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VOL. XXXI No. 6

ADVENTURE

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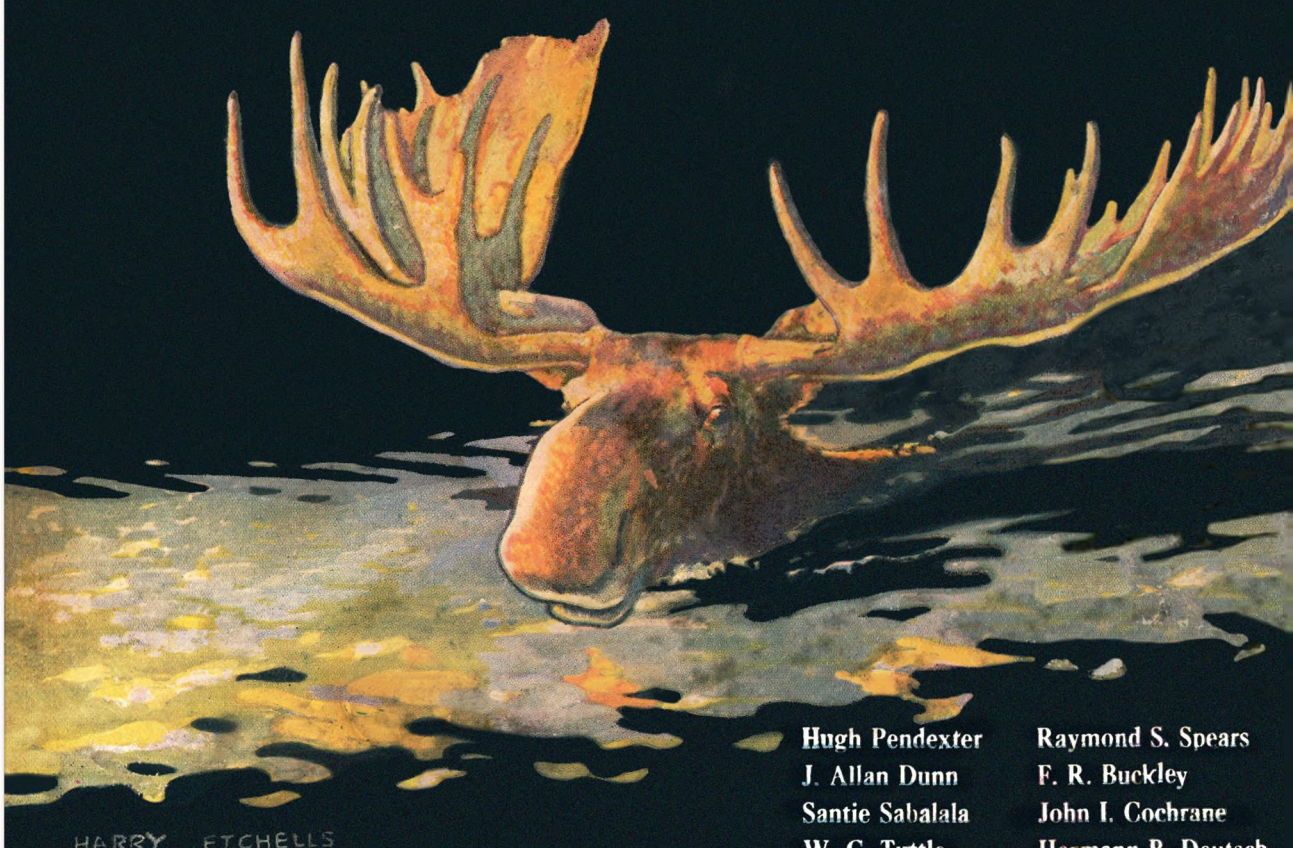

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THE COOKE TRAINED MAN IS THE "BIG-PAY MAN"

ADVENTURE
Nov. 30th, 1921

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York City. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 31
Number 6

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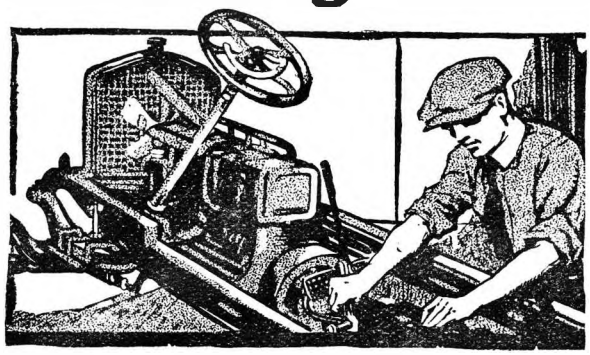

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The Warning of the Desert

by William Lawrence

THIS is the story of Bill Andrews—plain Bill Andrews. He was twenty-six years old—married—the father of as fine a baby boy as you have ever seen.

But Bill was just like thousands of other men. He had been forced to leave school and go to work when he was still young.

He had taken the first thing that came along and he had worked as hard as he knew how. But somehow or other, he didn't seem to be getting anywhere.

It was hard—terribly hard, sometimes—to make both ends meet. Sickness came—doctor's bills—the rent was raised—and all that sort of thing.

Above everything else in the world, Bill wanted to go home some night and tell his wife of a raise in salary—of a promotion that would mean a happier, better home.

I wonder if there is a man anywhere who hasn't had that same ambition, that same hope!

But that increase in salary and that promotion never came. Indeed, once or twice Bill came mighty near losing his job.

And then, one night, Bill came across an advertisement that told how men just like himself had gotten out of the rut and had gone ahead—how men with no more education than himself had studied at home in their spare time—how the International Correspondence Schools would come to him and help him to develop his natural ability.

Bill had seen that advertisement and that familiar coupon many, many times before. For two years he had been promising himself that he would cut it out and send it to Scranton. He knew that he ought to do it—that he should at least find out what the I. C. S. could do for him. But he never had.

And he might not have sent in the coupon this time, either, but for the few words under a picture called "The Warning of The Desert":

"On the Plains of Hesitation bleach the bones of countless millions who, at the Dawn of Victory, sat down to wait—and waiting, died."

Bill read that over two or three times. "The Plains of Hesitation!" "The Dawn of Victory!" These two phrases kept ringing in his ears. They worked their way into his very soul.

So he clipped that coupon, marked it and mailed it to Scranton. The literature that he wanted came by return mail.

Bill told me the other day that he was surprised how interested he became in his lessons—of the personal interest the teachers at the I. C. S. took in him—how his employers learned about his studying and saw evidence of it in his work.

"The most important moment in my life," says Bill, "was that moment four years ago when I sent in that I. C. S. coupon. And the happiest moment of my life was when I went home with the news of my first real increase in salary and my first real promotion. If I hadn't sent in that coupon I'd still be working at a humdrum job and a small salary."

HOW much longer are you going to wait before taking the step that is bound to bring you more money?

The way is easy. Without cost, without obligation, mark and mail this coupon. It takes only a two-cent stamp and a moment of your time, but it's the most important thing you can do today.

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☐ Telephone Work	☐ Railroad Positions
☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER	☐ ILLUSTRATING
☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ Cartooning
☐ Machine Shop Practice	☐ Private Secretary
☐ Toolmaker	☐ Business Correspondent
☐ Gas Engine Operating	☐ BOOKKEEPER
☐ CIVIL ENGINEER	☐ Stenographer & Typist
☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Certified Public Accountant
☐ MINE FOREMAN or ENG'R	☐ TRAFFIC MANAGER
☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER	☐ Railway Accountant
☐ Marine Engineer	☐ Commercial Law
☐ ARCHITECT	☐ GOOD ENGLISH
☐ Contractor and Builder	☐ Common School Subjects
☐ Architectural Draftsman	☐ CIVIL SERVICE
☐ Concrete Builder	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Structural Engineer	☐ AUTOMOBILES
☐ PLUMBING & HEATING	☐ Mathematics
☐ Sheet Metal Worker	☐ Navigation
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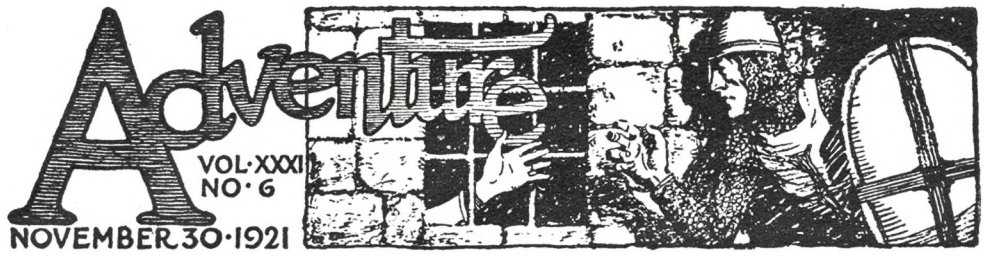

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ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

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Contents for November 30th, 1921, Issue

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

(Continued on next page)

(*Continued from preceding page*)

JERUSALEM—"the center of the world"—has become a reeking pit of unscrupulous conspiracy where the deadliest agents are employed in the strife of Mohammedan and Zionist; and *Major Jimgrim* is called to stand between Great Britain and a world-wide *jihad*. "UNDER THE DOME OF THE ROCK," the second of a series of novelettes by Talbot Mundy, will appear complete in the next issue.

A BRUTAL skipper, bucko mates and a hard-boiled crew made life a torment for the little stowaway whose one ambition was to reach America. But with his taking-off their days of torment began. A weird sea vengeance is recounted in "THE GHOST OF DAGO FIDDLER," by Norman Springer, a novelette complete in the next issue.

RED HUGO, the Norman adventurer, is setting the County of Toulouse by the ears, and to *Pierre Faidit* is assigned the job of reducing his castle by force or stratagem. "BEFORE MIDNIGHT," a novelette of medieval war by Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, complete in the next issue.

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

Don't forget the new dates of issue for *Adventure*—three times a month, the 10th, 20th and 30th

Adventure
NOV·30·1921
VOL·XXXI·NO·6

Yellow Treasure

A Complete Novelette

by F·R·BUCKLEY

IT WAS getting on for eight years since I had seen old Mandarin Campbell; and now, as I followed his Chinese servant through the big teak-wood doors into the anteroom of his library, I reflected that our interview was not likely to be a pleasant one. When I was a little boy he had always terrified me with his long yellow face and his trembling, clawlike hands; as I grew bigger, he had disgusted me by tips, not of good old United States currency, but of funny chunks of Chinese gold, which my father used to stick in the safe as curios; and our last interview—when I was going East to college—certainly hadn't improved my impression of him.

On the night of my departure my father had been called to his house on business connected with the sale of the Green Star Line, which he was being forced to sell; and I had to say good-by to him in this same library, with old Campbell sitting in his carrying-chair fingering the documents that stood for the blasting of my father's fortune, and grinning at the scene as if his forty years in the East had made his mind Chinese as well as his appearance and habits.

Now, returned to San Francisco after demobilization from the rank of ensign in the naval reserve, I had been calling at his house for six months, while I searched the town for work, and he had never even acknowledged my existence; until tonight, when his niece had just taken the last ray of hope from my situation by saying that she would cheerfully make up to me my lack of sisters, but that marriage was quite out of the question.

I hadn't objected to old Campbell's rudeness as such. I hadn't gone to the house to see him, and anyhow he was celebrated for his hermit-like seclusion in the library-wing of his palace on the hill, a seclusion which dated from before my father's memory. Great teak-wood doors, carved all over with the faces of devils, shut off this wing from the rest of the house, which nowadays was tenanted only by Alison White and an army of servants; and passage through those doors was strictly forbidden to all who had not old Campbell's express invitation; which, as I remembered from the days when I used to play kids' games with Alison, was extended and refused with an extraordinary whimsicality.

Fat men in white waistcoats and top-hats,

calling to confer with the king of the Chinese shipping business on matters involving millions of dollars, would be turned away by the two Chinese who always guarded the entrance. On the other hand, unshaven men in pea-jackets, who smelt of whisky and furtively polished their boots on the fringes of brocaded curtains, would be admitted and kept for hours.

It was this whimsicality that was making me enter the sanctum loaded for bear. Of all the hours I had spent in the old devil's music-room, he had selected for the issuance of his invitation the exact second when I was kneeling before Alison and trying to gain possession of her hand. The Chink must have seen the whole business as he glided into the circle of light from the floor-lamp and said—

"Mistel Campbell like see Mistel Carter in library."

It was just as I was writhing at the thought of it, that the messenger appeared in the anteroom and said it again. And I rose with the rapidity of some one who has something good and unpleasant on the tip of his tongue, and followed him into the inner room.

I can give no better description of that library than the statement that the mere sight of it killed my resentment instantaneously, and turned me from an angry man into an awed one, stripped of all emotions save a curiosity as to what the lord of such a place could want with such an insignificant mortal as myself. Usually, places we have visited as children seem smaller when we revisit them as grown-ups; but this room was more impressive to me at twenty-six than it had been at eighteen; and as a child I can simply have had no idea of it at all.

Never before had I noticed the line of gold-encrusted war-masks that hung like a frieze around the vast room, seeming to grin in the strange light from the single table-lamp behind which I could dimly see the form of old Campbell. Now for the first time I noticed that on each side of the door stood the stone statue of a Chinese king—statues looted, I have since learned, from the ruins of the sacred palace of Ken-Lung, and the walls, as far as I could see in the dim light, were covered with some kind of heavy silk brocaded in gold.

In short, the effect of that room was the essence of the effect of China itself—of a civilization three thousand years old, waiting carelessly for the homage of us savages from the West. It was in a sort of daze that I walked the fifteen yards over ankle-deep carpet to the table at which old Campbell was sitting, apparently just as I had last seen him; a Chinese behind his chair; his own face, yellow as parchment, tight-skinned as a mummy's, set with burning black eyes, one glance from which brought me back to my senses like a stab from a dagger.

I sat down, and, staring under the shade of the lamp—which seemed specially designed to throw the minimum of light around—tried to make out who was sitting at the end of the table to my right. I could dimly make out that he had a full beard, and that he was a man of powerful build—that much was evidenced by the hand he was resting on the table; a great hairy paw with an anchor, tattooed in red and blue, on its back.

"Mr. Carter," said old Campbell suddenly, "Captain McAndrew."

We shook hands. As if this was what he'd been waiting for, the big man arose.

"You know your instructions, captain?" asked Campbell.

"I ought to," said the big man.

"But do you?" snapped Campbell.

"Yes," said the giant, "yes, sir."

"Then that'll do."

Campbell leaned forward suddenly, tapping the table with an ivory paper-knife.

"And you remember the chief instruction of all?" he asked. "Silence! One word, and you fail. Two words, and you fail and get your throat cut. Do you understand that? I'm protecting you all I can, but be careful. That's all."

WITHOUT waiting for the captain to lumber out of ear-shot, Campbell leaned forward until I could see him comparatively clearly, and addressed me.

"That goes for you, too," he said, flinging down the paper-knife and interlacing his long, withered fingers.

"It's very nice of you to say so," I told him, a little of my spirit coming back under the sting of his dictatorial manner and the entire absence of any attempt at a greeting.

"Don't mock me, child!" snapped the old man. "I've not brought you here to chatter compliments even if you deserved them

—which you don't. You've been acting like a fool—or like your father."

I rose.

"If you, of all people, are going to insult my father's memory—" I began, hotly.

"Sit down. Your father ran the Green Star Line into bankruptcy. If I hadn't bought it in, he'd have died of a broken heart before he did. Do you deny that?"

"Yes!" I cried.

"It shows you know nothing of the matter, then. He had rich brothers. If he wasn't a fool at business, why didn't they finance him? I assure you it is so. You can take the assurance or leave it as you like. I'm telling you now that *you* are acting like a fool."

"Perhaps you will tell me how?" I said, through clenched teeth.

It seemed to me that the parchment face beyond the lamp softened slightly.

"My dear boy," said the old man, "this isn't an indictment. This is a statement of fact, and you must be familiar with the fact yourself. I know that a racing-car is all that's left of your patrimony, but don't you agree that to go looking for thirty dollar a week jobs in it is foolish—not to mention using your Navy bonus to pay fines for crossing Market Street at sixty miles an hour?"

"I don't see what business it is of yours," I told him. That fine, which had absorbed all but five dollars of my worldly possessions, was a sore point. And how, since it had only been inflicted that afternoon, could he possibly know of it in this seclusion?

"Added to this," went on old Campbell, "you're making love to a girl who will one day have more millions of dollars to her name than you have quarters. Sit down! You're young, and you're hot-blooded, and you're your father's son; but isn't that the act of a fool?"

His tone was kind, and a sudden memory of that evening's scene, as witnessed by the placid Chinaman, made me blush painfully.

"Yes," I said.

"I'm glad you admit it," said old Campbell, leaning back in his chair, "because I called you here to help you; and that admission is the first step. Now I want you to attend carefully to me. Are you listening?"

He leaned forward again, bringing his sharp chin down to the table so that the light fell downward over his face, and caused a hideous inverted version of it to stare at me from the polished teak.

"In helping you I'm going to help myself," he said. "Therefore it's a proposition you may refuse. I must have your promise, before I go any further, that in that event you will forget what I have said, immediately."

"I will," I told him.

"That's not enough," he snapped. "I want your word of honor. Do you give it or not?"

"It seems rather superfluous," I said, nettled, "when your confidence is apparently to be poured into the ears of Chinese servants."

Campbell chuckled.

"My servants are ex-soldiers of the Chinese Imperial Guard," he said, as if that were a certificate from Heaven as to their discretion. "Regarding some matters they might chatter—they have chattered. But not about this. Have I your word that in the event of refusal——"

"And in the event of acceptance?" I inquired, with exaggerated caution.

Campbell chuckled again.

"You heard what I said to McAndrew," he said "in the event of acceptance, two words mean your throat cut. Have I your word of honor?"

"Ycu have my word of honor."

He leaned back again.

"And you, on your part, have a second mate's ticket in steam?"

I told him I had the necessary formal qualifications for ensign, but that my experience in navigation was practically nil. They weren't particular about such things during the war. Personally, I was assigned to a battle-ship as physical director, and never stood a watch.

"I'm not after a navigator," said Mandarin Campbell. "The qualifications for this job are the cups you won at college and your record as a breaker of speed laws. Did you know that you've been driving at seventy-five miles an hour with a cracked front-wheel spindle?"

"I didn't much care whether it broke or not," I told him, the hair suddenly rising on my spine as the wonder flashed across me how he could possibly know about it. "In fact, the last few days I've been rather hoping it would."

"And you'd have got your wish if I hadn't had it replaced," he snapped.

"*You* had it replaced?" I gasped.

"Last Wednesday night," he said, "while you were here whispering sweet nothings to Alison and trying to sing Solveig's song as a duet. Yes, I heard you. And it cost me twenty dollars. Twenty dollars!"

The clawlike hand came into the circle of light again and started tapping the table with the paper-knife.

"But you may be worth it to me," he added, as if considering the matter, "if you'll take on this job. And the job will be worth something to you."

"And the job consists—?" I asked.

HE HESITATED. Then, before leaning forward again, he spoke a few rapid words in Chinese, dismissing the man who waited behind his chair, and several others who, unseen by me, had been standing in the shadows. I saw the dim flicker of the white-and-gold liveries pass through the penumbra, and then I heard the soft sound of a closing padded door.

"There is such a thing as bribery," said old Campbell softly, "and this is the heart of the business. The job consists in taking a packet to an old business friend of mine."

I waited for him to continue, but he said no more.

"Is that all?" I asked.

He gave vent once more to that unearthly chuckle of his.

"You'll find it quite enough," he said, still in the soft voice that seemed afraid of being overheard. "I'm no spendthrift; but I'm sending out a ship in ballast, when freight-rates are sky-high, and I'm offering to pay you, and each of the other three officers, a bonus of five thousand dollars each—just for delivery of that packet to Mo-fo-Goo's shop in Tartar Street, Nanking, and the bringing back of what Mo-fo-Goo will send."

"And the joker?" I asked.

"The joker," said Mandarin Campbell, laying his hand flat, palm-down on the table, "is death! In China, there is one man—Mo-fo-Goo—who will help you to execute this commission. There are fifty thousand, in China and elsewhere, who are sworn to stop the commission and execute you. And their name is the Tae-ping Tong. Do you understand that?"

"The odds seem a bit exorbitant," I remarked, "but what is this Tae-ping Tong?"

"What is it?" asked old Campbell, as if he couldn't believe I was in earnest. Then he seemed to realize that naturally I shouldn't know anything about it, and with his eyes sort of dreamy, he began to explain.

"It'd be before your time—just a little," he said, with a bit of the chuckle," about in '50, when I was a youngster in the East. Younger than you are. That was when Hung-sew-Tseuen got converted to Christianity——"

He chuckled and seemed to wake up.

"There's no need for you to know the whole history of the Tae-pings," he said, once more the merchant-prince issuing his orders, "There was a Chinaman who went mad and made others mad with him. He believed himself the anointed of God and the new Emperor of China. He raised an army that believed in him, and he took possession of the province Kiang-su; then he built himself a palace in Nanking, married thirty wives, and sent his armies out to conquer the rest of China. It took two million soldiers, officered by English and French and Americans, ten years to conquer him; and then when the Imperial Viceroy, Tseng-Kwo-Fan, stormed the walls of Nanking, this Hung-sew-Tseuen set fire to his palace and went up to heaven in the smoke; thirty wives and all—like an emperor!"

He seemed to be dreaming again.

I coughed.

"Well," he said, the sharp ring back in his voice, "it is the descendants of Hung-sew-Tseuen and his army that you have to fear. They are banded, nowadays, into a secret society. They are outlawed in China; the very name of Hung-sew-Tseuen, dead though he is, is proscribed; discovery means death to any of his followers; failure in an object set for them by the Tong means horrible death. One object set for the Tong is the prevention of this packet from entering China. Do you understand that?"

"I do," said I, the hair along my spine rising again as I thought of the Chinese knives with which dad used to ornament his study.

"Do you accept?" asked old Campbell, putting his face down again to where the inverted image joined the real features in staring at me.

"Yes," said I, in the voice of one hypnotized—a very natural voice, I have since

come to believe, for me to use in the circumstances.

"Then you will report on board the *Khan-Do*—to Captain McAndrew—at five o'clock next Wednesday morning, ready to go out with that tide. Do you understand that?"

"And the packet?" I asked.

He chuckled.

"The packet," he said, "is not to be disposed of like that. It is evident that you have never lived in the East, young man. You have a simple and confiding mind which makes me fear for your future."

His thin mouth widened into a flickering grin, in which his black eyes did not participate.

"To entrust the packet to any particular officer would be to jeopardize that officer's life—and the safety of the packet," he said. "And since there are four deck officers, to pick out one would be discriminating. You see that?"

I nodded, puzzled.

"So that until a short time before the vessel sails, it will be uncertain—even to me—which officer is to have the charge. And after the sailing I shall be the only person to know who has got it. Do you understand?"

I nodded again.

"According to my custom I shall visit all the officers on the night before sailing. After the vessel leaves the dock no officer will mention the subject of the packet to any other officer. It is an order and a matter of prudence. There will be a Chinese crew. Do you understand?"

"Why a Chinese crew?" I asked.

"Because they are customary; and to eliminate possible Tong men by putting in a white crew would arouse suspicion. Are you a perfect fool?"

The taps of the paper-knife on the table took on the force of blows.

"Remember what I tell you and try to realize it," snarled the old man, his black eyes boring into mine. "You are stacking up against the East, that knew more in its cradle than you will know when you die. And you're not fighting plain criminals, or criminals at all, but religious fanatics sworn to stop what you're doing, with the knife or the strangling cord. One slip—one incautious movement—and you will be a dead man. And now, for the last time, do you wish to back out?"

He didn't need to fling in the taunt. The dreary round of overmanned offices, the slow drift toward destitution, the general grayness of life ashore, culminating in Alison's words of that night, had made me ready for anything.

I shook my head.

"Then that'll do," said old Campbell, suddenly letting the vibrance go out of his voice and leaning back into his chair out of sight. As he leaned back, one claw picked up a cube of ivory that had stood at his elbow during the interview and flung it into a metal bowl. Before the resonance had died away, a Chinese was standing at my elbow with my hat, coat and cane.

"Good night," I said to the darkness beyond the lamp.

There was no answer.

In silence I let the Chinaman help me into my coat; and in silence—it was late, and Alison certainly in bed—I let him lead me to the hall and open the front door.

As I went to the threshold, there burst upon me the sight which has remained clear in my eyes ever since; which will be clear in my mind till I die; my first introduction to the works of the Tae-ping Tong.

The house was built on Colonial lines, with great white pillars in front of the door. Erect against one of these pillars, pinned in a standing position by a Chinese knife driven through his throat and deep into the wood, his eyes wide and glazed, his head twisted by the death agony until its beard pointed at the waning moon—was Captain McAndrew.

II

AS MORE or less of an athlete, I'd always had it drilled into me that the human organism is adaptable, but I'd never thought of this adaptability as applying to the old mentality, or to such astounding conditions as now confronted me. Yet the fact is that after the shock of that first icy plunge into horror, I went about the business of equipping myself for participation in this strange venture much as I had gone about other business in the past.

Looking back, in the calm of my night-watches in the Pacific, on the week preceding our sailing, I was almost incredulous of the ease with which I had changed from a law-abiding young civilian in search of a job, into an apprentice desperado, testifying unmoved at the hushed-up inquest on

Captain McAndrew, and nonchalantly purchasing two Colt .45's with which to prevent myself from sharing the captain's fate.

I guess the old freebooter spirit isn't far below the surface in most of us, for I was never of a lawless nature, and yet, six days from my interview with old Mandarin Campbell, the only incident of all our drama of secret outfitting and furtive sailing capable of impressing me, was also the only incident which might be considered to bear any relation to the normal life I had lived heretofore.

It occurred on the night before we slipped down the bay. Old Campbell, carried on board from his limousine by two Chinese servants, and followed by another whose hand seemed glued to his hip, had paid his momentous visits to the officers and was leaving the ship.

The new captain, a thick-set Irishman named O'Day, was below in the engine-room, telling the chief engineer that the ship had a list, and that it must be due either to ill-trimmed bunkers or to slack water in the ballast-tanks; Fraser, the first officer, was on the bridge; and to the second officer, Burns, and myself fell the duty of seeing the owner to the gangway in due style.

Burns and I, having formed a sort of alliance of youth, had been ashore together all afternoon, and had only come aboard a few minutes before old Campbell's arrival. We were therefore as surprised as he was at the sight which met us on our way to the gangway aft.

The bridge of the *Khan-Do* was built separate from the engine-room house, and between the two structures was an open deck-space of perhaps fifty feet, in the center of which was Number 3 hatch. A terrible place, could I have seen into the future! And even in the present, the theater of a most sensational event.

Opening on this deck were two cabins; provided, when the ship was built, for the accommodation of occasional passengers. In each of them the light was on, and in each of them a passenger was calmly unpacking. To make the astonishing event still more so—while the occupant of the port room was apparently an old man, the passenger in the starboard cabin was undubitably a young girl.

The deck, lit by a cargo-light, was filled with Chinese seamen, attending to the battening of Number 3 hatch. Regardless of the fact that any one of the blue-bloused workers might be the assassin appointed for him, old Campbell clapped his hands sharply, and, when the bearers had set down his chair, sat staring at the two lighted doorways in silence, as if speechless with rage. I noticed that his two servants, and the silent gunman behind, closed around him, in readiness for orders; but it was to me he spoke when at last he found his voice.

"What's this?" he snarled, pointing with a trembling finger. "Passengers? Passengers? Passengers, you —— lily-faced pap-eating lot of fools!"

"This is the first I've seen of them," I said apologetically.

"The first you've seen of them?" he roared, with a violence that seemed to shake his frail frame dangerously, "who in —— business is it to see them? Passengers —now! Fetch them to me. Where's the captain? Fetch the captain."

"He's below," said Burns.

"Then fetch him from below," shouted Mandarin Campbell. "And you, you Carter, bring me those passengers. Hop to it, curse your souls!"

For all Burns or I could have picked him up and shredded him to pieces, the old man's fury dominated us. Burns hurried away aft as if the devil were after him, and I was starting on my errand with a good deal more speed than dignity, when the port passenger saved me the trouble.

In silhouette, we saw him take a wide-brimmed hat off a hook near the door and crowd it carelessly onto his head. A moment later, he stepped over the sill into the glare of the cargo-light, and leisurely picked his way through the litter of rope-ends and canvas until he stood before the chair in which Mandarin Campbell was writhing in anger.

Arrived there, he folded his hands under the tails of a weather-beaten frock coat, leaned belligerently forward and stared Campbell in the eyes, over the tops of a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles, put on very much askew. Taken as a whole, he gave the impression of having been built on the bias. The thin line of gray whisker which ran down one side of his face did not seem to match the thinner line which ran down the other. His thin, sharp nose had a distinct twist at its tip; and the almost invisible line of his mouth slanted above his withered chin. The eyes he had fixed on the

terrible old man in the carrying-chair, while normal themselves, glittered as if to heliograph news of a twisted disposition.

"I think you know me, Campbell," he said, in a voice that creaked. "But in case you've forgotten—I'm Doctor Henry Parsons, late of Kiang-su. Does that convey anything?"

Campbell ceased to fidget with the arms of his chair, and leaned forward, his eyes searching the wrinkled face thrust so boldly into his own yellow mask.

"You!" he said at last, in a strange hoarse voice.

"Yes, I," said the doctor cantankerously, "and no subject for your yells and furies, Campbell! It's no pleasure to me to travel on your stinking *Khan-Do*—especially when I've got my daughter with me. But this I tell you—when I've paid my passage-money, and there's no other boat I can take for a month, I am going to travel in this ship, if you and your gorilla of a captain howl yourselves blue in the face!"

"What are you doing here?" snarled Campbell as his adversary, balancing on his toes like a fighting bantam, turned slightly to give Captain O'Day, who came hurrying up with Burns, the benefit of his last speech.

"I'm going back to China to study leprosy," said the doctor, his voice rising defiantly, "and I'm going on this ship!"

Campbell turned to O'Day.

"Who sold this man and this woman passage on this boat?" he almost screamed. "Have you seen his ticket? Is everything in order? What the —— does it mean? You—you're in charge here, aren't you?"

"I can have them put off, if you order it, sir," said O'Day, making a threatening movement which sent the listening deckhands shuffling back to their work at the trot, "but they have authorization from the office, dated a month ago. They're nominally signed on as doctor and stewardess."

"And if you lay a finger on either of us," snapped the doctor, "I will have you arrested, Captain O'Day, for assault and battery, and you'll not sail. Do you understand that?"

He turned to Campbell.

"And if you say another word, you paralyzed snake," he said with cold venom, "I'll speak to these underlings of yours in a way you won't like. Who was treasurer of Nanking when the Tae-ping rebels were there? Tell me that, Campbell, will you? Tell me that!"

He stepped back, and Burns and I moved forward, exactly at the right second; for, his face blanched to a sickly cream color, his lips drawn back to show his toothless gums, old Campbell had risen from his chair for the first time in fifty years, and had flung forward his yellow hands to grasp the doctor's throat.

If he had got his grip, in the passion that seemed to possess him, it seemed there must have been a tragedy. His hands clutching empty air, the strength seemed to leave him, and with a sort of gurgling moan, he staggered back, to be caught by his servants and lowered again into his chair. He lay there breathing heavily, a fleck of foam in each corner of his mouth; and he did not move even when the doctor stepped forward and took his pulse.

"Good for another ten years," snapped old Parsons, letting the yellow wrist fall limp. He added a few crackling words in Chinese which made the bearers pick up the chair again and pad on toward the gangway; the bodyguard, his hand still on his hip, keeping between the chair and the deckhands. "And I think, captain," he went on, squinting up at O'Day, "that we may now consider the matter closed. I sail with you!"

And, though O'Day kept the gangway down until the last possible moment, hoping for some outside aid which should take this complicating factor and his still more complicating daughter out of the mess already frying on the *Khan-Do*, sail with us they did.

NOW, leaning over the bridge-rail, seven days out from 'Frisco, staring out into the sweating purple night where a brilliantly lit liner was tearing south, her band playing and her passengers, in evening dress, just about sitting down to dinner, I was wondering how much nearer the doctor's advent had brought us to the death that hovered around the ship.

It had seemed to me, when I came aboard, that the thought of murderous conspiracy and long-cherished revenge among the cheery little yellow men padding around the decks in the San Francisco sunshine, was absurd; but my opinion had changed when the doctor had shouted forth the

secret Mandarin Campbell had guarded even from us—that he, whose emissaries we were, was himself a renegade official of the Tae-ping Tong.

Since then, every thud of old Mackenzie's engines had seemed to drive us deeper into the atmosphere of danger which was made almost unendurable by the strict injunction not to speak among ourselves of matters concerning that accursed package. Intimate as I was with Burns and O'Day, I was bound by my promise not to compare my apprehensions with theirs. I could only draw my conclusions from O'Day's brooding eyes as he looked over the bridge-rail at the crew as they moved about the forward-deck; and from Burns' oppressive silences as he came off watch.

Even grizzled old Fraser was fidgety; and I, though not a nervous man, had got to a point where I instinctively would not turn my back on the yellow quartermaster as he stood at the wheel, his attention fixed on nothing more bloody than the compass-card. Formerly, even violent awakening from sleep had left me unmoved. Now, as a touch fell on my shoulder, I spun around with my heart racing, and my hand halfway to my pistol pocket.

"It's all right," said the voice of Burns.

"Bit early, aren't you?" I asked, with a forced laugh.

"Oh, I'm a hog for standing watch," he replied. "Can't get enough of it. How's she steering?"

I told him, and he strolled over and looked at the compass; then came back and stood with his back to the rail, facing me. From the look of his eyes, and the unusual silence following his attempt at a joke, I could see he was upset about something; and I touched his arm as I started to walk to starboard where he could speak to me without fear of being overheard by the man at the wheel.

"Been playing bridge?" I asked. It was customary for the three officers off watch, with the doctor for a fourth, to make a game in the captain's room, evenings.

Burns shook his head. That told me quite plainly where he'd been—on the boat-deck with Sylvia Parsons. He had been attracted by her from the first, but had seemed to struggle against it; during the last three days, however, he had been weakening in his resistance to the girl's fascination—she was as plainly in love with him, from the first, as he with her, and tonight, unless I was very much mistaken, he had been making things definite between them.

"Look here, Carter," he burst forth suddenly, in the low voice that was getting to be habitual among us, "I want to ask you something."

He lowered his voice still more.

"For ——'s sake," he said in a whisper, "have *you* got that packet?"

He turned away instantly and looked out to sea.

"I know you can't answer," he said. "I apologize for asking you; but something—something's happened tonight that's—that's upset me. I feel like a —— lamb gamboling on the floor of a slaughter-house."

"I can sympathize," I told him.

"It was bad enough before—this business of being put up as a cock-shot to distract attention from some one else; without even knowing who the some one else is," he muttered,"—but now, with Sylvia, it's——."

"Jumpy?" I asked him.

"Jumpy?" he whispered. "If I could only let myself be! But there's no excuse for it; the——Chinks go around smiling and shuffling as if nothing was too pleasant for us. If there was only some sign of something tangible, instead of this everlasting tension. You're feeling it, too; and Fraser and O'Day are getting so that they can't hold their cards steady. If this goes on, we'll reach the Yangtze a shipload of nervous wrecks."

He gave me a shove toward the two steps leading from the bridge to the alleyway where our cabins stood—his to starboard, mine to port, and the captain and Fraser's in the middle.

"Don't wait for the bell," he said, "I'll relieve now. I want to think. Go and play bridge."

As I opened the door and entered the room where the game was in progress, I heard him begin to pace the bridge with the speed and restlessness of a caged tiger.

The bridge was more showy as a scene for drama, what with the tropical night and the sound of a Chinese banjo some one was playing down by the anchor-windlass; but it was in that room that I got my first sense of real impending trouble. I don't know just what was responsible for the shiver that went up my spine, and seemed to make imaginary bristles rise on my back under my duck uniform, but the room was full of electricity.

For one thing, it was sweltering hot, for the big electric fan blowing out of the port could not take the place of the night-wind that was making the bridge at least bearable; then, its air was clammy with churned up cigar-smoke; and finally, each of the four men sitting around the captain's table, seemed ready to fly at the throat of any of the others.

The presence of danger is said to draw men closer together, but at any rate, the approach of it seems to have just the opposite effect. O'Day, who had started the trip as a sort of genial Hercules, looked at me over his cards like a sulky dog looking up from a bone. Fraser and the doctor were glowering at each other, and the chief engineer, called in to make up the game, looked hot and angry.

"Where is she?" asked O'Day.

I told him the position—one hundred miles off the north mouth of the Yangtze-kiang; and then, as Mackenzie rose, moved toward the vacant seat. In an instant, the doctor was standing up, pulling at Mackenzie's arm as he moved off toward the door.

"You're a Scotchman, all right," he creaked, more unpleasantly than ever; "you forget that you're ninety cents in the hole, don't you?"

"Ah'm not," says Mackenzie, looking at Fraser and the captain for confirmation. "Ah'm no' in the hole a' all."

"Do you back him up in that?" says the doctor, leaning over toward Fraser and O'Day belligerently.

"Yes," says O'Day, as if he'd said the same thing before.

The doctor threw the cards all over the floor.

"Then you're all thieves!" he shouted, his childish fury contrasting oddly with his sparsely venerable whiskers and his seventy-year-old wrinkles. "You're thieving servants of a thieving master! This tub's what you *should* be on—somewhere near old Mandarin Campbell, the king of the thieves. The thief who robbed the thieves!"

O'Day sprang to his feet and with a sweep of his arm slammed the port shut.

"Do you think you shut me up?" shouted old Parsons. "Do you think I don't know? Do you think I'm not aware that you're on this trip to reclaim the booty old Campbell hid out on his brothers, the Tae-pings? A fit job for such as you. A fit job!"

The murderous folly of it—screaming out the death-warrant for all of us in a tone that could be heard, closed port or none, by the Chinese quartermaster, as well as any Chinks that might be on the deck, held us paralyzed for an instant. Then I sprang forward, and as the doctor opened his mouth for another outburst, stopped his words with a fist stuffed between his jaws. He struggled furiously, but he was weak with age, and I had no trouble in holding him.

It was as we stood there, O'Day and Fraser pale with the shock of it, and Mackenzie staring around the room as if he thought we had all gone mad, that the door was flung open again, and a Chinaman was hurled into our midst. After him, his knuckles bleeding where they had struck the Chinese, came Burns.

HE POINTED to the prostrate Oriental.

"Listening at the door," he said, in a voice that indicated he knew what the man had heard.

There was a dead silence for as long as it took O'Day to draw a deep breath. The peril had ceased to hang over us. It was with us. With the blow that had stunned the Chinese—he was already beginning to move feebly—Burns had brought our adventure to the stage of open fighting. And we all felt the better for it.

"Mackenzie," said O'Day, "get back to your engines. Fraser, take the bridge. Are you armed?"

Fraser nodded. Shoving Mackenzie before him, he went to the door.

"If anything goes wrong with your engines, Mr. Chief," said O'Day, "I'll personally blow your brains out. Keep watch, Fraser, and if there's any sign of trouble forrard, fire a shot."

The door closed behind them. We four remained under the greasy electric light, strangely grouped around the fallen Chinese.

"Loose him," says O'Day to me, stepping up close to the doctor.

Rumpled as he was, the little medico stared up at the vast bulk of the captain without a tremor of fear.

"You see what you've done, you cursed runt!" growled O'Day.

"Yes, I do," said Parsons.

O'Day looked into his eyes.

"You're a doctor," he said softly,

"perhaps you can tell me what would have happened if I'd done what I wanted to do when you were yelling our lives away, and clutched these two hands around your throat?"

He held them up—great hairy paws that shook with his rage; and the doctor inspected them calmly.

"I charge a consultation fee of one dollar," he remarked.

"You shall have it," said O'Day, grinning grimly, "I aim to teach you a lesson. What would have happened, eh?"

"You would have got a bullet through the brain," said the doctor, pulling his hands from under his coat-tails with a Navy revolver in each, "before you'd moved a yard. Stand still!"

"I—" began O'Day.

"Not you," snapped the doctor. "Look behind you!"

Behind O'Day, unseen by us in the heat of the moment, the Chinaman had arisen. He was now standing, rather weak upon his feet, his hands up his sleeves, his pigtail, released from the confines of his missing hat, hanging over one shoulder, his almond eyes blazing malevolence upon us. He was the first angry Chinaman of my experience; and I thought as I looked at him that of all God's creation I had seen hitherto, he looked the most capable of evil. His upper lip was split, where Burns' fist had struck it; and as he spoke, a fresh bead of blood broke from it and ran down his chin.

"Missa Mate velly foolish," he said softly. "Foreign devil strikee Tong-man he die. He *die!*"

O'Day stepped up to him.

"Chinaman listen foreign devil's door, he die too," he snarled. "Savee that?"

The Chinaman looked at him without changing his expression an atom.

"Pellaps," he said, "Chinaman velly good number one sailor. Suppose captain killee, captain stretchee neck."

He hissed the words with such viciousness that even O'Day stepped a little back from him.

"And now Tong-man speakee you all," says Hwen-sung-Lo—it was our bosun. And without even the semblance of asking leave, he sat cross-legged before us on the spot where a moment before he had lain unconscious.

"Second officel die for strikee Tong-man," he said, looking first at me and then at O'Day. "And you and you die too. Unless——"

He pointed at us in turn.

"You givee up packet you catch for Mo-fo-Goo in Tartar Street, Nanking. Savee?"

O'Day turned to the doctor.

"You see—?" he began; but the Chink broke in.

"Doctol velly good man, tell nothing new," he said. "Tong know all long 'go."

As suddenly as he had squatted down, he rose and held out his hand.

"You catch packet," he said in a tone that reminded me of a steel hawser all wrapped up in silk, "suppose you givee me?"

"How d'you know the second officer hasn't got it?" asked O'Day, in a voice as soft as the Chinaman's.

"You givee me," said the Tong-man, still holding his hand midway between us. "Tae-ping Tong askee once!"

O'Day swung around to the locker beside his bunk, and with one swift grab inside drew out—not the package. I think the Chinaman's eyes, quicker than ours, must have caught some glint of the polished steel of the handcuffs before they were visible to Burns and me, for it seemed to us that O'Day had scarcely opened the door of the locker before, with the rapidity of lightning, the Tong-man had turned, snatched a knife from his sleeve, and sprung upon the captain from behind.

Quick as he was, however, Burns and I, warned by some subtle instinct, I suppose, were quicker. As Hwen-sung-Lo's arm flashed up above O'Day's spine, two simultaneous reports filled the cabin with deafening sound, and two steel-jacketed bullets crashed into the back of the Chinaman's bald skull. The knife tinkled to the floor; and the dead man, his head driven forward by the impact, dived over O'Day's back to fall with a thud against the cabin wall.

"I pronounce him dead," said Doctor Parsons, smiling at us pleasantly, "quite dead."

O'Day, erect again, the handcuffs dangling from his fingers, looked from us to the corpse and from the corpse back to us again. He bit his lip as he saw the knife lying at his feet, where it had fallen, and for a moment he seemed in a quandary. Then, quickly, he went over to his writing-table and produced the familiar book bound in green leather and stamped with the company's ensign.

"I'll thank you both later," he said, in the clipped, businesslike voice he used in his official capacity.

He turned over the pages and dipped his pen in the ink. From below, we could hear the buzzing of the crew, roused by the sound of the shots. A knock fell on the door; and from outside came the agitated voice of Sylvia Parsons, asking her father if he was all right.

"Meanwhile," said O'Day, "I must log you both for violent treatment of a seaman."

THE Yang-tze pilot came aboard the next morning; for it was still dark—about four A.M., when we came to lie off Tsung-ming Island, and, the captain being on the bridge, and I stationed on the forward-deck keeping an eye on a crew now obviously dangerous, it was not until we were tied up at the Nanking dock that I was summoned to the captain's room to have the formal log-book charge read over to me.

And when I reached the room, it was empty, though the log-book, lying on the desk with a wet pen in the bight of its pages, testified that O'Day had only stepped out for a moment.

I sat down, prepared to wait, and through the port giving on the bridge I suddenly heard the voices of Sylvia Parsons and Burns, the second officer.

"If you're not going up-country till next week," he was saying, "surely we shall see each other again. A good deal can happen in a week, you, know, dear."

"Too much," she replied, in a frightened voice. "I'm afraid of it, Harry. What did it mean, last night?"

"Pooh!" he said, laughing. "Your mysterious signals, you mean? Some Chink playing with a lantern. They're like children."

"Harry," she said, earnestly, "I was on the boat-deck watching for a long time. I was wide-awake, too—that's why I was there so late. And I tell you that some one was in the bows signalling as we lay off that island this morning. I would have told Mr. Fraser, but that I dared not go to the bridge after—after what happened."

"Well, signaling can't hurt us," he said, probably drawing her to him. "I do that myself sometimes."

And at that moment, O'Day walked in, followed by a white man who was dressed in the usual fashion of Americans in the East, who chewed a cigar, and who suddenly, at the sight of my rank-badges, seemed to take a great interest in me.

"Where's Burns?" asked O'Day.

"Just outside the port there," I answered.

"Mr. Burns!" shouted O'Day, forgetting the formalities. He was evidently much perturbed. "I can't understand," he added to the man in the linen suit, "just how you became aware of this business at all."

"Not necessary that you should," said the man, easily. "But I don't mind informing you that you have had a pilot on board, and that he's been over the side more than half an hour."

Burns entered.

"This is very irregular," growled O'Day, fingering the pages of the log-book undecidedly. "I should report——"

"You will allow me to know my own business," said the stranger coldly, turning on the captain, and then on us, a pair of narrow black eyes startling in the intensity of their gaze. "You gentlemen, I believe, are the second and third officers of this ship. A Chinese seaman was killed, aboard, last night."

He turned back the lapel of his coat and displayed a badge.

"As an officer of the American Consulate," he said, "I arrest you both on a charge of wilful murder."

III

SLOW as old O'Day was when confronted with emergencies not connected with navigation, the ugly sound of these words jarred him into further protest.

"Why," he began, "the Chink had a knife in his hand——"

The stranger broke in.

"You needn't tell it to me," he said, "I'm not a judge and jury. Maybe this is only a formality and maybe it's irregular, but I've been sent here for these two men and I'm going to take them back with me. You can either comply or resist. It makes no difference to me."

"It's all right as far as I'm concerned," said Burns.

O'Day looked at me, and saw that I agreed. It evidently relieved him.

"But I'm coming over myself as soon as I

can get away," he said dubiously as we started toward the ladder.

As we crossed the gangway, I looked back, to see him still standing at the aft-rail of the bridge, scratching his head as if he had doubts as to the course he should have taken. In fact, as he told us later, he had decided that he should have gone with us.

HE WAS in his cabin changing to his best uniform before following us up immediately, when there was a knock on his door, and the tall, lean form of Roger Nixon, the line's Nanking agent, entered.

It is not the custom of agents to visit steamer-captains—rather the reverse; but time hung heavy on Nixon's hands, and he had always something unpleasant to say; so that to wait for a new victim to come up to his office was beyond his patience. He slipped wearily into O'Day's own chair and bitterly asked him what he considered himself to be doing in Nanking.

"You're in ballast, ain't you?" he demanded. "Would you mind telling me what you expect to take back with you to 'Frisco?"

O'Day stared at him.

"Because," said Nixon, "the *Have-Got* was here last week, and cleared with every atom of cargo there will be in sight for the next month. When I got old Campbell's wire I thought he must be insane. I cabled back and told him there was nothing here but two cases of machinery to be shipped back to some American firm, and he cabled me to keep my mouth shut and give you those for a cargo. A ton of machinery in a five-thousand ton ship! And he said to send you back as quickly as possible. He's sent you out in ballast, and now you're to turn around quickly in ballast and go back. Is he mad?"

O'Day shook his head as he pulled on his other boot. Correctly enough, he considered silence to be the best policy.

"And for another thing," said Nixon, his internal acidity increasing as he found the captain unwilling to join in the conversation, "if I were you I'd be careful whom I let my officers run around with. This isn't San Francisco, you know. And I tell you bluntly, Captain O'Day, that the Tae-ping Tong's no organization to be mixed up with just now."

"What?" gasped O'Day, half rising.

"It was bad enough when it was a sort of religious secret society, under the son of Hung-sew-Tseuen—old Hop-see-Long as he calls himself; but now old Hop's retired to the hills, and this half-breed Britisher's in control of it, it's dangerous! It's suspected of being simply an organization for overthrowing the republic and bringing back the monarchy, and anybody who's seen about the streets in company with this man Murchison is in danger of prison. The authorities haven't been able to prove anything on him yet, but—I'm warning you."

"You mean——?"

"I mean," said Nixon, "that I've just seen two of your officers going ashore in broad daylight, with Murchison, and——"

"He's a Tae-ping Tong-man?" cried O'Day, throwing open the door again and yelling furiously for Fraser.

"He's its leader, nowadays," snapped Nixon, "and——"

Fraser came up to the door, panting. O'Day, at the drawer of his escritoire, was stuffing a gun into each of his hip-pockets.

"Fraser," he cried, "there's trouble with Carter and Burns. I'm going ashore after them. Call the engine-room on the speaking-tube and get a couple of engineers to go with me. Tell Mackenzie to keep steam up and keep the crew aboard. We're likely to be leaving in a hurry, and this bunch of yellow devils'll have to do. Get me?"

Fraser nodded. He was a man of few words, but remarkably effective actions. It was just after seven bells.

BURNS and I heard seven bells strike as with the stranger we turned the corner of one of the piles of hide-bales which filled the pier. We were making our way, as we thought, to the motor-car which was to convey us to the consulate; but as soon as we had turned that corner we saw that this dark and stinking alley ended against a dead wall. Then, too, there was something in the stranger's face as he turned toward us which sent my hand flying toward my pocket.

Before it got there, however, the world seemed to crack open in a blaze of varicolored light, and the entire continent of Asia to strike me on the back of the head. As I staggered forward, clawing with my hands to keep off the surging darkness I saw Burns fall under the onslaught of a gigantic Chinese in a blue blouse; and I had a dim

impression that the white stranger was laughing heartily.

Then the world temporarily ceased to exist.

IV

I OPENED my eyes with the firm conviction that I was dead. For one thing, the separation of my lids admitted no slightest ray of light; for another thing, my bodily sensations were those of lying on a feathery cloud which was whirling in a celestial wind of velocity about 6, as they say in the seamanship books; and—conclusive evidence to my hazy intellect for the first few seconds after waking—the cold nose of an animal was moving over my face. I thought it was my little dog, Tanner, who died when I was nine, and it was not until I tried to pat him and heard the unmistakable rat-like squeak the animal made as it scuttered away, that I had any doubts as to my arrival in a better world. Then, lowering my hand again, I touched the surface of what seemed to be a scummy pool of ice-cold water. A second later, away to my right hand, I heard, above the scratching scurry of numerous rats, the sound of labored human breathing.

"Burns!" I called, in a voice that seemed to need oiling.

It hurt me to speak, and there was no answer. I lay still for a few seconds, my eyes straining upward into the absolute blackness; and then, with an effort which seemed to tear the muscles of my neck and shoulders from the bones, I tried to raise my head. It would not leave the brick floor on which I now perceived myself to be lying. Feeling around the back of my neck with sore fingers at the end of an aching arm, I found that my hair was glued to the pavement with the dried blood from a gash behind my right ear.

"Burns! Burns!" I called again.

It seemed to me that there was a slight movement over to my right; a little change in the timing of those stertorous breaths, but there was still no reply. Visions of horror flashed across my mind. I remembered what I had heard of the fiendish cruelty of the Chinese. I had a vision of Burns, regaining consciousness, undergoing questioning as to the whereabouts of that accursed package, being unable to give any information and being flung back into this dungeon with his tongue cut out.

Disregarding the agony in neck and arms, I tore my hair free and sat up; a current of warm blood from the disturbed gash trickling down my neck. The rats, frightened by my movement, filled the place with the sound of their scurryings for shelter. One of them, leaping across me, scratched my cheek with his claws, and I gave a hoarse scream of fear.

"Burns!" I cried, trembling all over.

This time a groan answered me—just such a groan as it seemed to my shattered imagination might come from a dumb, empty mouth. My head hanging between my arms I crawled slowly over in the direction of the sound; a fearful journey only possible to a man either desperate or half-conscious. I was both; but even now I can feel the newt that writhed under my fingers when they plunged into one of the puddles which were scattered over the uneven floor.

It was a wide floor; I think I must have fainted once or twice before, calling out again in that far-away voice of mine, I heard an answering croak from close at hand; and, reaching out, touched the stiff shoulder-straps of Burns' uniform. He was lying on his side, I felt, with his head in an angle of the wall. Above him was an iron staple let into the rough stone; but no chain hung from it; he was not shackled.

I shook him.

"Burns!" I cried again.

And, dipping my hand into the puddle which was chilling my knees, I flung dash after dash of the filthy water into his face. After a moment, he stirred and tried to sit up.

"Stink," he said in a thick voice, "where are we? Who's swabbin' decks?"

I gave a hoarse chuckle, in which Burns, after a few seconds of fatuous consideration, joined. I have known death's-heads to grin with more abandon than we did, but the muscular action gave us both a better mental reaction.

"Where are we?" asked Burns again in a more rational tone. Then there was a silence while each of us tried to piece together the meaningless snatches of memory that were flickering through his mind. I myself should have had a clear idea of everything, I felt sure, if only a picture of a Chinese in a blue blouse hadn't kept flashing past my mental eye.

Then there was a square of blinding sunlight that kept seeming to blot out what I

was trying to remember about that agent from the American Consulate; and I was following, with another part of my brain, the movements of a rickshaw which I had glimpsed through an open door of the pier, going down the brilliantly sunlit street.

"He wasn't an officer at all," said Burns suddenly, as if he were trying to pin a fact where it could not get away from him.

"Who was he?" I asked, automatically, the picture of the white man with the narrow black eyes at last emerging from the general confusion. "He had Chinese to help him, Burns."

"He must have been a Tong-man," said Burns dully.

I thought this over for a considerable interval, and found it most reasonable.

"Then," I said, wishing that the agonizing ache in my brain would allow me to say something really smart, "we're prisoners of the Tae-ping Tong. That's not nice, Burns. *Burns!*"

He made no answer; and, reaching out and feeling his face, I found his eyes closed and his lips lax. He had lapsed comfortably back into unconsciousness; and I was so near it myself that I went on calling him by his name for some minutes, until my throat was sore, before I thought of returning to the expedient of dashing water in his face. And then as he began to show signs of consciousness my exertions proved too much for me, and I fell forward with my head on his shoulder.

I suppose that the stupor following the smash on the base of my skull must have merged into normal sleep for I awoke, an incalculable time later, to find my head pillowed on Burns' rolled-up tunic, and myself feeling hungry. And Burns, speaking from close at my side, announced that I'd been snoring like a good 'un.

"How long have I been asleep?" I asked him; but he said he didn't know, having only just woke up himself. His voice was clearer, and his replies were as much improved in rationality as were my questions. I put my hand through the wall of blackness which enveloped me, and, as it touched him, he grasped it.

"When you woke up," he said, putting the general subject of dungeons and filth and looming death behind us, "I was just going to strike a match. I've got a box, in a water-proof case." He gave a sudden groan. "——, my head aches!"

"Did they club you?" I asked, as I heard him pull off the lid of the tin match-box.

"Did they not!" he replied. "You tell 'em, phrenologist—I've got a bump."

That was Burns all over. He was about four years my senior—a big, dark six-footer with a twinkle in his black eyes that only the troubles of others—of Sylvia Parsons, for instance—could extinguish.

"Get a complete map of the apartment in your mind before the match goes out," he added, "noticing especially any fire-exits or similar devices. Ready? Fire!"

The match flared up with what seemed to our eyes an extraordinary brilliance, and it was not until it was half consumed that we could stop blinking and examine our prison. I myself was, further, too struck by the horrible state of Burns' face, to do more than notice that the room was square and made of rough stone, before the light died out.

He had said that he had a bump. Actually, he had a cut running from side to side of his forehead; and his face, in its horrible patchwork of dark red and dead white looked more than anything like one of the Chinese masks in old Mandarin Campbell's library. At the thought of that old devil, sitting in his chair three thousand miles away, gloating over the ill-gotten gold we were giving our lives to get for him, my courage seemed to break.

"Did you see anything, Bill?" asked Burns.

"Only one thing," I said hopelessly. "We're done for."

"You've got kind of long-sight, haven't you?" asked Burns, cheerfully. "Now, I can't see as far ahead as that. All I could notice is that we're imprisoned underground—the roof's dripping, and that they don't intend to maroon us here. The evidence is, that there's a door about nor-nor-east of where I'm sitting, and that in front of it are two pitchers of water. Lord, my head hurts! That boy must have hit me some wallop!"

I was suddenly conscious of a burning thirst.

"Where are the pitchers?" I asked, starting up.

Burns grasped my arm.

"Wait," he said, "we don't know how long we're going to be here. Save 'em. And I saw something else, old son. I don't want to raise your hopes unduly, but the wall opposite to us isn't of stone, but of wood.

And if I'm anything of a marine inspector, of rotten wood."

I felt him rise from my side, and heard him walk unevenly across the floor. A moment later, I heard the thud of his boot-toe against wood whose squashy sound of splintering gave evidence of its condition.

BUT above the sound of the splintering arose another sound which, tearing through the darkness, seemed to stop my heart. From the other side of the wooden partition came the sound of a girl's frightened scream, suddenly stifled. We listened for an instant, but heard nothing more. I rose and stumbled across to where Burns was standing.

"What was it?" I asked in a whisper, gripping his arm.

"There's a woman in the cell next to this," he whispered back. We stood there with our hearts thumping, straining our ears to catch any sound of movement; but none came.

"Who's there?" called Burns softly. There was no answer.

"We won't hurt you," he added, still in the same reassuring tone. To me he added, in what he fondly imagined to be an undertone, but which reverberated in the confined space, "Oh for a Prisoners' Trades Union! She thinks we want to murder her!"

In the silence that followed, it seemed to me I could hear the sighing sound of the girl's breathing through a throat constricted with fear. The thought of any woman in the filthy darkness of this den sickened me.

"How big's that opening you kicked?" I asked him. I felt him bend to investigate.

"About a foot square," he whispered back, "but I can kick it larger. The wood's like punk."

"And scare her to death?" I asked. "Not much. Stand from under. I'm going through. Gimme the matches."

It was a tight squeeze, but I'm built more for speed than for comfort, and I got through. And no sooner had I freed my legs from the clutch of the rotten wood and squatted on my haunches preparatory to striking the light, than I became conscious of a human presence near me in the dark—close up, almost touching me.

Putting out my hand, I touched a bare arm, soft, smooth and rounded. It was trembling violently when my fingers fell upon it; and then, strangely enough, it ceased to tremble at all.

"All right," I said, soothingly, "all right."

I have heard a good deal about this business of love at first sight; but I claim to be unique, in my own experience anyhow, as the only man to fall in love by the simple sense of touch. Naturally it isn't a matter one discusses with the majority of one's acquaintance; and—except when, as now, operating under a pen-name—I shrink from exposing the subject even to the concealed incredulity of my intimates. But the fact is, that that one touch of my fingers on the arm of this fellow-prisoner in the dark thrilled me more than the most melting mood Alison had permitted herself in the presence of penniless me.

"Are you all right?" said Burns through the opening, alarmed, possibly, by my ten-second silence and my failure to strike the match.

As he spoke, my fingers slipped down, over a tangle of bracelets worn Chinese-fashion, to a tiny soft hand that closed with a terrified tightness over them.

"Quite all right," I said, opening the match-box, and propping it against my foot so that I could strike the match with my one free hand. And then to the girl, "You speakee English?"

"Yes," said a small voice. And I was surprized to notice that, though the word had a foreign accent, it was not thick and long-drawn out in the pidgin-tongue used by ninety per cent. of Chinese who speak English at all.

"Then don't be afraid," I said, dropping the pidgin myself. "I'm going to strike a match. Are you ready?"

The soft fingers trembled in my own, and the light sputtered up. And that was my first sight of May-sing, between whose hand and mine there had already flowed that strange electricity that most of us experience at one time or another, and which none of us, tomes and libraries to the contrary notwithstanding, understand in the slightest degree.

I must have looked a horrible figure to her—hair matted, face stained with blood and the rank fungi of the dungeon floor; uniform torn to shreds and daubed with mud and slime; yet she looked at me without shrinking. As for me, I sat there till the match burned my fingers, entranced.

She was small—so small as to make little more than a heap of bright-colored silks

in the corner where she sat; and her color and features were of the almost Caucasian type that belongs to certain of the Manchu aristocracy—the descendants of the steel-capped men of the north who ruled China in person for hundreds of years, and who rule it, by the dead hand of tradition, to-day, republic though it is.

The hand which clasped mine was slender and short-nailed; her feet, one of which peeped from under the edge of her skirt, unbound. As the match burned my fingers and went out, I realized that though pure Chinese, she must have been educated outside of the old régime—probably in one of the convent schools for the daughters of wealthy merchants. And then Burns broke in again with his bellowing whisper.

"Any one there?" he asked.

"Yes," I told him, dazedly.

"Then I'm coming through," he said, driving his boot viciously against the sides of the opening. "Show us a light."

The new match flared up just as his astounded eyes reached a position from which they could see May-sing and myself holding hands across a green-slimed puddle, and looking at each other. He grunted and groaned as he came through the enlarged opening—we had to separate to let him in—and stood leaning against the wooden wall looking down at us. The match went out and his voice came down through the darkness.

"You're a swift worker, all right, Bill," he remarked. "But don't you think we'd better be getting down to business? Does your friend speak English?"

"Yes," I told him.

He slid into a squatting position beside me.

"I don't know your name—" he began.

"May-sing," said the small voice, "daughter of Hop-see-Long."

"Thanks," said Burns, in an embarrassed tone. "I'm Harry Burns, second officer of the steamship *Khan-Do*, and this is Mr. Carter, third officer. It's pretty abrupt, and all that, but we seem all to be in the same boat. Do you know where we are?"

"We are in the dungeon near the secret passage—under the city walls," said the small voice.

As unobtrusively as possible I moved over until I could reach out once more for the little hand. It closed again on mine with a reassuring touch.

"What secret passage?" asked Burns.

"The passage that leads into the city from the ruins of the palace of Kien-lung," said May-sing, "the passage where the traitor Campbell led the emperor's troops to take Nanking, long ago."

"Campbell?" I cried. "I thought he was the treasurer of the Tae-pings when they occupied Nanking?"

"He was—and only he and my grandfather, Hung-sew-Tseuen, the leader, knew of this passage. But Campbell let in the troops of the emperor, so that he could steal the gold of the treasury. Now the passage is bricked up, and only the Tae-ping Tong know that there is a way into it. It is very sad."

"Then we are in the hands of the Tae-pings," said Burns, heavily, "and buried under the city walls."

"Whyfor?" asked May-sing.

Burns merely groaned. I drew breath to explain as much as was possible of our circumstances, but I found that my moral courage wasn't up to the task of telling this girl—evidently a co-hater with me of that grinning yellow devil in San Francisco, that I was an emissary of the traitor, caught in the attempt to get him back his loot.

"Why are *you* here?" I countered.

Her self-control, in that hellish place, was wonderful, but at the question, I felt her shudder.

"My father," she said, "is only son of Hung-sew-Tseuen, an' therefore head of Tae-ping Tong; but for five years, since republic come, he live in hills and lead Tong no more. Tong was to put Christian emperor on throne instead of heathen, but my father he say republic better than both. Now, since he is away, a bad man—half white man—come and gather Tong around him—try make himself leader."

She choked on a little sob.

"That's *our* friend, Carter," snapped Burns. "But how does this bring you here, little lady?"

"They send to my father, won't he please come speak with Tong again—they have great meeting tonight. He come down river in his ship, yesterday, and bring me for see Nanking."

Here she actually did break down. The horror of the place and of her situation at last proved too much for her; and sinking her head on my shoulder she burst into tears.

"So they kidnaped you to hold over—" Burns began.

Suddenly, from some place close at hand but muffled by the thickness of the stone walls, came the thundering boom of a gong. May-sing lifted her head. The brazen call boomed again.

"It is the meeting!" she whispered, her hand clutching nervously at my coat.

Somewhere nearer a door slammed back against a wall. The third roll of the gong sounded louder.

"Some one is coming!" whispered May-sing. "Back! Back! If we are together, they kill!"

Burns was half through the aperture again before she had finished speaking. I delayed for one more risky second; and then in obedience to Burns' command to play unconscious I hurled myself face upward on the slimy floor of our own cell.

THE pad of felt-soled shoes approached along the passage; and crazy streaks of light, thrown through the cracks of the cell-door by the moving lantern, swept to and fro across the dripping ceiling. A key turned in the lock. I closed my eyes as the door crashed back, letting in the full glare of the lantern. The man carrying it, I could see through my lashes, was tall, and dressed in some kind of brilliant uniform. Behind him, lined up against the stone wall, I could dimly see a file of armed men.

The officer swung the lantern first over Burns and then over me; and then laughed.

"You are not unconscious," he said in very good English, "for we have heard you talking together."

Yet, as one does, I stuck to the foolish ostrich trick and kept my eyes closed.

"Do not lie so still, foreign devils," snarled the Chinese, kicking me viciously in the ribs. "You are going to be tried by the Tae-ping Tong in council. After that you will lie still forever and ever."

The kick seemed to me beneath a white man's dignity. I staggered to my feet. Four of the armed men had followed the officer into the room. Now two of them sprang on me and bound my hands behind me so tightly that the ropes cut into the flesh. Two more were doing the same thing to Burns—powerful giants to whom his struggles made not the least difference.

"Forever and ever!" chuckled the officer, as we were pushed into the corridor. "March, foreign devils!"

Surrounded by swords, accompanied by dancing black shadows of ourselves and our guards on the rough-hewn ceiling and walls, we stumbled along the stone corridor on our way to the place of doom.

V

THOUGH, for the honor of our race, we were keeping a tight rein on ourselves and holding our faces as close as possible to the Oriental standard of blankness, it was with pretty poignant feelings that we saw the officer at the head of our escort step forward to a carved oaken door in the wall of the passage, throw it open and motion our guards to lead us forward into the council-chamber of our enemies; but the effect of the apartment itself when, pricked from behind by sword-points, we stood in it under the glare of a dragon-lamp hung from the ceiling, was so terrible as to make our previous emotions seem as nothing.

Our nerves had been keyed up almost to breaking-point by our contact with the inanimate things of medievalism—the stone-walled dungeon with its filth and blackness; the sword-blades and the smoking horn-lantern. Now we were face to face with the dark ages incarnate.

The council-chamber was of about the same size as the prison we had just left; with the same rugged walls and the same low stone ceiling—groined at the corners, I saw, with fantastic shapes of dragons. But here the floor was covered with a heavy red carpet which seemed to give a soft wickedness to its grim strength; and at the far end of the room our judges squatted on silk pillows that seemed strangely effeminate for such a place.

