodrich felt like giving him a chance. He decided to stand pat. The officers wouldn't believe him, anyway.

"It'll be a joke on you," he said pleasantly. He had settled himself to say nothing of how he came by the things which identified him. "There's no law against a man having a .30-.30, a black hat, and a gray mule. I guess you'd find half a dozen men in the Monterey Forest Reserve heeled like that. I tell you I'm not this guy Baker. I'm Bill Goodrich. You take me out to Monterey and you'll sec."

"No chance for an argument," one officer said shortly. "We'll have a bite to eat and get on."

They took the precaution of shackling his wrists while they cooked. Goodrich burned with resentment at the handcuffing. Then they gathered up his stuff, packed it on the gray burro, brought two saddle horses out of concealment in the brush, and set off down the mountain trail.

They rode. Goodrich had to walk. He had hunted hard that forenoon, and he was tired. With his ironed wrists it was difficult for him to walk with ease. He could not keep the flicking branches from lashing him across the face. The cocksurenness of the men grated on him. A most ungodly anger

grew in his breast. Curiously it was not directed toward Baker, who had bestowed upon him the goods and chattels directly responsible for this error in identity, but against the two deputy sheriffs. They were pluming themselves on his capture, and they were callously indifferent to the misery they were inflicting upon him. They refused to free his hands so that he could travel more easily, even though he promised not to attempt escape.

Ten miles out from the big pines, two thousand feet lower down, the trail forked. Goodrich stopped.

"Look here," he said angrily. "I've told you straight I'm not this guy Baker. There are a hundred people in Monterey who can identify me. You aren't going to drag me all the way to Salinas, are you?"

"Surest thing you know," they jeered. "You suppose we don't know you got two brothers and a swarm of friends between here and Monterey? No foolin' now. You hike right along."

"I'll be damned if I do," Goodrich said sullenly. "I've walked as far as I'm going to."

The upshot of this was that one officer finally dismounted and grudgingly permitted Goodrich to ride. But they took the Salinas road. And at the stage station, in late afternoon, Goodrich, with sweat-grimed face and handcuffs on his wrists, was an object of rural curiosity while the officers hired a motor car. By that means they covered the intervening thirty miles of road and landed Bill Goodrich in a stuffy cell at the county jail just as dusk was falling.

Next day, by dint of protest and demand, he got in touch with a lawyer. The following day he was freed, after a brief grinding of the ponderous wheels of the law. There were men to bespeak him as Bill Goodrich, and other men to prove that he was not the much-wanted Baker—who had shot and killed a rancher in the Salinas valley.

Bill Goodrich learned that even in Salinas there were people who believed Baker had ample justification for the shooting. Personally, after his experience with those two deputies and the county jail, Bill Goodrich spitefully hoped that Baker got away. He kept a close mouth on how he came by the gray mule and the black hat. He sneered at officers who questioned him. And he left Salinas as soon as he could.

Goodrich was a rolling stone. That in-

cident left a very bad taste in his mouth. He would wake up sometimes out of a dream in which he was back in that foul-smelling jail. It managed to spoil that section of California for him. He was about through there, anyway. A touch of tuberculosis had sent him to the Monterey Forest Reserve under a doctor's advice to get high in the mountains, to sleep outside, to eat plain nourishing food, and take plenty of open-air exercise. Thus he had achieved health. He went back to the same doctor and had his lungs examined. And when the medical man pronounced him sound, with a warning to repeat the same course of treatment if the symptoms recurred in future, Bill Goodrich began to roll again. In time he rolled himself clean out of the United States into the British dominions to the north—specifically, into the coastal region of British Columbia.

Here Bill Goodrich tarried a while, long enough to take root in a certain locality. He worked in logging camps, made a hand on cannery tenders, prospected a little, trapped, fished salmon, tried his hand at various things, using a cabin and a plot of cleared land on Cortez Island as a pivotal point for his ventures. He liked the country. It was covered with noble forests, in which game abounded. Bill Goodrich was a lineal descendant of men who had crowded frontiers off the map, men handy with either a rifle or a plow. Bill was at home in wild places. He was never satisfied without elbowroom. B. C. looked good to him, its woods and clear streams and enormous mountains. When he accumulated a few hundred dollars he filed on a hundred and sixty acres of government land. He began the stupendous battle with the stumps around his cabin.

When five years had passed over his head since the autumn night he spent in the Salinas jail, instead of being on the high-road to a pioneer's modest fortune Bill Goodrich had to acknowledge two rather significant items on the debit side of his ledger. One was a recurrence of his old lung trouble, a touch—just a touch—of tuberculosis.

"Get off the coast. Get away from this damp air. Go as high as you can get in the mountains, preferably where it's warm. Do that and you'll soon shake it off. The bugs can't stand dry air and sunshine." Thus a doctor.

The other item was a man in the neigh-

borhood, a bullying individual who didn't like Bill Goodrich. Ever since he took possession of this government land Goodrich had recognized this dislike as a menace.

And on a mild September afternoon, at a steamer landing on the east side of Cortez, Bill Goodrich killed this man—shot him neatly between the chin and collar bone in the presence of twenty people. Goodrich hadn't wanted to kill this man. He had hoped to avoid a clash with him, especially when he learned that he must leave Cortez and seek the high mainland ranges if he wanted to beat the white plague. But the man was a natural trouble hunter. He had been making Goodrich's life miserable for six months. He died with his boots on and a gun in his hand because he had made the very common error of mistaking quietness for timidity, self-control for fear, and so had put himself and Bill Goodrich in a position where one of them had to go under.

Nevertheless, even justifiable homicide brings a man foul of the law. Bill Goodrich knew himself to be justified. He was not sorry. The thing had been forced on him.

But—the other man cut quite a figure in the logging business. There was money behind him. There were others willing enough to carry on his feud, to get Bill Goodrich legally since a personal clash had failed to eliminate him. There was an economic motive functioning behind the purely personal one.

It seemed to Bill Goodrich that the hills offered a more desirable sanctuary than the courts. He might come off clear in court—in the hills, those rugged hills up-thrusting into blue sky, his life and liberty depended solely upon his own unaided effort, his skill, his fortitude, his own individual quickness of hand and brain.

So he left an awed group staring at the dead man sprawled limp in the mellow sunshine and trudged back to his own cabin, some two miles distant. No one stayed him. He knew no man who had witnessed the affair would meddle with him. But he knew also that a telephone line ran from the scene of the shooting to Campbell River, whence shortly a provincial constable in a government launch would set out to arrest him. And Bill Goodrich had no mind to suffer arrest. He had a distrust of courts, a horror of jails—which last dated back to his Salinas experience. That had remained a vivid picture in his mind those five years.

He could so easily visualize that cramped, foul-smelling steel cage, the drab walls. The memory filled him with a sense of living burial, which he swore he would never undergo. Right or wrong he was for freedom, the open sky, the friendly silence of the woods. A man, he said to himself, might as well be dead as in jail—better, if the tubercle bacilli had gotten a tiny foothold in one of his lungs.

So he put a reasonable quantity of staple foods, a small silk tent, two blankets, his warmest and stoutest clothing and boots, his rifle and cartridges, some fishing gear and a good ax in a Peterboro canoe. He waited till dark—chancing the arrival of an officer meantime—that no watchful eye might note the direction of his flight.

He paddled then in the dusk across the head of Lewis Channel, passed between the Redondas and the mouth of Malaspina Inlet. At the lower end of a nameless islet standing in the mouth of Desolation Sound he picked up the thrum of a motor. But this gave him no uneasiness. It came from far up channel, not from the westward whither the police launch must come. He bore in for the shadow of the islet, however, as matter of precaution. He did not want to be seen, even casually.

But while he was still a cable short of the nearest point, a finger of light, dazzling white, split the darkness and made a round, brilliant spot on the shore. It swept slowly over weedy bowlders and beached driftwood, and came wavering out across the water until it rested upon him.

The beam held him in its white circle like an actor in the spotlight. To the eyes behind that searching shaft he knew he and every detail of his equipment must stand out bold as a single black letter on a sheet of white newsprint. Then the light flicked out. The launch passed him almost within hailing distance. By her dim outline and her cabin lights Goodrich recognized her as a provincial forestry boat, driving down out of Desolation Sound. Her crew knew him. They would hear of the killing. They would talk.

Goodrich considered, watching the stern light of the cruiser grow dim across the water. He had started with a well-defined plan. It called for many hundred miles of travel in the highest, roughest part of the roughest mountain chain in North America. It meant hardship indescribable. But it meant ulti-

mately that he would gain reasonable immunity from the consequences of his act—and also give him an even chance to destroy the tubercle bacilli which had once more gained foothold in his lung tissue. He did not want to change this plan. He could think of none better, none so good.

He paddled across to the mainland shore. Up the long sweep of Homfray Channel he traveled under cover of the dark, lying up on bold, cliffy points during the day, with his canoe hidden in hickets of salal. Finally he passed into the narrow reach of Toba Inlet, a thirty-mile stretch lined by cliffs that lifted a thousand feet sheer from salt water, by thick-forested slopes, by mountains that were but a setting for glaciers which gleamed ghostly in the moonlight. He was an infinitesimal speck creeping along a sullen shore, a little awed by the heights above and the gloom below.

Goodrich was very glad when he passed over the bar into Toba River at the Inlet's head, stole by an Indian village, and made his solitary camp five miles upstream. For he was now beyond the last settler's clearing, fairly into the wilderness. He need no longer move furtively in the dark. He could bare his face to the sun, travel openly and unafraid. Pursuit could come from only one direction; from behind. It must come as he himself had come, by paddle and pike pole.

Three days up Toba Valley, Bill Goodrich was forced to admit that they must have guessed right and followed fast—also that some one must have seen him. Perhaps a Siwash had watched him from cover on the bank on the lower stretches of the Toba, and talked when the officers came seeking.

Goodrich had followed around a great sweeping bend in the river, a twelve-mile loop that brought him after six hours' labor at the pike pole back within twenty minutes walk of where he had cooked his breakfast. A narrow neck of land separated the two channels. Goodrich had heard of the "Big Bend." When he found himself above it, something of the same instinct that wakes a deer double on its track, sent him across the neck. He had been told long ago that there was a portage across this neck. It might be as well to know about this portage. And he had a sudden craving to look back downriver.

He found the portage with a little difficulty, a level trail blazed through heavy cedar—a trail craftily blind at both ends.

He found something else, less to his liking. Peering from a screen of brush on the downstream side of the neck he saw a Siwash dug-out coming up a long, straight stretch. Two men stood in it, thrusting stoutly on pike poles. A third walked the gravel bars along shore.

Goodrich watched till they came up. They beached the canoe within forty yards of him. Two men were white. One was an Indian, a stout, wooden-faced Siwash.

"Po'tage da'," the Siwash indicated.

The two men gazed at the heavy stand of cedar on the valley floor, the mat of undergrowth that ran to the river bank, fern and blackberry vines, thorny devil's club, all the foot-tripping and skin-raking tangle that clothes the floor of B. C. forests. They did not regard the prospect with pleasure.

"How far across?"

"Maybeso half mile," the Siwash answered. He stood staring indifferently.

"Pack the infernal dugout and our junk through half a mile of that jungle? Well, I guess not," one said. "Me for the river. Chances are we'd lose time on a carry in that brush."

"Let's take a look from the top of the bank," the other man suggested.

They climbed up. A six-foot cedar trunk and a clump of elderberry separated them from Bill Goodrich when they stopped. He imagined they must be able to hear his heart beating. He crouched on his haunches, scarcely breathing, his fingers hooked in the lever of his gun. The men stood talking.

"Looks worse. Supposed to be a trail, but that damn Siwash don't act like he wanted to show us much. Personally, I'd rather pole ten miles of open river than pack five hundred yards through this brush."

The man's companion agreed.

"There's the chance that we might miss Goodrich on the bend," he continued. "He can't be so far ahead now. We have to go careful—keep a good lookout."

The first man stuffed his pipe full of tobacco and lit it.

"I wish I knew just how close we are on him," he said. "I don't suppose he'll shoot on sight. Still, he'll probably be pretty shy. And he might be quick on the trigger, too. I can't say I'm stuck on this little job. If the darned fool'd had sense enough to give himself up after the shooting he'd come clear, with a good lawyer, from all accounts."

"If we can overhaul him and manage to

make camp with him," the other said, "we can casually let out that we're cruising timber for Mayer & Runge. I've got those blue-print maps to stall around with. He don't know either of us. Get him off his guard once, and it'll be easy. I'd take a chance on making the arrest sooner than work my passage through this brush with a load."

"I wonder how far he'll go," the first man said.

"I don't know, and I don't care." A boastful note crept into the other's voice. "If he goes to hell I'll still be on his trail. I ain't started after a man in six years that I didn't get him."

They took another look at the thicket on the neck and went back to the canoe. One got in. He and the Siwash leaned on the poles again, pushing the long, narrow craft up over a swift shoal. The other shouldered his rifle and walked along the bank.

When they had gone a hundred yards or so, with the ripple and croon of the stream to drown any small sound his feet might make, Bill Goodrich rose from his hiding place and hurried back across the narrow neck. He had six hours start. They could scarcely pole around the bend in less time.

Goodrich slid the red canoe afloat. He looked back whence he had come over the portage, down the river where the law personified in two men with rifles bore up after him.

"Well, here's *one* you won't get," he muttered defiantly.

He did not stop when dark fell. Even on the darkest night the sheen of running water makes a path which can be followed. Late in the night a crescent moon sailed up from behind a mountain, and made his way easier. He pushed on till daybreak, rested two hours, and went on. All that day, though his arms and legs ached, and blisters grew on his fingers from surging on the pole, he bore up a stream which steadily grew swifter and shallower.

But he had taken a lead which he meant to keep. He felt reasonably safe from surprise. If he could hold that gait they would never come up on him. And in another day or two he would be near the divide. At the first natural barrier he meant to cache the red canoe and on the ridges he would shake pursuit cleanly from his trail. Without dogs no man could follow him among the high places of the coast range.

So, thinking only of the men following him upstream, reckoning nothing of a possible danger from ahead, Goodrich turned a sharp bend in the river late that evening and blundered squarely upon a camp on the water's edge. A dugout was drawn up on the gravel. A fire was burning, and a man beside the fire hailed him pleasantly. Goodrich knew he could not go on, he could not withdraw without arousing suspicion. He was very tired. The man couldn't possibly know he was a fugitive. And the officers were too far behind to matter for that night at least. He returned the man's hail, and beached his canoe beside the other.

For twenty-four hours he had kept going with only brief intervals to rest and cook food. He had traveled the last six hours on his nerve alone. His body was a worn-out shell. When he sat down beside the fire and took off his boots and hung his wet socks on a limb to dry, he grew drowsy at once. Every fiber of his body was slackening, crying aloud for rest. The strain of long-continued exertion had started an intermittent cough.

The man had a pot of tea brewed. There was fried venison and potatoes in a pan, bread—the staples of woods travel.

"Dig in," he invited. "I just ate. No use you bothering about grub outa your own pack."

"Thanks," Goodrich accepted. "I feel sort of all in, all at once. Tough going."

The other man talked a little. Goodrich learned that he was a trapper, going into a region he had trapped before. Goodrich knew that he ought to account for his own presence. No man bore so far up those lonely valleys without definite object. But he was too tired to care. And the man asked no questions, betrayed no curiosity whatever.

"I had an idea nobody trapped this far up," Goodrich said at length, feeling that he must say something. "I figured on looking over the ground myself."

The other grinned.

"There's oceans of room," he replied. "I kinda wish some good, square guy would run a line up here. It gets pretty lonesome before spring. I stick it out because it pays, not because I like the hermit life so well."

Goodrich coughed behind his hand. He didn't want to talk. He rose stiffly, sore in every muscle. It was pitch-dark now.

"I'm going to turn in," he said briefly.

He gathered stuff for his bed, spread his blankets, laid the silk tent over these to fend off the dew. His eyes closed in sleep while the other man still sat humped beside the heap of glowing coals in an attitude of profound reflection. There was nothing uncommon about that. It is a woodsman's habit.

Well toward morning Goodrich awoke, alert, refreshed, very much alive to his situation. He hadn't reckoned on running into anybody. He had not meant to be seen by a soul in the valley of the Toba. But he had grown tired and less watchful and so blundered into this man's camp. He lay now thinking upon his next move. The constables would come up with this man. They would learn positively that Goodrich was bearing upstream, so many hours ahead of them. They would hunt him as they would hunt any predatory animal. If there had been a doubt of his presence on Toba headwaters this hunt might soon have grown perfunctory. But coming upon this trapper they would know.

He couldn't turn back now. He could, of course, lie up in the brush, and when the officers passed double back downstream. But he was aware of an increasing double risk in returning to the coast. He would have to dodge furtively to avoid recognition. And another sea level winter would kill him as surely as a jail. High in the hills, among dry snows, breathing dry sun-washed air, that sore spot in his lung would heal. He could win health and keep his freedom on the summit of the coast range.

A picture leaped up before his eyes with such vividness as to make him catch his breath. A gray mule, a black Stetson, and a .30-.30! He paralleled that with a red canoe, a 303 Savage, a black and green Mackinaw coat. On the beach lay a black Siwash dugout of cedar. The other man's rifle stood within reaching distance. The man's clothing lay beside his bed. The man himself slept soundly.

Bill Goodrich lay debating with himself. It seemed a rotten thing to do. Yet the man would suffer nothing beyond inconvenience. The officers would take him out. By the time he had established his identity Goodrich would be far in the depths of those grim mountains, his trail lost for good. With a week's grace a hundred men could not locate him in that wild jumble of peaks and cañons.

Goodrich decided. He rose softly, took

first of all the two rifles so that if the man did wake he would be safely disarmed. Then Bill packed his bedding. Moving stealthily he transferred his stuff to the dugout. Last of all, he crept furtively near the bed to exchange clothing. He brought with him his own rifle to set against the tree.

As he came near the foot of the bed he became aware of the man's eyes, wide open, alert, fixed on him.

"What's the idea?" the man asked casually.

"I'm pulling out," Goodrich answered.

"With all my stuff? I guess not," the other's voice sharpened. "Don't move. I got you covered with a .45."

He sat up, baring the blue-barreled Colt. With his left hand he fumbled about and struck a match and took a steady look at Bill Goodrich.

"I don't aim to rob you," Goodrich said quietly, at last. "All I want is your canoe and rifle and your Mackinaw. I'm leaving you my own things. They're better than yours. That ain't robbery."

The man struck another match. His eyes narrowed in scrutiny. He smiled suddenly, broadly, at last.

"Lay down the rifle," he ordered.

Goodrich obeyed. The man let his revolver rest on the blankets. The match in his fingers burned out. The pale gleam of the moon through a tangle of boughs showed them dimly to each other.

"Let's get down to cases," he said. "What kind of jack pot have you got into?"

"I killed a man on Cortez Island a few days back," Goodrich answered quietly. "There's two officers about twelve hours behind me on the river. I figure I was justified. I don't intend to be taken. I've got a bad lung—a touch of T. B. A month or two in jail would probably set me back so I'd never shake it off—even if I come clear on trial. I don't like jails nohow. Life's too short for me to lay in one. That's all."

"H'm," the man grunted. "So you were going to swap outfits with me. I was to be the fall guy for these constables, eh? They'd grab me and turn back? Was that it?"

"Something like that," Goodrich admitted.

"That's a mean hole to put a man in," the other commented. "What give you the idea?"

"A fellow did it to me once down in California," Goodrich answered dispassionately. "It didn't hurt me much, though I was

pretty sore at the time. Spoiled a hunt in the Monterey hills was about all. These fellows don't know me by sight. While they were taking you out and you were getting identified, I'd make my get-away clean."

"Suppose I take you in myself," the man observed suggestively. "According to your own account you've killed a man. You were going to put me in a nasty position. I might have got gay with these constables not knowing what I was up against, and got shot all to pieces myself. I don't know but I ought to take you in myself."

"You won't," Goodrich answered soberly. He meant this. There was no doubt in his mind; only a grim determination. "There's times in a man's life when he has to do something desperate. I didn't shoot this fellow because I wanted to. I had to. I don't propose to be penalized for it. No, you nor nobody else will take me in. At least, not alive."

The man laughed softly.

"No," he said, "I have no idea of even trying to take you in, either dead or alive. Look here, I'll take a sporting chance on you. Go ahead. Take any part of my outfit you need. Leave me yours. I'll go through with the play. You'll get a week's start. I don't know as it'll do me any harm. I kinda like the notion of helping a man out of a jack pot."

"You mean it?" Goodrich asked, dumfounded at this turn.

"Sure, I mean it!"

Goodrich could see the man grinning as if the idea tickled his fancy. He dropped the six-shooter and began to roll a cigarette. Goodrich sighed relief.

"Well, I don't know why you should," Bill said. "But it's darned white of you. I guess I'll take you at your word and drift before you change your mind."

There wasn't much more to do. The man flung Bill Goodrich a cartridge belt to go with his rifle. Goodrich took the other's gray Mackinaw.

When he had finished these simple preparations the man had got on his boots. He walked down to the canoe with Bill.

"Look here," he said. "About twenty miles above here you'll strike the head of canoe navigation—a sixty-foot falls. Three hundred yards above that a creek makes in from the nor'west. You go up that creek a half mile and you come to a big slide. Climb the hill to the east, and in the timber

on the first bench you'll strike a blazed line. Follow that till it runs out. That'll be a matter of fifteen miles. When you pass the last blaze you'll come out on an open fern sidehill. On the opposite side of the creek you'll spot another big slide. You cross the creek, go up on the north side of the slide till you strike a narrow bench about five hundred feet above the stream. When you get on the bench face north and you'll see a big bald mountain away off. There's two sharp knobs on this mountain and a glacier between. Head straight halfway between the two knobs and keep going along the bench. You'll come on a cabin inside of half a mile if you hold a straight line. There's plenty of grub there. Nobody but me knows that cabin's there. I got another one farther up the divide. The air's like old port wine up there of a winter morning. Be good for that bad lung of yours."

He hesitated a moment.

"You can stay at the first cabin till I come," he said. "Unless you got a better plan; unless you aim to hit the long trail by your lonesome. They ain't a ghost of a chance anybody will come in there after the first snowfall."

"I'll be there," Goodrich said unhesitatingly.

"All right," the man nodded. "Can you remember what I told you about the way?"

"I got a picture of it in my mind," Goodrich declared.

"If you're a woodsman you'll find it, I guess," the other said. "It's going to be daylight soon. Better beat it. Good luck."

He thrust out his hand. The hearty pressure of his grip conveyed to Bill Goodrich a great deal more than words could have done. Goodrich was almost gay as he drove the cedar dugout up the narrowing river, and the rising sun flooded the closing valley with warmth and light. He didn't quite fathom the man's readiness to shoulder a dubious load. But it showed that his heart was in the right place, Bill Goodrich said to himself. He was a little puzzled, too, by the quickness with which the man had grasped the situation. But it was a generous impulse for which Goodrich was deeply grateful.

He reached the big falls in time, hauled the dugout far into a deep thicket. Then he took a pack and bore on till he found the smaller creek and ultimately the blazed line. He had some difficulty locating the cabin, even though each mark stood in his

mind's eye like a beacon. But he found it eventually. And when he stood under its roof and slipped the pack from his shoulders it was like getting home.

The law would never come at him there. He was high in one of the ruggedest sections of the coast range. He could win back his health, grow a beard and mustache. When he went out among men again, with time to dim their recollection, no one would know him. A man could live in the hills a long time, if he were at home there.

He recalled Simon Gun-a-noot. Simon had been accused of killing a man. And Simon was a Northern Indian who feared the white man's legal processes. So Simon had taken to the mountains and stayed there. For thirteen years the constable had hunted Simon Gun-a-noot. The chase cost the province thirty thousand dollars. And Simon had hunted and trapped in the highest and loneliest ranges until he learned that he was sure of acquittal if he gave himself up. The case of Simon Gun-a-noot comforted Bill Goodrich. He, himself, did not mean to be caught. He was no criminal. He felt no prickings of conscience. What he had done he had to do. There had been no way out of that clash save the way he had taken.

The cabin was roomy, built of heavy logs, roofed with split cedar shakes, tight, dry, and warm, with a rough fireplace at one end in lieu of a stove. The door was heavy, hand-hewed planks, oddly fitted with a heavy bar to be set in place from within. It stood on a narrow bench with a small spring bubbling out of a cliff that rose sheer behind. The front view commanded every possible approach. And it was very hard to find. To Bill Goodrich it seemed made to order for security. One man could hold that place against a dozen, if occasion arose.

So after he had made another trip down to the falls in Toba River and packed in the last of the supplies, he spent his days pleasantly learning the lay of the country for miles around. He shot a deer for meat. He watched bear feeding on the slides. The creek below was full of small trout. There was abundance of small fur sign. Goodrich was not lonely, but as the days passed he began to grow anxious for a sight of the man who had made this oasis of peace accessible to him.

He stood in the doorway of the cabin one evening at sunset. In the hush that shrouded those rugged solitudes a stick

cracked sharply on the slope that rose steeply from the creek. Goodrich listened intently. At rare intervals he caught faintly the sound of something moving up toward the bench. He stepped back within the shadow of the door to watch, his rifle handy. Presently a head, and then a pair of shoulders, burdened by a pack sack, lifted to view. It was his man. He came up to the door, looked in.

"Hello, old-timer," he greeted Goodrich. "I see you made it all right."

He backed up to the table and Bill helped him slide out of the pack straps. They shook hands. The man wiped his sweaty face.

"I see you got some meat hung up," he remarked. "Say, I could chew the leg off a deer raw, right now."

"Sit down. I'll get you some supper," Goodrich directed.

When he had two big venison steaks sizzling over the fire, and a pot of water slung on the hook to boil, he asked:

"How'd you come out with them?"

The man laughed.

"All right. I told 'em who I was, but naturally they didn't swallow it. They took me clear to Vancouver. I got identified there easy enough."

"How'd you account for the red canoe and things?" Goodrich asked.

"I didn't," the other replied. "There ain't no law against anybody having a red Peterboro, nor a 303 Savage, nor a black and green Mackinaw. I just stood pat about them things—like you did about the gray mule and the black Stetson that time in the Monterey hills."

Bill Goodrich stared in sheer amazement.

"Was *that* why you took it up so quick?"

"Sure," the other nian grinned. "I had a good look at you that night in the pines. I read the papers while I was making my get-away. I could easily see that you had stood pat on what happened that night. I thought you were just trying to get away with my outfit down there on the river until you told me what you were up against. It was easy for me to put myself in your place, seeing I'd been through the same mill myself. And—darn it all, Bill Goodrich, one good turn deserves another."

What Bill Goodrich answered to that is neither here nor there. But it is a matter of record that he has never been brought to trial for that Cortez Island shooting.

Black Art

By Rothvin Wallace

In these days of revived interest in spiritualism and wide use of ouija boards it is only natural that colored citizens should be as much interested as their white brethren in the theory of the influence of departed spirits. The doings of the "I Will Be a Spirit Congregation" are here set forth with the fidelity of a trained observer

MR. HORATIO PINKWIDDY was a born actor, although, so far in his scintillant career, he had not elected to benefit Thespis by his histrionic attainments. Rather, his ability was reserved for the multitudinous activities of the Great International Association for the Protection of Freeborn Negro Americans, of which he proclaimed himself the Grand Traveling President.

As Mr. Pinkwiddy administered the affairs of the G. I. A. P. F. N. A., he was called upon to assume many rôles, each dependent on the economic condition and social status of those of his race with whom he happened to be engaged. When occasion required, he could adorn himself with the raiment of the rich, and express himself in the language of a college professor; if, on the other hand, necessity and the prospect of reward should demand, he could assume the garb and speech of the plain people—and get away with it.

In his present enterprise, he had chosen to appear as a solid business man—and he dressed the part with cutaway frock coat, broad-brimmed felt hat, a low fold collar, and subdued four-in-hand tie, in which blazed a huge horseshoe of near diamonds. But despite his sartorial care and the impressive speeches that he had prepared, matters were not going well. In this thrifty coal-mining town, where he had had every reason to expect that the sale of G. I. A. P. F. N. A. bonds would be easy, he had met with a severe setback. Popular interest attached itself infinitely less to bonds than to the great revival services being conducted by the I Will Be A Spirit Congregation. Moses Slathery, the popular tonsorialist, summed the whole thing up in a nutshell, thusly:

"Man, yo' ain't got a ghost ob a chanct."

Feeling at odds with the world in general, and himself in particular, Mr. Pinkwiddy flung himself into his favorite seat at the Biltmost Hotel, and ordered and ate dinner. Whereupon he felt somewhat better. Also he was in an interrogative mood.

"Who dat spohty niggah in de lef'-hand coanah?" he asked.

"Him? Dat's 'Diamond Jim' Birchwood." The proprietor leaned over and added confidentially: "Him's de son ob ole Mammy Birchwood, de voodoo doctah, whut's callin' up ghostses nights down to de I Will Be A Spirit meetin's. Jim, he mak' gamblin' his perfeshion."

"Huh! Who dat rusty-lookin' black niggah 'cross de room?"

"Dat Sam Pebble, but folks heah'bouts call him de Black Rockyfellow, 'countin' his riches. Yassah, he's de riches' man bouten town, evah since a yeah ago come las' June a comp'ny mule done run off an kill his wife an' baby, an' he collect eight thousand dollars damages."

"Hah!" Mr. Pinkwiddy smiled, cleared his throat, and gave other evidences of interest. "Seems to me lak him an Jim is eatin' a pow'ful lot ob vittels."

"Yo' said it, Mistah Pinkwiddy. Dey's eatin' a duel."

"Eatin' a duel? Whut fool kind ob eatin's dat?"

"Waal, sah, yo' see, Sam an' Jim is bofe sweeter'n honey on ma new lady waitress, Miss Hedda van Tossel—not on'y 'cause she's purty, but fo' her high standin' as a actress befo' de conclushuns ob necessity compel her to take a job servin' on table. Yas, sah, she was a actress still come las' week, when de hypnotizin' an' ventriloquizin' show she play wif done bus' up heah fo' lack ob bizness. De management say he couldn't compete wif dat I Will Be A Spirit

revival meetin'. Hedda say she's a Dutch lady; an' I reckons she tells de truf, 'cause she mak' dem two fool niggahs Dutch treat deyselves till dey mos' bus' wif food, jes' so's dey can linger longah to have her serve 'em."

Mr. Pinkwiddy unlimbered enough to enjoy a moderate laugh at the hotel keeper's recital. Also, he was sweeping the cobwebs from his hall of memory. Likewise, his nimble brain was attending the parturition of the germ of an idea, which had to do with the sale of G. I. A. P. F. N. A. bonds.

"Hedda van Tossel—Dutch—actress," murmured Mr. Pinkwiddy. "'Pears to me lak one time I knowed dat gal. Yas sah, dat's de truf. She's a little heftier bouten de middle pahts, but dat sho' is Hedda, an' purty as evah."

"She's a good drawin' cayahd fo' de Bilt-most restaraw," confessed the proprietor. "I hopes she don' git no job at play actin' soon."

As the proprietor went to make change for other patrons, Mr. Pinkwiddy's thoughts took quick action. He was impatient for a talk with Miss Hedda van Tossel, but was compelled to await the pleasure of her two exacting customers, seated in opposite corners of the room. Both, obviously, had gormandized to repletion, and now were sparring for the time and attention of the coquettish, though businesslike young waitress, who, from Mr. Pinkwiddy's point of vantage, seemed impartial in her smiles and favors.

"Miss van Tossel," said Diamond Jim, summoning her from his rival's table, "yo' mought fotch me a glass ob ice watah when yo' feels a mind."

Miss van Tossel made haste to fill the order, leaving the Black Rockyfellow to the dour contemplation of his opponent's strategy.

"How yo' admiah ma new fo'teen carat ring?" questioned Diamond Jim, indicating one of his numerous adornments.

"It look moughty handsome, Mistah Birchwood," replied Hedda. "Dem ruby red stones jes' suit yo' complexion."

"I was allowin' to mak' it a gift present to some one," insinuated Diamond Jim.

"Was yo', now? Dat'd be mos' elegant fo' de lucky gal." Miss van Tossel gave him a side glance, then dropped her eyes with becoming modesty.

"I didn't espress mase'f I had no gal in mind," coquetted Diamond Jim; "but——"

"Miss van Tossel!" exploded the Black Rockyfellow across the room. "If it ain't astin' yo' too much to disinterrupt yo' conversation, I would please be obleeged fo' yo' to fotch me de bes' cigah whut de house affoahds. I's a payin' guest, I is."

"Yas, sah, right away, sah," responded Miss van Tossel.

Then, to the rage of Diamond Jim, and the further annoyance of Mr. Pinkwiddy, Miss van Tossel struck a match and held the flame sweetly to the fire end of the Black Rockyfellow's purchase. Furthermore, she permitted herself to become engaged in a conversation that was especially annoying to at least two observers, because it was conducted in tones so low that they did not reach the ears of the inquisitive.

"Miss van Tossel, is yo' got a toofpick, please?" interrupted the seductive voice of Diamond Jim, when he could stand the strain no longer.

"Right away, yas, sah," replied the obliging waitress.

"If some peeples'd think mo' bouten gahden picks dan wif spadin' dey moufs wif toofpicks, de high cost ob livin' mought be mo' reduced," growled the Black Rockyfellow.

At this juncture Mr. Pinkwiddy's impatience overcame him and caused him to give peremptory summons to the vascillating young serving person.

"Hedda!" he called. "Come heah!"

Both of Hedda's dark gallants started, as if in resentment, at this unexpected command, but it was not within the province of either, of course, to interfere with the conduct of her duties toward a patron. The Black Rockyfellow, however, chewed savagely at his cigar, while Diamond Jim seized the opportunity that a toothpick gave him to make display of his ample jewelry. Meanwhile, he sent a chocolate-colored glare in the direction of Mr. Pinkwiddy, while his vis-à-vis of the Rockefeller category flashed vengeful glances from the slits that flamed his dull ebon countenance.

"Did yo' call, sah?" asked Miss van Tossel sweetly.

"I extended yo' de courtesy ob a summons, ma'am," replied Mr. Pinkwiddy with dignity. "I would hab yo' do me de honah ob a few minutes' conversation; but acc'ordin' to whut I observes ob de rules ob de house, it's on'y fittin' an' propah dat I oadahs something, so's not to be wastin' yo'

time. Fotch me a piece ob raisin' pie an' a cup ob coffee."

While Miss van Tossel was executing the order, her rival suitors continued to glare. Each was conscious, however, that he had exhausted all subterfuges to prolong his occupancy of the table; but each was determined that the other should not have the advantage of being the last to depart. Mr. Pinkwiddy, therefore, provided a neutral diversion that enabled them to leave simultaneously, with grace and dignity. Watching each other, they arose together. Still watching, they paid their checks. With continued watchfulness, they went out at the same time—and Mr. Pinkwiddy breathed a breath of relief. At that moment, Miss van Tossel laid his pie and coffee before him.

"Some sugah fo' de coffee," he said.

"'Tain't sweet enough?" she asked.

"'Tain't," he replied, after a noisy sip.

"Maybe yo' lak fo' me to mix a little sweetness in," she insinuated.

"How come?"

"Some folks lak me to stir dey coffee wif ma fingah." She treated him to a melting glance and allowed a coy smile to reveal her perfect teeth.

"Miss van Tossel," he replied with stern gravity, "I ain't flirtin'. I's a bizness man. I got a money propersition to mak' wif yo'. Fust off, I's gwine say I knows yo' ob old, long 'fo' yo' evah thought ob slingin' hash in dis heah hotel."

"'Deed, am dat so? Maybe we meet up in Saint Thomas, wheah I was bo'ned at; or was it in Holland; when I was on de gran' tour?"

"'Twan't neither; us met up when yo' was playin' burlesque in de Dusky Belles Frolic Company."

Miss van Tossel stood back, and, for a moment, contemplated this relic sprung from her past. A light of recognition crossed her face.

"Man, I's got yo' now! Yo' is Horatio Pinkwiddy, whut own de show when it bus', owin' me fo'ty dollahs. Since yo' was speakin' ob money, I calc'lates yo' is gwine pay me dem fo'ty dollahs."

Mr. Pinkwiddy made a wry face at the blunt recollection.

"I's gwine put us bofe in de way ob makin' many times fo'ty dollahs," he evaded.

"Whut yo' doin' heah, dressed up in dem stoahkeepah's clothes, an' makin' talk lak a niggah?" she demanded irrelevantly.

"Sh-h-h-h!" cautioned Mr. Pinkwiddy, and glanced about apprehensively, lest some one might have overheard. "Niggers, he whispered, "are suspicious; if I reveal the benefits of my collegiate education and express myself according to my ability, they are inclined to refer to me as a 'biggity nigger,' and refuse to do business with me. Pardon me, then, Miss van Tossel, if I lapse into the vernacular—for Gawd knows, business isn't so good."

"I's wise," she smiled and dropped into a chair beside him. "Whut's de game?"

"Bonds."

Hedda shook her head.

"I ain't much favah bonds," she said. "I was mahhied onct, an' if dat wuthless niggah hadn't been chopped into undahtakah food one night to a crap game, I'd 'a' been in bonds yet."

"I ain't proposin' mahhiage bonds," hastened Mr. Pinkwiddy. "Whut I has to offah is bonds in de Great International Association for the Protection of Freeborn Negro Americans, ob which I has de honah to be de Grand Travelin' Pres'dent."

"Yo' sellin' dem bonds?"

"Esactly—one dollah per each, payin' ten per cent guarumtee interest, and comin' to full maturity in thur'ty yeahs f'om de date ob issue."

"I ain't got no money fo' bonds."

"Didn't reckon yo' had; but yo' is got heaps ob common sense, an' if somebody say: 'Hedda, dey's a basket full ob gold, an' all yo' got to do is to he'p yo'se'f,' yo' ain't gwine be slow stickin' yo' hand in, is yo'?"

"I ain't got de drift, yet, Mistah Pinkwiddy; an' yo' got to show me good. Whur yo' got headquarters fo' dem bonds, an' who gwine pay all dat money aftah yo' sells 'em?"

Mr. Pinkwiddy withdrew a fat wallet from an inner pocket, and extracted a card, on which were printed his name, that of his organization, and the picture of an imposing skyscraper.

"Dat makes yo' answer," he said grandly. "De associashun is de embodiment ob de latest development fo' de advancement ob ouah race, sharin' wif de white folks all de rights, liberties an' pursuits ob happiness whut dey enjoys."

"An' dis heah am yo' headquatahs?" asked Hedda, planting a tapered finger on the picture of the skyscraper.

"Esactly."

"De whole buildin', jes' lak dat, belong to de niggah race?"

"Esactly."

Hedda burst forth into a paroxysm of girlish laughter.

"Oh, Mistah Pinkwiddy," she tittered; "yo' is de funnies' man! Yo' is jes' got mo' nerve dan a bad toof!"

"Esplain yo'se'f, Miss van Tossel," demanded Mr. Pinkwiddy, with offended dignity.

"Dat buildin' whut yo' got on yo' cayahd, is de home quahtahs ob de Gotham Ole Line Comp'ny, whar I pays ma insurance money ever' time when I's in Noo Yawk."

"Waal," returned the unabashed Mr. Pinkwiddy slowly, "if me an' yo' is gwine be pardnahs, we ain't gwine tell nobody heah'bouts bouten dat, is we?"

"Reckon we ain't—iffen we's pardnahs. Now, den, espress yo'se'f; whut's de game dat's agitatin' yo' mind?"

"Yo' is a actress," said Mr. Pinkwiddy with irrelevant profundity.

"Dat ain't no surprise to me," retorted Hedda pertly. "Mos' folks say I's a good actress, too."

"Yo' know bouten de weedja boahd?"

"Dat speehit boahd, lak whut Patience Wo'th writes poetry on fo' de Kansas City lady?"

"Esactly."

"Law, Mistah Pinkwiddy, dey ain't no speehits bouten dem weedja boahds, 'ceptin' fo' iggerent niggahs, an' de lak. One time las' yeah, when I was to a pahty in Looeyville, I take one ob dem boahds an' scare a passel ob fool peeples mos' to death, makin' 'em b'lieve I was communicatin' wif disembowled speehits. Fact is, I was jes' fakin' de whole show."

"Did yo', now, did yo', now?" cried Mr. Pinkwiddy. "Bless de Lohd ob Chanct, we is gwine save de day fo' de Great International Association for the Protection ob Freeborn Negro Americans. Dat sho' we is, Miss Hedda van Tossel, as true as yo' is settin' dere dis minute."

"How come?"

"Don't ax me yet how come," replied Mr. Pinkwiddy excitedly. "Yo' know bouten de I Will Be A Spirit Congregation, which is holdin' revival meetin's?"

"Don't I, now? I been dere twict, jes' to see dem fool niggahs pehfoam. Dat Dia-

mond Jim Birchwood's mammy, de ole voodoo doctah, is one ob de chiefes' attractions."

"Yo' is got de right idea, Miss van Tossel. But how'd yo' lak to go down dar an' mystify 'em some wif de weedja boahd?"

"How'd I lak—say, Mistah Pinkwiddy, yo' sho' is de funnies' man!"

"'Tain't nothin' funny bouten it," retorted Mr. Pinkwiddy. "Whut I aims to do is dis: I supplies yo' wif de real dope on de niggahs heah'bouts, so's yo' kin spin de weedja boahd an make it appeah lak' it's de speehits a-tellin' on 'em. Den, when dey gits all fussed up an' scary, yo' tell dem de speehits say dey got to buy bonds in de Great International Association for the Protection of Freeborn Negro Americans."

"Yas," murmured Hedda sapiently. "An' den whut I's a mind to find out is whur I comes in at on de finish. Dem bonds ain't no good, is dey?"

"Whut fo' yo' care bouten dat, so's I gives yo' a commission on whut I sells aftah de meetin'?"

"How many commission?"

"Twenty per cent. An' if de scheme go good, us kin wohk it all ovah de country."

"Fifty-fifty," remarked Hedda with terse insistence.

"Meanin' dem's yo' tehms?"

"Fifty-fifty on de gross an' net proceeds," repeated Hedda firmly.

In this matter of commission on the sale of his bonds, Mr. Pinkwiddy was compelled to yield—with a mental reservation, however.

"How us gwine wohk it?" she asked, now growing enthusiastic at the prospect of the venture.

"Fu'st off, us got to get a weedja boahd."

"Dat's easy. I got mine in ma trunk," she informed him.

"Dat's all de mo' bettah," he beamed. "Den yo' is got to git yo'se'f acquainted wif de haid ob de Speehit Congregashun. Mebbe dat Diamond Jim fellah, whose mammy is wohkin' voodoo at de meetin's, would interduce yo'."

"No, sah," she replied emphatically. "Dat ole mammy gwine be jealous ob ma rival powahs an' put de cuhse right onto me. But I's a mind I kin git——"

Hedda paused—as one minded to reflect carefully for a moment.

"Yo' was a-sayin' yo' had a mind yo' could git——" Mr. Pinkwiddy started to prompt a trifle impatiently, at length.

"Sam Pebble, de Black Rockyfellow," interrupted Hedda.

"And by dat yo' mean whut?"