There were perhaps fifty persons in the chamber, for the walls were lined around with the immobile figures of armed men, standing with their hands folded up the sleeves of their crimson blouses; yet what gripped my attention instantly was that black-dressed group on the cushions.

There were six of them, counting one who sat a little to one side on a sort of low throne, and it was impossible to choose which face of the six surpassed any of the others in expression of relentless evil.

The five men on the cushions were of the

fat-faced, pig-like type—Southern Chinese, I guessed; hairless, thin-lipped, and with eyes whose viciousness was partly masked by encroaching rolls of fat. More than anything, they reminded me of puff-adders—bloated, unmoving, and deadly.

The man in the chair, on the other hand, was lean and almost Caucasian in feature. It was with a sudden shock that, looking at the cruel curve of his mouth and jaw, I recognized him as the fake American consular officer who had led us to this place.

As I looked at him, his eyes met mine, and I expected to meet at least some flicker of triumph in his face; but there was none. Unable to support the inhuman gaze, I looked away at the empty throne which stood at the other side of the room from his, and tried to concentrate on wondering who was to occupy it.

As I did so, he gave a curt order in Chinese, and our guards pushed us away from our position near the door to the opposite end of the chamber from the council. Behind us was the wall, with its line of armed men. Our escort divided—two men at each side of us, and four between Burns and myself.

Evidently our business was not first on the council's list. Unflattering as it may seem, in fact, the council was paying no attention to us. All six men had their eyes turned to the door by which we had entered; and now, with my faculties freed from the first spell of that terrifying room, I could note that their tensity of attitude was caused, apparently, by their expectation of some one who would shortly enter.

And suddenly there fell on the door one loud knock, followed by three light taps.

Inside the room there was dead silence. By Western standards, there was no movement, no display of emotion, among the Chinese; yet my sharpened senses could detect that a thrill of apprehension ran around the room, starting from the black-robed men at the head of the room, and running through the ranks of guards. The officer who had brought us in and who now stood by the door, his drawn sword in his hand, looked at the lean man in the throne as if asking instructions; and then, as the latter raised his hand, turned and shot back the bolts.

For perhaps ten seconds he stood bowing into the black space left by the door's opening; then he backed away and permitted the entrance of the new arrival. At that moment, every one in the room except Burns, myself, and the council, bowed low and reverently where he stood. And there stepped into the chamber a Chinese whom, from the assurance of his bearing as well as from the honor accorded, I guessed to be none other than Hop-see-Long, son of Hung-sew-Tseuen and titular head of the Tae-ping Tong.

Two attendants followed him into the room; the bronze gong somewhere outside boomed again, and the door closed behind him. Moving with great dignity, his silk robes swinging around him, he went forward as if to take his place with the council, stopped suddenly in the middle of the room, and stood there, while the bowing Tong-men straightened themselves in the midst of a heavy silence.

I was staring at his back, wondering just what quality it is in some men that gives them power to dominate their fellows as he was dominating this assemblage of desperadoes, when suddenly he spoke. And spoke in English!

"Are you here?" he asked, in a tone that fell on the silence like drops of molten lead.

He was looking at the lean man in the throne to the left of the council—the quasi-American.

"What do you here, Mur-chison?" went on the soft voice. "Here among *my* people?"

Again that thrill ran around the room. I glanced across at Burns, and saw that his eyes, too, were fixed on the scene with a strained intensity, and that his lips were compressed as if he, too, felt the electricity in the air.

Murchison rose.

"Speak in Chinese," he hissed, with a dart of his hand toward us.

Hop-see-Long turned gravely and looked at us. Then with equal gravity he turned back to Murchison. I could see the lean man's hands were clenched and that his fingers were clutching and loosening on themselves convulsively, as if he were in the grip of some great excitement—no trace of which, however, showed in his face. His white blood gave him his features, but his Oriental half controlled them.

"I speak in Chinese only *to* Chinese," said Hop-see-Long advancing a half step toward him. "To white men I speak the language of the foreign devils, as you call them—you,

who are yourself a foreign devil! Where is my chair of office?"

Turning to the fat-faced men on the cushions, he snapped out a repetition of the question in Chinese. They cringed from him, but did not answer. There was a crisis ahead. Suddenly, remembering May-sing's words, I saw the whole situation. Hop-see-Long had left the Tong leaderless when he considered its usefulness to be at an end. Murchison had somehow gained the leadership in fact, though not in name; and now he intended to force Hop-see-Long's abdication, and take the official title for himself.

WE WERE witnessing the decisive battle of a civil war, and the result might mean life or death to us. I almost groaned aloud as I remembered May-sing, in the dungeon a dozen yards away—to be held evidently as a weapon over her father.

"There is your throne," said Murchison, pointing to the empty chair, while the pig-faced council stared in awe at the scene. "Take it!"

"Since there is but one leader of the Tae-ping Tong," said Hop-see quietly, "why do I see two thrones? Accord me the favor of an answer, white man."

"I sit in the other, as co-ruler of the Tong," said Murchison, in a voice that trembled. "And——"

"By whose warrant?" asked Hop-see-Long. "It is five years since I have been here. Then you were not of the Tong; nor any of these." He waved his fan around the room. "By whose warrant, I beg?"

"By warrant—" began Murchison.

"Of the ex-emperor," said Hop-see-Long. "Is it not so?"

He turned his gaze on the council, and its members cowered, making half-hearted gestures of negation.

"Yes," cried Murchison, "by his warrant."

"It is a warrant I do not recognize," said Hop-see-Long. He bowed gravely and raised his fan in signal to his attendants.

"Stop!" cried Murchison.

Hop-see-Long paused in his turn toward the door.

"The business is not complete," said Murchison; "the council would speak with you awhile."

"The council," said Hop-see-Long, "has nothing to say that the honorable foreign devil has not dictated. Let him speak himself as to why he has called me from my far-away home with the voice of the Tong."

"Be seated," said Murchison, bowing toward the other throne.

Hop-see-Long bowed in his turn.

"It is an honor of which I do not feel my contemptible self to be worthy," he said, "the honorable foreign devil will address his servant standing."

They were now sidewise to us; separated by a space in which we could see the apprehensive yellow faces of the council as its members moved uneasily on the silk cushions. It was striking to see the contrast between the faces opposed to each other—the face of the pure-blood Manchu with its calm, and the lean face of the half-blood, now beginning in spite of its owner to show signs of the rage that was boiling within him.

"The Tong has wished to inform the honorable son of Hung-sew-Tseuen," Murchison snarled, "that the time has passed for inaction; that the Tong's existence is menaced by the government, and that its treasure is being stolen by foreign devils—messengers of the traitor Campbell."

For an instant, Hop-see-Long's gaze rested on Burns and myself.

"And so?" he inquired.

"And so the Tong demands of the honorable son of Hung-sew-Tseuen, who has deserted it to its fate, that he resign his office, and give place to another leader."

"Then why is my miserable presence desired?" asked the old Chinese. "The Tong has doubtless chosen its new leader."

"The Tong desires the written word of the son of Hung-sew-Tseuen," said Murchison, "and his honorable approval of the new leader."

"The excellent foreign devil would say that there are still certain real Tae-pings in the Tong, and that these demand a writing from Hop-see-Long before they will turn their hatchets to the support of the accursed emperor and against the republic that has freed them?"

Probably no one in the room but the speakers and Burns and myself knew what was being said; but once again that odd tremor shook the council and its guards.

"If the exalted prince says it is so," said Murchison, bowing deeply, "the dust under his feet will not presume to contradict."

Straightening himself abruptly, he held out a scroll to Hop-see-Long.

"Sign!" he ordered.

Hop-see-Long looked at him impassively and made a motion with his fan. The two attendants turned and started toward the door. The old man was turning once more to follow them when Murchison gripped him by the arm with a violence which tore the silk at its seam.

I saw certain of the armed men around the walls drop instinctive hands to their weapons. I could well believe that Murchison had found it hard to handle the small percentage of the original Tong remaining, without authority from the leader they believed divinely appointed.

"Do you know that your daughter is a prisoner in my hands?" he snarled.

Hop-see-Long bowed.

"I had surmised it," he replied, as if the affair were of the most casual interest.

"And do you refuse to sign?" asked the half-white, his hand slipping suddenly to his sleeve. It was my instinct to cry out to the old man in warning, but my throat seemed paralyzed.

Hop-see-Long turned his face for the first time to the council. I guess by all the rules of writing I oughtn't to put in here what he said, considering that I didn't understand it then, and wasn't given a translation of it until some months later; but it was obvious from the way he spoke, and from the effect of what he said on his hearers, just what was meant; and the words might as well go with it.

"Members of the Tae-ping clan," he said, "and you also, cowardly followers of the half-foreign devil; hear me. I am the son of Hung-sew-Tseuen, the Prince of China appointed by the Christian God to overthrow the bad emperor of those days; who was murdered by treachery before he could accomplish his purpose—and murdered by just such a yellow whiteman as this dog before you.

"When I reached manhood I led your councils against the bad emperor of my time; and would have fought him to the end had not forces more powerful than any Tong overthrown him and placed a government of the people in his place. Now I am threatened that if I do not consent to help him back to the throne, my daughter shall die.

"Brothers of the Tong, and dogs of the foreign devil, kill her if you will; but my consent shall not be given. As long as I live I am leader of the Tong, and on him who disobeys my order falls the curse of his ancestors!"

The council shrank back on its pillows. There was a tinkle of steel as one of the guard dropped his sword against the stone wall. Murchison saw and heard; he took one step forward toward Hop-see-Long, as the old man stood there with his arm upraised, and played his last card for supremacy.

"Then die!" he shouted.

His arm flashed up from his sleeve; and, falling in a glittering semicircle, the knife he had snatched from his sleeve darted into the old man's side.

A groan of horror went up from the men around the walls. At the same instant, just as I saw to my amazement that the old man, though he had staggered under the force of the blow, had not fallen, and that the blade of the dagger had snapped off short in Murchison's hands—there was a spatter of shots from somewhere outside the door; and suddenly the great gong boomed out like a tocsin of despair.

It had been awe-inspiring enough before, when it rang what we had thought was our death-knell; now, beaten by some frantic guardian, it seemed to shake the fabric of the council-chamber. And over its maddened roll came nearer and nearer the sound of shots and shouting.

"Chain mail!" screamed Murchison. "Treachery! Kill the prisoners! Kill!"

Luckily for us, in his confusion he continued to speak English. The guards had their sword-points at our throats, and if he had given the order in Chinese we should have been dead men within the minute.

But before he could repeat the order, the two attendants of Hop-see-Long had darted from behind their master and hurled themselves upon Murchison, carrying him cursing and struggling to the floor.

And as the officer of our escort drew his revolver and made a step toward us, there was a muffled Chinese scream from outside the door; and with a rending crash one of the carved panels splintered inward under the blade of a double-bitted ax.

"Hold 'em, boys," roared the voice of O'Day, "just a minute longer! We're with you!"

VI

THE ax thundered again; one of the bolts holding the door-frame to the posts flew droning across the room; a revolver, thrust through the shattered panel, spat a bullet into the back of the officer to whom had been entrusted the duty of killing Burns and me in case of need; and then the whole door gave inward, and with a spring from the fall to which his momentum had carried him, O'Day was among our guards, slashing right and left with that fearful ax.

One Chinese, trying to oppose its sweep with a futile sword-blade, crashed into a corner split from shoulder to breast-bone; another, slower than the rest at flinging down his weapons, staggered back, his face smashed by a thrust from the ax-helve; and then, as the four engineers and dozen native-police of the rescuing-party rushed into battle with the Tong-guards at the other end of the apartment, O'Day drew the reddened blade over our manacling ropes, and we were free.

"Get a coupl'a swords and come on," gasped the captain, grasping his ax a foot from the blade and hurling himself into the fray.

A minute after the others, Doc Parsons had entered. He was standing in the doorway, an incongruously huge revolver in each hand, firing steadily into the writhing mass of Tong-men which was forcing back the first rush of the police toward the council, now cowering and shivering on its silk cushions. It was under cover of his bullets that Burns and I chafed our wrists until sensation returned to them.

It was obvious from the first that only by the most desperate efforts could any of us escape from that hell-den alive; and it was with hands still blue-white and numb that Burns and I picked up yataghans dropped by our escort and started forward. Just as we did so the weight of the guards around the walls, who had swung across the room and now formed a cordon in front of the council, forced our men back a clear three yards.

In the moment's breathless pause that followed, I saw old Hop-see-Long rise slowly from the floor. His silken cap had disappeared. His face was bruised by the feet of the fighters who had trampled him. His expression of bland dignity had given way to a strange look of fury; and in his right hand he grasped a short sword of dull gray iron.

For a moment the old man stood staring at the red-bloused line before him; then the ghastly head of Murchison rose above the press, and with a hoarse shout like a battle-cry, Hop-see-Long, son of Hung-sew-Tseuen sprang toward his enemy. Into the gap in the ranks created by his onslaught, revolvers roaring, rushed four men of the native-police, to be surrounded and swallowed up as both wings of the Tong guard leaped toward us.

I saw O'Day's ax describe one glittering semicircle, and heard the revolvers of our engineers hurl four bullets into the mass. Then as Burns dropped on one knee to avoid a sword-stroke I sprang over to the defense of Doctor Parsons, who, his revolvers empty, was grappling with one Chinese while another awaited a chance for a fatal thrust. One of the dragon-lamps had crashed into splinters under O'Day's ax; the stone chamber was a hell of men struggling in a fog of oil-smoke, dimly lit by the red glow of the lamp remaining.

O'Day was roaring like a bull; and suddenly, sobered by the shock of feeling my blade slip into something soft and writhing, I heard my own voice shouting something unintelligible. Doc Parsons had clubbed the man who had grappled him and was reloading, his face twisted into a comical look of pained remonstrance.

I leaned against the door-post an instant to laugh at him; and in that instant, Murchison flashed past me and disappeared into the gloom of the corridor. On his heels, his pigtail flying, his face covered with blood, and his eyes blazing, came the half-naked form of Hop-see-Long, his short sword upraised.

It was as a giant Chinese rushed forward to intercept the old man that I interfered. It seemed to me that the real and would-be leaders of the Tae-ping Tong should settle their differences alone. Forgetting my sword, I hurled myself at the Chinese's legs with a football-tackle. The cold breath of steel puffed past my ear; then he fell with a thud, and we rolled grunting and tearing at each other under the feet of the fighters. At the instant of his fall I shifted my grip to his throat, and to this I held until his struggles ceased and his head rolled sidewise.

Then I arose, to find that we were lying in a clear space where the center of the fight had been, and that the remainder of the Tong-guard, crouching before the sweep of O'Day's ax, was making a stand at the other end of the room—around the silken cushions where the council had sat. It was a last stand; they were rats in a trap, and as desperately deadly.

As I rose, two of our engineers rushed forward in an attempt to break the line. Two sword-blades licked out, and they both staggered back. Then for the second time, the ranks broke and mingled. Burns and O'Day, swung with their backs to the right-hand wall, struck out terribly at a half-dozen which wheeled to their assault.

I was just going to their assistance, when suddenly I saw one Chinese—the red-bloused guard who had stood at Murchison's elbow when the council was in session, dodge around the outskirts of the fight, flash past Doc Parsons, and slip out of the shattered door. The doctor's bullet, fired too late to stop him, hummed past my ear; and then I was out of the door, too, and after him.

As I had known he would, he turned down the passage leading to the dungeons, padding over the uneven stones of the passage with a rapidity that left me far behind. And, but for some difficulty he had with the rusted lock of the cell in which May-sing was imprisoned, he would have accomplished his purpose before I, bruised by running into the invisible angles of the walls, could have caught up with him. As it was, I hurled myself through the wooden door just in time to catch his wrist as he raised his dagger above the girl.

Evidently the moon had been obscured by clouds when Burns and I were in the cell; now, from a narrow air-slit near the ceiling trickled a few rays of bluish moonlight. They enabled me to see my enemy's throat; and in an instant my fingers were around it. He dropped back, catching me around the waist in a crushing grip as he did so; and the next moment we were on the slimy floor, growling like beasts, in a death-grapple.

In the surprize of the moment, he had forgotten the dagger he still held; but suddenly I felt one of his hands leave my side, and knew he was preparing to stab me. The point of the dagger had grated against a rib before my hands, snatched from his throat, could arrest it. I twisted the wrist until the dagger dropped tinkling to the floor; and then, with a heave of his legs, the Chinese threw me off and rolled over on me.

Now his hands were on my throat, and his knee on my chest; the darkness seemed to break into a thousand volcanoes of fire. I struggled, tore at the yellow fingers sunk in my neck, kicked and rolled under the pressure of the knee that was driving the life out of me; but the volcanoes were just being extinguished by black waters that advanced with a roar like the dissolution of worlds, when suddenly I felt my adversary go limp and release his clutch. The next instant he had fallen forward on me and was gasping horribly, with his face on the stone floor.

"Are you hurt, Car-ter?" came the voice of May-sing, as if from thousands of miles away. "Car-ter!"

I COULD not answer. All the arrears of weariness from my period of unconsciousness and violent excitement seemed to have come upon me at once; and while my instincts urged me to get up and rejoin the battle which seemed still to be raging in the council-chamber, I could not move. I could still hear O'Day's voice bellowing above the *thud-thud* of his ax and the crackle of revolver-shots; the fight seemed to have extended to the corridor; Tong-men in retreat, I thought.

I made a futile effort to rise but fell back gasping. May-sing's fingers sought over my shoulders for my face; the dagger which she had picked up and plunged into the Chinese rang again on the flagstones; and then I felt her silk-clad arm slip under my head and raise it. That is my last clear recollection until I awoke in my bunk on the ship with the pungent taste of brandy in my mouth, the electric light glaring into my eyes through the undrawn curtains, and the face of Doc Parsons, a dirty bandage around his forehead, above me.

"Where am I?" I asked, as he drew back and put down the brandy-bottle on top of my cupboard.

From outside came the rattling roar of the steam-capstan forward. It seemed to shake my very brain. Rolling clumsily over the side of the bunk I picked up a pillow from the settee and stuffed it into the end of the ventilator. There seemed to be something eluding me. The noise of that

capstan stirred up in my mind the vague memory of something I had to do; something that was in danger of remaining undone if I could not remember it at once.

"We're back where I never expected we should be," snapped the doctor, "and that's on board ship. Does your head hurt you?"

"Where's Burns? How did you find us?" I asked, tearing my hair as that vague memory of duty unperformed still haunted me.

"Burns is in his bunk with concussion of the brain," said Doc Parsons, "and I found you by the simple process of following Hop-see-Long when he came to town for the first time in five years. Thereby incidentally proving myself smarter than the Chinese Secret Service."

The rattle of the capstan stopped suddenly. I could hear the voice of Fraser, with a high nervous note in it, ordering the watch aft "allee same quick." As the only deck-officer on the active list, he was evidently attending to work at the bow and stern as well. We must be unmooring!

"But what—where—" I began, trying to ask what had happened after the fight in the council chamber—what had become of May-sing——

"You lie down again and rest, young man," said Doc Parsons, laying a calming hand on my arm. "There may be troubles ahead, God help us, but you needn't worry about the past. You're out of the clutches of men that had got a rack ready rigged to torture you—we saw it as we came in through the anteroom; and you're putting to sea again. That's better than much fine gold."

Like a flash of lightning, memory returned to me. We were getting ready to drop down the river—to put to sea—without the gold for which we had been sent. We were leaving Nanking with the purpose of this terrible voyage unaccomplished.

I hurled open the door of the room, and rushed to the bridge. It was unoccupied save for a Chinese pilot who looked at me calmly, and smiled as if I had been the most spick and span watch officer in the world instead of a blood-stained scarecrow in a uniform that was mainly rags. Turning, I staggered down the alleyway, brushing aside the doctor as he came out of my cabin, and threw open the door of the captain's room.

O'Day was there, sitting at the table wrapping a bandage around a horribly cut hand; his face, freed from the tension of his berserk rage, pale and drawn under the electric light.

"Are we unmooring?" I demanded.

He stared at me and then at the doctor, as if to ask if I were in delirium.

"We can't leave!" I cried. "The packet has not been delivered!"

O'Day started and rose from his seat. The loose end of the bandage trailed unnoticed on the table.

"Have *you* got it?" he asked curtly.

I stared at him, too used to the habit of silence on the subject to speak at once. But it was obvious that I had it; and O'Day stepped forward and gripped me by the shoulder.

"We're escaping with our bare lives," he said tensely. "We fought our way back to the ship in the center of a patrol of police. The whole district is roused. We ought to be staying to give evidence at the trial of those Tong-men but the Chinese authorities are clearing us out because they think our staying would raise the whole city. At this moment there's a crowd around the pier-buildings, and a detachment of soldiers with a machine gun keeping 'em back. A man's just been on board to say that if we're not gone in fifteen minutes, the soldiers won't be able to hold the mob back."

I heard Fraser shouting orders now at the stern. Above the hiss of steam from the funnel rose the threatening murmur of that crowd ashore.

"What are we going to do?" I asked.

O'Day tore at his forehead.

"It can't be delivered," he cried, "and yet— In ——'s name, how am I going to obey orders like that? It's impossible."

His face suddenly crimsoned.

"We've lost two men in the cursed business already," he growled. "We'll lose no more. You can sling the packet over the side. Where is it?"

"In the chart-house," I told him, "behind a loose panel."

"What are we going to do?" he cried, still undecided, and in agony as to his sacred duty.

"You can sail without me," I suggested, without any pretense at enthusiasm.

"Listen," snarled O'Day. "I know what's in this packet. Old Campbell stole the treasury of the Tae-ping Tong, and dared

not remove all his loot until now, when he thought his end was near anyway. This is an order to some Chink to deliver this gold to us. We can't deliver the order, and if we could, we can't ship the gold. If we're in Nanking tomorrow, our lives aren't worth a dead match. I'll obey an owner's orders when they've to do with righteousness, but I'll not spend human lives to help a thief. Make one step toward that door, and you go into irons. There's been a curse on this trip from the first, when the doctor came aboard and told us what the trip was for. We'll go back without the gold, and it's the last time I sail under the Green Star flag."

His face was blazing with the light of determination. Suddenly, too, I felt under my feet that indefinable something that comes to a ship when her last tie with the land is broken. A moment later, Fraser clattered up the ladder and reported the ship loose. His face was gray with exhaustion. He had been in charge, alone, keeping that cutthroat crew aboard with a shotgun, since O'Day had gone ashore; now his eyes were half-closed, and the hand he rested on the doorpost trembled violently.

O'DAY moved toward the door.

"I'll take charge," he said. "You can turn in, Fraser."

"One moment," broke in Doc Parsons. "I have something to say about this sailing back empty-handed."

O'Day crossed to him threateningly.

"As long as you're on my ship," he growled, "you'll say what I say about it. Savee? We're sailing back empty because you came on board when you did and told us what we were doing; also because I'm not going to take back my ship loaded with what'd get us all killed on the high seas. That gold can stay in China until judgment-day! That's all!"

"Listen to me, you fool!" hissed old Parsons, leaning across the table, with his eyes glaring above the rims of his glasses. "Do I talk for the pleasure of it?"

O'Day stared at him angrily, but there was no doubting, from the tensity of the old man's attitude, that he had something vital to tell us.

"When I came aboard at San Francisco," he said, in a low, rapid voice, "I came by the orders of Campbell himself. The giving of the packet to young Carter here was a blind. So were the visits to the other officers. So was the quarrel between Campbell and me —all designed to avert suspicion from me. Carter's packet contains nothing but blank sheets of paper. The real packet with the order to Mo-fo-Goo to deliver the gold was in my hands!"

"You —— ——," roared O'Day, stepping forward with his arm upraised.

"Stop!" cried the doctor.

The ship's siren blared.

"Take the bridge, Fraser," snarled O'Day over his shoulder. "I'll relieve you in a few minutes. The pilot's there."

A moment later we felt the first throb of the engines going astern to clear us of the dock.

O'Day was gazing at the doctor with a sort of contemptuous pity.

"I suppose your daughter was brought along to divert suspicion, too?" he asked. "A nice adventure for a girl like that!"

The doctor raised his hands in a frenzy of despair.

"Don't mock me!" he cried. "I've been through —— enough. How do you think I've felt when I've seen Carter and the rest of you used as dummies to be knifed instead of me? How do you think I felt as I shouted out all that news about Campbell in this cabin that night—news the Tong-men aboard already knew—so that they'd be certain I had no hand in the business? I did it because Campbell could send me to jail if I refused and—and—I was afraid. I'm so old! I'm so old!"

Suddenly, his hands still in the air, the tears started to his eyes and ran down his wrinkled old cheeks. A moment later, he slumped back on the settee and buried his face in his hands. To see such a hard man broken up was too pitiful. O'Day stepped forward and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"The fault's not yours," he growled comfortingly, "it's that old —— driver back there in the big house that's to suffer. And I'll make him suffer when I get back, by Peter and Paul. But we didn't get the cursed gold, and there's an end of it. Think, man, if we'd got it! Our lives'd be one terror of attack all the way across."

Parsons raised his head as if the words had stung him.

"O God!" he said, rising.

I felt a shiver run up my spine. I knew quite certainly what was coming. So, judging by the increase in his pallor, did O'Day.

"What?" he demanded. "Speak, man!"

The doctor looked from one to the other of us, his lips working soundlessly, his hands playing nervously with the fringe of the table cloth.

"I delivered the packet to Mo-fo-Goo," he said. "He was down at the dock when the ship came in. He'd been warned a month ago that we were coming, and he'd got the gold out of its hiding place, all ready to be shipped. The packet was just a "deliver to bearer" order. His plans were made. He said he would see it aboard."

"But nothing's come aboard but those two pieces of machinery that are on the deck," cried O'Day.

We were clear of the dock, and our engines were swinging our stern around to the rushing yellow current of the river. Now that we were away from the shelter of the pier-houses, the murmur of the crowd before the machine guns of the soldiers ashore came to our ears as a low thunder that seemed to make the blue-black night-air tremble.

"That was Mo-fo-Goo's plan," said the doctor, dropping his voice to a helpless whisper. "They *are* the gold!"

O'Day took his cap off, stared at the lining for a moment stupidly and then put it on again without wiping away the sweat that had started to his brow.

"If this crew knows it—"he began in a weak voice; and then, bursting into sudden activity, he clattered down the ladder to the deck, with me at his heels.

A knot of Chinese was chattering around the cases as they lay one to each side of Number 3 hatch; and at our approach the blue-clad figures scurried forward with unnatural speed. After that, there was little hope in either of us as, with exaggerated carelessness, we strolled past, glancing at the cases.

They had been loaded aboard carelessly, as heavy machinery; and the iron corner-strapping of one had come adrift.

On the deck by that corner, glittering under the cargo-light, lay five gold coins.

VII

FIFTEEN minutes later, O'Day, the doctor, old Mackenzie and myself were in the midst of a council of war. Fraser, whom on our return to the bridge we had found dead asleep standing up, had turned in. The pilot, it seemed, was not one of the regular men, but a Chinese naval lieutenant sent aboard specially, and he had blandly informed us that he was quite capable of taking the ship out unaided. O'Day's instincts rebelled against this violation of precedent, but there was nothing to be done.

Fraser was played out, snoring heavily on the captain's settee; Burns was disabled; and I knew that one moment's release from the tensity of planning against death would send me to sleep as helplessly as Fraser. The only member of the conference around the red-checkered cloth who was anything like fresh was old Mackenzie, and he had been fully alert only since O'Day had poured into his ears the details of our position.

"I wouldn't mind so much," O'Day ended, "if the girls weren't aboard."

"Girls?" I cried, "is May-sing here?"

"Where the —— do you think she is?" snarled O'Day, his nerves on edge, "back in that —— city alone? What were we going to do when her father disappeared chasing that white Chinaman, except bring her along?"

"Where is she?" I demanded.

"She's in Burns' room with my daughter," said old Parsons, "looking after him. But if you're going to break up like that at the thought of her, young man, she'll very shortly be over the side with her throat cut. Don't gape at me! Think!"

"Where are we going to put them if there's trouble?" I asked.

"They'll stay where they are," snapped O'Day, "this is the most easily defended part of the ship. There's only one way up here and that's the ladder, and——"

"But shan't we be down there defending the gold?" I asked.

"What in ——'s name would they want with molesting the gold?" said O'Day. "The only thing they can do is murder all of us and take the ship back. Run her aground somewhere and get the stuff off her. They can't pick up those crates and swim ashore with the things in their teeth, you fool."

"I'd sooner they did that same than murder us a'," said Mackenzie gently. "But wilful men maun hae their way. How do ye propose to stop them, Captain O'Day?"

"How do you propose to stop your firemen from coming up?" queried O'Day bitterly. His head kept dropping toward the table-top an inch at a time, and every once in a while he would give a spasmodic jerk

of his neck and wake up. "We can manage the deck-crowd, but that's all. Have you given your end of it a thought?"

Mackenzie twiddled his fingers.

"Well," he said, "ah did casually run the end of a live steam-hose intae the stoke-hold an' inform ma yellow assistants that it wad be turrned on gin they troubled me ony. An' since they saw one o' their number scalded on the way oot, ah've hopes they'll no' be fractious. An' what hae ye done, captain?"

"We'll have no trouble until the pilot's gone," said O'Day, "and that's five hours yet. I'll fix something. I'll fix something."

"Ah'd send the gold ashore with the pilot," said Mackenzie. "Man, man, ye canna fight wi' twenty o' these yellow devils and them armed."

"Understand this, Mr. Mackenzie," snarled O'Day, "if that gold had remained in its hiding-place I'd have been the happiest man in the world. But now it's out and bound to pass into some one's possession it's going to old Campbell. That's my duty and I'm going to carry it out. Savvy that?"

He reached out and pressed the button which rang for his Chinese servant. Thirty seconds passed; a minute; there was no answer.

"The fight's on, all right," he said grimly. "I want something to eat and a drink of whisky, and some sleep."

"So do I," I muttered.

"There's time yet," said the doctor, rising; "and Sylvia can look after the food."

"She can't go down to the galley," cried O'Day.

"I shall be with her," remarked the doctor, drawing his revolvers, now gray with powder-crust, from his tail-pockets, "and she is not unused to danger. She has been with me five hundred miles back of Hankow."

"And you?" asked O'Day, his eyes half-closing at the suggestion of sleep. "We'll need all our effectives!"

"With a nap on the galley floor and a hypodermic of strychnin, I shall endeavor to do my part," said old Parsons.

"I'll come—" I began, full of an ambitious project for walking around to Burns' room and seeing May-sing.

"You stay where you are," said the doctor. "Go to sleep! Mackenzie, are you coming?"

Mackenzie rose and stretched himself.

"Aye," he said, "ah'm comin' as far as the ladder here. Lads, ye should no get set to sleep wi'oot postin' a sentry. They Chinks micht not rise *en masse* while the pilot is wi' us but they'd slip up the steps an' cut your hearts oot cheerfully. Ye lack forethocht. Has onybody a pistol?"

The doctor handed him one.

"Engine-room?" asked O'Day, with his cheek on the table-cloth.

"There's an airnest young man by the name o' MacWhirter on the platforrm, wi' a pistol i' one hand an' wrench i' the ither," said MacKenzie. "All's well aft, I assure ye. Sleep noo."

There were streaks of dawn—red and violet—in the sky; I had the last glimpse of it through the port before I dropped into a heavy slumber. When I awoke, the brasswork was glittering in a stream of golden light, the circle of sky framed in it was an intolerable blue, and I noticed, as O'Day, opposite to me, moved and yawned under Mackenzie's wakening hand, that his hair was matted to his forehead with the heat of the cabin.

"We've a nice day for it," said the old engineer, laying the revolver on the table and wiping his brow. "The pilot boat's comin' off, men. Oor only protector is leavin' us. But here comes the coffee."

IT CAME—coffee and bacon and bread. I saw Sylvia pass the door, carrying the pilot's share forward to the bridge. Ours was brought in by May-sing who put the tray on the table and, after a quick glance at me, stood there with her eyes downcast. I rose to give her my chair, but she refused it and made as if to leave the cabin.

"Don't you know," said the doctor, who had followed her in, "that Chinese ladies don't sit down with men? You'll have to remedy your education, young man, if your intentions are serious."

He was as crusty as ever, holding the girl by the arm and squinting at me over his glasses. The sight of May-sing's blush made me, I suppose, blush too.

"Speaks English, eh?" snapped the doctor, glaring at her. "Look here, Carter, she's had her brekker. Where's she going to stay when——"

"Here," said May-sing, looking at me.

Evidently she knew what was coming; and with an odd thrill I realized that she was

saying she would stay with me. But it was impossible. I shook my head. At this moment Sylvia entered.

"What's going to happen about the man at the wheel?" she asked without preliminaries. "The pilot says he's prevented him twice from bolting. Since we've stopped to wait for the pilot boat."

We looked at each other. Fraser was still lying in the coma of exhaustion. Mackenzie had tried to waken him and failed.

"Mr. Burns is conscious, but unable to move," said Sylvia. "You men have got other things to do, most likely."

"I'm here," said a weak voice from the doorway.

Burns was leaning against the post, his head bandaged, but looking, thanks to the washing Sylvia and May-sing had given his wounds, infinitely better than during the fight. "Shall I take the bridge?"

Sylvia turned like a whirlwind and took him by the shoulders.

"You'll go right back and turn in," she cried.

"No, I won't," said Burns. "I'm strong enough to sit on the floor of the wheel-house and keep a gun turned on the helmsman."

"So am I," blazed Sylvia, "and I'm going to do it."

O'Day by this time fully awake, intervened.

"You're going to be locked in Burns' cabin with this young lady here," he said heavily, pointing to May-sing. "This is a man's job."

Sylvia stepped up to him, her cheeks burning.

"I'm going to be right here doing my part," she told him, "and I defy you to stop me."

In the silence following these audacious words May-sing's soft voice arose.

"I too," she said.

Sylvia smiled.

"I don't know about you," she said, looking at the little figure in its bright silks, "but I'm no novice with a revolver, and if my life's going to be at stake I'm going to have something to say about it."

"Also myself," said May-sing respectfully, bowing first to the captain and then to me. With a lightning-like movement of the wrist, she made a dagger flash in the sunlight and retreat up her sleeve again. "I attend helmsman."

A shadow filled the doorway; turning, we saw the smiling face of the pilot.

"Boat come," he remarked, shaking hands with himself cordially.

He stepped into the cabin.

"I speak word ashore?" he asked, the smile vanishing. "Seems likely you have trouble with crew. Could send patrol-boat after you."

"No—no!" cried O'Day, thinking, no doubt as I was thinking, of those cases by Number 3 hatch. We had been cleared of the port in face of all the charges against us and the evidence we should have given, as a matter of public policy. But if a word reached the authorities of our half-ton of ownerless gold— With a shudder I wondered if the helmsman could have spoken of it. But he had been on duty since before it was known to be on board. No reliefs had appeared on the bridge, either.

"All right," said the pilot.

His eyes rested for a moment, puzzled, on May-sing; but he hesitated no longer. He shook hands with himself again rapidly and disappeared down the ladder.

A moment later he was over the side, and his boat was pulling away. We watched him through the port until he sat down in the stern-sheets, his back to us; and then O'Day, drawing a deep breath, started for the door.

"Can you read a compass?" he asked the girls.

"On my father's yacht," said May-sing eagerly.

"Then I'm going to leave you in the wheel-house for a few minutes," said O'Day. "Miss Parsons, you'll guard the top of the ladder. Mackenzie, you'd better get aft before trouble starts. Miss Sing, you'll note the course and you'll persuade the man at the wheel not to let her deviate."

May-sing nodded, her right hand caressing the knife in her sleeve; her eyes, for a moment, anyway, on me.

"You'll be out of sight in the wheel-house," said O'Day, leading the way to the door. "You crouch behind the weather-screen here, Miss Parsons. If any one attempts to come up, shoot."

All of us except Sylvia and Mackenzie followed him to the bridge. The Chinese quartermaster had left the wheel and was leaning over the fore-rail staring down at a group of Chinese on the forecastle who were only too evidently conveying to him, by sign language, the news.

O'Day gripped him by the collar and

hurled him flat on the deck. Almost at the same instant, there was the snapping report of an automatic, and a bullet flattened itself against a ventilator cowl. I glanced across the estuary toward the pilot-boat. It was a mile away, nearing its cutter, and the pilot did not turn his head.

O'Day started, stood upright for a moment, drawing another bullet from the fo'c'sle and then ducked like the rest of us. May-sing bending over the prostrate Chinese was speaking to him in his native language. As she drew the knife from her sleeve and tapped its point on the deck at his side, he turned, got on all fours, and went over to the wheel.

"If I speak, he understands," she smiled at us. "Suppose you set course, captain?"

"Are we going out with this gang?" asked Burns, horrified.

"Unless you've some better plan to suggest," growled O'Day. "Do you know what we've got aboard?"

"Why in —— name didn't we get another crew?" asked Burns.

"Because I didn't know until we were out in the stream that we'd the gold aboard," shouted O'Day, "and because I knew that if this crew got ashore, we'd not get another in time to sail at a moment's notice."

Burns opened his mouth to speak again.

"We can't make another Chinese port now because we'd be detained and the gold confiscated," roared O'Day. "Whatever I'm doing is the only thing to be done. For ——'s sake shut up and let's carry on. I'm captain here until I'm murdered."

"We've got women aboard," said Burns.

It was the thought of Sylvia that had driven him to this unheard-of course of questioning the captain's wisdom.

"And they're turning to and doing something while you're standing whining there," said O'Day, pointing out the course on the compass-card to May Sing.

"I'm not whining," said Burns. "I——"

AT THIS instant, just as O'Day rang the engines to half speed, there arose from the deck aft a terrible cry in the voice of Mackenzie. Rushing to the aft-rail, over which Sylvia Parsons was already leaning in an attempt to get a shot at the struggling group below, we saw that two Chinese, hidden in the cabin which had been occupied by the doctor, had sprung out on the engineer as he passed on his way aft, and that they were now trying to drag him forward.

Before any others of us could move, Burns was half-way down the ladder, the bandage slipping over one eye with the violence of his movement.

"I'll show whether I'm a coward or not," he cried as his feet touched the deck.

One of Mackenzie's adversaries turned to meet this new attack, a knife in his hand. Burns' foot shot up and kicked the weapon to the boat-deck, where it lay glittering in the sun; then, after one terrible left to the man's face, he caught him by the waist, raised him aloft with unnatural strength, and hurled him over the side.

The other man, releasing Mackenzie, had turned on Burns when I slid down the ladder. Before either of us could get to grips with the Chinese, however, a bullet hummed down from the top of the steps and dropped him at our feet. We turned to face forward just in time. Half a dozen Chinese were rushing aft upon us through the alleyway under the bridge-house.

"Get to your engines, Mackenzie!" yelled O'Day, clearing the ladder, it seemed, at a bound and knocking the leading attacker flying into the scuppers with a thrust of his shoulder. "We don't want your firemen——"

The next moment he was at grips with a deck-hand, holding his arms to his sides while he forced his neck backward to the breaking-point; and Burns and I were trying to hold off knife-thrusts while we backed to the ladder. Only one of these men had a revolver, and Sylvia brought him down as he was taking aim at Burns.

The doctor, I learned afterward, was leaning over the forward bridge-rail with a Martini he had snatched from the rack in the chart-house, keeping back the rest of the fore-guard.

O'Day's man fell to the deck with a limp thud. Spinning around on his heel he caught two of the men facing me, and brought their shaven heads together with a sickening crack that laid them both senseless; and a moment later all three of us were back on the bridge-deck unhurt. On the steps of the ladder lay the man Burns had grappled, unconscious.

The man who had tried to knife me was staggering forward howling with the pain of a broken arm. All three of us were utterly exhausted. Burns lay down on the red-hot

deck and closed his eyes. O'Day made a gallant attempt to brace up, but failed. His strength was at an end. How, at his age, he had so far stood the strain, was beyond me. He leaned over the rail and stared around the blazing, shoreless expanse of the estuary.

The pilot-boat was a mere speck to the north. Save for a steamer whose smoke smudged the horizon, it was the only ship in sight. On our starboard quarter Tsung-ming Island was receding into a hazy patch.

"Carter," said O'Day, in a voice that lacked all semblance of vitality, "we're dead men. We can't go back, we can't go forward without food, fighting all the way against these odds. We're going to die at sea within ten yards of enough gold to make us all millionaires. I've done my best. I've done my duty; but there's a curse on us. There's a curse on that gold! We're all accursed! Accursed!"

Then suddenly his knees crumpled under him and he fell to the deck, breathing heavily, just as Fraser had done when at last he keeled over—played out to the last deuce.

Burns and I picked him up and, staggering under his weight, carried him into his room and laid him in the bunk. We turned to find Fraser opening his eyes, wakened it may be by some psychic warning of his new responsibility. But while yet he lay there, staring at us dully, the doctor rushed up to the door.

"The Chinks have ducked below," he said. "There's some deviltry afoot. Where's the ammunition for the Martinis?"

"Top right-hand drawer in the chart-house," said Fraser, like a thick-voiced automaton. "Here's the key."

"It's gone!" cried the doctor. "The lock's been forced, and the drawer's empty!"

As I sprang over to the drawer in which O'Day had kept his revolver ammunition, Burns, with a face of horror, darted through the door toward his cabin. By the time I had assured myself that all the boxes hidden under the captain's shirts had disappeared, he was back.

"Mine's gone, too!" he cried. "You needn't look, Carter. They'll have made a clean job of it. Fraser, we'll have to put back. This is suicide."

"What did the old man say?" asked Fraser, in the same thick voice.

"He said to carry on," I answered, "but he didn't know——"

"Then those are the orders," said Fraser, fumbling on the settee for his cap. "I've no authority to change 'em. Carry on!"

"But when they rush us," queried the doctor, "I've got three rounds in one of my revolvers; there's a round in each of the rifles, and these boys may have six shots between 'em. What are we going to do in face of fourteen Chinamen amuck?"

"Make every shot tell," said Fraser, starting for the bridge.

"And then?" asked the doctor.

"Pray!" shouted Fraser, a sort of wry smile on his rugged face. "Pray!"

VIII

THE afternoon watch wore away; all of us on the bridge; May-sing still standing by the almost exhausted helmsman; and the signal-cannon, for which we had found one charge and a collection of scrap-iron, poking its nose through the forward bridge-rail; but there was no sign from the forecastle.

Alone this time, Doc Parsons had risked a trip to the galley, to find that everything capable of being used for food or in the preparation of it, had been removed. Over the engine-room tube, Mackenzie reported hunger in the engine-room, but peace in the stoke-hold.

"They were fractious," he said, "but ah gev the steam-cock a bit turn an' they're quiet the noo. Good-by, if ah dinna see ye a' again."

"They're waiting for night," said Fraser, as he put the tube back on its hook. "There's no need for us all to be here. Who's freshest of us?"

"I am," I said.

The doctor had changed my bandages while I was unconscious, and they had not come adrift like Burns' in the scuffle on the deck. I suppose really I looked quite as haggard as the others, but it was no time for argument even if we had had the strength.

"Can you take the dog-watches, then," asked Fraser, "while the rest of us sleep?"

I glanced at May-sing whose bright black eyes were fixed on me, and nodded. At that moment the Chinese at the wheel toppled sidewise and fell. The sudden movement almost got the ever-ready knife into his back; but he had genuinely fainted. Fraser cut the rope off a life-belt, tied his hands and feet, and pushed him into the shade.

"I'll ——" I began; but May-sing had already mounted the wheel-box and taken the spokes into evidently practised hands.

"I manage often," she said, with a smile that showed her tiny teeth and brought a half-hearted answering grin from all of us. "Go away, men."

"Fire a shot if you need us," said Fraser, as he turned to go. "But for ——'s sake kill somebody with it! If they rush give 'em the cannon."

At one bell there came the sound of hammering from the forecastle; and for the next hour I watched tensely. Sylvia Parsons in spite of persuasion had remained at her post by the ladder, and I shouted the warning to her; but there was no demonstration by our enemies.

Fraser was right—whatever their purpose, they were waiting for darkness. Meanwhile we were driving forward at ten knots in an empty sea; and I figured that it wouldn't much matter if I kept my watch from inside the wheel-house. Before the cool which was falling on the blazing day should merge into this fatal night, I wanted to talk to May-sing.

I was standing at her shoulder, looking down at the curve of her cheek, at the peep of one little golden ear from under her black hair, at her little hands on the black oak of the wheel; and yet I could say nothing. I could tell by the quiver of her shoulders that she was conscious of my nearness, yet she did not look up from the card.

We must have stood this for nearly an hour when I gathered myself together enough to say she must be tired. She answered with a little sigh; and I put one hand on the wheel to relieve her. I had been looking at the horizon, and my eyes were unaccustomed to the dusk in the house; so that my fingers fell on hers, as they had in the dungeon.

"May-sing!" said I huskily.

Her hand fluttered under mine, and her breath fanned my cheek.

"You take the wheel, Car-ter?" she said softly, as if her heart was pounding like mine.

Like a ghost she slipped from between my arms, and, in a trembling voice, gave me the course. Then with quick little steps she went out into the sunshine of the bridge and stayed out of sight on the port side for a few seconds. When she returned, slipping from the light into the dusk like some bright butterfly, she was calm again.

"There is no sign of Chinamen," she said, taking her place at my side. "I suppose mos' likely they wait for night to kill us, Car-ter."

"Perhaps they'll have to wait longer than that," I said, trying to give my words some ring of conviction.

She paused as if to think it over and then shook her head.

"Unless maybe God come down they kill us all," she said, quite calmly. It was funny to realize, as she spoke, that she was a Christian. "I shall not like them to kill you, Car-ter."

I thought I heard in her voice something of the former tremor.

"Why not?" I asked unsteadily.

The horizon had changed from a line of gold against a blazing blue, to a dark line across a sky of ultramarine. Soon a smoke-like mist would slip over the edge of the world toward us; then the stars would try to shine in the dying light; and then, with a sweep that would fan those stars into bright points of flame, the night would be upon us.

"Why not?" I asked again.

"You save my life," said May-sing softly.

"And you mine," I answered, "but now we're going to lose them again. Is that all?"

There was a long silence.

"And—I like you, Car-ter," came the soft voice. "I am very bold."

"I like you, too, May-sing," I said.

Her silken shoulder touched mine.

"I am very bold," she said, almost inaudibly; "it is the Christian school. For there the Europe girls would talk, and I could not help but listen. Do you like me much, Car-ter?"

The mist was over the skyline; the stars were gaining ground on the sinking sun.

I left the compass-card to its own devices, and looked at May-sing. Something about the poise of her head as she looked back at me, and the curve of her olive throat, cut my voice to a whisper.

I said, "Very much," but she did not hear.

And then suddenly she was in my arms and I had kissed her.

"Oh!" she cried. And then again, "Oh!"

She made no effort to break loose; but with one hand to her lips she stared at me with wide eyes.

"That is very strange," she said at last, in a small, frightened voice. "It—is—very—strange——Car-ter."

"It means," I told her, "that I love you."

"They have not taught it to me with the other English," she said, taking her hand away and laying it on my arm, "but it—is—pleasant, Car-ter."

She reached up her lips to my face.

"I love you, too," she said; and was about to make a creditable first attempt at the English of it, when a light blazed into the wheel-house, and from behind the flash-lamp came the voice of O'Day.

"What the —" it began.

The light flashed off, and a powerful shoulder pushed me away from the wheel.

"Ten points off her course by the telltale compass," roared O'Day, spinning the spokes violently.

He chuckled, tried to control it, and finally laughed.

"And no —— wonder, "he growled, like a good-natured bear. "Rouse out the gang, young man, and see to the side-lights. Hop! Then you can turn in."

IT WAS now dark, and the forecastle lost in the blue void beyond the bridge-rail.

As O'Day spoke, there was a shout of effort from below—a sudden flood of ruddy light—and a crash—as a barrel filled with kerosened tow landed blazing at our feet.

I rushed upon it, and a bullet from the outer darkness fanned my cheek. As I carried it to the side and hurled it over, four more shots missed me by inches. While Fraser, the doctor, and Burns rushed up, their weapons ready, O'Day tore the housing from the bridge search-light, and threw over the switch; but scarcely had the arc sputtered into being than a bullet struck the lens, smashed the carbons and gashed the captain's face with the flying pieces of glass.

We heard the patter of felt-soled feet going back to prepare another fire-bomb; and O'Day, furious, fired a chance shot which brought a derisive cry from the dark.

"It's no use," he said heavily, flinging his revolver on the deck. "We're dead men."

He stepped across and rang the engines to "Stop."

"The side-lights give them a mark," he said, "there's no lookout, and we don't want to go ramming anybody. We'll fight it out here. Who's on guard at the rear steps?"

"Sylvia," said the voice of the doctor.

"Go and relieve her," said O'Day, "Tell her to sleep. And keep one round for her."

The doctor moved away.

"Hear me?" snapped O'Day.

"Yes," said a trembling voice, "one round."

He disappeared.

"And you, Carter," said O'Day, as I felt May-sing's hand slip into mine. "You keep one, too."

He could see me, in the dim radiance that still seemed left over from the day, so that I only nodded. May-sing pressed against me, and I put my arm around her waist.

"You, Burns, keep to starboard. I'll take port. Fraser, you attend to the cannon. For ——'s sake don't fire until——"

There was another shout from below; and as we all rushed to the rail, a dark object with a fuse sputtering behind it flew over our heads and crashed on the roof of the wheel-house. With the speed of lightning, Fraser caught the edge of the roof, swung himself on top, snatched up the barrel regardless of the flames already bursting from it, and hurled it back over the rail.

As it smashed into a blazing heap in the midst of the men who had thrown it, he leaped back and jerked the lanyard of the cannon. With a roar that deafened us it leaped backward under the recoil; and I saw five men fall under its jagged blast. But before any of us could fire at the survivors they had disappeared. The barrel blazed on, illuminating an empty deck.

"They've got us," said Fraser hoarsely. "The deck's steel, and fire can't hurt them. The bridge and the houses are wood. Either they'll pick us off one by one or we'll roast! They've broken into the paint-stores——"

O'Day picked up the engine-room tube.

"Mackenzie?" he said. "We're going down to the deck between the bridge and the engine-room house. We can't hold the bridge. Do you want to leave one of your men with the steam-hose and join us?"

He put the tube back and rang the telegraph to "Done with engines."

"Done with the whole business," he said, sort of regretfully. "Mac's coming up with three men. Might as well make it sociable." His old self took command again. "If we're down there before they heave another flare we can barricade the

alleyways and make sure of taking a few of them with us," he said. "Come on!"

Groping our way to the ladder we told Doc Parsons the plan and slid down the steps to the deck. May-sing came down after me; Sylvia Parsons waited for Burns, and O'Day left last. As he started down the ladder, there was a thud on the bridge, and another kerosene barrel flared up.

"Hurry!" he said, coming down the rest of the steps with a run. "They'll be on us when they see we don't take any notice. Get the doors off those cabins. Quick."

Mackenzie and two of his juniors ran up, each with a revolver in his left hand and a huge wrench in his right. Using the wrench-handles as crowbars, and O'Day's huge strength, we burst from their hinges the doors of the cabins in which Sylvia and her father had traveled out, and jammed one diagonally across each alleyway leading from forward.

As we worked, forcing them as tightly as possible into place, and praising God for the narrowness of the passages, we could see the crew standing on the forecastle in the glare from the bridge, revolvers ready for any who should attempt to extinguish the flames. No one fired at them though they were perfect targets. In a few seconds at most they would know we had left the bridge, and be on us.

We wanted all the time at our disposal to strengthen our fortification. With the materials at our command, we could not hope to do more than check their advances for a moment.

"Ready?" called O'Day from the port side.

The woodwork of the bridge was beginning to blaze; suddenly we heard the Chinese voices forward raised in evident argument as to whether to attack now or to wait. After a moment the chatter died down and one dominant voice continued briefly—giving orders, by its tone.

"Leader say to attack now," sobbed May-sing at my side. "O Car-ter!"

We must have looked a ghastly company, lined up there against the white steel wall of the engine-room house, our worn faces lit up by the red glare from above, our eyes fixed on the black mouths of those alleyways.

Burns and I had taken rifles and given our revolvers to the girls; there would be time, if the Chinese rushed us, for one volley; and then it would be hand-to-hand work in which the rifle-butt would be the man's weapon.

O'Day, trembling all over as he had trembled with rage in the Tong dungeon, stood on the center of the hatch, his rifle already grasped by the fore end.

Suddenly he turned his blood-stained face around to us with a roar.

"Ready!" he shouted. "They're coming!"

INCREDIBLE as it may seem to persons acquainted only with the simplex mind of the Occident, the howling devils who now surged up to our barrier had foreseen just such a moment as this, when a second might decide the fight; and, leaving the rifles in the chart-house racks with a shell in each breech, they had drawn the charges.

Our three rifle-bullets should have smashed into the group as they halted to climb the barricades. Instead, the firing-pins fell with dull clicks; and, had not O'Day been ready with his clubbed rifle on the hatch-cover, the attackers would have been among us before we could reverse our weapons.

As it was, the line of yellow faces halted for a moment at the end of the circle over which the captain was swinging his club; and then, with a shout, Mackenzie and his engineers sprang forward, and Burns and I joined them. But for this chance to take the initiative, the battle could not have lasted a minute.

Four of the Chinese, as if warned that he was the most dangerous of us, surrounded O'Day. Mackenzie and a junior—MacWhirter had fallen with a bullet in the shoulder—had rushed half a dozen blue-clad figures into a whirling hand-to-hand at the mouth of the port alley; and Burns, the doctor and I had the rest upon us over by one of the cases of "machinery."

The gold that had brought us to this pass was right in the center of the catastrophe—as malignant as ever; for Burns, stepping back from the sweep of a fid that would have spattered his brains on the deck, stumbled over one edge of the case, fell, and would have been knifed before he could rise had not Sylvia Parsons sent a bullet into the cruel yellow face that was bending over him.

I remember driving the butt of my rifle into another face that sprang up before

mine in the red haze; and then there was a loud report behind me, and I felt a sledge-hammer blow on my thigh. It spun me around, and I saw, crouching against the deck-house, a Chinese with two revolvers, sniping into the mêlée. My leg was refusing to move; I could only crawl on all fours; and it was among the legs of the swaying crowd that I made my way toward him.

I must have gone through the outskirts of O'Day's fight, for I was crushed to the deck by a body which had an indeterminate mass instead of a head. The sound of the shots was my guide as to direction. All our cartridges were gone, except the two I prayed Parsons was reserving for his daughter and May-sing.

Burns, I saw through a momentary break in the pack around him, had smashed his rifle butt into splinters, and was taking knife-stabs on his left arm while he drove his right into the faces of his foes. Doc Parsons, mounted on the case of gold, was laying about him with the butt of his revolver.

The fifty-foot strip of deck was a hell of screams, thuds, and hoarse shouts. Mackenzie, beating time with his clotted wrench, was singing a hymn. O'Day was delivering himself of the most frightful oaths, interspersed with shouts of "Take that!" and bursts of terrible laughter. The Chinese fought in silence, grimly certain of victory.

I passed the aft end of the hatch-coaming, and was within three feet of my quarry. He was intrenched behind the coaming, and using it as a rest for his elbow as he fired. He was going to press the trigger as O'Day's back showed clear before him, when I reached out a hand and grasped the pistol.

In an instant he had snatched up the other revolver and fired it in my face with a roar that stunned me; the bullet fanned my ear and buried itself in the calf of a Chinese behind me. Then, with a blind effort, I raised myself and fell on him bodily. His head bent forward under my weight; I put my hands on his shaven skull and forced it still further between his knees. He tried to scream but his breath was shut off as his neck crumpled. Then there was a crack, and he gave way entirely.

"Back!" roared O'Day, in a new access of fury. "We're done, boys! Give 'em a last rush!"

The fore end of his rifle had come off in his hands, and the barrel and splintered stock had flown over the side. Now he leaped off the hatch with his fists clenched. Mackenzie and his aide rushed across to him and for a moment the main body of the Chinese shrank back against the bridge-house.

It was the last flicker of aggression before our light went out. The next rush of the yellow men, the next raising of those knives in those long, cruel hands, would be the last. Doc Parsons, tearing himself out of the fight around Burns, staggered over to where Sylvia and May-sing were standing, clinging together in the fear that had at last overtaken them; and drew the revolver he had kept for them.

He was standing right by me, and I heard him saying good-by to his daughter. It was at this moment that May-sing's eyes fell on me, lying there with the Chinese beneath me, staring at the momentary halt in the battle as if it were a drama which was interesting but which did not concern me in the least. I was wondering which of the devils who were leering there in the light of our funeral pyre—the blazing bridge—would find me helpless and send me after the others.

"Car-ter!" cried May-sing, piteously.

Just as she left Sylvia's arms and crouched by me, a jar ran through the ship, as if some other vessel had brushed against it; and, as O'Day and his adversaries looked instinctively toward the side from which the jar had come—it was to starboard, just aft of where we were standing—there glided into view alongside, a masthead, from the top of which a Chinese, judging his moment, leaped to the deck with a line in his hand.

There was a snarl from both O'Day and the Chinese; a movement to fall on this new intruder who might be of either side; when suddenly May-sing rose from my side with a scream of Chinese words which checked the attack and turned all eyes on her.

A moment later the man with the line had drawn up a rope ladder from the motor-launch alongside—from the height of its masthead I judged it to be such—and then the miracle happened.

Over the side, still in the torn rags of his rich garments, with the dried blood closing many more wounds than he had had when he rushed through the door after Murchison, came the grim form of Hop-see-Long.

HE STOOD on the rail and raised the broken half of that dull gray sword of his. As if at a signal, there came from the boat below the shout of many men.

"He have brought help," sobbed May-sing to me, before she ran forward to throw herself at the old man's feet.

"Thank God!" I heard old Doc Parsons mutter.

But the danger was not past.

For one moment, the apparition of the son of Hung-sew-Tseuen; and for another moment that shout telling of numbers within call, had checked the Tong-men facing us. As Hop-see-Long stepped down to the deck and raised his daughter to his arms, the crew's leader—a low-browed villain with a thin drooping mustache that added to the repulsiveness of his face—stepped up to the old man and snarled a few words at him, demanding, it seemed to me, by what right he interfered.

Hop-see-Long gently put the girl to one side; with a frightened run she came back to me. At the same moment, over the rail, appeared the two attendants who had followed Hop-see-Long into the council-chamber. They, too, were torn and wounded; with their master they made a grim trio standing there by the rail with the swaying masthead light of their vessel behind them.

Hop-see-Long spoke.

"He say he is head of the Tong," whispered May-sing.

The leader shouted a reply in which I could distinguish, often repeated, the name of Murchison. I did not need May-sing's whisper to tell me that our crew was disclaiming allegiance to Hop-see-Long, and contempt for his orders, and proclaiming their loyalty to Murchison and the Old Empire.

I expected at any moment that Hop-see-Long would raise his sword and strike the fellow down; but he did not. Instead, he smiled and turned to one of his attendants. The man slipped around from behind him to his side.

The chief of our enemies was shouting and shaking his claw-like hands in the old man's face.

"— Murchison!" I heard him say, and then with the scream of a fanatic. "Murchison!"

"Murchison?" said Hop-see-Long quietly.

And made a sign to the man at his side.

The next instant, thrown by the attendant as one throws some distasteful article away, a round object struck the canvas of the hatch-cover, bounced, rolled over the uneven projections of the hatch and came to rest, full in the glow from the bridge, where all—the Chinese, now suddenly cowering behind their leader—O'Day, the girls—all of us, could see it.

Grinning, its eyes turned up in the last agony, there lay the head of Murchison!

"Aiiiii!" shouted Hop-see-Long, in a weird yell of triumph.

"Aiiiiii!" came an answering shout of many voices from below.

For a moment the scene was motionless; then—it seemed to my confused senses—in a flash, armed men had swarmed over the side. Old Hop-see-Long stepped forward on to the hatch-cover, kicking aside the body of a Chinaman which obstructed his path. His servants surrounded the eight men remaining of our crew and shepherded them with violence to the side; but of force there was no need. They went unresistingly; and as the leader, last to leave the ship, turned as he reached the rail and bowed low to the victorious leader of the Tong.

The old noble on the hatch ignored him. His eyes had picked out from among us O'Day, in all his disguise of rags and blood-stains; and squatting himself, as it were, on a throne of blood-stained canvas he motioned the captain to come and sit with him. With his men forming a fierce semi-circle behind him, the dead littering the hatch-cover, and the flames from the bridge throwing odd shadows across his terrible old face, he looked like some Chinese god of war, holding his court.

"Captain," he said sternly, as O'Day staggered to the hatch-coaming and sat, "I have come for the gold."

O'Day raised his head sharply.

"I pursued you to save your lives," went on the old man, "but this murderer aboard has said that you are escaping with the remainder of the treasure the traitor Campbell stole from my father and the Tong when he betrayed us in my infancy. Is this the truth?"

O'Day stood, staggering.

"Yes!" he cried. "It is the truth! There lies the —— stuff."

"Then I will take it," said Hop-see-Long softly.

"Not while I live!" roared O'Day. "I was sent for that gold; I've got it. I've come out here on the high seas with a crew of murderers, and made my officers face certain death, rather than give it up, to the authorities, and I will stick to it until I'm dead. My orders were to bring that gold. I'm paid to obey orders. The first man that lays a finger on one of those cases I'll strangle with my bare hands!"

"You are a brave man, captain," said Hop-see-Long, bowing where he sat.

The two of them looked into each others' eyes for a moment.

"And to a brave man," said Hop-see-Long, "I can refuse little. Be seated, honorable sir."

O'Day remained standing, every muscle tensed. With a fine courtesy, Hop-see-Long rose and stood opposite him.

"But I can not allow you that you should convey this treasure to a traitor, a murderer, and a thief!" he said sternly.

"And I can not allow you to take what's in my charge," snarled O'Day, "and I won't!"

Hop-see-Long bowed again.

"I shall not demand it," he said, his gaze running around our haggard ranks, and finally resting on me as I lay with my head in the crook of May-sing's arm.

"Upon this gold," cried the old man, in the tones that the old prophets must have used, "lies a curse! It was taken by my father, with violence and bloodshed, though his cause was just. It was the reason for his fall and his miserable death, from which I alone, of all his children, escaped. During my years as leader of the Tong, though lost, it was the cause of strife, of rebellion, of conspiracy. The hope of finding it was the reason for the rise of this accursed Murchison who has tried to use the Tong for evil ends. To this ship and to all of you, it had brought terror and death. Now I tell you that there shall be an end of it! Let the gold be hurled into the sea!"

O'Day started.

"If it goes into the hands of Campbell," went on Hop-see-Long in that strange high voice, "he will use it to suck the blood of the people as he has drawn the blood of your youths to gain it. He is an evil man, and gold in his hands is a deadly poison to the world."

Mackenzie broke in with a hoarse growl.

"It's so!" he rumbled, "it's the —— truth. What am ah gaun to tell the mithers of the twa dead boys?"

O'Day looked around at us. I tried to shout my agreement with Mackenzie but my throat would not work. The faces of the others were drawn with a hatred of the grasping traitor who had sent us on this terrible errand.

"If you agree," said Hop-see-Long, "a crew of my men shall work your ship home; and the life of Campbell shall be spared. For assuredly the knife of the Tong is at his throat. He has sacrificed others in his place long enough. This I tell you: that if you or any of you die in defense of this treasure, the thief shall not live. Tonight the peril of this treasure ends!"

O'Day looked up at him suddenly.

"I agree," he said. "Not because I'm afraid of your numbers. I'd turn to and fight the whole lot of you, and so would Burns and the rest of us—even Carter there with his smashed leg."

"It is not to be doubted," bowed Hop-see-Long.

"But you're right!" shouted O'Day. "The stuff is accursed! It's got the curse of all gold and the blood of hundreds on it! Get it off my ship and let the sea-water wash it!"

Hop-see-Long bowed again.

"It is done," said he; and over his shoulder snapped an order to his men.

Even with a May-sing to make consciousness desirable one can not lose blood long without also losing one's grip on things. Now my head had dropped back until all I could see was the column of sparks from the bridge—across which, as I looked, the launch at our side began to send a stream of water from her pumps.

"If it's anybody's gold, it's yours," I heard O'Day say.

"I am rich," said Hop-see-Long, "and my wealth is honestly gained."

There came suddenly a silence, broken only by the labored breathing of men near me. I was perhaps five feet from the case which lay to starboard. It was heavy. Twice, as it was lifted, there was a bump as it slumped back to the deck, and the pad-pad of more men coming to help.

"Aaaaah! Aaaah!" gasped three or four voices, in the strain of lifting. "Acha! Acha!"

"Farewell!" cried Hop-see-Long suddenly, in English. "Farewell!"

There was a moment's silence—I suppose as the heavy box rested on the rail-top; and then Hop-see-Long shouted another command.

With a grinding noise, the case slipped outboard over the rail. From below came a sullen, mighty splash.

An instant later, the case to port creaked, groaned, and was gone.

And, as if my lease on life had been limited to the duration of our peril, the glow of the fire died from my eyes, the sobbing of May-sing from my ears, and I lapsed back into illimitable blackness.

IX

I WAS in a strange cabin, whose port, blazing with the cooler sunshine of a northern latitude, was not over the bunk, as my cabin port had been. It was opposite to me; and silhouetted against it was the head of a man. He was reading a book; as I stared at him he glanced up, bringing his face into the light. It was O'Day, and he stepped forward and took my hand. His head was still bandaged. Suddenly I saw tears start to his eyes.

"Thank God!" he said.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"In Sylvia Parsons' old cabin," said O'Day, "you've been delirious and —— knows what, and we didn't think you were coming through. You've woke up just in time to see us enter 'Frisco."

"But May-sing," I asked, "where is she?"

"Now, you want to keep calm," said O'Day; "it's all right. She went back on the launch with her father. Lie still! But before she left, she went to him, right before us all, and had a long parleyvoo in Chinese: and finally the old man went and looked at you as you lay there, and sort of smiled, and told me where he lived in the mountains."

I closed my eyes.

"But when they were leaving," O'Day said protestingly, "the girl went over and patted your cheek and said, 'Oh, tell him to come soon.' What more do you want than that?"

I opened my eyes again. Somehow it seemed to me that the way back to China, though it led through jobs, and money-making, and all the complications of civilization, would not be arduous. And later events proved I was right. I was already doing well for myself, a year later, when Uncle Norman left me that astounding hundred thousand dollars.

O'Day leaned over the bunk and surveyed my face critically.

"I'm going to call the doctor," he said. "You look kind of flushed to me."

I grasped his great hairy paw and held it. I didn't want crusty old Parsons breaking in on the vision I was having of May-sing; a little golden maid in her bright silks.

O'Day ran a perplexed hand through his hair.