"Fo' to make me interduced befo' de I Will Be A Speehit Congregashun. Sam, he's a pow'ful smaht pillah ob de congregashun, an' whut he say talks loud, jes' lak money. I aims, lakways, to extoht a little assistance f'om Diamond Jim, regahdin' de sins an' virchews ob some dead an' gone ones ob some folks he know."

"Dat's it, Hedda," beamed Mr. Pinkwiddy. "Yo' is got de right idee, fust off. Now, fer to-night, ma advice is yo' practice hahd wif dat weedja boahd, so's to-morraah night, mebbe, yo' kin feed plenty mystery to dat hongry, speehit-lovin' band."

"'Foah goin' to bed, I's gwine do dat; but fust, I's got engagements."

"Mo' dan one?"

"Two—wif Diamond Jim Birchwood an' Sam Pebble, de Black Rockyfellow. Fust, I meets up wif Diamond Jim, down to de post office, an' sees whut he's gwine ax me to do. Den, escusin' mase'f fo' ten minutes, I engages de attenshun ob Sam Pebble, ovah in front ob de Sweetheahs' Candy an' Soda Emporium, an' I finds out whut entertainment he's gwine offah. De man whut is got de best idee fo' pleasin' a lady's appetite is got me fo' de evenin', and de one whut elects hisselt to hole hands in de dahk is de one whut ain't."

Mr. Pinkwiddy permitted himself the enjoyment of a laugh at her naive materialism.

"Don't yo' allow, Hedda," he asked, "dat de one whut wishes to hole yo' fair hand in de dahk is de one whut love yo' de mostest?"

"No, sah!" Hedda negatived his question with the emphasis of an explosion. "De man whut love a lady is gwine do whut give her de mostest pleasure; he ain't gwine ax her to waste time settin' in de dahk holdin' hands, while he save money. No, sah. If he de right man, he's gwine wait till she git to de p'int ob seggestin' handholts in de dahk. Den she ain't gwine let him spend no money, nuther."

"Waal, yo' bes' be thinkin' mostest bouten bonds an' weedja boahds," was Mr. Pinkwiddy's parting advice.

Not for many days had Mr. Horatio Pinkwiddy been so carefree and buoyant as since effecting his agreement with Miss van Tossel. Indeed, it seemed that this new luminosity of hope had dispelled all of the

quondam darkness of despair. After all, his facile wits had carried him over another barrier in life's steeplechase. Mr. Pinkwiddy was whistling blithesomely as he entered the Tonsorial Salon conducted by the artistic Moses Slathery, flung himself into a chair, and, with prodigal abandon as to the high cost of barbering, called for a hair trim, a shave, and a massage.

"How come bizness?" asked Moses solicitously.

"Comin'," replied Mr. Pinkwiddy enigmatically. "Reckon now I's gwine git dat ghost ob a chanct, which yo' said I ain't."

Despite adroit questioning on the part of Moses, that was all Mr. Pinkwiddy would vouchsafe as to his business prospects.

Leaving the shop elegantly tonsured and a-reek with toilet water, Mr. Pinkwiddy headed for the old warehouse, wherein the I Will Be A Spirit Congregation was conducting its revival. His purpose was to get a line on the proceedings there, in furtherance of his own base designs.

He passed, on his way, the Sweethearts' Candy and Soda Emporium, and noticed that Miss van Tossel was lined up against the composition marble bar, by the side of the Black Rockyfellow. In one slender hand she clutched a two-pound box of candy, while the slim forefinger of the other was curled about the near-silver handle of a glass of raspberry ice-cream soda.

"Huh!" soliloquized Mr. Pinkwiddy. "I reckon Diamond Jim Birchwood is suffering a lonesome evening."

Arrived at his destination, Mr. Pinkwiddy found the stage set for any kind of a spirit that might have time and inclination to perambulate. An improvised platform, that emitted sepulchral creaks when stepped upon, occupied the center of one end of the large, rectangular room. Crude benches, that would seat probably five hundred persons, were clustered about the rostrum. Four smoky kerosene lamps cast lurid shadows over the awed assemblage, and lent ghostly imagery to the dark emptiness of dusty corners.

As Mr. Pinkwiddy entered and tiptoed to a seat on the last bench, the Reverend Job La Ment, pastor of the flock, arose to speak.

"As per usual," he said, "us is gwine to hab, fu'st, de esperience ob dreaahms, which I is heah to intehpret lak unto de days when David an' Goliath spell out fo' Nichodeemus dat speehit handwritin' which de Good Book

say appeah on de wall. Nex' off, de ushahs will gathah up de collectshum—an' don't nobody heah present think de speehits ain't got a eye out fo' any mean skunk whut frows a penny in de basket, when de Lawd call fo' a silvah offahing. De programme will close wif speehit talks an' manufestatshuns by Mammy Birchwood, who am widely known bouten ouah midst.

"Who gwine be de fust on hisen or heren feets, now, to espress a dreahm?"

A murmur passed over the audience as the Reverend Job glared ghoulishly through the flickering shadows. A little woman beside Mr. Pinkwiddy shivered, though the night was warm. Another, a few seats away, sobbed aloud. There was a spasmodic scraping of feet and a blowing of noses. They seemed to be waiting for the hand of the infinite to strike, and even Mr. Pinkwiddy felt a little chill trickle down his spine. Then, in the center of the room, a fat mammy arose.

"I is got a dreahm!" she spluttered hysterically.

"Sisiah Buttahball is gwine express he'se'f bouten a dreahm," intoned the Reverend Job. "Ever'boday draw neah an' gib atenshun."

"I hab a dreahm las' night," cackled Sister Butterball, "whut appeah lak a moughty fine dreahm!"

"Dat's good!" shouted a gentleman in a front seat. "Tell it to us, sistah."

"I dreahm bouten ma matter, Violet Liza, her whut wohks in de gents' pants factory in Sheecawgo, makin' her twenty-fo' to fo'ty dollahs each per week. I dreahm she war dress all in white, wif flowahs on, an' she say to me, 'Mammy, I's got fine news fo' yo', an' dey ain't gwine be no mo' hahd wohk.' Den she frow a heap ob jingly gold into ma lap; an' f'om somewhars back in de dahkness dey come out a big, spohty-lookin' cullud gemman, whut Violet Liza say is her husban'. Dar, now, brudders an' sistahs, iffen dat ain't a fine dreahm, I don't know whut dey is!"

"Praise be!" cried the gentleman in the front seat. "Sis Buttahball done hab a fine dreahm. De' Rev'rund now gwine intehpret its true meanin' fo' de faithful."

The Reverend, meanwhile, had begun to act as though he had contracted a sudden spasm, or as if a flea had taken lodging between his undershirt and his epidermis. Suddenly he bent forward, clapped both hands

over his eyes, moaned dolefully several times and addressed his flock in a hushed voice.

"De speehits tell me," he said, "dat Sis Buttahball done hab a veyh bad dreahm, 'countin' de fact dat dreahms, lak womens, go contrariwise. Fust place, if Sis Buttahball see dat gal in white, she was wearin' black. Flowahs mean a fun'ral; mahhiage, 'pearin' in a dreahm, am a suah sign ob death; gold spell hahd luck, an' plenty wohk to git it. Sistah Buttahball, dat am a pow'ful troublesome dreahm."

Sister Butterball, during the interpretation, had begun to rock and moan in her seat, invoking responsive lamentations from others in the congregation. Mr. Pinkwiddy, too, felt a trifle uneasy, but he had attended to learn certain things, and his knowledge was not yet complete.

"Sis Buttahball," thundered the Reverend Job suddenly, "whut am yo' sin? De speehits say dat dreahm am come as punishment for a ovahshadowin' sin whut yo' commit recent."

Sis Butterball shook and wept and spluttered and denied. The Reverend Job, however, was adamant.

"If—if—iffen yo' tehms it a sin to pluck a little pullet f'om a roadside fence durin' de night, an' wring hes neck fo' ma stew-pot," she wailed at length, "den, Rev'rund, I is a sinnah."

"Dat's it!" shouted the Reverend jubilantly. "Dat's de sin whut has come to find yo' out! Step up, Sis Buttahball, an' ease yo' conshunts by payin' one dollah penance money to de chu'ch. An' den, when yo' goes home, I advises yo' to undreahm dat dreahm, iffen yo' wants peace ob mind fo' de future."

"Ease yo' conshunts, sistah," intoned the exhorter in the front seat.

Mr. Pinkwiddy observed joyfully that Sis Butterball, without any objection, walked to the platform and paid her dollar. Then, rocking with grief, she waddled to one side of the room, followed by a small group of sympathetic friends.

"De nex' dreahm now is in oadah," announced the Reverend Job.

If there were any other dreamers present, however, they decided to profit by Sis Butterball's sad experience and hold their own secrets.

"Time 'lapsed fo' dreahms," snapped the Reverend. "De ushahs now gwine take de collectshum; an' remembah whut I say

bouten dat silvah offahing. Also, de ushah whut do up de left side ob de house will please not ovahlook dat pahty ob moanahs 'round Sistah Buttahball."

Mr. Pinkwiddy was a most interested spectator of the process of taking the collection, and noted that the basket did not pass a single member of the flock without an attendant jingle of silver. Being on the last row of seats, most of the others had contributed before the usher reached him. Mr. Pinkwiddy ostentatiously threw a silver dollar in the basket, making a loud splash among the coins of lesser denomination; then, very unostentatiously, he extracted seventy-five cents in change, leaving his net donation but a quarter of a dollar. He was pleased to observe, however, that the Reverend's admonition had carried weight, and that the silver offering had been general.

The Reverend made haste to sweep the contents of the collection baskets into an old shot bag, which he thrust into a capacious hip pocket, and during the general natural interest in this act Mr. Pinkwiddy took the opportunity it afforded him to take a sneak.

For his own practical purpose, he had seen all of the spirit meeting that he desired; to wit, the congregation responded, without protest or cavil, to any demand made upon it for money. Ergo, when Hedda van Tossel got before that crowd with her ouija board, and quoted the spirits as advising the liberal purchase of the bonds of the Great International Association for the Protection of Freeborn Negro Americans, a bull market in those insecure securities was certain.

Sweet dreams softened the slumbers of Mr. Pinkwiddy that night—dreams of a kind, however, that he would not have cared to repeat to the I Will Be A Spirit Congregation. The following day he devoted to the perfection of his knowledge of certain well-to-do residents of the town and their antecedents, and, in the late afternoon, he compared notes with Miss van Tossel. Everything was lovely. The Black Rockyfellow had agreed to present her to the I Will Be A Spirit Congregation, and Diamond Jim Birchwood had proved a source of much valuable information, under the adroit questioning of the soon-to-be sorceress.

That evening, Mr. Pinkwiddy was in at the opening of the spirit revival, to assure himself of a front seat. Proceedings were

conducted as on the night before, with the exception that, instead of Mammy Birchwood and her voodoo incantations, the Reverend Job la Ment had a new attraction to offer. He dwelt long and glowingly on the powers of Miss van Tossel, who, he proclaimed, "am not in commutation wif de speehits fo' any pelf or gain, but on'y fo' de private an profound info'mashun ob de faithful whut seeks wohds wif de demised an' de departed."

Miss van Tossel made her entrance after the manner of a queen, condescending to bestow her presence on a few favored subjects. Indeed, she looked more like the kind of "queen" spoken of colloquially in Harlem and other parts of New York than Mr. Pinkwiddy desired. She wore one of her lowest of low-cut stage gowns, which, between spots, registered a vivid pink. Showers of tattered tinsel fell about the skirts, and parted, as she stepped, to disclose her blue satin slippers and yellow silk stockings. Under one shapely arm she carried the mystic ouija board.

For once, however, the astute Mr. Pinkwiddy was wrong in this guess. A spontaneous gasp of awe and admiration went up from the congregation, which settled, then, into the hush of solemn respect. Miss van Tossel sat down in the chair that had been provided for her in the center of the platform and proceeded to go to work. With the ouija board across her lap, she set the little table to spinning, at the same time affecting a strained, far-away look. The audience was impressed, and Mr. Pinkwiddy gave an inward chuckle.

"Dey is a speehit speakin'," said Miss van Tossel, at length, in the most sepulchral voice that she could command. "It is a he-made speehit. He's a middlin'-sized man, wif gray hair an' bent shouldahs. He say hes name an Abraham—Abraham Sp-p-p—come on, now, speehit, spell de res' ob dat name." Hedda rotated the little table violently. "Dat's it, dat's it—Abraham Spintop."

An articulate shudder swept the congregation, and a woman shrieked.

"Abraham Spintop," repeated Hedda. "He say he hab a message fo' hes datter. Is de datter ob Abraham Spintop in de audience?" Hedda stopped proceedings while she glanced about. "If she is, let her come up on de stage—platfohm—an' git de message."

"Come up an' git yo' message, Sis Spintop," bellowed the Reverend Job.

"Yo' lays yo' fingahs on de little table acrost f'om mine," directed Miss van Tossel, when she had Sis properly seated, with the upside part of the board resting on her knees. "An' yo' jes' touches it light, 'cause, iffen yo' beahs down hahd, yo' discomberates de speehit's mind an' scares him off."

Sis Spintop had not the strength to do other than she was told to do. Thereupon, Miss van Tossel proceeded:

"Listen to whut Abraham Spintop say: 'I is well an' happy in de speehit life, an' is watchin' ovah yo' welfare, datter. Yo' is gwine make a big bizness success, but be careful ob men whut would mahhy yo' fo' yo' money; an' 'tain't safe to be keepin' yo' cash in dat ole blue teapot in de kitchen cupbahd. Bettah git de seat fixed in ma ole rockin' chaiah, 'cause one day, mebbe, I's gwine be comin' to set wif yo' a spell. I sees befo' yo' many money comin' f'om a investment whut's gwine he'p de cullud race to de impohtance whut it desehve. De great emancipatah, whut am heah in de speehit life, say to me to tell yo' an' all yo' frien's dat dey's gwine spring up a big oadah fo' de liberation ob de cullud peeples ob de wohld, an' dat yo bes' buy de stocks an' bonds ob dat oadah, an' buy 'em heavy. Bettah git yo'se'f a new, wahm coat befo' de wintah set in, an' fake keer ob dat misery in yo' back. Dat's all de advice I'm got fo' de present time.'"

"Dat sho' talk lak ole Abe," wailed a weazened septuagenarian.

"An' he speak ob de blue teapot," sobbed a woman.

"An' hes ole rockin' chaiah," voiced her neighbor.

Whereupon, further lamentations were in order, after which Sis Spintop was sufficiently revived to be dragged back to her seat in the audience. Mr. Pinkwiddy was overjoyed. He was just a little apprehensive, however, of the dour expression on the face of old Mammy Birchwood, who sat in a corner glaring at her rival for mediumistic honors. Her son, Diamond Jim, arose after Miss van Tossel's initial performance and slipped out of the room. The ouija manipulator, however, was oblivious to everything except the glory that was hers. She had them going, and going good. In-

deed, the emotional pressure became so great that, after the fifth sitter had received an intimate message from her great-grandmother, the Reverend Job deemed it wise to adjourn the meeting until the following night.

It had been an evening of signal victory for Miss van Tossel and for Mr. Pinkwiddy.

Only one question now puzzled Mr. Pinkwiddy's mind. Should he fare forth, on the morrow, and offer his bonds broadcast to the community, or should he sit tight and wait for the buyers to seek him out? Perhaps, he determined, the latter would prove the wiser course. They would be all the more eager to buy, and buy big, he reasoned.

On the following morning, Mr. Pinkwiddy decided to kill two birds with one stone, as it were. He would tantalize prospective bond buyers by being "absent on business" when they should come flocking to the Biltmost Hotel, eager to invest their money as the spirits had directed. This, he figured, would be one bird in his bag. For the second, he paid three dollars for the hire of a horse and buggy, and went out to the prosperous farm conducted by Mr. Gideon Horn. Gideon's chief crop was corn, and his greatest profit was said to be derived from the distilled juice thereof. Therefore, Mr. Pinkwiddy had seen to it that Miss van Tossel's ouija performance should throw a goodly scare into Gideon. Therefore, also, Mr. Pinkwiddy had no qualm of conscience in hanging the said Gideon up for all that he would stand.

He had calculated that Gideon ought to come across with fifty dollars, but, when that astute gentleman volunteered a hundred, Mr. Pinkwiddy at once doubled on the latter sum. They compromised on one hundred and fifty, which Gideon handed over in neatly engraved currency, in exchange for the equivalent representation in badly printed "Protection of Freeborn Negro Americans" certificates. Also, Gideon insisted that Mr. Pinkwiddy stay to dinner. Furthermore, he induced Mr. Pinkwiddy to partake generously of a potent white liquid of powerful alcoholic content, that caused Mr. Pinkwiddy not to care much of a hang what happened. In conclusion, he prevailed on Mr. Pinkwiddy to remain for a snack of supper, and started him townward well after night had dropped its sable mantle about the schemes o' mice and men. And it was well for Mr. Pinkwiddy, incidentally,

that the livery horse knew his way home, and was accelerated thereto by visions of a trough of oats.

The brisk drive did much in the way of conditioning Mr. Pinkwiddy for what lay before him. It was nine o'clock when he arrived, and high time that he was in the midst of the I Will Be A Spirit Congregation. He decided not to stop at his hotel, and to hurry at once to the revival meeting, where Miss van Tossel was scheduled for another séance with the ouija board. He arrived just in time for the "silvah offahing," which the Reverend Job la Ment was announcing from the platform.

"An' atterwa'ds," continued the Reverend, "us is gwine hab some revelashuns f'om dat well-known queen ob speehit mystics, Mammy Birchwood."

Preceding Mammy Birchwood to the platform came an attendant, bearing a black pot, swung by a chain to a tripod. This he set up in the center of the rostrum. And then came Mammy. Her head was wrapped in a large yellow silk handkerchief, her black, gimlet eyes snapped fire, and, in one hand, she clutched what appeared to be a bundle of sticks.

"To-night," announced Mammy Birchwood, "I is gwine make incantations f'om de mystic yarbs, which I pluck in de woods. I is gwine set dem on fiah, whereupon I reads de happenin's ob de past, present, an' futshur f'om de smoke which arises outen ma cawldron."

"De smoke say," she cried, "dat evil peeples am loosened in ouah midst. Dey is a yallah woman whut call he'se'f a witch doctah, whut appeah heah wif a boahd, whut jes' lie, an' lie, an' lie. She make perfeshun to speak whut de speehits say, when she spend de day befoah 'cumulatin' infoah-mashun bouten de peeples which she claim to make talks wif deys daid depahted. Dat woman lie. She wohk a unhoneest trick on dis congregashun fo' a no'count, ondeceivin' niggah man, whut say he hab bonds to sell fo' de benefit ob de cullud race. Dat man am a delushun an' a snare! Dat woman am a Jazabel an' a she sarpent! Dey ain't no truf in dem! Dat's whut de smoke say, brudders an' sistahs, an' dem whut sehvs de mammon which dey inspiahs ain't gwine do

nuffin' but th'ow deys money lak pearls befo' de swine."

Exhausted by her raving, Mammy Birchwood collapsed on the platform, even while the black pot still belched its pungent fumes. A murmur passed through the congregation, as the significance of her diatribe struck home. Mr. Pinkwiddy became conscious that angry eyes were being turned in his direction. He saw Diamond Jim Birchwood coming toward him. Fortunately, he occupied a rear seat. He arose. He started to walk nonchalantly toward the door. Somebody shouted: "Dat's him?"

Mr. Pinkwiddy forgot his dignity and ran. Not knowing where else to run, he beat it for the Biltmost Hotel. The proprietor met him in the lobby.

"Iffen yo' ain't in too much hurry, Mistah Pinkwiddy," he said, "I's got a message fo' yo'." Mr. Pinkwiddy nodded feebly, while trying to regain his breath. "Dat gal, Miss van Tossel," continued the proprietor, "say fo' me to tell yo' dat de beans was spilled. She say yo'd know whut she was meanin'. She say dat Diamond Jim an' de Black Rockyfellow done push her into a cohnah an' make her 'fess up bouten dat weedja boahd an' which she lubbed de mostes' an' was gwine mahhy. She say she select de Black Rockyfellow, 'cause ob hes money, an' dat Diamond Jim was mighty mad, an' she think was gwine tell hes mammy bouten ever'thing. She say yo' wou'd onderstand. Den she an' de Black Rockyfellow done cotch a train, sayin' deys gwine 'lope fo' to be mahhied."

Mr. Pinkwiddy understood—and understood only too well. Likewise, he understood the meaning of the roar of angry voices that came to him from the distance. He had a hunch that the I Will Be A Spirit Congregation was coming, en masse, to engage him in an interview.

Mr. Pinkwiddy made a sudden dash for his room on the second story. He dashed a few essential personal belongings into a suit case. When he heard the voice of the mob clamoring for him in the lobby, he dashed out of the window, across the kitchen roof—to the ground—to the railway station. A train was just pulling out—to where, Mr. Pinkwiddy neither knew nor inquired. However, he dashed aboard.

Stories in the next number by Edison Marshall, Knibbs, McLaurin, Sinclair, Rowland, Somerville, and other headliners. And don't forget the complete novel by Francis Lynde.

Make or Break

By John Fleming Wilson

Author of "The Mystery of Marbury Passage," Etc.

(A Three-Part Story—Part III)

CHAPTER XI.

THE three-hundred-ton steamer *Rachel* was, as Peter Simpson justly remarked, an unambitious vessel. She had been built for the shallow waters of the Gulf of California, a broad-beamed, flush-decked craft with no weatherly qualities; she was overengined and underboilered, with but the sketchiest kind of auxiliaries.

"I've filled her up with fuel and fresh water," Peter told Alicia when they were at last clear of the land. "And provisions; mostly coal and provisions. But she'll do a neat twelve while she holds together, and Heaven protects its own."