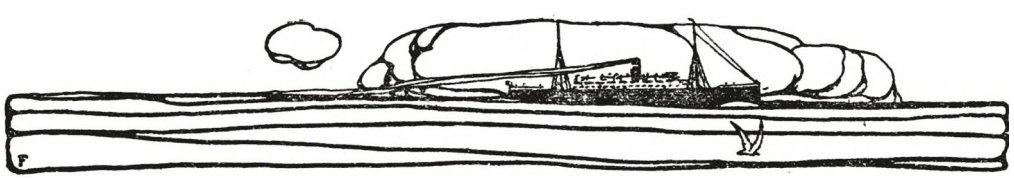
"You've lost an awful lot of blood," he said doubtfully. And then: "We're all pretty well shot up. You know, all the way home me and Fraser and the number one Chink have been standing watch and watch. Good job Hop-see-Long left his first mate with us. Burns is too knocked out to do anything but lie in his bunk and hold hands with Sylvia Parsons. I bet it'll be a long time before any of this ship's company go back to China after another treasure! What're you smiling at?"

I was smiling at the dream of May-sing. I would go six hundred miles up the Yangtze to Hankow, and take horse into the mountains until I came to some old palace perched on a slope above the river; and there she would be——

"Nothing—only you'll lose your bet," I said.

"Eh?" grunted O'Day, as the door opened and the doctor came in.

"About not going back to China after another treasure," I told him. "I am!"



In Kaffir Kraals*

Upina Survives through Childhood

by

SANTIE SABALALA*

A Remarkable Account of Actual Savage Life Told by a Zulu Who Lived it.

EDITOR'S NOTE—Since white men first penetrated the Black Continent there has been a constant struggle to understand the soul and psychology of the savage—to learn something of his ideals; his secret reactions to emotions, such as suspicion, rage, hunger, ambition, love; his instincts in the jungle; his apprehension of death; his animal lust for butchery in battle; his seeming callousness to pain; his extraordinary superstitions and occult powers. . . Hitherto the best that has been done was in H. H. Johnston's "History of a Slave," strung second-hand on tales told him by a Mohammedan converted from savagery. But here at last we have the curtain plainly lifted!

Santie Sabalala, a pure-blooded Fingo-Zulu, of the race that brought forth Lobengula and Chaka, the most terrible leaders of savages of whom we have any record, has boldly bared the soul of the savage. Santie Sabalala, who was taught by a friendly white man, gives an account that has no single hint of the influence of civilization or religion. It is pure savagery told by an extremely intelligent man who has come out of the kraals without forgetting anything that was magnificent, strange, horrible, or funny in the life of his own people.

His style of writing is unusually good. The scenes he portrays are extraordinarily vivid—and terrible. And altogether we believe he contributes a remarkable chapter—more absorbing than fiction—to the history of man. While the portrayal of savage life from birth to settled maturity extends through six articles, each of these articles is a complete picture in itself.

IT IS GIVEN very few people to come out of one environment and live in another and be able to recount their experiences and feelings in that other existence. Yet that is precisely what the writer will attempt to do, for, have you ever thought what funny tales and incidents the people who have departed into the great Beyond would tell if they could return?

I hardly think they would be so very much impressed by the Great and Wonderful Pearly Gates or Streets of Gold as by the more "human" elements, such as the fact that St. Peter was a very surly individual, studying one's record in the Corporal Form or how quickly and efficiently the Chief Recording Angel was able to get hold of that record without any bothersome

* *This is an Off-the-Trail Article.* *See note at foot of first contents page.*

red tape; and that Gabriel wore a perpetual frown because the Day of Judgment was continually being postponed and his Trumpeters getting overtrained.

However, the writer is not a returned spirit, but happens to be just an African who will relate things and incidents in the native life from infancy to childhood and from childhood on through the alloted life span—which have no duplicates in civilization.

The tale will, I hope, prove entertaining to many and instructive to all.

WHEN a mother gives birth to a child, none of the precautions and care known to her civilized sister is given her—nor does she expect any. However, during the period preceding birth, when it is apparent that another life is to be brought into the world, certain traditions are observed.

One is that the mother-to-be may go to the river with the other women to get the daily supply of water for the kraal, but on no account whatsoever must she fill her own *kalabaas*, because in scooping up the water to fill the *kalabaas*, she might by chance look into the water and see a reflection which she might imagine to be her own, but which is in reality *Tiko La Se*, the Evil Spirit, who is always around and ready to do any kind of mischief, and is, according to the current belief, able to turn himself into anything he may take into his mind to be.

The expectant mother lives a rather retired life in the community compared with other times, for she has at her beck and call all the children in her immediate vicinity to do whatsoever she commands.

On coming out of any hut, she must never turn to the left but always to the right; for if she does not, the child will be born left-handed, and left-handed people always become *umtoyati* (witches), and walk backwards in a straight line on moonlight nights.

This being so, all children born left-handed are killed at birth.

How to determine whether a child is left- or right-handed is left to the "old wife" of the tribe, who observes the child closely for the first three days to see which of its two big toes it is most interested in, and what side it is most fond of lying and rolling on. Thus the poor innocent mite balances its own life on its back and literally holds its own life in its tiny, puny hands.

There comes a day when the stork leaves a pink-brown squirming bundle of chuckles; for be it known the native baby at birth and a few weeks afterward has a composite coloring of pinky-pink-brown which is very pretty and sweet to see, and it may be said right here that the offspring of the great hippopotamus is also pink in its first six weeks of jungle existence. How this comes about, I make no attempt to explain, but leave it to the scientist to find out.

The child may be born anywhere or in any place. The mother may be out in the fields or in the forests gathering *spingo* or some other native jungle berries, when the child is born.

The mother, unlike her civilized sister, is not burdened down with all kinds of trappings such as clothing, corsets, supports or high-heeled shoes, but is dressed in a very simple manner, leaving the limbs free and the movements easy and graceful. Every one who is in the neighborhood at the time of birth is very anxious to know whether it is a boy or a girl.

If it is a girl, they murmur—

"May she grow up to be sturdy and strong." For a boy the saying is—

"He must join the *impi* (warriors) and eat a whole leg of beef to prove that he is a man."

The native test of character, stamina, and integrity is for a warrior to prove himself the biggest eater. Consequently the man with the greatest appetite is the one who gets the most important commissions and compensations.

All native girls, as soon as they are able to toddle, are made to carry something on their heads. First this is done so that they will have an erect carriage; but the second reason is that when they grow up they are to become the beasts of burden, for they have to bring the water from the river and wood from the forest. Their education or instruction goes right down to the fundamentals of life. They are taught all the duties pertaining to a large household and the responsibilities of motherhood.

The boys are taught the responsibilities of parenthood.

IN A day or so after the birth of a child the witch-doctor is called in. Instead of coming he sends a message back to the effect that a dish of *amazimba* (kaffir-corn) is to be cooked and a little salt put on it, after which it is to be placed by the first post inside the hut on the

right-hand side, and left standing there all night long. His mandate is obeyed.

Next morning it is discovered that the dish of kaffir-corn is empty; therefore, a spirit must have eaten the food up. But the question foremost in the mother's mind is whether it was an evil spirit or a good one who ate up the kaffir-corn. By the strange process of thought that the native mothers have, she arrives at the conclusion that it must be one of the spiteful three ever-present evil spirits—"Tikolose," "Mpundulu" and "Ipo Hili."

Some one in the household is sent post-haste to summon the witch-doctor that he may come and protect the child from the witches. It being daylight he does not come himself, but sends his *umfazi* (wife) to minister to the new-born babe, for it is beneath the dignity of a great *umtakati* to show himself during the day unless it be that the king is unwell. In that case this indisposition is made into a gala occasion, for the witch-doctor brings out quite a few tricks from his fur bag.

But to return to the mother with child, and the coming of the *umfazi we qira* (the wife of the witch-doctor). The heavy dew of the night has hardly been dried up by the morning sun, the herds of cattle are just beginning to blend into the far distance on the *veld*, when a single form darkens the doorway for a second or two. It enters the hut, and one is able to make out the features and say whether it is a man or woman. It happens that the visitor is a woman; in fact, the witch-doctor's wife, which is an honor for the other sex, because women are generally held in scorn among the natives and held in super-scorn by those of the Black Art—as it is understood women do not have the wonderful "mind" that the males have. This is the native idea pure and simple.

As the light strikes on the face of the woman, one is able to make out the features, which are boldly cast but not strikingly so, except the chin, which is heavy and thrust forward. She sits herself down beside the mother and without ceremony takes the nestling babe away from its mother's arms. She gives the infant a violent shake. The little one whimpers at this kind of treatment, but happens to look into those mystic eyes and stops whimpering. More shakes and the child is absolutely docile.

II

THE *umfazi we qira* turns the child over on its little stomach and from the depths of a fur bag that she has brought with her, she takes out a sharp-pointed bone and scratches four deep cuts up and down the child's back, first below the left shoulder blade. Into these cuts she rubs "protecting powder" which will protect the child from witches and witchcraft all through life's journey.

The medicine is made out of the following ingredients: some hairs of a baboon, a native berry, the dried fat of a recently killed ox and mud from the *idinga*. During this very painful operation the new-born babe has struggled, kicked and tried to scream, but has failed in every way, as the left hand of the powerful wife of the witch-doctor has pressed the little body down hard on the earth floor until the little one breathes in gasps and with great difficulty.

The mother sits by uttering not a sound, but a look into her face shows that she is suffering as much as the infant.

At last the witch-doctor's wife is through, and the weight of that heavy hand is taken off. The poor mite writhes and yells in its agony. The witch-wife smiles blandly all the while, remarking that the protecting medicines are working. An hour more of this, and the woman takes her leave.

The African sun has already dried the dew on the long grass and as a symbol of this higher power working within, the day-old babe tries to smile through his tears, despite the pain that has been inflicted on his tender little body. Life, painful and earnest, has already begun for him, and as always where the guiding light of knowledge has not penetrated, the woman and the child suffer most.

The air is filled with the continual buzzing of the sharp-biting flies. The mother takes up the child, puts it on her back with its feet astraddle of her hips, binds it tightly to her with *ba-yi* (bark cloth) made out of the inner bark of the tree, stoops down and gets her *kalabaas*, and placing it on her head, she goes out of the hut, on her way to the river for some water about five miles away.

With the hard and burning earth under foot and the terrific torrid scorching flood of a near midday sun beating down on both of them, she covers the head of the babe to protect it from the sun. As to her own feet,

they are able to withstand the heat of the earth far better than any walking shoe made, for having gone barefoot ever since she could toddle along, her soles by constant usage have become so hard and horny that only green and half-dried thorns are able to penetrate this wonderful formation that nature has provided her with, in common with the other natives.

The mother swings along over the *veld*, down by *emtengen*, thence by a *kloof* following the dried-up course of the river until she reaches the *idinga* where she leaves the *kalabaas* and goes in search of *isi spingo* and some *ingwenye* (a kind of wild plum) and other tropical wild fruits that are to be found abundantly in the forests and the jungles. But she goes more to enjoy the cool shade of the wonderful trees.

In an hour or so she comes back to the *idinga*, fills her *kalabaas* with water; and though it is a large one and filled to the brim, she lifts it up with ease and grace, places it on her head without spilling a drop, this being one of the household "duties" that she was taught in her girlhood.

She starts for home to prepare the daily meal for her lord and master. She enters the gate even as the sun is going down; the glorious rays die one by one. The air resounds to the trot, trot, trot of cattle, sheep and goats as they are driven into the space called *sibayi* which is in the center of the village. The mongrel dogs set up a great yelping and howling.

Into a certain hut a stalwart form enters and turns to the side of the males. He sits down on his haunches and some *nkobe* is served to him. He eats in silence, his first wife watching him all the while. Having finished, he demands to see the babe. None of his wives dare speak or utter a single word unless they ask permission or are spoken to first by the head of the house.

The mother timidly yet proudly unbinds the child from astraddle her hips, where it has been sleeping peacefully. The child awakes to find a pair of eyes regarding it intently. In irritation at being awakened, it doubles its fists and pokes them into its eyes, trying to rub the sleep and smoke out of them.

The stalwart one speaks—

"*Di funga umaa mgum mzungo.*"

The mother's face beams, because here for the first time in *nyanga ezi nezi* her lord and master was pleased.

And so she and the other wife eat their meal and having finished put away the few meager wooden vessels. The rush mat is laid out for the stalwart one; his hide robe that he covers himself with is brought to him; a live coal is fished out of the fire for him, and put in his pipe.

The burning sticks are taken out of the fire and put out, leaving the red-hot heart to burn, and even that gets dimmer and dimmer. The heavy breathing of persons asleep is heard, but above this sounds the hungry, noisy suckling of a babe, and in the dying light of the fire, the mother smiles, because, though the day has been hard and long, still the stalwart one had said—

"*Mzungo.*"

And that was wonderful, and made it a perfect day.

III

WHEN the infant was about a month old, two very important things happened to it. One was that it was given a name, and that it was marked with the tribal mark.

Again let it be said that the giving of a name among the natives to a child is a far different thing from what is done in civilization, for whereas the doting parents-in-law and other relations scramble all over themselves in order to palaver over the new-born child in civilization, the child and only the child decides and determines what its name shall be among the natives.

How is this done by a mere infant?

Simply thus: for the first few weeks after birth his or her actions are observed closely, and the most preponderating action or characteristic begets the child its name. In the case of the babe under consideration, it had been given the name of Upina, which in translation means, "Where is he?"

This was because the little one when taken off his mother's back would at once quietly crawl away on his hands and knees. His mother with a start would glance about the dim hut, then frantically rush outside and question the first person met—

"*Upina um mitwana wam? Kwam mbona?*"

The answer invariably would be negative. She would search in the near vicinity and return in anguish to her hut. A chuckle in the dim recess of the hut would catch her hearing and upon investigation she would

find her offspring behind some shields playing with a nest of eggs that a hen had laid there.

A slapping of the infant's hands, none too gently. He would not cry but merely "pull a face," for the native instinctively is a stoic in every sense of the word, and this is impressed on the children as soon as they are able to understand anything.

On a certain morning the mother emerges from her hut with the child under one arm and a native *zembe* in her right hand, which has been sharpened to the keenest edge that any steel or metal can be sharpened. She walks over to the *sibayi*, deposits the child on the ground, returns to the hut with the *zembe* in her hand and comes out an instant later with some dried herbs in a wooden dish. This she places beside the child, calls to some one to bring her *amanzi*. When it is brought to her she pours the water into the dish and breaks the leaves of the herbs into the water. Having broken them all up she stirs the whole mess with a stick and tastes it, and seems satisfied that it is all right. She leaves the dish and contents there and fetches a black round piece of wood, which is about six inches thick and twelve inches in circumference. It is smooth on both sides and when examined closely it will be found that innumerable finger marks are imprinted on it and small cuts on it too numerous to be even counted.

Everything being in readiness, the mother leans over and takes hold of her first-born, who, for a wonder, for once has not lived up to his name. She doubles up his chubby brown right fist, leaving only the index finger pointing; she puts this finger on the block, picks up the *zembe* and nicely and as clean as a whistle chops off the first joint.

The child stares for a second and swoons away with sudden shock and pain.

The mother picks up the end of the recently chopped finger, wraps it up in some bark cloth and then turns her attention to the babe. She first puts the little hand into the *amanzi*, then ties some sinew around the wrist and takes out the infant's hand, and from somewhere on her person she unearths a piece of pig rind. She gently rubs it over the red raw end of the finger, after which she picks up the still unconscious form of her babe, takes him into the hut and sets him down on some hides and puts a piece of bark cloth over him and goes out of the hut to tend the fields, possibly to hoe or *sika umbona*.

As soon as she arrives among the other women they question her in shrill, high-pitched voices—

"*U nja nina umtana wako wetu?*"

"*U lungile u lele ngoku*," she answers them.

"How is the child?" is their query.

"Very well; he is asleep just now."

Sleep and swoon being so much akin unless the latter happens in an unusual way or place no notice is taken of it; and "marking" being a tribal custom, the swooning away of the subject is very much expected.

It need hardly be said that should one of the little ones subjected to this cruel custom not faint away, there is no doubt that he or she would be done away with immediately—killed instantly.

The sun mounts the heavens and reaches its highest heat, which forces the women to seek some refuge from the burning rays. They separate into groups—this one going that way and another a different way, but the mother goes back to the *ka'ya* and finds the little one awake, weak and whimpering softly from loss of blood and pain.

Flies buzz around him, some on his little forehead, some on the bark cloth that covered him and on the recently cut finger. Here they are black and seem to be sucking the life from him.

The mother picks him up, murmuring soft soothing words into his little pink ears and suckles the baby, after which she croons a native lullaby until the child falls asleep in her arms. She gently swings him on to her back, gets her *bayi*, covers the child's head and adjusts it so it will support him, making a kind of a seat on her back for him with his legs astraddle her hips.

She ties the two ends first above her breasts, reaches back and tucks the right hand of the baby so that it will be upright and not shed too much blood on her, and sallies forth to finish her work in the fields with the other women.

THE reason for chopping off a finger at a certain joint is a measure of protection. The strong tribes who go down on raids and harass the other weaker or more peaceful ones, do it to keep out spies. Should a person be met in one of the forest-paths and act in an unsatisfactory way, he is commanded to hold up

his right hand. Should it show the tribal mark, he is suffered to go his way unmolested, but should it be cut a joint lower he is killed instantly. This system does away with passports and identification papers.

The weaker tribes, on the other hand, have this marking because the weak-kneed individuals will not be able to desert and go and claim relationship with a stronger tribe, for they know the consequences, and no mother would even think of chopping off less than the prescribed joint. Accidents? They are not allowed to happen. If one does, the life of the child is the forfeit.

And so, as in everything that the native does, there is a reason, though not always apparent to the uninformed outsider.

The days move themselves into moons and many more moons, until they number nine or ten. During all these *nyanga* the child's finger had festered a little and some matter had formed in it to be squeezed out by the mother. That Upina had not been blood-poisoned was partly because he was a healthy baby, but mostly through his character, which even then was coming to the surface.

His mother attributed his wonderful escape from any great harm to the ossified centipede that she had bought from the witch-doctor's wife for four hens and a buck. Weaning time had brought out all the stubbornness and self-will that was inborn in him and would cause him a certain amount of pain in being disciplined.

The weaning is a different and more complete one than that known in civilization, for long before the ordinary time for maternal separation the mother induces another way which is quite unique in its form and in the manner in which she introduces the habit to the child.

She sits herself on the ground in the fashion tailors do in civilization. On her lap is the child, its head resting on her left knee. On the right hand side is an open *steya*, in which is some sour milk or *amasi*. She steadies the child's head with the left hand, ladles out the milk with the right, brings up the left from the head and funnels it over the child's mouth, pours the *amasi* into the funnel, and the liquid goes into the mouth. Not being used to the acid-like taste of native *amasi*, the child promptly refuses the next handful.

The mother is not troubled by this little matter, for she pinches the little nose until the nostrils stick together. The baby squalls with the pain, but the *amasi* drowns its cries; it is fed until its little stomach resembles a small-sized brown "blimp" filled to capacity with gas.

Naturally the child is very uncomfortable; the mother eases him by rolling him over her knee on his stomach until he feels better. The ordeal having been trying, both mother and child are tired, the child drops asleep then and there. The mother lifts him up and takes him to a certain hut outside of which sit three or four old women. There are five or six children playing around the hut. She walks inside it and lays her burden down, looks at it fondly and on the impulse imprints a kiss on the soft satiny skin and goes out of the hut, on out of the village *tango* to the forest to get some fire-wood for her particular household.

She returns at the setting of the sun with a good load of wood on her head. She sets it down beside her hut, not slamming it down, but as she has been taught and has done time without number, bending her neck forward, easing the load down with both hands and standing it on end. The wood is tied up with half-dried creepers and *intambo*. Something sticky and slimy, yet warm and human, wraps its arms around her legs. She cries in delight and picks up her son, who immediately shows his reason for welcoming her return by grabbing hold of one of her breasts and beginning to nurse, in spite of the fact that he had but two hours past been fed by one of the old women.

True, the old women had not taken such pains to see that he was fed as his mother had done earlier in the day; for they had filled several dishes with *amasi* and gathered together all the children in their care and deposited them around the dishes, leaving the children to feed themselves the best way they could.

Some had taken knee baths, others had seemed to be possessed with the idea that one should sit in the thing, and with the attendant upsetting of the dishes, they had rolled in the muck of the sour milk, the old women not taking any notice of the children's condition. This explains the sticky, slimy condition of Upina when his mother picked him up.

She snatched him away from her, but uttered a cry of pain, for he had a firm hold of her. However, she managed to pry his little fingers loose and set him down and

held him away with one hand. She fished and searched around the wood that she had just unloaded and brought out from among the sticks and timber a beautiful, colored, slab leaf of the *ikala* plant, whose sap is more bitter than the most bitter gall.

She ran a finger around the broken end that had been growing on the parent stem and smeared this sap first on one breast and nipple and then on the other thickly, and then walked into the hut. The stalwart one was there sitting by the fire and gazing into space.

No sooner had she set herself down than the child wanted to nurse. His first taste of the terrible bitter-tasting sap brought an agonized whimper from him and made the stalwart one look up. The mother smiled in satisfaction, but the child returned to her breasts again, his expression one distasteful grimace, as he licked away the bitter stuff and nursed. The mother thought her child was bewitched and watched it in horror.

The stalwart one watched his son for a moment or so and then leaned back, stretched a hand and brought forward a stick that had large patches cut on one side and smaller ones on the other side. He looked at the smaller patches first, then at the larger ones. A slow smile stole over his face as he counted them—

"*Inye, mbini, ntatu, zine, hlanu, ntandatu, sinxe, sibozo, sitoba.*" Nine!

There were nine large patches. This was the age stick and his *noyana* was nine *nyangas* old. He looked into the heart of the fire, his eyes glowing and gazing into space; but the smile lingered.

IV

IT WAS a great day in the kraal, for a hunting expedition of the *aba-fana* had been organized a few days before and the kind spirits had been on their side, the evil ones absent perhaps. At least, this is how they accounted for the wonderful success of the hunt, as they had killed some *impunzi, umfunlha, intaka, kunye, amagala* and other game too numerous to mention.

Every one was happy, for there was meat for all and different kinds of it, also lots of fat to keep their hides smooth and soft and protect it from the burning sun's rays. Laughter, songs and the light roll of drums filled the air. The shrill, high-pitched voices of the women blended with the deep-chested tones of the men, children rushed hither and thither with choice morsels in their hands and mouths. The sky was clear, yet there was just enough wind to make the day bearable.

A lot of *utuyala* (native beer) is drunk, but has no effect on the partakers, as it is not—and never is—sufficiently fermented to make any one intoxicated, although the ingredients that go to make up the concoction are enough to try any person's stomach not used to it. *Amazimba*, kaffir-corn, *gmele*, water-flies that get drowned by accident, dirt, several *musis*, some *nkobe*—these are the ingredients used and left standing in the *kalabaas* for several days. The "top" is taken off or skimmed and made into *um doko*, which is a good thirst quencher on a very hot day.

And so the air is filled with sounds of joy. The unmarried girls smear their faces with red ochre, thinking themselves beautiful—a state of mind that they have in common with their civilized sisters. They are dressed in holiday attire; brass armlets from wrist to the elbow, on both arms or forearms, seed beads around their necks, some having these hanging down to their middle, seed-bead headdresses on their heads, and about their waists. They have seed-beaded aprons worked on to the hide of some kind of wild game or another. From below the knee seed beads strung on sinew are worn. Being loose they make a clapping noise and the more noise these *ntse* make the more they are admired.

Around the thighs are worn copper and brass wire rings woven by the natives themselves on hair taken from the tail of an ox or a zebra killed in the chase. More of these rings, worn loosely, are on the ankles, making a noise, when several of the girls are in motion, not unlike the swish-shamoow of the sea as the tide comes in. Thus is a native girl dressed for a gestic occasion. Mind, this is not her very best but only what might be termed her outdoor party dress in civilization.

And the *aba-fan?* Face smeared with white clay from forehead to chin around the ears, his wonderful and finely proportioned body having been well oiled and then the oil rubbed off till his whole being shines as if he is made of dark glass, he sports on his head some wild-ostrich feathers. Around his neck is a beautiful necklace that he has fashioned himself. On his arms, too, are brass armlets. Also on the upper arm

above the thick end of the muscle he has several brass rings bound around it. On his fingers are both copper and seed-bead rings, which gives him an excuse to flirt his hands in graceful gesture more often than is the native habit.

Around his middle is a wonderful *musi* or *nciyo* with a fine pattern which has been carried out in a very workmanlike manner. His ankles have tied around them some tails either of *umreundla* or *makrooti* which from a distance look like civilized "spats." In his hand he carries an intricately carved stick as he minces in his way to the *eku hleni.*

As to where the beads come from—these are bought in trade or barter by the natives who send five or six strong *aba-fana* to a trading station, two, three and sometimes five hundred miles away, at the same time procuring other things such as wire, salt, and so on. The journey may take two or three months, time not being a great factor in the native's life. Thus a whole tribe may be wearing beads and woven copper and brass wire rings, though only a half dozen in the whole tribe have ever set eyes on any civilized person.

In saying "tribes" it may interest a few to know that some number from fifty thousand souls to two hundred and fifty thousand, and one village does not, as is mistakenly thought, constitute a whole tribe, but only a small part. Some of these communities have approximately from fifteen hundred to five thousand persons, the head of the community being a petty chief, who is appointed by the *nkosi* (king), and whose word is law. He takes his orders from the king and only from him.

But to return to the village under consideration. The older men are busy skinning the game that was brought in early in the morning. The evil spirit must be feeling good—as only two heads of game were eaten up by *ongonyama!*

Five or six fires are blazing, around which cooking of all kinds is continually going on. Little boys are in their element as they pick up hoofs around where the butchering is going on, or beg a scrap of meat and race back to a fire, there to break a stick, and, putting the meat on the splintered point, impatiently turn it around and around until it sizzles with the heat. Though half done, it is taken off the stick and blown upon as it is passed from left hand to right and back again rapidly to cool.

Still hot it pops into the mouth. Saliva mixed with charcoal runs out of the corners of the mouth. The boy grimaces rapidly but chews on manfully, passing the morsel from one side of his mouth to the other. A gulp and he swallows it. A vacant stare comes over his face as the hot morsel burns its way down. A swallow or two, and he pats his stomach as the piece of meat evidently reaches its destination.

On the other side of the fire a little girl, naked, sits on her haunches with a live brand of wood in her hands. She has been told to watch the *ba-ka* of some pumpkins and been given two ears of corn as her own. These two she is roasting by the fire, keeping an eye on the pumpkins, yet a more wary one on her companions, who hover at the back of her, watching for a chance to snatch her corn away and eat it, but the live brand in her hand deters them. Already one of their number has felt the pain of a burn from that brand and one by one they leave her, baffled by her direct strategy, and she is able to eat her corn and tend the pumpkins in peace.

V

 AS THE sun was about two hours from the setting, the feast began. Because of the day's great heat nothing is ever done on a big scale until late noon which is carried into the night. And so everybody began to eat. The children, with that peculiar physical make-up that is so common among native children—that is, the "bay windowness" of their little stomachs—ate till they were tight as little brown footballs.

They would go a little way off and dance this condition off and come back and eat some more. Their elders—the men—ate with gusto, ate with great appetite and heartily laughed loudly as they cracked the bones, getting marrow out of them. They told terrible and awful lies to each other, and the only being who believed these stories was the narrator himself.

The food began to have its effect, for be it known the native does not eat meat very often, only about once a month, sometimes longer, all depending on how lucky the hunters have been in the chase. So, after a month's abstinence from meat, they gorged themselves. The older men became, as it were, intoxicated by the fresh-killed game, and, after humming a favorite war song

for a while, the whole village took it up.

First the *abafana* took it up, then the *ama ntombi;* the wives joined in last.

An *umfaam* jumped up with a fighting stick in his hand, yelling—

"*Zowka, zowka! Izani, izani ni bone!*"

The whole village shouted—

"*Izani!*"

Everybody scrambled up in excitement. They formed a circle around him as he flung a challenge to his companions to better what he was to do. He shook his body in rhythm with the music. He "trembled" his arms, then held up his right arm with the stick in his hand and with a wonderful control of his body he made the muscles of his back from the shoulder blades to his feet "ripple" in time with the music.

A second *umfaam* leaped into the circle with a yell, banged his stick hard on the ground, gave a leap into the air, and landing hard with both feet level and with both feet still, and head too, he "shook" his body till the crowd went into a frenzy.

A third challenger was now in the circle trying to better the performance of the other two by standing on his toes for a second and bringing the heels down with resounding thud, shouting in a deep-chested voice his contempt of his companions.

The excitement became intense; the women's voices grew sharper as they sang; the clapping, faster and faster. Dozens and dozens of other *abafana* joined in the dance, the beat of the drums became more staccato with a tripping note, and an excited *ntombi*, delirious with the music and the general atmosphere, commenced to dance with the gesticulating crowd of young men. She was struck to the ground even before she had half begun to dance, for it is against the native law for the women to dance with the men and for a man to be seen dancing in a crowd of women!

That is an abomination that must never happen twice to any man, for should it happen his feet are cut off.

A glorious African full moon rose over the distant hills; a hyena laughed out there in the night; one of the mongrel curs started howling; the dancers faltered in their steps; the singing and clapping became dispirited and died away as the superstitious minds were gripped by the fear of the unknown. A howl half begun was choked off as some one strangled the cur. The bodies of the dancers were steaming in the cool night air, perspiration streamed down their faces and bodies so that small damp spots formed in any place where any had stood any length of time.

Groups formed as every one slowly made his or her way to that particular part of the community he or she lived in—talking in undertones as to what the howling of the *inja* meant. Some gave their opinions about the evil spirit; others, that it was the act of Okulunkula—the greatest of the great—who was warning them through the howls of the now dead dog, whereas a few moments before the air had been full of joyous and merry sounds.

Now everything was silent save for the lowing of the cattle in the *sibayi* and a crashing sound as a truculent goat butted one of its mates against the reenforced thorny fence. The shadows under the light of the climbing moon were long and uncanny, and Upina, racing along side by side with another companion, striving with all the speed he could muster to "cross" his companion's "shadow" in order that no "spell" be easily cast on him, shoulder to shoulder, leaning on each other as they rounded the Simbayi muttered—

"*Hayi buut; Suka-suka.*" A grunt and a lunge and he was in front of his companion —had "crossed" his "shadow" on him. No spell could touch Upina, but he could "spell" his companion if he wanted to, according to the native legend.

Badly frightened, the "cross-shadowed" boy went on his way to his family hut, roaring vengeance, and scoffing at the idea of his shadow being crossed; but this was done in order to keep his courage up more than anything else, for even at that very moment a bat flew over his head and the already demoralized boy nearly collapsed with added fright.

Upina, in high spirits, went as fast as he could to his parents' abode, or, as should be said, to his own mother's hut, for in the three years and odd months past, the stalwart one, his father, had acquired three more wives, which, with Upina's mother, made a household of four wives, each wife having her own hut. Upina entered his mother's hut and turned to the right. The hut was dark.

As he slept just in one place he was able to find his mat and as he handled and laid out his hides that he covered himself with, he discovered that he still retained in one of

his hands a bone that he had been gnawing at during the dance. Having lain down and covered himself he proceeded to gnaw the bone with great relish. From out of the dark a voice demanded if he was gnawing a bone.

"*Ewe bawo,*" he answered.

"*Yi bope ngum tya yako zala yi nyama,*" commanded the voice of the stalwart one, for it was he.

"*Ewe?*"

"*Ewe.*"

And so being only a boy and no more greedy than others, the idea that the bone would be covered with "red live" meat if he tied it around his middle appealed to him and he followed out the command by doing so, breaking a string of beads from around his neck in order to get the sinew with which to tie it, which was a great sacrifice for a little boy when you consider how fond they are of their beads.

EARLY in the morning, just before dawn, Upina awoke, thinking that the evil spirits were really eating up his stomach. He put his hand on the bone. It was alive with things that crawled.

In panic fright, Upina tugged at it, once, twice, and broke the cord that held it to his body and flung it from him. He jumped up and rushed out of the hut like one possessed, brushing off those crawling things from him in a terrified frenzy.

The stalwart one, as a well-seasoned warrior should be, was a light sleeper and awoke when the bone struck the mud wall, where his offspring had flung it away—anyway he had been expecting something of the sort to happen—and smiled contentedly as he heard Upina stamping the ground outside in efforts to rid himself of the seeming curse.

The stalwart one knew that the boy was cured from any further tendency to gluttony where flesh was concerned. Knowing this, he smiled as he turned over to sleep until the sun was up.

When Upina had tied the bone to his middle he had promptly lain down, covered his head with the robes as all natives do and fallen fast asleep with that graceful abandon that always seems strange to any one not used to native ways. Sleeping on his side as he did, the bone rather slid down on the mat, and after a while ants worked their way through the mat and

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attacked the bone; then tried the gristly part; and then sampled the sleeping Upina with the results related.

As to how these little termites "know" that there is any meat or bones near them, I make no effort to explain. That is up to some entomologist to try to solve. Place a bone anywhere inside the hut or outside, and in a little while the red ants will be seen to be crawling over it. During the rainy season they work out; salt is poured on them, under which they disappear in the hole that they have made. Dig down one, two or three feet, no sign of them will be found. How do they live? Where do they live? None can answer, and as to what purpose they serve, ask the native. He will shrug his shoulders and say *andazi*, perhaps to teach *aba ntwana* not to eat too much meat.

Upina sat in the boys' hut, one of a dozen or so, by the fire, listening to a spell-binding, imaginary tale told by one of his companions, a tale that only the native boy knows how to tell. And so the story ended —*pela kantsomi*—and the listeners breathed normally again, their imagination quickened. They bombarded the spell-binder with questions as to what had happened to the different characters in his tale.

Upina heeded them not, for his mind was turned inward for on the morrow he was to take his first plunge into the world. He was to go with several other boys into the wilderness and the *veld*. For four days to look after the tribe's immense herd of cattle. He was only about four years old, or five at the most, yet he had been able to survive

the terrific hardship and suffering that life imposes on all native children. He had thriven on it, for even as he sat there by the fire one could see how sturdy and well formed he was.

The dancing flames of the fire brought out the healthy sparkle of his eyes as he brought his knees up and rested his chin on top of them and rubbed his hands up and down his shins as they were comfortably being toasted by the early African fire, for it was cold outside, it being the early Fall which meant Winter. Winter meant rain, and that meant deluge, for in Africa there is no snow, except on the high mountain-tops many thousand feet in the air.

Rarely does the flutter of those wonderful feathery flakes fall. About once in a decade does it happen, but it makes a lasting impression on these children of the tropics as well as others in temperate climes. The high altitude combined with the change of weather leaves the surrounding atmosphere just a little above the freezing point.

So the stories continue and the boys "pop" corn in the three-legged iron vessel. It is minus two legs and sits rather lopsided on the fire supported by a stone or two. Upina remains in his brown study, as it were, wondering about the morrow and the other morrows to be, for now he is not a *nkwe nkwana* (small boy) but a real *nkwenkwe* (boy) and of the *gumele yama gresi* (cattle-herders)—a rank to which every real native boy aspires.

Some one in the assembled crowd flicks a bit of hot coal at Upina. He comes to life with a bound with his hand on that part of his anatomy which has been touched by the coal. He wants to know who shot at him. He accuses a certain one of the group who is given to practical joking—a denial, words, hot words, one push, two pushes, forehead against forehead, they argue into one another's mouths, not hearing or knowing what the other is saying.

Their particular companions and admirers urge them on. The foreheads slip and both noses hit strong young shoulders. they grab hold of each other and sway this way and that, their excited companions get up and jump up and down in glee. Imaginations get heated and so does action too, and instead of a single encounter between two the whole thing becomes general.

There is one, however, who does not take part in this hilarious and uproarious noise making and giving off of young energy, for that's what it really amounts to, but slyly and quickly with both fists full, eats up the pot full of corn. A form opens the lower half of the door and enters unnoticed inside the hut. It thunders—

"*Pezani!*"

They cease as if by magic! An instant's silence, and the voice commands them—

"*Lala ni makwedini.*"

A chorus of voices answer—

"*Ewe—buut.*"

The form goes out and the boys prepare their mats and hides to sleep. Ten minutes later and they are snoring.

THE sun had not risen yet and the morning was cold, dark and chilly because of the heavy dew that had come down during the night.

An *umfana* emerged from one of the huts and strode quickly to the hut where the younger boys were, with a wicked-looking *umlezo* switch in his right hand. His left held his *bayi* wrapped tightly around his person. He stepped into the hut and laid his switch on the sleeping forms with vigor and force.

Sweesh! As the switch came down on four sleeping forms. The forms under the sleeping hide knocked straight against each other. The hides rose and fell like the waves on an angry sea. Sweesh! The second time and several naked brown boys leaped to their feet and ran blindly, stumbling this way and that way in the dark hut. Sweesh here, sweesh there! Sweesh! Sweesh! Sweesh! Everywhere!

"*Vukan! Nyana mbigasna.* Get up, you good for nothing milk of sheep."*

"*Pumani! Neow vulela ama tole.* Get out and let the calves out."

The hut was now filled with the bellowing of young voices. The boys fell over each other in their mad scramble to get out of reach of that wicked *umlezo.* They streamed out of the door. Some racing like mad went to let the calves out in their small enclosure; others leaped at the *kalabaas* hung high on palings after the night before milking. Three boys opened the rude *sibayi* gate; the calves came on a scrambling gallop, jammed at the gate, were kicked and beaten in; the cows awaited their calves with distended noses and legs spread out, and not until the

* *The natives do not drink sheep's milk.*

calves were feeding did that strange serene calm look come back on their faces.

The boys who milked the goats went in with their *selowas;* haunched down and tilted the *selowas* and milked eagerly and quickly. The young kids butted them playfully but got no response from the milkers because they were cold. Their teeth chattered; their feet were pink; and their poor young fingers were nearly numb, for the ground was hard and cold as the tomb.

When they thought that the calves had had enough the cow milkers came forward, for be it said, in spite of the fact that the native is generally and currently made out to be a cruel being to man and beast alike, no native would think of milking any cow until after the calves had suckled. The very thought of doing otherwise would petrify them with horror. After milking the cows they went and set the *selowas* beside the fence on the left side of the gate.

The darkness was giving way to the light of the rising sun, whose rays could be seen coming over the *qina* behind the kraal. The cattle were driven out by two of the boys while the rest were getting their *skoff* (rations) that was to last them the four days they would have to look after the cattle and live on the *veld* or in the jungles, all depending what and where the cattle were driven for pasture.

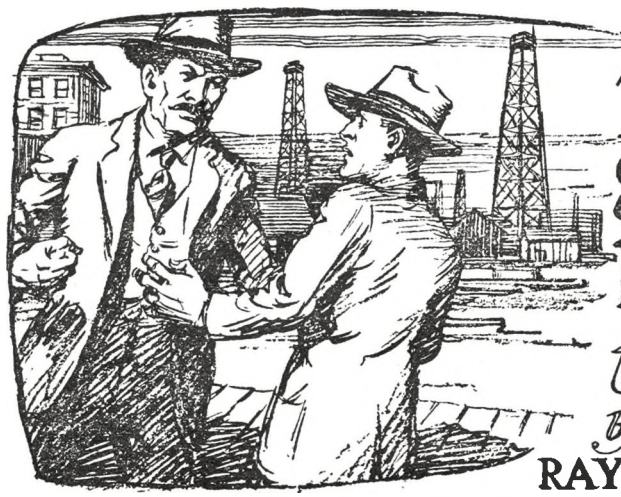
The *skoff* was none too lavish for it consisted of some smoked meat and some *sonka* (bread). This and nothing more. These rations were merely by way of a safety measure, for game is plentiful and the boy herders were expected to hunt and live from what they were able to kill; and it need hardly be said that they lived up to the expectations of their elders.

The youngest boy (who happened to be Upina) was told to carry the fire-brands, every one having his favorite equipment for hunting, such as three sticks of varying lengths, an *asigwemba*, a piece of steel about thirty-six inches long and one-fifth of an inch thick, both ends bent one inch back on to the main part.

All this was native work, done by the *kraal* blacksmith on his little crude hand-forge and foundry where iron ore was brought down, smelted, formed and tempered, for dagger, spear, battle-ax or assegai. With this equipment, together with the *skoff*, they followed the cattle and drove the whole herd of sheep and goats over the hills on to the *veld*. They did not gain the top of the hills, however, until they had a fine wetting, for the grass was very high and the dew heavy and the boys were small. Therefore when they finally emerged from the growth of wild grass they and the cattle looked as if they had been dragged through a river; their brown bodies agleam with the cold moisture of the night dew, the cattle, sheep and goats' bodies throwing off a dense steam that almost shut them out of sight.

No sooner were they on the *veld* than the whole crowd of boys promptly ate up their whole four days *skoff*.

This is the first of six pictures of native African life, by Santie Sabalala, each complete in itself. The next appears in the December 10th issue.



The Spirit behind the Bluff

by RAYMOND S. SPEARS

Author of "The Diversions of a Monographic Professor," "River Laughter," etc.

THERE are some who say the Old West is dead, but its spirit lives, sometimes in the most unexpected of humans. Lots of people want to make us believe that the very best thing that the frontier gave humanity has given way to the artful palaver of the real-estate agent and the promotion of fake oil stocks.

As it happens, this is the story of Timmy Keyes, who dealt in stocks which were good under the blue-sky law, in bonds that a bank would accept as collateral on a note, and in lands that he would tell the truth about, though it killed a sale. He believed in the eternal compensation from faith in steadfast toil and unwavering belief in the Goddess of Chance.

Timmy had his reward. When the oil boom struck Piute County, Timmy's faith in his own country found him just staggering under a burden of sage, alkali, desert and rocky wash. Somehow, he had dreamed, a boom would be justified and he would find himself wealthy beyond his dreams.

He had figured on irrigation or on chemistry revealing use for the unlimited quantities of many kinds of salt in his possessions; he had dallied with a salt bush that would serve as cattle-feed; he had bored for fresh water and found oil—crude, explosive, smoking, salable oil!

That was the reward of Timmy Keyes' faith. Away down under the dry and arid surface of Timmy Keyes' possessions, where he hoped to find water that a cow at least could drink, he found a fluid that was worth $2.18 a barrel at current market rates, according to the analysis. He had paid seventy-five cents a barrel for water; now folks would pay him cash for what flowed out of his own land! Faith in one's own home country? Is it rewarded? Ask Timmy Keyes!

To Timmy's region swarmed thousands of hungry adventurers. Where there had been a struggling, parched and desperately hopeful scattering of humans now struggled and swore and schemed a mob without discipline. Timmy was rated at more than a million. He was hailed as the biggest man in all that part of creation. His credit was unlimited. His acclaim was heard over a dozen oil regions.

Timmy could hardly believe his good fortune, his luck, the payment that had been made for his faith in the land. He was, in all the throng, the most surprizing man to meet, to see. He was fairly frightened by his wealth, there was so much of it. He was actually pale when he contemplated his responsibilities.

He had amassed square miles of sage and alkali when those lands were to be had for a few cents an acre. He had taken what seemed to be the leavings of desperate, poor men. The acres had now begun to spurt oil!

His wealth made him respectable, but he was and looked to be a "little man." He weighed enough, he was tall enough, he filled clothes of sufficient size to permit him to walk with his head up. Nobody ever said Al Jennings wasn't much, because he

was nearer five feet than six feet tall. Some of the best men that ever sat in a saddle west of the Mississippi weighed less than one hundred and thirty pounds.

Timmy Keyes was afraid, so he was small. His wealth made him tremble lest somebody kidnap him; his feeling of weakness did not leave him day or night; he could not get over the bashfulness, the modesty, the dread of meeting strong men.

He was the strange, meager, central figure of a great turmoil, of big doings, of vast fortunes flying hither and yon, and because he was the owner of lands, the driller of new wells, the real dictator of that region, hundreds looked to him in the tumultuous weeks while the oil find was coming into its own.

Keyes, in business, was shrewd, strong and competent. He drew his contracts, laid down the terms of his deals, claimed his equitable share in the enterprises. He was a different man, bargaining over pipe-line rights and for the sale of his oil as his wells came in, from the man who shrank along the streets of Keyeswells, afraid of his skin —literally.

"WAD" METCHLER arrived in Keyeswells a little late for first pickings. He was more than six feet tall, had killed two men that people knew of, and had a low, growling voice that backed up the menace of his staring eyes, in their shadow of grisly gray brows.

Metchler had made and lost fortunes. None knew now whether he had a fortune or a shoe-string.

Keyes was walking down the new sidewalk from his concrete-block office building, looking over his shoulder at the southeast where he had a glimpse of a new gusher, which was just being throttled down, when he bumped into Wad Metchler, who was looking in the same direction. Metchler with an oath, turned on Keyes, who shrank back in haste.

"You—" Metchler began; but "Paraffine Webb, a friend of Wad, broke in sharply, saying—

"This is Mr. Timothy Keyes, Mr. Metchler; let me introduce you!"

Metchler hesitated. Keyes sprang forward eagerly. Then Metchler squeezed the little hand of the great oil man till the bones crinkled, and Keyes rose on his tiptoes in anguish only partly concealed.

By the look of Keyes, Metchler knew that the man was afraid, small, and therefore just the man Metchler was looking for. In an oil town a man must be his own man. There are things that influence, money, possessions and all the perquisites of position and wealth do not buy. Metchler had some of these things. He was a bully, and claimed the respect due to a man whose fist preceded his smile, and whose guns were the enforcers of his judgments.

There was law in the oil camp, now becoming an oil town with the certainty of becoming an oil city before long. There were deputy sheriffs, a competent city marshal and a city board of trade of which Timmy Keyes was the chairman.

Everything that money could buy was Timmy's; yet his associates saw him now, growing pale and wan as Wad Metchler, with twenty years' oil-town experience behind him, applied the screws to the biggest opportunity of a long, bullying and nervy life.

He crossed Keyes to the ill-defined limit of Keyeswells. His methods were skilful and obvious. He made a duel of what against any other kind of man must have been an attack on the law and order of a surging and ill-controlled community. He challenged the individual; he addressed the chairman of the board of trade with the utmost civility and respect.

He suggested improvements, which would tax especially the property of Timmy Keyes. He demanded an aggressive policy of competition with other oil regions, which would especially hurt the income of Timmy Keyes. He started a campaign for a strong man for chairman of the board of trade in Keyeswells, and all the malcontents, who had found no fortune where they expected or at least hoped for easy pickings, joined with Metchler in attacking Keyes politically.

All the business ventures of Metchler were directed at undermining the public's confidence in the financial leadership and suzerainty of Keyes. Physically Metchler seized every opportunity to have the thronged streets see him bullying the undersized, fearful man whose faith in that land had made him wealthy, and whose lack of courage in the physical sense made him prey to just this kind of assault.

The associates of Timmy Keyes went to him one by one and urged on him the necessity of doing something.

"Hire somebody to kill Metchler if you don't do anything else," one demanded.

"But that—that would——"

"That's what it would if you were caught doing it," the man said. "You can't hire an assassin and not lay yourself open to blackmail on the one hand, and to hanging for murder on the other. But that'd be better than letting Wad Metchler walk on you the way he is doing."

Keyes shrank from meeting to meeting of oil men; he was a good man on the board of trade, alert, confident and capable; he was progressive, and gave of his substance to have good streets made, a good city hall built, and all the other improvements that could not come fast enough by ordinary political and municipal promotion. His fortune was added to faster than he could count it. His humiliation grew more and more desperate every day.

Metchler had him foul. A man didn't need courage in attacking a craven like Timmy Keyes. Others of Metchler's crew began slyly to undertake the same kind of tactics. Instantly there was an ominous growl.

For an hour Metchler himself paused, startled by the stiffening of Keyeswell's public against more than one man nagging the foremost citizen in town. On second thought, Metchler saw the point. Fair play would not permit more than one bully at a time, as regards one man.

With a laugh Metchler emerged from the retreat he had found the instant word went around that everybody couldn't hound Timmy Keyes. The bully knew now what was expected of him. If he succeeded in running Timmy Keyes out of town single-handed, he would instantly become the chairman of the board of trade, and would succeed to all the powers that Keyes had in his own hands. As that chairman Metchler, with his keen understanding and careless experiences, would be able to fasten his hands on the fortune he had come seeking—another fortune.

The following morning Metchler in his huge automobile, with truck tires and an enormous engine, came down Derrick Street just as Timmy Keyes turned in out of Pipeline Lane, which led, now beautifully paved, to his own home, an old ranch house just out of town. Metchler, at the steering-gear of his car, saw his chance. Stepping on the accelerator, he slid in behind Keyes' runabout, drove swiftly ahead and rammed the left drive wheel of the smaller machine. The blow tore away all that side of Keyes' automobile, and left it wrecked in the street.

"Get out of a man's way!" Metchler yelled as he passed on. "Blocking up the street, you coward!"

The city marshal arrested Metchler, who was taken before the city judge, who fined him ten dollars "for endangering the lives of women, children and others by reckless driving." It was a good joke. Two hours later a paper was served on Keyes ordering him to "clean up the débris" which he had scattered on the corner of Pipeline and Derrick Streets, "including the glass." Keyes was obliged to send two of his own hired men to do the work, while a crowd stood around jeering them.

That afternoon Metchler waited at the same corner, grinning and alone. Scattered along both sides of the street were spectators waiting to see the fun, when Keyes should emerge from a meeting of the Keyeswells Pipeline Company.

"I'm going to collect damages for what he done to the paint on my bow fender," Metchler explained, "taking it out of his hide if necessary."

No one told Keyes that Metchler was waiting. The meeting was adjourned, and Keyes came down onto the sidewalk. Metchler buttoned one button of his coat, and started for his victim. Keyes saw him coming.

For an instant Keyes hesitated, but it was from fear surprized. He turned and dashed down the street, and because he was limber, small and scared, he could run faster than Metchler.

Every one yelled, whooped, laughed and jeered. Without looking back Keyes jumped farther, faster and more desperately. He could hear the heavy footfalls behind him as thick soles pounded the concrete, the plank and the dried earth of the sidewalks there.

On the next corner was an open door with a dark interior. Over the door was the sign "Simms & Co." Keyes plunged into that refuge, as a rabbit jumps into the burrow when a coyote pursues. On the instant every yell, every laugh, every sound without ceased. It was a hardware store.

In the store there was only one man. He was Dan Simms, who had known Keyes for many years, and who knew that the faith of the little man had made that great wealth

for all of them. He reached into a gun cabinet, picked out a certain one of the repeating shotguns there and said:

"Timmy, I've been waiting for you to come; and here's the gun I saved up, and she's loaded. You were a good wing shot at chickens and jumping jacks in the old days."

Timmy Keyes stopped short. He looked into the eyes of his old friend. He saw the faith of a man in him. He reached and took the gun, turned on his heel and raced back at the doorway.

Wad Metchler was still coming. He had slowed visibly as he saw whither Timmy Keyes had rushed. He was now sixty feet distant as Timmy Keyes sprang forth into the bright sunshine, gun in hand.

Timmy's cheeks were splotched beneath a light tan. He had the repeating shotgun by the breach held with one hand as he squared deliberately away.

He was a quick, good shot at birds. He now gave Wad Metchler all the time needed to go for his big 45s. It was fair range for a revolver. Metchler had killed a man at a greater distance. As against Timmy Keyes, frightened man that he had long been, it was a fair proposition—revolvers against a shotgun.

Metchler stopped so suddenly that his soles slid on the pavement. He grabbed at his guns, but the coat he had buttoned for the chase intervened and he found the butts of his weapons covered with the cloth.

Panic seized him. The cowardice that had permitted him to bully a man afraid now shone forth in all its mean and craven spirit.

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot, Keyes!" he screamed, "I—I was on'y foolin'!"

"About face," Keyes ordered, and Metchler turned. "Take off your coat; drop your belt."

Metchler did as ordered.

"Now march for city court," Keyes said, and stepped quickly, and overtaking Metchler, holding the shotgun against the fellow's spine, having slung the belt and holsters over his own shoulders.

There in the court Keyes said to the judge:

"You fined this man ten dollars for running me down this morning, and ordered me to clean the dirtied street. Now you send this man to jail for one year, and fine him $500 for disorderly conduct."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Keyes," the judge gasped. "Just as soon's I can prepare the complaint an'—an' commitment."

"I'll appeal that," the prisoner declared.

"No, you won't," Keyes said to him. "You've hounded me, and you've bullied me. You'd use your freedom on appeal to kill me. You say you'll go to jail, or I'll blow your back-bone in two now, and take my chances with the courts on your record. Say you won't appeal it—say you'll go to jail, you cowardly scoundrel!"

"Yes, sir! Don't shoot, Mr. Keyes! I'll go to jail!" Metchler whimpered. "I—I was only joking—I——"

"On the strength of that, judge, I'll pay half the sentence—the five-hundred-dollar fine, Keyes said with the western flow of humor. "But he'll serve the term in jail."

Keyes left the prisoner, well sentenced, in charge of the city marshal. He walked back down the street to Simms' hardware store. Simms was there. Keyes handed the gun to the man, and said:

"I owe you my honor, Dan. Give me a—Why, say! I got that scoundrel's revolvers, haven't I? Well, all right. I'll wear them."

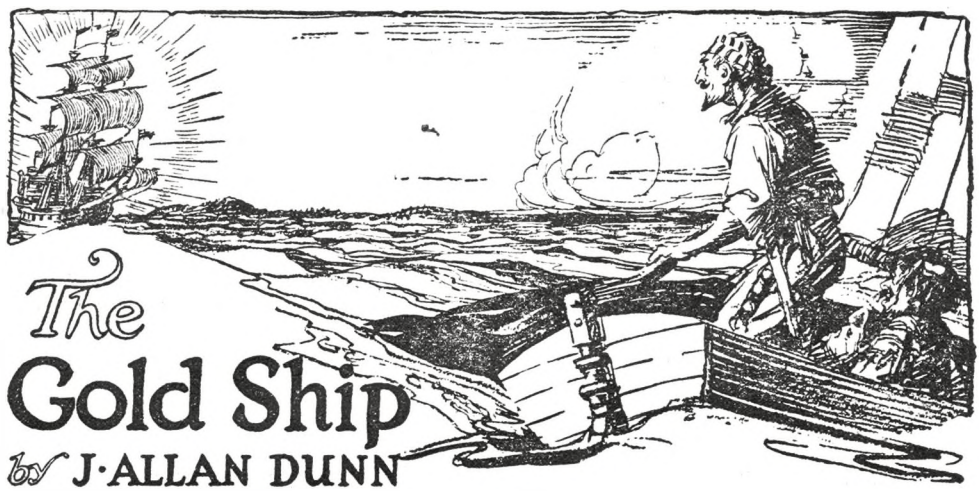
"Good Lord—Timmy!" Dan gasped as he took the gun. "I thought this was the—the twelve-gage automatic. It's a sixteen-gage and—and the —— thing ain't loaded!"

"What?" Timmy gasped, his jaw dropping. "Holy smoke! And I was throwing a bluff—I looked as good as that, did I? Well—um-m— All right, Dan. I don't think I'll wear these guns, either. Hang 'em up in your window—put a card on 'em, 'Captured by Timmy Keyes'. Leave 'em there. Now, Dan—just which one of those guns is loaded?"

"That one—this one right here," Dan said.

"All right, Dan. Much obliged. It wasn't—wasn't the gun I needed. But I know where it is, now. That's enough. When I need it next time I'll come—and I'll come a-running—but not the same way."

"You'll never have to come, Timmy," Dan said. "Every man in town knows now that you can take care of yourself. Nobody'll ever have a chance to try you thataway, or any other way, again."



The Gold Ship

by J·ALLAN DUNN

Author of "The Moon Master," "The Exterminator," etc.

A SCORE of men sprawled on the sand in the spattered shade of overhanging thicket that came down in an almost impenetrable jungle, from the rocky hill summits to the shelving margin of white beach. Most of them were asleep, arms and legs flung wide, bronzed and hairy, with bearded faces exposed recklessly to the sun's shafts that pierced the boughs, or pillowed on corded forearms, noses to the grit.

All wore short wide breeches and short-sleeved wide-collared tunics of dingy white or grimy striped pattern. All had sashes of stained but vivid silk beneath more practical belts of leather with heavy buckles of brass or silver. Few boasted foot covering. Some had gaudy kerchiefs bound about their heads.

Pistols were stuck in some of the belts or laid on the sand beside their owners. Cutlases were thrust in the beach at varying, drunken angles; and empty bottles were scattered where tipsy hands had flung them after draining.

One, lean and tall and angular, without a beard but with a week's growth of red stubble sprouting from cheeks and chin, sat bolt upright, gray eyes set and vacant, singing in a high tenor that was charged with half-maudlin sentiment, oblivious of audience or the lack of it.

The blue waters of the Windward Passage lipped the beach gently. Across the channel, westward, the hills of Cuba showed blue as the sun slanted to its bedding. To the north, Great Inagua Cay loomed low, and back of it the islands of the Bahamas faded in vanishing perspective.

The afternoon was hot and drowsy, the hum of insects mingling with the soft plash of the tide, the harsher dissonance of snoring men, topped by the tipsy tenor. Palm trees soared majestically from the bush, green fronds bowing in the fitful breeze.

A man sat apart from the others on a coral clump close to tide edge. Long, muscular arms were wrapped about his knees, his chin sunken on his chest, his blue eyes alight, charged with a certain desperation that was offset by the humorous quirk of his well-shaped mouth.

The chin was a bold one, decked with a beard trimmed to a point. The mustachios were upcurled, the eyebrows cocked upward of their own volition. Of medium height, he was sparely and powerfully built. Seated, he gave the impression of a coiled spring. Inactive, he disseminated a well defined suggestion of gaiety coupled with recklessness not unbacked by efficiency.

> "For it's hame, dearie, hame,
> Oh, it's hame I lang to be;
> For my topsails they are hoisted
> And I must put oot to sea."

The Scots accent of the red-stubbled tenor were strong. Liquor could not spoil the real quality of the voice nor drown the feeling of the singer. The character of the

listener's glance changed to milder aspect and became dreamy.

"Oh, the oak and the ash
An' the bonnie birchen tree;
They all are growin' green
In the north countree.
So it's hame, dearie, hame,
It's hame I lang to be;
'Tis far an' wide I've wandered
Since I parted, sweet, fra' thee."

A lazing giant, black-visaged and surly, raised on one elbow and cursed the singer. Another man essayed to fling a bottle at him but the missile slid from his flaccid fingers and he fell back on the sand while the Scotchman sang on through his recurring refrain of

"Hame, dearie, hame,
It's hame I lang to be;"

unconscious of criticism.

Before the gaze of the man on the coral clump the limpid sapphire of the channel turned to a crisp sea of steely blue whipped by the wind—the choppy waters of the English Channel, or, as he styled it, in his own beloved Norman-French, The Sleeve.

The headland of Cape Maisi changed to the white cliffs of his native town, Dieppe, where the Arques came rolling down to the pebbly beach. He saw the castle on the western cliff, time-worn and battle scarred; on the eastern, the Church of Our Lady of Good Help. He saw the nestling town, red-roofed, the shipping in the harbor, the fishing craft at Le Pollet anchorage, and his eyes grew dim.

SUDDENLY he smacked a fist hard into a horny palm and rose, wheeling on the singer whose song ceased abruptly with a dropping jaw as his senses struggled back to consciousness under the lash of the unexpected tirade.

"Name of a fool, Sanderson, stick to surgery and forget to sing! You lament like a moulting raven. Home, is it, that you want to be?—with your earrings pawned for a jack of liquor and your breeches lacking in use and decency? A fine sight you'd make, Alec Sanderson, beneath your bonny birchen trees, with the village children laughing at you for a waif and a vagabond. A murrain on your song!"

Sanderson surveyed him with a blinking stare that began to hold a ray of intelligence.

"Aye, Pierre, m'lad," he hiccoughed. "Hame. 'Tis where we'd all be, first and last. I'll warrant ye the words got beneath your skin, to say nothing of the voice, for ye ken I've a voice beyon' the ordinar', syne I've tipple to mellow it. I'd not give ane wee bell of purple heather for all the bloom o' the Antilles, nor a sup o' Scots usquebaugh for all the sack brewed in Hispaniola.

"I came to the Main to mak' my fortune, I'm free to admit. I'm a registered apothecary an' chirurgeon, a man o' letters and o' family. An' yet I'm naught but a wastrel, a ne'er-do-weel, dreein' my own weird, brought down to ministering to the hurts of a pack o' buccaneerin', roarin', rantin' ruffians wi' no more prospects than a stranded starfish, out of elbow, out of luck, out o' siller, out o' liquor.

"An' you, Pierre, wi' mair brains i' your feet than the rest possess in their headpans, you reproach me, Alec Sanderson, man o' learnin' an' family, wi' havin' no seat to my breeks. Mair, you draw me a picture of mysel' chased by the bairns beneath the birches for a gipsy. Man, think shame of it!"

Tears of fuddled self-sympathy stood in his eyes. Pierre laughing at him, clapped him on the shoulder. The sleepers began to awaken, yawning into the lowering eye of the sun that destroyed the last of their shadow and warned them of nightfall and the need of a better lodging. They examined the already empty bottles, tilting them for the last few, aggravating drops, with a few curses at their luck, grouping gradually about the still grumbling Sanderson and Pierre.

"Look you, men," declared the latter. "Alec here declares us out of everything."

"True enough," broke in the swarthy giant who had sworn at the singer. "We've not enough powder to prime our pistols, let alone charge 'em. There's not three doubloons in the whole company. We've lost our ship and our skipper. What's to do? We came out here to discuss the matter."

"And spent the afternoon in guzzling," capped Pierre. "Now, let's talk in sober fashion. Since we have nothing left to lose, it is certain we must better our condition if we are resolved to make the effort. Most of us have come over seas, as Sanderson has confessed, in the hope to make our fortunes and return. We have helped win Hispaniola and Tortuga from the Spaniards. We have seen French governors established, but the isles are overrun with colonists and the cattle are fast disappearing.

"There is no more profit in *boucan* or in hides. You know how long it took us, and with what hard toil, to gain a shipload, only to lose all in the channel. Misfortune, it seems, has taken pains to buffet us. We are marked for men who are unlucky. We lose at cards and at dice. We are reduced to the condition of beggary if we are not yet beggars.

"What to do then? Why, to force the hand of Fortune. To make a bold bid. Since Opportunity avoids us, let us go out and seek Opportunity. Look you, we French hold Hispaniola and this isle of Tortuga; but the Spanish, our enemies, hold the seas. They have taken toll of us, and heavily. Let us adjust the balance.

"Their *flota* galleons carry rich freight wrung from the toil of Indian slaves. Treasures of gold and silver and valuable produce—enough, in one hull, to make rich men of all of us and send us home in honor to our own places. The cause is just—to despoil the foes of our countries and enrich ourselves at one stroke, to accomplish that for which we came to the Main. What say you?"

" 'Tis piracy."

Pierre whirled on the speaker.

"Call it by what name you will. If it is piracy to singe the beard of the king of Spain, to avenge the tortures of the Inquisition, the wrongs of enslaved natives, then enroll me as a pirate! Will any feed us on Tortuga for the love of our company? Has the governor, Le Passeur, any love for those who can not pay his tithes? Something like this we must do—or perish."

THEY caught the infection of his spirit, rallying to the flash of his eyes, the ring of his voice, thronging together, throwing up their arms with a hoarse cheer. All save the giant.

"Brave words," he said. "Do we swim out into the Caribbean and wait for a galleon to come by and deliver itself to us? Do we catch flying fish as we go and drink the dew from our beards? When do we start? Speech will not slake thirst nor fill an empty belly, to my mind."

Pierre was swift to see the dampening of their ardor.

"We are not quite to the end of our resources," he said. "Simon, the Jew, is in my debt for a buffeting I saved him—perhaps for his very life. He has sworn to repay me. I can get from him some arms, powder and bullets, some provisions and a boat. We do not need much if our hearts are welded to our enterprise. So long as his boat does not leak and has a sail and sweeps, she will serve us. Fortune favors the brave."

Sanderson suddenly chuckled.

"I am minded," he said, "of what a wise man wrote over thirteen hundred years ago. Eumenius, orator and scribe to Cæsar Constantine. Listen."

They gathered round the red-headed chirurgeon with the respectful awe in which they held his learning, their jaws slack as he quoted in Latin:

" '*Atque ita eventu temeritatis ostenderant nihil esse clausum piraticæ desperationi quo navigiis pateret accessus.*'

" 'And so, by the result of their daring exploit, showed that wherever ships can sail, nothing is closed to pirates in desperation'," he translated. "I am for Pierre. Let us go and seek out Simon. If he gives us a black cloth and some white bunting to boot I will make shift to furnish us a fitting flag for the expedition."

"Look you," went on Pierre, pressing the moment. "I was born in a caul. Beneath a fortunate star. So far my happy hour has not come, but it is close. A wise woman foretold at my birth that riches and honor would come to me out of a golden ship. See, it is stamped upon my wrist."

He held out his forearm for their inspection. Distinct through the sunburn there showed a birthmark that, with little imagination, showed like a miniature ship, high-pooped, full-sailed, golden under the patina of tan.

"Twice since then has my fortune been read," he said. "By a breed woman at Port Royal, a voodoo mistress. By a gipsy in Bordeaux. Both spoke alike—of a golden ship sailing on the seas, freighted with my fortune, and of riches and honor and the name of Pierre le Grand! That ship is now upon the seas, my braves. Let us put out to meet it and share its cargo. Within a week, mayhap by this time tomorrow, we may be drinking rich wines and clinking doubloons in other pockets than these rags now hold."

They hung on his words, swept by superstition, inflamed by the hope of betterment, wrapt in the picture his words had conjured

up for them, confident in his self-belief, gazing on the birthmark as a magic talisman.

Only the black visaged giant, surly and jealous, still demurred.

"And you, it seems, are to be the self-appointed leader and claim the major share," he grumbled. "It is not the first cock that crows in the village that is always the best bird. If we obtain this boat and turn from buccaneers to pirates, it is the best man among us who should be captain. The best, I say."

He glared truculently around, one hand on the butt of his pistol. They shrank from him a little, except Sanderson who regarded him sardonically, and Pierre.

"It is my mission to heal wounds rather than make them," said the Scotchman. "You need not roll your bull eyes at me, Volin. A chirurgeon is apter needed at the tail of a fight than at the beginning." Volin turned on Pierre, contemptuously appraising his lesser bulk from head to foot.

"Pierre le Grand!" he sneered. "Pierre le Petit would suit you better, I am thinking."

The eyes of the Norman seemed to dissolve into little pools of blue flame about the black pupils in which shone points of light.

"As you say, Volin, we have yet to get the boat," he said in a voice that was cold and fine as the sweep of a steel blade. "That comes later. First"—and the blue flame grew fiercer—"there is this matter of height between us which seems to trouble you. My shadow may be less than yours, Volin, but a good sword makes arm lengths equal.

"When a man is dead," he added softly, "it makes little difference what size his grave is dug. There is still light left and the beach is level. What say you, Volin, between you and me, shall we prove which is the better man?"

He stepped aside and plucked his cutlas out of the sand, tossing it in the air to catch it again by the hilt.

"The better man," he repeated, running his thumb along the keen edge of the steel. "Or shall we make it to the death, Volin the Black?"

For just a moment the giant hesitated while the crowd held silence.

"We will make the ring," he said sullenly.

Pierre laughed.

"I thought so," he said. "You have lost the fight already, Volin."

TWO men made a fairly true circle in the sand on a spot that was level, hardened and still damp from the ebb, tracing the circumference with the point of their cutlases. The diameter was about eighteen feet, a radius of three paces from the center.

Volin and Pierre stripped off their tunics and stood naked save for sash and belt and the wide breeches that came to their knees. The sun sank almost clear of clouds. The long shadows of the men ranged sharp over the white coral. Volin's chest and stomach were shaggy with black hair, Pierre's skin practically smooth.

Pierre might have weighed a hundred and sixty pounds, his opponent fifty more. Volin's muscles were bunched on his shoulders and arms. His breadth and depth of chest, as he expanded it, were prodigious, his calves enormous, his slightly bowed legs sturdy as the trunks of young oaks. He swung his cutlas like a cane and it whistled against the air.

Pierre stood aside with point to the grit, waiting for the preparations to be completed.

Sanderson took a red silk cloth that some one stripped from his head and stood within the ring.

"You'll take stations north an' south," he said dryly. "Cross blades on guard at the word, and watch the kerchief till it drops. Then at it, an' may the Lord ha' mercy on your souls. I'll do the best I can wi' your bodies."

Volin took place as if he were planted in the beach, his visage lowering. Pierre advanced, lithe as a panther, the supple muscles rippling over his torso like snakes under the skin, free but coordinate, a gay smile on his lips, his eyes still holding a light like burning alcohol.

The blades touched with an earnest click of steel. Pierre's feet were far apart, his left arm crooked, the wrist curved. Volin bent his behind his brawny back, the fist clenched.

"The first to step fairly outside the ring loses the fight," said Sanderson. "Are ye ready? On guard!"

The crowd gathered in a crescent between the fighters and the shore, to keep their shadows from interference. Sanderson retreated to the border of the circle, equally between the pair who viewed the red signal held at arm's length at shoulder level, from

the corners of their eyes. He bunched the silk cloth and let it fall.

Before its fluttering folds had fairly touched the sand, Volin sprang back, whirling his cutlas high, bringing it swishing down with a force that seemed irresistible, driving to cleave Pierre's neck where it joined the shoulder. Pierre's weapon flashed up, red in the sunset as if already blooded. The giant's blade glided from its well placed angle and he barely parried a lightning lunge that made him step back so that his heel smudged the ring.

Bellowing, he flailed a dazzling circle to sweep aside Pierre's guard. Pale sparks flew from the grating steel as Pierre nimbly sidestepped, well inside the ring, his cutlas always set to swerve aside cut and thrust, sending in snaky lunge after lunge that were barely avoided by the clumsier Volin.

He saw the giant's stomach begin to heave and the sweat break out upon his face. He laughed as he danced away from a swinging blow.

"Too much rum and beef, Volin," he mocked. "Taut belly, slack body. You are over-blooded. I will relieve you presently —Ah-h!"

A streak of blood showed on Volin's upper arm where Pierre's point had sliced the flesh. The red stream flowed down to his wrist and dripped on the sand. Pierre pushed the attack and Volin responded with a furious rally. A straight thrust, caught and carried through in *tierce*, passed between Pierre's side and arm.

Volin grasped at the steel threatening his throat and roared as Pierre slashed it loose, almost severing the giant's thumb. Cursing, he leaped awkwardly forward, beside himself with pain and rage, his left arm with its bloody fist bludgeoning at Pierre's smiling face, his cutlas held edgewise in front of him.

Pierre seemed to shrink before the onslaught. He dropped to his left knee and sent up his blade, swift and true to the mark—Volin's hairy armpit.

There was a *skreek* of steel on bone, a gush of blood—and Pierre's steaming point coming out back of the giant's shoulder, crimson-tipped.

For a moment Volin seemed to hang suspended on the weapon, his face convulsed. Then he staggered back, clear of the circle, the hot blood pouring from the wound, and sagged to the beach like a dropped chain.

THE boat that Simon provided was little better than a canoe. It barely held the little company of reckless adventurers. There was no chance of comfort other than shifting their cramped positions. Occasionally three or four would lie down on the shifting bottom-boards or curl up in stern or bow. Oftener they swam about the craft to stretch their limbs. That was before the sharks began to keep them persistent company.

First one high fin had appeared and trailed them. Then another showed, until day and night at least a score of the sea tigers formed their escort, the ripples from their fins streaking the blue water from dawn to sunset, showing arrowy lines of phosphorescence after dark.

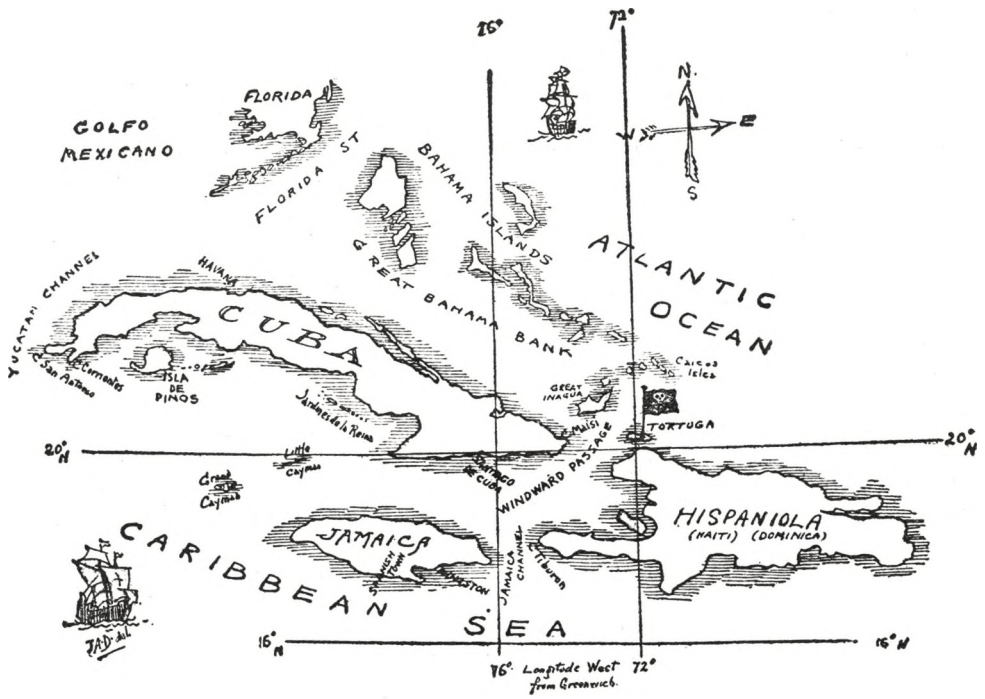
The food that Simon had provided was neither plentiful nor of high quality. The biscuit was moldy and weevil-bored, the meat badly cured and the wine thin. He had been niggardly with the powder. Equipped thus, they had left Tortuga under a fire of comment that was close to jeering. That, in their desperate pride, precluded any return save a triumphant one.

There was a mast in the *pirogue* and a lugsail. The last was of as doubtful strength as the rigging. They dared not trust it in a stiff breeze. Nor could they sail within ten points of the wind, while the craft made leeway like a crab. The thole-pins were clumsy and the oars ill-matched. The seams needed calking and an hour's cessation from bailing found the water beginning to slosh about in the bilge.

In such sorry, desperate case Pierre steered his inadequate command as they ran down the Windward Channel and out into the Caribbean Sea, looking for a prize in the shape of a rich merchantman that might be boarded by a *tour-de-force*. Volin was in hospital at the house of a woman who favored him. But where, through his own fault, he dropped out, nine more hardy spirits who were hard put to it to secure what they deemed the necessaries for living had volunteered.

Besides Pierre and Sanderson, the chirurgeon, there were twenty-seven men, armed only with pistols, cutlases and resolution.

The oars were splashing listlessly, the sail filled and flapped as the *pirogue* laboriously topped each dark-blue hissing roller that reflected from a myriad shifting facets the brassy glare of the mid-afternoon sun. It



sagged as they sank into the valleys. The men lolled on the thwarts, their belts tightened against a growing hunger, their tongues swollen in dry mouths.

Some chewed on bullets, since Simon's tobacco had given out on the fifth day and they had been seven at sea. All gazed covertly, almost continually, at Pierre, with bloodshot, sun-scorched eyes. Their faces were sullen. Luck seemed steadily against them. There seemed nothing ahead but starvation for them, a meal to the persistent sharks, or a humiliating return. The rations had been halved again that morning.

The high range of Hispaniola was in plain view with the verdure of the lower slopes and levels about the blue hills like a green veil. It was on their lee and, aiding the wind, a current held them gripped, slowly swinging them in toward shore and the promontory of Cape Beata, that seemed to them far from being "blessed." Pierre doubted whether he could persuade them to put about to sea again, and his soul was sour within him.

So far his will had triumphed, his belief in his "happy hour" and the "gold ship," that was birthmarked on his wrist, unfaltering. While the rations were full, and before the wine and tobacco gave out, he had held his crew closer to his own mark of confidence. The last twenty-four hours had seen the barometer of hope go down hour by hour until the degree marked danger from open mutiny, holding him responsible for a feather-brained enterprise. He would be the laughing stock of the Spanish Main, he told himself, chewing the bitter cud of failure as he held the tiller and gazed moodily ahead toward the land.

In the west clouds were already marshaling for the sunset review. A cable's length away a covey of flying fish soared from the water, gleaming in blue and silver. Instantly the sharks' fins on that side of the boat disappeared, as the sea-tigers, while waiting for their human feast, chased the dolphins that in turn harried the flying fish. The men's eyes turned longingly toward the shimmering skimmers, then dully back to Pierre with slow resolution gathering to protest.

"Let's make Beata Island, mates. There's water there."

The gruff voice was echoed by others. Pierre glanced down the boat to where Sanderson's gray eyes reassured him of one steady adherent. He marked the man who

had spoken. His right hand gripped the tiller, his left crept down to the curving butt of the pistol in his belt.

"So, Michel, you are the first to quit. Yet I think I heard you take oath with the rest of us not to turn back until we had taken our ship."

He laid the pistol on his knees, shifted hands on the tiller and raised the long muzzle until it pointed at the rowers. The bow oarsman shrank aside.

"Show us then your ship," said Michel sullenly. "Show us a ship and I'll fight while there's life in me. Dead men can not capture prizes, nor starving ones neither." As if moved by a master cord, all hands strained their eyes round the mastless horizon, then returned to Pierre, carelessly fingering his weapon.

"You'd go back to be laughed at—jeered out of every tavern in Tortuga, a byword in all Hispaniola?" he asked them.

"I'd rather be laughed at by men than fought over by sharks," retorted Michel. "That's what'll be the end of us. Look at the brutes. They know they'll get us soon. I counted twenty-nine at noon. One for each of us."

THE flying fish had disappeared and the sharks had resumed their patrol. One eighteen-foot monster veered toward the boat, its blunt nose close to the surface, its yellow eyes regarding them viciously. It half turned on its back, the dirty white of its belly glazed blue by the watery film, its rows of teeth showing savagely in the triangular maw. One of the men struck at it with an oar and the brute, with hardly a motion of fins or tail, rushed at it, caught the splintering blade and tore the sweep away as the sailor lost his balance and lunged heavily against the gunwale, hauled back by his comrades.

"Let shark fight shark," said Pierre. "We'll keep our quarrels. We are all in the same boat and I am its commander. There's land in sight for cowards. There's food left for brave men. I thought I had shipped them. You styled yourselves picaroons and pirates while your bellies were full. Must you always cast sixes to keep heart in the game?"

"There are no stakes in sight," grumbled Michel. "The sap is out of us. I'd as lief be in —— as grilling in this boat."

"Aye!" The murmur rose almost to a shout.

"—— is where you'll be in short order, Michel," said Pierre with the muzzle of his pistol slowly lifting, leveling. "You swore to obey me. You gave me the right of life and death over those who refused my orders. I doubt if you have the capacity for prayers," he went on grimly, "I'll say one for you."

Disappointment had curled his brain a little. The sun had turned his blood to fire. His finger twitched on the trigger. So far his will had turned aside despotically all suggestion of failure. Now he gave it rest. He was not keen to kill but he sensed this for the sticking point and a somber despair stiffened his purpose. He judged that the first man to weaken in the enterprise would be weak in other ways. The blue flame glowed in the eyes that mercilessly met Michel's. Michel cowered.

"I but spoke what was in the minds of all of us," he said from behind the back of a fellow. "Put it to the vote."

Pierre reviewed the chances, reading the haggard faces. There would be but one vote with his, he figured; that of Sanderson. The men, unclean, cramped, half-fed, had lost their stiffening. There were two quarter-rations left. The morning would see them at the end of their resources, barely able to make a landing. He had failed—unless he compromised.

He caught a short nod from Sanderson in the bow, as if the chirurgeon read his mind and agreed with his finding. At the same time, he had loosened his brace of pistols behind the men's backs, ready to follow Pierre's lead.

The heart was out of them. To shoot was sheer murder—useless. They were like ashes, all the fire gone, unless he could furnish it with the spark that still burned within him.

"There is no need to vote," he said. "I do not ask the impossible of any man. Only his utmost. We have enough for one fair meal, enough to stay your appetites. We'll make it tonight's supper. We'll stand as we are until the breeze fails, which it likely will by sunset. Then we'll drift and paddle westward until dawn. If the sun finds no sail in sight, we'll land at Port-au-Prince or keep on to Jamaica and Port Royal, if the wind favors.

"We are in the highway of Spanish

shipping. We have waited a week without sight of sail. Never, I venture to say, has such a thing happened before nor will again. Fortune has tested us to the snapping point. To those who stand her whimsies she gives golden rewards at the last. Come, we'll finish our food tonight—tomorrow will be another day."

There was neither assent nor dissent from the men. Then Sanderson spoke.

"We're wi' you, Pierre. Fortune is a hard lass to woo, but her half-sister, Misfortune, canna abide bein' laughed at. Heavy heart never gets over the hill." He started to sing a popular catch, his voice hoarse but putting spirit into the lilt so that one or two began to join the chorus, husky from thirst though they were. Presently the whole crew were singing, in time if not in tune, the lanky red-headed Scotchman with his stubbly fiery beard and green-gray eyes perched in the stem beating time.

Pierre, holding tiller in the stern, was the only one who did not sing, though he was grateful enough to Sanderson. His eyes were moody. He was the gamester awaiting the last roll of the dice that either sends him from the board a beggar or gives him a new lease on life.

Pierre was a Norman. What sounded like brag to some was natural foaming of the spirits to him. The wine of his veins was not a still one. It bubbled and effervesced. He had vaunted that he, Pierre le Grand, was about to come into his own—that he would return to Tortuga master of a treasure ship of Spain to fire a salute to the fort before he came ashore, and, after scattering gold and broaching casks of wine, after bestowing gifts and giving a farewell feast, he would sail back to La Belle France, a conquering hero.

These and other things sounded foolish now. To return was unbearable. They would call him by Volin's name—Pierre le Petit. He gritted his teeth and muttered a good Norman oath. Sooner than that he'd put a bullet through his head as he sat on the gunwale and let the sharks get him for a fool who had listened to fortune-tellers and gipsies.

The sun sank and the coast of Hispaniola heightened and deepened in color, blue to purple, purple to indigo. The wind grew fainter but still held. The *pirogue* rode the dark, glassy surges that were veined with molten gold where the lowering sun shone on their shifting mirrors. The men sang on. But Pierre, looking at the birthmark on his wrist, heard them not.

"'Twas at Saint Kitts I met a lass,
Black eyed as any gipsy;
I pledged her in a friendly glass
And then with love grew tipsy—o!
And then with love grew tipsy.

I took the lass away with me,
We landed in Jamaica.
But there we soon failed to agree
And so I had to shake her—o!
And so I had to shake her.

A sailor's love is like the sea,
Inconstant and uncertain;
He holds one lass upon his knee,
With one behind the curtain—o!
With one behind the curtain.

The lasses they do not repine
When Jack turns out a roamer;
They laugh and in a glass of wine,
They pledge the last newcomer—o!
They pledge the last newcomer!"

THE southwestern portion of Hispaniola was shaped like a long-toed boot, the promontory, of which Cape Beata is the southern headland, being in the perfect form of a heel. The sole, with Cape Tiburon in the toecap, spurning the Jamaica Channel, is slightly lifted, and the inside line of the heel cants westward.

As the sun dropped close to the horizon, its beams almost level with the crests of the waves, Pierre bestirred himself to serve the remains of food that he guarded in the stern-sheets.

The faulty breeze blew in his face as he measured the distance they were from land. They had made their westing off Beata and, whenever they lifted to a crest, they could now look into a deep bay beyond some scattering island of no great dimensions.

Suddenly Pierre's figure, moving sluggishly, galvanized into swift action, his face transfigured. He rose half erect, grasping the tiller, the light from the sunset ruddy on his eager, exultant features.

"Look, lads!" he shouted. "Look and then down with you below the gunwales. Let no more than six of ye show in plain sight, so they'll take us for a fisherman when they close in. The light'll fail before they'll make us out clearly. There she is, my braves! Regard her, then, and know my fortunate hour has come. There sails the gold ship of Pierre le Grand—to us, lads! to us!"

They crouched to his order after one quick look and then remained to gaze as they huddled on the bottom boards. Slowly finding her way into the open Caribbean, clearing the cape with the last of the wind, there came a stately ship that the sunset gilded from truck to waterline.

The canvas was dyed saffron in the glow. Golden drops fell from the prow that rose flashing from golden foam. Her gleaming sides threw off radiance that blazed on the protruding muzzles of cannon and winked from the scrolled carvings of her high, decorated poop. The very rigging seemed to be spun from thread of gold as she came lunging majestically along.

At every roll of the rounded hull from the brine the high light of her dripping curves shifted in a swift dazzle of light as brilliant as the flare from an opening furnace. She might have been plated with the precious metal from keel to vane. A ray of light breaking through a gap in the ridge, held her fairly in its widening beam and dusted her with gold, transmuting her with the touch of Midas to a ship of magic, her hull in an aureate sea, her pyramided canvas aswim in ambient, amber-tinted air.

The men gazed with awe and then, kindled by Pierre's triumphant cry of identification, of appropriation, they shouted in chorus—

"The ship of gold! The ship of gold!"

"Ours for the taking, lads. There lie beds for your sore bones tonight, coverlets of silk, velvet raiment. A ruff for your neck, Michel, instead of a round of bloody beef packed from the hunt. Rare wines, rare victuals, gold to clink——"

"There may be gold, my captain," said the man who rowed next to bow, an ancient worthy, bald of pate and gray of sprouting whisker, "but, from the look of things, there's iron a-plenty to protect it. Look at those guns and see the royal standard. Yon's a galleon of the *flota*, a war-ship, no merchant. There is a dog can bite. Should they have the humor to sink us they could do it ten times before dark with those grinning culverin. And she'll carry from seventy to a hundred men."

"Call it odds of three to one, then," said Pierre. Now, with his gold ship in full sight, he neither sensed nor brooked opposition and swept it aside like so much rubbish. "If you are too old to fight, my friend, if you have lost stomach for close work, you may stay in the boat—aye—and keep it for your share, for, once out of it, we'll not return.

"The men aboard of the galleon have to be paid. The more of them, the more money we'll find aboard. Once master of her, we'll raid the seas with those same culverin until we bite into something that satisfies us. If the dons aboard see us they take us for fishermen, unworthy notice. We'll wait 'till after dark, then row to her and board her. Any one of us is worth six men surprized and that's the way we'll tackle her.

"There's no moon, the sky's thickening enough with clouds to hide most of the stars and there's scant wind to drive them off or give the galleon more than steerage way. Why, 'tis made for us! A dash, a bold face, maybe a thrust or two and a shot and 'tis done with."

They cheered at that, not loudly, for fear of being heard aboard the galleon. The ship of gold was fading to a dark bulk. As she veered, lanterns showed on her poop and lights from the quarter windows.

The sea ran dark, touched with crimson gleams. In the light of the dying embers of the sunset Pierre read the faces of his men, turned toward him, set with present purpose and courage. He had fanned the spark to a flame.

"Once we board, we stay," he told them. "To falter is to fail. The Spanish are not easy on prisoners. Better to die. Are you committed to the venture? Are you gamecocks or partridges?"

The vision of the golden ship was still with them. Superstition helped to crystallize their courage. They believed this was the "happy hour." They gave him a deep-throated assent.

"Good! Then Alec Sanderson shall use his chirurgeon's tools to good purpose. With luck it may be the only use for them. See you, Alec, you shall be the last to leave this apology of a canoe. Simon made me promise to return it when we were through with it. We'll pay him for it instead. You could put your foot through the rotten planks if you trod carelessly. But Alec shall scuttle us a hole or so and we'll sink her. We'll fight with the sea back of us. Name of a dog, we'll make them think we are water devils!"

Sanderson leaned aft from the bow, leading the second cheer.

Before it reached the horizon line the sun plunged into a mass of cloud that completely obscured it. Night fell swiftly. The land vanished, the sky blended with the sea. Pierre ordered the sail taken down and for a time they drifted while he kept the bow to the waves with the tiller and an improvized sea-anchor made of oars lashed together.

THE galleon, showing now only as a cluster of fixed lights, was slowly bearing down upon them. Pierre made his plans and gave his orders while they munched the last crumbs of the food they trusted would prove only an *entrée* to something more substantial and appetizing.

Committed to the reckless enterprise, Pierre was fully sensible of all its hazards. He was spinning a coin with Destiny. One side meant lingering imprisonment, perhaps torture and the Inquisition, if not death.

That possibility he thrust aside and made what preparations he could to curry favor with Fortune by boldness. If they encountered strong opposition and the fight grew too hot, his men might try to retreat. That he would cut off by sinking his boat beneath him—as another commander once had burned his bridges.

He determined to attack while a part, at least, of the Spanish crew would be at supper. He detailed his men under subleaders, to the best of his judgment of their fighting ability and character. A cross-eyed, wild-tempered Irishman named Fallon he told off to capture the powder-room.

"See you, Tom," he said. "You should find it amidships on the gun-deck. Take seven with you—choose your men now, quickly, and get them together beside you. Tremaine, you'll take seven more. Make for the fo'csle, hold 'em up by surprize, disarm them and clap 'em under hatches. De Blois, take you three and carry the wheel. Taque, you, with your brother and two more, clear the deck of the watch.

"I'll attend to the afterguard. They'll be in the cabin over their wine. Remy will come with me; and Michel Otard, Renton and Grey. Alec, you'll follow to the cabin when you've finished your scuttling.

"We'll board aft at the break of the poop, to starboard. She's on the port tack and she'll not be shifting. When she's ours we'll put her about and sail up Channel tonight. Tomorrow we'll wake Tortuga with our guns and give them a scare till we break out our flag.

"Draw all your pistol charges and recharge. Try your flints. Fight hard and quick. Now, muffle those rowlocks, and out oars. We'll row to meet her. Pull soft, lads; show no seafire in the strokes."

To Pierre the deed was not so much one of piracy as warfare. As long as history ran, the men who dwelt on the southern slopes of the Pyrenees were at bitter enmity with those on the northern. It was the bounden duty of every Frenchman under Louis the Thirteenth to kill any Spaniard under Philip the Fourth, as every Spaniard equally felt himself entitled to hang every Frenchman.

In Tortuga there were not only French—there were English, Irish, Scotch and Dutch, all equally pariahs in the eyes of Spain. And in Europe, the Thirty Years war was on. So Pierre meant to capture the galleon as speedily as possible, in one swift rush, aided by hot lead and cold steel.

They met the galleon's course a little ahead of her bluff bows. Gazing upward they caught the glint of the sprit light on the steel cap of a sentinel, took another stroke and caught at the sloping sides, easing themselves sternwards.

Sanderson pulled out the boat's cleaning plug and tossed it away. He made swift work with his saw while the water gushed in and the overladen *pirogue* began to settle.

The night was hot and the gun ports were open. The muzzles of the culverin projected. Along the run ran bilge molds, there were chain-plates on the outside of the rail, deep carvings on the walls of the after cabin, all good as ladder rungs to desperate men.

They had thrown off their boots, those who had them, and they sat silent, clutching their cutlases, ground to razor-edges before leaving port, pistols ready in sling and belt, taking great breaths of anticipation.

Between the foundering *pirogue* and the galleon the wash ran suckingly, charged with pale phosphorescence. From the open cabin windows there came the clink of glass and metal, scraps of short sentences.

Pierre's hand encountered a rope like a boat fall. Above him he saw a crane rigged for taking small boats inboard. He clung to the rope, then passed it down forward, finding the second fall. The water

was now almost up to the thwarts of the canoe which was ready to sink beneath them.

"Now!"

They rose to Pierre's whisper as if it had been a bugle call and swarmed up the side of the galleon like so many cats, spurning the scuttled boat that sank in a swirl as Sanderson leaped for the muzzle of a culverin and clawed up after the rest.

A few startled sailors confronted the leaders. Two were struck down. The rest fled with Tague and his men hard after them.

De Blois leaped up the carven ladder to the poop, lit by its three lanterns. The officer of the deck was staring overside when de Blois jumped him. Pierre caught the quick ring of steel. A shot sounded forward where the Britisher Tremaine tackled the forecastle. The cross-eyed Fallon and his seven fighters had rushed below to the powder room.

The Spanish sailors, panic-stricken, had dived below believing themselves attacked by seafiends as, dripping wet, the ragged, unshaven buccaneers flourished their naked steel or clapped pistols to the heads of willingly surrendering prisoners.

UNDER the rail of the poop, in a gallery formed by the hood projection of the upper deck, a sentinel had been set. So swift had been the rush of Pierre and his four that the man, unsurprized, was still gawping through the glazed windows at his superiors in the cabin. He was armed with sword and arquebus, helmeted with a light morion.

Michel, anxious to distinguish himself, snatched off the helmet with one hand and struck the sentry a blow with the butt of his pistol upon the base of his skull. The man toppled, pitched forward, trying to spin on his neck as Pierre flung open the door.

Beneath four flaring candles that were set in a ceiling lantern of wrought iron, four richly dressed hidalgo officers in ruff and ruffle, sat about a massive table playing cards. The cabin was handsomely paneled and hung with tapestry. There was a valuable Eastern rug on the floor. There were flagons and goblets on the table. The luck seemed to have been going all the way of the man who sat facing the cabin door. Gold pieces were piled in front of him. He was holding up a card, displaying it with a smile and gay words that suddenly froze to silence.

"You will observe," he was saying, "that once more I hold the winning card. I—in the name of ——, what is——?"

Pierre reached the table in a bound, leaning across it with one hand outspread upon the scattered cards and stakes, his pistol leveled at the player's breast.

"You will observe," he cried, in fair Spanish, "that you have overlooked this little ace—this ace of trumps that will assuredly spoil your suit of hearts unless you quietly surrender."

The commander of the galleon dropped his cards and held up his ruffled wrists as he shrank back against the paneling. Four savages, foul and fierce looking, puddling his cabin rug, grinned at him sardonically behind the man who covered him with a pistol muzzle that had grown as large around as a porthole. At the temple of each of his officers was a similar menace.

A lean, red-stubbled devil with hairy legs and arms stood in the middle of the floor holding a great cutlas by hilt and blade in hands that swung low towards his bare knees.

A cross-eyed, panting pirate appeared in the cabin door.

"All secured below," he reported exultantly. "Tremaine has 'em herded. The ship is ours."

Don Sebastien de Rueza y Dourado, vice-admiral of Spain, was a proud man but he did not let his pride interfere with expediency.

"Your ace wins, señor," he said. "I take it you are Frenchmen. May I ask the name of your leader?"

"You may call me Pierre le Grand," said the Norman, the battle-flame of his eyes changing to milder complacency. "Since I have won the game, may I ask the exact amount of the stakes? It may save some searching and inconvenience on both sides."

Don Sebastien heaved a sigh of resignation.

"This is the *Santa Ysabel,* bound for Cadiz, laden with gold bullion," he said. "You have made a rich haul. Now take that —— pistol away from my head. And tell me what you propose to do with me and—my command."

"Since we are rich, we can afford to be

generous," said Pierre. "We are not murderers. You are prisoners-of-war. Such of your men as suit I shall impress as crew. The rest I will put in a boat and give them a chance to reach Cuba without delay. As for yourself, and these gentlemen, to whom I have not the pleasure of being introduced——"

He paused while more grinning pirates crowded into the cabin. Don Sebastien gave the names of his officers.

"All men of rank—and therefore of ransom, I see," said Pierre le Grand. "We will arrange those matters later. Now, it is dry work fighting, we will pledge you in a glass of wine. *Ventre de Saint Gris*, but I admire a man who takes things philosophically."

Two hours later the *Santa Ysabel* had been put about and was making up for Cape Tiburon on a breeze that had gathered as the night advanced. Pierre paced the poop with Sanderson. Both were washed and shaven and were clad in the spare raiment of the galleon's officers. All the men, unwounded every one of them, had been fed and wined and clothed. The treasure room had been inspected.

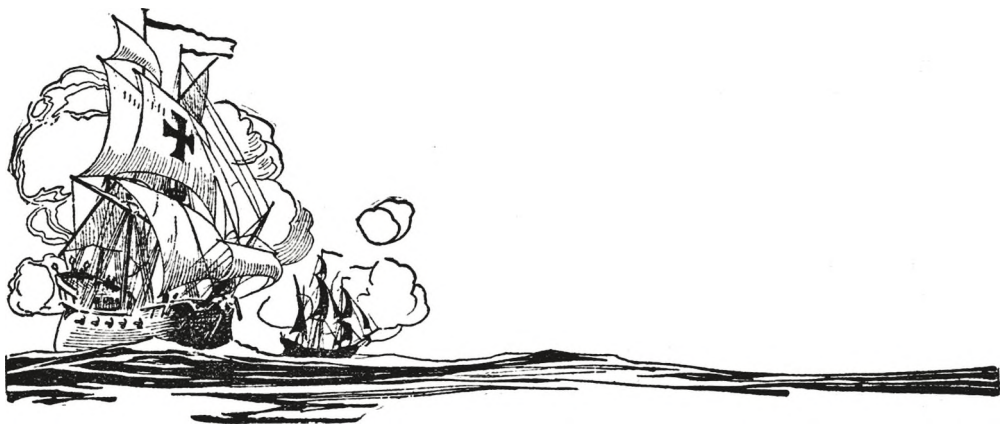
"I shall renounce piracy," said Pierre. "I am rich enough to be a very honest man They may even ennoble me. We sail for Dieppe, Alec, after we have shown Tortuga the kind of fish we catch in the Caribbean—and thereby encourage others to do likewise. Those who wish may stay there and chuck away their money. I must send Volin a few luck pieces. But I shall save mine. I am a Norman."

"And I—am a Scotchman," said Sanderson, dryly. "I'll go with ye to Dieppe and then——"

"What then?" asked Pierre le Grand. The chirurgeon did not answer. It was doubtful if he heard. He had gone to the poop rail and he was singing, just above his breath:

"For it's hame, dearie, hame,
It's hame I lang to be;
For my topsails they are hoisted
And I must put oot to sea."

Pierre smiled sympathetically. He gave an order to the helmsman and then he went below to superintend the weighing and reckoning of the bullion cargo of the gold ship.



Lost Diggings

A Five-Part Story
Part I

by

HUGH PENDEXTER

Author of "The Torch Bearers," "Wolf Law," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE MAN WITH THE GUNS

BELOW the rim of the Bitter Root Mountains the sun was kindling a mighty fire for a hot day's work in the Snake River basin. It lacked an hour of sun-up when "Shoshoni" Hale parted from his companion a few miles north of the Payette River and resumed his quest. That his might be a grim business was suggested by the .44 Henry repeating rifle, the aristocrat among long guns, and the two eight-inch Colt revolvers of the popular .36 caliber. There were but few men in this Summer of 'sixty-five who did not carry arms in the Territory of Idaho during the frenzied race for gold, but even the road-agent and the killer seldom carried a rifle and two hand-guns.

As Hale picked his way through the clumps of sage-brush he kept his gaze on the ground, searching for signs in the bunch-grass. He had no eyes for the glowing east and the many shades of purple and violet, the color heritage of arid lands only. By midday the plains would be a sickly yellow or somber russet-brown or a depressing gray.

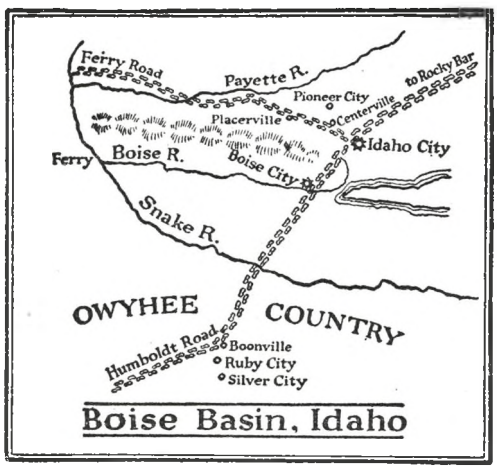
Now it was as if the doors of a subterranean furnace were flung open while a new world was being created. Far off mountain peaks, unseen during the haze of broad day, stood forth high in the heavens, peaks of amethyst and sapphire, floating in space as their bases remained lost in the shadows. As the magic of the coming day increased in potency the earth shadows shrunk and range after range took their places below the isolated elevations, until from base to top the deeply sculptured planes were revealed most minutely. If Hale lifted his head to stare at this fairy world, the real Idaho, it was to take advantage of the morning light and search the background of the basin.

By the time he was within a mile of the river this miracle of a restored earth had passed its climax, and the mountains began to withdraw behind the veil of violet haze. Where all had been distinct and definite, although many miles distant, now all was blurred, even in the foreground. Hale's wide eyes, grayish-green like the sage, half-closed as the increasing light became a physical offense. By contrast the shadow of ledge or bluff was a thing of ebony, opaque and of substance. On many a cloudless morning Hale had witnessed this coming and vanishing of the mountains and vaguely knew the miracle somehow fitted into his scheme of life and satisfied a soul hunger, but on this particular day his mind was blind to all except his errand.

As his tall form breasted the sage closer to the river he halted and sniffed at the dry air. Wood was burning near by, and he thrilled with the hope he was about to come upon the quarry whom he and his camp mate had been following for several days, but whose

trail had been lost for twenty-four hours. He shifted the rifle from the hollow of his arm and scouted toward a fringe of cottonwood that blocked his view of the riverbank. Sunflowers and rabbit-brush, brilliant cousin of the goldenrod, broke the monotony of the grayish-green color scheme, but Hale saw only the thin smoke rising in a straight line above the trees.

When he and his companion lost the trail they knew the man was making either for Idaho City on Moore's Creek, or Boise City on the river of that name. He had struck south for Boise so that the fellow, if he had gone there, might not have too great a lead in escaping into Utah or California.



But with the smoke just ahead his doubts vanished and he smiled in grim complacency and covered the quarter of a circle to beyond the lower end of the growth. On finishing this stealthy maneuver he halted in chagrin; instead of discovering a camp-fire, he was looking at a double log-cabin, flanked by the lush green of cultivated land, where the fine yellowish-white dust deposit had been blessed by water and sown by man.

"Vegetable farmer! Luck of a dog!" he growled, throwing his rifle over his shoulder and striding forward.

The man he sought would not be living in a cabin and raising vegetables; rather, he would be lurking in some box canon or riding desperately for the cover of some town before taking a southern trail.

Before Hale could make the corner of the house he was confronted by a man of his own stature, but much older; for the long hair and beard were snow-white. Hale sensed the absence of hospitality the moment he encountered the frosty eyes. The lean face of the trailer hardened, and coming to a halt he gruffly saluted—

"How d'do."

The old man combed a hand through his beard and eyed him suspiciously, his quick gaze taking in each detail of the stranger's dress and weapons.

"Howdy," he responded. "You're no miner." The coldness of his faded blue eyes became less obvious. "You're rigged out like a mountain-man of the old days, only you ain't old enough to be one of them."

"Neither miner nor mountain-man. I've been working on the wagon-road up north."

"That would be Cap'n John Mullan's road. It ain't any great shakes I take it from what I hear."

"Folks are a heap disappointed when it comes to Winter travel," admitted Hale. "But that's because of the snow and not Mullan."

"You can't have had much doing in that line for two or three years," mused the old man, holding his ground as if barring the way.

"I've been hunting since work on the road finished."

"But you ain't done any hunting for gold, you say. Queer guns for a hunter, them two big hand-guns."

"That depends on your game."

The old man found this curt retort containing something sinister. His tall form stiffened and he harshly demanded—

"Be you an officer of the law?"

Hale shook his head; then, as if reading the other's suspicions, he quietly added—

"And I'm not a law-breaker."

"Glad to hear the last. Glad to hear the first, too, as some of our law-officers ain't much better'n them that they're s'posed to chase."

"A faint smile twisted Hale's lips. After a pause he politely said:

"Don't let me keep you from your victuals. I only want to know if you've seen a man pass here with a black mare, marked with a white star on the right hind-quarter."

"Black? With a white star? Two days ago. Forded ten rods above the house. Didn't call. Made south towards Boise City."

"Thanks. I guessed it right. Stranger, that mare was stolen from me. I'm going after her if the chase takes me to Mexico."

"Then you're crazy even if you do pack so many guns," snorted the old man. "Folks in Payette Valley will tell you 'Old Idaho' is queer for growing vegetables instead of hunting gold; but even he knows better'n to try to git back stolen property once the thieves have cached it south of the Boise. They got a horse from me early this Spring. I kept my trap shet. If you can overtake the cuss in the open and you can use that rifle—yes. But to poke into town and try to git the critter back—well, you might as well try to locate a rich quartz lode in a sheet of Snake River lava."

"Huh! So, you're Old Idaho? Heard about you up North. You came out to Oregon with the year of 'forty-five immigrants. You was one of the first to prowl around the Boise Basin."

Old Idaho did not relish this. He warmly replied:

"That's a name some derned fools tucked onto me. My real name's Prescott. I didn't do any prowling round this basin."

Seeing the old man was displeased, Hale maliciously continued—

"Up in the Cœur d'Alene country they reckon you're the man that found the 'Lost Diggings' in 'Forty-five."

"Tarnation lie!" passionately cried Old Idaho. "Some joking feller started that mess of talk. I don't know nothing about mining. Don't have to. Don't want to. I make money raising vegetables. With flour a dollar a pound in Idaho City this last Spring—and causing a mob to fire the town—I reckon my lost diggings is right here. There ain't no 'Lost Diggings'. Never was."

"Oh, it's no disgrace to you even if you did prospect a bit. No need of having a fit over it. I was just saying what folks up North are saying."

"They ain't no call to hitch my name to any 'Lost Diggings,' " grunted Old Idaho. "Your mare's in Boise City if they ain't run her down to the Owyhee and sold her."

"And I'd better be hurrying along, eh? You're a hospitable old cuss. Bet you make friends with every starving man you see."

The old man's irritation vanished.

"I hail from New England, where they're just as free with grub as they be anywhere in the world. My heart's all right; but I have my troubles. I have to size folks up before asking 'em to light and squat. Got a granddarter living with me. Too many rough-looking men round these parts for me to be promiscus with free grub. Most of 'em are all right, but you can't tell when the wrong one will come along. Three different times some fellers from Buena Vista Bar come snooping down here this Spring, and I had to throw some lead from my old gun before they'd take the hint and dust out. But I reckon you're all right. You're after a stolen mare. You ain't got any time to stop and visit. Come in and eat. What be you called?"

"Hale. Maybe I'd best be moving on."

"Not Shoshoni Hale?" eagerly asked Old Idaho.

"I've been called that up North. Fool notion of fool people."

"I'll use only the last part of your handle, but I always want to admire the Injun part of it. You've got to come in. We'll grub and talk."

Hale, known from Walla Walla to the Beaver Head country as "Shoshoni Hale" because of his reputed influence among the Indians of that tribe, could have explained that he already had eaten, but the glimpse of a face at the window aroused his curiosity; and he followed his eccentric host into the cabin.

AS HE halted inside the door a slim young fellow in buckskin trousers and flannel shirt advanced to meet him. While he was glancing about to behold the granddaughter Old Idaho was saying—

"This is my granddarter, Harry Idaho."

"Harriet Prescott," she quickly corrected.

And Hale knew that a glance at the small beaded moccasins should have proclaimed her sex. She took his hand and permitted him to retain it while she scrutinized him searchingly. He was embarrassed by the intensity of her gaze and considerably abashed by the continued presence of the small hand in his big palm. It was almost as if she hoped to find in him some one she had been looking for. He felt relieved when she withdrew her hand. He was nonplussed when she gravely announced—

"I reckon you're all right."

"I hope so, miss," he meekly replied.

"But why do you pack two revolvers and that rifle? When I sized you up from the window I reckoned you was one of Jem Helm's gang. While you was talking with

granddaddy I had you covered." She jerked her head toward a muzzle-loading rifle leaning against the wall by the window. "My goodness! but that's a mighty fine looking rifle!" she exclaimed as she studied the Henry.

"Regular humdinger," he awkwardly assured. "See how she works." He manipulated the mechanism for her edification. "Land sakes!" she cried. "It's worth a dozen of those old muzzle-loaders. I tried to get granddaddy to buy me a Spencer."

"Too heavy caliber for a gal," mumbled Old Idaho. "Has to be cocked by hand. Don't have enough power. Sometime I'll git you a Sharps."

"That's a good buffalo gun," said Hale. "It shoots well. But it's a breech-loader, and if the action gits loose you'll git a burst of flame in your face from the powder-gas every time you fire it. When I git through with my business on Boise River I'll see if I can't pick you up a Henry, miss."

"Oh, will you?" she cried, clapping her hands like a child when promised a toy. "Granddaddy will pay you what you pay, and something besides for your trouble."

"I didn't mean it that way, miss," sheepishly explained Hale. "I wanted to fetch it as a present."

"No you won't," broke in Old Idaho. "I've planned to buy her one in Idaho City. Then sternly to the girl, "No presents from strangers, Harry. That's settled."

"It doesn't matter so long as you git what you want," said Hale. He unfastened his belt and shoulder-strap and deposited his weapons and blanket in a corner. "You like guns?"

"It's guns, or nothing," she moodily replied. "And I thought you must be one of Helm's gang when I saw you with the hand guns and rifle."

"Man I'm trailing may be one of the gang. Stole my mare. How old are you?" He spoke in jerks as he was unaccustomed to talking to young women.

"Twenty."

"You don't look it." Her face expressed displeasure. He quickly added, "It's the rig you're wearing. You'd look bigger in petticoats."

"My goodness! Is that so?" she cried in mock amazement. "Well, if size shows age you must be older than the Salmon River Mountains."

"Harry, behave yourself," commanded Old Idaho. "Shoshoni Hale can make the Injuns fetch and carry for him like so many tame dogs. He's probably got some of 'em waiting for him near here."

"Nonsense," growled Hale, feeling confused. "That is, I have a friend, a Shoshoni, camping four or five miles north of here, waiting for me to come back after I git my mare."

"Didn't I say so?" triumphed the old man.

"So that's who you are? Shoshoni Hale," purred the girl, and studying him with lively interest. "You must have lots of influence over them."

"I've got a few friends among 'em," he mumbled. "Lots of white men have found Indians make true-blue friends. But I ain't much account when it comes to talking with a young woman, miss. I reckon I'll be going, or they'll have that mare way down in Chico."

"Get down to the table and I'll set on the breakfast," she briskly commanded. Hale slid meekly onto a stool and found that when seated his head was level with hers. This added to his confusion.

"So they stole your mare," rattled on the girl, pausing half-way between the table and the cook-room. "Well, seeing that you are you, perhaps they won't eat you up. Why didn't you fetch along your Indian to help get the mare back?"

"You're mistook, miss," timidly explained Hale. "That Indian talk is mostly foolishness. I can't bring Black Cloud into it. White men don't think much of killing an Indian. Up in the mountains it would be different. I let him pick up the trail, but once I see it was making for a town I had him stay behind. If I could jump the critter outside of the town I wouldn't ask for any help except from my rifle."

"If I had a rifle like that I'd ride through Idaho City and nary a man would make eyes at me—less I wished him to."

With this pert remark she disappeared. Old Idaho took the head of the table and furtively studied the bowed head of his guest. The face, he decided, was too long to be attractive. The eyes had a trick of remaining half closed, and their color reminded him of the grayish-green sage. The girl returned with a platter heaped with meat and dumplings, and a pot of coffee. Hale lifted his head and eyed the dumplings wolfishly. It had been several months since he had eaten bread, the nearest approach to it being hardtack.

After he had helped himself the girl remarked:

"So you're going after the mare? Why don't you tell the Payette Committee about it? They've done lots of good in getting stolen property back. If they'd had Ben Riply over at Idaho City when it was burned this Spring the thieves wouldn't have lugged so many store goods into the hills."

"I don't belong down here. I can't ask favors of strangers. I pack my own blankets and run my own trails. If I can't get the mare back after locating her the thief is welcome to her."

"You seem to be awfully cock-sure of yourself, Shoshoni Hale." She spoke as one overawed, but he knew she was making game of him and his face colored. He was ill at ease under her solemn eyes. He feared for what her artless bluntness would incite her to say. Entirely unaccustomed to women's company he felt he was trapped and helpless. The old man perceived his growing embarrassment and tersely commanded—

"Harry, keep your trap shet!"

"Oh, I don't mind!" protested Hale, mopping his long face. Then he humbly explained to her, "Being a stranger, it don't strike me as proper to go round begging for help. Up North I might feel more free to call on."

"And you might not," she soothingly added. "You might just trust to your hand guns and rifle. You look like that."

This time he flushed with happiness. It was a wonderful experience to have a young woman, as tantalizingly pretty as the girl was, give him praise. He found himself saying—

"It was only a notion my coming down here, anyway."

After he had spoken he decided it sounded idiotic. He discovered that Old Idaho was grinning in his beard.

FOR several minutes they were too busy eating to talk. The girl was taking time to perfect her estimate of the stranger. All tongues did not agree as to the kind of man Shoshoni Hale was. He had been active in building the Mullan wagon-road from Walla Walla to Fort Benton, and was credited with having a more extensive knowledge of the country between the upper Missouri and the Cascade Mountains than he was entitled to. But there is no pleasure in adhering to facts when gossiping about a man.

It is very probable that his friendship with certain leaders among the Shoshoni was construed to mean that he knew the country as well as they did. As a fact he was sufficiently familiar with all the country forming Idaho Territory and western Montana, northern Utah, and parts of Washington and Oregon to serve as guide to the majority of newcomers to this, the latest El Dorado.

To say he knew the country as well as the Indian he had left north of the Payette was nonsense. But his reputation as a trail-maker alone would not have made his name conspicuous among the miners in the Snake River Basin. Something else was needed to keep his name alive at camp-fires and in the saloons on the Boise, the Clearwater, and the creek tributaries of the Snake and Owyhee.

There was a mystery about the fellow; therein was found the stimulus. He dressed like a mountain-man of the old beaver régime. No one seemed to know where he had been, or what he had done since quitting road-building in 'Sixty-two. Not that he had vanished during these three years, for such a prolonged absence would have spelled oblivion. He had come and gone, flitting in and off the scene. But he was never known to prospect for lode or placer; and yet he always had his bag of dust.

It was an easily accepted truism that an able-bodied man in Idaho Territory must be engaged in mining, ranching, farming, transportation, merchandising, selling rum, or gambling, or else he must have a much less wholesome occupation. More from a love of exaggeration and the human desire to increase the mystery than because of any adequate proof it came to be whispered by some—some who had never seen him—that he painted his face and did gruesome work while thus disguised.

This poisonous uncertainty about the man persisted, although no proof involving him with law-breaking had been unearthed out of all the too few examples made of outlawry by the Payette Committee and other extemporaneous tribunals.

Yet surely was a man to be eyed askance who had no vocational background? No one had produced any evidence connecting Hale with the banditti, but his detractors said this evidenced his great cunning. It

was too well known that Indians, as well as white men disguised as Indians, were preying on the stage lines, on freight and pack-trains, and on lonely horse ranchos.

Old Idaho was busy mulling over some of these bits of gossip as he ate his breakfast.

The story of the stolen mare now began to worry the old man. True, he had seen a mare, conspicuously marked as Hale had described. But suppose a man planned a coup against property, and suppose that man realized there were those who suspected him of being on the wrong side of the law; what better rôle of innocence, then, to adopt when venturing into the Payette Valley than to come as one who had been plundered? How easily and quickly could he establish himself as an injured man by having an accomplice precede him with the alleged stolen property so marked as to be noted and remembered? Being a vegetable farmer, Old Idaho should not have feared even a robber. Perhaps the trim little figure of his granddaughter was the treasure he wished no lawless man to discover.

Age weighs and deliberates long after Youth has leaped to a conclusion. The girl was immensely pleased to have met this stranger. Infrequently other men wandered down the valley and called at the cabin. Among these were some with the eyes of a mountain-wolf as they gazed on the girl. Old Idaho bruskly sent all such about their business. As yet none had dared, or cared, to disregard his orders.

Yet it was a lonely life for a girl of twenty. Day after day the wonderful blue mountain tops hung in the heavens at dawn; shadow succeeding glare at evening, with a purple sea covering the plains. At dawn and dusk mountains appeared and grew immeasurably in height and flung out far reaching ridges, yet hid themselves at noontime. And there was the glory of the nights, when the rapid radiation brought coolness, even a chill, when the heavens were crowded with stars and each star burned like a planet.

She accepted these wonders just as she accepted the Summer winds from the west, heavy with dust, and blowing with a steady persistency throughout the afternoon and dying mysteriously at sunset. Out of all these phenomena she made many stories and peopled the heavens and the haze with her day-dreams. But she was young and full-blooded and her spirit clamored for something which neither the marvels of the zenith, nor the beauties of earth could supply.

She had a horse to ride, if she would promise not to go too far. She had guns to shoot, but was not permitted to venture widely and depend upon them. And there was a time for a brief spell when she had had a dog to love. With the dog came her first touch of romance.

The dog was a gift from a man in Idaho City. His hands were better kept than those of any other man she had ever seen. She met him on one of the rare occasions when her grandfather took her to the county seat. He was very picturesque, a bit melodramatic, in his black jacket, snowy shirt, his brown trousers tucked into irreproachable French patent leather boots. His hair was glossy and his beard short and distinguished looking. And he removed his black felt hat when addressing her with a mixture of impudence and meekness.

He told her his name was Ferdinand Patterson, and that he had never met a woman to notice her until he met her. Then he gave her the dog and she had brought it home, with her mind filled with romantic nonsense. Soon after he invited himself to the cabin and ate with them. She had been highly elated at this break in the sage-brush monotony. Then her grandfather walked aside with the man and talked to him briefly. He rode away without even saying good-by. The next day Old Idaho found the dog shot through the heart, and the old man buried it and said it had gone back to town. The gambler had taken back his gift.

THUS with her sentimental background but hastily sketched in with emotions which she could not analyze, the girl was in love with love without knowing it. She was as frank and honest in her desire to discover and understand her strange impulses as she was unconscious of her masculine garb. Life to her was always on the edge of becoming a wonderful and beautiful adventure. As she watched Hale she vaguely began to understand that the adventure could not begin until there came a man who was not old like her granddaddy, nor wicked as she believed all gamblers to be, nor animals as were some of the bewhiskered creatures who happened upon the cabin.

She tilted her head and surveyed Shoshoni Hale with marked deliberation. Hale was

eating heartily although it was his second breakfast. He grew flustered when he became aware of the girl's fixed gaze, and refused to take the dumpling he had reached for. He ceased eating when she peremptorily demanded—

"Where did you come from anyway?"

"Lewiston and Oro Fino."

"I mean your home. Where was your home when you was a boy?"

"I never had a home," he slowly told her, and gravely returning her level gaze. "I was a baby when my mother died, so I do not remember her. It was back East. My father brought me West. Wagon-trains. Sickness. Starvation. Bloodshed. Then a brief time of plenty to eat. I never had the chance to be a boy."

"Your father is dead?"

He nodded and rose from the table and picked his belt from the corner. Facing about he said in a colorless voice:

"Yes, my father's dead. Dead these six years."

His recital was terse and lacking all details, yet it painted for her a picture she could visualize. She understood wagon-trains, sickness and famine; yes, and even bloodshed. Although sheltered from the many grim incidents characterizing the main roads of travel, there were times when surging, avaricious, reckless humanity overlapped into the valley and marked its intrusion by untoward acts. Eager to talk further with one who met her on a plane she could understand, and feeling nothing but pity and sympathy for this old-young man, she hurriedly told him:

"It's much the same with me. Granddaddy and my folks came out in 'Forty-five. My father died just before I was born at Umatilla. Poor little mother felt so sad she died when I was a baby. I don't remember her. We came here five years ago. Tell him, granddaddy, how you were up this way when the wagon-train went through in 'Forty-five, and how you went looking for lost cattle and found——"

"Hold your tongue!" fiercely commanded the old man. "Chatter! chatter! How many times have I told you— There, there. You're a good girl. Let's say nothing more about it." Then to the astonished Hale he awkwardly explained, "Certain things nerve me up. That trip to Oregon made wounds that don't heal easy-like."

The girl ran into the adjoining room and Hale somehow knew she was hiding tears. He felt very miserable on her account and very angry with the old man. The anger and excitement in Old Idaho's bearing when he checked the girl's innocent impulse smacked of senile madness.

"She must be lonely as —— here," mused Hale aloud.

"She's happy enough when folks from the outside don't come in to put fool notions in her head," mumbled the old man, moving toward the door. "That mare of yours must be in Boise City by this time."

Belting on his hand guns and securing his rifle and blanket-roll, Hale followed his host outside. He looked back for a farewell glimpse of the girl, but she remained unseen. It seemed monstrous that one so sweet and alluring should be reduced to sorrow. It was a man's game to suffer, but this gentle creature was no more intended for sadness than a song-bird for the snare.

Hale suddenly saw his life hard and ugly like a sheet of lava. The girl was the first decorative bit to relieve that ugliness. Her personality filled him with a longing to know more of that unsuspected plane which her sweet artlessness seemed to type. His scowl was venomous as he magnified the maid's tears into a tragedy. Old Idaho twisted his beard nervously and muttered—

"Women always jabber too much."

Hale gave a short laugh; more like a bark than anything else. He was starved for a woman's talk and this ancient one was objecting to it. He had just discovered what a bleak, dreary affair his life had been, and the old man had cut short his vision of what might have been.

"All they think about is keeping their tongues a-wagging," Old Idaho continued.

"Old man, I've lived much alone. I've wandered in the mountains and gone a year without seeing any white women. The honest white women I've seen for the last six years I can count on my ten fingers. I didn't get to have a talk with only a few of them. It seems to me that if an ounce of blood could buy a word from the little girl I'd stick around and listen till I was bled white. There's some things so much out of joint that a man don't git riled up over 'em. What you say is one of them things."

"Well, I don't like chatter," grumbled Old Idaho. "And it always raps me for any one to keep harping on them Lost Diggings of 'Forty-five."

"Men up north of the Clearwater still talk about the 'Forty-five immigration and the Lost Diggings," said Hale, eying Old Idaho narrowly. "Something about a man going to look for cattle and finding gold. The story goes that he found curious looking rock and brought back specimens to the wagon-train along with the cattle, but was too much of a tenderfoot to know he'd been tramping over a fortune. The story has it that he tossed the specimens—some of it almost free gold—into the tool-box. Some say the train reached Oregon before the man learned it was gold."

"Lies! All a pack of derned lies!" whispered Old Idaho, his beard wagging violently. "Every new country is filled with them kind of lies. Wade and Miner started to find them Lost Diggings two years ago and made the rich strike on Jordan Creek. So if ever there was any Lost Diggings they've been found in the Owyhee country, and the men from Placerville relocated 'em when they pounced down on Discovery Bar."

"Of course," murmured Hale. "Well, I'll be gitting after my mare."

"I'm just a vegetable farmer. Never hankered for digging gold. I ain't no miner," persisted Old Idaho.

"You don't need to tell me that—or anything. Keep the little girl close to home. Now that the Oregon and Washington troops have been mustered out of border service the Indians will be making free of this basin. They've suffered too much not to strike back. And they have horses and guns and ammunition. And they can fight. What's worse than Indians are some of the men from the 'left wing of Price's army' that are wandering up and down the basin."

"I can take care of my own so far as any white scum is consarned, but I can't lick a whole tribe of Injuns. They all oughter be shot."

"They probably will be in time," was the morose rejoinder. "The old treaty of 'Fifty-five ain't been lived up to. The new treaty ain't been confirmed by the Government. Settlers are living under the terms of the new, and the Indians are clinging to the terms of the old. Eagle-from-the-Light is ready to swap war-pipes with the Blackfoot and Crow nations and kill all whites in Idaho and Montana. If the trouble ever gits started you want to clear out of this valley on the jump. Until it breaks you won't be harmed by Shoshoni or Nez Perces so long as you stick here at home. Look out for white men, who are worse than Indians."

"I know how to handle whites. Run one dandified feller out this early Summer, who come down from Idaho City to pester Harry."

"So? What's he called?"

"Patterson. Gambling feller."

"Ferd Patterson? The skunk! I knew of him in Oregon and Washington. Don't warn him off if he comes again. Kill him on sight. He's got a blood record the whole length of the Coast. He scalped his woman in Portland. And he's in Idaho City? Can't have been there long."

"Don't know nothing about him 'cept he's a gambling feller. Dresses slick and is just the sort to turn a fool woman's head. I'm shy of my girl meeting any strange men. Reckon there's queer yarns about almost every man one meets out here."

He punctuated the last with a thrusting glance at Hale.

Hale smiled wearedly.

"That's all right," he said. "Be suspicious of me till you learn something about me. I won't even say that I'm half-way decent. But be suspicious of the other fellow, also. Of course the girl must meet men some time and they'll be strangers till she gets to know 'em. It's for you to get acquainted with 'em first. As to talking about me I'll only say this: they don't to my face.

Old Idaho grinned maliciously and replied—

"They don't talk to Patterson's face, either."

Hale mulled this over for a few moments and then slowly said:

"Perhaps it would be better if there was more face-to-face talk. I believe I'll start the good example. Yes; I'll make it my business to meet Patterson before I go back north. I'll meet him in some public place, where there'll be witnesses, and I'll tell him what I know of his record."

"And die in your tracks," Old Idaho jeered.

"I don't think so. But that's a risk a man takes if he tells certain truths out here."

"If you ain't killed by him you'll be killed by some of his pards. He has a gang close at hand all the time. No one will be punished for killing you. There's a lawless set of hellions loose along the Boise and in

Idaho City. They need a committee like what we have in the valley here."

"Well, no one has killed me yet. That's a good sign. So long." And making his way down the bank he forded the shallow stream and took up his walk to Boise City.

Old Idaho watched him for a minute, and told himself aloud—

"He may be all and more then what some folks say about him. But, dang it! He's too well set up a man to be clumping through sage-bush and bunch grass. Hi! Shoshoni Hale! Hi! Hi! Wait a bit and I'll lend you a hoss."

Hale waved a hand and called back:

"Thanks. But I'll be outfitted all right once I locate the mare."

CHAPTER II

BOISE CITY JUSTICE

THE prevailing west wind was a blast from a furnace and blew with a monotonous persistency that made Boise City nervous and irritable. From midday until sunset the wind would hold, and the accumulative effect of its daily visitation made disputes a dangerous pastime. In front of the Tusk Saloon the temperature was a hundred and five, but thanks to the dry air, not so unendurable as a lesser degree of heat in a more humid climate. And yet it was hot enough.

A stranger in the town, with his first night before him, would resent the information that night would find him eager for blankets.

The Saw Tooth Mountains were smothered in haze and were to be located by the futile attempts of a thunderstorm to reach the plains. Each day the sullen clouds piled high their resources and with ferocious displays of lightning threatened the sage-brush levels, only to be defeated and dried up by the hot west wind. But each day the line of defeat would lie farther from the base of the serrate range. Not until Autumn, however, would the rain conquer and reach the vast plains.

And Boise City was crowded with sweltering humanity. The average citizen's temper, unless restrained, would flash up over trifles. Men came and went and the town was always full. Beginning with early Spring stage-coaches from Placerville and Idaho City, some thirty-five miles to the north, had been bringing in and hauling away the gold-hungry. The upper country was rushing flood-tide to the Owyhee country along Jordan Creek, breaking the journey at Boise. But the Owyhee country was poorly timbered and entirely unlike the Boise Valley.

The mines were far up in the mountains and the country was rough and the roads poor. Perhaps one out of a dozen remained after finding the discovery ground was taken up and new diggings hard to find. And northward streamed the disappointed with Boise again taking toll. The travel over the Blue Mountains from Oregon and up from California and Utah held to a high level.

In one month two thousand wagons arrived from the East to scatter throughout Montana and Idaho, with a goodly percentage reaching Boise. Wagon- and pack-trains were arriving constantly. Hotels were filled to capacity. The gambling-resorts and saloons, gay with glass and furnishings, packed in from Portland at twenty-nine cents a pound, ran day and night to satisfy the excitement seekers. Possibly the majority of the adventurers were from the Coast, and already had grooved their minds to liberal ideas regarding pleasure.

And there were many men of evil there. Desperadoes flocked in from east of the Missouri, from Montana, from the Salmon and Payette Valleys to form a partnership in crime with men fresh from making the bloody history of the Coast. This miscellaneous riffraff not only leavened the honest citizenry, but also managed to have things much its own way. Organized and unorganized villainy resulted in chaos. It was well near impossible to convict of murder in the first degree. For two hundred deaths by violence the law hanged five men.

An Owyhee man made his kill and was sentenced to serve ten years. After two months of retirement he was pardoned on a petition showing that he did not hit the man he shot at, and, therefore, was guiltless of premeditation. This persisting reign of crime was logical enough so long as there were county and territorial officials who stole or squandered the public funds. The basin of the Snake was at the mercy of wrong-doers. Highway robbery, the wholesale looting of wagon-trains, raids on horse ranchos, and the counterfeiting of gold-dust, were of frequent occurrence.

These crimes were often accompanied by murder. The fact that the unwritten law justified the shooting of a man found seated on a stolen horse did not check the stealing of horses. As if these depredations by lawless whites were not enough for the basin to endure there were the Indians viciously active. The creation of a new military subdivision for Nevada and the Owen's River valley in California was expected to put an end to the red men's raids on the traffic between those regions and Idaho. The efficiency of this protective service was supposed to be doubly insured when Charles McDermitt, the man who went to the rescue of the immigrants in the Modoc country in 'Fifty-two, was named commander. But despite this veteran's efforts the Indians hampered the California road traffic throughout the Spring and Summer of 'Sixty-five.* They were bold enough to attack a saddle-train on Jordan Creek and a wagon train at Farewell Bend, securing mules in both raids.

Sheriff D. C. Updyke found the social status of Boise City very pleasing as he sat in his office near the Tusk Saloon and listened to the reports of his deputies. A discord was struck when Deputy Gamby reported that a certain rancho keeper, who had been "robbed" by parties unknown of thirty head of horses entrusted to his care by miners, was refusing to split the profits.

"He says he's afraid to make a move till the owners git through hunting for the nags. Says he thinks he's more'n half suspected. He says that after things have quieted down he'll produce the stock for us to sell."

"He'll turn the hosses over now, or he'll quit keeping a rancho," growled the sheriff. "You take Dollinger and go down there and tell him them's my orders. If he holds back I'll arrest him as hoss-thief and hang him."

"If you arrest him he'll tell things. The town will set their vigilant committee to working and some of his blabbing will be believed. Better strike a bargain with Jem Helm. Wash your hands of it and let Jem put it through. Then if there's any blabbing it will be against Helm and his gang."

Updyke snapped his finger scornfully.

"Send Helm? You're crazy. Chances are Helm put him up to hiding the stock and holding it out on us. Let him talk and be ——. If I arrest him he won't have any time to talk. We'll turn him off ourselves and lay it to the vigilants. No, Gamby; we don't want Jem Helm's fingers in this dish. He'n his gang ain't showing any hankering to work in double-harness with us. Take Dollinger and try soft measures. If they don't work just come back to me for further orders."

Gamby passed out, ill-pleased with his errand. A second deputy approached the sheriff's table and hoarsely whispered—

"Ben Riply's in town."

Updyke rose from his chair and sat down again.

"That little devil! Why didn't you tell me before?"

"He just come in from up-country."

Updyke scowled heavily. Finally he said:

"I ain't afraid of that rat. I represent law'n order in Ada County. No outsider can tell me what to do even if he does talk for the Payette Committee. He ain't on his own stamping-ground down here."

"Mebbe he's here to git Boise to start its committee working again."

Updyke pondered over this suggestion for a few moments and did not relish it. He ordered:

"Find Gamby and tell him his business can wait till I learn what Riply's up to. Swanger, anything new?"

Deputy Swanger lounged forward and announced—

" 'Sydney Bill' brought a mare in and sold her to Ferd Patterson."

The sheriff swore furiously. When he could get back to connected speech he declared:

"That comes of trusting one of them Australian fellows. He knows our rules; all stock to be turned in. He knew he hadn't any right to sell, even to Patterson. If trouble comes he'll expect us to save his hide. Find out from Patterson what he paid. Tell him I'm asking. I never trusted Bill in money matters."

"Bill 'lows the mare was so marked as to be recognized easy. Told me he thought he'd been trailed and didn't want her on his hands. He says he made the price cheap so Patterson would take her and forget who sold her to him. Of course Patterson understands the risk he's running of losing her if the owner turns up."

"Losing her in Boise City?" jeered Updyke. "You fellows make me tired. What am I sheriff for? Why is Curks the judge?

*McDermitt was ambushed and killed by Indians at Queen River on August 11, 1865.

As sheriff I won't let any one take the mare by force. If the matter's carried into court Curks will stand firm for his friends. Patterson played it low down. He knows how the game works and he skinned Bill by playing a low figure. When he done that he was skinning me. If he wants to play any of those games let him do it where he sleeps, in Idaho City. It proves what I've always told the men; let me do the planning and dickering. Get the price from Patterson, then find Bill and send him up here. He'll be at the Tusk."

At about the time Swanger was locating Sydney Bill—so called because he had been a leader of Sydney Town in San Francisco, and an Australian convict before that—Shoshoni Hale came down the main street of the town, his grayish-green eyes roaming from side to side in search of some trace of his property.

On the outskirts of the town he had inspected several small horse corrals and had satisfied himself the mare was either in the town or on the road to Salt Lake City, or California. A group of loafers before a stable raised a laugh at his elkskin trousers and moccasins. This, not that the garb was a rarity but because of a vicious desire to deride and pick a quarrel.