"Dad is always referring to Heaven when he knows perfectly well what he's about," Martha, his daughter, informed Alicia with upturned pretty nose. "But he doesn't fool me." She looked admiringly at Alicia and smiled.

"I don't know yet just how to take him," Alicia confessed. "He roars at me so."

"He doesn't roar at *me*, I can tell you," Martha remarked. "He used to try to but I wouldn't stand it."

The girl was seventeen and of a fresh and wholesome appearance that delighted her hostess—for that was the relation Alicia Stillings established the moment she saw Martha and liked her. Like most young women of her age, she was a mixture of shrewdness and candor that made her interesting. Her attitude to her father was almost maternal.

As the days passed and the air grew more wintry and the sea rougher the two girls became inseparable and Captain Simpson used to sit during his hours below with his stockinged feet elevated and listen with an expression of honest enjoyment to their chatter.

Sometimes he would utter a solitary word of appreciation, beaming on them the while: "Minxes!"

At other times he would come down from the wind-swept deck to stamp round and roar for hot tea and scold them both with gusto. When he had exhausted himself he would grow mild and reminiscent and narrate tales of his wild and adventurous youth.

"Don't you believe a word he says, Alicia!" Martha would cry often. "He's trying to make himself out an awful pirate!"

"I am a pirate!" her father would thunder and laugh at the involuntary flinching of the two girls. Then he would speak in the wheedling tones he knew so well how to use and Alicia would find herself fairly trembling with delight at the music of his voice. But always when she met his glance she saw no change in the stony blue of his eyes. For long she felt oppressed by the sense that Simpson was, behind all his rough good humor and sentimentality, a cold, calculating, pitiless man who watched steadily and unceasingly for a chance to strike. But this passed. She became accustomed to that chill gaze and even took a certain pleasure in it, as in a firm and unalterable strength in him.

But when the *Rachel* sighted Cape Sarahchef on a blustery winter's morning and turned out upon the tumultuous Pacific once more, and the word ran round that before long word should come of the *Dark Star*, and the wireless man sat day and night long in his little room listening in for some whisper of her, Alicia could think of little but the ship they sought and the man she had come to find. Then the ship hummed into excitement over the word that dripped down the swinging aërials from the sodden sky. Peter Simpson brought the slip of paper from the wireless room into the cabin and held it

silently out to Alicia. She read it slowly, without moving her whitening lips:

Ex ss. *Vulcan* 10 Oct.

INTER-OCEAN, S. F.:

27th September picked up small boat ss. *Dark Star* and chief officer Greening, who reported *Dark Star* afire and sinking 450 miles northeast Cape Erimo. Steamed to position given and searched thirty-six hours without finding trace. Proceeded Mororan, discharged, loaded, and again went to position where *Dark Star* last reported. No trace. Undoubtedly lost all hands. Am proceeding.

TIMMS.

"Cap'n Timms," Simpson remarked gruffly, "is master of the Inter-ocean *Vulcan*, a collier. Evidently he had word to look for the *Dark Star*. Didn't find her, you see."

Alicia kept silent while she fought for self-control. When she could speak she said: "But this chief mate—how did he happen to be in the small boat?"

Peter Simpson lifted up his voice raucously. "I know *him*," he said. "One of your fine, gentlemanlike mates who're always whispering in an inside office. Perfectly respectable, my dears—I thank God I'm a dishonest man. Pooh! *He* reported the *Dark Star* on fire and in sinking condition! Pooh!"

"Then you don't think—you think maybe—"

"Timms is honest as the day is long—but not a minute into the night, my dears. I don't doubt Timms didn't find any trace and honestly believes the *Dark Star* is lost. Timms himself I'd credit. But when Greening turns up to corroborate him, I draw the line. I wouldn't believe Greening about anything! Pooh!" Captain Simpson expelled his breath violently as though blowing the ex-mate of the *Dark Star* to limbo.

"But where can the ship be?" Alicia cried.

Captain Simpson waved one hand largely. "There or thereabouts, my dears."

"Don't be silly, dad," Martha said rebukingly.

"Silly? I'm not silly. Lord love us all, I'm far from silly. Trust me to find a smart man. Young Edwards is clever. I'll say that for him. I'll find him."

Off he went and they heard him bellowing orders from the *Rachel's* little bridge, and the tiller ropes creaked in the sheaves under the deck, and the motion of their vessel altered and presently Simpson came down, perfectly satisfied with himself, smiling and chuckling. But Alicia observed that his

changeless blue eyes seemed sterner than ever, glittering under his heavy brows. She went to her own cabin where she fell on her knees and prayed.

The fourth morning after the interception of the *Vulcan's* message, Alicia and Martha went on deck for a breath of air, to see far to starboard the mist-enwrapped bulk of an islet. It rose out of the spume and smother dimly, ghostlike, and desolate.

"One of the Kuriles," Simpson told her briefly.

A strange sound roused Alicia, the snap of the little wireless. She listened. The captain glanced at her out of his ebilled eyes and nodded.

"I'm trying to pick up the *Dark Star*," he told her. "I have an idea young Edwards ran up here to fight his fire and get his old packet shipshape again. We have a range of three hundred miles at most—a hundred of this kind of weather. The *Dark Star* will be keeping an ear open. We may pick her up."

All day long the *Rachel* steamed within sight of the islands that are strung along the boundary of the Okhotsk Sea, and at regular intervals the wireless sent out its call. There was no response. That night Captain Simpson did not come down into the cabin but kept watch above, sheathed in heavy clothes, booted and capped in ragged furs, his grizzled face cut by sleet and nipped by frost. Martha slept like a child. Alicia lay in her berth and stared wide-eyed at the deck, seized with the rigor of a biting and incessant sorrow.

Slowly the long chain of the Kuriles was passed, while the winter swept down from the arctic and whipped the roaring seas into a wild welter that called for all of Captain Peter Simpson's lore and skill. He was now turned taciturn, low-voiced, but never having to give a command twice. His men glanced askance at his frosty eyes and moved their lips in inaudible murmurings.

Six days passed. There was vague talk aboard the *Rachel* that their commander was daft and should be overpowered and confined. The pallid wireless operator, drowsing at his desk, still sent out his call with chilled, trembling fingers. And still no response came out of the void. Alicia braved the weather and went to the bridge. After all, this was her ship, her cruise, her search. But Simpson stared at her when she spoke and merrily said, "Get below."

She went down in exultation. No such sacrifice as giving over the search was required of her so long as Peter Simpson held his strength.

The girls were interrupted at their supper by the wireless operator stumbling down and holding out a bit of paper. Alicia stared at it and laughed hysterically. It was illegible, drenched with spray, a mere blotted scrawl.

"What does it say?" she demanded of the operator.

"Says *Dark Star* safe in harbor Si Musir Island," he mumbled, saluted and shambled away to his bed.

So the news came. Alicia struggled to the bridge and found Simpson still standing stiffly braced in the wing and peering into the smother with unwinking eyes. He nodded to the soft cries she poured into his ear, gave her a single ironic look, and resumed his watch, as though nothing human mattered in this battle with the elements which he was winning.

In due time the *Rachel* found a pass between two islands and drove through under a full head of steam. Once in the lee she slipped quietly into an entrance between two low promontories and dropped anchor just before dawn. A cable's length away could be seen through the driving snow the glimmer of other lights. Peter Simpson indicated them with a broad, stiff gesture, as though signifying the end of his search, staggered off, and went to bed without a word.

In the gray of the belated dawn Alicia got up and dressed and went on deck. It was still snowing and a bitter wind was blowing the waters of the little bay into streaks of foam. She could barely discern the shape of a steamer near by. Presently a small boat appeared, being rowed by a single man toward the *Rachel*. It arrived in a flurry of spume and its occupant snatched a sea painter thrown him, made it fast, and quickly climbed up. Alicia saw Tom Edwards, browned with wind, thin, haggard, but content. She held out one slim hand.

Edwards took it gently. His eyes blazed on hers. Alicia was stricken with sudden terror. She drew back.

"Dick Hawley sent us," she whispered hastily. "Is everything all right?"

He stared at her a moment and then smiled awkwardly. "I hope so. What packet is this?"

Alicia explained volubly, fighting him

away, trying to silence the cry in her own heart. And in the end she was victorious. They fell into natural chat and went down into the cabin and hammered joyously on Peter Simpson's door. The old man responded with hoarse bellowings, but they would not be denied and at last he appeared, staggering on his stiffened limbs, roaring husky objurgations, his stony blue eyes still changeless and austere.

Edwards shook his hand warmly. "You found me," he said. "In another three days I'd ha' been on my way."

"In another two weeks Dick Hawley will collect the insurance," Simpson retorted grimly. "Why the rush? Why not wait and let Dick gather in the coin?"

Edwards grew pale under his tan. He met the old man's eyes steadily. "Dick's not that kind of a man," he replied in tones as full and sonorous as Peter's. Alicia noticed with a sinking at the heart that Tom's face and expression were such as she had never dreamed of. There was both wrath and obstinacy, determination and brutality in his look. And he moved about the little cabin with a lithe smoothness, a perfect poise and balance of muscles that irresistibly called up the picture of a wild animal. In her fear she reached back and caught Martha's hand. The girl squeezed Alicia's fingers affectionately and turned her frank, cheerful eyes in admiration on both her father and Edwards. She felt no dread. "Dick was dying when we left," Alicia whispered.

Edwards spun on his heel and showed her a shocked face. "Dick—Dick *dying*?"

"Dead," old Peter rasped. "He couldn't stick it out. He tried to play the honest and respectable businessman—and it got him. He was a weakling. He was a fool. He is dead." Simpson glared around at them with his piercing, brilliant eyes as if to challenge demur to this obituary of the man they knew as a friend.

"Honest old Dick!" Tom murmured.

Peter thumped his bulging chest resoundingly. "Would that please him? With his executors trying to collect the insurance on the *Dark Star*? Honest old Dick!" he said mockingly. "Sure! And they'll have his ghost up to plead to a charge of barratry. A fool. Look at me! I was once Dick Hawley's friend and his partner. I learned my lesson. I quit. I reformed. I told him myself he was on the road to destruction.

'I'll never touch an honest penny again,' I swore. I haven't. I'm here. I have six thousand of this young woman's, and inside of two months I'll have every penny she possesses. Dick is dead. I'm alive and my girls are going to have jewels on their fingers and look down on the poor but honest."

Edwards caught only the gist of this. He turned on Alicia wonderingly. "Your money?" he stammered.

Alicia faltered. She felt that she couldn't explain without confessing too much. She cast an appealing glance at Peter Simpson. The old man lurched forward.

"I've been on that confounded bridge six days and six nights," he rumbled, "conning this little old bumboat along the Kuriles. And you bang on my door when I've been turned in for exactly three hours and ten minutes and bother me with your piffing affairs. What do I care who put up the funds for this cruise? What is it to me if a young lady comes into my shop and sheds tears on my shoulder and relates a harrowing tale of disaster on deep waters? I put aside the tears and take the coin. That's me: Peter Simpson. The coin talks. Miss Stillings owes me twenty-four thousand dollars. I'll collect at the end of the voyage. Now I'm going to sleep again." He went off, and Martha ran after him, patting his broad back tenderly. Peter turned to say, in an indescribable tone, "Minxes!" He slammed the door.

Tom Edwards stared at the closed door and then sought Alicia's face. He looked tremendously embarrassed and was nowise reassured when Martha giggled maliciously.

"I'm all at sea," he mumbled. "Is it true Dick is dead?"

Alicia drew back and sat down at the covered table with a red cloth, and he obeyed her gesture and seated himself across from her.

"I left Dick dying," she began, and presently was in the full flood of her recital. Martha listened, knitting, with a mature expression of detachment, on a sweater. Alicia told of all that had happened after the *Dark Star* sailed, as she had heard it from Hawley, from Emerson Scott, and from others. "Dick thought he had ruined your career," she ended. "It struck him down. I told you he went to see your father, Tom."

Tom nodded soberly. "I can fancy what father hinted to him," he remarked.

"The truth is," Alicia went on, "that it was all arranged to wait till you turned up after being reported missing, to report the loss of your vessel. Then they were going to charge you openly with plotting with Dick to wreck the *Dark Star* for the insurance."

Edwards looked at her with an odd expression on his lean face. "What did Dick say when you told him you were coming?"

Her thoughts fled back to that moment in the dull room; she seemed to hear again the dying man's broken message.

"Dick told me to tell you never to quit—to stick it out," she whispered. "He was sorry he had quit."

"And you—why did you come, Alicia? Why didn't you just send Peter Simpson?"

She met his eyes steadily. "There was no one else to bring you Dick's message."

"And you used your own money—came all this way on this wretched old tub just to tell me to hang on, not to quit, to stick it out?" he demanded curiously.

Alicia appeared to withdraw herself a little. "Yes," she said in lingering tones that hovered in the little cabin like music. Then she timidly laid a thick wallet on the table and pushed it over toward him.

"And this," she murmured. "I didn't know—you might need it—to make sure of bringing your ship back."

He stared. "Money? Yours?"

"For Dick's sake!"

He fingered the wallet slowly and then thrust it back to her with an easy, sinuous movement. "Keep it, Alicia. I can make this cruise on my own."

She felt suddenly thrust out of the thick of things. His voice, his intonation seemed to rebuke her for trying to share his troubles and his perils. She thought herself, suddenly, a fool for having come thus far; she had been unwomanly; her eyes filled. Tom caught the glimmer of tears and rounded on her.

"You've done wonders," he said, perceiving with odd shrewdness what ailed her. "I don't think I could have managed much further if you hadn't turned up. My steamer is pretty nearly out of coal."

"Captain Simpson brought lots of it," she murmured. Then she smiled mistily. "He thought of so much you might need. And when we heard you were on fire he swore."

"How did you hear I was on fire?" he demanded quickly.

Alicia told him of the wireless they had intercepted from the *Vulcan*.

"So Greening was picked up, eh?" Edwards remarked in a mellow voice. "And old Timms looked for us and proceeded, under the impression that the *Dark Star* had foundered. Good! They're walking into their own trap, please Heaven, Alicia. Dick will be gloriously avenged."

"But you were on fire?" she insisted.

"We certainly were," he answered. "It burned smartly till we got into this bay and beached the steamer and pumped the hold full of water. Then we unloaded and straightened the cargo out and restowed everything. We're almost through now. I was expecting to sail for Hakodate day after tomorrow, in fact."

Alicia said nothing for a while. Her fine eyes rested thoughtfully on him, with a hint of subdued triumph under an expression of solicitude.

"And you can really sail your steamer to Hakodate?" she asked presently. "It's seaworthy?"

"Greening didn't do me so bad a turn," he replied. "He made me go back to the old rules I learned when I was a boy—about loading and seamanship." Tom smiled reminiscently. "The *Dark Star* isn't what one would call a good ship; she's been badly used. But I've loaded her this time so that she'll stay right side up. I'll make Hakodate all right."

"And Vladivostok? I can see that Captain Simpson is worried about the trip across the Japan Sea."

"In ballast," Tom responded, "and at this time of year? Don't worry!"

She thought it best to accept this. But she sat very still, and slowly he forgot his difficulties in the new thoughts which her presence inspired. Alicia had always been beautiful, frank, yet aloof in all her actions. She had the manner of a girl who was quite content with her environment for the simple reason that it didn't matter too much. In the little, cramped cabin of the *Rachel* she appeared a visitor. She did not, as Peter Simpson would have expressed it, *belong*.

Martha fitted in nicely; she did *belong*. She had been brought up among sailormen and was familiar with their ways and their language. Rough men did not affright her, nor puzzle her, nor, in a word, bother her. She accepted them in the pleasant knowledge that she would always be treated with

due consideration and that her place among them would always be yielded. Alicia gave no such impression of complacency. She was at ease, but only as one who could manage and direct so long as it was her pleasure to do so; she had the unconscious air of a personage.

When he realized this, Edwards began to compare the present with the past. Having been brought up in the same social class, he was quite aware that Alicia had strained the conventions horribly. There was a plain solution to all this. He thrilled when he understood what it was. But had she any thought of such a way out? Did her frankness go the length of admitting that he might ask her to marry him? Had she pondered this?

He looked at her with an emotion different and profounder than that which had always held him in her presence. He had always loved her. She had been constantly in his dreams. He had fought for the right to keep himself free to win her.

"What are you going to do now?" he demanded bluntly.

Alicia smiled. "In a way we are both in the hands of Captain Peter Simpson," she answered. "I think he has everything planned."

"But you have done so much—already," he murmured. Then with a rush of frankness he went on: "You must think of yourself, Alicia."

A little color tinged her cheeks. He perceived that she was quick to seize his meaning. She looked at him with embarrassment. "I fancy I must stick it," she said.

"I'm under terrific obligations," he responded.

She considered this. "I can withdraw them."

"But I want to be under obligations, Alicia—if it is going to be all right. You see, I'm not out of the woods yet. I'm only part way to Hakodate. When I get in—"

"Then you have to go on to Siberia," she interposed with astounding calmness.

"When I get there—"

"The voyage is back to San Francisco, isn't it? You won't give up before you get back, Tom?"

"Give up? No. Certainly not. But I'm thinking of you, Alicia."

She turned her face to him, and he saw that she was in deadly earnest. "You have no right to think of me."

"I know! I'm a failure—now. But when I get this job done I'll have the right," he replied.

"If I give it," she told him.

He stared. "I see. I've got to make good all around. Well, it's worth while." She detected a fire in his eyes that thrilled her momentarily. "By thunder, who'd ha' thought that the Alicia Stillings that used to sit in the music room and palaver with Dick and the others would come clear to this faraway island and act as though the North Pacific ocean was a corner of a ballroom? You know I loved you, Alicia. I'd have asked you to marry me long ago if father hadn't kept me out of the money-making side of business. Now we're both here, on a couple of rotten steamers, with lots to do ahead, and you sit there and talk as if we were still in your home on the hill." He rose and looked down on her with a passionate intensity. "You talk as though it lay in your power to go about the world and forbid me to love you, or to claim you. One would suppose that I was cold—and trust-worthy."

"I realize perfectly what I have done," she said steadily. "How other people may look at it doesn't matter, does it? I did it for—for Dick's sake." She glanced at him. "You have forgotten Dick."

Edwards threw up one hand resignedly. A vast rumbling portended the irruption of Peter Simpson, who glowered savagely and demanded to know when the *Dark Star* would sail.

"Day after to-morrow—if you'll give me some coal," Tom replied.

"Miss Stillings owns the coal. Ask her," Simpson grumbled.

"For the voyage back?" he asked hesitatingly.

Simpson's cold, blue eyes showed no sign of interest. He waved one hand at Alicia.

"I suppose you will be all right from now on?" she suggested.

Edwards' impulse to keep her with him was conquered by pride. "Certainly. I have my steamer loaded again and I see nothing to hinder my finishing the voyage. You go back and report us and put a stopper on gossip."

"I think that will be best," Alicia said sweetly. "And I don't think we need wait after we've given you the fuel, need we?"

Edwards found nothing to say. Presently he left and returned to the *Dark Star*, and

Peter Simpson gave orders to break fifty tons of coal out of the hold and load it in sacks on the other vessel. When this had been done the *Rachel* quietly hoisted anchor and slipped out of the bay and vanished into the dull mist. Tom Edwards saw her go. Alicia had not so much as said good-by. He had not even discerned her figure on deck when the *Rachel* went past him.

"She doesn't care!" he said bitterly to himself.

But Peter Simpson was listening to his employer's instructions at that moment.

"I am going to Hakodate, captain," she told him. "I promised Dick Hawley I would. I'll collect the freight there and we can see that the *Dark Star* gets across the Japan Sea safely."

Simpson nodded understandingly. He dropped a hint which was to be remembered long afterward. "I'll keep the *Rachel* traveling so long as you say so. But there's always a time when it pays to stop and reckon up."

Five days later the *Dark Star* came to an anchor under the lofty rock of Hakodate and Tom Edwards stared past the leaning junks at the squat, ungainly form of the *Rachel*. A bustling comprador came off and handed him a note from Alicia. He stared at the formal words that preceded her signature. Then he swore, and the comprador, wise in the ways of harassed mariners, cocked his black head on one shoulder and eyed the topmasts. Alicia had bought out Dick Hawley's interests and was now the charterer of the *Dark Star*, the owner of the cargo waiting in Vladivostok, and Tom Edwards' employer.

Now he knew she had solved her own problem long ago, without help. No one, even the most meticulous, could offer any criticism of a young woman who traveled the seas on business connected with her own freight and her own ships and her own employees.

"I wonder how much money she has?" Tom said to himself. "It's a mortal certainty she'll have mighty little if I don't manage to make the *Dark Star* behave." He considered grimly the idea of wrecking that wretched vessel, bankrupting Alicia, and then triumphantly running away with her.

The comprador recalled him. "Boss say you go——"

"Boss!" Edwards muttered in an awe-struck tone.

CHAPTER XII.

Alicia explained briefly that she had purchased Dick Hawley's business outright when she had found him incapable from physical weakness and mental stress of conducting it to a conclusion. Further than this she did not tell, though Tom Edwards understood pretty well that she thought herself a trustee rather than an outright owner. He went to Peter Simpson for further news and was rebuffed. The old captain's stony eyes were more than ever inscrutable. He insinuated that whatever money Miss Stillings had was his eventually.

"Unless," he admitted, "you do better than I ever expect you to do. I've found that young fellows are likely to make tremendous professions of zeal and uprightness and general respectability when they want to get a young woman's money," he reminded Tom. "The consequence is you'll be thinking always how a thing looks and not what it really is. You and the *Dark Star* will be forgotten in six months."

"But what would you do in my place?" Tom demanded, taken wholly by surprise.