Not heeding them, he plodded up the street until arriving at the Tusk. Here he halted and mopped his dripping face and curiosly eyed the nine-foot tusk mounted on a block of white-oak. It measured nine inches through at the base and once was worn by some prehistoric monster. It had been found by a prospector on Rabbit Creek, ten miles from the Snake, and laboriously brought to town to serve as a sign for the saloon and gambling-hell.

The Tusk was a long structure with a bar along one wall and the floor given over to gaming-tables. Men were pouring in to cool their blood with fiery potations. Men were emerging, too stupid to find a bit of shade.

HALE brushed back his long hair and entered. The bar was well-filled, with a drunken miner the center of attraction. This fellow, dressed in rags, with trousers fashioned from flour bags, with his toes protruding through his broken boots, was spending gold dust and nuggets with the freedom of a man of millions. Those who pressed close about him were looking beyond the gold he had with him. They were feverish to learn where his diggings were located.

Hale worked his way close to the group and called for whisky. He drank slowly and kept a curious eye on the drunken miner and men fencing him in to the bar.

"You don't know where you got it," taunted one man.

"I don't, huh?" mocked the miner. "See green in my eye? Think I'm drunk, don't ye? Wal, I be. An' I know where there's enough of this yaller dirt to keep me drunk for a million years. *Yee-ouw-w!* Every one take a touch of p'izen on 'Lucky Tom' of Lost Gulch. Huh? Where's Lost Gulch? Where I git the dust, you fool."

Significant looks were exchanged. A whisper ran from the bar around behind the miner to the bar again. Then one of the men declared:

"You're a stranger to us. You're spending your dust right handsome. It does you proud. But how do we know it ain't counterfeit, just zinc and copper? They've been hanging folks around here on just a suspicion of counterfeiting dust. You ain't known round here except by a few. You come in and tell yarns about striking a bonanza. There'll be some ugly talk; then some one will act rash, and you'll be through with drinking and your Lost Gulch. Now you know we're your friends, Tom. Tell us where you made your strike. Or go and file on your discovery claim; then no one can jump it. You know the law allows you to hold one creek, one bar, and one hill claim. But if you don't file you'll wind up by holding nothing."

"You talk like you was drunk," answered the miner, and he smiled broadly. "Never entered your noodle that an assayer can soon tell you if my dust is the real article or not, huh? Or did you folks think I was so drunk I wouldn't think of it? First, I'm going to swing for counterfeiting dust; next I'm going to have my claim jumped if I don't file and let the whole basin know where it is.

"Mister, that placer belongs to me. Men up in Oro Fino are making fifty dollars a day pounding up rock in a common hand mortar. But I can take out five hundred dollars a day and keep it up for years. There's bushels of it in the gravel beds of Lost Gulch. That's my name for it—just Lost Gulch. Counterfeit dust, huh? How about this? Just tickle your peepers with this."

He slammed down on the bar a piece of ore that resembled lead, a chlorid of silver impregnated with gold and worth four dollars an ounce as taken from the mine, and so soft as to be cut with a knife.

"Any counterfeit about that, huh?"

"Ruby silver, by ——!" some one gasped.

The half-circle seemed to shiver. Eyes that burned with murder were focused on the ragged fellow. There were men at the bar who would gladly have cut his throat for an ounce of dust, and if his boasting was half-true he possessed the secret to millions. The spokesman for the group breathed deep and fast as if exhausted by fast running. When he could control his voice he signaled for the others to remain quiescent and pushed the bottle before Lucky Tom and in a jovial voice cried:

"Good luck to you, my boy. I hope you've got tons of it! Hope you live a million years to enjoy it! Drink up on a poor devil who hasn't any bonanza behind him."

The miner chuckled sardonically and flipped a nugget across the bar and said:

"We'll drink, but I'll do the buying. No use for me to cart any of this stuff back with me."

Before any reply could be made a sturdily built fellow with a polished bald head leaped up from a small table, his cards still grasped in his hand, and buffeted his way through to the miner's side and demanded:

"Where's the gulch you're yelping about? Spit it out! You men are too soft and polite. His secret belongs to all of us. Curse me if I'll drag along when I see a man who's found enough gold to make us all rich! Now, you big fool, where's those diggings located? You don't hog them any longer."

And, still gripping the cards, the gambler drew a dragoon pistol, sawed off short, and held it under the miner's nose.

"I'm desperate! I'll stand no holding back. You spit it out, or off goes the top of your head. The game's big enough for me to risk anything on it. The percentage makes me sit in. Come! I'm waiting."

The group remained silent, no one interfering. Shoshoni Hale reached a long arm over a man's shoulder and tapped the gambler on the head with his open hand.

"Easy there, stranger," he gently warned. "If that pistol should go off by mistake your head would follow his at once."

Without removing his gaze from the miner the gambler quietly asked—

"Has he got me covered?"

"No gun in sight but he looks like he'd draw right smart."

"All right," calmly observed the gambler and, lowering his weapon, he backed to a clear space in the floor.

The miner faced about and rested his elbows on the edge of the bar and grinned delightedly at the discomfited gambler. Without glancing at Hale he said:

"Much obliged, neighbor; but now I'll take the ribbons. I ain't so drunk but what I can take care of all the trouble that comes head-on. You boys scatter to one side so's I can size up this critter that tries to sink a shaft in my private affairs."

The crowd quickly melted away. Hale gave the miner a sharp glance and decided he was able to look after his own business. With a gesture to indicate he was through with the situation he moved down the bar. For nearly a minute the gambler stood with his pistol dangling from his right hand, the left hand still clinging to the cards, his bald head thrust forward like a vulture's. Lucky Tom, still leaning against the bar with his hands hanging loosely before his deep chest, found the situation amusing, and he began to laugh loudly.

The gambler slowly announced—

"I will now teach you to laugh at me." With that he threw up the pistol and at the same moment the miner's hand flashed from the bosom of his shirt, and the two explosions almost came as one. The pistol ball grazed the miner's neck and smashed a bottle of whisky on the back-bar. The lead from the revolver drilled through the polished bald head and the gambler went down on his face.

Instantly Hale had the miner by the shoulder and was pulling him toward the door and whispering in his ear:

"Git out of town! I'll swear it was self-defense. But git out now."

He fairly hurled him the remaining distance to the door. Lucky Tom gave him one look of thanks and fled. The room was a pandemonium for a minute. Many of the patrons had crawled under the tables, or behind the bar, or had bolted to the street in anticipation of further shooting. That a man who had appeared to be so helplessly drunk should be so capable of defending himself left the remaining spectators stupefied.

Hale was the first to advance and kneel

by the gambler's side. Glancing up after a brief examination he said:

"He's dead. The other fellow shot in self-defense."

The side door opened to admit a man wearing a black jacket and brown trousers and high patent leather boots. He walked to the dead man, explaining:

"Heard on the street some one had been bored. What! Old Hawk!"

And he knelt beside the corpse and turned it over and rested a hand on the silent breast. Hale marveled at the symmetry and flexibility of the smooth hand.

"Old Hawk is sure dead," he muttered.

Then he sought to remove the cards from the clinched left hand and found the death-clutch defied him. He curiously read the cards and with a grunt of disgust rose and brushed the dust from his knees and exclaimed—

"How could he expect to win with a rotten hand like that? Bury the cards with him, boys. Send me the bill. He meant well but he overplayed. Where's the man who shot him?"

A chorus of disjointed exclamations answered him and it was half a minute before he learned just what had happened. The story of the dust, and the ruby silver brought no change to the man's face, but when cries of "String him up!" began to fill the room he loudly called:

"None of that! The dead man was my friend, but he was shot in a fair fight. He never should have toted that cursed pistol with its stubby barrel. We'll have an inquiry, but no hanging. Some of you find the fellow and tell him he won't be harmed if he comes back peaceably."

HALE had had enough of the place. He worked his way through the crowd and reached the street and took shelter from the sun in the shade of a warehouse. The novelty of reading a newspaper appealed to him and he paid a dollar to a boy for a copy of the *Idaho Statesman*, a tri-weekly, and found it filled with mining news. He read how the Landon lode, consolidated with the Pioneer, was yielding twenty-three dollars for every hundred pounds. The Ada Elmore, near the head of Bear creek, the first and most famous of the South Boise quartz mines but grossly mismanaged by speculating trustees, was claiming to yield two hundred and seventy dollars gold for each ton of rock and was asking for capital to repair the deliberate mischief worked by the speculators.

He learned that thousands of tons of ore were being shipped to San Francisco and New York to attract capitalists. Hill Beachy feared he must close his stage road to Star City, Nevada, and California because of the hostile Indians. The Oregon Steam Navigation Company announced its plans for navigating the Snake as far as Salom Falls with a big steamboat. The stock of the Humboldt express company had been run off by Indians, and a stable-keeper had been killed within forty miles of Jordan Creek.

Woolen socks were a drug on the market and the only commodity not bringing exorbitant prices. Readers of the paper were urged to use them for cleaning guns. Carefully folding the paper, he thrust it inside his shirt for further perusal and strolled down the street. He asked no aid in locating the mare. Perhaps he was so used to doing things for himself that the thought never occurred to him.

A derisive voice yelled something and he swung his head to find himself once more passing the loungers who had jeered him on his first appearance in the street. The fact that the wooden building was a stable suddenly decided him to inspect it. As he turned toward the entrance the idlers discovered he was carrying two guns besides the Henry rifle. They became silent, but eyed him sullenly. He halted and soberly appraised them and then entered the building. A weasel of a man with crafty visage glided in front of him to block his advance and asked:

"Looking for somebody? He ain't here."

This evoked a laugh from the men at the door.

Hale brushed him aside, and continued toward the rear of the stable. The man followed and demanded—

"I asked you if you was looking for somebody."

"Why, something like that," was the slow reply, and Hale halted and began studying the different stalls. "Who might you be, little feller?"

"I might be a big lummox, blundering in where I had no business. But it happens that I run this stable. My name is Kolb. Now what do you want here? Looking for free quarters to git sober in?"

Hale's thrusting glance came to a halt on a box stall at the rear of the stable. The door was closed and the shadows in the corner had made it easy for him to miss it in his first sweeping inventory.

"I'd think it would be hot for a critter inside that contraption," he said in a loud voice.

As if the occupant of the stall wished to indorse the remark there came the thudding of hoofs and a low squeal. Hale leaned his rifle against a hay-mow and hooked his thumbs in his belt and faced the open door. Kolb observed that he was smiling, and yet there was something in the half-closed eyes that canceled any suggestion of merriment.

"We don't like to have strangers around here unless they have business," bruskly informed Kolb.

"That's a mighty good rule," agreed Hale, and nodded his head vigorously. "A mighty good rule. You ought to live up to it all the time."

The men at the door began sidling inside. Each time Hale spoke the hoofs in the stall became more clamorous. Hale put two fingers to his lips and sounded a shrill whistle. Immediately he was answered by a shrill squealing and a violent tattoo against the door.

"Git out of here! You're skeering my stock! Git out!" yelled Kolb, brandishing his arms wildly.

The loungers noiselessly pressed forward. With a flirt of his hands Hale drew his guns and held them half raised and appeared to be contemplating them admiringly. He explained, "You fellers understand that these are .36s and not them measly .31s that strangers from the East fetch in here."

"What do you mean by coming in here and drawing guns?" cried Kolb as he backed away. "Think you can scare me or my friends with your threats?"

"Threats? Scare you?" blankly repeated Hale. "Lordy sakes! I was just saying that these are .36 caliber guns. When you buy a gun git this kind. Don't fuss with the .31s. I see one of your friends favors the new navy .44, only he hasn't got it slung on right. They're sure powerful. But I've tried all makes, and for blowing a hole through a horse-thief, or stopping a road-agent, there's nothing so neat and business-like as the .36. And don't buy the paper cartridges. They ain't water-proof. This country's dry but you never know when you're going to fall into a crick. Buy these and run your own bullets." And he tapped the metal flask with its small measuring stopper and the set of molds hitched to his sagging belt. "Now I'll git my mare, and I'll be needing a heap of room."

The men remained stationary as Hale slowly backed toward the stall. Kolb began to curse loudly. Some one at the door yelled:

"Wait a minute, stranger! I'm an officer of the law. Move another step at your peril."

Hale replaced his guns and replied—

"Folks didn't ought to stand in peril of their lives from an officer of the law."

"I'm mighty glad you've come, Deputy Sheriff Swanger!" greeted Kolb. "This man acts like he was crazy. Sun or whisky, I reckon."

With brisk step the deputy-sheriff advanced toward Hale, a finger touching the badge on his woolen shirt. Hale quietly explained:

"I'm from up Oro Fino way. Been trailing my stolen mare. She's in that box stall."

"The sun or whisky has melted his few brains into fat!" cried Kolb. "That door ain't been opened to-day."

"If that's true then you're worse than a sneaking little rat. You're plumb bad," gritted Hale. "To keep a critter boxed up like that in weather like this!" To the deputy, "She's all black, smooth as satin, with a white star on her right hind quarter. Her name is Pinaquana." A terrific kicking greeted the name. Hale smiled and continued. "It means in Shoshoni 'A smell of sugar,' she being that fond of sweets." There came more squealing from the stall and a continuation of the tattoo on the door. "I want to be legal, but I'm in a hurry to give her some fresh air. Go ahead and open the door. Hi, girl! Just a minute, Pinaquana!"

For the next thirty seconds it seemed as if the mare would batter down the door and effect her own release. She only desisted when Hale called out for her to be quiet. Swanger glanced up and down the tall figure and disapproved of the heavy belt-guns. He had come from the Tusk after sending Sydney Bill to the sheriff. On passing the stable one of the loungers had informed him of what was going on

inside. But the stranger was not the type he had expected to find. An immigrant, or a farmer, would have been quickly sent to the right about. A truculent miner would require rough handling but would have been easily disposed of. But this fellow impressed the deputy as being very simple, or very deadly. The half-closed eyes gave the lean visage a sleepy, feline expression. The eight-inch guns seemed to go with the tall figure.

"Now see here! This won't do at all," Swanger sharply began. "The animal in the stall is making a racket because it's thirsty. If you think it's your property——"

"Think? I know."

"Then you'll lose nothing by going about it in a legal way. You must git a search warrant and have it served. That'll make it right and reg'lar and give you a chance to prove property."

"Waste time gitting a paper when my mare's calling for me to take her out of the —— coffin?" exploded Hale. "Me run after a paper when all I have to do is to open the door and fetch her out?"

"You're a stranger here. There's been too much law-breaking round these parts. You can't walk into a stable and take a horse without showing your right. Everything's going to be reg'lar. There ain't anything to show that you've lost any horseflesh."

FROM an inside pocket Hale produced a writing and held it for Swanger to read. It was signed by Hill Beachy, pioneer in developing the territory's transportation lines, and a man of great influence. The paper stated that the bearer, Calvin Hale, had lost through theft a black mare marked with a white star on the right hind quarter, that the signer knew the mare belonged to Hale, that she would come at his call and do various tricks at his command, and that she answered to the name of "Pinaquana." Swanger's face lengthened. It was rumored that Beachy, weary of the continual theft of his horses and mules, had organized a vigilance committee among his employees and that the ferreting out of horse-thieves would soon be the stage-line's chief occupation from Idaho City to California.

"How do we know you're Hale? You might have found this paper," said the deputy.

"The mare identifies me as Calvin Hale. Beachy identifies Calvin Hale as the owner of the mare. It's simple and sure."

"But it ain't reg'lar," protested Swanger. "I reckon we'd best go to the office."

"And find some other critter in that stall when we come back," said Hale. "I'm afraid I sh'n't have time to go to your office unless I ride there on the mare. I want to be legal, but life's too short to fuss around too long with you folks."

"That ain't no way to talk to the law," ominously warned Swanger. "You blow in here from nowhere——"

"From Oro Fino," corrected Hale.

"And claim a mare in Kolb's stable. You fetch a paper that any one could fetch if they found it——"

"But there ain't no one else on earth that can make that mare do tricks and come at his call excepting me. Hi, Pinaquana, sing for me."

Much neighing and squealing emanated from the stall until Hale commanded—

"That'll do."

Whereat the mare became silent. To the deputy Hale said—

"Any of you gents git her to do that and you can keep her without a word from me."

The deputy sheriff was nonplused, yet desperate. He heartily wished that Updyke was handling the case. He wished himself out of it and yet did not care to let the stranger get the best of it. The impasse might have led to an open break, with Hale attempting to rescue his pet by gun-play, if not for the arrival of another man. He advanced to within a few feet of Hale and the officer. Hale recognized him as the man with the smooth hands, who had assumed the funeral expenses attending the burial of the dead gambler in the Tusk Saloon. His black soft hat and snowy shirt, the flowing bow-tie and shiny leather boots made him a dandy. Ignoring Hale he said to Swanger—

"What's this I hear on the street about some one claiming my mare?"

Swanger was much relieved. He nodded toward Hale and explained:

"Mister Patterson, we don't want any trouble here. I know you feel riled, but the law can straighten it out. This man says the animal in that stall is his."

Patterson swung about and stared insolently at Hale and remarked:

"You seem fresh from the wild mountains, stranger."

The loungers snickered in huge enjoyment.

Hale studied the gambler thoughtfully; his interest quickened.

"Is your name Ferdinand Patterson?" he asked.

The gambler nodded, a slight smile of amusement curving his lips.

Hale's face crinkled into a broad grin, and he heartily exclaimed—

"Then you're just the feller I want to see."

"Suppose we settle this matter about my mare before we get better acquainted," suggested Patterson, still smiling, but with the glare of the killer in his gaze.

"I feel acquainted already," replied Hale. "You're Texas raised."

Patterson's eyes narrowed and his smile became a snarl.

"I just knew there couldn't be two by the same name," rejoiced Hale. "Know you? Why, I know you like a book, from cover to cover. You went to California in 1850. You got into a fight in Yreka in 'Fifty-six and was shot."

"What the devil you driving at?" whispered Patterson his pallid face growing hard and tense.

In a voice that sounded rollicking Hale ran on—

"And you had a fight in Sailor Diggings in 'Fifty-nine and had to git out."

"Curse your gall! Who are you?" demanded the gambler.

"I'm the man from the wild mountains you was speaking about. I'm glad to meet up with you. You've had lots of street fighting since the Sailor Diggings affair, and you don't git hurt like you used to. T'other feller gits hurt now. You killed Staples in Portland——"

"Help! This man's trying to kill me! I'm afraid of him!" loudly yelled the gambler, and at the same time pulling a derringer from his coat pocket.

Before he could do more than raise it the muzzle of the heavy Colt was resting against the spotless shirt front.

"If you could shoot first—which you can't—and if that trinket could send a bullet through my heart, I'd still smash a hole through you with this old .36," murmured Hale. "That toy would look better back in your pocket, wouldn't it? There! You've got some sense, even if you are a skunk. I promised a certain party up in the Payette Valley that I'd look you up and in a public place, talking face to face just like this, call off some of your rotten record to you. Now I've done it. I'll just add that you've committed more'n one murder, that you're a low-down coward, and never kill unless you can catch your man off his guard.

"If you ever go down the Payette Valley, where once you shot a dog, I'm going to git you. Yes, sirree! I surely will plant you beside that poor dog. Now we've settled that much I'm going to put up my gun and any time you hanker to draw on me we'll race for it, even Stephen. What say?"

"You're either drunk or crazy," was the gambler's husky reply.

"Not drunk. Crazy? Maybe. Now we come back to the mare. How do you happen to claim her?"

"I bought her."

"Then you bought her of a thief. Show him to me and I'll give you what you paid him for her."

"Thanks. But I prefer the mare. I don't know the man I bought of. He looked honest."

The last brought a chuckle from Hale. Suddenly becoming grave he said:

"Patterson, you claim the mare. Then you have a legal right to open up that stall. Do it!"

For a fraction of a minute the gambler stood motionless, glaring into the grayish-green eyes. Then he wheeled and walked to the stall and threw open the door. Like a black streak the mare sprang into the stable floor and rested her velvet muzzle on Hale's shoulder.

"Easy, old girl," he softly whispered. "Don't stand so I can't see our loving friends."

Swanger was much wrought up. He was angry with Patterson for not drawing quicker and for not shooting once he had drawn. The loud call for help would have been a perfect alibi when testified to before Judge Curks. But he should have shot first and shouted afterward. To permit Hale to ride the mare away would be a blow to Updyke's influence over his rough following. The deputy realized a stage had been reached when it would be poor policy for the sheriff to mix openly in the dispute. The responsibility must be shunted to other shoulders. He loudly proclaimed to the loungers:

"I swear you men in as special deputies to help me enforce the Law. Kolb, hitch that mare in an open stall and give her water. Mister Patterson, you and this mountain feller will go before Judge Curks and make your claims. If either of you offer any resistance you'll be shot."

Hale's tanned face remained as impassive as an Indian's, although he was beginning to understand that so far as the sheriff was concerned he stood a small chance of recovering his property unless he resorted to gun-play. But there was every chance the court would instantly detect the soundness of his claim, and he told himself he would exhaust all peaceable means before resorting to violence and exiling himself from the territory. He knew he would finally get the mare, or be killed in trying. In a low voice he said:

"I'm a law-abiding man. I respect the law—when she's working. We'll go to court and see how it pans out. Good-by, girl. I'll be back for you."

With a parting caress he picked up his rifle and walked beside Patterson into the street.

The building used for the court-room was a small structure near the Tusk Saloon. The special deputies solemnly marched on both sides of the two men. The curious and idle fell in behind the little procession, and by the time the court-room was reached there were men enough in attendance to fill it to the door. The majority of the spectators kept up a running fire of derisive remarks directed at Hale. But there were some in the crowd who were grim of purpose although saying nothing.

Judge Curks, said to be the personal friend of Governor Lyon, was summoned from the Tusk. He was cadaverous of face and gaunt of frame. His rusty black long-skirted coat and his long black hair accentuated the natural pallor of his bony face. There was something mortuary in the whole effect of his presentment. Hale felt dubious as he stared at him.

Curks seating himself behind a small table, stared indifferently at Hale. As he looked, however, his indifference was pricked through with curiosity, and he frowned slightly. Swanger briefly explained the nature of the dispute, in which much doubt was indirectly cast on Hale's veracity and no mention was made of Patterson's abortive attempt at murder. Hale smiled grimly as he perceived how openly the machinery of the law was moving against him.

"Well, sir!" snapped the court and addressing Hale. "What have you to say about this display of mortal weapons?"

"I reckon judge, we're here to talk about my mare," drawled Hale. "I ain't heard that any one has made a complaint about my weapons. Seems to me that the nub of this hearing is the mare. She's down in that rat's stable." And he pointed at Kolb. "And I want her now."

"You deny threatening our citizen's lives with deadly firearms?"

"What's the use of my answering that? They can lie faster'n a dozen honest men can tell the truth. That gambling person drew a derringer on me and I had to stick the business end of my gun against his white shirt to make him behave. Now let's talk about my mare."

"You are fined fifty dollars for aiming a lethal weapon at Mr. Patterson."

Hale swallowed convulsively. Those near him observed the big veins swelling out on his bronzed neck. He fought down the ferocious rage that was trying to drive him into seeing red, and forced a ghastly smile, and said:

"All right. It saved my life and was worth it. Now can we talk about the mare?"

"You are fined another fifty dollars for contempt of court," ruled the court.

Hale closed his eyes for a moment and clinched his hands together to keep them from his belt. The court directed—

"Now you may make out your case."

THE paper signed by Hill Beachy was presented and made an impression on Curks. Beachy was not a man to be trifled with. Pursing his lips and frowning at the writing, Curks finally said:

"Whatever Mr. Beachy says assays out one thousand in this court. He is a staunch pillar of this territory. But this writing does not identify you as the Calvin Hale who lost the mare."

"Just what I told him, your honor," spoke up Swanger.

Curks glared the deputy into silence. Hale sighed resignedly and said:

"I am Calvin Hale. The mare will recognize me and no one else. She'll identify

me. Have her fetched outside the door. I'll call her in here by word or whistle. If any other man can get her inside here I'll give him a bill of sale on the spot."

The judge cleared his throat and slowly shook his head, and ruled—

"That wouldn't be legal identification. Assuming for the sake of my illustration that you are not the rightful owner, there's nothing to show the mare will not also answer the call of her real master, whereas all men here in Boise City are strangers to her except yourself. It will be necessary for you to go and bring in some one to identify you."

The gray-green eyes threatened homicide although the thin lips retained the physical semblance of a smile.

"Meaning I must trapse way back to Oro Fino on the chance of finding some one who knows both me and you, and then to git that person to travel way down here, and me paying him for his lost time at the rate of eighteen dollars a day?"

"Get your witness where you will, or can. Doubtless you can find some one right here in Boise City."

Hale stood up, his hands resting on his hips; and his voice came in a husky whisper as he asked:

"You mean to tell me that if I ain't lucky enough to find a man who knows both of us that I must lose my mare?"

"The law does not indulge in sentiments," said Curks crisply, his deep sunken eyes focused on the brown fingers so close to the two .36's. "The law is blind and deaf to everything except legal evidence."

Hale took one gliding step forward but came to a halt as a slim, dapper little man popped into view of the court by the simple process of squirming in between two burly miners.

"Just a minute, if your honor will be so kind," was the shrill request.

Hale eyed the little man in surprize. The judge straightened and mumbled:

"Certainly, Mr. Riply. Always glad to hear Ben Riply when he speaks for law and order."

Ben Riply, of the Payette Committee, whose name was growing to be feared more by lawbreakers than all the safeguards to property and life the law had been able to establish, advanced with mincing steps and stood beside Hale. Peering up into Hale's face he queried—

"Are you sometimes called Shoshoni Hale?"

"I'm called that more'n I am Calvin Hale."

"I recognize you. Your honor, I've never spoken to this man before and know nothing about him. I saw him in Lewiston this spring when he was pointed out to me as Shoshoni Hale. I am convinced he is the man Hill Beachy refers to in his writing."

"Shoshoni Hale," repeated the court in great surprize. Then he frowned severely and said, "There's queer stories about Shoshoni Hale. Can you speak as to his character, Mr. Riply?"

"I know nothing about him. I have heard certain gossip, but gossip is usually slander and is never evidence for a court to consider. I am positive he is the man Beachy names."

Curks rubbed his chin and became busy with the record book. The machine was not working well when the combined efforts of the sheriff, judge and their numerous tools could not prevent one man from recovering his stolen property. Riply, insignificant in person, symbolized that silent justice which struck without warning, which left its mark—"XXX"—placarded on more than one dangling victim, and which would not hesitate to apply its corrective methods to men in high places.

In all the history of America's development it would be difficult to find a situation similar to that existing in Ada and Boise counties, where the enforcement of the law was lodged in the hands of the lawless and with the actual work of regeneration being accomplished by vigilant committees. As an individual Ben Riply was of no consequences; as the mouthpiece of the citizens' secret tribunal he exerted more influence than a garrison of soldiers. After making certain entries in his book the judge lifted his head and announced :

"I find that this man claiming to be Calvin Hale, alias Shoshoni Hale, is the owner of the mare now in Kolb's stable. I find that the mare was stolen by parties unknown and was bought by Mr. Ferdinand Patterson in all good faith. The claimant Hale is to receive the mare back upon his payment of one hundred dollars, being the two fines imposed by this court, and upon the further payment of fifty dollars shrievalty fees. He must also pay for the keep of the mare at Kolb's stable, as it would

be a cruel injustice to charge the same against Mr. Patterson, who is already a sufferer from his bargain."

Hale drew a deep breath and seemed to expand. Riply spoke up and inquired:

"May I ask your honor why the thief is not requested to settle for the stable board? Or does he remain unknown despite the fact that Kolb and Patterson both met him?"

Before the court could answer Patterson replied:

"I met him. He is a stranger to me. He told a likely story. It was I who took the mare to the stable."

Curks gravely announced:

"This court will be only too happy to deal with the thief once he is taken into custody. I assume our sheriff is searching for him now."

"Four men hunting for him. I got the word while sitting here," spoke up Swanger.

Hale glanced down into Riply's solemn face and laughed. Pulling out a bag of gold dust he curtly inquired—

"What are the stable charges?"

Kolb coughed apologetically and "allowed" that thirty dollars would be about right. The court nodded an acceptance of these figures. Hale threw back his head and laughed raucously. Fortunately for himself and for the assemblage he had not lost his sense of humor. Luckily for Swanger and his henchmen he had come to town ignorant of the intolerable condition of affairs. And possibly it was well for the judge and his tools that something extremely ludicrous was found by the man in the proposition that he could have his stolen property back after paying its worth. Riply's thin face grew sober as the stentorian laughter rang out over his head. Swanger and Patterson made ready to draw, while Curks pushed back his chair and thrust a hand between his long coat-tails to grasp the handle of a bowie-knife.

Riply seized Hale's arm and shook it impatiently and whispered:

"Pay up. Take your mare and get out! I say it in a friendly spirit. If you try anything desperate I shall probably see you hang. I'm here to help Boise City clean up."

Hale suddenly ceased laughing, but it was not because of Riply's warning. A man was hurriedly working his way through the crowd to the judge's table. He carried a slip of paper in his hand. Obviously his errand must be connected with the case just decided; and Shoshoni Hale was now convinced there were grave potentialities in anything the townsmen might say or do.

His gaze followed the man to the table and saw the judge receive and read the paper. He noted the bewilderment on the bony face. He saw Curks stare to the back of the room as if seeking the author of the communication. Instantly Hale's gaze swung about on the same business; and his mouth opened as if to cry out. It was only a glimpse, the finish of what Curks had seen in its entirety, a bearded face raised above the level of the crowd and a hand pressed against the right cheek and shoved sharply upward.

WITH the growl of an animal Hale jumped up on a chair to further observe this man. But there were many bearded faces there, one looking much like another.

"Are you crazy? Or have you lost your nerve?" demanded Riply.

Dropping to the floor, Hale rubbed his hand across his forehead and brought it away wet with sweat.

"Perhaps a little of both," he muttered. "I must git out of this quick."

"Scared?" incredulously whispered Riply.

"Not of anything I can face. Not of anything I can see coming. But of a knife thrust out from the darkness, or a hunk of lead shot at me from behind and by a man I wouldn't know if I met him a thousand times—yes; I'm afraid."

With that he walked to the table and threw down a bag of dust and curtly said:

"Two hundred dollars' worth. Keep the change for any one you've overlooked. And I'm in a hurry."

And as he spoke he turned his head and watched the door.

"In connection with the fine for aiming a mortal weapon I must ask you where you are from," announced Curks, savagely staring up at the set profile.

"Lewiston and Oro Fino."

"Before that?"

"Oregon. From 'Fifty-nine to the end of 'Sixty-two I worked for the Mullan road party."

"Before going to Oregon?"

"Why do you dig into my life when I

was a younker? You seem keener for that than for learning if I owned the mare."

"You're addressing a duly organized court of justice in the territory of Idaho," warned Curks. "You have been fined for presenting a loaded firearm to the person of an inoffensive citizen. I must have something of your record."

With his broad hands on his hips and his face still turned toward the bearded faces at the door Hale slowly replied—

"I was in Utah before going to Oregon."

"That's all," said Curks, sweeping the bag of dust into an inside pocket. "This court is adjourned."

Hale did not seem to hear the dismissal but remained watching the door. A small hand yanked his arm, and Riply was saying:

"It's time for you to go. Come. I've got your rifle."

Hale followed him to the door, the spectators filing out ahead of them. As he reached the door both hands dropped to his guns.

"None of that!" hissed Riply with a backward glance. "By the eternal! You'll swing yet if you don't behave."

"I ain't doing no harm," mumbled Hale, never shifting his gaze from the waiting mob of men ahead. "I'm just prepared. You don't seem to understand."

They passed out the door and were greeted with a chorus of jeers. Hale halted and announced:

"I just want to say half a dozen words. I can nail any —— thief that has the run of this town. There won't be any law business the next time I'm robbed."

"You come along and get your mare and ride out of town," angrily commanded Riply.

"I reckon you're on the level," said Hale. "We've heard things about you up Oro Fino way."

"I don't know whether you're on the level or not," grumbled Riply. "If gossip has the right of it, you're not."

Hale remained facing the mob. He asked of Riply—

"Any of these men strangers in town?"

"I don't know. They come and go all the time."

"Who took that writing to the judge?"

"One of the town drunkards. No account."

"That Curks is a bad one. He comes from Utah."

"That don't signify. Why didn't you want to tell about living there?"

"I was only a boy when I quit there," was the evasive answer.

"Stop staring like you wanted to pick a fight, and come along. Who you expecting to see, anyway?"

"I don't know. That's why I'm looking."

"I don't aim to nose into your affairs, but if there's anything you want to tell me——"

"Much obliged. You mean well. You've done well. Once or twice I reckon I'd a commenced shooting if not for you."

"And filled a noose before morning. There's the stable-keeper. Wait outside while I get your mare."

"Don't bother. I can take care of myself."

"Then step sharp. I've something else to do besides spending the day with you."

When Hale rode his dancing mare from the stable Riply was waiting down the street and motioned him to rein in. He warned—

"They won't drop this. And there's something you haven't told me. I'm afraid you'll be followed. The next time the odds will be all theirs. You'd better go back to the mountains for a spell."

Hale peered anxiously up the street. Riply wondered if his nerve was weakening.

"I ain't afraid of these low town dogs that bark when told," he muttered. "Did you see the man that sent the writing to the judge?"

"I didn't notice him."

Hale weighed something for a moment, made to ride on, then changed his mind and leaned low from the saddle and whispered—

"Did you happen to see a man at the door have his hand like this?"

And he placed his right hand against his cheek, the fingers extending upward, and pushed it up until the lobe of his ear was cradled between the thumb and index finger. Riply gazed at him in amazement.

"No; I saw nothing like that. What are you getting at, anyway? The sun hasn't made your head feel queer, has it?"

Hale straightened in the saddle and made sure his rifle was securely in place.

"Just a bit of nonsense of mine. I'm a great feller for fun. I'll take your advice and ride back north. If I'm followed up

there the odds won't be so great. Much obliged to you. So long."

Riply watched him canter down the street and into the Idaho City stage road. Under his breath he apostrophized the receding figure:

"I hope you won't ever wear our trademark. Too pretty a built man to hang three crosses on. But there's something queer about you. Something queer besides all the yarns they tell. Better get north of the Clearwater and stay there."

CHAPTER III

UNDESIRED GOLD

HALE commenced the thirty-five mile ride to Idaho City at an easy pace, as he planned to camp for the night and did not desire to ride after dark. Pinaquana was eager to eat up the road in one long mad gallop, and tossed her head in saucy disapproval as the master held her down to a moderate gait. The west wind had an hour to blow before sunset terminated its labors. He proposed to ride into the twilight and then camp and make sure the mare had suffered no hurt during her capture and imprisonment

As he passed the Umatilla stage-coach bound for Placerville he noticed the dust smothered passengers and driver eyed him sharply. Each passenger had paid a hundred dollars for the privilege of taking a trip which would call for hearty congratulations if it ended without a hold-up. Hale was surprized at the interest he created, for the heat of the day and the discomforts of the journey must have wearied the travelers exceedingly.

He was still wondering at the unexpected show of interest when he overtook a long wagon-train. This was hauled by horses and mules now that Summer was well advanced and oxen, with their noses close to the alkaline dust, were supposed to sicken and die. Again he was conscious of being keenly scrutinized. And, as with the stage passengers, he thought he read hostility in the men's gaze. He met stage-coaches and wagons bound for Oregon, Owyhee and California, all traveling by the way of Boise City, and at every encounter found himself the target for all eyes.

Also he caught fragments of comments which puzzled him. He learned the reason for this attitude when he met a small pack-train, guarded by a dozen heavily armed men. This escort proclaimed that a cargo of gold was being taken out. He swung out to one side of the road and several of the guards covered him with their rifles, and the leader warned—

"Draw off, or we fire!"

Hale held up his empty hands and sent the mare swerving farther to the side, and cheerily called out—

"I'm honest."

"Few honest men pack two heavy belt-guns round here besides toting a rifle," bawled the train boss. "You look too much like you might be running with Jem Helm's gang to suit us."

Hale's rifle was under his leg. To avoid unnecessary suspicion he shifted his heavy revolvers inside his shirt. From then on there was much less hostility shown by those he passed. But if the wayfarers had been interested in him he was chiefly concerned with the road behind him. The sun dropped below the Blue Mountains. The wind diminished in violence, and in the east appeared the twilight arch, the earth's shadow thrown into relief on the dust particles in the sky heights.

It was a magnificient piece of celestial engineering and spanned the heavens and grew in height as one looked. Its upper edge was clear cut at first, but soon faded as it rose higher above the horizon. Hale ignored the phenomenon as his one concern was to learn if any horsemen were following him from Boise City. This was the reason for his breaking the journey by camping; he would not ride when he could not see his back trail. So intent was he on watching the road behind he did not detect the trap laid for him in the junipers ahead. His first intimation of danger was the hoarse voice calling out—

"Put up your hands!" The command was followed by the clicking of gun-locks.

With his rifle inaccessible and his revolvers tucked inside his shirt he hesitated none in obeying the command. As the mare came to a halt a masked man emerged from the junipers. Two .36 caliber Colt revolvers were in his belt.

"Hop down and keep quiet. Half a dozen guns are covering you," said the masked man.

Hale obeyed. The man walked behind him and passed a hand around him and

found the guns inside the shirt. He pulled them out and tossed them to one side, and remarked:

"You carry good guns. If we wasn't already outfitted with the same brand we'd have to take 'em. You must be a dangerous sort of a cuss. Walk behind them trees."

Hale advanced into the ambush, the mare following at his heels. Behind the junipers were several heavily armed men, all masked. Their horses were cropping the bunch grass close by. One of them exclaimed—

"We got him."

"Looks that way. When Jem Helm goes for to git a man, let him be Lucky Tom the miner, or who he will, that man is usually bagged." As he spoke he ran his hand inside Hale's shirt and pulled out a small bag of dust. He continued his search and at last angrily declared, "You've got more dust than this. You're sober, so you couldn't 'a' thrown it all away at the Tusk saloon."

"What dust he carries with him ain't no account alongside of the gulch where he gits it," said one of the men. "S'pose we git to work on the one prime idee. A little fire will make him lead us to it, or tell us where it is."

Hale laughed softly. "You fellows are barking up the wrong tree," he told them. "If you're after Lucky Tom you've missed him. He must have passed here several hours ago. At least, he left Boise City that much ahead of me. Killed a gambler in the Tusk when the gang there was trying to learn his secret. I'm Shoshoni Hale from Oro Fino way. Do I look like a prospector?"

The man who proclaimed himself to be the notorious Jem Helm examined him closely in the fading light and seemed especially impressed by the moccasins. He swore softly as he weighed the chances of having made a mistake. Then he said:

"We've heard of Shoshoni Hale. But how do we know you're him?"

"He's the crazy miner. Lucky Tom started this way. This is the only horseman that comes anywhere near filling the bill. Toast his feet till he admits it."

"Shet up!" commanded Helm. To Hale, "How do we know you're Shoshoni Hale? Wouldn't a little fire make you sing another tune?"

"It certainly would. Burn my feet and I'll say anything you want me to. I'll say I'm President of the United States. But if I say I'm not Shoshoni Hale I'm a liar. In my inside pocket is a writing from Hill Beachy. I used it in gitting back my mare that was stolen from me and hid up in Boise."

The writing was quickly produced and read by Helm aloud.

"Enough to make a thousand devils mad!" fumed Helm. "Boys, he ain't the cuss we're looking for. He talks according to book."

"He knows too much to be turned loose," some one insisted.

"I was told by Ben Riply to git up north and stay there," said Hale.

"Best way is to take no chances, then we won't be sorry."

Helm called for silence, and said:

"Queer yarns are told about Shoshoni Hale. I've often thought you'd make a good man for my gang."

Hale replied:

"No; I'd want to be boss and we'd fight and one of us would be killed. That would be a foolish waste of material. You're welcome to this country. I always stay north of the Clearwater."

This frankness did not displease Helm. He accepted the statement for face value.

"Prick up your ears like a coyote. Wolf didn't ought to eat wolf. I won't take your guns, nor mare. You can go back to the road and find your guns and clear out. We'll keep your dust, but if you catch any of us on your stamping grounds you can return the favor."

"All right. I'll remember. But I stand a small chance of paying you off as I've never seen any of you unmasked."

"And you never will," chuckled Helm. "Every one talks about Helm but he can go into Idaho City under a different name and no vigilant would know him. Now go, but don't try any games. Just ride away. And remember this; don't travel these parts again unless you're carrying plenty of dust. It makes the boys mad."

"I'll try and do better next time. Trouble is some robbers in Boise City got at me first."

"Don't say anything about this in Idaho City. My men will be there, and you can't yip but what some of them will hear you."

"I shall say nothing in Idaho City. Do I go now?"

Helm nodded and Hale leisurely returned

to the road, the mare crowding at his heels. He recovered his revolvers and rode on. The theft of the pouch left him penniless, but he accepted it philosophically. There were one or two friends in Idaho City who would be glad to stake him. He spurred along to make up for lost time and kept a sharp watch for a likely spot for spreading his blankets. The mare suddenly shied as a man crashed through the bushes and yelled at him.

Enraged at what he believed to be a second hold-up Hale slipped to the ground and rested an eight-inch barrel across the saddle and grimly announced:

"I've just been robbed. I have nothing but this mare and guns. If you want them you must kill me."

"Don't cry afore you're hurt," replied a voice which was slightly familiar. "No one has a call to throw a gun on Lucky Tom of Lost Gulch. I wouldn't turn my hand over for all the gold west of the Rockies. I know where I can git it by the bushel. Friend, what I'd admire for to have is a drink. I'll pay fancy for it. I've got a bit of fire in back here and a pan of bacon cooking. I heard your horse and hoped you might be packing something good for a dry throat."

"I'm packing nothing but guns, but I'll join your fire."

"Thought every one out of Boise packed whisky," sighed the miner. "Well, come along and have some bacon and tell me about this robbery business. I laid down in here to rest and fell asleep, or I'd been in Idaho City afore this."

HALE followed him through the thicket to a small fire burning in a circle of rocks. A big frying-pan of bacon was simmering on a flat rock in the circle. The miner gave Hale one glance and thrust forward a hairy paw and excitedly cried:

"Dawg-gone my old boots! If it ain't the mountain-man that give me my chance to light out when I was in trouble! You're more welcome then whisky, man. You're white. What do you call yourself?"

"Shoshoni Hale."

"The Injun feller?"

"They talk a lot of foolishness about me. I know some Indians. Have some good friends among them. They're either for you or against you for the limit."

"I don't care if you're full of Injun blood. You turned a good card for me. What they doing about it in Boise? Got folks scouting after me for killing that snake?"

"Patterson, a gambler, buried the dead man and insists it was a fair fight. I don't reckon there'll be any trouble. But you'd better keep away for a while. The Boise City gang will stand up for you so long as they think you'll show them your diggings. Ben Riply's down there talking vigilance committee to some of the merchants. Stay clear is my advice."

"That's hoss sense," muttered Lucky Tom. "Them vigilants are nasty sometimes. Reckon I'll drift to Centerville, or Pioneer City, where I can finish out my drunk. Idaho City's my first choice, but it's too much like being in Boise. What about being robbed? Making game of me?"

Hale related his experience with Jem Helm. Lucky Tom chuckled much to think how the outlaw had been taken in. Then looked grave and muttered:

"Still I ain't out of the woods yet. He may jump me here."

"If he does we'll stand them off. I'm tired of being knocked about and abused," rumbled Hale.

"That's good talk. Say, I'm lonely."

"Cash in your gold dust and visit the coast."

"I mean I'm lonely as a hound pup. I need the company of a man I can trust. You assay out top-high. I'm going to take you in as my partner. It's devilish lonesome up in Lucky Gulch."

"I'd be more of a bother than a help. Then I've got a heap of trouble of my own. For the next few months I'll be busy dodging knives in the back."

"You don't say! Well, don't talk less you want to, but my ears are burning."

"Some one's after me. Been after me a long time."

"Plug 'em! You seem to have a pretty gun-way with you."

"I don't know who they are."

"You talk like you was me when I'm drunk. Folks you never knew chasing you around to do you dirt when you ain't looking? Ain't that ——!"

The miner was inclined to be skeptical.

"That's the truth of it.

Lucky Tom snorted and sarcastically remarked—

"Funny that complete strangers should hanker for your blood."

"Funny? You bet! I wake up in the middle of the night and laugh when I think about it."

A broad grin expanded the miner's face.

"You're a queer cuss. If you've got a dish in your blanket roll pitch into the bacon. If you haven't one, use mine."

Hale produced his tin plate and the bacon and some hardtack were divided. After they had eaten and had filled their pipes the miner asked—

"The Helm gang cleaned you out, huh?"

"About two miles below here. Skinned me clean. Had my guns tucked inside my shirt like a derned fool and never had a chance. Still they was pretty decent. Mistook me for you and had to have something for their trouble; but they let me keep the mare and my guns. I ain't kicking."

"Lucky they didn't git me penned! They'd burned the truth out of me about the gulch if they'd tried tickling my feet." After a brief pause he continued, "I'm talking free to you because you're a white man. Come in with me and I'll make your fortune. I ain't got nary a relation in the whole world. I ain't got any use for dust 'cept to buy whisky and tobaccer. There's enough for the whole basin. I'm gitting scared in my old age. They'll snag me sure some day; then they'll tickle my feet and I'll tell the truth, and then they'll wipe me out. Next time I quit the gulch it'll be for good. I'll make the coast by the Mullan road. You'll be welcome to what I'll be leaving. Heap of it, too."

"Thanks. But I can't do it. I'm being hunted. They'll kill the man they find me with. Up north of the Clearwater I have friends, both red and white. Strangers are soon spotted and I'll have a chance to put up a fight. If I win out I'll remember your offer and play gunman for you if you're the same way of thinking."

"You must feel mighty squeamish about these unknown fellers when it makes you pass up the best placer in Idaho. And to do it at that when you're cleaned out."

"They started after me years ago when I was a boy. It was an awful jounce to me, being a kid. I was scared nearly crazy. All I thought of was crawling off to the mountains and hiding. It's hard for to remember that I'm grown up. The boy keeps cropping out in me. If I could find out just who they are I wouldn't mind so much. Judge Curks at Boise knows 'em, I'm sure. It was the boy's fear that kept me in the mountains and with the road-builders instead of mixing with strangers every day in a hunt for gold. I was beginning to believe the trail was dead; but to-day I learned better."

The miner pulled a heavy bag from under his worn blankets and tossed it across the fire, remarking:

"You're broke. Mighty poor plan when you're running from the devil. Don't open your yawp like that but take that dust. It's so much dirt to me. You treated me white. What man's safe to leave word with in Idaho City as to where we can meet after you've shook the skunks off your trail?"

Hale promptly replied:

"Either ex-sheriff Pinkham, or Jack Gorman, who used to be a deputy. Both are my friends. I'll remember this dust. It's mighty neighborly of you."

"The —— it is! And me offering you half my gulch and you turning it down! Talk to me! Tell me things that don't have to do with mines and miners. Talk about sheep. Women. Anything 'cept gold."

"I don't know anything about sheep except the great horn cores of mountain sheep I've found bleaching in the sage. And women? Lord bless you! They're a new animal to me. I haven't seen but few white women since I was fifteen. I've talked with not more'n a dozen; that is, real white women. All I seem to know is road-building and Injun ways."

"I'd admire to hear about road-building," gravely said Lucky Tom and he settled back and puffed his pipe in huge contentment.

So Hale began a narrative of the trials and adventures attending the construction of the Mullan road. He knew his subject thoroughly and the miner was a hungry listener. He talked for more than an hour.

"If I could only have you to spout to me in Lost Gulch!" the miner sighed when Hale finished and insisted they should go to sleep. "I reckon why I'm so keen for whisky is the talk that fills the places where it's sold. I never tote any into the gulch to drink when alone.

"Well, you can't shake me till we reach Idaho City; that's fact."

"Turn in then; for I start early. Where's your horse?"

"Round somewhere. Turned him loose when I first got in here. Probably down to the creek."

Hale rolled up in his blanket, keeping his belt guns with him. The miner said—

"You've forgot to hobble your mare."

"Can't drive her from me. She'll go to the creek for a drink and then come back. That young lady knows more'n most women, I reckon."

THE miracle of the morning was well under way when they rolled from their blankets. The night had been cold and the dawn was chilly. The miner, weakened by his recent debauch, was glad to sit by the fire, his blankets wrapped about him. Hale fried hardtack with the bacon, and boiled coffee. What might have been depressing in Winter, or have remained concealed in broad daylight, was once more revealed. The mountains to the north and northwest were within pistol-shot.

The distant Salmon River and Bitter Root Mountains seemed to be close at hand, every ramification of their far flung slopes being clearly visible. The miner did not raise his gaze from the ground, and once Hale had wiped the smoke from his eyes he desired only to be away with this, the first light. The mare was eager for the road, too; she had stood over him when he awoke.

"You squat there and watch the bacon. I'll fetch up your horse," Hale volunteered.

"Hate to be waited on, but there's ice in my bones this morning," mumbled Lucky Tom. "And my boots are so busted out they hurt me to travel. I've put off buying a new pair for a year, but now I've come to it, I reckon."

Hale started for the creek but thought he heard a horse wandering about near the road and turned back in that direction. He broke through the thicket just as the Boise City stage coach rolled by. Sleepy eyes opened wide on glimpsing the tall figure belted with the long revolvers. Deciding it was the approach of the coach that had deceived him he re-entered the thicket and in a detour made for the creek. He soon found the miner's horse. He removed the hobbles and had sprung onto the animal's back when two gunshots shattered the quiet of the morning. For a moment he remained rigid, then pulled his guns and galloped back to the camp. He thought he heard the clumping of hoofs in the road but could not be positive.

The bacon was sizzling in the pan. The coffee was boiling on the coals. Lucky Tom still sat by the fire, his head bowed on his chest. The mare stood half concealed among the bushes, her ears pricked forward in greeting to her master. Hale ran to the miner and placed a hand on his shoulder. Lucky Tom lifted his head and settled back against the strong arm and muttered:

"*Bang! Bang!* Felt like a giant had grabbed me and was shaking the liver out of me. I'm going to cash in."

"No, no," cried Hale, his face ghastly with the horror of it. "I don't believe you've been hit. Who were they, how many, where did they go?"

"Don't know. Didn't see 'em. Prospect round my back and you'll find color. Open my pack and git paper and pencil. Move spry-like."

He would have toppled into the fire had not Hale caught him and eased him to the ground. Hale tore open the hickory shirt and found a gaping wound, one which only a ball of large caliber could have made. He believed the assassins had used a buffalo-gun. There was a red welt across the top of the shoulder where another bullet had sped. He had been shot from behind, and Hale's experience with such wounds warned him the man had but a short time to live. He had seen Indians make remarkable recovery from wounds that must have been fatal to white men, but even an Indian could not survive this gruesome hurt.

"The paper," murmured the miner.

Hale took a pad of paper and pencil from the shabby pack, Lucky Tom grinned on beholding them and explained:

"Fool notion of mine. Took 'em to the gulch so's I could draw picters when I felt lonely. Boost me up and let me lean against you."

"You'd better keep quiet."

"Don't bully a dead man. Up with me."

Hale dropped beside him and lifted him and supported him with arms and shoulder. The miner scrawled laboriously, his tongue thrust into the corner of his mouth much like a school-boy writing his first exercise.

"Tear it off. Keep it," he whispered.

"Wish I had a drink." Hale started to lower him back to the ground but was sharply commanded: "No! Wait!"

This time he worked rapidly and skilfully; and Hale perceived he was drawing a map of some mountains south of the Payette river. As the pencil filled in the paper Hale recognized the country.

"Where I marked *G* means Gulch," feebly explained the miner. "Enter from the east. Mouth hid by landslide. Narrow opening along side of high cliff. Grapevines. Place looks narrer. Plenty room. My wickyup's there. Never build fire 'cept at night and in my fire-hole. Overhanging cliff going to bust loose some day. Never enter or quit only at night and when you know you ain't trailed. Do as I've done and all —— can't find you."

Hale laid him back and groaned:

"God! To know who did it!"

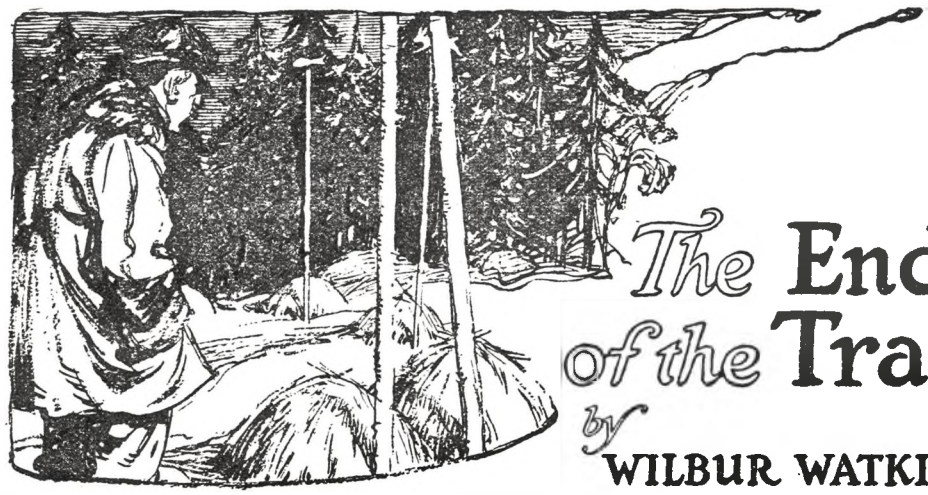
The mare squealed and advanced toward the fire. With a sharp intake of breath Hale lifted his head and stared at the white star on the black, glossy coat. He believed he thoroughly understood all that had happened. He had been followed from Boise City. When he broke the thicket and into the road in search of Tom's horse he had been seen by his pursuers and recognized. They were not on the stage-coach but were mounted. It was one of their animals he had heard, and had supposed it was Tom's horse. They had dismounted and had followed him back toward the camp. While he was at the creek, they had crept up and had seen the man before the fire. Near by they had seen the mare with the white star. Pinaquana's presence had identified the muffled figure as her owner. They had fired the two shots at what they supposed to be Shoshoni Hale, and believing they had killed their man they had fled.

"Man! Man!" sobbed Hale, bending over his new friend. "Tom, man! They took you for me. I brought death to you."

"Good joke on 'em. They held you up for me. Find 'em sometime—gunway with you."

His head rolled to one side and he began breathing in a stertorous manner. Hale ran to the creek and brought water, but Lucky Tom of Lost Gulch had taken his last drink. And he passed out with a whimsical smile on his lips, as if his last thoughts had been of amusement at the rare joke the murderers had played on themselves by killing the wrong man. Hale covered the still form with blankets and picked up the two sheets of paper. It was Lucky Tom's dying wish that he profit by the mine. The map told him how to find it. The writing deeply affected him as he read:

This paper shows i give my mine in lucky gulh to shoshon hale my only frend i give him paper showin how to find it 2 strangers shot me in the back whil hale was huntin for my hoss at the crick. lucky Tom.



The End of the Trail

by WILBUR WATKINS

"WHOA, dogs!"

At the quick command the five huskies straining at the big toboggan heavy laden with a miscellaneous collection of traps, freshly-taken skins of mink, lynx and marten, and several chunks of frozen caribou meat, eased up in their collars. Some, availing themselves of the brief rest, bit industriously at troublesome ice-balls between their toes, while others looked back questioningly through the cloud of frost which rose from their shaggy bodies as though to learn from the movements of the driver what prompted the unexpected stop.

Jim Ryan, breaking trail through the loose snow ahead of the dogs, also turned. He saw his partner, "Doc" Bishop, withdrawing a small caliber rifle from beneath the lash ropes which bound the load.

"What's up, Doc?" he asked.

"I'm going to pot one of those ptarmigan for supper," Bishop answered, indicating with a sweep of his arm a willow bar off to one side of the trail where a number of the birds like animated snowballs in their Winter plumage were visible, perched in the tops of the willows or feeding on the wind-swept ground.

"Fat chance yuh got," Ryan complained. "Yuh won't kill anything but a lot of time, an' we've got none of that to spare if we hit camp 'fore dark. Yuh can't sneak up in gun-shot of them birds out in the open like this. Come on. It's turnin' plumb cold, an' we gotta keep mushin'."

From the closely drawn hood of his parka his breath rose like puffs of pale smoke as he swung his arms vigorously backward and forward against his body. On perceiving that his advice had gone unheeded he kicked off his long-webbed breaking-shoes and stamped impatiently in the snow as his partner advanced toward the willows.

As Bishop raised the rifle to sight on the nearest bird the whole flock with great cackling rose in the air and swept away toward the lower end of the bar.

Ryan snorted derisively.

"What'd I tell yuh?" he jeered. "Them birds ain't no fools. A cheechalker'd know better'n that. Let's get goin'."

He slipped on the shoes once more and struck out rapidly down the ice-locked river. The dogs leaped to their feet, anxious to be on the way, for they knew they were due to arrive that night at the trappers' home station where plenty to eat and a two-day rest usually awaited them.

Bishop hurriedly returned to the toboggan and reaching over from the rear sought to shove the butt back under the ropes. As he did so there was a sudden sharp report and a dull "plunking" sound like a pebble hurled from a distance into deep water. He straightened up quickly, a startled look on his face, his hands clasping his stomach. Then a cry of anguish burst from his lips:

"I'm shot, Jim! My ——, I'm shot!"

As Ryan wheeled about he saw his partner pitch forward in the snow.

In his haste Bishop had forgotten to lower the hammer of the rifle when the birds took wing and in shoving it under the ropes

the trigger had caught and fired the cartridge. The bullet had entered his body.

The light of the short January day had long since been blotted from the sky and only the faint glow of the vast field of stars above and the Arctic moon, peeping like a cold, disdainful eye through the spruce-tops, dispelled the shadows of the trail as the struggling dogs and Ryan, pushing with every ounce of his strength on the handle-bars, drew the toboggan containing the senseless form of Bishop up the slope from the river bank to the door of the cabin.

Ryan rushed inside, lit a candle with numb and stiffened fingers and applied the flame to handfuls of shavings which he stuffed into the sheet-iron stove. When the fire was roaring up the chimney he crammed in chunks of wood and then returned to the toboggan. Seizing the wounded man by the shoulders, he dragged him inside, hoisted him to a bunk in one corner and covered him with robes. He filled a vessel with chopped ice and set it on the stove to melt, replenished the fire once more and went out to take care of the tired dogs.

When he returned the ice had melted and the room was warm. Bishop with returned consciousness was moaning weakly. Ryan threw back the robes.

"How yuh feelin', Doc?" he asked anxiously.

"I'm goin' to die, Jim; I'm sure goin' to die," Bishop moaned.

"Die, ——!" Ryan retorted roughly. "Fergit that stuff. That little scratch you got wouldn't even give a Siwash kid the belly-ache."

"You can't fool me, Jim," the other returned weakly. "You know I studied medicine once, and I know what I'm talkin' about. She got me plumb dead center, and my guts are punctured, Jim. I ain't got a ghost of a chance. Just got to lie here and die like a gut-shot wolf. And I ain't half fit to die, Jim; Lord knows I ain't fit to die."

"Hey, now! Lay off o' that stuff," Ryan cut in. "I'm tellin' you you ain't hurt bad. You are strong and husky as a moose. You'll mush out o' this fine and dandy in a few days. Hold still now while I peel off these duds. I'm goin' to take a squint at that scratch, and swab it off with hot water and wrap something around it."

He spoke with all the assurance at his command, far more than he really felt.

Gently as possible the blood-soaked garments were stripped away and the wound bared; a tiny, innocent-looking puncture oozing a small trickle of blood. But at sight of it Ryan caught his breath; his weather-beaten face paled and for an instant he felt sick and dizzy. As he turned away to get the pan of water he muttered dazedly to himself:

"——, it's a bull's-eye sure enough. Poor old Doc."

His optimism and the hope that the wound would prove superficial were entirely swept away.

For hours Ryan lay awake on his bunk listening to the painful, labored breathing of his wounded partner and trying to force his long inactive brain-cells to meet the demands of the emergency.

"I gotta have more dogs," he reasoned. "If I could catch Daly and Jones at their home-cabin I could get their string and maybe one of them to help me. I could make it up there in six hours, I reckon, but they might be gone over the line and my time'd be wasted. If I found 'em, though, I'd be back by noon tomorrow, and by dark we'd be headed south for the fort. If a storm didn't hit I'd have Doc inside the mission hospital inside three days."

At last he rose resolutely from the bed and began to pull on his outdoor garments.

"It's gotta be done," he declared. "It's Doc's only chance. I gotta find Daly and Jones and get their dogs."

In spite of the fact that many hours of labor had elapsed since he last slept, he quietly left the room. From a peg outside the door he took his snow-shoes and a rifle and set off with long, quick strides up the river toward the camp of his nearest neighbors, thirty miles away. Each step was accompanied by the snapping of his exhaled breath in the bitter cold night air and the sharp crack of freezing ice, loud and clear as the bark of guns. From the woods on either hand there rose the hunting cry of wolves, spokesmen of the desolation wailing at the moon.

"HEY, Daly, come alive! Hear that?"

Jones nudged his sleeping partner with a vigorous elbow. Daly sat up drowsily. From the direction of the dog-houses a pandemonium of savage barking had suddenly shattered the air.

"Must be a wolverine prowlin' around,"

Daly surmised. "Reckon I better dangle out there. Might get a shot at him."

As he pulled on his clothes a hearty kick sounded on the door.

"Who's there!" he cried.

"It's me, Ryan. Lemme in," came the response.

Daly sprang to the door and drew the bolt. Ryan staggered into the room.

"Lord, boys, I'm plumb glad to find you here," he gasped.

"What's up, Jim? What's wrong?"

"Bishop's shot himself. I come to get your dogs."

Once more that night Jim Ryan set out on a journey. But this time it was one of ease. With a huge hot meal stowed away beneath his ribs and snugly wrapped in frost-excluding robes he lay at full length in the rawhide basket of a big toboggan and slept the sleep of exhaustion, while the toboggan sped steadily onward over moonlit ice in the wake of eight powerful huskies, with young Mike Daly officiating at the handle-bars to keep it right side up.

It was forty hours later when thirteen malemiuts, their sharp ears standing upright and brushes curled proudly over shaggy frost-covered backs, burst from the wall of forest and bounded down to the frozen surface of a vast, wind-swept lake. Back of them bobbed a big toboggan containing the robe-wrapped body of the wounded trapper, with Daly at the handle-bars and Ryan trotting behind. As the leader reached the ice he stopped suddenly, looked questioningly to the left and the right, then back at the men.

Across the expanse of ice ahead no sign of trail was visible.

Ryan and Daly hurried out ahead of the dogs and circling in opposite directions returned to the toboggan.

"What luck?" Daly asked.

Ryan slowly shook his head. "None," he said. "There must have been considerable snow when the Siwashes broke out the trail in the Fall, and last night's wind swept 'er away slick and clean. There ain't a bloomin' scratch to tell which way she goes from here."

"Just some more of our same kind of rotten luck," Daly growled.

It seemed that misfortune had indeed cast her lot with them the moment they loaded Bishop into the toboggan and started south on the hundred-and-fifty-mile journey to the mission hospital at Fort Yukon. Straining every muscle to make the greatest speed and wasting not a moment of time that could be saved, their patience had been taxed to the limit by countless annoying incidents, from broken harness and dog-fights to open water on the river which necessitated wide detours in loose, unbroken snow.

When they reached the portage trail and the shelter of the timber with only sixty miles between them and their goal they felt the greatest difficulties had been passed. It was not so, however. Across long stretches of swamp and in spaces where the timber was sparse the loose snow on either side of the packed trail had been swept away and the trail stood up eight inches above the ground, a narrow, slippery backbone that required the constant effort of both men to keep the toboggan upon it.

And then they arrived on the shore of the lake to find the trail entirely obliterated. They looked hopelessly out across the ice toward the dim line of forest that marked the other side, in whose ten or twelve miles of length there was one tiny spot where the trail led through its otherwise impenetrable wall. That spot they had to find.

"I know this lake—Fish Lake, the Siwashes call it," Ryan declared. "But I don't know no more'n the man in the moon where the trail quits it. It may be straight across, or at the south end or the north end or anywhere in between. It's got my nanny; I don't know what the —— to do."

"Well we gotta keep movin', that's a cinch," Daly answered. "If we stand here much longer we'll be froze stiffer'n a poker. Looks like a toss-up to me. Le's leave it to the dogs. That old leader of mine is a plumb wise mut. He's pulled me out o' more'n one tight hole before now. Maybe he can smell us out o' this one."

There was nothing else to be done. Ryan hopped into the toboggan, and Daly stepped on to the foot-board at the rear and spoke to the dogs:

"Come, you mutts! Come alive there!" They sprang up in readiness to go. The leader again looked to the right, to the left and behind.

"Mush on, Nugget! Mush on there!"

Then Nugget with his nose close to the ice set off in a diagonal direction toward the southern end of the lake.

They were nearing the other side when

an exclamation of wonder and delight burst from Daly's lips.

"Well, I'll be danged!"

Straight ahead in the wall of forest he could see two trees, standing close together, their dark sides scarred by the broad white blaze of an ax.

The dogs bounded up the bank over crusted drifts of snow and—straight between the two blazed trees, like a narrow alley between the walls of tall, dark buildings—the trail led into the forest.

ONCE more in the shelter of the timber they made a short stop for lunch and to feed the dogs. It was then they noticed a marked change for the worse in the condition of the wounded man.

While Daly kindled a small blaze from dry spruce twigs and birch-bark and put on a can of snow to melt, Ryan laid back the robes and roused Bishop from a deep sleep.

"How yuh feel, Doc? How yuh comin'? Yuh think yuh can stand a cup o' hot tea?" he inquired.

For an instant Bishop regarded him with wavering, feverish eyes before replying.

"I'm goin' to die," he declared slowly. "There ain't no mortal use you boys goin' to any more trouble on my account. I'm just about done. I'm swelled up tighter'n a drum and my fever's gettin' hotter all the time, and my pulse is 'way up—feel it."

"I don't know nothin' about pulses and don't want to. But I do know yer comin' out O K. You'll be in the hospital in another twelve hours," Ryan answered stubbornly.

"Where are we now?" Bishop inquired.

"Just across Fish Lake, 'bout fifteen miles from old Beaverhead's village."

"You'll bury me at Beaverhead's," Bishop declared with cool finality.

Then as Ryan turned away he rambled on in a half delirious, self-depreciating monologue:

"What a hole to die in! And I ain't fit to die. Never did a worth-while thing in my whole life. Maybe that's why. Reckon I ain't fit to live. Could have been somebody at one time but chucked the chance away. Just threw it away. I ain't thought of anybody but myself. Just plumb selfish clear through. Reckon that's why I'm dyin' here like a crippled dog. And they'll plant me among the Siwashes in a Siwash graveyard.

"Jim, O Jim!" he suddenly called out. "Dig the hole deep, Jim. Down at Nulato one time I saw where the wolves had dug out a Siwash that was planted shallow. It looked awful. Make it six feet anyway; won't you, Jim?"

When the tea was boiled they tried to make him drink some, but he resolutely refused and kept his mouth tight shut when the cup was pressed to his lips.

"Don't dare to," he mumbled. "My guts are punctured. I'm swelled as tight as a drum now. There ain't no use anyway. I'm sure done for."

"Looks to me like he's goin' fast," Daly whispered as they drank their tea and munched at frozen bannocks.

Ryan nodded his head sadly.

"Am afraid so, too," he muttered.

As they repacked the grub-box in the toboggan snow began to fall, a few flakes, soft and fluffy as down from the breast of a duck, whirled hither and thither by the breeze. Ryan glanced apprehensively to the north.

"She's comin', Daly," he declared. "See how black the sky shows over yonder. That spells storm sure as fate. We gotta get to Beaverhead's before she hits."

Throughout the afternoon they pushed on with the utmost speed; but the snow kept coming thicker than ever, and darkness fell early. With the approach of night the wind arose and increased steadily in violence until from all around the swaying forest sent up a wail of protest against the lash of an arctic blizzard.

In the teeth of the gale, the cold and blinding snow, Ryan and Daly struggled to hold the trail and forced the exhausted, whimpering dogs on into the night. They made slow and painful progress until the dogs suddenly pulled up short, and the crack of the lash and the shouted commands of the men failed to budge them from their tracks. Ryan, running up ahead to see what the matter was, was brought to an abrupt standstill by a sharp blow on the head. He had collided with an overhanging ridge-pole of old Beaverhead's house. The dogs had stopped in the shelter of the wall.

The house that sheltered four generations of the Beaverhead family was made of logs; square and flat-roofed. The interior was one large room with upright timbers here and there supporting the

ridge-poles. The floor was mother earth carpeted with a vast accumulation of filth, scraps of food, bits of bone, rabbitskin, moose-hair, bits of grease and fat, the rank-smelling fleshings of mink and lynx skins, spruce needles, shavings, and over all a layer of dust.

During the Winter season this house was the home of some thirty people, of all sizes and ages. Their rough couches of spruce boughs cluttered the floor close to walls clear around the room. The bedding, robes of rabbit and caribou skins, was rolled up during the daytime to serve the purpose of chairs.

Such as it was, the Beaverhead home was shelter from the fury of the storm; and the palace of a king could have been no more appreciated by the exhausted trappers as they carried their wounded companion into the dimly lit room.

The family apparently was all at home. The old chief received them with great demonstrations of pleasure. His ancient, copper-colored features folded into deep wrinkles and his withered lips peeled back in shameless exhibition of rows of yellow teeth as he smiled a welcome, proud of the rôle he played as host to the white men.

Most of the other adults of the family sat back in silence in the shadows along the wall, smoking vile tobacco and eyeing curiously every move the visitors made and every article of their equipment. Children of all ages scampered about the room, in their excitement kicking up clouds of the stifling dust and, getting into each others' way, squalling and fighting among themselves. Some of the younger ones approached close to the wounded man where he lay on a spruce mat in the corner and stared into his face with their bead-like eyes.

"White man ketchum shot," one of them whispered. "Mebbyso him die."

Ryan and Daly—at the chief's invitation—satisfied their hunger with huge chunks of half-cooked moose-meat and steaming hot broth from the meat-pot which simmered on the one stove in the room, a small sheet-iron affair with a rusty stove-pipe running through the middle of the roof.

Bishop still refused to partake of any nourishment. He talked weakly but almost incessantly, denouncing himself for the most part, and bemoaning the fact that he had to leave the world without having accomplished a single thing for the help or betterment of his fellow men. He entertained not the slightest hope of living; had given up to black and utter despair.

It was near midnight before his moaning trailed away into sleep, and silence reigned in the room except for the snore of the sleeping Indians and the roar of the storm without.

IT SEEMED to Ryan that he had scarcely dozed off when a noise at the opposite end of the room aroused him. He sat up. Was it morning? Surely not. He looked at his watch. It was three o'clock. He watched the figures at the far end of the room. Two old women were working over the form of another prostrate on one of the spruce beds. Most of the Indians were up and children were peeping curiously from beneath their robes.

Daly sat up.

"What's the rumpus, Jim?" he asked.

"Don't know. They seem pretty much worked up, though, about somethin'."

One of the old women heard their voices and nodded to another. Soon a caribou robe was stretched from the wall to one of the posts, blocking their view of the corner where the women worked.

After a half-hour had passed and the white men were unable to go back to sleep Daly's curiosity got the better of him. Seeing the old man seated on a pile of robes, humped over with his head on his knees in an attitude of utter dejection, he asked:

"Hey, chief, what's the matter? Somebody sick?"

The old man raised his ancient countenance, whose every wrinkle showed worry and sorrow.

"Ugh!" he grunted sadly. "Leetle Maree Tsoe ver' mooch seek. Mebbyso him ketchum babee, mebbyso him die."

His head drooped again to his knees.

"What do you know about that?"

The white men looked at each other in consternation as it dawned upon them; in that setting of filth and squalor, back of the greasy old robe in the corner, there was being enacted the world-old drama of birth, the struggle of life with death that new life might be born. And it appeared evident from the old chief's words that death held the upper hand.

Then they noticed that Bishop, too, was awake.

A woman came hurrying to the chief. She spoke quickly in the Indian dialect.

The old man wrung his hands in an agony of despair.

"Him die!" he groaned. "Him die! Preety queek leetle Maree die."

Bishop threw back the robe which covered him and rose to his knees. Ryan and Daly sprang upon him, seized him by the shoulders and sought to force him back upon the bed.

"Lay down!" they cried. "Do yuh want to kill yer fool self?"

"Lemme go! Lemme go!" Bishop protested in a terrible voice, and struggled from their grasp.

They sank back, staring in unbelief as Bishop rose to his feet and with slow, steady steps crossed the room.

"Me white doctor," he explained to an old woman who sprang up to block his path.

She drew one side and Bishop disappeared behind the caribou curtain.

Several moments passed before a woman again emerged and spoke to the chief. The wrinkled features then broke forth in smiles, and it seemed that all around the room the attitude of fear and sorrow was suddenly changed to one of gladness. But to the waiting men it seemed an eternity before there issued from beyond the curtain a high thin cry, a squall that was quickly muffled into silence.

Then Bishop emerged. He walked slowly, with fists tightly clenched and eyes set and staring straight ahead as if he were crossing on a narrow log across a bottomless abyss. Beneath the stubble of beard which covered his face his lips were curled in the shadow of a smile.

The northern wilderness had never before appeared so utterly lonely and desolate and human effort so puny and unavailing as it did to Ryan in the gray dawn of the following day. When he awoke he rose and turned back the robe which covered his wounded partner.

One look at the sick man's face was enough. The ghastly paleness, the deep-set blue encircled eyes told him that despite their valiant efforts, their hours of torturous struggle with the cold and the wind and storm, Bishop was very near to the end of his trail.

He left the warmth of the cabin for the storm-swept world without. The trail leading on to the post was blocked with great drifts of snow, and here and there huge trees torn up by their roots by the force of the gale lay prostrate across the way. He satisfied himself that travel over that trail was utterly impossible and turned dejectedly back toward the cabin.

It was then that he noticed the Indian graveyard in the clearing back of the house; the queer little huts built over each grave to shut out the cold and the snow, carrying the fight against these greatest enemies to human existence in the north even beyond the span of life itself. Above each tiny hut, like long, slender fingers of ghostly hands, there towered the monuments erected in honor of the dead, long straight poles glistening white against the somber background of the encircling forest, with quaint wooden images, a fish, a lynx, a rabbit, spinning in the wind at the top.

For a long time Ryan stood motionless in silent contemplation of the graves; then as the cold bit in and made him conscious of himself again he bowed his head as if to the dictates of a higher will and began to kick the snow from a level piece of ground a few feet from the nearest hut.

"Might as well get busy," he mumbled. "It'll take us at least three days to thaw down a hole here, an' I'm sure goin' to make it at least six feet just as Doc asked. She sure is a —— of a place to plant a decent partner like Doc in."

"What the deuce yuh think yer doin', scratchin' around like a sick malemiut gettin' ready to bed down?"

Daly had seen him from the house and approached silently through the snow.

"It is a bed sure enough, Mike," Ryan answered sadly. "The last bed for the best partner a man ever had."

Daly burst out laughing. "Yer crazy as a loon, Ryan. Bishop's feelin' fine this morning; temperature down, pulse normal. He was tickled as an old granny when they showed him the kid he helped bring into the world last night, and the mother smiled at him from across the room. Now he's settin' up, and an old squaw's feedin' him soup. He laughs and says he sure is goin' to get well. I reckon when he got to shiftin' around last night he found he wasn't as near dead as he thought he was; but instead the wound had really begun to heal and——"

But there was no reason to continue expounding his theory, for Ryan was well on his way to the house, plowing through the deep snow like a bull moose with a wolf-pack at his heels.

Gran' Mobi's Jest

by HERMANN B. DEUTSCH

Author of "On Bayou Noir," "The Wooing of Placide Dumaine," etc.

PIERRE LAROCHE, who lived in New Orleans, never had heard of Innocente Mauvoisin, who lived in a swamp cabin near Merci Cove. Neither had he ever heard of Beo the Indian, who lived God only knew where. All three knew of the Gran' Mobi, of course. To Pierre Laroche, Gran' Mobi was an amusing superstition; to Innocente Mauvoisin, Gran' Mobi was something dreadful, to be exorcised by many devout prayers; but to Beo the Indian, Gran' Mobi was the only thing on, under, or over the earth that he feared.

Of the three, Beo the Indian was the only one ever to have seen Gran' Mobi. Beo the Indian was a hard drinker, whenever opportunity offered.

At almost the same hour that Sunday morning the three stirred into activity. Pierre Laroche woke to the pleasant consciousness that there was no need to go to the office and that the weather was ideal for the fishing-trip to which he had been looking forward all week. Innocente Mauvoisin roused herself to the consciousness of another day's work in running the trap-line that had been her father's before his death had left her alone in the world. Beo the Indian awoke to the unpleasant realization of a breakfastless dawning, and a gnawing, burning whisky-thirst which he had no present means to satisfy.

It was with bitterness against all mankind in his heart that Beo the Indian stepped out of the screened palmetto camp where he had passed the night. He did not know whose camp it was, nor was he deeply concerned over this detail as long as the owner had not appeared to evict him. Probably it belonged to one of the city hunting and fishing clubs.

The only reason Beo had sought shelter there for the night was that even to a swamp-rat like Beo the Indian a night in the open swamp meant death from mosquitoes. During the day it was not so bad. Beo had lived in the swamps so long that his system had become hardened to the mosquito poison. He could remain without more than slight discomfort where any one but a swamp-rat would have been driven frantic by the bloodthirsty little insects. But not even he could have faced or endured a night in the swamps without some sort of protection.

Beo spat into the still water of the pirogue ditch on whose banks the camp was built—a ditch which, as he knew, joined Bayou Sauvage some three miles away. Bayou Sauvage formed a link in the waterway which led to town. Beo would have done or given a good deal just then for a pirogue and enough dollars for whisky. He might even, he thought, dare an encounter with Gran' Mobi.

However, that sort of speculation led nowhere. Beo the Indian knew that it was unwise to think of the Gran' Mobi at any time, since such thoughts were apt to bring on the very presence of that evil thing in any one of its many guises. He

cast a fearful glance about him lest indeed Gran' Mobi might have come upon him even then—either in the form of a man who had no face, but only a scarred, puffy and featureless visage that was ever bloody under a wild tangle of snaky hair, or as a woman wound about with hissing serpents, or as a great flaming snake whose forked tongue could lay hold on a man and drag him to destruction.

No; one must not think of these things, particularly when one had other pressing things—like breakfast—to think about. Beo the Indian was hungry; and that craving at least he could satisfy. To this end he picked up a stout club and strode swiftly across the little clearing where stood the palmetto camp, to the near bank of the pirogue ditch. Here he picked his way cautiously into the swamp.

This caution he increased as he heard a resounding "kata-*thunk*" ahead of him. Stooping carefully, he slipped through the rank swamp vegetation and over the sodden ground like a shadow. Carefully he raised his club, and when he brought it swishingly down, he grinned. Reaching down over the grassgrown lip of the ditch-bank, he picked up a huge bullfrog, stunned but still twitching. The frog must have weighed fully a pound, and Beo was still grinning as he tied the stunned animal to his belt and crept farther along the banks of the pirogue ditch into the swamp.

Beo the Indian was lucky. Four of the large frogs he killed—a plentiful breakfast for one who was not overparticular. But far better, he had come across two muskrats and a bull mink, caught in some one's traps. To Beo it mattered little whose traps they were, and before he set about cooking breakfast he skinned the mink and the two muskrats and stretched the pelts inside out on the arched springs of three bent twigs.

Then he cut himself another twig, slender and straight, sharpening both ends. On this he spitted the legs of the frogs he had killed and the loins of the two muskrats. The rank flesh of the mink not even Beo the Indian would eat as long as there was other food. Over a tiny Indian fire, which sent scarcely a wisp of smoke into the still, heat-laden swamp air, he broiled his kill and feasted.

It was after the meal that he devoted his attention to the three pelts. His problem was now simple. It was a question of finding a pirogue. Those three pelts would bring him at least six dollars, and six dollars could be translated freely into enough bootlegged brandy to satisfy the craving within him.

But the six dollars—and the whisky—could be had only in town, where to be sure money and spirits were plentiful because the bootleggers just then were using fishing-smacks and oyster-schooners to bring Cuban rum and Mexican brandy from the Gulf islands over the passes of the south Louisiana swamps. However, town lay somewhere off to the east, and to reach it Beo the Indian must traverse three miles of pirogue ditch and twelve miles of Bayou Sauvage.

Quite literally Beo the Indian winced at the thought of attempting to cover that distance across the swamps afoot. But good fortune had not yet tired of Beo the Indian, for at this moment there was borne to his ears, across the still swamps, the crashing of undergrowth.

PIERRE LAROCHE had stowed a large woven wicker basket into his little runabout. The basket contained his lunch, a can of fresh shrimp, a tin box of odd hooks and lures, some artificial minnows, a bottle of white pork-rind, and some spools of braided line. His jointed steel casting-rod he stowed in a flap fastened to the inner surface of the runabout door. Then he cranked, jumped in, headed his little hopper joyously toward the Westwego Ferry.

Leaving the ferry at the western bank of the Mississippi, he rattled past the grain-elevators and distilleries of Westwego, and then headed out over the open country.

It was early Spring, and dry, but even so the roads were none too good. However, Pierre Laroche, with the prospect of a good day's fishing ahead, cared little for the jolting he received.

Ever westward he sped, through the cypress swamps about Paradis, and across Bayou des Allemands with its hyacinth islands, and finally across the fertile fields that bordered Bayou Lafourche. Here he turned off, on a barely distinguishable prairie-trail.

At a clearing he ran his car into concealment, picked up his wicker basket and rod and trudged across the springy mud toward the swamps. The trail lost itself altogether,

and a few rods beyond this point Pierre Laroche came across a weed-grown ditch.

Here he parted the reedy tangle and brought to view a cypress pirogue, filled to the brim with dried palmetto-leaves. These he swept out deftly, stowing rod and basket into the little dugout. From a recess in the ditch-bank he drew out a short paddle and a long pirogue pole with broad, forked tip.

Stepping into the stern of the pirogue he seized the pole and propelled his craft along the ditch, which was so narrow that it gave him a scant half-foot clearance on either side. Less than half a mile farther along the ditch gave out upon a broad canal; and, seating himself, Pierre paddled west here, searching the bank. At length he found the mouth of a second ditch, and up this, pole in hand, he made his way.

At irregular intervals the ditch widened out into a broad pool, the ditch-diggers of a bygone time having taken advantage of the presence of a chain of such pools to lessen their labors. At the first of these pools Pierre paused and, jointing his rod, cast about for the game green trout which might be lurking there. Meeting with no success he changed bait, and jerked a few fat, buttery goggle-eye and one or two sacola out of the water.

It was fair sport upon which to whet one's appetite for trout, and Pierre might have remained a little longer but for the descent upon the pool of a cloud of mosquitoes. When one of those clouds approached there was safety only in flight.

Hastily Pierre shipped his fishing-tackle and poled away. Even so he was caught by the vanguard of the cloud, as half a dozen white lumps on his bare forearms attested. Like every city dweller Pierre Laroche was very sensitive to the poison of the swamp mosquitoes. Every bite raised a white lump of irritation from the poisoned skin.

At the third pool Pierre found green trout in abundance. The whereabouts of this chain of pools was one of Pierre's pet secrets, and few indeed were the fishermen who visited it. In one or another of the pools there was always sure to be good fishing in plenty.

With the first whirring cast of the wooden minnow among the reed stems near the bank there came a rush through the water, and amid a silver shower the trout struck. So surprizingly swift was the rush that it caught Pierre off his guard, and the deft wrist stroke which should have driven home the barbs merely served to jerk the bait away from its intended victim.

Smashingly eager, however, the trout struck again immediately, and this time Pierre's answering tug on the line made the big fish fast. The battle was too furious to be of long duration, and the shimmering green trout soon flopped about in the bottom of the pirogue.

At once Pierre sent his dugout to the marshy edge of the pool, where he beached it securely and stepped out into the swamp. Here was good sport and he might well stay a while to enjoy it.

Two more trout he landed as he began a slow circuit along one side of the pool; but on the third cast of the lure there was a rush and a strike which betokened something other than trout. Automatically Pierre had jerked back his wrist in the swift movement that fastened the barbs, and the rush which followed almost tore the rod from his grasp.

Straining, dropping the tip of his rod cunningly along the fish's line of flight when necessary, Pierre fought the battle. Alert to take in the least hint of slack as the big fish came to a rest or "back-tracked," he nevertheless had to permit his catch time and again to make a wild dash away while the reel shrilled its high spinning song out over the swamps. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the big fish began to tire. Shorter and shorter became the dashes, while the amount of slack which could be taken up by the reel increased correspondingly.

"Must be a whale," grunted Pierre after the fashion of fishermen the world over. "Feels like he weighs a ton."

One more half-hearted dash for freedom, and the big fish gave up the fight. Slowly, sulkily, but none the less steadily, he was reeled up to the bank. It was with a snort of disgust that Pierre Laroche greeted his first view of the prize.

"A choupique!" he exclaimed as he saw the blunt head, the broad, mud-colored back scales, and the short, choppy tail, that distinguished the carrion-fish. "By all that wears fins and scales, it's a choupique! To think of me wasting a good half-hour over that!"

He addressed the big fish scornfully. "If it weren't for my bait that you've got in that ugly mouth of yours, I'd bust this line and let you swim off and starve."

But the fisherman's pride at having brought to shore a nine-pound choupique with nothing but a silk trout-line overcame Pierre's chagrin. Using his open clasp knife as a gaff, he lifted the big choupique, kicking and flopping, from the water, extracted the wooden minnow, and kicked the fish back into the pool.

"There, durn you—and I hope you get stranded on a mud-bar," he grumbled. "And that spoils the fishing here, because the rumpus has scared all the trout 'way beyond the city limits by this time. Now I'll just naturally have to get back to the pirogue and hunt a better 'ole.'"

Picking up his rod and his two trout he made his way carefully back along the edge of the pool. There was need for care, for the leaves of the rank marsh-grasses were razor-keen and it would not do to plunge recklessly through the tangled brakes.

Pierre completed the circuit without haste. Then he looked blankly at the place where he had left the pirogue. The impress of the dugout on the sedge where it had been beached was plainly visible. There could be no mistake about that. But the pirogue was gone.

AT FIRST Pierre Laroche did not take his predicament too seriously. He realized that the pirogue had been stolen, and knew that he would have to make his way back to his car afoot as best he might, of course. But he had no fear of losing himself as he need only follow the three waterways by which he had come—the present ditch, the broad canal, and the ditch in which his pirogue had been concealed. The broad canal he would have to swim, but if he took his time and proceeded with becoming care he could make the entire trip without being very much the worse for wear at the end of it.

And so he started, discarding his rod and his two trout regretfully, and carefully cacheing the former. Picking his way cautiously and avoiding the patches of keen-bladed grass and cane, he stuck to the ditch and to the banks of the pools which formed part of its course, making slow progress but husbanding his resources.

Yet with all his caution he did not altogether escape injury. Three crimson slashes across his face showed where the sharp blades he encountered in the brakes had cut home once when an incautious, stumbling step had sent him pitching headlong forward.

He had lost his cap, and his hair was plastered down in wet, ropy locks. But what bothered him most was the all but intolerable smarting of his eyes, into the corners of which the heavy salt beads of sweat kept trickling. To remedy this he knelt by the bank of the ditch to give himself the refreshment of a wash.

When he arose it was with a cry of alarm. Descending above him was a dense cloud of mosquitoes. The sight drove from him all need for holding his strength in reserve—all need for caution—all need for sticking close by the banks of the ditches along which he had come. Crossing his arms before his face to shield himself as best he might, he plunged headlong into the swamp. On he crashed through the brakes, losing all sense of direction, until a fallen branch tripped him and flung him full down upon the quaking ground.

There he lay sobbing with exhaustion until he had in some degree recovered his breath. When he arose he did so unsteadily, while an intense irritation throughout his body told him something of the number of mosquito bites he must have suffered. He ran his finger-tips tenderly over his features and could feel the lumpy irregularities which told him that his face must be puffed and swollen beyond all recognition.

His forearms, cut and bleeding until they seemed all but raw, caught his eyes, and he tried to smile; but he could manage no more than a wry grimace, due to the stiffness in his swollen cheeks. He was very much alive to the necessity for getting out of the swamp with all possible speed, for it would not be long now until the fever induced by the mosquito poison should begin in earnest, and to be caught in the swamp by a fever would hold him there until nightfall meant death.

There was left to him no sense of location. He had lost all that in his mad flight from the mosquitoes. But he knew that sooner or later he would cross a pirogue ditch, and somewhere or other along this ditch there would be a human habitation. Swaying and lurching dizzily, Pierre Laroche set out across the swamp.

BOTH sides of Bayou Sauvage were deeply shaded by overhanging branches, for the sun stood nearly overhead. Along the center of the black water, thrown into sharp relief by the

marginal shadows, lay a golden, sunlit track, in which there skimmed with effortless grace the pirogue of Innocente Mauvoisin.

Lightly poised in the stern stood Innocente. Graceful as some creature of the wilds of which she seemed a part, she swept her pirogue down the sunlit path, swaying ever so lightly with the motion of her craft.

Innocente was well content this Sunday morning, for the trap-line was yielding rich spoil. The bodies of three raccoons, one skunk, a miscellany of muskrats and, best of all, four or five slender mink, lay in a tumbled heap in the pirogue; and those skins were bringing high prices in the New Orleans market. There would be enough soon to enable Innocente to leave the swamp she hated.

Ever since her father's death the season before, she had found the swamp unbearable. She knew nothing of the manner in which he had come to his end—whether he had fallen victim to moccasin, alligator, or to the treacherous swamp-muck itself.

They had been all in all to each other, Innocente and her father, for her mother had died in the swamp cabin where Innocente was born. The girl had kept that cabin in order ever since she could remember. That is why it had become doubly hateful to her now, since every evening she spent there alone brought to mind so vividly the cozy evenings she and her father had made there together—the joyously laughing lessons when her father had taught her English, which is a foreign tongue in the swamps.

Her one desire was to save enough money to enable her to leave the marshes and attend school in one of the New Orleans convents. Her schooling finished, the sisters would find a place for her in the city, where she might forget the swamp that had robbed her of her parents.

Her eyes sparkled as she looked at the heap of furry bodies in the pirogue. Those skins meant more than a hundred dollars, and she had run only a little more than half of the line of traps. Of course, such a catch was quite a windfall, for Innocente had not the strength to care for a really extensive trap-line.

Still the season had been a good one; and, unless her luck changed very decidedly for the worse, it would be her last in the swamps. The sisters in New Orleans, would care for her. Had not Père Louis, the priest who made his rounds of the swamp cabins, told her that time and again?

Innocente laughed as a big boattail grackle, frightened half out of his scattered wits by the silent approach of the pirogue beneath the limb on which he was sunning himself, squawked in terror and flapped indignantly off across the swamps. She lifted her voice in a rollicking little song her father had taught her:

Raoul, he go to town one day—
(*Raoul, ain't you ashame'?*)
He buy a shirt so ver', ver' gay
For wear to call upon Aimée
And break her heart. Then some one say—
"Raoul, *ain't* you ashame'?"

Innocente did not finish the chantey, for she had come to the ditch which marked her next trap-setting. Skilfully, with just a touch of the paddle, she slid the pirogue into the ditch, where she fastened the dugout with a long whang-thong to the low-hanging limb of a live-oak. Slipping the carrying-strap of her bait-sack over her shoulder, she splashed gaily into the standing water of the swamp, and made for the nearest of her traps.

IN LAZY contentment Beo the Indian was paddling Pierre Laroche's pirogue down Bayou Sauvage. No longer was he hurrying, for he had discovered in the wicker basket a small flask of whisky, now empty. At least, he had managed to dull the keen edge of his thirst.

There was no bitterness in the heart of Beo the Indian now, for the world had treated him royally this morning. Good food—good whisky—what more could the heart of Beo the Indian desire? As for the rest, was he not headed for town, with potential money in the shape of a quartet of pelts? And the pirogue, too, would fetch a good price, for it was sound as a nut and beautifully shaped. An excellent world—a glorious, golden world.

Beo checked suddenly, and, leaning forward, clutched at the region of his heart. Clenching his fist he pounded his left breast several times. Finally with a deep breath he resumed an upright posture, although some moments elapsed before the deep lines which had been drawn in his face by pain disappeared.

Had a doctor observed this little bit of by-play he would have said "whisky heart" without more ado. But Beo the Indian, to

whom such brief attacks were by no means a novelty, knew better. Whisky gave strength to a man, and did not rob him of it. Whisky did not cause those queer pains as if a horde of tiny demons were trying to pluck out his heart-strings by the roots. Whisky eased those pains, which were certainly—most certainly—the work of Gran' Mobi.

Whenever the sudden sensation of a tug at his heart bent him double with the swift pain of it Beo the Indian knew that, though invisible, Gran' Mobi was somewhere in the neighborhood. He glanced fearfully about, forcing himself to peer into the forest shadow ahead, lest the Gran' Mobi leap out of some concealment where he might be lurking even then.

But quite suddenly Beo the Indian forgot Gran' Mobi and his fear. There came to him, apparently right out of the forest. the clear voice of a girl, caroling a swamp chantey.

> Raoul he stay in town one day—
> (*Raoul, ain't you ashame'?*)
> An' soon he feel so ver', ver' gay
> He throw that prit-tee shirt away,
> An' buy a dress for his Aimée.
> (Raoul, *ain't* you ashame'?)

Digging his paddle deep into the black water, Beo the Indian checked the progress of his pirogue in its own length. Cautiously he edged in toward the bank, chuckling evilly as he came to the mouth of the ditch where a pirogue—a trapper's pirogue, to judge by the little pile of furry bodies in the bow—was fastened by a thong of whang to the low-hanging limb of a live-oak.

INNOCENTE was stooping over the trap where the sixth mink of her day's catch was darting and leaping with snaky speed to the limit allowed by the steel jaws which were locked on one of his hind legs, when Beo the Indian, parting the brush, looked into the "cove," or swamp clearing, where she was at work. After one satisfied glance Beo the Indian discarded the stalker's caution with which he had approached the cove and stepped boldly into the clearing.

As she heard the step Innocente whirled about and faced the Indian, who hooked his thumbs into his belt, spread apart his feet and leered. Innocente's eyes took on the hard look of shining obsidian, as—in English—she said:

"What do you wish? What are you doing here?"

Beo the Indian shook his head.

"I ain't goin' hurt yo'—me. Why you are afraid?" he said.

"I'm not afraid," blazed Innocente indignantly, stamping her foot with a splash on the sodden ground. "Make off, you——"

"Don't call poor Beo no ugly name—no," said the leering Indian. "I only want to see you smile, my little, my lovely!"

He advanced a step or two, and as he did so the girl retreated. Suddenly she turned and started like a deer across the clearing. With awkward leaps which covered a surprizing amount of ground Beo the Indian followed her.

Within twenty yards he had caught her and was crushing her roughly to him in his great arms. Struggle and scream as she might the girl could not break that grip. She saw the face with its two evil eyes come closer to hers.

Without warning that evil countenance became transfixed in what appeared to be an agony of fear. The two arms which had held her powerless relaxed, and she slipped from the Indian's grasp to a crouching position on the ground.

Beo the Indian, however, stood motionless. For from the other side of the clearing an awful figure was advancing upon him. It appeared to be a man, but it had no features—at least no recognizable features—for the face was puffed beyond all recognition and bloody from countless encounters with the blades of the cane-brakes. Above the bloody, puffy face there hung glistening, wet, ropy locks, like snakes writhing about.

There was a rattle in the throat of Beo the Indian, and with his clenched right fist he was beating at his chest over his heart.

"Gran'—Gran' Mobi!" he gasped.

Then his breath came back to him with a rush; and, giving one sharp yell of terror, he fled crashing into the swamp.

Innocente had looked up in amazement, but the sight which met her eyes sent her down to the ground, cowering, crossing herself, and beginning a paternoster. Yet the figure advanced steadily, halting when it had come within a few feet of the girl.

"If you please, *mam'selle*," it said thickly, "drink—they stole my pirogue—the mosquitoes——"

With a little cry of relief the girl sprang

to her feet, gazing more closely at the grotesque figure.

"Drink and food and all else that is mine, *m'sieu*," she cried. "It was you then who saved me from that thing that was here. I thought in truth you were Gran' Mobi himself. As for the pirogue, mine is close by, and shall take you where you will."

She had unfastened a felt-covered canteen from her girdle as she spoke, and had passed it to "Gran' Mobi," who drank greedily of the cool, sweet water.

"Gran' Mobi! What nonsense!" chuckled Pierre Laroche.

Trappers brought in the body of Beo the Indian to town a few days later. They had found him lying face down, with his left hand clutched at the region of his heart.

Those who profess to know the Gran' Mobi frequently remark that he has a keen, though vicious, sense of humor.

Sled Wheeler and the Nameless Order

A Three-Part Story
Conclusion
by
JOHN I. COCHRANE

Author of "The Open Night," "The Drop of Doom," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

DAN WHEELER, adventurer—for such was his chosen profession—was stopped one morning while crossing the lobby of one of San Francisco's leading hotels, by a titled young Englishman, Lord Brendon, who informed him he had a message of importance to deliver from Drake, an old pal of Wheeler's.

In the course of conversation Lord Brendon confided to Wheeler that he had invested all his money in a mining property in which Drake was interested, and that they were attempting to get a clear claim to it but could not on account of certain holdings owned by a man named Garth.

Brendon soon learned that Garth was a brutal and notorious political boss who had long terrorized the district, and was in some way connected with a mysterious secret society.

After receiving Drake's message Wheeler took Brendon with him at night to visit Lu Yan, a Chinese merchant who lived in the heart of San Francisco's Chinatown. Drake's message concerned two priceless Asiatic jewels, which Garth was determined to obtain possession of by every means in his power, and Lu Yan warned Wheeler that his life was in danger on account of his association with Drake.

Dan, however, refused to be intimidated. On the way back to his hotel he was attacked by one of Garth's "stranglers," and, in a barehanded fight, choked his opponent to death.

When Garth received news of his failure to do away with Dan he decided to nullify Drake's influence by taking Wheeler into his employ, and offered him the job of manager of the Cascade Club, a gambling joint, connected with the hotel, which he ran. Dan accepted, but before taking over the job managed to tell Senator Sands—the friend of all who desired law and order in the community—that Garth was getting dangerous, and would stop at nothing to attain his own ends.

That evening while Dan was handling the crowd of gamblers, Garth received word that Drake, whom he was expecting to bring the jewels to the city, had been robbed. Violently excited, he immediately left the hotel with Wheeler and Brendon to discover what had happened.

At Dalton's ranch they found that Drake, who had not been robbed at all, was merely visiting Dalton, his friend. That night Garth offered Drake not only a large sum of money but all rights to the mining property in exchange for the two jewels which were still in Drake's possession.

Drake, however, refused to give an immediate decision. To safeguard himself for that night he obtained the services of Koloi, an Indian whose life he had once saved. Having stationed Koloi at the door of his room, he went to sleep.

The whole party was awakened the following morning by Garth, who, in a frenzy of excitement, told them the Indian had disappeared—and that the jewels were missing.

KOLOI left a clean trail behind him, enabling them to track him to Bridge Cañon. They set out in pursuit, but were compelled that night to stop off at the mountainous retreat of Jonas and Adam Kinney.

Adam Kinney got Wheeler and Brendon alone and told them he had spoken with the Indian, who, according to his account, had been ordered by Dalton to take the jewels away and hide them in the "Gold Cave," an almost inaccessible spot down the cañon. Kinney explained to them the perilous nature of the Indian's task. In order to reach the cave it was necessary for Koloi to traverse blank spaces in the path above the seemingly bottomless chasm, whose upright walls offered not even a handhold.

The Indian, however, by means of a hand-over-hand method, with the use of two peeled poles, reached the cave.

The next morning Wheeler and Adam Kinney, with the assistance of bamboo poles which Kinney had long been practising with, successfully imitated the Indian's achievement, and got within hailing distance of Koloi, who had sought refuge in the Gold Cave. Kinney then left Dan to go and meet Brendon. Soon afterward Drake, who with Garth had approached the cañon from a different direction, reached Dan.

Garth suddenly threatened to shoot Drake if he did not call out the Indian and make him give up the jewels. Drake bargained however, and finally Garth agreed to give him a quitclaim deed to all his mining properties in return for one of the jewels. At Drake's order Koloi emerged from his hiding-place with only one "Twin." Immediately the Indian came within reach Garth snatched at the jewel, and then, double-crossing Drake, stated he would take the life of the Indian if Drake did not order him to bring out the other jewel. Drake refused, and before he could prevent him, Garth had fired at both the Indian's wrists, and shot them clean through, so that Koloi, with one last faithful look at Drake, dropped like a plummet, down through that terrible space into the boiling waters below.

Garth then offered Dan ten thousand dollars to make the trip to the cave and bring back the remaining jewel. Dan accepted, and reached the cave, only to discover that the roll, which should have contained the precious gem, was empty. Replacing it with a stone, he came out, but refused to give up the roll, which Garth imagined contained the other Twin. Working himself into a fit of demoniacal rage Garth fired at Dan, and having apparently shot away the poles which supported him, became convinced that he was killed.

Through one of his poles jamming in a crevice of the rocky wall, Dan had a miraculous escape, however, and thanks to his almost superhuman strength, reached safety after a tremendous effort. Meeting Brendon, he recounted the whole dramatic story to him, and then proceeded to hurry back to the city to give Lu Yan news of all that had taken place.

Lu Yan, deciding that Dan had fitted himself for his confidence, related the history of the Twins. They were two diamonds that blazed with an extraordinary green fire, and were stolen from a temple in inland Asia by a false priest.

"It is always told that whoever has in his possession even one of the Twins, unless his eyes be blue or green, he shall come to misfortune or death right soon," stated Lu Yan. "But if the lucky man have eyes of green by nature, and come by the stone without guilt, his is a charmed life so long as he carries the stone; and good fortune shall be his thereafter."

Lu Yan went on to tell Dan that he was acting as agent for Prince Iotu, the rightful heir to the throne of the country from which the Twins were stolen. There was, however, a pretender to the throne. The little kingdom, being rich in resources, a certain European power was anxious to obtain valuable concessions there. They could obtain these from the pretender, if only they were able to place him on the throne. Their one chance to do this was to restore the stolen jewels to the temple, as the priests had prophesied that with the return of the Twins would come a wise and powerful ruler to lead them back to all their ancient wealth and power. Garth was attempting to obtain the jewels to sell to this European power.

Lu Yan then intimated that the mysterious secret society, with which he also was connected, would know how to act against Garth, and informed Dan that he must consider himself under the society's orders.

Dan returned to the hotel, disguised as a Chinaman; gaining access by means of a secret corridor leading to Garth's private office in the Cascade Club. There he met Brenner, who had taken his place as manager; and soon they were joined by Lu Yan and Senator Sands.

Together they discussed the activities of the two main crooks in Garth's employ, Scotty the Crimp, who ran a bar, and Ardmore, who posed as a respectable member of society. Dan suggested a plan whereby a break might be caused between the crooks and Garth; the plan being that some of Ardmore's cash should be marked, and that he should find it missing; eventually identifying it in Garth's possession. The plan was agreed upon, and Dan proceeded to carry it out.

CHAPTER XII

LU YAN had been pacing his rooms for some time—a very long time it seemed to him—waiting for the return of Wheeler. Now and again as he passed between the lacquered plaques, vases and other things of beauty that made of his rooms a museum of delight to knowing ones, he paused before the pedestaled shrine of the serene Buddha as if tempted to offer up a prayer.

For Lu Yan, philosopher and advocate of freedom from desire, was worrying. Twice

he had called up the servant from below to tell him to repeat what Dan had said before leaving. It seemed that Dan had waited for some time for Lu Yan to return, and then had gone without leaving any message.

"Again it was my fault," Lu Yan communed with himself. "I should have returned more promptly—perchance I could have persuaded the youth not to venture out again, to risk his life among foul beasts. He can hardly succeed alone among so many—my faith is based only on his surpassing skill and quickness in the handling of men—my hope is only that he may return sound in body. Verily human affections bring suffering as the day brings darkness in its train."

He was about to try once more to compose himself to the perusal of the noble truth as to the real Nirvana, when he stopped with his shell-rimmed spectacles half-way down his nose.

Was that a sound at the door below? It was nothing—he was a disturbed old man—possessed by fancies—

That was something! A knock—a step on the stairs—three at a bound—the curtain swept aside.

"Been at it again!"

Dan stopped in the door accusingly.

"I told that toddling highbinder downstairs to tell you I was all right—not to worry—and I bet you've been doing nothing but! It's all over—anyhow I couldn't sleep with the Crimp on my mind, but now we're all cleaned up to date and I am due to sleep about nineteen hours by Scotty's big chronometer."

As he spoke Dan was relieving his pockets of his black shiny wig and goggles, also of a pair of walnut shells so scraped as to fit inside the cheeks and to change the voice beyond recognition. He apologized:

"I had to try my own hand at the disguise business and it worked! I feel so good I'd have a fit if I felt any better."

"You have not been in Scotty's place alone!"

"Maybe not—but look what he loaned me! This pack of kale was inside his vest, and I didn't disturb the hard stuff. But look at the kettle! One of the kind that tells who's the next President—and inside the case is the name of the poor cuss he stole it from—probably at the bottom of the bay long ago. I wish I'd given his dirty claw one more twist and put it on the blink for stay-so."

Dan exhibited the gold watch and made it strike.

"It is enough that you return unhurt—more than I have merited," Lu Yan said contentedly. "I have been planning how we may avoid the risk of attempting to rob Ardmore. It is still more——"

"That was dead easy—he had his all in neat packets."

Dan pulled the packs of bank-notes from another pocket, tossed them on the table and sighed like one content.

"Now if I can have a cup of real tea I'll hit the hay. And a few of those cakes. Hello, Ike! Good boy! How'd you know I wanted them?"

As the new man had appeared with his special favorites and the tea all prepared, and disappeared smiling, Lu Yan said:

"He, too, has watched for you anxiously—he has become your devoted admirer at sight. You will need help to remove the stain."

"How do you get the darn stuff off?"

Dan was enjoying the cakes.

"I got some in my eye. Did Ikey Down-Stairs tell you about it?"

"No—he was too deeply concerned for your safety."

Lu Yan sat down to feast his eyes on Dan's enjoyment, and to listen with twinkling eyes.

"Well, I got an eyeful of it, and while I was doing a ghost-dance I said things—the stuff gouged until my ears rang—I yelled to Ike to call out the Fire Department, and he got off to a running start—me after him as blind as a new kitten.

"We'd be running yet if he hadn't taken a header down-stairs. He left the rug that threw him, all fixed for Dan—I turned over twice—never touched a feather—and sat on Ike at the bottom.

"I thought I'd never get enough breath into him so he could see the joke—I don't think he's got it figured out yet."

"The American sense of humor is difficult for the tinted races," Lu Yan observed soberly.

"Tinted! Wow! And you're one of 'em!"

Dan's half-smile flickered for an instant.

"Speaking of tinted—I'll bet Garth turns a few fancy shades when he runs against the results of this night's work. I am getting to to hate that bilious bird so I shall hate to lose him! I do love him *so!*"

" 'My son,' " Lu Yan quoted solemnly,

"'beware of the corruption arising from the wish to injure. It corrodes the spirit as rust darkens bright steel.'"

Dan was eating with absent enjoyment, but after Lu Yan had finished he suddenly looked up.

"How's 'at?" he asked sharply.

Lu Yan slowly repeated the quotation. Dan seemed to be saying the words under his breath, and to revolve them carefully. His eyes narrowed and wandered round the richly furnished room, searching, and lighted at last upon the Buddha—sitting plump-cheeked and sleepy on his pedestal. He pointed at it his porcelain teaspoon, accusingly.

"He was the boy that got that off—for money!"

"It is indeed a part of the Teaching of the serene Tathagata," Lu Yan assented. "One of the Five Hindrances to Nirvana." With a face as bland as that of the image.

"Sure! He would." Dan nodded. "Too fat and sassy—that lad."

But he kept turning his long, level eyes thoughtfully toward the eternal figure of contemplation upon Emancipation from Things. At length he admitted:

"He looks darn satisfied with himself and comfortable, at that. It must feel good—maybe he *knew*."

After regarding the revered Tathagata for a time, tolerantly, he tipped his head sidewise to peer at Lu Yan out of narrowed lids.

"It may work—but as for me, 'gimme more action or gimme the hook!' How's that for a quotation? I made it to order—after Pat Henry. Pat was real American—pure Irish; the poisonest kind of American—and he believed in scrapping. Yes'm! *He* didn't sit cross-legged on the floor till his brains turned to lard and his eyes turned in. And he got *his* stuff put in the Fifth Reader—that's better than the Five Hindrances—what? My word!"

Dan's face softened attractively as he was reminded of Brendon. He went on softly:

"I wonder if Drake and Brendon get back tomorrow—today, I mean. Now there is a lad I don't wish to injure—not a-tall—if he is British and wears riding-britches. You ought to see 'em—Mm-*mm!* Hush! Let me tell *you*—if that lad—" again returning to the round-cheeked Buddha who seemed to draw his eyes—"if he ever sees Brendon—Lord Percy Brendon—in his *Br*itish *Br*itches—he'll Crack his Crystal—you hear *me!*"

"Are you never weary?" Lu Yan asked wistfully.

"Sure—that's what ails me now. I never slop over and leave my face running like this when I'm in my right mind. Please wake me before night some time. I want to go to the big dance, in costume. Good night!"

And Dan went to his room, admiringly winding his new chronometer on the way, like a boy with a new toy or his first watch.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEELER was not the only one who had a narrow escape from death at Bridge Cañon. When Ghost Garth told his story of the "accident" that had swept Koloi and Wheeler to their death, Dalton and Luke Wood, as well as Adam Kinney, looked from Drake to Brendon—then at each other. By a nod or shake of his head Duke Drake could have started a lynching-party that would have rid him for all time of his most dangerous enemy.

For it was as open but courteous enemies that he and Garth started to return to San Francisco. The declaration of war came that same night before the Kinney's fire, after the others had gone to bed.

Garth by that time had become settled in his conviction that there was something keeping up the spirits and courage of Drake and Brendon. His wonderful intuitive reading of faces was not needed to tell him that they were not depressed by despairing bereavement. Brendon might be kept up by the prospect of winning out on his mine, but Drake—he was sure—had another shot in his locker.

"I am on to you, Drake. Either you did not send both stones by the Indian, or it didn't go down the cañon with Wheeler. What's your cold hand? There's something up your sleeve."

He did his best to read Drake.

"I answer no more questions, Garth."

Drake met his eyes steadily.

"I am sick of your cold cruelty. You're no man at all—just a demon. But I fear you no more than Wheeler did—and he laughed at you. From now on it is war to the knife—and God help you!"

"I am sorry for you Drake—you'd be

dangerous if you were not soft in spots. Your soft spots will down you."

Garth spoke with no rancor.

"If you're not afraid it is because you don't know enough," Garth added. "You are not scared for your own life—but you ought to have the sense to see that I can get you through your folks. That's your vulnerable heel, my Achilles!"

"Thanks," said Drake dryly.

On their way back to the city Brendon marveled at the quiet courtesy with which these two superb gamblers addressed each other. One would never suspect that they were not absolutely secure and friendly, except that they did not speak an unnecessary word. Even Garth made no attempt to annoy or to exasperate his opponent—no attempt to goad him into any self-betrayal. He was too deeply absorbed in his cold reasoning and planning. Also, no doubt, he was weakened by the reaction from his fits of rage and excitement. An odd mixture—this Garth.

At the ferry-landing Drake's sister, Mrs. Sands, and his daughter Lina were waiting for them with a carriage. Garth did not go at once to his own carriage, but stood watching the meeting of the family party out of the corners of his eyes.

Lina gave her father a hug that turned Brendon white with envy, then gave him a look that turned him whiter with hope—for all the way back he had been swinging between delight and despair as he realized that now he was as rich as she, and that now he could risk the fateful question. For back home, you know, a chap that goes wife-hunting for money—well, he may be perfectly all right and all that, but—it's not exactly cricket, if y'know what I mean.

But Garth saw the look that passed between this young pair—freshly sound and wholesome both, and tingling to their fingertips—and he burned with the corrupting desire to injure, for he wanted the girl himself. He wore his every-day smile, however, as he heard a part of the welcoming talk.

"Where is Dan Wheeler?"

Mrs. Sands was the one to ask.

"I was looking forward to having him at the new house—I have fallen in love with Dan."

"He did not come back with us," Drake answered without altering a feature—but Brendon's face became suddenly stiff and blank as he saw Garth in the offing.

Drake added aside—

"Tell you later."

"Something has happened!" Lina was quick to see. "Is Dan—hurt? He can't be—dead!"

She turned to Brendon with the last whispered word.

"Not now—later!" Brendon whispered.

But she was too agitated to see their signals for silence.

"He can't be!" she protested, white with horror. "He was so strong—so fearless—so alive! He can't be— I don't——"

Garth had drawn shamelessly nearer, on the pretense of seeing to his carriage, and he now turned to her with a malicious smile.

"No—I don't think he's dead—he can't be—not yet! But wait!"

HE TURNED and got into his carriage without waiting for any response. The others watched the carriage roll away swiftly—stunned at this outbreak of malice. For Garth was uniformly suave and flattering toward all women. Mrs. Sands shuddered.

"That man always gave me the creeps—I believe he is the devil in person," she said seriously. "I hope you have finished your dealings with him. What was it you were to tell us," to her brother, "about Dan?"

"Wait until we are alone—I don't know how many spies Garth may have here."

He looked at the driver of the carriage.

"Did you drive through the streets without escort? I thought there was rioting and danger."

"We don't have to, now—only a few steps to the float."

His sister brightened at Drake's manner and the prospect of showing her new possessions.

"We are in the new house across the bay, and you know the Senator has bought a steam-launch—a steam-yacht, really—the *Lina W.*—she is waiting for us at the float. We can talk on the way across."

She lowered her voice at the last. As she picked up his bag Drake whispered to Brendon:

"We had better tell them—they can keep a secret, if they are women. I know them both."

"Well—rath-*er!*" Brendon assented with emphasis.

He did not mean that a man ought to know an only sister and daughter, but that

they were not just ordinary women. He was in love.

The *Lina W.* was graceful as a racer, repainted white, with a cabin that would hold a score of people, and rechristened by the Senator—intended for use as a private ferry and pleasure-boat.

"We shall keep her in the new boat-house at Sausalito, when we are not cruising and picnicking round the bay," Mrs. Sands explained as they admired the freshly finished craft. "Now we are on the water, the two men can not hear us. What is the mystery about Dan? He is *not* dead—*is* he?"

"No, he is not. He is alive and well—I hope—and somewhere in the city. But for the present at least he is supposed to be dead. All this must be kept an absolute secret."

Drake told the breathless women the chief points of the cañon expedition and its purpose. So tense was their interest and excitement that he had no trouble in keeping back certain aspects of the situation that might prove awkward and complicating. He gave them some idea of the value of the two wonderful jewels, and he related Dan's exploit on the bamboo poles with dramatic effect.

Their excited delight threatened to carry them beyond safe bounds.

"Be careful," he warned, "not to show anything by word or look that may give Garth a hint that Dan is not dead and the gem lost with him. I do not know how much he suspects—you heard him—saw his nasty grin. If he finds out Dan is still aboveground, and thinks he is still in possession of the second diamond, he is able—has the power—to put him out of the way in a moment!

"Everything depends on keeping the whereabouts of that second gem from Garth. Perhaps the lives of more than Wheeler hang upon that one thing, and its hiding-place must be kept a secret—a secret that can not be too closely held. I do not dare to tell a soul—not even you. I have told nobody."

He looked for a second at their dilated eyes and white faces before he added:

"I must ask you moreover to restrain all natural curiosity—not to ask questions about it—not to allude to it. It is hard, but I know you will do it."

"I think Garth suspects," Lina said after some thought, coming to the core of the matter at once, "but that he can not explain the situation to his satisfaction. He may solve the thing at any moment—he is a fiend at guessing, and he may stumble on a clue any time. He will have the city scoured for news of Wheeler. But—" she looked up with a brave smile—"I know Dan Wheeler and Duke Drake—and I have seen you both in a tight place before. I know you will win."

She included Brendon in her smile, and he could not get out a word.

"But wasn't Dan splendid!" She clapped her hands with delight.

"And isn't he—oh, *isn't* he just having the time of his life? Can you imagine anything Dan would love more than the chance he has now to 'mix in,' as he'd call it? If I could have one wish—I'd wish to be Dan Wheeler right now!"

Meeting Brendon's adoring gaze, she had the grace to flush most becomingly, and made toward him a little involuntary movement of reparation. His lordship was clean strain, however. He spoke up with generous enthusiasm that held no tinge of jealous envy.

"Rath-*er*, by Jove! Who wouldn't be Dan Wheeler if he could, don't you know? He's the sort of chap that any fellow admires—the sort to get a——"

He was about to say, "V. C.," but recollecting that he bore that award for courage himself, colored painfully.

"What I mean to say is, you know—he belongs to the knight-errant class—King Arthur and the Round-Table Knights—all that sort of thing, if y'know what I mean?"

"We know!"

Mrs. Sands patted his arm comfortingly.

"We are not likely to forget with examples before us—don't you know!"

She finished with affectionate raillery. She was very fond of Brendon, but did not wish to appear to be pursuing him, for the sake of Lina. She at once reverted to her first inquiry.

"That brings us back to the question before the house—*where* do you suppose Dan is at this moment?"

"I am hoping to get news of him at Lu Yan's," said Drake, "if you can have me ferried across after we have reached Sausalito. And now tell me—" to his daughter—"what has been doing in the social whirl?"

"We have been overwhelmed with attentions—especially from the English and other

naval officers. The *Victoria* and the *Kronprinz* are both in the bay, and there's a big masquerade ball tomorrow night at the hotel. All the officers will be there. But I know you're not interested."

"Not? Aren't we, though?" Drake shot a startled glance at Brendon. "What did the commander of the *Kronprinz* talk about, for instance?"

"He was very anxious to know when you would return—wanted to meet Mr. Garth, I believe—something about—oh, I don't know what!"

"I am afraid I do," said Drake, "and if you will pardon me, I believe I will not go to look over the new house until I have seen Lu Yan. This puts another face on the matter. Brendon will stay here with you."

The pair of lovers were off in a land of their own already, far out of reach of such dry-as-dust matters as the plotting for possession of a pair of gems—luckily unconscious that their very existence depended on the outcome of that uninteresting performance. Ignorance is bliss because it saves a lot of worry.

LU YAN was in his oddly furnished office, surrounded by his clerks and assistants—large, serene-faced Chinamen with the manners of courtiers, quite unlike the laundryman who typifies the race for most of us. The great merchant answered Drake's most pressing question before it was asked—as he took his hand in welcome—in an undertone.

"Yes—Dan is still asleep in his room upstairs. We shall go to my apartments where we shall be undisturbed."

Tranquilly he gave his parting instructions to the attentive staff who accompanied him to the door; bowing him and his honored guest out with fine ceremony before returning to their work.

It seemed to Drake that he had entered a world of tranquillity and contemplation where no hurry or worriment could follow, when he followed his host into the up-stairs apartments and was seated cross-legged like the Buddha.

But Lu Yan was very serious as he gave him the details of Dan's doings, and revealed what he had learned concerning the events of the last four days since the arrival of Drake's letter.

"I had no means of informing you regarding the Twins, and the plot of the pretender and his aids, since Garth had access to the mails," Lu Yan closed his exposition. "It seems that Garth has been offered a great reward—money and a title abroad—for the delivery of the two gems aboard the *Kronprinz*.

"It is enough to buy him body and soul, and the man's head is turned, no doubt, by the prospect of realizing all his ambitions. He will convert all his property into cash and leave the country, the moment he can get his hands upon the other gem."

Lu Yan showed no sign of reproach or of faultfinding, blaming himself as usual.

"That would be all we could ask, if I had not made the mistake of selling him one of the gems," said Drake. "But I had no inkling of the coming of the war-ships—no idea that the matter would be rushed to such a sudden climax—and I had a chance to make a fortune for Brendon. I did it—seized the opportunity to get Garth's claims, and his lordship's fortune is made.

"I hoped to be able to buy back that gem from Garth, after he found that he could not find the mate to it. I intended to deliver the second one to you as I had promised. Then, after it was safely in the hands of your principal—Prince Iotu—and he was safely aboard the *Belle of Nippon* bound for Hong Kong, I expected to get back the first one from Garth. I had no knowledge that the time was so short nor Garth's plan so desperately dangerous. But perhaps that would be the best plan now—I can deliver that second stone to you or the prince within a few hours, if you think best."

Drake lowered his voice almost to a whisper, and Lu Yan hastened to assure him.

"I have sent out all servants—we are alone. No—I should not want to take charge of the gem, even with a strong bodyguard. Garth *is* desperate, and remorseless, and his power is great in this city even yet. The prince agrees with me. He does not want the Twins delivered into his hands even, until after midnight tomorrow night."

"Why?" asked Drake in surprize.

"At that hour the captain of the *Belle of Nippon* will receive him on board his vessel and guarantee to protect both him and the gems. Before that time he can not be prepared, and the chances of robbery would be too great," said Lu Yan.

After some thought he continued:

"I am sure that it is best to keep the hiding-place of the second gem a secret—known only to you, until the moment of delivery—and in the mean time to strive to get possession of the one that Garth has."

"That is the great difficulty," Drake said solemnly.

"It is difficult, but I hope not impossible"—Lu Yan did not look hopeful—"if we can keep Wheeler's existence from coming to the knowledge of Garth. I have only one servant in the house, and his discretion I can depend upon."

"Dan could get that stone from Garth," said Drake, but without faith.

"The prince would not receive it—he believes absolutely that their power would be gone if they returned as they went, by theft," Lu Yan answered.

"Where *is* Dan?" Drake looked round. "I thought I heard some one shout."

There was a sound like a distant wail of distress, coming from down the passage. Lu Yan rose anxiously. The wail rose to a long yammering, howl half-smothered and restrained like the chest-bound cry of a nightmare that makes one's spine crinkle with fear. Then a heavy thump shook the floor and was followed by steps approaching down the passage—barefoot steps.

Dan stood in the door in nightshirt and blanket—rubbing his eyes with one hand and clawing at the elusive blanket with the other.

"That makes six times by actual count," he announced, "and it's a-plenty. The last time I fell *up*, with the cañon on top, spilling water all over, and the walls squeezing my head. I'm going to quit before something happens! He*llo!*—hello! Glad to see you, Drake!"

He stepped inside to get the light out of his eyes, for the afternoon sun struck in through the window.

"I *am* glad to see you!"

He shook hands vigorously and flushed with surprize and pleasure.

"Just wait until I get some pants, will you?"

Drake smiled his rare, slow smile.

"I certainly will—you look good to me, Dan. Last I saw of you, you were on those bamboos in the cañon—you seem to be on them yet! Get into some clothes, since you are so shy—we want your advice."

Dan was already off down the corridor. Presently he reappeared, buttoning as he came, with his curly hair still tousled and making him look about eighteen years old.

"Was that last remark sarcastical?" he asked as he tied his tie before a small mirror in a gold frame, and looked over his shoulder. "I am no good making plans ahead of time—I can do it better on the spot, or afterward."

"This is near enough to being on the spot," Drake answered, "and your schemes always work—that's the point. How are we to get the stone Garth has got, if we can't buy it or steal it?"

"What's the reason we can't steal it?" Dan immediately wanted to know.

"Because the prince won't take it."

"What if he doesn't know?"

"Lu Yan would know, and he won't buy it."

"Hm!"

Dan rubbed the back of his neck thoughtfully. He had asked the first questions mechanically, thinking meanwhile, and now he stood for a minute, staring Buddha in the face, before he flashed his quick half-smile. Then he sobered as quickly and stretched himself with a yawn.

" 'Scuse me! Oh, well—I don't see more than three ways to do it—and mebbe they won't work. Got to get the other side of the question. There are always two sides to a question, you know, and generally a lot more."

Neither man interrupted—for Dan did not talk nonsense in vain.

Wheeler abruptly asked—

"Time is it now?"

"Six—evening."

"You got here at three?—you and Garth?"

"Two-forty."

"Got to rush!"

Dan started for his room, calling to Lu Yan over his shoulder:

"Get the yellow paint—Chinaman again—I hate it!"

"In about an hour or less," he explained to Drake while Lu Yan made up his face, "Garth will be talking to this von Reuter—the commander of the *Kronprinz*—in the office at the Cascade Club, and I got to be listening in the hole over the mantel behind G. Washington. That's the other side I meant. When you don't know what to do—find out what the other fellow is going to do—and fool him!"

Dan winked one eye at Drake, for Lu Yan was penciling the other.

"There's a quotation for you—a brand-new one—just made it!"

Lu Yan finished—Dan got up and looked down at his legs with distaste.

"I always did hate this scenery—makes me feel foolish—glad Brendon isn't here to see these pants. I couldn't say a word about his breeches—you know—my word! Sure you don't want that spark stolen? I can bring it back in *my* pants. By Henry, there *ain't* no pocket—that's the limit! Well, so long!"

"Why did we let him go?"

Lu Yan looked at Drake hopelessly.

"I shall not know a peaceful moment until he returns," he added.

"Nor I," said Drake. "But I don't know any better plan than his new quotation, and Dan always makes good. I will wait here, if you don't mind. Of course he took his gun—the one I sent him?"

"Yes—he never lets it out of his hand—as you directed."

"That's right. Well, we can only wait," Drake sighed.

"It is delightful not to have to wait alone," Lu Yan sighed also.

DAN got into the club-house unseen—or unrecognized—and got into the up-stairs hall between the rooms occupied by the employees. Here he ran into Brenner—just coming out of his room to go to supper. Brenner was not surprized this time.

"That you, Wheeler? What's up?"

"Sh-h!"

Dan hushed him with a look at the transoms.

"What's this I hear about Garth selling out—this afternoon?"

"How did you hear? He only told me an hour ago. Yes, he wants to sell—lock, stock, and barrel. Something is going to break; soon!"

"Garth down-stairs in the office?"

"Yes—Commander von Reuter with him—five minutes ago. I just came up for my hat——"

But Dan was in the linen-closet and the door had closed behind him.

Brenner shook his head hopelessly and went to supper.

Dan made cautious haste to the little door behind the mantel picture—gently opened it a crack to listen and see.

"No."

The first word he overheard was in Garth's whispery, treacherous voice.

"Drake is one of these fools that can't tell a lie straight. He is deep and clear-headed, and can't be scared—a hard man to handle—but he doesn't know how to lie. A regular G. Washington!"

Dan shrank as he saw Garth look up at the picture. He thanked his luck that Garth was near-sighted.

"Then what is the explanation?" The heavy voice had a slight burr.

"Same old answer to the impossible riddle—the boy lied! This time the truthful Drake did lie, and it was a keen move. He knows I am a character-reader and he figured that a simple lie would fool me better than anything else. And he was right—it puzzled me a long time—but I finally worked it out by inference and exclusion.

"It was the only possibility, and after I got it solidly fixed, all the facts fitted. I've got him dead to rights! You can be sure as death that I will have both the gems—and what I want besides—on board the *Kronprinz* tomorrow night! So be sure to have steam up and ready."

"I don't see—I should like to be as sure as you are yourself," said the heavy, obstinate voice, "so that I may be prepared in case of accident."

Dan blessed the German thoroughness that insisted on an explanation, and listened intently.

"It is so rich I hate to share it! But listen—here it is in a nutshell. They think I believe Wheeler dead and the stone lost—the fools. Well, let them think so. They think, the other stone being lost, that I will sell the one I have. Well, I will. Then they expect to deliver the gems to Prince Iotu aboard the *Belle of Nippon* after midnight, Friday night.

"I have told you how I have the boat fixed. I may let part of them get away before the explosion, but the safest way is to blow them all up but the girl, and bring her with me aboard the *Kronprinz*. They will never know—these fools in town here—that I didn't go up with the rest, until it is too late to do anything about it. You see how easy it is—and how simple."

"But why destroy the whole party? It might lead to international complications," von Reuter objected.

"You do not appear—nobody can prove

I went aboard by agreement, even if your boat should pick me up in plain sight of other craft. You will simply be engaged in humanitarian life-saving," Garth urged.

"But why take those chances of complications? You can get the stones by simply forcing them to give them up—without injuring the prince or young Brendon. If you get the men Wheeler and Drake, it ought to satisfy you, and it could be made to seem accidental. I don't want any chance of international complications." Obstinately persistent.

"There is another reason—since you insist."

Garth was annoyed but suave.

"I propose to force the prince to aid me in the matter of the Secret Order without a Name."

Again the startled hush. It seemed minutes, but was perhaps ten seconds before von Reuter said—

"Will you repeat that last sentence?"

"In the matter of the Order That Is Not—perhaps that is how you think of it—or the Order That Acts without Any Name."

"I refuse absolutely and finally to be in any way associated with the enterprize, onless you *gif me your vord*," the burr becoming thicker with excitement, "that you vill haf noding vatever to do vith this prince—or vith Brendon, or vith the crazy matter you last mentionet!"

And Dan could hear the puff of exhaled breath.

"Then you are afraid of it too?" said Garth with a short laugh.

"I know of no such foolishness—you seem to be *in*-sane—*verruckt!* If dere is further talk of dis supject, I sail from dis port *at vonce!*"

"All right—all right—have it your way! I am not unreasonable. But listen—if there is nothing but craziness to it—why are you all so scared of it?"

"I tolt you that one more mention and——"

"I beg your pardon—I won't do it again—we will cut out that feature. Otherwise the plan is the same, unless I give notice of change to Number Two. Is that all?"

"I see no oder opjection!" stiffly. "*Auf Wiederseh'n!*"

"So long!"

Garth laughed after the officer had gone; put his feet on the desk and looked up at G. Washington. "That was funny; wasn't it, George? If he knew I lied to him he vould sail at *vonce!* The whole thing is —— funny—funnier than you know, George!"

At that moment Dan thought he had never hated the man so well. It was not because he intended to break his promise to the German commander of the *Kronprinz*—not because the plan he had just heard involved his own slaughter—it was simply because it was Garth, and he was Dan Wheeler and there was a predestined antipathy between them that meant no truce this side of extermination.

Garth was looking about the small office. In one corner was an old-fashioned iron safe—very thick and fire-proof, but easy for any cracksman—not used for anything more valuable than the account-books of the club. As Garth's eyes fell on it it gave him an idea. Without a word he cast a furtive glance behind him to make sure the door was closed into the hall, then took the leather roll containing the precious diamond from an inner pocket and locked it in the safe.

Dan saw the move and its reason. No box-man would look there for a very valuable gem, and it was safe from fire. But how easy it would be for him, with a duplicate of that key in his pocket, to put that diamond where it would be still safer! But Lu Yan's principal would not take it on those terms—it wouldn't do.

Now what next? Would it pay to hang around and watch Garth any longer—with all this explosive information in his possession? Wouldn't Lu Yan and Drake sit up when he told them Garth was wise to their scheme and had a plan to checkmate them? And such a plan! Moreover, it would prove the wisdom of his own move—to find out what the other fellow was up to, and fool him!

That was all they had to do now—to spoil Garth's plan. And the sooner he could get to his two waiting friends the better. He was just starting to crawl back when a voice in the office—speaking to Garth—stopped him.

"See here, Garth, this is the finish!"

It was the voice of Ardmore. Dan peeped and saw the man's face, white with anger, and perhaps with fear. His voice shook, and the bank-notes in his hand shook rapidly.

"See those notes, Garth?" he went on in a strained, high key. "They just came over your roulette-table—paid out—the first

when the game started this afternoon. They are marked, and they are my money! A porch-climber took 'em from my cash-box last night—he said half of it went to you—and this ain't the first time. You rob the bulls—the bulls rob us—the crooks rob us—and you rob us all while you claim to give us protection. No use denying it—I got you cold!"

The man's voice rose with his confidence as Garth only smiled, but now Garth leaned forward and silenced him by simply ceasing to smile.

"Have I denied anything, James?"

He asked it sweetly—too sweetly—and Ardmore began to shake again.

"What are you hollering about, James?" Garth purred on. "I deny nothing—I don't like your voice, James, and I have heard enough."

"You don't bluff me any longer," Ardmore shouted. "And there are others in the same fix—this is the last time."

"You are right! This is your last speech to me—if you are in sight when I count three you will rest beneath the daisies, James—the snowy, snowy daisies!"

Garth thrust forward his smiling face—the smile drawn to a snarl—as he half-sang the sickish refrain of the old song to the last words. The effect was ghastly—emphasized by the gun that Garth suddenly put against Ardmore's stomach.

"I hate to spoil this carpet, Ardmore. One—two—good-by!"

Ardmore had fairly leaped backward, fallen over a chair and scrambled through the door that Garth sprang to open for him—gun still in hand. It was not ludicrous, for Ardmore had saved his life by only a split second. Garth would have fired at the word three without thinking of the consequences—but that comes a bit later. Garth shut the office door.

Ardmore almost ran to the stair-head, but stopped to look after the lone man who had just mounted the stairs and was making straight for Garth's office. He had recognized Scotty the Crimp—and Scotty's wolfish face was not pleasant.