"Me? I'd forget everything but myself," said the barbarous old man, and went off to consult with Martha about cabin stores.

Alicia showed a new face, too. The result was that the *Dark Star* completed discharging; procured more fuel, and sailed promptly for the Siberian port. She arrived in a season of dull, sluggish weather which was interpreted by the wise as portending a blizzard.

Edwards found that the cargo he was expected to load consisted of a vast deal of old iron, brass, zinc, and copper which had been scrapped during six or seven years on the Trans-Siberian Railway. He instantly saw its value in a high market. But to carry it all in the *Dark Star* was no simple proposal.

During the lading the steamer lay a cable's length offshore and the cargo was brought out on clumsy lighters and swung inboard by the *Dark Star's* own winches. Edwards, with the help of Ticknor, saw to the stowage and the trimming. When the last pound was on board the steamer floated almost awash. Even the calloused port officials, accustomed to loading junks and Japanese tramps, looked doubtful. Edwards scorned them all and put to sea out of St. Peter's Bay for Mororan to load three hundred tons of coal.

By good fortune the Japan Sea was calm during the passage, and they arrived safely in the roadstead of the coaling port. For twenty-four hours strangely clad natives climbed aboard from lighters and flung coal down any available opening. Then the *Dark Star* pulled in her mooring lines and slowly headed for the open Pacific.

Tom Edwards' advices were that the *Rachel* had waited in Hakodate until informed that the *Dark Star* had loaded in Vladivostok. Then Captain Simpson steamed out of the straits for home. It was likely that the steamer Alicia was on, being four knots the faster, was already far on her way before the *Dark Star* cleared the land.

"I only hope we get a good slant, sir," Ticknor, now chief officer, remarked to his commander when their vessel was heading into the ugly, stiff Pacific seas.

Tom glanced thoughtfully over the *Dark Star* and laughed. "She certainly looks in bad shape to buck a gale, doesn't she?"

Mr. Ticknor pondered this carefully. "Stiff," he remarked.

"And for a couple of weeks she was the other way," Edwards responded. "Then we were afraid she'd roll over; now she won't roll at all. That heavy stuff in her bottom is going to stiffen her frightfully."

Mr. Ticknor ventured a rash statement: "A ship of this kind can't stand up to the weather we're bound to run into."

His commander nodded absent-mindedly. His thoughts were really not on his ship at all; they were out in the Pacific with the *Rachel*. Presently he went below to consult Malcolmson about Peter Simpson.

The chief engineer gave Simpson a good name: "He used to be rather hot-headed and anxious to do more'n his share. It got him in wrong with a good many folks who like to see things go on in the usual way. Then they told about him that he was hard on crews. Lastly they made out that he was hard on ships. But he never lost one and always got in. However, he quit sailing years ago and started that ship chandlery in Oakland. Always done pretty well, but they say he's turned kind of savage in business. In fact, he tells everybody he is out to do them."

"Did you ever heard of him really cheating anybody?"

Mr. Malcolmson had not, most decidedly. "Nothing specific. All talk—gossip. But"

—the chief engineer threw a shrewd glance upon Edwards—"I allow that if Peter Simpson once started to do anybody he'd do him. I'll allow that there wouldn't be any stopping him, if he put his mind on it."

Edwards put this aside. "I can't like his taking so many risks with that old *Rachel*."

"Nobody ever threw any doubts on Peter's seamanship," Malcolmson replied.

So the *Dark Star* pursued her slow way across the Pacific, defying the elements, steaming steadily under the wintry sky, presenting the spectacle of a wholly unseaworthy vessel annulling the ordinary laws of nature. For her freeboard was too little to keep the smallest sea from flooding her decks, and her crew's estimates of her reserve buoyancy were nothing short of profane.

"And add to that that she's so stiff she stands up to everything and can't roll handily," said Bos'n Padger to the carpenter, "and we have the makings of a first-chop disaster. Just one hard blow, and one whooping sea, and the *Dark Star* will be dark for good."

"Fair criminal, I call it," said Chips morosely. "These young skippers!"

Padger cheerfully acknowledged that Captain Edwards was youthful. "But there's somewhat about the lad that makes me think he's going to pull through," he said. "And then, o' course, there's the young lady has a hold on us and is drawing us fast toward port."

"If he values that young woman's life," Chips remarked, "he'd ought to get her off that *Rachel*. I made one voyage in that old hooker and it was one too many. She's weak. Few people know it, but she wasn't rightly built for strength and some day she'll fall apart and drown some one."

"I reckon that's what makes Captain Edwards so anxious for news by wireless," the bos'n returned. "Ye can see that he's thinking a good deal more about the *Rachel* than about the *Dark Star*."

But the next day Edwards found his hands full with his own vessel. The gale that had held off for so long began to blow with a malicious bitterness that foretold a lengthy period of bad weather. From being merely "wet" the overladen steamer sullenly plunged and dived into the rising seas with a queer, intense quivering that brought frowns to the faces of her crew. Now and again she would roll violently, suddenly stressing every par-

ticle of her fabric and uttering a profound and melancholy note to the pitiless sky.

Mr. Malcolmson, seated in his pajamas on the much-spotted sofa down under the gauges, would listen, now leaning forward with a curious expression of discomfort as the ship lurched to port, then reclining like a sated epicure when she careened wildly to starboard.

"She's got a kind of a whimper like an old, cold woman," he told his assistant. "I can't make out what she means, but she means no good, I'll be bound."

The assistant glared out of his scorched eyes and demanded to be set ashore.

"If anything fetches adrift, down we go like bally stones," he insisted.

The third day of the gale Edwards found his steamer getting unmanageable. The constant belaboring of her by the sea, her tortured rolling and lurching, could be met by neither helm nor engines. The wind had started a vicious current running athwart her course, and she was slowly but surely yielding to it.

"I'll try to keep her going another hour," Edwards told Ticknor when a roaring comber had brought the *Dark Star* to a full stop, leaving her to lurch drunkenly in a thunderous hollow.

The youthful mate nodded, balanced himself agilely against a tremendous dive, and brought up with a run alongside his commander. They clutched each other frantically an instant, then fell apart, panting like wrestlers. And above the roar of the sea and the resonant boom of the wind they heard a sharp, slender, poignant sound, as if a bullet had flicked by. They both turned and stared upward. The wireless bridle had snapped and the aërials were outflung like strands of hair.

"Get that rigged again, mister," Tom ordered. Then he peered at the topmasts and added: "From the lower masts. Those topmasts are going."

But this task proved formidable beyond all expectations. Ten hours scarcely saw the wireless again in a condition to operate, and by this time the *Dark Star* was barely surviving.

"A good smashed hatch would put us out of our misery," Mr. Ticknor said wearily. "I'll bet we haven't enough reserves of buoyancy to lift us out if we once get both decks filled. By gad, sir, feel that!" The steamer sank swiftly into a valley between two long

seas exactly as a shot duck drops out of the sky. The water rose up her flanks, foamed to the bulwarks, and cascaded down into the decks. Still the *Dark Star* did not rise. Instead she lay inert, rolling sharply through a small arc. The men on the bridge hung on grimly, watching the islandlike fore-castlehead which seemed sinking slowly. Would it rise again? Could the ship clear herself? Was this the end of the voyage? The fore-castle emerged with a rush and the water roared away and disclosed the figure of Padger caught, as it were, in the sliding door that closed the alleyway into the crew's quarters. The old man withdrew suddenly and the door slid shut.

"By thunder, the bos'n has quit!" Edwards cried.

Mr. Ticknor shouted in response: "Quite time, too! No place down there for any sailorman. Whew!"

Another sea took advantage of the steamer's sluggishness and drowned the after deck. A great spurt of water shot out of the welter and licked a boat from the chocks just below the bridge.

Edwards took a sudden resolution. "Get the oil bags out, Mr. Ticknor. We'll make a slick for her to ride in."

So the oil was used and the *Dark Star* was eased so that she ceased to plunge and dive and took the seas almost on the beam. She became dry and lively. It was impossible to keep one's footing on her decks, but the risk was gone of being swept overside. Padger came out of his refuge and solemnly resumed work. Malcolmson rose from the depths to talk briefly of condensers and boiler stays.

"I hate to waste time this way," Edwards informed him. "But she won't take much harm."

"You couldn't have driven her another hour," the chief said gravely.

"This gale may last out the week," Edwards complained.

"Who would sell a farm and go to sea?" Malcolmson rejoined, recurring to the ancient question. "I'll warrant the *Rachel* is doing badly, too."

"I hope not," was the fervent response. "She's in good trim and fast. Old Simpson would have run clean out of this gale long ago."

"You don't know him!"

The engineer's tone was suddenly acrimonious. Edwards stared.

"Peter is that kind of a sailorman," Mal-

colmson went on. "Hard on ships. He swears meteorology is a swindle from first to last. You can bet he's bucking away on his course. You can't persuade him to go around a storm."

"He's got wireless," the captain reminded him.

"Augh!" Malcolmson snorted. "What good would that do him—up here?"

"We're here, and he knows it," Edwards returned.

The engineer lifted his eyes in supreme disgust. "Yes, we're here! And much good we would be to any one!"

His commander offered no response. But he appeared to consider the *Dark Star* in relation to her capacity for a rescue. And this done he called the bos'n.

The old man came and made his report, in a slightly ironical manner.

"Nonsense, bos'n! You've been in plenty of worse pinches than this!"

"Yes," said Padger, raising his voice, "yes, sir, I have. But I was always a fool, sir. I might have been a gardener and slept dry in a decent house ashore. First off, I was too young to have any sense. Then I got too old to have sense."

Edwards smiled tolerantly. Compared with this timeworn seaman he felt his youth, his own pertinacity, his own inexhaustible energy. And then—he confessed it exultantly—there was Alicia!

For days, now, he had steadfastly put her out of his thoughts. He had fixed his mind on the *Dark Star* and winning to port. But at this instant he realized that, after all, this was only an incident, an episode in his life.

The wireless operator clambered up with his oilskin book and laid it under the hood of the chart shelf, with a significant gesture. Edwards went over and sheltered the inclosed paper with his hands and read the message. The *Rachel* reported herself sinking and asked for help.

Methodically he consulted the chart and marked the position given in the call. He sucked in his salty lips. Evidently Peter Simpson had had hard luck. He had made little progress. His ship was going down a scant seventy miles to the eastward of the *Dark Star*.

Without an instant's hesitation Edwards had made his resolve. He proceeded to execute it. He bade the operator call the *Rachel*.

"Tell them we are proceeding to their as-

sistance and will reach them at midnight," he said. Then he gave orders to haul the *Dark Star* back on her course. He summoned the chief engineer and demanded all the speed the machines were capable of.

Malcolmson listened, glanced at the sea, sniffed the shrilling wind, and retired without speech. Mr. Ticknor gulped a couple of times and beckoned the bos'n.

"I'll give you fifteen minutes to get the hatches battened down more surely and the ventilator cowls stopped. See to it that there is no opening anywhere for water to get below, bos'n."

During this time the steamer continued her wallowing in the trough, amid the oil slick. Edwards saw the carpenter wielding his maul on the wedges, the bos'n stopping the ventilators at the deck, a few hands working hastily to secure the cargo booms better. Then he walked over to the trap hatch and lifted it and looked down on the round head of the quartermaster at the wheel.

"Due east," he said in a tremendous voice.

The man at the wheel looked up suddenly, open-mouthed.

"Due east, quartermaster!" Edwards boomed.

The man repeated it in a croaking cry, "Due east, sir!" He put the wheel over.

Edwards reached out and jammed the telegraph lever from quarter ahead to full ahead, listened for the clang of gongs below, and repeated the movement. There was a pause. Then the indicator fell sharply and a telltale bell on the bridge signified that the order had been recognized and obeyed. The *Dark Star* lifted her heavy stem and cut a great slice out of a towering surge. She swung still farther into the wind, took the prodigious impact of the next hurtling sea full on her bows, and lay down to her work. She slipped out of the oil slick. The crests rose about her swiftly, flooded her decks, crashed against the bulwarks, and rose to the bridge.

"She won't live half an hour," Ticknor gasped when he regained the bridge. "Her plates are jumping like withes."

But the steamer survived for two hours. Yet in the darkness of the winter's evening she was harder to watch. Several times she was swept so heavily that even Edwards held his breath. He was using the engines, now, and the clangor of the gongs was incessant. A hasty trip by Ticknor to the depths gave

the information that Malcolmson had called his entire crew and was himself at the machines.

By this time the gale was at its height. It shrilled out of the blackness with an extravagant note of bitterness.

The wireless operator had reported that his calls for the *Rachel* had not been answered. He had been able to pick up nothing.

"In four hours more we'll be there," Edwards told the mate when he suggested that the other steamer had already perished.

"Yes, sir," was the reply. Ticknor had little expectation of surviving another watch, and kept to monosyllables.

At midnight the *Dark Star* was, herself, in extremely bad shape. One hatch had been smashed at the coaming and all the endeavors of Padger and his men had failed to stop the hole efficiently. The reserves of the steamer were being rapidly exhausted.

"We've steamed past them, if they're afloat sir," the mate shouted. "They're probably down wind—to leeward."

From the wing went up a rocket, hissing into the smother with wild flarings. For a moment it lit up a circle of seething mountains of water, the half submerged structure of the *Dark Star* and went out, leaving the watchers to feel the pain of utter blackness.

"I'll keep on a while," Edwards cried desperately.

Half an hour later he heard the vague tinkle of the engine-room telegraph. He leaped to the dial and peered into it. Malcolmson had stopped the machines. He jerked the speaking tube up and blew down it furiously. He put it to his ear. The assistant was speaking:

"Main feed pumps, sir—condenser—no vacuum——"

Edwards dropped the tube and gave his orders rapidly. Ticknor dropped from the bridge with Padger and a quartermaster. The carpenter emerged from the wheelhouse, ax in hand, and joined the little cluster at the break of the bridge deck. Below them the forward deck was invisible, buried in wildly tossing water. Beyond that a dim glimmer of light showed that the forecabin was still unsubmerged.

"She'll do, with the oil bags and the anchors out," Edwards told Mr. Ticknor. "See the chief and find out how long he will be."

The report was that Malcolmson could promise nothing.

The next hour was to live in Edwards' memory as the longest of recorded time. He forgot the plight of his own vessel in the discovery that nothing mattered if he was unable to find the *Rachel*. Alicia was the single being existent for him. He went over and over all his acquaintance with her. To his amazement he found that during a friendship which had never yielded a moment's articulate tenderness he could recall a thousand little intonations of her voice that marked a shy, reserved emotion in his company. She had been different with him than with any others.

"And we'll never even have kissed," he told himself.

At four in the morning the engine room reported that repairs had been made. Tom ordered hove in the anchors which had acted as a drag to keep the *Dark Star* head to the sea, and resumed his slow drive eastward. He laughed when he thought what a frail refuge he had to offer the people on the *Rachel*, if he found them.

Half an hour before the dawn Ticknor shouted wildly. An instant later Edwards himself perceived an infinitesimal spark of light through the smother to windward, a couple of points on the bow. Rockets flared up in answer, lavishly telling of the *Dark Star's* inexorable resolve to save.

"We ought to pick 'em up in a few minutes," Edwards cried, and dispatched all available hands with heaving lines to be ready in case the survivors of the *Rachel* were in small boats. He threw caution to the winds and drove the shattered steamer toward the position where the light had shown. It had quickly vanished, as if only shown by some superhuman effort which could not be repeated.

The dawn found the *Dark Star* alone on the desolate sea. No sign of the *Rachel* had been found.

CHAPTER XIII.

At noon of the day after the sighting of the light which marked the last despairing appeal of the *Rachel*, Tom Edwards turned his steamer's head directly westward. He had listened to his officers without remark. They had pleaded the cause of the almost sinking *Dark Star* and pleaded it in vain.

"It wasn't the *Rachel* herself," Edwards

said curtly. "It was a boat they managed to launch when their ship sank. I'm going after that boat."

Malcolmson withdrew from the conference quietly with dignity. His expression was that of a man face to face with a sublime illusion. Ticknor, on the other hand, was openly scornful of his commander's sanity.

"Your idea is that no one has anything waiting for 'em ashore except yourself," he told his superior hoarsely. "You've run this old tramp into staves. She's opening up like an old barrel in the sun. Go on! Sink her! You set out to lose her!"

Edwards stared at him soberly. Then he directed his attention to other matters. The gale was rapidly going down and the sea becoming moderate. But later he summoned Ticknor and showed him the chart.

"I figure that a small boat would run quartering," he told him. "It's just four hundred miles to the most easterly of the Kuriles. Peter Simpson would make for that. We'll go see."

Ticknor went down to consult Malcolmson.

"We don't have to stand for this," he said savagely.

"For what?"

"For turning round and going north," the young chief officer retorted. "As if any small boat could survive! As if they really launched one from the *Rachel*."

The mate suddenly assumed a sober and responsible air: "We daren't let this go further," he said firmly. "We must stand together."

The chief engineer cocked a weary eye to the throbbing gauges. "On what?"

"Making the skipper see reason—making him resume our voyage to the coast."

"Why?" Malcolmson seemed ready to listen to arguments.

"Because we're breaking our voyage, invalidating our insurance, and risking the vessel and all our lives for no reason at all," Ticknor growled. He seemed sure of his technical ground.

"And you want me to join you in going to Captain Edwards?"

"Certainly."

The chief engineer wiped his gray lips with the back of one lean, knotty hand. "You make me sick," he said bitterly.

"I talk sense, at least."

The engineer scorned him with a glance. "Didn't we see a light during that gale in

the position where the *Rachel* reported herself sinking?"

"I don't see——"

"You do *not*. You and your filthy sea-lawyer reasons for quitting. By thunder, that light was shown by men dying on deep waters—and a woman—two women. And you'd 'resume the voyage!'"

"Because the skipper is in love——"

"Sh-h-h-h!" Malcolmson's hiss thrilled the noisy engine room. His voice fell: "What would you do if a glimmer of light from a girl you loved had showed through the spindrift of a gale? You'd mark it down in the log, I reckon, and continue your voyage with three thousand tons of eternally condemned junk loaded in a thrice-damned steamer manned by men of priceless virtue and ineffable value. You wouldn't break the voyage, would you, to drive north to overhaul the woman you loved sitting in a half-swamped boat among half-drowned men? And you dare speak of a man—who is a man—being in love, and speak of it sneeringly, when you ought to thank God that you earn your salt on a job that once in a while calls for a real man, and gives him a chance to turn aside from dirty routine and do—or die."

The mate withdrew hesitatingly, like a man reluctant to confess himself bested. Malcolmson flung an inarticulate curse after him and then raised his voice unmelodiously to his men in reproof, exhortation, and recrimination.

All night long the *Dark Star* plunged on, emitting the glare of soaring rockets, suffused with the nimbus of coston signals, calling into the blackness with the plangent scream of piercing beams. At regular intervals her siren choked, gulped, and roared above the noise of wind and sea. In the dawn Edwards wrote up his orders, swallowed a cup of steaming coffee, and resumed his vigil. The day passed like a desolate ebb tide of time. The darkness came once more, sullen and pitiless. Edwards sent up the first rocket himself and when it had died peered into the murk for the little spark of light that would be his answer. None showed. Ticknor, professionally busied, morose, bitter, gave vent to the opinion that he was the unwilling witness of a gross extravagance. He murmured something about "valuable lives" and was confounded when Edwards responded with restrained meekness, apologizing.

"I ought to have picked the boat up inside an hour after she showed us that little flare," he said. "It was my fault."

Ticknor instantly felt a flood of generous feeling. He admitted the fault and condoned it. He intimated with nobility that he did not fear for himself.

This bettered conditions on the bridge.

Before midnight the supply of rockets was almost exhausted, and most unwillingly Edwards had been forced to lengthen the intervals to an hour and slow his steamer to quarter speed. But at eleven o'clock he himself detected a tiny spark almost abeam, so distant as to evade direct gaze. Without a word he altered the *Dark Star's* course, heading her for the point where he had seen that forlorn signal. He ordered another rocket to be sent up. The response to this was a second dot of light almost ahead, which many eyes saw. Cries rose from the observers and down in the engine room Malcolmson, sleepless and testy, heard the vague news.

The sea, while crested and heavy, was not terrifying. In perfect style the preparations for rescue were made. The light appeared nearer, at more frequent intervals.

"An electric flash light, sir," Ticknor said deferentially. "I hope the ladies are safe."

Edwards made no reply to this. He maintained a steady and calm demeanor, as though he was about a commonplace task. He gave no sign that the moments which must pass before he knew the truth were torture. And in due time the *Dark Star's* searchlight sizzled from the bridge and its sharp pencil of brilliancy swept the waters, coming to a halt when a small boat tossed into the beam, sank away out of it, rose again into the full luminous glare of it.

The steamer swung slowly, steamed up, and afforded a lee. Ticknor leaped into activity, aided by Padger and his men. A low, hoarse murmur came from the small boat, answered by the triumphant bellow of the bos'n. Edwards stood looking down on the scene, imperturbable and commanding. Lines whistled out. The lead of one plumped into the boat. On the top of a sweeping sea it swam up under the *Dark Star's* low bulwarks. Followed a tremendous to-do, shouts, silences, then a wild, cackling cheer. Two sailors had dropped into the almost water-logged craft to hook on the blocks of the falls. Edwards began to lean over the bridge rail, his eyes burning into the dimness in

which the great tragedy or the enormous triumph of his life was being completed. He saw the boat rise suddenly as the men fell back on the ropes and hove in. It floated upward out of the sea into the lights of the deck like an ethereal and sublime vehicle, bringing souls up from death.