It might be interesting—if profitless—to speculate on the possible results that would have followed if Ardmore had decided to go on down the stairs instead of tiptoeing back to listen at the office door.

But back he went, to hear the finish of Scotty's peroration, interrupted by Garth.

"Get out now, Scotty—while you are alive!"

Ardmore outside shivered at the tone—it was Garth's homicidal wheeze—he was still more deadly than when Ardmore had scrambled from the office. Ardmore started again for the stairs just as Scotty burst through the door backward.

After him came Garth—half-crouching—his never failing Colt level at his hip, his face grinning and mouthing like an ape's.

Scotty passed Ardmore in the hall, driven by the terror born of a close look into Garth's fearsome face.

Garth saw Ardmore—flattened against the wall—start to run after Scotty. As the first frightened dart of his prey sets loose the tiger's spring, this movement set off Garth, and he fired from the hip—once.

The gun crashed just as Ardmore approached the stair-head—he seemed to pause—he threw up both hands—bent backward, throwing his stomach to the front—then apparently hurled himself down the stairs with desperate abandon. But what landed at the bottom was a limp and lifeless body that slid onto Scotty's flying heels as he sprinted for the door.

At the hearing before a hastily summoned grand jury it was found that the bullet entered at the back of the neck and came out through the mouth—yet the verdict was justifiable homicide—self-defense!

For Garth's machine was still functioning, in spite of louder rumblings and complaints. There is no doubt, however, that the episode hastened the movement to form the Committee of Safety.

Dan waited in the office until he had heard a short interview between Garth and Brenner, who was one of the first on the ground after the shooting. The hallway had been filled with men the next instant, all of them as early as Brenner, but Brenner was practically the only witness called at the hearing.

In his listening-post Dan heard Garth tell Brenner what he—Brenner—had seen. After he had got his instructions well impressed on his employee, Garth turned easily to another matter.

"Brenner, I told you I would give you a commission on any sale you would steer my way—within twenty-four hours. I only mentioned real estate at the time, but the same thing applies to a very valuable diamond I want to sell—a green diamond—and sell quick!

"Moreover, there is five thousand in it for any man that will remove a certain person who is in the city, but who is reported to be dead. That's all. The hearing is set for eight o'clock—don't forget what you saw."

And Garth left the office himself.

As Dan made his way up to the linen-closet he told himself:

"Garth is certainly cleaning up quick—he intends to make a clean sweep before to-morrow night; but why did he tell Brenner that?"

He later specified:

"Telling Brenner five thousand for taking me off the earth! Did he expect Brenner to take his little old gat and go get him a mess of Dan Wheelers? He did *not!* He was just obfuscating the issue. He is going to do his own rat-killing—he thinks! Let him think!"

In the upper hall he ran into Drake, who saw him with a sigh of relief.

"You were gone so long I couldn't stand it any longer. I came to see if Garth had discovered your rat-hole and smothered you in it."

"I never thought of that—he might."

Dan paused thoughtfully. His cue had slipped as usual and the effect was quaint. He suddenly remembered:

"But *we* are all right! It's easy now—Garth is wise to the whole thing except that we're onto *him!* He's laughing himself sick."

"What do you mean? He knows you are alive, and the stone not lost?"

"And that you are going to buy back the other one," Dan nodded. "And he is going to let you do it—get his hands on all the cash he can scrape together. Then—just before the steamer sails—day after tomorrow night—he's going to capture the whole outfit on the way across the bay—Prince Iotu, the Twins, Miss Lina and the rest of us.

"He is going to take the Twins and Miss Lina aboard the *Kronprinz* and off they go! The rest of us on the *Lina W.* I understand he intends to blow up—just for a sort of fireworks—grand-stand finish! Ain't he sweet?"

"He would do it! He *could* do it—" Drake was white-lipped—"if you had not discovered it in time. It is so simple—so simply savage and impossible—that nobody but Garth would have framed it."

As the frightful picture rose before him, Drake had to control his voice as he said—"But we ought to be able to block it now."

"Easy! Get the Senator and Lu Yan into action—and have Brendon go to the commander of the *Victoria,*" said Dan. "They are next-door neighbors or something over-across—look!"

He interrupted himself eagerly.

"The commander of the *Kronprinz* is leery of mixing it with the British Government, but nobody gives a hoot what the U. S. says. Why not have the wedding tomorrow or next day. That would spike one of their guns anyway."

"I don't imagine they would care to kidnap Lady Brendon," Drake reflected. "But I am not sure the couple are——?"

"Don't know they're going to marry?" Dan chipped in crisply. "But we do, and we'll tell 'em. See? What's the use fooling along?"

"Not any—you'll tell 'em," said Drake.

"Who—me?!" Dan exploded.

Then with blanching cheeks—

"Well, I can do it!"

Then with a look down at his "scenery"—

"I see myself doing it!"

Drake laughed—a thing that happened once in a blue moon, and took his arm.

"I didn't mean it. I will do it. But you go tell Lu Yan and I'll see the Senator. There is the mine business to be settled, and the Senator will buy Garth out. All we have to do then is to block Garth's piracy plot and arrange for the wedding. It does look as if you had solved the problem and ended our troubles—if we make no mistake."

"I told you it was easy," said Dan. "Find out the other fellow's game and beat him to it!"

He added:

"Better not come with me—so long!"

Dan hurried back to Lu Yan, who would be uneasy until he appeared, and ruminated thus:

"That settles Brendon. Just let me get a liking for anybody and he goes and gets himself shot, or hanged, or married—but this *is* so sudden! Well—variety is the mother of action, and action is all the difference between a stiff and a live one. Gimme action!"

With his cue askew he darted along the narrow streets, fairly boiling over with life and vitality. There was plenty of activity in prospect—and the world was bright. If only there were a little scrap round the corner—just for exercise.

A truck-driver at a crossing swore at him with a felicity that bespoke real spirit, and

Dan was tempted. A cued Chink trimming a drayman in an alley had its artistic possibilities, but Dan waved his cue at the husky mick and sprinted on.

Within half an hour he had told his story to the merchant. Lu Yan was all wonder and congratulation.

"Truly you are favored of fortune," said he. "In all my days I have never witnessed your equal for activity or courageous spirit."

"I can't blush in these clothes—who ever saw a Chinaman blush? How do you account for that?" asked Dan. "And look! Why can't I shed this make-up now? Garth knows I'm on the job—he'll have spies watching this house. How about that?"

"I can provide an efficient body-guard," said Lu Yan gravely. "It is a thing I have never been forced to do before, but the means are at hand, and you must remember that a price is set upon your head."

"Don't bother," said Dan carelessly.

But he knew how thorough and reliable were the tong hatchet-men and gunmen. They were not picturesque or graceful in their methods, but wonderfully "efficient" as Lu Yan said—especially within the bounds of Chinatown. He was touched by Lu Yan's solicitude, especially as the merchant went on:

"Also, since Garth has offered five thousand for your 'removal' I shall let it be known that double that amount will be the reward of frustrating the attempt by removing the remover."

Wheeler looked in the serious face for signs of humor, but it was not there. He reflected that in Chinatown this thing was not only possible but commonplace. Not even a tong thug would attempt to ring in a spurious corpse and collect the reward—they were scrupulously honest. He would be safe at Lu Yan's—that was certain, and uninteresting.

"But I have got to do *something!*" he protested complainingly. "I can't sit here with What's-His-Name and think myself to sleep"—looking at Buddha. "And don't waste any good money on a cheap yegg—if anybody tries to collect Garth's five thou, he'll be welcome to what he gets."

He finished with a grim set of his cleft chin.

"We might pay a ceremonial call on the prince across the bay," Lu Yan suggested. "I think I could get his consent."

"*Gosh!* No!" Dan jumped. "I'd rather climb the cañon again—and besides he's so particular about coming in contact with anything or anybody. I am too of-the-earth, earthy! There I draw the line—right there!"

"He suggested it himself," said Lu Yan wistfully. "He would send a formal request if he thought it would be welcome."

"Request! Hm! He'll have to send a few cattlemen—good ropers—and I'd give 'em a battle, at that," said Dan. "No, sir—not unless *you* make a point of it yourself."

"I shall not do that," Lu Yan said after reflection. "I do not dare to interfere with your movements. I believe I share the belief—you would call it superstition—of the prince."

"What's that?" asked Dan. "About what?"

"About you."

"Go on!

Dan was incredulous.

"He has been fully informed of your movements, and he charges all of us—those working in his interest—not to influence you in any way. He believes the fortunes of the Twins to be bound up with yours, and that you are a predestined instrument for their return—also that you are under their protection."

"They may be big medicine, but—as I said before—give *me* the gun!"

Dan touched his faithful companion.

"*But* we'll try to deliver the goods."

Then restlessly:

"*But* that doesn't answer the question—what am I to do all tomorrow? I got to have a job to keep me out of mischief."

After a moment in thought:

"What does this prince look like—much tinted—very dark?"

"Just about your coloring—and with the same colored eyes."

Dan blinked for a moment and wrinkled his nose. He was evidently surprized.

"That being the case," he said deliberately, "wait till I change my make-up and we'll go take a look at him."

"You are a most engaging youth," said Lu Yan with a smile, "and you will never regret it."

Dan was always reticent about that visit, but one could gather that he was surprized to find the prince so much like white folks. Simple and boyish in manner, he made a hit with Dan at sight. Although flanked by

two turbaned, dignified and bearded counselors and guardians, he talked to Dan in excellent English, going at once to the point that interested him.

"I have heard the story of your feat in the rock cañon—it was a feat of great courage and strength. You must be very proud. Were you much fatigued by the—what is the word—*shock*—the terror?"

"I went to sleep on the rock-shelf, in a second," said Dan.

"And now you have conquered another fear! It is good—is it not?"

And they grinned at each other with understanding.

"Another thing for your comfort."

The prince turned to say a few words in what Dan called "heathen" to his counselors, who at once left them alone—Lu Yan going out with them—before he resumed:

"Please say nothing in answer to what I tell you—you understand?"

Gravely, like a boy repeating a solemn rite, he waited for Dan's nod and went on:

"You will be given the aid of a Power That Acts, and exists only in action. I am told that this is in accord with your nature and your faith, and it is well. Your aid will be in proportion to your merit, your merit measured by your actions and your silence. Raise your right hand."

In a sort of "trance" as Dan termed it, Wheeler raised his hand. The prince placed his own flat against it—palm to palm—while he whispered in Dan's ear three words that nobody else ever heard before or since. That sounds foolish, but they are Wheeler's exact words—the words he used in telling all that he ever could tell of the incident—and he added that nobody could ever know or guess them. It was very disappointing as a piece of reportorial work. But thereafter it was noticeable that Dan never alluded to anything resembling a secret order—or the Order That Is Not—so it would seem that such descriptive terms come from the mouths of outsiders only.

He noted that when the two counselors and Lu Yan returned they preserved the silence of a reverent solemnity. His description was:

"They acted as if I was being married or buried or something, and I was so tongue-tied myself that when the prince tied one of his counselors to me like a tin can to a dog's tail for the next day and a half I never even thought of making a kick. All I knew about it is what I am telling you."

And that was that; for the next day one of the prince's bearded companions hardly let Wheeler out of his sight. He returned with him and Lu Yan to the home of the latter, where he was an honored and self-effacing guest.

After the first hour, during which Dan was embarrassed to find the large, dark eyes fixed on him steadily, he got to the point where he forgot the man's presence a greater part of the time. Dan always insisted that the dignified Oriental hypnotized him into believing he was not there.

One reason for his belief that he was hypnotized was that he was seized that evening by a heavy drowsiness that he did not succeed in shaking off. The strain and loss of sleep on his cañon trip was the real reason, no doubt, together with the suggestive influence of the sympathetic remark of the prince—that he must have been weary from reaction after the shock.

Anyhow he became so dull and sleepy early in the evening soon after his return from the call on the prince, that he went to an early bed and slept late into the next forenoon.

This, the day just finished was Wednesday. The day when the *Belle of Nippon* was to sail, when the jewels were to be delivered to the prince aboard ship—and when Garth had planned to blow up the *Lina W.*—was the next but one—Friday. The big ball was set for Thursday night.

CHAPTER XIV

DURING his breakfast, which he took with Lu Yan, who had waited for him to wake, Wheeler was informed that a part of his day was disposed of in advance. He was formally invited, requested and ordered to appear at the house of the Sands. He had not yet set foot therein, and he was threatened by divers penalties if he did not do so at once—and cause the other foot to follow forthwith. The invitation was worded:

"Since you have officially, if not publicly, come to life, you are summoned to appear before us, your friends—to be subjected to certain punishments in the form of surprizes, pleasant or otherwise deponent saith not."

Signed by Annette Sands.

But it was his lordship who met him at the

float and administered the first surprize.

"We'll give you the worst one first, old chap!"

He seized and wrung Dan's hand with such a grip and such a beaming face that Dan did not need to look over Brendon's shoulder at the blushing face behind him.

"Shucks!" said Dan. "It's a fizzle—I knew it yesterday."

"But we didn't know it ourselves until last night," Brendon protested. "I say, you know!"

"Well, what d'you expect when you're in love?" Dan retorted. "You won't be more than half-witted for a year or so yet. Everybody else knew it long ago—all but you two."

"But the wedding is to be tomorrow, and we sail on the *Belle of Nippon* with the prince," Brendon confided, expecting to see incredulous surprize on Wheeler's face at such indecent haste.

But Dan's instant response was:

"I don't take any stock in long engagements. What's the matter with today?"

It appeared there were various mysteries that made that impossible. But the bride-to-be wanted the privilege of attempting the second surprize on the way across the bay in the *Lina W.*

"You know you brought out something from the Gold Cave in the canon—in the leather roll," she began as if it were a matter of no importance.

"Yes. Did it turn out to be ore?" Dan asked instantly.

"You are the most disappointing person to surprize I ever saw!" Lina protested, her face falling pathetically. "I refuse to tell you any more about it."

"But that's enough," said Dan. "Great luck! It means a lot more value and bigger money for your future husband. Congratulate you both!"

"Thanks—but that is not the point. You don't deserve it." Lina turned away in displeasure that was partly real.

"You can tell him," she said to the Englishman.

"The point is, don't you know," said Brendon with a wink at Dan, "we agreed that half the increase in value ought to go to you—since you were the discoverer of the new vein of ore. We don't know just how much it will be—take time for analyses and all that—but it will be several thousands at least."

"Moses! But what would I be doing with several thousand dollars? I'd lose it in—" Dan was protesting when Brendon broke in:

"Not dollars—pounds! And you can have it in stock in the new company if you like. And why not? It's yours just as fairly as the money paid to the man who discovered the first vein—and you earned it a lot more dangerously. I'd take it in your place, really."

And he meant it.

"Well, perhaps," Dan considered, "I will take it if her ladyship says it's all right."

"Certainly it's all right," her ladyship responded warmly, turning her most brilliant smile on Dan. "It should all be yours by rights—all that you discovered. Discovery-rights are all the rights a prospector has when he makes a strike, but his right to the price he gets is never questioned. In this case it will cost money to get out the ore, so—yes, I should say a half is the least you ought to have."

"That settles it—I'm a bloated mine-owner. For I shall take it in stock, so I won't lose it all the first night," Dan decided on the instant.

He was lionized and shown over the delightful new home the Senator had just moved into, and it would seem that there was every reason why he should be a care-free young man. But after dinner he found it hard to be even politely agreeable. He was in the viselike grip of one of his spells of moody silence, when it was physical pain to speak and impossible to think of anything to say. At such times he had learned that he must get away by himself or be allowed to sulk it out—no matter how much he might wish to please, he would only open his mouth, like the fabled Irishman, to put his foot in it.

Drake and the Senator had come in time for dinner, fresh from buying out Garth's real-estate—the hotel and the club-house. They had also settled up the mine business and were feeling satisfied with the world in general. After they had finished at table the Senator said:

"Brendon, you are the only one we can spare to the ladies. We want Wheeler to talk over some business matters."

"Are you going to keep him all the afternoon?" his wife asked.

"No—oh, no. We'll fix things in a few minutes," he answered absently.

"Come on, Dan."

Wheeler followed Drake and Sands to a shady pergola in the grounds, where the two older men proceeded to finish some details of organization and stock-issues that were Greek to Dan. Finally the Senator turned to Dan, his face lighting up.

"Well, Wheeler—thanks to you we have got that business settled up. Drake is going to buy back the other stone from Garth this afternoon, and we think we have fixed things so that Garth's crazy piratical expedition for tomorrow night will run on the rocks.

"It looks as if we had got things fixed about right all round—it looks to me as if Garth had given up that fool scheme, if he ever had it. I don't see any reason why you should keep in hiding any longer. I heard Garth telling some young fellows at the club that your death was a false rumor, and that it was a joke on him."

The Senator's manner was that of a world manager, who arranges the affairs of the universe before breakfast, as an appetizer. He added—

"The young folks all want to go to the big masquerade ball at the club-house tonight, and I don't see any reason why you shouldn't go if you want to—do you?"

Dan knew that his feeling of being left out of it was childish—and it made him all the more bitter. He was half in earnest when he said:

"No—I don't see that it makes any difference what I do! One thing I do know—I don't want any of your mine-money or mining-stock."

The glint in his greenish eyes was hard and steely—his thin, sensitive lips set in a cruel line.

"Wha—why—but, Mr. Wheeler—Dan, you don't understand—"

The Senator stammered as he got the full, benumbing gaze from Dan's narrowed lids.

"I know I don't! I don't pretend to. I've done my circus-act—played clown—now run away and play! In other words: 'You're through and paid off. Git!' I don't have to be kicked out twice in the same place!"

Dan got up and started for the boat-landing without any hat. The Senator had sat paralyzed for some seconds, but he now got up to follow Dan with words of sincere apology on his lips. Drake caught his arm.

"Don't try to talk to him now—you'll only make it worse," said Drake.

"Then you go. He must not think that we——"

"You can't stop him thinking, or help a bit until he has had time to think it over and cool down. He will be more ashamed of it than you could be," Drake explained sadly. "But it is serious—I don't like it."

"But what did I do?" Sands protested. "I didn't do anything."

"Very little—you didn't quite recognize his existence until you suggested that he was at liberty to go to the ball if he wanted to. You didn't even suggest that he go with our party. No—you didn't do anything!"

"Great Gideon!" with measureless horror. "I never thought—I was thinking of him as one of the family all the time. We shall be in a sweet mess if he quits us!"

"We shall," said Drake. "Worse than you know."

"But he ought to have more sense."

The Senator showed signs of reviving pugnacity.

"Sense enough to know this is where he belongs—as much his home as——"

"Certainly!" Drake broke in. "Especially the first time he ever set foot in your house."

"Unh!"

The Senator made a noise as if somebody had kicked him in the stomach, and sat down hard.

"What can we do? He wouldn't sell out to Garth while he is feeling sore?"

Drake thought it wholesome discipline to say with a shrug:

"You couldn't blame him if he did. We may be able to fix the thing up—but I have got to see Garth at the club-house and buy that diamond."

He got up, looking at his watch.

"I will try to explain things to Dan before the masquerade, some time this evening. I can't promise to bring him round—he doesn't get over a spell like this in a minute."

"Then, as a parting shot:

"If Dan leaves us, we're done! I can't stop to explain, but you may take my word for that!"

The Senator passed one of the hardest afternoons of his busy life. For an hour he sat miserably reviewing the events of the last week, and weighing the possibilities of the two days to come; and his summing up was—

"I'd give all I possess if it were tomorrow night and we were all out of this scrape."

CROSSING the bay on the *Lina W.*, Drake was in doubt as to speaking to Wheeler about the Senator. He watched the hard cameo-profile set toward the city ahead, and formed and rejected several set speeches. At last he said impulsively, just before landing at the city side:

"See us through, Dan—we're gone if you don't, and I am getting scared. Things are *too* smooth!"

Wheeler flashed one keen look into the honest gray eyes that never lied and looked away without a word or change of feature.

Drake started at once for the Regal in search of Garth, and Wheeler turned toward Chinatown. A few steps from the float he met the bearded Brahmin, and it flashed over him that the mysterious counselor had not accompanied him across the bay. He spoke to him, breaking his hour-long silence—

"You did not follow me?"

"I was here—between you and the peril that threatens."

The dark eyes looked toward the city as the man added casually:

"The hour approaches. It is written."

Something prompted Wheeler to say—

"Tomorrow night, you mean?"

"No. Then it will be past," said the priest solemnly. "When you see tomorrow's sun rise all will be fulfilled as it was written in the beginning."

With the shiver that ran up his back Dan felt this demon letting go his hold upon him. He hurried to Lu Yan's, followed by his shadow. He was again headed for action.

Lu Yan was out, having left word that he would soon return, but Dan was in a hurry—it was getting toward evening and he was more and more sure of his hunch that something was going to break—and break soon.

In spite of his distaste for it, he hurried into his laundryman make-up, aided by the Brahmin with his face-fixing. He was going to try to listen in from behind G. Washington in Garth's office, and he did not see where his turbaned companion was to get into the picture.

"I am going where you can't follow without attracting attention to me."

He couldn't speak anything but plain English to this dignified person.

"It is well," said the priest with a submissive bow. "I shall not hinder nor influence your movements."

And on the way to the club-house Dan got a glimpse of the white turban but once, and that was just before darting into the alley to the rear entrance. He had no time to spare for his counselor, but he had to admit that he was onto his job.

Brenner was not in his room, and Wheeler hurried into the closet—down the narrow, dark steps to the door behind the mantel-picture. He heard Garth's voice at once, and cautiously opened the lifting door a crack, knowing that Garth's near-sighted eyes would not see the movement.

"You fooled me a while, Drake," Garth was saying with his insolent and challenging smile, "and you have played a good game. You figured that I would sell the diamond when I found I couldn't get the mate to it, and you win. I will sell it to you—deliver it right now."

While Garth went to the safe to get the leather roll containing the case with its precious contents Drake looked up at the picture over the mantel. Dan opened the trap a bit wider and wiggled the end of his cue through the crack to assure Drake he was there. Drake nodded his satisfaction—Dan was still with him.

"You can look at it."

Garth handed Drake the roll, and while he opened it to make sure the gem was there, Garth went on—

"You can have it for fifty thousand—and that's cheap."

"Fair enough."

Drake held up the flaming gem to the light for a moment before replacing it in the roll.

"Put it back in the safe—it's a good place, and we take possession tomorrow morning."

Garth smiled to himself as he put back the gem, while Drake counted the price in bank-notes—surprized that Garth had not asked twice the sum.

But as he took the money Garth searched Drake's face keenly.

"You're a deep one, Drake. I thought you'd grab it and run—what are you up to now?"

"And I thought you'd hold me up for twice the price—I came prepared to pay it."

Drake met Garth's gaze coldly.

"But I am making you no present—either cash or information—and I shall play the game out with no favors. Are you sport enough to meet me half-way? Have you got a pack of cards here?"

"No. But there are plenty just across the hall, in the gaming-room."

Garth looked into Drake's blank face with suspicious inquiry.

"I will throw you a cold poker-hand to see whether I pay you the other fifty thousand or get the diamond for nothing—doubles or quits. Are you on?"

"Yes," Garth said after a moment. "Come on."

He stepped to the door, and behind his back Drake signaled to Dan to get the gem from the safe while they were out of the room. At the same time he was saying to Garth:

"Lock this door while we're out—I am taking no unnecessary chances."

"We shall be where we can see it all the time," said Garth, and again: "What are you up to? I don't see why you don't take it with you if you are——"

His voice became muffled as he withdrew from the door, but he had set the spring-lock.

Dan hurried down from the mantel, muttering to himself:

"He didn't know I had my keys. I might have gummed his game—whatever his game is. I don't believe he knows what he is up to. No wonder he's got Garth guessing. Maybe that is it—to get Garth rattled. It looks fishy to me—looks as if Drake's foot has slipped—but I'm not supposed to do any brain-work."

As he muttered to himself, however, he was using the duplicate key and taking the leather roll from the safe. Putting it safely inside his loose Chinaman's frock and his vest underneath, he was back in his cubby-hole before Garth's key rattled in the door.

"You win this time," Garth was repeating as he entered. "But luck always turns some time. Here's your money."

"Thank you."

Drake pocketed the roll of notes he had given the other man just a few minutes before. Garth, meantime studying his face intently, asked—

"Aren't you going to take the roll with you?"

"No."

Drake turned to the door.

"Not now."

"Shall I see you at the ball tonight?" Garth asked, as if to make talk. "It is my farewell appearance, you know. I am leaving town for good in the morning."

"I expect to be there," said Drake. "So long."

He left the office without another word.

Garth stood in the office, alone, motionless, listening acutely. Presently he sat down.

"I expected he'd come back and get it," he said half aloud. "He's up to something. Why did he want this door locked?"

There was another moment of silence. Suddenly he started from his chair, so suddenly that his feet slipped on the carpet. He hurriedly unlocked the door of the safe—looked in the top drawer—then pawed through the others. As he straightened up, Dan got a glimpse of his face, pale and anxious, and heard him curse under his breath.

Without an instant's hesitation Wheeler beat a quick retreat—up to the linen-closet and into the upper hall. One of the bedrooms here was Brenner's—he had an idea it was the one whose door stood ajar—and he stepped inside. He peered through the crack on the hinge side of the door until he saw the linen-closet door open part way—watched Garth poke his head through, look along the empty hall, then withdraw his head and shut the door. At last Garth had found the secret getaway passage that had served him—Wheeler—so well. That was the end of *that!* Again Dan muttered and growled under his breath as he made his way out of the building.

"Now he *has* done it! *I* may be a fool—but there are others!"

He was referring to Drake, the astute gambler and diplomat, but that was not what he called him in his mumbling discontent.

But there were things to be done now—lots of things. He first looked all along the dark alley for the Brahmin's white turban. It was barely in sight—in a dark doorway. Dan raised a hand and beckoned—the man came swiftly.

"Take this to Lu Yan quickly—it is valuable.

"Yes. One of the Twins," he added.

The priest's dark face lighted, and he made a profound salutation before he touched the leather roll. Then he hid it in his robe and went away from there with a speed that aroused Dan's admiration.

"Some sprinter for his age!" he remarked as the turban vanished. "He will get to Lu Yan before Drake does. Well, they've got 'em both now—if they can hang onto them

until tomorrow night. And *that's* where the shoe pinches—'Aye, there's the rub'—and it will be a rub that'll take some hide off, or I'm a Hindu!"

As he could see trouble thickening ahead, however, Wheeler was coming out of his fit of the sulks. He didn't care to see Sands yet, and he was vexed with Drake's doings, but he must see Lu Yan—as soon as he had got a few words with Brenner.

CHAPTER XV

DRAKE and the Brahmin arrived at Lu Yan's abode almost at the same instant. The leather roll had hardly been delivered by the bearded priest with reverent ceremony when Drake's knock was heard at the door below. As the latter entered the room Lu Yan welcomed him with suppressed delight:

"You have succeeded, then—you have both in your possession? Indeed the faith of the prince was well founded. You will no longer laugh at his beliefs, for all the prophecies are about to be fulfilled."

"You notice I didn't bring them both myself," said Drake, smiling slightly. "That looks as if I took some stock in the notion that it's not safe to have them both at once."

"Was that your reason?" Lu Yan asked seriously.

But without waiting for an answer he turned to the priest.

"Where is Wheeler? Is he safe?"

"He is safe, and on the way hither," was the instant answer.

The speaker withdrew into himself and into the corner of the room at the same time.

Drake's expression of satisfaction disappeared at Lu Yan's question.

He spoke out frankly:

"I am worried about Wheeler. He is offended with the Senator, and he is in one of his silent spells. I don't know what to do about it, and I am afraid he will do something reckless."

"How did it befall?" Lu Yan asked almost in a whisper.

Drake was telling of the flare-up at the Senator's when Dan's step was heard on the stairs. He entered and flashed a look about the room that took in all three men and their expressions. Then he said to Lu Yan in his accustomed tone of almost affectionate friendliness—almost a filial affection:

"That's the last time I wear this outfit anyhow. I am going to the big ball tonight in a different make-up."

Drake let out an almost audible sigh of relief as he hastened to say:

"Then you are all right again, Dan? The Senator was very much hurt this afternoon—he thought you understood that he wanted you to make his home yours, and it never occurred——"

"That's another thing altogether!" Dan interrupted sharply. "I am going to the ball all by my lone self, and not tagging after anybody. The Senator needn't worry about me—I'll take care of myself. I can do it—at least as well as you and he have done up to date. What did you want to throw the game for? Garth has a walk-over now!"

"What do you mean?"

Drake stood up uneasily.

"We were through with the secret passage, if that's what you mean, and I thought it best to throw Garth off the scent. He doesn't know now whether I am carrying the gem I just bought from him or not. And moreover——"

He stopped and his mouth dropped open. Dan took it up where Drake left off. His tone cut like a knife.

"Yes—exactly! Moreover—what does he do? He sits down and figures it out; finds the passage I got out by. Then what does he do? He sits down again and does some remembering! He goes over all he has said and all he has framed up in that room. He knows we are wise to his plan for tomorrow night—so he'll change that plan!

"So you see it now, do you? It's about time! What are you going to do now?"

Drake dropped on the couch again—his face in his hands—and sat so long that the other three became uneasy.

Dan showed no mercy, however, but said still more cuttingly:

"Your flourish of throwing that cold hand won you fifty thousand—and may lose you your life along with some others. It was a great stroke—I congratulate you, *Mr.* Drake! Shall I have the pleasure of seeing you at the ball? I take off my cue to *you!*"

He dragged off his cue and false scalp with a flourish, and passed out to go to his room.

Lu Yan had listened in silence and with growing alarm.

"What is this concerning the loss of life? Is this some more of the—humor that I find it so difficult to understand?"

Drake raised a face that was drawn with misery.

"I am afraid it is solemn truth, but I had not realized it before," he said slowly. "We knew Garth's plan for tomorrow night. Inhuman and incredible as it was, it would have succeeded if we had not discovered it and prepared to stop him. Now he knows we have discovered it and he will make another—just as murderous and no doubt just as effective—and I am the one who is to blame for it all."

"But we have until tomorrow night to discover and circumvent his plot," Lu Yan pointed out placidly. "I have no doubt Dan will succeed—he never fails."

"Try to make him understand how much we depend on him," Drake urged. "I can't say anything to him—and I must tell the Senator. Perhaps we can do something, but I haven't much faith. I tell you this man Garth is a real fiend. I never fully realized——"

Dan came along the passage, and Drake paused to look up at the door as Wheeler entered the room. He had got into his own clothes, and looked as neatly well-groomed as if he had had an hour for the process.

"I am going out to see about a few things —my costume for this evening for one—and I may not be back before the ball. Come on!"

The last words were to the Brahmin, who had silently risen from his squatting posture in the corner.

"What will your costume be?" Drake could not help asking quickly.

"I am going as myself," said Dan, "since I am supposed to be dead. I am coming in after the Grand March, and will tell the announcer to shout—

" 'The *Late* Sled Wheeler!'

"That is supposed to be funny!"

He snapped the last over his shoulder as he passed out, his thin lips a-curl.

"He ought not to take such a risk," Drake said to Lu Yan in an undertone. "Garth may have him sandbagged or shot. Can't you stop him?"

Even as Lu Yan shook his head the Brahmin, who had paused to listen, turned at the door to say with authority:

"His movements may in no way be hampered or hindered. Those are my instructions—more particularly at this time."

And he was gone in Wheeler's wake.

"What does he mean by that?" asked Drake.

"He has instructions from the prince, no doubt," Lu Yan responded. "Or perchance he has been gazing in the crystal sphere and seen what is to occur."

"I wish he could tell us what that devil, Garth, is going to do tomorrow night," Drake said dully. "I will take that roll with me anyhow, and carry it until the time comes to deliver both aboard the steamer."

"Be very cautious, and take no chances yourself," charged the Chinaman.

"No danger tonight," said Drake. "Good night!"

And he left Chinatown carrying one of the sacred gems in the leather roll, in an inside pocket of his vest. In his head, also, he carried the knowledge of the whereabouts of the mate to that gem. Nobody else had any hint of where he had kept it so well concealed, and he intended to keep that secret until he could deliver both safely to the prince, after the captain of the *Belle of Nippon* was ready to guarantee to protect both the gems and the prince. That time was still more than twenty-four hours off.

Meanwhile the great masquerade was to take place that evening.

CHAPTER XVI

MANY of those who were present tell of that historic ball to this day, with varying degrees of exaggeration and enthusiasm, but they all agree that it was the most brilliant and memorable of all the social events up to that date. Everybody was there with wife and daughter, and the big floor was filled. The gymnasium of the Cascade Club was decorated in rich colors, and the music was the best the Coast could boast.

Senator Sands was popular among the best people, who had heard of his sudden purchase of the hotel and club, and welcomed the news of Garth's immediate departure—making the occasion a sort of informal housewarming and expression of their delight. Many of these were openly jubilant among themselves at the prospect of being rid of the corrupt boss whose inhuman crimes had only lately come to light.

Yet Garth was there, insolently smiling and triumphant beneath his mask and scarlet horned head-dress. For he was fittingly costumed as Mephistopheles—a gracefully striking figure in scarlet silk tights—when he

entered the hall with his attendant imps in black. The men in black tights were not so easily recognizable, and it was whispered that they were of a class that distinctly did not belong. But their cards were in order and were not challenged. The presence of the retiring boss and his potentially dangerous henchmen gave an added spice to the occasion—the needed tang of uncertainty and excitement.

The party from the new Sands residence across the bay were present at the formal opening of the ball—in fact it was led by his lordship and Lina Westcott, as Sir Walter and Queen Elizabeth.

It was in the humming interval that followed the second dance that the herald in costume at the door announced—

"The Late Sled Wheeler of Bridge Cañon!"

The immediate result was a silence of horrified surprize. It was still generally supposed that Sled Wheeler had met his death a few days before in an accident at Bridge Cañon—there had been whispers connecting Garth with foul play—and now there were other whispers of indignation among the men.

"Some of Garth's doing! This is a bit too raw—the man ought to be lynched!"

And threatening masks turned Garth's way.

Garth seemed to feel and accept the challenge. With a springing stride he approached the man in the doorway, while the dancers opened a way.

Wheeler was dressed in an exaggeration of his usual neat and well-groomed self, wearing a grim mask cunningly painted with fierce, long eyes of a startling green. Even at a distance they seemed to glare with a fixed, inhuman malice that sent shivers up one's back.

Even as Garth approached the new arrival the whisper started round:

"It *is* the man himself! It's Dan Wheeler!"

The listening hush became more tense.

"Welcome—welcome to my latest guest in the realms of darkness!" Mephisto called out in a sepulchral bass. "But, may I ask, how—in —— can the infernal business go on down below, with both of us away?"

In slightly raised voice—the hoarse tones that had such a peculiar resonance—Dan responded:

"Don't worry! If the devil's post is vacant I'll send Ghost Garth to fill it."

Not even a single laugh broke the silence.

As the whispering hum broke out again the orchestra struck up the next waltz—the quite new "Beautiful Blue Danube." And von Reuter, the man who had agreed to Garth's plot as first formed, was the first on the ground to claim Lina Westcott as his partner for this number. Never had the gossips and chaperons had so much exciting material for whispering—so many thrilling rumors to pass on under the seal of secrecy.

Brendon was to be married the next day—Garth had planned to play *Young Lochinvar*—a duel was slated for the next day between Garth and Brendon—the man in the turban in the corner was a real Hindu priest, and was plotting some delightful crime—the Colt Dan Wheeler was wearing so conspicuously hidden was the very one that had downed Smiling Snead and the bandit, Jaros—Garth was leaving this very night, after he should shoot his lordship, who was really related to Sir W. Raleigh. Oh, it was a delightful ball, really—perfectly lovely!

Wheeler was a graceful dancer, but he had other things on his mind that night. After two waltzes that Lina Westcott had written in on her own card for him, he took his stand near the door of the men's retiring-room (the boxing and fencing room of the gym). There he kept his exaggerated eyes fixed on Garth with a steadiness that Garth tried to ignore.

He noted that Garth occasionally gave orders or received reports from one of the imps in black tights who came and went furtively. Dan himself spoke a few times to young Ralph Streator—a leader of the younger set whom he had known three years before, and knew to be a thoroughbred—who came to him as midnight approached. He drew Dan aside to whisper:

"Something is going to break—tonight—on the water-front. I've got some real men on the watch. But don't let Miss Lina or Garth out of the ball. You better see to Garth yourself."

"I'll see to him," Dan growled. "Listen! If you can't find me—any time—and you got anything to report, tell it to the guy in the turban."

He tipped his head toward the bearded Brahmin in the corner. Then he resumed his watch.

As the time came near for unmasking he was more and more convinced that there was a tension among both his friends and those who gathered round Garth. It even seemed to make itself felt throughout the hall. There was more subdued whispering and gathering in small groups on the side-lines—more vanishing and reappearing of Garth's imps in black.

Dan still kept his gaze focused on Mephisto himself.

Drake managed to get the Senator within earshot of Dan to say:

"I am getting more scared. That snake is hatching something—I wish I knew what."

"For tomorrow night, you mean?" Sands asked quickly. "He would have no object in doing anything tonight."

"Probably," Drake said moodily. "But he's got us on the hooks and he knows it. It's all my fault. I wish it were tomorrow night—and over."

"Look how he follows Lina about," growled the Senator. "He's doing it just to terrify her and annoy Brendon. I'd like to get a grip on his dirty throat."

Drake turned his head toward Dan in mute appeal, but Wheeler gave no sign of hearing. He had not spoken to the Senator since their set-to twelve hours ago, and he could not do it now although he was stirred by what he had just heard—moved to cold and fixed purpose.

The two older men gone, Dan began to move his lips silently—a bad sign—as he thought grimly:

"They are scared of they don't know what—better be! Garth always springs his trap first. They expect him to do it tomorrow night—and so he won't. He's trying to scare the girl, so they'll go home with her—that's what *we* won't do! Everything all balled up—nobody knows anything—all scared blue—nobody on the job. But me! I got to get action. This thing has gone far enough—too far!"

He looked about him to see how the ground lay just as the signal came to unmask and threw his own mask aside. All over the hall the masks came off, and dancers stopped where they were.

Through the chattering crowd Wheeler picked out the dehorned head of Mephistopheles. Garth was smiling more insolently and brightly than ever—and coming toward his corner, toward the door of the fencing-room.

"Dan!"

He was startled by the soft voice of Lina Westcott, and she was at his side—looking up at him with great, frightened eyes as she said shakily:

"Don't look at Mr. Garth; but I am afraid, Dan! The man has got me scared—almost to hysterics. Now he is unmasked I can't *stand* that smile—it makes me feel unclean. I don't want to frighten the others—and he's coming again now."

"What has he been saying to you?" Dan muttered as Brendon came up.

"Said he was leaving tonight—in two hours—that he was saying good-by to all but me, but he would see me again! He said it twice."

"The animal is going to den up!" the Senator's heavy voice broke in on the other side of the girl. "He is going to hide and work under cover until tomorrow night, so we won't know what to do—so we can't keep watch on him."

Sands stopped, seeing he was frightening her still more. Drake came close to his daughter to whisper:

"Never mind, Lina—we are all here to take care of you. Do you want to go home? We will take you now, if you like."

"I think I feel safer here—where you all are."

She took Brendon's arm on one side and Dan's on the other.

"There he comes again!" she whispered in a fascinated, helpless manner, staring fixedly at the insolent face approaching.

GARTH drew slowly nearer—smile and look singling out the girl. It was a look that insulted—outraged—and it was as if he held her helpless, with the strong men about her unable to interfere.

"I am saying good-by," he purred softly at Lina. "But not to you—only *au revoir* to you."

His slow, deliberate emphasis made every man's fingers itch for his throat.

"Take her away. Keep her right here," Wheeler said distinctly in the Senator's ear. "Tell young Streator to stay with you."

It was his first word to the Senator that night, and Sands started, then hastily obeyed. Dan detained Drake and Brendon with a hand.

"Garth! Remember what I told you!"

Wheeler faced the smiling boss, and the

look on his own face made the men knot close about them both.

"I told you the time was coming for a show-down—it has come."

The words were mild, but a silence followed that was ominous.

"You talk big, Wheeler," Garth sneered. "Let it go at that."

"Twice you tried to kill me and failed," Wheeler went on in level tone. "The third time you thought you had done it. Now it's my innings—this is my night to fight, and you will fight or back down. Pick your two men—Drake and Brendon are mine—and come in here!"

As he spoke he motioned and led the way into the fencing-room. Garth followed—after him came the German commander of the *Kronprinz* and his lieutenant, Schroeder. The door was closed on white inquiring faces.

"What is this? A formal challenge in the style of our grandfathers?"

Garth made an effort at lightness, but his smile was sickly.

"Still if you are bound to have it, I don't know why not."

"I know why not," Dan said. "Because you lack the sand to give a man a fair deal. You want a sure thing or a chance to do a dirty trick. But now you will fight or back down. Do you back down?"

Garth hesitated. Too much depended on the outcome to risk it all on an even chance, but he saw in von Reuter's face a dawning contempt. The German thought him a coward. His eyes became bloodshot.

"No, —— —— you!" Garth cursed in a voice suddenly thick. "If you are tired of li——"

"I am tired of your talk," snapped Wheeler. "Quit, and get action."

"Then I have choice of weapons!"

Garth's face flashed with triumph as he turned to the German officers.

"Will you two gentlemen oblige me? And I choose the sword!"

He turned on Wheeler with a malicious snarl.

"Since you want medieval procedure, we'll have medieval weapons."

"Anything at all—so we get at it."

Dan spoke in the same level tone.

Drake was pale—his mouth open to protest. Garth was a skilled fencer and swordsman. Wheeler never had held a foil and would be butchered.

At that moment Drake saw the turbaned Brahmin, who had slipped in unobserved with a few onlookers. His dark eyes were fixed on Wheeler and he gave no sign, but his face was tranquilly contemplative. Drake could hear his words of the afternoon —"He may in no way be hindered"—and he knew he could not persuade Dan in that mood, possibly.

Garth was grinning with suppressed delight—he had Wheeler cold!

"It is ver-rry ir-rregoolar—" von Reuter gargled his r-s heavily as he protested—"and I must not be detained by any le-gal consequences—no ar-rrests or delays. I must aboard ship to sail vithin two hours."

He looked about the large room.

"And it can not be done here."

"Why not go aboard the Senator's steam yacht—the *Lina W.?*" Garth asked Drake, insolently grinning.

"The two men on her can be kept for'ard, and the body"—with a wave of his hand at Wheeler—"can be dropped astern with a weight to sink it. We can run out into the bay, and be back here within an hour. Nobody will be any wiser. The little cabin is well lighted—small, but my man can't get away from me."

Again Drake was about to protest at the absurdity of the plan, but——

"That's right," Dan announced definitely. "I won't get away. Where are the swords?"

The walls were decorated with all sorts of weapons, among them crossed swords of different periods and climes. But of them all there were only two exactly alike—two cavalry-sabers that had been carried in the last war—the Civil War—by the men who had given them to the club. Drake, who feared that Garth might insist on sharpened foils, reached down these sabers as he asked—

"What's the matter with these?"

"They're right—get busy," Wheeler again announced.

Garth stepped quickly forward, his smile gone, and drew one of the blades from its scabbard. It was still bright—blued halfway up—a broad, curved blade with dull edge and a sharp point. Garth tested it with his thumb—and his smile came back.

"It has a point—that's the main point."

He nodded to his seconds.

As the party got into overcoats to cover their costumes Dan heard a low voice at his ear.

"Beware the peril that will come after the battle."

The words were so clear that Dan only stared at the speaker—the Brahmin—with an absent look, but the speech registered on his mind as he nodded and got into the coat Brendon was holding for him. The Englishman was cool and steady. He said in an undertone—

"Young Streator is on the watch—did you ever handle a curved blade?"

Dan only nodded again, his eyes following Garth, who had started for the rear entrance with his seconds.

Wheeler was not letting Garth get out of sight. His direct mind was fixed on one main issue; namely, the cause of all this danger and anxiety. Garth was the center and cause of all the bother and the peril that was hanging over his friends and wearing them down—then the one thing to do was to attend to Garth. He would take care of Garth himself—Dan Wheeler, personally.

He didn't know any better than anybody else what the boss was up to—but to wait for the other fellow to do things to you was the sure and certain way to get licked. And the way to get your man was to go after him and get him. He would get him.

He knew moreover that Garth was feeling his relentless watch and the pursuit of his never swerving eyes. It was becoming visibly harder for Garth to maintain his forced smile of confidence. He insisted on riding to the docks in the same carriage—three in a seat—and facing Garth with a fixed gaze.

ABOARD the launch and out of hailing distance from the waterfront, the small cabin was cleared. It gave a space of not more than eight by twelve feet in the clear—with a bracket-lamp in each corner giving a fairly even light.

Dan, all his faculties focused on his opponent, felt Brendon's hands removing his coat. He shook his head when Brendon asked if he should take his vest and gun beneath. But he never once thought of the gun or of drawing it. He was itching for the feel of the hilt in hand.

"You know the guards and strokes?" Brendon asked quietly as he put the saber-hilt in his palm.

Again Dan nodded.

Eyes still on Garth's, Wheeler hefted the blade and swung it—dropped it in position *en garde* before him, point forward, obliquely down and to the left with hand reversed—the exact opposite of the first position with the foils—and he was conscious that Garth showed surprize, as well as of Brendon's low tone of delight:

"That's ripping, old chap! Watch out for a hamstring cut inside the knee. Tear into him at the word and keep him going. Good luck!"

He felt a light "lucky-touch" on his back. Brendon stepped away.

Garth stood erect before him—point up, at salute. His own came up. A step forward—measure blades, point to hilt—back at salute. A swing to right and left—pulled short, for there was scarcely room to measure space—again at salute. Eye to eye—points up and hands at chin.

"Ready—engage!"

With a stamp of foot and clash of steel the blades met and clanged harshly.

The four seconds, each in a corner under the bracket-lamps, stood crouched eagerly—ready to dodge swishing blades, and anxious not to miss a stroke of the deadly game. For it had been agreed that there was to be no interference or intermission—no pause until one man was ready to be dropped overboard astern with a weight attached. It was Garth's stipulation.

Dan went to work with a feeling of relief and a warm heart. He had been afraid that something might turn up to interfere.

With his man before him and blades clashing, he only subconsciously heard Drake's quick ejaculation of surprize and delight as he went into action. Drake, as well as Garth, had made the mistake of assuming him to be an utter novice. In the old gymnasium in New York he had taken to singlestick and broadsword like a duck to water—had been the old master-at-arms' favorite pupil in the growing days of boyhood when one learns a thing never to lose it.

The old feel of the game came back with the swish and clash of the blades. This was action—for fair!

Garth was a finished swordsman with foils or light rapier, and even with the heavy curved blade he had the advantage of constant practise—the deadly knowledge of certain tricks of the point. He was pressed too hard to try any of them now, but he would take his time. He could easily

keep up his guard—such a fury of attack would wear Wheeler out—then he would torture him as he slowly finished him. He knew just what he would do; he had only to be patient.

Dan was following him up—slash, swing and drive—right, left and thrust—until he had his man almost to the wall. Then it was only by a vicious combined thrust and parry that Garth managed to slip away under Dan's arm.

Wheeler was after him with a whirl and catlike spring that all but caught Garth on the turn—guard down. Garth's smile faded, and he settled down keenly to the business of saving his skin from the furious onset of this amateur—this reckless madman.

Dan was living his life to the full. This was what he was made for—his work and deep pleasure—and he fought with keen and hearty zest. His man was before him, and nothing between. The world might go hang; he would get him, and the harder he fought the better.

Not that Wheeler belittled the skill he met. He could feel by instinct, by the waver of the treacherous black eyes, that there was something coming. That vicious, drawing stroke at the inside of the leg behind the knee—ha! That was Brendon's "hamstring stroke!" He met it with circling blade as he heard Brendon's "Pretty work!" and swung a full back-stroke in answer that made Garth leap back.

Again he saw Garth slip—a false slip—and hold ready for a nasty upward thrust at the stomach. He simply stepped back in cool disdain—waited for Garth to raise his guard. Then he went after him with a new and stronger attack.

Now he noticed that Garth was beginning to breathe hard—was saving his strength—using the point to keep him off—abandoning the slashing cuts that took more strength and wind.

Dan kept his gaze fixed on the beady eyes—on the face that now was the face of a trapped and snarling beast—and pushed his man hard and harder. The resistance his blade met was getting weaker. Each blow was a bit less heavy—each parry a bit more tardy—while he felt his own strength still on the increase. He still had power in reserve. *Now* he had only to tear in and finish him!

But wait! Was that right? That would be too easy. Was it a ruse? Even as he checked his foot in a sudden advance his back-stroke met no blade!

Garth had ducked his head, and at the same time whipped a vicious point back crosswise at his eyes.

Dan felt his circling blade would be too late—threw back his head—jerked up his left arm—just in time to save his eyes.

Even in that frightful instant he dimly recalled reading of that supremely dastardly stroke, worked out by some Italian in olden time.

He had escaped, but at the cost of a hacked forearm and a cut above the brow that spurted blood on the instant.

Even as he recovered, Garth was on him like a wildcat. Thrust on thrust—in quarte—in tierce—over—under—smashing his guard. Then a ripping upward stroke that Dan only escaped by a backward leap.

For the blood that flooded one eye put him off in his measure of distance. Dan cleared his eye with an upward wipe of his left hand—guarding with the blade in his right—but those left fingers would not work and the blood swept down like a crimson curtain. Again he had to strike and duck to get out of a corner, for Garth was driving him in fierce triumph, ready to finish him at the right moment. The watchers were silent and breathless.

Again Dan made the attempt to free his vision—found his little and ring-fingers still worked responsive—with them held up the flap of skin and dammed the flow of blinding blood, just as Garth's blade passed under his arm and he swayed his body. He had it—and held it tight! Left hand at his brow and keeping his sight clear, he sprang forward with a quick lunge that wiped once more the grin off that hateful face.

Dan heard himself utter a low growl as he called on the reserve of mighty force within him. Now he was Dan Wheeler at his utmost—the super-fighter whose virile power grew greater with the call upon it—and a thrill shot through him with each smashing blow he swung at that demon face before him.

Fast and faster—strong and stronger he drove at that head before him—each cleaving drive more downright and resistless. Slashing with a force and crushing weight that would not be denied—twice the opposing blade gave way beneath his own—his edge found flesh—wounded the face that he

pursued. That face was now strained in a stare of pure terror.

Without mercy or compunction he drove and drove again—and again—saw the blood-streaked mask tip back weakly. *Now*—one full down-drive with the point—just at the neck-base. The blade sank home, deep and soft and tight!

By instinct he leaped back and jerked his blade free.

There was no face before him now. Only a huddled red thing lay at his feet on the floor.

But the crumpled figure stirred, raised a head—bloody and tangled—and showed a face drawn and old, but weakly malicious as it moved its lips:

"I—got you—yet! Almost time—" it rasped hoarsely.

Then a gurgling cough and the head dropped.

At the word "time" von Reuter had snatched out his watch. Now he took one horrified look at it—and with one shouted word to his lieutenant—

"*Heraus!*" he darted up the narrow cabin stairs to the after-deck, Schroeder at his heels.

There was a double splash outside.

In the silence within the bloody cabin, the body on the floor had sprawled flat and still. Like something in a dream Dan felt it was all over—felt Brendon shaking his hand—saw tears on his fresh and beaming face—and recalled the Brahmin's words—"Beware the peril after the battle."

"The boat has stopped long ago," Drake was shouting, "and both men gone—dived overboard. Come on—quick!"

Then Drake and Brendon were supporting him up the stairs to the fresh air—there were lights of a boat bearing down on them astern—and from her deck a man shouting:

"Are you there? Brendon! Jump! Dive overboard! Jump—for ——'s sake!"

"Can you swim?" Dan heard Brendon asking as he dragged him to the rail.

He nodded—put one hand to his swimming head.

Then he felt Brendon pick him up like a child and bear him to the rail—dive with him into the icy water.

He felt the chill and shock—his ears roared—his chest ached to bursting with the attempt to hold his breath.

Then the whole world blew up with a mighty noise.

CHAPTER XVII

THE sun was shining on the blue water outside the open window when Wheeler opened his eyes. He was stiff and sore, and his arm hurt when he put it up to find what was wrapped tightly around his head.

"Hello there! Awake, old chap?"

Brendon's voice was a-tremble with delight.

"Do you want some water?"

"About a bucketful—yes!" Dan croaked from a dry throat.

"Been keeping it ready for you."

Brendon poured from a lovely large pitcher.

Dan ignored the glass and seized the pitcher. As he tipped it up—and up—Brendon was fairly dancing with suppressed excitement.

"We were deuced anxious until the doctor said it was just sleep—and to let you sleep, don't you know. But we were afraid you wouldn't wake up, so we could go on with the ceremony this evening; and then we couldn't sail on the *Belle of Nippon* with the prince and party. But this is simply top hole, really!" he rattled on, watching Dan with eyes that danced.

"Here's your pitcher—gimme the glass."

When he had drained that, Dan wiped his lips and said in his own voice:

"Where am I anyhow? D'you mean to say you been waiting for me to come to life before you went on with the wedding?"

"I should say we had! You're at the Senator's—where it would be quiet, y'know."

Brendon hastened on, because Dan and the Senator had not yet made up since their quarrel.

"Nobody would hear of doing anything until you were on the job. Do you think you can be wheeled into the other room for the ceremony, old chap?"

"You try it! Anybody that comes in here with a wheel-chair will go out on a stretcher. Where's my pants? And that gun? It will rust in no time if it isn't cleaned and oiled."

"So fa—Mr. Drake said. He cleaned and fixed it—it's in your clothes, and your pants are being pressed. I'm afraid the doctor won't like it——"

"Get those pants or I get up and trail 'em in a blanket!"

Dan proceeded to pull the covers off as a demonstration.

"Wait! They're in the next room—and everybody prancing about on tiptoes. I'll get 'em."

While Dan was getting into his freshened raiment he was keen for explanations.

"What blew up anyhow?" he asked first.

"The *Lina W.* There was a time-thing—infernal machine of dynamite that Garth had put in the hold," Brendon said in a half-whisper. "The two men on the boat were his—took the place of the others while we were at the ball."

"Then he didn't change his plan?" Dan interrupted.

"Set it ahead a day, that's all—a long-headed scheme that almost got us. All evidence would have gone up with us in the explosion, don't you know, and he would have been at sea on the *Kronprinz*—she went last night; or this morning, I should say."

Brendon sobered suddenly.

"We should all—if it hadn't been for you we'd all be—where Garth is now."

"I hope not," said Dan dryly. "He went in the right scenery anyhow. But it was the Brahmin who told me to look out for trouble after the fight was over."

Dan spoke with respect.

"I'd like to know how he knew."

"Saw it in the crystal perhaps," said Brendon. "They do some odd things. The prince says you were under *the* protection. I don't know what he means."

Dan thought of the order, but he kept silence about it.

"Perhaps he thought I was carrying one of the Twins," he said cheerfully. "How about something to eat?"

"I have made 'em get a big steak ready."

The voice came from behind Brendon. The Senator stood in the doorway—he was flushing like a bashful boy, uncertain of his reception.

"Doc Harrison said be mighty careful what we fed you, and so I picked out that steak myself—weighs three pounds," Sands finished shyly.

"Senator, you have got about all the brains in the U. S. Senate."

Dan held out a hand, which the Senator wrung heartily as Dan added in an undertone:

"Thank you! I am no talker."

"No. Fighting's your game," said the Senator briefly.

No further mention was made of their falling-out, nor of the cause of it—Dan's mining shares that brought him a handy income within the year.

"Now the ladies want to know how much longer you're going to keep them waiting to be presented."

The Senator's face was again full of genial satisfaction.

"Where are they?"

Dan got up, and on hearing they were in the big living-room adjoining, went out at once with a brisk step. Only his head felt a trifle light and balloonish.

"Dan—can you ever forgive me?"

Lina came to him with hands outstretched and moist eyes full of entreaty.

Dan was stunned—stood trying to figure out what there was to cry about. You never could tell what a woman would do next!

"What you been doing now? What's it all about?"

Dan looked at his friend, Mrs. Sands, in appeal. "Here—*don't.* What's the joke?"

He snatched away the hand that the sentimental girl was raising to her lips.

"You—hurt!" he said, and reddened painfully.

"Did I hurt the poor arm?"

The girl looked up with an April smile.

"You must let me kiss the place to make it well, then!"

"You will have to stand worse than that, Dan," Mrs. Sands consoled him. "The whole thing—or most of it—has leaked out unofficially, and you are the lion of the day. Didn't you see the big bank of flowers in your room?"

"I supposed it was fixed for the wedding."

"No; they have come in all this forenoon—for you, from the clubs and from various individuals."

"Makes a man feel like a fool just the same," Dan protested.

"You'll have to sneak into town after dark," said Brendon, "or they will meet you with bands and present you with the keys of the city on a gold platter—all that sort of thing."

"I'd rather have a few good skeleton pass-keys," said Dan. "And what I am looking for is that platter of steak."

The manner of disappearance of the steak convinced Dan's hosts and friends that he was no longer to be cast in the role of pampered convalescent; but he continued to be lionized, greatly to his exasperation and

annoyance. The prince came in person to pay a ceremonial call of congratulation, and Drake returned from the city with more flowers and messages. Wheeler welcomed the wedding preparations that diverted their attention for a time.

THE Twins were delivered to the prince in the captain's cabin of the *Belle of Nippon* only an hour before she sailed. The bridal party was aboard, bag and baggage, and attended the rather imposing ceremonies of the transfer of the gems to the priests of the temple—the two companions of the prince. He, as well as they, was in the priestly robes of white. One of the bearded Brahmins carried an object covered with a piece of embroidered white satin.

Before asking Drake for the gems, the prince said:

"In order that no harm may befall any one, let me ask: You have been careful to have the two stones conveyed by separate persons?"

The party behind Drake exchanged glances of dismay that were fixed in astonishment when Drake answered:

"Yes, your Highness. They have never been in the possession of one man but once—and then only for a few moments."

"And not by his will?" the prince asked seriously. "Who was that person?"

"Dan Wheeler."

After a quick look at Dan, whose face was stunned blank, the prince smiled slightly.

"It is well. His eyes are green, and he is under *the* protection. You will now deliver them one at a time."

Drake took the roll from his pocket, the little casket from the roll—opened it and held out the little box, in which the gem flared with a piercing brilliance.

One of the priests—the one with empty hands—came forward and after a profound obeisance took the gem from the box carefully, and held it out to the other Brahmin. That one removed the satin cover from a gold circlet with two empty settings, placed the gem in one, where it was held firmly in place, and covered the circlet with the satin once more.

The first priest turned back to Drake, who held out his hand to Dan.

"Let me take *the gun*," he whispered.

In a daze Wheeler drew out and handed to Drake the beautiful Colt that had not once been out of his possession since he had got it.

Drake took from his pocket a thin key, which fitted the head of the screw holding together the two cheek-pieces of the grip—the handle of the weapon. One of these removed—the mate to the first gem shone clear and sparkling in its pocket inside the spring. Drake detached and gave it to the priest, who repeated his deliberate movements.

As soon as the two gems were in position, in the settings made to duplicate those in the home temple where they belonged and where they were finally to rest, their rays seemed more than to double their blinding brilliance. They shot a fiery gleam that flared and brightened through all the range of colors from deep green to lightning blue. The gold circlet was placed in its casket and taken away to be put in the ship's safe. Not until then did the prince say—

"The Twins are proved, and the price is ready."

He produced three packets of Bank-of-England notes; gave one to Drake, one to Lu Yan and one to Wheeler.

"What do I do with this?"

Dan looked at Drake with hostile suspicion in his eye.

"It is yours," said the prince, answering for Drake—who smiled behind his hand.

He wanted to see what Dan would do when royalty tried to shove him around. Dan looked at the prince, and the hostility faded from his face. But all that Drake heard the youth say as he pressed the packet back into Dan's hand was—

"It is your duty—it is so ordered."

To the surprize of all, Wheeler pocketed the notes without another word; even responded to the prince's smile with his own little flicker of a half-grin that so brightened his rather cruel features.

The good-bys had to be cut short. Brendon, however, made an effort to get a promise out of Wheeler.

"You are coming to Brendon Court just as soon as we get home—don't forget that."

His lordship held to Dan's hand.

"You promise?"

"If I can get away."

"No—no ifs or buts. You are coming or I come after you."

"And I with him," her ladyship put in.

"I will show you a whole lot of people—

forty at a time—all dressed in pink coats and riding-breeches," Brendon urged.

"That will fetch me—if anything," said Dan soberly.

Nobody was doing much laughing for some reason, even as a bluff.

Wheeler himself seemed to see something in the eyes of her ladyship that made it hard to turn away and follow Lu Yan to the gangplank.

Dan did not refer to the Secret Order That Is Not in any way after that night, even to Lu Yan or to the Senator, who became his most loyal friend next to Drake and the Chinese merchant.

But on the way to Lu Yan's home Dan broke his silence.

"And all the time I was carrying that stone in the handle of the gun! You remember you said the green-eyed guy that carried one bore a charmed life?"

"I told you that such was the belief of many," Lu Yan answered.

"Hm!" was Dan's only comment at the time.

But later, in the fragrant peace of Lu Yan's apartments, Dan lay on a couch lazily staring at the Buddha on his pedestal; while Lu Yan serenely read from his endwise book that folded like an accordion.

"I'd like to know what he thinks of this business."

At this first break in a long silence Lu Yan looked up—from Dan to the eternal Tathagata—and asked—

"What business?"

"These Twins and the stories about them—whether I'd have let go that pole in the cañon if I hadn't had the stone along—and—some other things."

He was thinking of the Brahmin's warning, and the protection the prince spoke of, but he did not say anything about a Nameless Order. It was hard to talk of a thing that had no name or any distinguishing feature. Moreover he was pleasantly tired and comfortable.

"Doubtless it is a part of the Noble Truth as seen and known by him."

Lu Yan turned to a certain passage.

"Let me translate for you—very poorly—a brief passage."

He had read for only a few minutes, in a low and steady monotone, when he stopped and looked over his shell-rimmed spectacles at the prone figure on the couch.

There had come to his ears a sound suspiciously resembling a gentle snore—very like a snore.

So Lu Yan, after carefully covering the relaxed figure on the couch, returned to his serene perusal of the Noble Truth, but he no longer translated. For a snore was what it was.

The seated Buddha kept right on; continued his everlasting Emancipated Contemplation.

THE END

The Innocent Bystander and the Triangle*

by TREVOR NICHOLS

Author of "Captain Findlay's Last Voyage," "Hell's Bell," etc.

IT WAS seven o'clock, our first night out, and George's watch below. After dinner George had led me to a chair on the saloon deck, found another for himself, and we were smoking our pipes and at peace with the world.

The sea was calm, the *Tioga* making an easy twelve knots, and we talked of The Things That Had Been. George unloaded on me his most intimate thoughts and his most recent conquests, and I listened sympathetically, and did likewise. Therefore we got along splendidly and had a fine time.

We fell silent as men will who are sated with food or with a subject. We sank into a luxury of contentment, contemplated space, gloried in our egos, and waited for our hearts to fill and overflow into further speech.

"Do you remember Joe Davis?" said George at length.

"Holy Joe?" I asked, calling upon that gentleman to stand forth from my store of remembrances.

"That's him," said George.

"He was third officer in the *Caroline*, wasn't he?"

"That's him," said George.

"Well?"

"Before you went nutty and ashore, you quitter," said George.

"Well?" said I.

"He's married," said George.

"You don't say!" I said. "Never thought it of him. How did it happen?"

"Triangle," said George and knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"You don't say!" I said. "Never thought Holy Joe'd mix in a thing like that!"

"He didn't," said George refilling his pipe. "They mixed him up in it."

"Who?" I said and knocked the ashes from my pipe.

"Do you remember the *Aunt Louisa?*" said George and lighted his pipe.

"Captain Brinkman?" I said, refilling my pipe from George's pouch.

"The same," said George.

"Go ahead!" I said lighting my pipe with a match borrowed from George.

"It's quite a long story," said George doubtfully, combing his mustache with the stem of his pipe.

"Go ahead!" I said. "If I don't like it I can go to sleep."

"YOU know the *Aunt Louisa* wasn't much of a ship, even in those days," said George, addressing himself reminiscently to a stanchion in front of him. "She was an old pot-bellied, lop-sided, —— forsaken son-of-a-gun of a tramp. She looked as if she'd never pass inspection, and always did pass.

"Whenever she left port nobody expected her to get back to port again. And she always did get back to port, creeping up the river like a monumental, decrepit, wheezy old toad with just enough life left to reach her moorings and no more. She never made better than six knots in her days, though old

Hawkins claimed she'd make eight if the Old Man wasn't so stingy with her coal. But old Hawkins was a speed maniac and likely to exaggerate.

"Well, she's still at it," said George thoughtfully. "Joe's got her now."

"Where is Brinkman?" I said. "I thought they'd die together, he and the old girl."

"They were that thick," said George. "But I am coming to that. Shut your trap and listen.

"I had made a couple of trips in her when Joe came aboard. He was tickled stiff. His first berth as second mate, you know. Had never been better than third before, and he with a master's certificate. Had had it four years. He wasn't so tickled when he found out that we didn't carry a third for him to lord it over. But he bore it, oh, he bore it, did Holy Joe. It was a stepping stone, he used to comfort himself and me. Maybe it was, but I guess he thought it pretty much a tombstone later."

George paused and I ventured to say I had always thought Joe a peculiar guy, but George didn't pay any attention.

"Did you know old Brinkman had a daughter?" said George.

"Yes," I said. "Lived with an aunt somewhere, I believe."

"The same," said George. "Lived with her Aunt Louisa. But the aunt died and the daughter had to go from somewhere to elsewhere."

"Quite likely," I said. "But where?"

"To the *Aunt Louisa*," said George.

"Oh, I see," I said, baffled.

"Well, you don't," said George. "You were always a mutt.

"You know old Brinkman was as tight as a rich relative," said George. "Naturally the scuttling of Aunt Louisa upset him. The daughter hadn't cost him much, so far. She had worked for Aunt Louisa and Aunt Louisa had fed and clothed her. But with Aunt Louisa come to a sorry end everything else had come to a sorry end. The Old Man was up a tree.

"He turned his money over and over and decided he liked it too well to part with any of it. So he made up his mind to take her along. The daughter, I mean, not Aunt Louisa. In the *Aunt Louisa*. Capital arrangement for the old skinflint. Saved him quite a bit on board and lodgings. Not to mention clothes.

"She didn't cause much of a stir aboard. She wasn't exactly a beauty. I may say she was exactly the opposite. But let that pass temporarily. She was a dandy worker. Learned at the aunt's, you know. Strict old lady. She took entire charge of old Brinkman's quarters. Kept them as clean as a Dutch Sunday school. You might eat off the floor if you wanted to. The Old Man told me so many a time. And he didn't lie. Later she— But let that pass, temporarily.