He shut his eyes, clinging to the rail with both hands, swaying on his feet. The boat was level with his knees, with his waist, with his breast. He opened his eyes and stared at the pallid and hollow faces so close to his. He saw the bristling head of Peter Simpson, the yellow polls of a couple of hands, the dark, austere visage of a man he knew to be a stoker by the rag still bound about his forehead. He moved his eyes on, to a bowed head, shining sleekly in the light. He groaned. Martha Simpson lifted her face to his and moved her lips without a sound. He leaned far out to catch what she was saying, heedless of the men clambering around him to swing the boat inboard. Martha met his beseeching and importunate gaze and moved her lips again:

"Here."

She made a small gesture. He followed its direction and perceived that Martha held some one whose head lay in her sodden lap. The light fell clearly on Alicia's upturned white face and closed eyes. The boat creaked inboard to the clutch of willing hands. With a single sweep Edwards thrust his arms downward and took Alicia up into his arms and through the open door of his cabin. There, under the swinging lamps, he laid her down tenderly on the lounge. No breath parted her lips. Her hands were icy, her cheeks marble. She lay, delicate and immobile, sublimely unconscious of the man who swayed over her. He sank to his knees—his head fell on the seeping hem of her torn sleeve—he sighed profoundly and relaxed, one arm thrown about her.

"The skipper hasn't slept a wink for eight days," the chief engineer remarked, balancing himself opposite the shambling figure of Peter Simpson. "You can thank God he didn't." Malcolmson's bloodshot eyes gleamed austere. "It's hard on a youngster."

The old man facing him nodded, as much as to say that age knew better, knew what it would get out of life.

"The two girls——" he rumbled.

Malcolmson stared down at the captain,

overcome by mortal weariness, sorrow, and failure. "We could move him down to my digs," he remarked. "That would give your daughter and the other young woman this cabin—think they can do all right?"

"Yes," Peter Simpson returned, in a murmur. "Minxes!"

Mr. Ticknor thrust in his head respectfully. "Excuse me, I wanted to ask the captain the orders!"

Peter Simpson roused himself and croaked, "Nor' nor'east, a quarter east till eight in the morning, mister. Three-quarters speed."

The mate concealed his chagrin at being thus promptly ousted from his temporary command of the *Dark Star* and shot another question: "Any need to show any more flares, sir?"

Captain Simpson closed the history of the *Rachel* with a curt, hoarse, "No."

Mr. Ticknor had hardly vanished when the door opened again and Martha and Alicia appeared, wan, faint, trembling. They paused and stared fearfully at the figure lying by the lounge.

"Asleep," said Malcolmson gently. "I'm afraid he thought he was too late when he picked you out of the boat, Miss Stillings."

Alicia craned her slender neck shyly. "He thinks—he thought I wasn't alive?" she asked in a thin voice.

"Yes."

"Oh, I must tell him I *am* here," she cried, ran and knelt and bent over Edwards with a benign gesture. She called into his ear, "Tom! I'm all right! Tom!"

Peter Simpson coughed furiously. "Minxes!" he muttered, and fixed his cold, stony, blue eyes on Malcolmson. The unconscious man on the floor stirred uneasily, thrust out a groping hand. Alicia took it into her own. His face slowly cleared of its pain. He sighed softly and relaxed again.

CHAPTER XIV.

All the next day, while the *Dark Star* steamed toward the coast, still two thousand miles away, her young captain lay senseless in the chief engineer's berth. Martha Simpson had constituted herself nurse the morning after the rescue. She had wakened, found her father, inexorable old man, on the bridge, received with spirit his scolding for her being up so early and gone to inquire of Mr. Malcolmson about the health of Tom Edwards. The engineer had indi-

cated his patient with a stiff gesture. With perfect composure Martha had examined him, felt his pulse, and listened to his breathing. Then she turned to Malcolmson.

"You old men have no sense at all," she remarked, tossing her sleek head.

Malcolmson assumed an expression of anxiety. "I did the best I knew how for him," he mumbled.

"Oh, *him*," she returned equably. "He's merely worn out. I'll look after him. But you're sick. I'll warrant you haven't been off watch for weeks. And now you are going to bed."

The chief remonstrated. He said that Captain Simpson who had been shipwrecked, adrift in a small boat in mortal weather, ought to be wrapped up warmly and between blankets. He himself was all right. The girl sniffed loudly. She glanced at his gray cheeks, his wrinkled chin, his peaked nose, his burned-out eyes. With a kind gesture she made him understand that he was helpless. She pounded a hard pillow and placed it at an exact angle on the lounge, swept a blanket from the floor and looked at him with eyes imperious and maternal. Like a flood weariness poured over Malcolmson, enveloped him in its turgid and irresistible tide, washed his mind of consciousness, and drew him down into the depths of sleep. Martha nodded, adjusted the pillow under his grizzled head, and stood looking at him triumphantly, finger on lip. She appeared to enjoy a sense of pride that she could so enforce her will on an experienced and obstinate old man.

Then she went to Edwards' side and leaned over him. When Ticknor came in, almost reverential in his obsequiousness, he found her washing his commander's face. He viewed this operation with amazement and awe. Martha went on till she had finished, then swung on him.

"You're the mate, aren't you?" she asked crisply.

"Yes, ma'am," Ticknor said respectfully.

"And while Captain Edwards is sick and unconscious and you ought to be handling the steamer, you let my poor old father stand watch up there in the sleet and cold!" Her cloudless eyes appraised him.

"Captain Simpson took charge himself," he returned in a profoundly aggrieved voice.

"Oh!" Martha responded in a tone delicately blended of complete understanding of the reason why her father distrusted

Ticknor and of maidenly wonder at Ticknor's endurance of such a slight. She proceeded with her ministrations.

"How soon do you think Captain Edwards will wake up?" the mate proceeded. "The steamer is quite unseaworthy," he told her, "though I wouldn't worry you if I could help it."

"Does father know it's unseaworthy?"

"He's not the captain!" he replied with dignity, as though such a problem was impossible of discussion with a lesser personage. In his voice was a peculiar intonation which stirred her to anger. But whatever she might have said was unuttered. Tom Edwards suddenly sat up, his eyes blazing. He appeared not to have seen Martha.

"Who's not captain of this ship?" he demanded in a voice that shook the room.

"I was just—it occurred to me to ask if you were awake, sir," Mr. Ticknor stammered.

Edwards glanced at him with contempt, then stared at Martha. It was apparent that he was still dazed, trying to gather his thoughts into coherence. Martha discerned his, Edwards' fear. She leaned forward and said quietly, "You fell unconscious before Alicia revived enough to tell you she was all right."

He pondered this, and then his fiery eyes lost their look of agony. "Is she—*alive*?"

Mr. Ticknor now saw a chance to say something agreeable. "Not only alive but well," he interposed cheerfully. "Hope you'll soon be about, too, sir." He withdrew and closed the door.

"Tell me what happened to the *Rachel*," Edwards pleaded.

Martha smiled. "She started to leak and didn't quit. When she was half full she turned over. One boat got away—with six."

"The others?"

"Gone," she said simply. He looked up and saw that her eyes were filled. For one long moment he saw in a vision the end of the *Rachel*, going down in the terrific seas, amid choked cries, a single boat soaring away out of her last flurry to fly before the gale into hopeless night. He bowed his head and gave the *Rachel* her due.

"Good old packet!"

"And father wouldn't talk for a day and a night," Martha went on in her pleasant voice. "He just stared ahead, steering with an oar."

"Then?"

"Then he told us he was going to make for some island or other. He told us you would pick us up."

Edwards swung his long legs out of the berth and showed a face colored with the flush of boyish delight.

"He knew it!" he murmured, awe-struck. "Good old Peter Simpson!"

"He's on the bridge now," Martha suggested.

He rose and pulled his rumpled clothes straight and departed, a little weakly, but with the old swing. And when the door, opening for a moment to let in the thunder of the engines, had closed on him the girl bowed her face in her hands and sobbed brokenly. She did not observe Malcolmson when he roused up, but when she turned and saw him she fled to him with a little cry, as to a sure refuge. The chief engineer, unrefreshed by his short nap, gazed at the head on his breast with a beneficent glance. He patted it with his shaking hand, but said nothing. He saw the empty berth. Out of the vast storehouse of his memory he instantly matched the sorrow of the sobbing Martha.

On the bridge Tom Edwards asserted himself quickly and effectively. Peter Simpson yielded and started below. He staggered toward the bridge ladder. He looked incredibly old. "I lost the *Rachel*," he mumbled. "I was too hard on the old packet." He gulped over his unbelievable confession: "The fact is, I turned back to find the *Dark Star*."

Edwards stared. Slowly he comprehended this: that when Peter Simpson was well on his way to port he had deliberately turned back into a winter's gale to assure himself of the safety of the *Dark Star*. Then the meaning of this struck home. He recognized the matter-of-fact deed of a master mariner capable, even in old age, of making the world dwindle to nothing in the fire of his splendid desire.

"By thunder, you did it for Alicia!" Tom whispered.

Peter stiffened, his ice-cold blue eyes steadily on his auditor: "I did it for thirty thousand dollars," he croaked. "You'll marry a poor woman, young man. I'll live in comfort on the money you both might have saved by being sensible." With this he departed down the ladder.

Edwards gazed after him and slowly re-

gained consciousness of his immediate duties. He summoned the mate. He said curtly: "I want you to understand that this steamer makes the Golden Gate in eleven days. I want to hear no more of your whining. What do you mean by having your decks so dirty? That starboard boat needs relashing. Get after the crew and get this ship clean. That's all, mister."

Having given these commands Edwards knocked on the door of his own cabin. Alicia opened to him. They stood looking at each other, she in hastily dried clothes that betrayed her figure, he unshaven and unkempt and haggard. They swung easily to the quick, jerky roll of the *Dark Star*, conscious of nothing but the moment. He spoke first, in a muffled voice.

"I'm glad you are all right."

Alicia smiled. "You look pretty well fagged."

"I was anxious," he said simply.

"It's too bad we had to lose the *Rachel*."

"Hard on Dick Hawley," he returned.

"Dick would—will——"

"He knows," Edwards remarked confidently. "I don't know by any wireless or message, but I've a notion that he knows we all pulled through, even if he died. It was kind of predestined, I guess."

"I'd like to think so," Alicia murmured. "It would please him to know it, though, of course, he'd be sorry about the *Rachel* and those brave boys who went down with her. They were very brave, Tom."

"I know it," he responded gravely. "I'm grateful to them."

She fell in with his mood. "When shall we get into San Francisco, Tom?"

"Eleven days hence," he answered promptly. "Then——" He paused. "I wonder what my father—and Greening—and the rest will say then?" he finished.

"They can't say much, can they?"

"Oh, they've got to say something," Edwards replied with absolute assurance. "I have it already fixed what they will say. And they'll say it! I give you my word they'll say just what I expect them to say. I'll make them say it." He drew a deep breath. "Now I have something to say—to you, Alicia."

She became very still. He saw that she knew what was in his heart, but her eyes gave him no encouragement.

"I love you," he said in a restrained, muffled voice. "I've always loved you since I

knew you, I guess. Will you marry me when we get ashore?"

Alicia considered this thoughtfully, a fine color mantling in her cheeks. Finally she sighed.

"I'm very proud," she said, "of what you have done. But I can't marry you." She lifted her eyes to his for pity. "Will you try to understand? You haven't won me."

Tom stared at her with burning eyes. He seemed to be gathering himself to snatch her into his arms, to crush her into yielding, into submission. But she confronted him with composure, with a gentle confidence in her own unapproachable and untouchable spirit. He suddenly gave way. A curious expression of perplexity showed on his face.

"In seven days," he said briefly, and went about his work.

The following week, though the weather continued moderate for the season and the latitudes, Edwards kept watch unceasingly. He was taciturn and reserved. He said little to any one—nothing to Alicia. Yet she saw that he was not hurt nor offended. She felt his constant thought for her comfort and her welfare.

During the short passage into the Golden Gate, Edwards kept his reserve and ignored Alicia's attempts to draw him to conversation. By this time she felt that she had not satisfied the demands of common gratitude. Womanlike, she reasoned on the basis of what he had achieved, not on the basis of what she had herself suffered to help him to success. And when the *Dark Star* finally docked, amid the amazed comments of the water front, and Edwards had quietly performed the needful tasks and attended to the details and so vanished, she wept secretly.

For several days she had to manage the affairs which Dick Hawley, who had died the day the *Rachel* sailed, had left to her care. Then the hour came when, as charterer of the steamer, owner of the cargo, and heir to Hawley, she had to meet Robert Edwards himself, head of the Inter-ocean line. She had neither seen nor heard of Tom.

She entered the big office on Market Street with an assured step and head held high.

CHAPTER XV.

The great Robert Edwards rose easily from his chair when Miss Stillings was ushered in and bowed. That single act, performed with gravity, self-assurance, and con-

summate grace, gave Alicia a thrill. She took the offered seat and announced her business.

"I have the papers here, Miss Stillings," Robert said in his great, muffled tones. "My figures show that the end of the voyage leaves us still some nine thousand your creditor."

Alicia's face was unchanged, though she understood perfectly the insolence of this falsity. She merely said, "I have my papers here—and copies of some affidavits, one by a Mr. Greening, who is in your employ."

Robert nodded. His features displayed no surprise. He took the papers and spent a long time studying them. When he looked up she saw a little tinge of gray under his ruddy skin.

"I see you demand thirty thousand dollars in balance," he remarked. "On the strength of the foolish allegations in these papers—plot to wreck the *Dark Star*, conspiracy, and so forth. That is blackmail, Miss Stillings. You have been ill advised."

"The amount is the precise sum Mr. Hawley's estate and myself have lost through your efforts," Alicia returned. "You insured the *Rachel*."

"But you got your freight money in Hakodate and your cargo home safely!"

"And I lost the *Rachel* and eight lives," she replied with perfect composure. "The relatives of the men who perished on the *Rachel* require some compensation in mere justice. I have settled that, you see. Then I had to pay Captain Simpson his loss."

"Simpson is an old scoundrel! He charged you ten times what any court in the land would give him."

"It was you who paid Mr. Greening to report the *Dark Star* lost at sea, Mr. Edwards. He swears to that statement, you see."

The man changed countenance for the first time. "My worthless son put you up to this!" he said in a coarse tone.

Alicia replied with a quiet and convincing, "No." Then she waited.

Presently Robert Edwards looked at her and asked crisply: "And if I refuse to settle?"

"Mr. Greening will be arrested before night. You will learn, and the public will learn, how you tried to kill your son."

Edwards got to his feet and went to the window. He stood there a long time. When he turned to his visitor again she saw that he was strangely moved.

"It was either he or myself," he said curtly. "Make or break! But I want you to understand that when I put him up against all this I felt he would win out. It's in our blood to win—when we want something most of all in the world. That's why he won, Miss Stillings. I reckon, after all, I didn't want anything very badly. I've played a half-hearted game. It's my way, when I go in for a thing, to go in regardless. I started this business that way. I spared no pains to show the boy what it means to have me against him, to have the world against him. Greening was my man. Timms was shrewd enough to see which side his bread was buttered. But Tom won. Believe me, or not, I'm glad."

Alicia listened with growing wonder. She felt the man's brutal simplicity and purposefulness. He made no apologies for his crime. He raised no question of right or wrong, made no suggestion of paternal rights or filial duty. And when he sat down at his desk again she dropped her eyes.

"Why didn't you send your lawyer around on this affair?" Edwards asked. "You have mismanaged it—an attorney would say—horribly."

"I see no reason for a lawyer," she answered gravely. "You settle the exact losses and we are square."

Robert stared at her thoughtfully. "By the way," he said abruptly, "where is Tom?"

"I don't know."

He leaned forward excitedly. "Didn't you promise to marry him?"

"No."

He seized the telephone and called a number. She heard his questions. When he put the receiver back on the hook his face was almost pale.

"You come here and try to make me believe Tom won," he said haltingly. "It's a lie. I've won." He reached over with a savage gesture and tore the papers into ribbons.

Alicia half rose from her chair. She tried to speak and failed. Only her lips moved. Her sudden, piercing glance arrested Edwards' triumph. He attempted to evade its message by a rude "Afraid for your property?"

She grew very still. Her color ebbed slowly, leaving her face miraculously clear, as if the silken skin was transparent and the pure flesh translucent. Only her eyes remained at once human and terrible.

IOB P

At last she spoke:

"Where's Tom?"

Edwards laughed, by some tremendous effort of his will. "Sailed on the *Dark Star* for Cape Town with a cargo of structural steel."

"You sent him?" Her words were an accusation of unfairness, of wicked treachery to his bargain.

He met her eyes bitterly. "No. You sent him. The bargain was fair enough, and I did my part: he wanted you. He scorned me and this company and all his duties to it. He threw it all up because you were the biggest thing in his world. He defied me! And when he had won—you told him you wouldn't marry him. I didn't send him on the *Dark Star* again. He went and offered for the job. I knew nothing about it till now. Young lady, your proofs of my wrongdoing fall to the ground. My son has taken the unseaworthy ship to sea again." He snapped his fingers, in a trifling gesture that enraged her.

"You fiend!" she cried.

"Fiend? I never gave him to understand that he had anything to gain by defying me! You are the one who deceived him."

They rose and confronted each other, the despot and the girl. The bitter truth was out. Alicia looked into her own heart. What this man had said was true, no matter what thousand excuses or explanations or interpretations might be alleged: she had allowed Tom Edwards to count on her, to throw over all that the world called his prosperity to be free to claim her; and she had sacrificed intensely to help him, had almost scorned her own world to go to him, and when all was won, she had quietly and composedly told him that, with all his doing, he had not won her.

"You thought you'd make me eat dirt, just to finish this play out," Edwards remarked. "You played the game for Tom till he held all the cards. Then you dissolved partnership and tried to cash in your own chips."

The sheer brutality of this braced her. After all, the man here had given her the hint for conquering: to want something more than all the world. Her racing thoughts ran down the thing she must do. She laughed, and her voice lingered on the words she murmured:

"I don't want the money—now." She indicated the torn scraps of the damning docu-

ments. "I asked the wrong recompense, Mr. Edwards. I'm ready to strike a fresh bargain."

His eyes brightened with relief. "Now you are talking sense," he said. "Of course, I'm not going to see you lose money, Miss Stillings. What do you say? Five thousand?"

"Tom," she said.

"Five thousand?" he repeated, frowning.

"Tom. Give me Tom."

Mr. Edwards recognized defeat at last. He tried to postpone it. "What do you mean? I can't give you Tom. He's at sea on the *Dark Star*."

"Send a wireless for the *Dark Star* to return to port," she said firmly.

"If I do—we forget all the past?"

"Your past," Alicia said with gentle serenity.

He gave her a grim look, resigned and exultant. He summoned a clerk.

"Have a wireless sent for the *Dark Star* to return to San Francisco immediately," he directed. He turned to Alicia: "She should be in her berth again day after to-morrow. Does that satisfy you?"

Alicia bowed. He ushered her to the door with easy grace, murmuring formalities. She went out of the office with a simple manner of detachment as though she were ignorant of the offices' mysteries and indifferent to its existence.

In the evening of the third day afterward the maid showed Tom Edwards into her music room. She sat on the polished floor under the lights with the South Sea drum before her. When Tom entered she rose and shook hands, blushing much. He was evidently puzzled.

"I get called back from a voyage and am told at the wharf that you sent for me," he said. "Anything happened?"

Alicia dropped her eyes. "Yes," she said.

"That I ought to know?" he went on, oddly stiff and formal.

"That you ought to know, Tom," she said lingeringly.

"What is it?"

She hesitated and her cheeks grew crimson. Then she lifted her eyes splendidly and murmured, "You've won, Tom."

He met that pure gaze and thrilled. Slowly, comprehension of the truth roused him. He said stammeringly, in a great voice: "You?"

She smiled wryly. "Me."

As they stood, enchanted by the brightness of their new world, a husky voice was heard in the passage and Peter Simpson and Martha appeared. At sight of the two so still, gazing into each other's eyes, Martha gave a faint gasp. Then she halted her father.

Alicia roused herself to receive them, Peter scanned her with his cold blue eyes and then turned to Tom. "I thought you were at sea again, captain?"

"I came back to marry Miss Stillings," he replied.

Captain Simpson smiled, patting Martha's hand as it lay on his arm. "You oughtn't to marry a poor girl," he croaked.

Tom smiled, too. "It never occurred to me. It doesn't matter." He met Alicia's half-frightened eyes with a glance that brought the color leaping to her face.

"She paid me thirty thousand dollars," Simpson went on in an odd tone. "I earned it."

"Of course!" Alicia said quickly.

Peter grunted. "I'm a rascal, and I'm proud of it," he remarked. "You admit I got the money. You admit I earned it. I never earned an honest dollar in my life—and was able to keep it." He drew out an old wallet and extracted a slip of paper. "Here's the twenty-eight thousand I really earned. It's yours, young folks. You will need it. I'll keep the odd thousands I cheated you of—for Martha."

"But it's yours, Captain Simpson!" Alicia cried.

"To give you as a wedding present," said the old man, his changeless blue eyes staring into hers stonily.

With a little cry Martha quitted his arm and rushed across to Alicia and embraced her warmly. "Oh, Alicia! You darling!"

Alicia turned moist eyes to Tom. He was staring at the doorway. She followed that amazed glance and saw Robert Edwards, tall, composed, imperious. He seemed to stand there as though the scene were for his benefit. His handsome face was slightly flushed with pleasure.

"Mr. Edwards!" Alicia murmured, suddenly mindful that she was the hostess and this man her guest.

To her complete astonishment he responded with a graceful wave of the hand, disclosing a compact parcel of papers. "I

"hope I'm not too late?" he said in a sonorous tone.

Tom took up the question: "Too late? Yes." He threw a glance of exultation at Alicia. His father stepped two paces inward.

"Some papers you and Miss Stillings forgot to sign," he said. He flipped the parcel open and spread the upper sheet wide on a handy table. He drew out a pen and laid his finger tip on a vacant line. "Sign here."

Tom and Alicia both drew in toward him, their eyes fixed wonderingly on the paper. They stared down at it, at its bold script, its legal phraseology, its quaint civilities. Then Tom glanced at Alicia. She responded with a look profound and inscrutable. Tom bent over the table and picked up the pen. Just as he was about to write Alicia touched him on the arm lightly.

"The date!" she whispered.

He peered at it curiously. Then he looked up at his father. "These papers were made out a year ago," he murmured.

"Full partnership," Robert Edwards said quietly. He glanced over his son's bowed head at the girl. His eyes held hers a moment and she met his intent, kind, boyish gaze with childlike frankness. "I knew only one way to make Tom choose a strong man's way. Maybe I was wrong." He lifted his eyes to Alicia again. "I did my best. I meant to break him—or make him. And after all—you had it your own way." Honest admiration shone in his eyes.

He held out his firm hand to Tom, who shook it hastily and looked to Alicia. She was spared painful embarrassment by another rush by Martha who again hugged her and exclaimed, "Oh, you darlings!"

Peter Simpson viewed the pretty scene with unmoved countenance. He turned his icy eyes on Robert Edwards. To him he

murmured in tones that were a caress: "The minxes!"

Followed many protests from Alicia as to both presents, then acquiescence. She saw that Tom was still dazed, unable to understand that his father had handsomely apologized and made amends, in so far as a man of his temper and ideas could set a wrong right. At last Robert Edwards quietly withdrew, and after him went Peter Simpson and Martha. The young people thought the old captain leaned slightly on his daughter's arm.

No sooner were they gone than Alicia looked at her lover curiously. He met her eyes wonderingly, shyly. Dreamy-faced, she sank to the seat on the floor and drew the drum to her. She clenched her hand and rubbed the shark-skin tympanum with a swift sweep. A dull sound rose in the room, rhythmic and deep. It gathered volume as she leaned over the instrument, and grew into a roar that died again into a rustling whisper. She beat the drum more swiftly, furiously, till its thunder rolled beyond the walls and echoed in the night. The man watching her suddenly raised his head, listening to the call. Then he held out his arms and swept the drummer up to his breast.

Presently Mrs. Stillings entered, concerned and anxious. She greeted Tom as though he had been away less than a day and scanned the room with searching eyes. She saw the drum.

"I do wish you wouldn't make that awful noise, Alicia," she complained. "There is nothing to be gained by it."

Alicia, lovely and flushed and sparkling, threw her lover a bright glance. He smiled in answer. They stood together under the formal lamps, amid the choice furnishings, in easy and natural postures, content with their world.

THE END.



HERO WORSHIP IN THE SOUTH

ROBERT M. GATES, one of the premier journalists of the South, declares that there are sections of Georgia in which William Jennings Bryan is still regarded as the next president of the United States.

"Down there they're heroworshippers, anyhow," Gates said recently. "When they once get the idea that a man's a great fellow, they look up to him until the last horn blows. There are Georgians who have been looking up to Bryan so long and so steadily that they've got sunburned tonsils."

The Queen's Pawn

By Presley E. Bryant

Texas is a great State, which teaches its children history in its own way, and at times interprets law in its own way. Its citizens are often original in their manner of looking at various phases of life. Ike Rutherford began at thirteen to blaze his own trail. He was "practical, hard-bitten, yet prey to a lurid imagination," as Texans sometimes are

THIS is properly a story of Mrs. John, but it must begin with Ike Rutherford. He plays, if it may be said of a boy of his temperament, a passive part in it, like a pawn in the queen's gambit.

But if he had not been there for the sacrificing, Mrs. John would not have done it.

It is necessary to go back a little. Strong, the only man who ever rode armed and shooting into and out of Dodge City while Bat Masterson was sheriff, quieted down at thirty and settled on eight hundred acres of fair land along a creek in the northwest corner of Arragon County. He did this at a time when the practice of settling on ranch land was still looked upon by the old-timers as an excess of caution. He bore the taunts. He had looked ahead and foreseen when that miserable little creek would mean the difference between meat cattle and hides, and he was soon joined along its course by other cattlemen. They dug water holes and settled back complacently against the coming of the drought.

Five years later a beneficent State government set up a frame schoolhouse within twenty-five miles of John Strong's abode and filled it with a slim, young teacher and a dozen tow-headed kids from the surrounding ranches. Strong wooed, won, and wed the schoolmarm in six months.

Three other rulers over that little educational shack had been lured from looking to cooking when Ike Rutherford's old father, who had fought tooth and nail during a long, hard life for the right to run sheep where hungry cattle were wont to feed, and who had spent that life and the increment thereof establishing to everybody's satisfaction but his own that faro cannot be beaten by pure mathematics, wearied of both vocation and avocation and shuffled off this mortal coil, with only Ike keeping cases on the deal.

Ike, about thirteen years old at this time,

philosophically rolled up his clothes in an old blanket, together with a slab of sour belly, a meager store of coffee and a sack of beans, and trudged sixty miles to Strong's place. He was one of those curious anomalies of the pioneer breed: practical, hard-bitten, yet prey to a lurid imagination; incredulous to the point of profanity, but likely to believe anything and implicitly, no matter how far-fetched it might be.

The boy did not know Strong, but he had heard his father say:

"Yes, suh, John Strong was the hardest youngster on the range afore he hitched up to Miz John. He was a quick-shootin' man with either 'han', but he never rustled a hoss, he never mav'ricked a brand, and he never shot at a pore sheep-herder."

"What's this here?" demanded Strong, when the wanderer, black-tanned, dust-covered and clad, for the most part, in the rolled-up, incongruous cast-off pants of his lamented pappy, announced his arrival.

"You Strong?"

His red-rimmed eyes devoured the big man defiantly.

"I am," admitted Strong. "Are you?"

"What?" suspiciously.

"Why, strong?"

"Hell, yes!"

"But can you ride?"

"Why not?" boldly. "What you-all askin' me that foh?"

"Well," hesitated the rancher gravely, "I was kind uh thinkin' you-all might be wantin' a job. But bein' a big, strong vaquero, most likely you'll be goin' out West somewhere."

"I'm a gonna work fo' you, Strong."

This boy was still as bold as brass.

"That so? What d'you reckon I'd be wantin' with a little, cock-eyed runt like you a-workin' for me for? This here's no kindergarten, young feller, my son, and don't you forget it."

John Strong scowled. His eyes flashed and Ike heard, deep within him, muffled, but unmistakably, the thunder that goes with lightning.

"Dammit, dammit, dammit," he began, working himself up to the ultimatum, "I'm a gonna!"

Straightway he realized that he had committed lese majesty, and to him came the recollection of the wild tales that his old man had told of this menacing giant. He was afraid. His fear infuriated him. He fell to cursing and sobbing, sobbing and cursing, as if his heart would break and the air turn blue.

Strong chuckled. That calmed him.

"You-all don't suppose you could take care of my horses, do you?" the ranchman inquired anxiously.

"Yes, suh," timidly, "I could; I know I could."

"Reckon you could ride that old outlaw uh mine named Bad Hoss?"

"Yes, suh, why I sho' could."

"You haven't seen him buck yet!" Strong warned.

"I kin ride him, suh."

"All right. If you can ride Bad Hoss you're hired."

Ike did ride Bad Hoss, though not that day. Strong would not let the boy take the risk, but about a week later, when the waif's keen appetite was getting dulled on Mrs. John's chuck and life was growing stale—Strong, having mysterious advance information about a baby, had put him to work helping Mrs. John in the house—Ike slipped out to the corral, threw and tied Bad Hoss, double-cinched a saddle on him, and was helling out into open country when the boss caught him, sticking to that treacherous, leaping back like a flea on a tame dog.

II.

That was all before the nesters filed up the creek. Ike had aged by then until his years numbered fifteen. If Strong, who had made him a buckaroo of sorts was his god, Mrs. John, who was teaching him to spell, was to him as a veritable goddess. That is how, one night, he happened to divide his loyalty.

The nesters were a couple of brothers named Asherby, dogged men, farmers from the East, who settled on a homestead claim beside the creek, just north of Strong's place

and beyond the line in Gill County. Before turning a clod of ground they built a dam, smack across the stream, with, however, a flood gate in it for their own protection.

That was finished in May. Then, just as the Asherbys had hoped and the ranchers down below them feared, along came the drought. In July the water holes began to dry up.

Characteristically playing a lone hand, John Strong galloped up to the very door of the nesters' house, jumped off his horse, and unceremoniously entered.

He found one of the brothers there, struggling with the Easterner's ineptitude over their evening meal.

"Jim Asherby," coolly, "go out to your dam and open that water gate."

"I've heard about ye," retorted Asherby hotly, but moving cautiously away from his visitor and toward the kitchen door. "You can't come bullying me. I'm a law-abiding citizen and I'm in my rights. Don't you go threatening me. There's been many a man hanged in this State for murder."

"I'm not going to murder you," replied Strong contemptuously, in that flat voice which somehow gave the lie to violence and at once suggested it; "I'm not threatening you, either. Go on; do your chores. Some time before noon to-morrow you are going to open that dam. *You open it!*"

Strong rode back, by his water holes. The cattle were bunching up around the fast-drying puddles, and in one he found a dead steer that had bogged and fretted its life out during the hot day.

Mrs. John had a hard time of it that night.

"Remember, John," she kept saying to him, "you promised to give up your wild ways when we married. You can't take the law into your own hands, John—not with me and little Irene depending on you. Promise me you'll go to the county seat to-morrow and do this legally. Promise, John!"

Finally, Strong promised. But when he hitched up the buckboard in the morning, it was more to please Mrs. John than with any hope of success that he contemplated conferring with his friend, old man Miller, the county judge.

"You keep your eye on the family, boy," he directed Ike and drove off toward Arragon.

There was foam on the bay team when

he returned the following afternoon, and there were heavy lines between his eyes. He turned over the rig to Ike without speaking and hurried into the house.

"It's all up, honey," he told Mrs. John. "There's a law in this State that says any measly nester can go right out and dam up any creek or river, just so long as it ain't navigable. Them Asherbys are just settin' on the law."

"That's a bad law."

"Yes, it is, honey, and," passionately, "by God it's got to be ignored!"

"John!"

She had another bad night. When the baby had gone to sleep, she took him out on the porch, under the quiet stars, and held his hand and talked for hours. She did not nag or plead, just talked sanely and wisely and persistently of what he must do.

At last he saw it. He had a stout head, though, as Mrs. John said, a hard one, and when he began thinking along legal lines he thought as straight and as true as he would have shot. He began forming her ideas into practical shape.

They might lose cattle and money, but they were not going to have anything on their consciences. John Strong on the morrow would go to the seat of Gill, the county on the north, where the creek turned in and where the nesters lived, and start proceedings. He would get a lawyer to attack the State law, looking to the granting of a court order that the dam be removed or its flood gate opened. On his return he would visit all the ranchmen with land on the creek and get them to take similar legal measures in the other two counties bounded or traversed by the stream. That would increase the chances of getting favorable action, by increasing the number of courts.

After they got the legal machinery started, they would not stop. An order restraining the damming of the creek would give only temporary relief.

"This is a cattle State," Mrs. John pointed out; "there's a lot of cattlemen in the legislature. All us people along this creek, except the nesters, are old-timers and taxpayers. There's no telling how much influence we've got, if we'll only ask for it."

Strong planned to rally his neighbors, get himself made their representative, and go to the State capital to lobby for a new law. But that would take him away from home

for quite a spell. What would become of the stock, of her, and the baby?

"Now, John," she chided, "you know perfectly well that I'm not going to run off or flirt with the Asherbys the minute your back is turned. I've got Ike to look after me, and you've got enough men to pull out any steers that get bogged up in the water holes, and Art's a good foreman. Probably you'll be back before it's necessary to skin our dead cattle—if it comes to that! I'll run the ranch and Ike'll protect me. He's really quite fierce and brave. You remember when he rode Bad Hoss—and him only thirteen, too?"

Strong was worried about his cattle dying on his hands—with those hands far away—rather than about Mrs. John's safety. The range was chivalrous. Besides, he knew Mrs. John for the upstanding woman that she was. He had seen cattle drop by the score when water holes went dry, and he knew the back-breaking and urgent race with the sun that must be won to save their hides, when every hand counts and fatigue does not. Those hides, in a bad year, mean the difference between ruin and a chance to come back.

He could see no alternative. Having, for the sake of Mrs. John, given up all idea of reverting to the old methods of the range, whereby undesirables were made to travel in high jumps with their coat tails, if they had any, flying in the wind, he knew that if he did not start the law going soon, soon he would be skinning steers.

The chance, he considered, was good that he could get a lawyer to draft a suit clever enough to result in a temporary injunction pending its trial and to delay that trial until he could get a hearing before the legislature. A gamble, but a fair one.

Once decided, he prepared to leave immediately. Before his departure he called Ike, who had been living for some time with the men in the bunk house. Ike was to stay at the ranch house during his absence.

"I'm trusting you, boy," Strong said gravely. "If you don't take proper care of my family while I'm gone I'll skin you, salt your raw hide, and lay it out in the sun! When Mrs. John goes anywhere, you go along with her, and you turn out the whole ranch if one of them Asherbys shows up here? Sabe?"

"Yes, suh."

"All right." Strong kissed Mrs. John and little Irene. "Adios." He clucked to his team—and the stage was all set for trouble.

III.

A week sizzled past and there was no rain. And no word from Strong. Then a breathless night—not sultry, which would have been weather for rejoicing on the range that summer, presaging rain; just a dead, dry heat that seemed to leave all nature panting, silently, saving its strength, lulling the beast of thirst.

Ike helped Mrs. John with the dishes, and a little later went with her to sit on the porch.

The last glow of twilight faded out. For an hour the night was inky black. Then a red gleam showed low in the east. Even the moon seemed hot. As it rose a strange, muffled sound came to their ears. It was for this that they had been listening.

"Ike," Mrs. John whispered, "they're milling!"

"Yes'm," Ike shivered. "Pretty soon they'll be——"

He did not finish. As if in echo to his thought, it came, the first, tentative bellow of a thirsty steer. Only that was needed. The cry was taken up, beginning along the creek. Then the whole night seemed yammering with it. Dry water holes, rasping throats, panicky thirst! In that bedlam of fear was the imagery of maggots, of buzzards darting from the sun, of mute, white skulls.

"Let's go in, Ike." Mrs. John's breath caught. "I c-can't stand it."

It was little better within. Mrs. John could not sleep. The torture of her beasts was torturing her. When at midnight she knocked at Ike's door, the boy was still awake.

"Yes'm." At once he was before her, fully clad, tense with excitement. "Yes'm! What is it, Miz John?"

"I'ke, do you know where my pony is to-night?"

He was frightened for a moment at something he thought he saw in her face. Then he laughed.

"Oh, Tiny cain't be far from the house, she's kitchen broke!"

Mrs. John did not smile at this.

"Go get her and put my saddle on her. Shake it up!"

"You-all not goin' anywhaahs——" he protested, his fear returning.

"Ike!"

She could make a little word like that sound mighty big. Ike subsided.

But when he called out a little later he had two horses saddled.

"What is that other horse for?" Mrs. John demanded coldly.

"I'm a gonna go with you-all, ma'am."

"No, you're not, Ike."

"Yes'm."

"You're going to stay in this house with my baby. Unsaddle that horse and turn him loose!"

Ike thought there was never such ferocity in human look and voice.

"Yes'm," he obeyed meekly.

Mrs. John did not hear him. A good horsewoman, she had leaped into the saddle and was already pounding away down the creek road.

IV.

Ike regretted his compliance at once and fell prey to the most tormenting dreads.

In the cattle country nothing is feared more than that a woman will fall or be thrown from a horse, hang her dress in the saddle, and be dragged.

Vividly in his imagination he saw Tiny slip sideways on the loose gravel of the creek road and the form of Mrs. John jerk out of the saddle. And then—he could not turn his mind's eye from the sight—her clothing rip to the neckband, and high-strung Tiny, maddened, not understanding, run frightfully away with the horrible shape, bounding and pounding at her flanks, spurting her on——

He groaned aloud. That made it seem more real. He began cursing, as the tears rolled down his cheeks. He had not thought yet of Strong's high fury when he learned. That would come later, with his temperament. An hour passed, an hour that only Dante could have recorded.

Faintly, then, spite of the bellowing on the range, far away, he heard hoofbeats.

"Dammit, she's comin'!" he said and kept saying, timing the words to a gallop.

The hoofbeats came nearer. Suddenly he went cold and something died within him. He caught the rhythmic pounding of a heavy body——

With a cry of terror he burst from the house and raced toward the creek road. Im-

pelled by an instinct, why he ran and what he expected to do he did not know. He knew that he had murdered Mrs. John—and the knowledge stunned.

After a little, in the moonlight, he could make out the figure of a horse and, as he ran, it seemed to him there was a rider——

A moment more and he was sure.

Learn what manner of boy was Ike Rutherford.

He flung himself wrathfully into the middle of the road and waved her down.

"Why in hell did you do it?"

"Why, Ike!" ohided Mrs. John, gently laughing.

"Oh, I thought you was drug," he sobbed.

"I thought you was killed, ma'am."

"You thought I was dragged, oh——"

Then softly:

"Look, Ike!"

"That's a—that's a flood gate. It's——"

"Asherby's flood gate," assented Mrs. John. "It got caught on my saddle—and was drug!"

"Ike," turning serious, "if anybody asks you about this flood gate don't you say anything. I don't just know what I've done, and I don't want anything said until Mr. Strong gets here. Do you understand?"

"Yes'm, I ain't gonna tell nobody!"

He answered weakly, but there was a high light in his eyes, where the moon spied on them, and she smiled happily.

Mrs. John hauled the flood gate up to the very kitchen door. There she took off her rope, dismounted, turned her pet horse over to the lad, and went to bed—and to sleep.

Before morning the bellowing cattle grew strangely silent, and a breeze blew up out of the south.

Along about noon Ray Asherby—he was the brother who evolved the dam scheme—though that is not the way the ranchers spelled it—to freeze out the cattlemen along the creek—and another man called at the Strong ranch house. The other man was a constable from La Talanquera, the nearest town, twenty miles away, in Gill County.

Ray Asherby was brash.

"Mrs. Strong," he asked, without formalities, "did you instruct this boy to steal my flood gate?"

"No," answered Mrs. John calmly, "I did not."

"All right, constable," Asherby directed, "take him in arrest."

Ike looked at Mrs. John, a trifle wistfully. The law was a terrible thing to him. "Go!" she said.

The boy was tried the day that Strong came back—with a temporary injunction and the sheriff himself to see that it was carried out. He did not drive in through the creek road; he did not know that the water holes were full. He pulled up, beaming, and yelled at Mrs. John to come see what he had brought her. She came, running—and took all the wind out of his sails. He listened a moment, and you should have seen his face! Then he gave her a hug and a kiss, climbed back into the buckboard, grinning, and said:

"Excuse me, sheriff. You can stay at the house or take any horse I've got. I'm going somewhere in nothing flat. Mrs. Strong'll explain. S'long."

He was driving away as he spoke. Before the dust swallowed him they heard him singing, for the first time since he had been a wild buckaroo, that classic:

"I went down South fo' to see ma gal,
Sing Polly, Wolly Doodle all day!"

"He's spoiling for trouble," Mrs. John told the sheriff proudly.

V.

Ike was arraigned before a shaggy old justice of the peace, who was succeeding in his ambition to appear very austere. Both the Asherbys were there, too. And a knot of staring, idle strangers. It was the first "trial" that many of them had ever attended and it was a red-letter day for the justice, too.

"Air ye guilty er not guilty?" demanded the old "court," glaring over his steel-rimmed spectacles.

Ike felt guilty, forlorn, and a very small boy, but, thinking of Mrs. John, he said nothing at all.

"Did ye hear me, ye hellion?" snapped the magistrate, leaning over the deal table that served him as bench, and boring Ike with his fierce little eyes.

"Yes, dammit, yes!"

When he was excited, Ike was invariably profane. He would have been in church, possibly in heaven. He could not help it.

"Don't ye cuss me, young tarant'la!"

The old man's dirty, gray beard stuck straight out in his fury. "Ye guilty er ain't ye? Order in *this* court!"

Again Ike was silent.

"Witness!" shrieked the court, exasperated.

Jim Asherby, in reply to the question, "Do ye swear," said "I do," and related what he characterized as Strong's wild threats, concluding by identifying the boy as an employee on the ranch.

Ray Asherby, a bolder man, scorning to prolong the hearing, testified succinctly that the boy rode over to his farm during the night, pulled the flood gate out of its grooves, tied a rope to it, and hauled it to the Strong ranch house. He had seen the boy's footprints in the mud on the top of the dam and traced his horse down beside the creek by the broad trail of the dragging gate.

"Do ye still say ye ain't guilty?" Ike's Nemesis glared malevolently.

"I didn't say!" Ike, keyed up with excitement and fired with the sense of the dramatic that was so strong in him, was beginning to enjoy his trial. Later, of course, he would go to pieces—

"And dammit, I ain't a-sayin', too," he added brassily.

"We-all, ye air guilty," stormed the magistrate, "guilty ez hell!

"In default of fine, ye air hereby sentenced to one month in the calaboose, so help ye, ye mis'erable crittur. *Amen!*"

Then shivers of relief ran up and down Ike's spine. "Hello!" a deep voice sang out. "What's this here?"

"An' who might ye be, pray?"

Ike answered.

"It's Mr. Strong, you dam' ol' goat; an' now you'd better look out!"

This was too much for the onlookers. They frankly guffawed.

"Order *in* the court!"

"Your honor," said John Strong, when the uproar had simmered down to scattered titters, as the loafers gave each other sly digs and meaning looks. "Your honor, I come here with no intention of disturbing this court, but solely in the interests of justice."

"Thet's right, young man," cackled his honor, "ye air a sensible boy, I kin see thet. Speak right up, son."

"This boy is charged with stealing a flood gate, is he not?"

"Is not—was, was," replied the justice.

"Well, he didn't steal it. My wife, Mrs.

John Strong, stole that gate. I want this boy released."

"He didn't steal it, eh? Thet's a pre-ceed-ent in the hist'ry uh this court, but the law air clear. Ef he didn't steal it, I sees no reason why ye shouldn't take him, son. None 't all. Young hellion, ye're free.

"Order in the courtroom!" he bawled as the Asherbys made to protest. He then delivered an opinion that you will look for in vain in the Southwestern Reporter.

"The court rules as follers, to wit:

"This heah boy, whatever you call him, hez been found guilty of stealing a flood gate, which same he did not steal. Theahfoah, he goes free.

"Mrs. John Strong stole thet gate: It looks like an' she ought to be 'raigned an' tried, but not so.

"This heah boy has been legal tried an' found guilty of sed offense. Same satisfies the law, ez culp'ritus est punishit.

"Theahfo'-ah"—it would be impossible to describe his pronunciation of this choice legal morsel—"theahfo'-ah court dismisses all cases an' sundry which may be brought agin' anybody *in re* this heah flood gate, ontill eternity.

"Order, I sez, *order!* Ev'rybody out, court's closed."

The Asherbys, particularly Ray, the bold one, were not beaten, and complications would have arisen; but they did not. The story got out and Strong's neighbors, who had been awaiting only some slight provocation, called a gathering of the clan.

As the evening shadows fell and while Strong, Mrs. John, and even baby Irene were carrying on over Ike for the twentieth time, the Asherbys had visitors and shortly thereafter the range echoed and reëchoed to the old methods.

The next day McLean, the Scotchman from just below on the creek, called at the ranch house.

"We wanted to do it legal," he said, "so we bought their bit of farm at five dollars the acre. 'Tis your affair, for the most part. Ye owe me fourteen hundred—and her-re's the deed—or I'll spr-radle yer ranch."

"Oh, I'll pay," laughed Strong. "Good of you to put up the money, Mac. *Muchos gracias!*"

"'Twas ma monney, less twa per cent," replied the thrifty and veracious Scot.

The Steamboat Sailor's Reply

By Harry Kemp

I CAN'T talk back to you, Daddy, but give me a word or two:
*Things change, and the world goes onward, and there's always something new,
In spite of the Wise King's saying—To God be all the praise—
And men still seek out new things and search for better ways.*

I grant there's nothing finer than a full-rigged ship at sea
With the rising moon behind her, or the sinking sun a-lee,
But there's also naught surpasses the unceasing engine room
Where the harnessed fire and lightning pushes onward through the gloom,
And the living rods and pistons plunge with a continued might,
While a hundred golden port holes go a-sweeping down the night.
And the furnaces, red-flaring, with the small black shapes close by
Of the men that feed their hunger: let the strength of them reply:
We don't roll and wait the wind's will, nay, we go our constant ways
Where you lay, becalmed and cursing, in those good old clipper days;
We go trailing smoky banners round the world and back again;
Tide and wind, they wait upon us and obey the will of men.
With the strength of many horses now the milky turning screw
Beats the wave bulk to submission as we lift and thunder through;
Head-on to the wind we labor, we defy the tempest's will
Where you rode bare-stripped, or waited for the hollow sails to fill.
We make ports you never thought of, we hail coasts you never knew,
We go ramming up wide rivers like an ocean to the view,
We go in and out of islands where the reefs lie under hand.
We began the Great Surrender of the Wind to Man's Command,
When big wing-spread ships will wander down the reaches of the clouds,
And they won't need steam as we do, as we don't need sails and shrouds,
And they'll climb the top of heaven with ten cargoes to our one,
And their tracks will reach from sunrise to the setting of the sun—
*And some time I'll maybe sit here, full of age, and sing the praise
(In the ears of young air sailors) of the Good Old Steamboat Days!*



The Hand of Ming

By Arthur Tuckerman

Author of "Barney of the World Police," "The Kid Pilot," Etc.

A tale of the Far East, in which a European shopkeeper, in Shanghai, invokes, to his own undoing, the aid of the grim society called The Hand of Ming, which stretches its hand across the sea to reach its victim

WHEN the little man with the haunted eyes came shuffling into the offices of Charlton Trask & Co. several of the stenographers paused in their work to stare at him. The office boy, too, eyed the stranger with evident disapproval.

"I want to see Mr. Trask," the little man wheezed hoarsely.

He was not at all pleasing to look upon. His faded blue serge suit, patched roughly at the knees and elbows, hung limp and creased upon a bent, ill-nourished frame; his cheeks were sunken hollows, his complexion an unhealthy grayish yellow. His untidy shock of hair was snow-white.

"I want to see Mr. Trask," he repeated, fumbling his shapeless hat with nervous twitching fingers.

His eyes, particularly, attracted attention. They were bloodshot—a queer, pale blue in color. In them there was a haunted look, as if he were in perpetual fear of something—something which—though hidden from his fellow men—lurked constantly at his elbow. His whole attitude was one of excessive nervous tension.

"Mr. Trask is not in San Francisco," said the office boy. "He is on a business trip in Mexico; we don't expect him back for several months."

The little man stared at him in a dazed fashion. He passed a trembling hand over his moist brow.

"I must find him," he muttered, as if to himself. "I must—"

The office boy, vaguely impressed by the stranger's earnestness, disappeared into an adjoining room. He returned a moment later, raising a beckoning finger.

"Mr. Trask's secretary will see you," he announced. The shabby little man followed obediently after him.

Within the inner office Henry Fisk, Trask's secretary, rose from behind a great desk to greet the stranger. The little man slumped heavily into a chair and did not utter a word until the office boy had left the room.

"Do you know Trask well?" he blurted out suddenly.

Fisk raised his eyebrows; he found this stranger's manners peculiar.

"I ought to," he laughed, "considering I'm his nephew."

The stranger glanced furtively about the room; his eyes rested on the door, which was about three inches ajar.

"May I close it?" he asked.

Fisk nodded with a kind of amused tolerance.

"My name," said the little man in a low voice, as soon as he had closed the door, "is Raff, William Raff. I'm from Shanghai. What I'm about to tell you is in the way of a confession, and before I speak I must have your word that you will not mention the matter to any one—except the one man whose life depends upon it."

Fisk shot a quick appraising glance at him; for a moment he deliberated, rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

"Go ahead," he said. "You have my word. If the story concerns us in any way, I'll be glad to hear it."

"I am going to die very soon," said Raff, touching his chest. "A doctor told me so when I landed here from China yesterday. That is why I must tell you this story, instead of your uncle. You see, I might die before he gets back, and then there'd be nobody to warn him."

"Warn him—what do you mean?" asked Fisk.

The little man glanced for the last time about the room, and then, satisfied that there

were no eavesdroppers, he began his story in a low, husky voice.

"During the last years of his life my father, a Shanghai merchant, lost much of his money in foolish speculation. I began work at the age of sixteen, and in ten years had saved enough to start a little shop of my own, not far from the Garden Bridge in the best part of the International Settlement. The business prospered, and I married a beautiful French girl, the daughter of a clerk in the French consulate. We owned a little villa out Patung Point way, and we were very happy together.

"After the war prices on imported goods became very high, and in order to keep up a good stock I rashly borrowed considerable sums, naming my store as security. Of course, I was sure that I would be able to repay my creditors within a few months, as soon as things became normal.

"One morning in May of last year a tall, well-dressed American came into our store to purchase some gloves; it was Mr. Trask, the head of this firm—your uncle. I was busy with my accounts at the time, and my wife waited on him. I saw that he was flirting with her—she was very young and pretty—but that didn't bother me much. I trusted Louise implicitly.

"He came to the store several times during the week, making generous purchases, and always chatting gayly with my wife. He was courteous and good looking, and I suppose she was naturally flattered by his attention. One Sunday she informed me that she was going to lunch with him at the Palace Hotel; afterward they planned to go to a concert.

"I confess that I was annoyed, and we had a little quarrel; I told her that I didn't think it looked well. But she went just the same.

"At eight o'clock that night she had not returned; I became very worried about her and stood on the steps of our villa waiting for her. At ten I became frantic and took a ricksha down to the Palace Hotel. The clerks there, in response to my inquiries, told me that Trask had been living alone at the hotel, but that two hours before my arrival he had sailed for America—with a lady who had joined him that afternoon. She was young, they said, and a blonde—they described my wife!

"Of course, I almost went crazy. But I was too proud to tell any of the few friends

I had in Shanghai. I staggered back to the villa, and sat up all night in my room, raving like a madman. Something seemed to snap within my brain.

"My first thought the next day was to follow Trask to America, but I was at a critical period when I was tied up with debts, waiting for business to straighten out, and I couldn't lay hands on enough money; besides, I knew that the instant I left the town my creditors would grab everything I owned. I didn't know which way to turn. For several days I wandered about the streets half crazed—it's a wonder the police didn't arrest me. The days turned into weeks, and I never went near our store; I couldn't bear the sight of it, where Louise and I had worked so happily together—it gradually went to wrack and ruin. At the end of a month my landlord demanded the rent for our villa; I couldn't pay him, and he gave me a week in which to vacate.

"Every day, every hour my hatred for Trask increased. The thought of revenge became an obsession. Somehow, I didn't blame Louise, she was just a foolish little child. I could understand how she had been impressed by his suave ways, his fine appearance.

"On the night before I was turned out of my house a very strange thing happened. We had one Chinese servant, an old, old man, who had been in our family years before my father died. Wong was a little man, with wrinkled skin like old parchment, and bright green cunning eyes; he had the wisdom of centuries stored in that old head of his. He came into my bedroom and told me that he knew all about Louise; in my ravings on the night she had disappeared I had told him everything.

"It was a strange secret that Wong revealed. It seems that he was a member of an ancient Chinese secret society of which we white men knew nothing. This society, the Hand of Ming—Ming is the Chinese for what we call Destiny—had members all over the world. The peculiar feature of it was that each member was pledged to do the bidding of any other member, no matter what that bidding was—the idea was, apparently, that they were all servants of Fate.

"To prove his great devotion to me, Wong proposed to give immediate orders for the secret murder of Trask by some member of the Hand of Ming. He pointed out solemnly that the honor of my house must be avenged,

and that this could be done without incriminating me. You must understand that Wong had always more or less resented my wife's presence in the house. He looked upon her unfaithfulness as a stain which had to be blotted out if I were to remain an honorable man.

"He asked me where Trask lived, and I told him San Francisco; he said that the murder could easily be accomplished there, as many members of the Hand of Ming were known to be in California.

"Before he left he cautioned me never to mention this society to any one; if I did it would mean instant death for both of us. He explained that it was only his devotion to me that gave him the courage to bare the secret to me.

"I must have been crazed—that is my only excuse, and so I told him to give the order. On the next morning I left the villa. After that I seemed to recover my senses a little—perhaps the very fact that I knew Trask was going to die had something to do with it. I think I forgot to tell you that Wong explained to me that every member of the Shou Ming—The Hand of Fate—had one year in which to complete his task; if he failed within that time he himself suffered death at the hands of his bidder. Accordingly, Wong gave me an address where I might call on him every month to learn if the deed had been done.

"Nearly every cent I had was gone, and I was forced to take a room in a filthy lodging house near the Soochong Creek; I found a job as clerk in a little French hotel and managed to eke out a miserable existence in that way—but it was very hard. My creditors had seized my store by this time.

"Three months passed; how eagerly I watched the calendar! Then the awful news came—"

The little man paused and shuddered slightly. He drew his chair closer to Fisk's.

"It was a hot afternoon in August. I had finished my day's work, and I sat down on a bench in the Public Gardens to enjoy the fresh air and read my newspaper. The first thing I came across was an account of the discovery of a woman's body in a cellar out on Potung Point—she had evidently been murdered by cutthroats for her jewels and money. The police identified her by a letter, found in an otherwise empty purse. The woman was my wife!

"I went directly to the police station and

found out that it was all too true; Louise, poor child, had been attacked in a side street while she was on her way home from the entertainment Trask had taken her to. She was wearing a small pearl necklace, I remember, when she left the house, a gift of her father's—that was gone from the body.

"I left the station dazed—at first I could hardly realize it all; the thing was so sudden, so terrible. And then it dawned on me that I had sentenced Trask to death—for nothing! He was absolutely innocent. The woman who had sailed with him to America, I learned some time afterward, was his wife. She had joined him a few hours after Louise left him; she had been away on a trip inland with a party of friends.

"That very evening I took a ricksha to the house in the Chinese quarter where Wong had told me I could always find him. It was a little shop in a crooked street near the Willow Tea House, a filthy, low-ceilinged place owned by a little brassworker who designed exquisite candlesticks and incense burners. He came hobbling out from a back room full of twittering songbirds, and told me that Wong had died of fever three weeks before.

"On my way back to my wretched room the awful thought came to me that my hands were tied. If I mentioned the Hand of Ming to the local police it would mean instant death to me, and I didn't see how it could prevent the murder of Trask. Those Chinese would never split on each other—not if you poured burning oil on them. I had no way in which to consult Wong's friends; in fact, I didn't even know whether there were a million members of the Hand of Ming or a paltry hundred. I was doomed to keep my lips sealed.

"I wonder if you can realize the horror of the inaction that was forced upon me by circumstances? I began to stay awake nights, half dreaming of Trask and his approaching fate—and I was responsible! I thought and thought, but my poor, weary brain could find no solution. Then I began to go down, down. It began with drink—and then opium—it gave me a few precious hours of refuge from my torture.

"And so I, who had once been an honorable Shanghai merchant became a low prowler of the streets; I haunted the worst dens of the Chinese quarter by night, always hoping that I would overhear something to put me on the track of the Hand of

Ming. But I never heard a word. I grew careless of my appearance, even of my health. The thing was preying on my conscience; it rarely left my thoughts.

"They were kind to me in that little French hotel; they let me keep my job, although toward the end they warned me several times about my appearance. And then, somehow, it penetrated my dulled senses that there was one remaining thing I could do for my atonement. I dared not write Trask, for I didn't know what spies the Hand of Ming might have on every side—but I could go and see Trask myself and warn him.

"The thought must have braced me up considerably, for I began—very slowly at first—to horde money, in order to pay for my passage across the Pacific. I almost starved myself, and I cut down my sleep to the minimum so that I could take a night job on the Soochow wharves to add to my little pile. I don't know how I lived through those six months, but by the middle of February I had saved the necessary money. I had won, but I was a broken man——"

He paused, overcome by a sudden fit of coughing that racked his lean body.

"Look at me now! I am a mere skeleton, a wreck of a man. You wouldn't have known me a year ago, a respectable, well-dressed merchant with a house, a charming young wife—everything to live for. And now—why, I jump whenever I see my own face in a mirror——"

"To get back to my story. I landed here yesterday. For that day I have waited and

toiled, month after month, and now you tell me that after all I've done—given up my very life—that my man can't be reached!"

He leaned forward, grasping Fisk's arm in a frenzy of misery.

"For God's sake, tell me that you will go down to Mexico and find Charlton Trask. Tell him to hide in the mountains, change his identity—anything, until the first of May next. Then he will be safe——"

Suddenly Fisk interrupted.

"Did you say Charlton Trask?" he asked incredulously.

Raff nodded his head violently.

"Yes, of course. This is his firm, isn't it? I saw the name, Charlton Trask & Co. on the doors. What do you mean, anyway?"

Fisk stood up, a look of something akin to pity in his eyes.

"My poor, poor man," he said slowly. "My uncle down in Mexico, whom I referred to, is not Charlton Trask; his name is Ernest Trask, and——"

Raff jumped up, clutching the edge of the table for support; he gazed at the other man with a look of stupid bewilderment. He swayed forward slightly as he spoke; the words came slowly, haltingly, from his thin lips.

"But — Charlton — Trask—where—is—he?"

"My other uncle, Charlton, who founded this business, is dead. He was killed in an automobile accident eleven months ago, the morning he landed in San Francisco from China."



ED HOWE HEARS SOMETHING

E. W. HOWE, the philosopher of Potato Hill, Atchison, Kansas, took an automobile trip last fall from his home to Miami, Florida, covering two thousand and eighty miles and passing through one hundred and ninety-six towns on his way. One of the things which made a great impression on him during his journey demonstrates all over again that philosophers, like women, have their share of vanity. This was a conversation which he overheard one morning in a small-town hotel.

Mr. Howe awoke to the consciousness that two chambermaids were in the hall outside his door and that they were talking about him. They also mentioned the name of a lady in his party.

"I don't think they're married," said one of the maids. "He's too old."

"You can't always tell by that," said the other. "Some young women marry these old fellows for their pensions."

In relating the incident at the end of the trip, the philosopher exclaimed: "Do I look like a member of the G. A. R.? I was six years old when that war broke out!"

A Chat With You

ONCE in a while we get a letter from one of our Canadian friends who inquires about the price of THE POPULAR in Canada, and wonders if the dealer has been profiteering.

No, the dealer is not profiteering. He is on the level. So are we. The guilty person is the creature known to financiers as "foreign exchange." Owing to the present high rate of exchange in favor of United States currency, the Canadian dealer has to pay more in Canadian money for his magazines. He doesn't get anything out of it, nor do we. We have not increased the selling price of THE POPULAR, although there are very few other things in the world that have not gone up sharply.



SPEAKING of letters, we are always glad to get them. We would like, however, the names and addresses of those who do us the honor to write to us. Whether in praise or blame, the anonymous letter is an unsatisfactory thing. We like to know the man who is talking to us. If you are kind enough to write to us and don't want your letter or your name published, just say so. But do sign your name and do give us the correct address. We answer, if possible, every letter we receive. We hate to have the answers come back un-

claimed. We have just received from the post office letters we addressed to A. C. Wilson at 387 Mitchell Street, Portland, Oregon, and L. M. Cheeney, care of R. W. Griffen, Silsbee, Texas.

If either Mr. Wilson or Mr. Cheeney happens to read this and wants to hear from us, we hope he will let us know his present address.



THE next issue of THE POPULAR opens with the first big installment of a great serial by Dane Coolidge. It is called "Maverick Basin." If you like the West, if you like outdoors and action, if you like thrilling incident and live people, this is the story for you. It is alive, tingling, vital. Coolidge has half a dozen great books of the West to his credit. This is one of the best of the lot. He is a genuine POPULAR writer.



DO you ever feel curious about the men who help to make THE POPULAR? Of course, the story is the thing and tells you all about the man you need to know, for every writer expresses his own personality in what he writes. At the same time, it is interesting to know what the story tellers are doing when they are not writing. Dane Coolidge, for instance, whose serial we

A CHAT WITH YOU—Continued.

have just mentioned, is very much of an outdoor man. He was an explorer and naturalist first and a writer afterward. If you read about any place in his stories, you may know that he has ridden or tramped across the country before he wrote a line about it. There is no living writer who knows the Southwest as thoroughly as Coolidge, who started life collecting snakes and small rodents as a scientist in the government employ.



GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER, who contributes a rattling funny story to the next issue, is a moving-picture man, a newspaper man, and a playwright, as well as a story writer. Henry C. Rowland, whose novel, "The Annex," opens the next issue, is a doctor, a veteran of the Spanish War, a yachtsman, and a lot of other things. H. de Vere Stacpoole has a big reputation as a scientist and man of letters, as well as being a writer for *THE POPULAR*. Charles Somerville, who has a grim story of a flood in the next number, is known as a newspaper man from one end of the United States to the other. Grinstead, who has a business story coming, is engaged in the oil business in Texas and has been a farmer, a prospector, and a newspaper owner as well.

Clarence Cullen comes back in the next number with another of his sparkling and racy stories of American life. He is a graduate of the old regular army, having seen service all over the United States. In addition to this, he

went around the world in the navy, and afterward built up a national reputation as a humorous writer for the newspapers. These are only a few of the men who helped to make the next number.



AT the same time we are looking for new men. We want more regular contributors, and we would much rather find them ourselves than have some other magazine find them for us. There is always an opening in this magazine. If you happen to know of any one who can write stories of modern American farm life, please steer him in our direction. We say "modern" because we mean it. We are not looking for the farm life of "The Old Homestead" and "Way Down East," delightful as it appears to retrospect. The old New England farms are falling into the hands of laterly arrived Poles and Italians. The new generation of farmers of our own stock is mostly across the Alleghenies. We want the story of the modern farmer who is an expert mechanic and live business man, as well as a scientific student of agriculture. Some of them have made a lot of money lately and some of them have not made as much as they should. There is always a danger that enough young men won't go into the raising of corn and wheat and cotton and live stock. If we can show people, through the medium of fiction, that farming today is a real business, we will be helping things along generally—and that is what good fiction is for.



AT THE START, W. L. DOUGLAS WAS BUYER, CUTTER, SALESMAN AND FREQUENTLY HIS OWN EXPRESSMAN AS WELL. OLD BROCKTON RESIDENTS TELL OF OFTEN SEEING HIM COMING FROM BOSTON CARRYING A ROLL OF LEATHER UNDER HIS ARM

W.L. DOUGLAS PEGGING SHOES AT SEVEN YEARS OF AGE

W.L. DOUGLAS FREQUENTLY WORKED EIGHTEEN TO TWENTY HOURS A DAY—RETURNING TO HIS FACTORY MANY A NIGHT TO LAY OUT THE NEXT DAY'S WORK, AFTER SPENDING THE DAY IN BOSTON BUYING LEATHER AND SELLING SHOES

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