"Did I tell you she and Joe came aboard at the same time? No? Well, they did. Bad omen, of course. Joe ought to have beat it then and there, as the lawyers say. But he didn't. And being there, he had to take his medicine whether he stood up or lay down. No help for it. No way out, except over the side, and that did not appeal to Joe. He hoped something would turn up. Of course. Miracles may happen. But they never do.

"WE WERE sailing for the Baltic with a lot of second-hand printing presses and other scrap iron. Quite a trip for the old girl. I mean the *Aunt Louisa*. I get a little mixed on account of the similarity of names. But the other Aunt Louisa is out of it now, thank the Lord, and it won't be so hard after this."

"I thought you said there was a triangle," I interrupted, somewhat disappointed. I like spicy things.

"I'm coming to that," said George. "Shut your trap and listen and don't bother me.

"We had hardly lost sight of the Land of Liberty and Pilgrims' Pride and Noble Free before the Old Man began to pull a long face. It seemed to affect him that way. It Plunged him in Thought. With capitals, mind you. It wasn't an easy matter that troubled the Old Man. He had a hard nut to crack. And he seemed to be trying to crack it with his teeth, for his mouth was quite effectively shut for a couple of days.

"And finally something did crack. Whether it was the nut or Brinkman's old bean I'll leave for you to decide. I am not committing myself.

"And of course as soon as something cracked he opened his mouth. It wasn't natural for old Brinkman to keep his mouth shut, not any more than it is natural for you to keep your mouth shut when I am telling

a story. He had a powerful vocabulary and liked to use it.

"He came to me one day with his face screwed up and looking as old and wise as Moses. It was my watch and according to his own rules he had no business to talk to me. But he did.

" 'I have been thinking quite seriously about my daughter for some days, Mr. Carey,' said he and laid his fat hands on the railing in front of me.

" 'Quite a pleasant subject to think about, I am sure, sir,' I said.

" 'You may say so, Mr. Carey,' said he. 'But to tell the truth I have worried considerably about her future. I believe she is old enough to be thinking of getting married.'

" 'How old is she, sir?' I asked.

"That made him mad.

" 'She is a good deal older than you are, you confounded spindle-legged son of Satan!' he said.

"I conceded the point and he settled down.

" 'Now,' he said, thinking hard, 'if you weren't such a good-for-nothing, whisky-drinking, tobacco-chewing sinner, the matter would be quite simple. In that case you might have married her.'

" 'Oh, no,' I hastened to assure him. 'I am not good enough for her, sir.'

" 'No, you aren't,' he said. 'You needn't tell me. I know it.'

"Lord, how I thanked heaven for my sins that night! That is the only time since I lost faith in Santa Claus that I really believed in a kind Providence.

"Well, the Old Man stayed with me in spite of my sins. In his mind he was thumbing over the list of eligibles.

" 'Old Hawkins is married,' he said grudgingly. 'That lets him out. And the second engineer comes of a consumptive family. That lets him out. He might have a bad influence on the succeeding generations.'

" 'That narrows the field considerably, sir,' said I.

" 'There is Joe Davis,' he said.

" 'To be sure there's Joe Davis, sir,' said I. 'A fine fellow and an ideal husband.'

"That made him mad again. Maybe he thought I was trying to be ironical. But I wasn't. I meant every word of it, then.

" 'He's worth five of you, you everlastingly —— descendant of a wharf-rat!' he said. He was always exceedingly polite when he got mad. But one got used to it and didn't mind.

" 'He is all of that,' said I. 'As a husband he is worth ten of me. I always was a bit wild. I prefer a wife in every port.'

"I wanted to rub it in so as to make sure I was forever out of the running, you know.

"He relented at once.

" 'I am sorry it is so, Mr. Carey,' he said. 'You are a fine sailor, and it is a pity you aren't a fine man. It is probably inherited.'

" 'No doubt, sir,' said I. 'I have heard say both my father and grandfather were a bit wild. Probably chronic in the family, sir.'

" 'Probably, probably,' he said, thinking hard. 'But now this matter about Joe Davis, Mr. Carey. It is a delicate subject. The question is how it may be arranged. Maybe you, Mr. Carey, may be able to give me some hints from your own somewhat extended—er—experience?'

" 'Glad to do what I can, sir,' said I, trying desperately to live up to my reputation. 'I'll think it over, sir. She might try to show that she is sweet on him—I mean, to show him preferences, sir.'

" 'Good idea, capital idea,' said Brinkman. 'Thank you, Mr. Carey.'

" 'Not at all, sir,' I said. 'Glad to be of some use.'

"A COUPLE of days later Joe Davis bumped into me on the bridge. It was my watch and he had no business there, of course. 'Aha,' I said to myself when I laid eyes on him, 'the plot thickens.' The poor boy looked as if he'd had a continual nightmare for two weeks.

" 'What is the matter with that blessed female?' he said with tears in his round owl-eyes. That is what he said, but he meant something else. Joe was always too moderate in his language.

" 'What female?' I said. 'Besides it is against the rules to talk on the bridge.' I felt like the villain in the piece. A mighty uncomfortable feeling. But that wore off.

" 'What female?' he said crossly. 'Is there more than one? Are you seeing double or am I blind in one eye?'

" 'Well, well,' said I. 'Don't get excited. What is the trouble?'

" 'She's gone nuts!' said Joe in a wild sort of way. 'She won't let me sleep; she won't let me eat. She ogles me as if I was a birthday cake with cream frosting, and she sticks

to me as if there was a million dollar prize on my coconut!'

" 'Well, well,' I said, trying to console him. 'When did you start drinking, Joe?'

" 'Drink!' he yelled. 'I never took a drink in my life, but now I wish I was soaking in a whisky barrel or happy with D. T.!'

" 'Well, well,' I said. 'Don't get excited. You should worry if a young lady goes and loses her head over you. You ought to feel flattered, Joe.'

" 'Bah!' said Joe in a gone sort of way, threw up his arms and ran away howling like a dervish.

"That didn't end it of course. It couldn't. Old Brinkman was a stubborn old guy and I felt I had to push the thing along. In order to protect my own interests, you understand.

"That very day the old boy trundled his embonpoint up the companion. My watch, mind you, the first dog watch. He looked worried but not discouraged. Oh, no.

" 'Well, Mr. Carey,' said he, breaking his own rule against talking on the bridge. It was tacked up, the rule I mean, on the pilothouse wall. Coming or going, you couldn't help seeing it. 'Well, Mr. Carey,' said he, 'it doesn't seem to go very well.'

" 'What doesn't seem to go very well, sir?' said I.

" '—— fire!' said he. 'Haven't you got any brains, you tobacco-spouting little shrimp! You have gone and made a pigsty out of my deck again! What? What! Indeed!' That cooled him off as I knew it would. His boiling point was remarkably low.

" 'I refer to the matter between my daughter and Mr. Davis, sir,' said he.

" 'Of course,' I said. 'I ought to have known. To be sure, sir.'

" 'He doesn't seem to take very kindly to the—er—treatment you suggested, Mr. Carey,' said he. 'My daughter says he doesn't seem to like it at all.'

" 'Certainly, sir. I mean that can easily be explained, sir,' said I. 'Joe isn't used to it. He never had a girl. He told me so himself.' And he had. I was telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. 'He is shy, sir,' said I.

" 'Maybe that is it,' said he. 'Probably that is it. You show remarkable intelligence at times, Mr. Carey.'

" 'Not at all, sir,' said I. 'I am just saying what he told me himself.'

" 'Well,' said old Brinkman, 'the question is, I suppose, what *may* be done.'

"I thought hard. I had to make good. To protect my own interests, you understand.

" 'Supposing he took sick,' I said. An idea had hit me squarely on the bean.

" 'It would be a calamity,' said old Brinkman. 'We should be short-handed. He has to stay well whether he wants to or not.'

" 'She could nurse him,' I said, 'and he'd have to get over his shyness. And besides, all patients marry their nurses; that is, all men patients do.'

" 'Good idea,' said old Brinkman. 'Capital idea. But he isn't likely to be took sick. His grandfather lived to be ninety and was never sick. And he might have lived longer if a train hadn't killed him.'

" 'We can't trust to luck, of course, sir,' said I. 'That would be suicidal. We'll have to see to it ourselves.'

" 'We?' said old Brinkman. 'How?' he said.

" 'Well,' I said, trying to break it gently, 'when I was a kid I once swallowed a chew of tobacco.'

" 'I had an idea you started early, Mr. Carey,' said old Brinkman.

" 'And I never felt so sick in my life as I did then, sir.'

" 'That was too bad, indeed,' said old Brinkman.

" 'I was thinking,' I said, 'that since Joe Davis doesn't use tobacco it may have the same effect on him.'

" 'Good idea, capital idea,' said the old fool. 'But it might be difficult to persuade him to swallow a chew.'

" 'Leave that to me, sir,' I said. 'I'll attend to that.'

" 'Thanks, Mr. Carey,' said he. 'You are a dandy sailor and it is too bad you aren't a fine man. But maybe you might improve.'

" 'I don't think so, sir,' said I. 'I am a hopeless case. But I always like to see other people happy, sir,' said I.

"IT WASN'T so hard. I spoiled half a pound of good chewing tobacco and bribed the messroom steward. Joe wasn't popular so it didn't set me back much. Joe had the morning watch the next day, from four o'clock to eight. We used to have coffee on the bridge at five. Weather was pretty chilly, you see, and you'd gulp down anything that was hot. Joe did.

"At ten minutes past five Joe waked me by stumbling into my cabin and sitting down on my stomach. He couldn't help it, you know. He was a sorry spectacle.

" 'You will have to take the bridge, George,' he wheezed. 'I am sick, deathly sick.'

"I helped him into his cabin and put him to bed. Oh, he was in a bad way. He thought he was going to die.

"I had to leave him.

" 'Hope you will be better soon, Joe,' I said.

" 'I don't care,' he wheezed, rolling his head from side to side like a scared turtle. 'Maybe I'll have peace from that blessed female now.'

"But he didn't, of course. And of course he couldn't help himself. She might have done anything she wanted to him. And maybe she did. He certainly was in no condition to object. But his recovery was marvelous. Brinkman took the bridge at eight and I stayed below until four in the afternoon. The Old Man had hardly disappeared before Joe joined me on the bridge. He was a sorry sight but he kept on his legs. He wore pajamas and a bathrobe. He looked like a lunatic.

" 'Hey!' I said. 'Get down from here, you lumbering idiot. Pack yourself off to bed!'

"He looked all about him in a scared sort of way.

" 'She is down there!' he whispered.

" 'She?' I said. 'What she?'

" 'S-s-s-she-e-e-e!' he hissed. 'You know what I mean, you blockhead.' That wasn't the way to talk to one's superior, but I forgave him. 'She's been down there all day!' he said. 'She is washing the floor now.'

" 'Well,' I said, 'what more do you want her to do, you ungrateful wretch? Are you never satisfied?'

"That was too much for him. That finished the conversation. He crept under one of the boats and cried.

"She tidied his cabin every day after that. It looked like a—a—boudoir and Joe, poor fellow, never set his foot in it without fear and trembling."

George stopped to refill his pipe.

"I see," I remarked. "That was one of the things we passed temporarily a while back."

"I thought you were asleep," said George. "You kept still so long."

"There was another thing, too," I reminded him, "that we passed temporarily."

"I am coming to that," said George, lighting his pipe. "Shut your trap and listen and don't interrupt me.

"That tobacco business was a fizzle, we had to admit that. The effects weren't lasting enough to do any real good. And of course it wouldn't do to repeat that stunt. Joe would have found it out and that would have queered the whole business.

"And we didn't have all the time in the world. We were getting somewhere, even at six knots—or maybe seven. Old Hawkins was a speed maniac, so we were probably making seven. I don't remember. I had a notion that if Joe once set foot on shore, in his present state of mind, we'd never see him again.

"The Old Man was pulling long faces and it made me creepy. I began to sleep badly.

" 'You fell down on that business, Mr. Carey,' said he one day. 'You didn't make him sick enough.'

" 'His constitution was a little too much for me, sir,' I said. 'It got rid of the stuff too fast. And your daughter is a good nurse, I am sure, and that probably helped him, too.'

" 'I have almost come to the conclusion, Mr. Carey,' said the old lunatic, 'that I ought to substitute you for Mr. Davis in this matter.'

" 'THAT would never do, sir!' I said, creepy all over. 'I'd never get through a ceremony anywhere without some other lady butting in with a prior claim.'

" 'I could marry you at sea, Mr. Carey,' said the raving lunatic. 'That is within my powers.'

" 'That is not to be thought of, sir,' I said firmly. 'I am not fit to marry anybody's daughter, least of all yours, sir.'

" 'You are a good sailor, Mr. Carey,' said the madman.

" 'A good sailor and a poor husband, sir. Like my father. Many a time I heard my mother say so. She knew, and my grandmother knew, both to their sorrow. You might ask them, sir.' I was nearly frantic, you understand.

" 'Maybe you are right, Mr. Carey,' said the old fool. 'But I would like to see my daughter disposed of.'

" 'Certainly, sir,' I said. 'But marriage is a pretty serious business, when you come

to think of it, especially for the father of the bride. Supposing there was a family, sir, and the good-for-nothing husband ran away. Her father would naturally have to support them and that would be pretty tough on him, sir.'

" 'Maybe you are right, Mr. Carey,' said the old skinflint. 'I have never looked at it in that light. I'll have to think it over.'

" 'Now, Davis would never do a thing like that, sir,' I said. I was determined to clinch the matter right there. 'He is steady as a Swiss chronometer. He's a man you can depend on, sir.'

" 'I am sure he is,' said the old fool, 'but he doesn't seem to be very tractable on this particular subject.'

" 'Shyness, sir, nothing but shyness,' said I. 'He'd run away from his own mother.'

" 'Well, what would you suggest, Mr. Carey?' said he.

"I thought hard. I had to settle this matter once and for all. My interests were getting more and more involved.

" 'Supposing,' I said, 'that your daughter took sick.'

" 'I don't see what that has got to do with it,' said the old fool. 'But what about it?'

" 'Since there's no other woman on board,' I said, 'she would naturally have to be nursed by a man. It would be a nice job for Joe.'

" 'He might object,' said Brinkman.

" 'He might,' I said. 'But somebody would have to do it. He isn't any better than the rest.'

"I oughtn't to have said that, of course.

" 'You confounded little shrimp!' said the old lunatic. 'How dare you say a thing like that about my prospective son-in-law!'

" 'I beg your pardon, sir,' I said. 'I meant we are all under your orders, sir.'

" 'I see what you mean, Mr. Carey,' said he. 'But I don't expect my daughter to take sick. I don't use tobacco in any form.'

" 'It looks like a squall,' I said. 'Is your daughter a good sailor, sir?'

" 'It does look like a squall,' said the old fool. 'This is my daughter's first trip to sea, Mr. Carey.'

" 'That is fortunate, sir,' I said. 'We will have to trust to luck for the rest.'

"It did blow up a gale, not much but enough to bowl a landlubber over. Of course it knocked the underpinnings from the daughter. Joe and the steward took turns at nursing her and cleaning the floor. The *Aunt Louisa* became a madhouse. We all realized that a crisis was coming. Oh, Lord!

"Joe didn't like it, naturally, but orders were orders. Oh, he was mad! Oh, Heaven! Oh ——! Never saw anybody so mad in my life. It was positively indecent to look at him. Oh, my! I saw a lot of him. He developed a passion for confidences. He enumerated the woman's shortcomings to me, one by one. Whenever he discovered something new, he'd run and tell me.

" 'She is flat-footed!' said he.

" 'So are you,' I said. 'You see the cootie in your neighbor's eye, but you don't see the cockroach in your own. You are forgetting your Bible, Joe.'

" 'She has ankles like a Polish washerwoman,' said Joe. Now, would you have thought that of Holy Joe?

" 'Anything else?' I said.

" 'She is fat as a pig!' said Joe.

" 'Anything else?' I said.

" 'She wears green underwear!' said Joe. Now, would you have thought that of Holy Joe?

" 'Anything else?' I said.

" 'She is ugly as Hades'! said Joe.

" 'Anything else?' I said.

"No there wasn't, not then.

" 'Well, Joey boy,' I said, 'please run along and see if you can discover something else.'

"And Joey would run along, foaming at the mouth, and do just that. Oh, Lord, what a time!

" IT BLEW a little harder; the *Aunt Louisa* rolled a little more; and the daughter got a little sicker. She was in a bad way and I hoped she would get worse. She did. Old Brinkman began to worry about her. His conscience began to bother him, I guess. The old skinflint.

"He broke his rules, his own rules, every day now. So did Joe. So did everybody else. But that didn't matter. ——, what a time!

"One night he came to me, hanging his head and acting the broken-hearted old father.

" 'She is pretty bad tonight,' he said. 'My poor little daughter.'

" 'Is she deathly sick'? I said.

" 'I don't know,' said the old sinner. 'But she looks it.'

" 'Thank the Lord!' I said.

"I shouldn't have said that, of course. But I felt so relieved, so thankful, I couldn't help myself. But old Brinkman was mad. Oh, my!

" 'You hard-baked devil, you!' he said. 'It makes you happy to see my poor little girl suffering! You vampire! You ghoul! You infernal brat of original sin!'

"But I didn't mind. I was too excited to listen.

" 'Now or never!' I said, pulling him along with me. 'Ever and forever. We have got to have a death-bed marriage!'

" 'You everlastingly —— son of Satan!' said old Brinkman.

"But I didn't mind. I pulled him along.

" 'Now is your chance!' I said. 'Now is the appointed time. Now or never! The opportunity that will never come again!' I was so excited I talked like a blooming evangelist.

"She was in the saloon. Joe was there and the steward was there. She was in a bad way, sure enough. She was pale and so weak she could hardly lift her eyelids. I tiptoed over to her and looked her over carefully. No, she was not at all good-looking. Joe was right. I tiptoed back to the rest of them.

" 'Hush!' I said. 'She is in a bad way. She is dying. She has a tumor on the brain. She has all the symptoms—faintness, pressure in the brain, and spells of vomiting. She can't live the night out. One of my sweethearts died of it. I know,' said I.

" 'Isn't there anything we can do?' said her old man. He was trembly. He evidently thought I was handing him the gospel.

" 'Nothing,' I said solemnly, 'except to grant her dying wish and pray for her soul.'

"I tiptoed over to her, bent over her, and tiptoed back again.

" 'Hush!' I said, holding up my hand for silence. 'She says she loves you, Joe, and wishes to marry you before she dies.'

" 'Me?' said Joe and edged toward the door.

" 'Joe,' I said, 'we all know she loves you. Joe, if you don't grant her last wish in this world you are a scoundrel and a quitter. You have accepted her attentions in life and now you would desert her at the door of death! Joe,' I said, 'if you leave her now I never want to set eyes on you again in this world, and if I see you in the next you will be burning in ——!'

"I was so excited that the tears ran down my cheeks. Old Brinkman was crying like an old woman and the steward was sniveling into a dirty handkerchief.

"Joe weakened.

" 'Are you sure she will die?' he said.

" 'Joe,' I said, 'if my life is worth anything to you, you can have it if she is alive tomorrow morning!'

" 'She does look bad,' said Joe.

" 'All right,' said Joe and sighed.

"I shook some sense back into old Brinkman's carcass and we clinched the matter then and there. Oh, my! Oh, Lord! What a night! What a night!

"SHE didn't die, of course. She was only seasick. We ran into smoother weather and she recovered and was as happy as a lark. But Joe was mad— Oh, how mad he was! He didn't speak to me for days and when he finally did he accused me of having tricked him and swore like a bandit.

"It broke his spirit entirely. When we touched at Plymouth to coal, he was the first to go ashore and get drunk. Oh, he drank steadily after that, off and on, and became a regular guy. But he made life mighty unpleasant for me. When he was drunk he swore he would kill me when he got sober, and when he was sober he threatened to kill me as soon as he got drunk. So I was in constant danger of my life.

"I left the ship as soon as we got back to New York and Joe stepped into my shoes. A year later there was an addition to the family, and Joe persuaded old Brinkman to go ashore and watch the kid. Joe has been running her since, the *Aunt Louisa* I mean, he and that ancient speed maniac, old Hawkins."

George paused and knocked the ashes from his pipe.

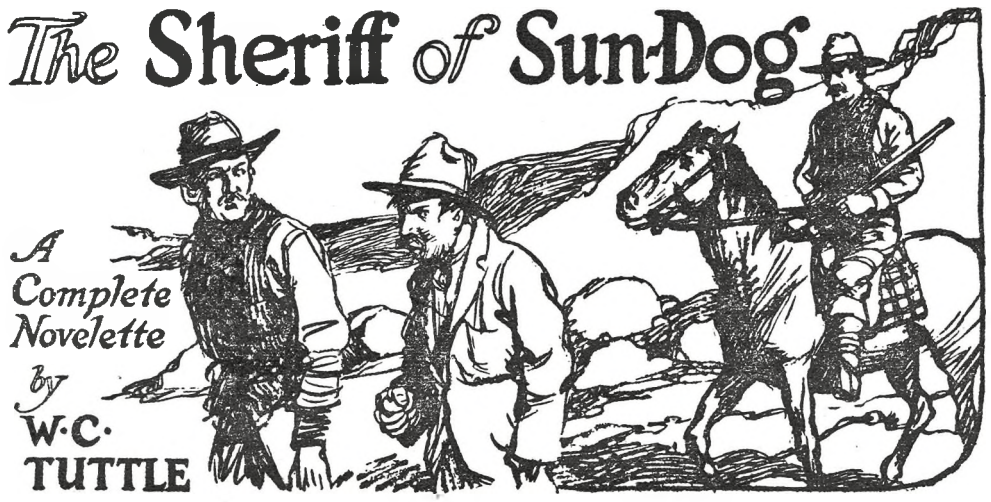
"You said it was a triangle," I said.

"Well, wasn't it?" said George. "There were old Brinkman and his daughter and Holy Joe. That makes three angles, doesn't it?"

"And there were you," I said. "That makes it a quadrangle."

"Oh, I," said George. "I wasn't in it. I was only an innocent bystander trying to keep out of trouble."

The Sheriff of Sun-Dog



A Complete Novelette by W·C· TUTTLE

Author of "Sun-Dog Trails," "Law Rustlers," etc.

IT WAS a hot day in Marlin City, the county seat of Sun-Dog County. It had often been said that there was only one tree between Marlin City and the Arctic Circle to break the north winds of Winter, and that the aforementioned tree was too far north to afford Marlin City any shade during the Summer.

At the hitch-rack, in front of the Dollar Down saloon and gambling hall, stood a forlorn looking saddle-horse, head down, as though seeking the shade of its own body. A long lean dog of nondescript breed slouched along the hot board sidewalk, hunting a shady spot. From Le Blanc's blacksmith shop came the odors of burning hoof, as the muscular French-Canadian swore at the stifling heat and tried to fit a hot shoe to the hoof of a half-broke bronco.

Inside the sheriff's office sat "Brick" Davidson, the new sheriff, and his deputy "Silent" Slade. The former sheriff, "Bunty" Blair, had appointed Brick as his deputy, and had resigned in Brick's favor. Bunty was glad to resign. Sun-Dog was no place for a weak-kneed sheriff, such as Bunty Blair. There was nothing weak about Brick Davidson. His flaming thatch of bright, brick-colored hair, a thin freckled nose, and an indomitable view of right and wrong, bid fair to make changes in cowland. Sun-Dog County did not elect Brick Davidson, although they had a chance at the last election. Sun-Dog followed the lines of least resistance and elected Bunty Blair.

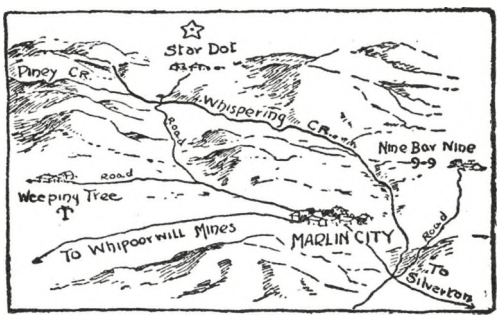
In fact, Brick had received the whole sum of seven votes—including his own. Lafe Freeman, owner of the Nine Bar outfit, of which Brick had been foreman, stated that Brick knew too much to get elected sheriff.

Bunty's resignation and Brick's appointment had been ratified by a majority of the board of county commissioners. Bill Voorhies, owner of the Lazy H outfit, and the acknowledged leader of the commissioners, was not in favor of Brick's appointment, but the board had acted in the absence of Voorhies and he could do nothing less than agree.

Voorhies was a ponderous sort of person, loud of mouth, slow of action, and desiring power above all things. In the past three months he had shipped a great number of beef cattle, and was entertaining a buyer at the time Brick was appointed. He bossed the county commissioners and bragged of the fact. Voorhies might have become a big politician and a power in the State, but——

Through sound reasoning Brick had cleared Scott Martin and his adopted daughter, Jean, of all complicity in the robbery of the Whipoorwill stage, and had succeeded in bringing retribution where retribution was due. Two men had paid the penalty with their lives, while the third, Zell Mohr, had been given a life sentence, but in trying to escape from the train on the way to the penitentiary had been instantly killed. Incidentally, Brick had won the thousand dollar reward. It had been a big day in Marlin City, but after the smoke of

battle cleared away, Marlin City and Sun-Dog County settled down to the humdrum existence of cow country and small cow town. It was all in a day's work. Few men gave Brick credit for doing anything out of the ordinary. He was just Brick Davidson, cow-puncher; rather fast with a gun, and ready of wit. Brick lived to grin.



He had an overdeveloped sense of humor, which, at times, grated on the sensibilities of slower thinkers. When it was announced that Brick had been appointed sheriff to succeed Bunty Blair, many of the graybeards shook their heads. Sun-Dog County needed a wiser, cooler head. Brick's hair was too red. He'd last quick. Brick heard some of the mumblings, and confided to Silent Slade.

"They're scared of me, Silent, don't yuh know it?"

"Well," Silent had replied, "well, hadn't they ought to, Brick?"

SILENT'S reply was very matter of fact. Silent did not try to be funny. He worshiped Brick, and trailed him around like a great dog—a dog six feet six inches tall, built in proportion, with a long crooked nose and a big humorous mouth. His hands were big and ungainly, but they lost their clumsiness when called upon to reach for the big, black-handled Colt .44 which swung from their owner's hip. In that respect they were very capable. Just now, Silent was perusing some old reward notices, while Brick spelled out a typewritten letter which Silent had brought from the post-office.

Brick's mouth drew down at the corners and his blue eyes twinkled as he looked up from the letter and glanced at Silent.

"Goin' to be —— rised and a chunk placed under its corners around here," announced Brick.

Silent looked up quickly. He had been bemoaning the lack of action just a few minutes before.

"For gosh sakes, Brick, whatcha mean?" he demanded anxiously.

"Letter from the cattle association."

Brick snapped his finger against the sheet of paper and glanced up at the ceiling, puffing vainly at an unlit cigaret.

"Oh!" said Silent, relaxing back in his chair. "What's eatin' 'em now?"

" 'Member me writing 'em about makin' a maverick law?"

"Heard yuh say yuh was goin' to, Brick, but didn't pay no 'tention at the time. What was it?"

"Billy Slavin, the secretary, and me are friends. Me and him punched cows down on the Little Missouri six years ago. Silent, did yuh ever stop to think what mavericks mean to a cow-man?"

Silent half-nodded and waited for Brick to continue.

"Them danged unbranded animals are to blame for half the cattle stealin' in this country, Silent. Mebbe she's a even break, you'll say. It ain't. I know some honest cow-men which this maverick stuff hurts. I spoke to Billy about it. He took it up. This here letter—" Brick opened it up again and held it up for Silent's inspection—"this letter says that from now on all mavericks are to be held, subject to disposal by the association. The cattlemen own and run the association, Silent; and these mavericks belong to the cattlemen. What is fairer than to let 'em dispose of these critters and use the money in the interests of the cattlemen? I kinda like it myself."

Silent bit his lip reflectively and nodded slowly.

"There will be —— rised, Brick, y'betcha, and I sure hope that your carcass and mine won't be used to bolster up none of the corners."

A maverick is an unbranded animal—usually a calf, which had been born in a secluded part of the range, or accidently overlooked by the cowboys. This calf, weaned away from its mother, after which no brand may claim ownership, becomes a prey to the first cattleman who can burn on a brand. Hundreds of mavericks were branded every year on the ranges; many cowboys acquiring a herd in this manner.

Brick Davidson new that this practise was all wrong, as it gave a dishonest

cattleman an edge over an honest one, and also was an inducement for a dishonest cowpuncher to overlook his employer's young stock until such a time as he could "maverick" a few for himself and get a start. Sun-Dog County was not without its rustling troubles. Brick knew that he had work cut out for him—if he upheld his oath of office. Brick knew every inch of the Sun-Dog ranges, knew the cattle business from "dally to hondo" as Lafe Freeman had said, and under ordinary circumstances would be an ideal peace officer for the county, but Sun-Dog did not seem to want Brick Davidson's protection—as was witnessed by seven votes including Brick's own vote. Brick got up from his desk, put the paper inside his vest, and picked up his hat.

"Yuh ain't goin' out in the heat, are yuh?" asked Silent.

Brick nodded.

"Yeah. I've got to pass around the bad news."

"What's the hurry?"

"This here office is runnin' today—not *mañana*," smiled Brick. "You stay here and don't let anybody bust the jail. If any outlaws come along with a price on their heads, jew 'em down, Silent. Get 'em as cheap——"

"Aw-w-w,——!" grunted Silent. "Lemme go along."

"And shut up the office?" Brick appeared very indignant. " 'Member them old Pinkerton books we had at the ranch? 'Member they had a eye painted on the cover, and the words 'We Never Sleep'? Do yuh? That's us, *sabe?*"

"All right, all right," grunted Silent. "While you're gone I'll paint a eye on the door."

"Make it a mouth," grinned Brick. "And above it put, 'We Never Shut Up.' "

OLD Jeff Seldon owned the Star Dot, horse and cattle outfit, and also owned a grudge against humanity. Although only about fifty-five years of age, he looked seventy-five. He was below average height. His skin was like yellow parchment, his nose hooked; his mouth so thin-lipped that he appeared to have only a slit, inside of which were a motley collection of misfit teeth and ancient gold fillings. His eyes were deep-set and savage, as they peered out past the thin, high bridge of his nose—peered out with disfavor upon every one and every thing.

Jeff Seldon had come from Dakota, and bought out the Bar Dot outfit a year before, bringing his five cowboys with him. It is doubtful whether Seldon could have hired a cowboy in Sun-Dog County, for Seldon's reputation was known.

He had practically been driven from Dakota for an unpardonable offence. In cowland a cowboy is welcome at any cow-man's table. His bunk-house is always big enough to sleep one more. It was merely range etiquette. If the owner was not at home, the visitor was welcome to enter the premises, cook his meals and occupy the beds.

Two cowboys, tired, hungry, stopped at Jeff Seldon's ranch. They stabled their horses, and started for the ranch-house, when Seldon met them.

"The town is just fourteen miles down that road," stated Seldon. "I am not runnin' a hotel."

"Much obliged," said one of the cowboys, and they traveled on.

From that day on, Seldon was a man apart from the range-folk. His stock was never picked up in a round-up. No man spoke to him. His cows never brought in calves, and the range country ate beef that did not bear the diner's brand. Seldon had plenty of money, and stood the loss as long as possible, but eventually sold out and traveled north.

If Seldon was crabbed before this mistake, he was a hundred times more soured on the world afterward.

He mixed little with Sun-Dog folks. He was a bachelor. His five men, Pete Kane, the foreman, Frank Fellows, "Bun" Partner, Jim Malone and Hal Breamer, were hard riders, hard drinkers, and close mouthed, even in their cups. The Star Dot ranch-house was seven miles from Marlin City, and adjoined the Weeping Tree range.

The ownership of the Weeping Tree had never been settled. Zell Mohr had owned it, but Zell was dead. Before his arrest and conviction he had given Scott Martin the right to occupy the old Weeping Tree ranch-house and to use the land. Zell had sold his Silverton property, but no one knew of any disposition having been made of the Weeping Tree.

Brick rode straight for the Star Dot ranch. There was no reason for passing the order to the Star Dot oufit first, but it happened that the Star Dot was so located

that Brick could easily return past the Weeping Tree ranch in time for supper. Brick was a biscuit fiend, and he knew that Jean Martin was the best biscuit builder in the world. Therefore Brick hummed a little range song and totally ignored the heat. Some day he was going to get up nerve enough to ask Jean to marry him—some day, maybe tomorrow. Brick was a lot like a Mexican, in that respect. Tomorrow looked like the very best day to speak to her about it—always tomorrow.

Pete Kane and Jimmy Malone were just coming out of the ranch-house door as Brick rode up. Kane was undeniably handsome of face and there was a wild, free grace to his figure, a dash and swing that denoted plenty of animal vigor. His tiny brown mustache was waxed to needle points, and his insolent brown eyes stared at Brick in mock terror.

"Well, if it ain't the policeman!" he exclaimed.

Jimmy Malone, a short, stocky cowboy, square of features, stared at Brick, and a frown centered above his eyes. Jimmy Malone did not like officers of the law. Brick ignored Kane's sarcasm, although he felt it keenly. It was not like Brick to ignore a gibe, but Brick was representing the law now.

"Jeff Seldon to home?" he asked.

"He is!" snapped a voice and Brick glanced at the door, where Seldon was standing, half dressed and with a boot in his hand. "Whatcha want?"

SELDON was plainly hostile to Brick, but Brick merely grinned at him. Seldon stepped out to the edge of the porch, one sock half-on and flopping from his foot.

"Can'tcha talk?" he rasped. "Whatcha want here, Davidson?"

"Just passin' out word that the cattle association is goin' to take charge of all mavericks from now on."

Seldon stared at him and then at Kane. Kane sneered. Brick's statement was perhaps an insinuation that the Star Dot dealt strongly in mavericked stock, but Brick did not mean it to sound as such.

"I'm startin' out to pass the word," continued Brick. "Got a letter——"

"Hol' on! Hol' on!" Seldon fairly exploded with wrath, and took two steps down from the porch. "You accusin' me of mavericking'?"

"Hold on you'self!" snapped Brick. "Nobody's accusin' you of anythin'."

"Whatcha talkin' thataway to me fer?" Seldon's voice rasped and broke in righteous indignation.

"I ain't accusin' anybody," soothed Brick. "The cattle association is goin' to take charge of all unbranded stock from now on, and I——"

"—— the association!" roared Seldon. "I don't belong to no association. I hope that the sheep run 'em out of the range!"

"Don't yelp," laughed Brick. "Talk natural, Seldon."

"I'll talk as I —— please! No penny-ante sheriff can come out here——"

"Whoa, Blaze!" gritted Brick. "Don't get personal, Seldon. I don't care if you don't belong to the association. I've been ordered to protect their interests, and I reckon I'll foller out them orders."

"You'd make a good protector for a calf," observed Kane, and Malone laughed outright.

"Yuh may find that out," agreed Brick easily.

"Protect ——!" roared Seldon. "They wouldn't elect yuh sheriff, but yuh run a blazer on Bunty Blair and——"

"I wouldn't talk thataway if I was you," interrupted Brick. "I ain't never done you no harm, Seldon. I'm out here to pass out an order that was given to me."

"Who made that order?" demanded Seldon. "Tell me that, will yuh?"

"The association made it, Seldon; but I suggested it, if yuh must know."

"The —— you did!" Seldon's parchment-like face seemed to wrinkle with wrath and he groped for words.

"You—you think you're a little —— on wheels, don'tcha? Mebbe yuh think that Sun-Dog is goin' to put yuh on a pedestal and worship yuh, but you've got the wrong hunch, lemme tell yuh that. I'll run my ranch to suit myself, and I don't want no —— sheriff ridin' up to my door and tellin' me that I can't do this and I can't do that. *Sabe?*"

"Bust a blood-vessel, if yuh don't watch out," observed Brick. "I knowed a feller like you, Seldon. He had a nasty tongue, too. Got mad at a dog one day and fell dead kickin' at it. You better be careful."

Seldon leaned back against a porch-post,

quivering with anger, unable to find words for a fitting reply.

"If you're all through—vamoose!" said Kane, jerking his thumb toward the road. "Next time yuh come here bring a warrant; otherwise—not. We don't ask no favors of the sheriff's office, and we ain't interested in the cattle association."

BRICK dropped the right hand off the horn of his saddle and leaned back, but made no move to go.

"Whatcha stayin' around here for?" Seldon seemed to get his breath back.

"I'm the sheriff," said Brick slowly. "I came out here to deliver an order. I've done my duty, as far as the sheriff end of it is concerned. You know what I told you concernin' mavericks. That goes as she lays— And now," Brick slid a few inches sidewise in his saddle, "now I'm just plain Brick Davidson, and I want one of your crowin' roosters to start herdin' me away from here."

"Whatcha mean by that?" asked Kane.

"I'm through bein' joshed, Kane."

"I own this here ranch," stated Seldon, rather inanely.

"Ownership unquestioned," said Brick; "but that don't give yuh no license to act like yuh did. I may be a penny-ante sheriff, but my game is too big for you or your punchers to set into."

For a space of ten seconds Brick's eyes bored into Kane's.

Brick felt that Malone would be slow to draw, and Seldon was apparently unarmed. Kane had all the ear-marks of a gun-fighter, and wore his gun handy. Then Kane's eyes fell. Brick shifted his gaze to Seldon.

"I hope you'll see your way clear to abide by that maverick proposition, Seldon. I'm passin' the word to every cattleman in this county. I reckon that the association men are in the majority."

"You're hopin' quite a lot for a young feller." Seldon was trying to keep his voice cool. "I was runnin' cows when you was ridin' a stick-horse, Davidson, and if you think for a minute that I'm payin' any attention to such a —— fool order, you're crazy as ——! You better resign and get a job herdin' sheep."

"When I can't enforce the law—I will."

Brick turned his horse and rode slowly away, taking a chance that few men would take under the circumstances.

"You better put in your application!" Seldon's voice was a mirthful squeak, but Brick did not turn his head. From behind him came the laughter of the three men, but Brick could not trust himself to turn his head.

"You're sheriff, Brick," he told himself. "You're paid to enforce the law—not to smoke up folks. Hang onto yourself, you danged fool! Nice thing for a sheriff to throw lead at cheap cow-comedians."

Brick shook his head and rode to a high point in the road before he allowed himself to look back at the Star Dot. He shook his head, glanced at the star on the lapel of his vest.

"—— such a job!" he exclaimed aloud. "Cripples a feller all up."

At the forks of the road, where the road led up to Weeping Tree ranch, a buckboard and two restive horses pulled up, the driver waiting for Brick to arrive. At first glance the driver appeared to be a man, but a closer view proved her to be a big, raw-boned woman, middle aged, her face tanned to a deep bronze. Her hair was done up under a floppy sombrero and a well-worn duster covered her calico dress. She grinned at Brick, and jerked back on the lines, as the restive broncs surged forward.

"Howdy, Brickie," she called.

" 'Lo, Mrs. Wesson. How's everything?"

"She was fine when I left." Mrs. Wesson, wife of the general store-keeper at Marlin City, threw back her head and laughed heartily. Mrs. Wesson was rough of speech and jest, but her heart was pure gold. She loved Brick Davidson like a mother and deviled him at every opportunity. Brick reddened, and grinned down at her.

"Just breakin' them horses?" he asked.

Mrs. Wesson glanced at the team and then up at Brick.

"Brick Davidson, you ain't interested in broncs, are yuh? I've been drivin' them coyote baits for a year and you sets there and asks me if I'm breakin' 'em. You sure observes things, cowboy."

"Oh, yeah," murmured Brick, "I knowed 'em when yuh used to curry 'em, but they're so shaggy and ragged lookin'——".

"Hol' on! Cale Wesson curried 'em this mornin'."

"Went out to," corrected Brick, "and then went to sleep on the stable doorstep."

Mrs. Wesson chuckled. Her husband

had often told her that she could talk the handle off a pump, and she and Brick were due for an argument every time they met. Suddenly she sobered and looked up at Brick.

"Brick, why don't yuh go to Weepin' Tree once in a while? You ain't been there for a week."

"Been busy."

"Yeah? Know Pete Kane? Do yuh? He ain't busy. Giddap!"

THE team sprang forward, and the buckboard whirled off down the road in a cloud of dust. Brick sat there and watched her fade off down the road. What did she mean? Pete Kane wasn't busy? Was Pete Kane visiting the Weeping Tree ranch? Brick wrinkled his nose and wiped the perspiration off his face. Suddenly it struck Brick that he had no right to say where Pete Kane should or should not go. He wondered if Mrs. Wesson meant to warn him. He knew nothing about Pete Kane—nothing against him. He was not friendly to Brick, but Brick reasoned that that fact did not make him any less a man. There was nothing narrow about Brick's philosophy of life.

He did not hate his enemies, neither did he turn the other cheek. He tried to hate Jeff Seldon, but the effort was a failure.

"Poor little devil," said Brick aloud; "his soul must 'a' been made of green stuff, and his ma left him out in the sun and he got warped."

Mrs. Wesson was out of sight before Brick came out of reverie. Then he touched his horse with his spurs and went on toward Marlin City. Brick had decided to go to Weeping Tree—tomorrow.

But Brick did not go to Weeping Tree on the following day. News of the maverick situation had percolated considerable in twenty-four hours, and Marlin City's hitch-rack held more than their usual quota of saddle-horses. The association men were in the majority, but few of them openly applauded the idea. It was a time-honored custom—wrong, no doubt—but the old cowmen were satisfied with the old order of things.

Brick was busy explaining his idea of it. Bunty Blair had acquired the Dollar Down saloon and gambling house, which was doing a thriving business on this day. Practically all of the nearest ranches were represented by either the foreman or owner. Neither Jeff Seldon nor Pete Kane was in evidence; but Breamer and Partner were there, saying nothing, but, as Brick observed listening considerable. They left early in the forenoon.

"She's all right," said "Bunch" Thornton, owner of the AD brand—one of the old-timers. "She's all right, Brick, but I'd say she's cuttin' out quite a lot for one sheriff to handle. Sure as —— she's goin' to rise discussions."

"It ain't a law," argued Bill Voorhies. " 'Pears to me that she's just a request. Mebbe they're right, though. Maverickin' sure does leave one big inducement for a feller to go crooked."

"I ain't sayin' a word," grinned Lafe Freeman, "but I've been wonderin' why Bill Voorhies' cows all have twins and my cows never bring in a calf."

Bill Voorhies joined in the general laugh which followed, and every one faced the bar and took a drink on Bill. Scott Martin had taken no part in the conversation, standing apart from the rest. After the drink the party slowly broke up, without any one offering to back the sheriff or the association.

Scott Martin had taken no part in the conversation, owing to the fact that an ear affliction had caused partial deafness, and he was aware of the fact that men must shout to make him hear. He followed the rest of the men outside, got on his horse and rode away toward the ranch.

Brick and Silent stood in the doorway of their office and watched the men ride away.

"Didn't see nothin' of Seldon's gang," observed Silent.

"Couple of his punchers were over in the saloon," replied Brick.

Brick had told Silent of his run-in with Seldon and Kane the day before, and Silent had bewailed the fact that Brick didn't cripple the both of them.

"You look out for them," advised Silent. "Seldon's a danged old centipede. Remind me of an old buzzard, with that yaller skin drawed tight across his sharp old face and that wrinkled neck. Betcha forty dollars his blood only circ'lates as high as his collar-bone."

Brick laughed and they went into the office.

"Lot of fellers," observed Brick, "ain't got sense enough to protect themselves.

You'd think they'd all be strong for this new order, wouldn't yuh?"

"I dunno." Silent wrinkled his long nose over the manufacture of a cigaret. "I reckon they all mavericks a little. Did yuh ever buy a watermelon, Brick? Didja ever notice that it ain't sweet and juicy like the ones yuh stole when yuh was a kid? I reckon that cow-men never grow up—not that-away."

"It ain't right," argued Brick.

Silent squinted at Brick's serious expression.

"It ain't," agreed Silent. "Far as I'm concerned I don't give a whoop-galoo how much they steal from each other, but this is your play, Brick, and I'm backin' yuh from my belt both ways. If you say she's wrong —she sure as —— is wrong, as far as I'm concerned."

"Much obliged, Silent," said Brick absently.

"No, yuh ain't," grinned Silent, " 'cause yuh never heard what I said.

"I think I'll ride out to the Weeping Tree," said Brick, paying no attention to Silent's statement.

"You ain't seen Scott Martin for almost an hour," grinned Silent. "He'll wonder if you're mad at him—or somethin'."

BRICK picked up his hat and walked out the rear door. At the rear of the office stood the small stable. Brick saddled his horse and swung into the street. He noticed that Lafe Freeman's team and buckboard were still at the hitch-rack, along with three saddle-horses.

Brick rode a single-footer, which ate up distance, and Brick, deep in thought, suddenly realized that he had swung off the main road and was within two miles of the Weeping Tree. He looped his reins around the horn of the saddle and gave a little attention to the manufacture of a cigaret. Suddenly his horse checked it's stride and threw up its head. Brick instinctively reached for his reins and glanced up. Coming up out of the ravine, traveling towards the road was Scott Martin's bay horse, still saddled and with reins dragging. Brick spurred ahead and crowded the horse against a sharp bank, where he got hold of the reins.

Brick's first thought was that perhaps the horse had thrown Scott, but the horse was too well broken and gentle to throw an average rider. Perhaps Scott had cut across the hills and the horse had fallen with him. Brick rode down the ravine, leading the bay. The horse showed no signs of having fallen. Brick rode down the twisting ravine for perhaps an eighth of a mile, when he suddenly heard the bawling of a calf. He swung his horse through the thick mesquite and came out into a small valley. Just beyond him a tiny trickle of smoke, like a blue thread faded into the soft breeze. That fire could only mean one thing —somebody was branding in the open range.

Brick started to get off his horse, when out of the brush came a big spotted cow. There was no question but what that cow was angry. She emitted a blood-curdling bawl and came straight at Brick, who dropped the reins of the bay horse and spurred into the open. He whirled his horse, around, untying his rope.

The cow seemed undecided whether to chase the loose horse or the one with the rider. Brick swung his loop and rode slowly in a circle. The cow, instead of rushing at Brick, whirled suddenly and started across the little valley on a lope. Brick spurred in behind her, belaboring her with the heavy metal hondo on his lariat. With a bellow of alarm the cow turned and went down the ravine, seemingly anxious to get away.

Brick drew up and turned his horse. Within twenty feet of him smoldered the tiny fire, and not over ten feet from the fire lay a calf, hog-tied. It was a young calf—too young to brand.

Brick swung down from his saddle and walked over to the calf.

"No wonder the old lady went on the prod," he muttered. "Some son of a gun couldn't wait for it to get weaned."

Suddenly Brick's eyes centered on an object just beyond the fire and almost concealed from his view behind a mesquite tangle. Brick's hand flashed to his gun, and he walked slowly forward, the butt of his Colt resting against his thigh.

It was a man, lying on his face, with arms outspread. Brick did not have to turn him over to know it was Scott Martin. After the first shock, Brick's eyes swept the surrounding country. A hundred yards away, outlined against the sky stood the spotted cow, watching for her baby, but the cow was the only living thing in sight.

Brick knelt beside Scott Martin, drew down one of the outflung arms and gently turned him over on his back. Martin was not dead. His eyes were open and staring, and his heart-beats were jerky, but he was still alive. Brick knew it was no use to examine the wound. Brick knew nothing about surgery, except to try and stop the flow of blood, but Scott Martin was not bleeding badly. There was a spot of blood between his shoulders, but no sign of a wound in the front of his shirt.

BRICK got to his feet. He did not know exactly what to do. Suddenly he saw a rider, cutting the hill, far across the ravine. Brick waved his hat and yelled, but the rider was too far away. Then Brick pointed his pistol at the sky and six shots echoed across the hills. The horse stopped. Brick waved his hat. The man swung his horse around and rode straight toward Brick, who walked a little farther up on the hill and waited.

The man was Lynn Barnhardt, of the Lazy H. He was traveling cautiously up out of the ravine, when Brick called to him and he came on a gallop.

Brick walked back to where Martin lay.

"Howdy, Brick," said Barnhardt, and then his eyes dropped to the man lying at Brick's feet. His glance swept to the trussed calf and the smoldering fire and then back to Brick.

"Pick's 'em young, don't he?" Barnhardt's voice was serious.

"Somebody shot him," said Brick.

Barnhardt looked curiously at Brick and then down at Martin.

"Yeah, it looks kinda that way. Dead?"

"No. See anybody in the hills today, Lynn?"

Barnhardt shook his head.

"How yuh goin' to get him to town?"

"Have to get a rig, I reckon. Will yuh stay here and—kinda watch him, while I get a rig and a doctor, Lynn?"

"Sure—go ahead. Whose calf is that, Brick?"

"It never got branded," replied Brick; "but its ma wears a Nine Bar Nine."

"Oh!" grunted Lynn. "Lafe Freeman's, eh? Go ahead, Brick."

Brick rode furiously back to Marlin City. Lafe Freeman's team and buckboard was still at the hitch-rack; so Brick went straight into the Dollar Down. He found a poker game in progress, and Lafe Freeman was sitting behind a large stack of chips.

"Scott Martin has been shot," states Brick. "Can I borrow your rig, Lafe?"

"Shot?" exclaimed Bunch Thornton, starting out of his chair. "Scott Martin?"

"In the back," replied Brick. "Where's Doc Meyers?—anybody know?"

"He's over in the restaurant," said Le Blanc. "I see her go in dere jus' now. I'm go to her—me."

Le Blanc lumbered out of the doorway and across the street, while Lafe Freeman bow-legged his way to the hitch-rack.

Bunch Thornton bought a bottle of whisky from Bunty, shoved it into his pocket and ran for his horse. Bunch believed that nothing was as good as whisky in case of lead poisoning.

Doc Meyers came out of the restaurant door, urged by Le Blanc, who was talking more French than English, much to Doc Meyers' mystification. Lafe yelled at the little doctor to come a-running, and the cavalcade dashed out of town, Lafe and the doctor riding a bouncing buckboard drawn by two running broncs, while ahead rode Brick and Bunch Thornton.

Brick and Bunch left the road near the ravine, but Lafe Freeman asked no questions. He had often sworn that he could drive a buckboard anywhere a man could ride a horse, and he almost proved it.

The doctor held on with both hands and prayed for the journey to end, while Lafe whooped at the broncos and drove them down into the ravine and out on the other side. The doctor fell off the seat a hundred yards from where Barnhardt was speaking to Brick, but Lafe drew up with a flourish and jumped out.

DOC MEYERS lost no time in idle speculation. His examination was rapid, and no one spoke during the time he opened the back of Martin's shirt and disclosed the bullet hole. The bullet had struck between the spine and the shoulder blade, on the right side. Meyers bandaged the wound and then motioned for them to put him in the buckboard.

"Is he hurt bad?" asked Brick softly.

"Yah. Bullet is in him yet. Likely one of them .41's. That flat end on the bullet kinda stops it. Looks like it paralyzed him. Maybe—we'll have to wait and see. Might be hard to recover the lead."

Doc Meyers used no extra words. Mrs. Wesson had said that a diagnosis by Doc Meyers sounded like a telegram prepaid by a stingy man.

"Goin' to take him home, ain't we?" asked Lafe.

Brick nodded.

"Yeah, I reckon it's best, Lafe."

Bunch Thornton released the calf, and headed it down the ravine. Brick rode on the rear of the buckboard, helping the doctor hold Martin in an easy position, while Lynn Barnhardt led Brick's horse.

Jean Martin was standing in the doorway when they swung into the quadrangle of the old Weeping Tree ranch-house. She gazed at them, wide-eyed and then ran out to the buckboard. Jean Martin was a tall, capable looking girl, with serious brown eyes and a tumbled mass of brown hair, which never seemed to stay "put" as she expressed it. Jean was barely past eighteen. Scott Martin had married her mother, a widow, when Jean was barely ten years of age, and less than a year later her mother had been killed by a misdirected bullet. Her love for her foster-father was as strong as it would have been for her own father. Although her name was not Martin, she had adopted her step-father's name, and was known to every one as Scott Martin's daughter.

Lafe Freeman tried to break it gently to her, but Jean only needed to be told the nature of the wound. Brick tried to tell her how he found her father, but she ran past him into the house to fix a bed. Brick helped Barnhardt carry him into the house, and then the men stood around silently and watched Doc Meyers prepare to try to find the bullet.

Jean's face was gray with the horror of it all, but she did not break down nor whimper. Jean was built of stern stuff, and the men watched her with a mixture of pity and admiration. Suddenly a figure darkened the door and they turned to see Mrs. Wesson dressed in her slouch hat and worn duster. She went straight to Jean and put her arm around the girl's waist.

"Honey, I came just as quick as I heard."

Jean smiled wanly, and looked back at the doctor.

"—— that maverick law!" muttered Bunch Thornton.

Brick raised his eyes and stared at him. For the first time it came to Brick that folks would think he had done it. He had found the tied calf, the branding fire. Doc Meyers had spoken of the wound being made by a .41 caliber bullet. Brick carried a .41. He remembered the queer look that Barnhardt had given him.

Brick switched his gaze to Jean, and found her looking straight at him, a look full of sorrow. Then she turned away.

Brick's soul cried out against these suspicions, but his lips tightened. It was damnable for any one to think he had done this, but how could he prove his innocence? Right now, his pistol was filled with empty .41 cartridges and the gun was foul with burned powder.

Brick glanced at Lafe Freeman. Lafe's lips were shut tight, but his glance seemed to be a warning.

"They all think I done it," thought Brick. His eyes swept the group near the bed, and he turned and walked outside to his horse, where he mounted and rode swiftly away. His mind was reaching out for a possible proof that he did not shoot Martin, but there was nothing.

He rode swiftly to where he had intercepted Martin's horse, and dismounted. In the dust of the road he found a footprint, partly obliterated by a wagon wheel. He searched up and down the road. Then he found another track, like the track of a monster bird. He studied this.

"Five toed bird!" he grunted. Five toed ——! That's the print of a man's hand!"

Just the one print. Beyond it was a mark where something had been dragged through the dust. On the yellowed grass, near the edge of the road he found a spatter of blood. It was almost dried in the sun, but was undeniably fresh blood.

Brick ranged like a hunting dog. Suddenly he found another track—the track of a horse. He examined it closely. The horse had crossed the road, headed toward the ravine. Across the road was the ruins of an old log and dobie cabin, almost concealed by brush.

Between the road and the ruin he found two more prints from the same horse. Brick went back to his horse. There was nothing unusual about finding the tracks of a shod horse, but Brick had never known a horse to be shod in this manner. The tracks showed that the toe-calks had been left entirely off the shoes, but the heel-calks were very pronounced.

BUNTY BLAIR hailed him from the saloon porch, as he came into town, asking of news from Martin. Bunty looked queerly at Brick, as Brick was unable to tell him anything further than that the doctor was probing for the bullet.

Brick found "Harp" Harris humped up in the doorway of the office, solemn of face and dejected of figure, trying to coax a tune from his jew's-harp. Nature had violated a precedent when she fashioned Harp Harris. In physique, he was a perfect line from his bat-ears to his ankles. An artist or sculptor might have used Harp for the model of "The Lost Chord," as he distorted his long, sad face over the efforts of breathing a tune into the most humble of instruments. Harp was foreman of the Nine Bar Nine outfit, and entirely capable, which spoke well of his lack of artistic temperament.

He squinted up at Brick, but continued to "hung-g-g-g, hong-g" for several seconds. He wiped the back of his hand across his mouth and got to his feet. The office door was shut.

"Where's Silent?" asked Brick.

Harp jerked his head toward the doorway.

"Somebody kicked the door shut, when I started to play."

The door opened and Silent looked out.

"Martin dead?" he asked quickly.

"No." Brick shook his head. "Hurt bad, though. Doc thinks he was shot with a .41. Who shoots a .41, Silent?"

"You do," Silent grinned, but sobered up as Brick nodded.

"Gee cripes, Brick, I didn't mean——"

"Looks kinda like I done it," admitted Brick bitterly.

"He had it comin' then," stated Harp. "Some folks do take goshawful chances in this here earthly spear. Got time to look at somethin' I brought in?"

Brick opened his mouth to question Harp, but he of the slabsides was already walking away.

"Foller him," advised Silent. "I'll sneak along behind. If I can ever get him far enough away from town I'm goin' to massacree him. The danged porkypine's settin' on the doorstep for an hour, hongin' —— out of 'After the Ball'."

"Shucks," drawled Harp. "You don't know 'Marchin' Through Georgie' from 'Take Back Your Gold,' you don't."

"I heard yuh play 'em," grunted Silent, "but that wasn't all yuh played."

"I never played either of them," grinned Harp.

Silent rumbled threats of violence, as they followed Harp to a little corral, which had been built out from Cale Wesson's barn. In the corral stood a red cow, while at her flank, huddling for protection, stood a spotted calf.

The cow bore the brand of the Lazy H, while the little calf had been branded with a crude Weeping Tree. Brick studied the two brands silently.

"I picked 'em up when I was comin' to town," stated Harp.

"It ain't none of my business, but I sure do hate to see folks slappin' a hot, runnin'-iron on a poor li'l calf thataway. Been done a couple of days ago, I reckon."

"Bill Voorhies seen it?" asked Brick.

"No. He'll be sore, I bet."

"You heard about Scott Martin, didn't yuh, Harp?"

"Only what Silent told me; and me and you both know Silent too well to——"

Ordinarily, Brick would have enjoyed the word battles between Silent and Harp, and would have been willing to explain it to Harp, but just now he seemed tired of it all, and wordless. He was not even interested in this new evidence against Martin.

Brick turned and walked back toward the street. Silent and Harp passed a look of mutual understanding, and followed him to the street, just as Lafe Freeman drove in with his buckboard, followed by Bunch Thornton and Lynn Barnhardt. Thornton and Barnhardt went into the saloon, but Freeman came over to Brick.

"Doc found the bullet," said Lafe.

"Forty-one?" asked Brick, and Lafe nodded.

"Wasn't hardly battered none. Doc's afraid it went so close to the spine that it might paralyze him. Martin ain't conscious yet."

Harp and Silent went slowly across the street to the saloon, and Brick watched them go inside before he turned to Lafe.

"Lafe, I never shot Scott Martin."

Lafe drew out a plug of tobacco and set his teeth into the edge of it.

"Zasso?" He rolled the tobacco into his cheek and squinted at Brick.

"Did you think I did, Lafe?"

"——!" Lafe spat contemptuously. "In the back?" Lafe shook his head, and added, "But I ain't everybody, Brick."

Brick nodded his head. Lafe had said "everybody," which included Jean Martin. Silent and Harp had asked no questions. If Brick had shot Scott Martin, according to their ideas, Scott Martin deserved the shot. Brick turned to Lafe.

"Want to show yuh somethin', Lafe."

They walked back to the little corral, where Lafe looked at the brands. The old cattleman shook his head.

"Was Scott Martin loco, Brick?"

"No."

THEY walked back to the street, where Lafe turned and put his hand on Brick's shoulder.

"Brick, I know you didn't shoot Scott Martin. I could swear it by —— and high-water, but—ain't you got no alibi a-tall?"

"Martin would know who shot him, Lafe?"

"Not unless he's got eyes in the back of his head, which he ain't.

"Go and find 'em, son. I told Doc Meyers to get hold of Doc Winchell, down at Silverton. Mebbe the two of 'em can fix him up."

Lafe went back to his buckboard and drove out of town, while Brick went back to the office and sat down to think calmly.

Was Scott Martin branding that calf when he was shot? If he wasn't, what was he doing that far off the road? Did he maverick that Lazy H calf, which Harp brought in? Would any man—any sane man, brand a sucking-calf, whose ownership was unquestioned? Who had reasons for killing Martin?

The questions seethed through Brick's mind, but he could grasp no solutions to any of them. He wrote out the questions, but was unable to think calmly, because the thought, "Everybody thinks you shot him," kept hammering his brain. He stared at the ages-old reward notices, with which most of the walls had been papered, but his thoughts were far from the "Wanted" ones, whose faces stared down at him.

Silent came in softly and threw his hat on the table.

"Jeff Selden's up in the Dollar Down, faunchin' to beat ——," he announced.

"What's eatin' him?" asked Brick absently.

"Says he found two of his Hereford calves branded with the Weepin' Tree. He says they was mavericks, which he was intendin' to slap brands onto right away. Seems that Frank Fellows found 'em up near the head of Piney creek. Frank brings 'em in and throws 'em into a bunch near the Star Dot, and today they finds 'em both mavericked.

"Seldon's the only one around here that owns any Herefords. He rides into town, mad as ——, and opines he's goin' out to the Weepin' Tree and jump on Martin all spraddled out. Bunty tells him what happened to Scott Martin, and now Seldon's sore at you. He was goin' to claw Martin to a fare-thee-well, and then he gets sore at you for—for——"

"For shootin' Martin," prompted Brick.

"He didn't just say that, Brick. He said this country was tryin' to reform too —— fast."

"Well," drawled Brick, "well, maybe he's right, at that."

Silent nodded over the manufacture of a cigaret, while Brick watched him closely.

"Did you know I shot Scott Martin?" asked Brick.

Silent scratched a match and squinted at Brick through the smoke of his cigaret.

"Uh-huh. Sure, I knowed it, Brick." Silent pinched out the glowing match and grinned at Brick. Now that we've both lied—what next?"

"Prove it?" queried Silent, when Brick did not answer.

"No." Brick shook his head. "Provin' that I didn't do it is goin' to take time. I reckon it's up to us to prove who did do it, Silent."

Silent walked to the door and looked up the street.

"Here comes your friend Seldon," he remarked.

Seldon lost no time in idle gossip. He brushed past Silent and walked over to Brick.

"Well, yore maverick law kinda started somethin', didn't it?" Seldon's tone of voice was like pouring vinegar into a raw sore. Brick leaned on the edge of his desk and tried to control his temper. He knew there was no use in arguing with Seldon.

"I'll fight m' own battles," declared Seldon. "If Scott Martin wants to steal all my cattle it's none of your business, *sabe?* I'll settle with the thief in my own way." Still Brick made no move; made no attempt to reply. This emboldened Seldon. His overbearing temper had found a target, and his little round eyes snapped. "I've handled a lot of rustlers," said Seldon, and

made no attempt to lower his voice, "I sure have, but I never shot one in the——"

He had meant to say "back." Brick's right hand shot out and the fingers gripped into Seldon's collar, cutting off the final word. Seldon clawed for his gun, but Brick's other arm circled his body, tearing his hand away from the pistol butt and dropping the gun to the floor.

Brick picked Seldon up in his arms, carried him to the door, with Seldon screaming curses and kicking vainly at Brick's shins. Brick grinned at Silent and started across the street. Seldon's screams had attracted the attention of Marlin City, and Brick and his burden had spectators as they crossed the street to the Frenchman Le Blanc's blacksmith shop.

LE BLANC looked up from his work-bench as Brick came in. Several men crowded in behind them, stopping at the doorway of the shop.

Seldon's conversation was incomprehensible, but the profanity was very clear and emphatic. Brick carried him straight to Le Blanc's slack-tub, a half-barrel tub filled with very dirty water, in which the blacksmith cooled hot metal. It was not a large tub, but Seldon was not a large man. The immersion followed, while the audience stood in silent enjoyment.

Five times did Brick immerse Seldon—immerse every bit of him, except his feet, and the fifth time Seldon spat out the dirty water without profanity. The water was very dirty, and the bottom of the tub was an inch deep with iron flakes, filings and such sediment as a blacksmith shop is heir to, and which did not serve to increase Seldon's personal appearance.

But Seldon did not curse any more. He was very meek as he sat on the floor beside the tub and tried to sneeze the water out of his nose.

"Ba gar, she's jus' lak' dip in hot iron!" grunted Le Blanc. "Get her hot lak' —— and den dip queek and she's mebbe spoil de temper. Ho, ho, ho!"

Seldon shot Le Blanc a malevolent glance, but did not speak. He reminded Brick of a rattler, pinned down and exhausted from striking at nothing.

Seldon got slowly to his feet and tottered out of the shop, a dripping scarecrow. Without a word he went straight to the hitch-rack, where the horses snorted their indignation of such an apparition, mounted his horse and rode out of town.

"Me—I'm glad for dat," grinned Le Blanc. "I'm no la'k dat sonn of a gonn."

"First bath he's had since the Custer battle," grinned Harp. "It sure does change a man."

No one asked Brick why he had ducked Seldon in the dirty water. It was none of their business, and men in the cattle country are prone to mind their own business; that is, if they desire peace and comfort. The audience drifted back to their own business, leaving Brick and Le Blanc standing in the doorway of the shop.

"You've shod a lot of horses, ain't yuh, Le Blanc?" asked Brick.

"You bet," nodded Le Blanc. "Shoe plenty cayuse. I'm wan good horseshoe—me."

The Frenchman swelled with self admiration. He had boasted of his methods of building a proper horseshoe a thousand times, especially when his belt was tightened around several drinks of straight gin, his favorite liquor.

"What's the idea of leavin' the toe-calk off a shoe?"

Le Blanc wiped his mustache with a dirty hand.

"Leave de toe-calk h'off, Breek? Umm-m—who do dat?"

"I dunno; I just wondered why anybody would."

Le Blanc considered it a while.

"Sometame de cayuse she's cut herself wit' toe-calk, Breek. When she's lope her hin' feet—" Le Blanc nodded violently. "I shoe cayuse lak' dat one time."

"Whose cayuse?"

"Four years ago, Breek. I'm de blacksmit' in Nort' Dakota. One blacksmit' she's shoe dis cayuse and de cayuse she's cut her front legs. De man she's come to me and I tak' off dem shoe. De man she's say to me for leave off de toe-calk. I'm remembair dees pony. She's jus' broke. She's keek —— out of me."

"Did it cure her of interferin'?" asked Brick.

"I never see no more. I'm t'ink she's cure. Le Blanc wan good horse-shoe."

"Who shoes their own horses around here?"

"Who try to shoe?" queried Le Blanc, meaningly. "Well, de Nine Bar Nine, de

Lazy H, de—mos' h'everybody, Breek, dey try to shoe cayuse."

"The Star Dot?" asked Brick.

"Seldon nevair buy de horse-shoe from Le Blanc. Mebbe she's buy from Wesson."

Brick nodded and walked back to the office. There did not seem to be a thing to work on. Everything led into a blind corner.

LAFE FREEMAN lost no time in going to Silverton after Doctor Winchell, and had him in Marlin City the next morning in time to send him out to the Weeping Tree with Doctor Meyers. Brick watched them drive away, and wondered if Doctor Winchell would be of any use. Winchell had added knowledge of human ills to his practise as veterinary. Doctor Meyers was also called in animal cases. Ordinarily, Brick would have laughed over the fact that two veterinaries were going to consult over a wounded human being, but humor seemed apart from Brick just now. Silent came to Brick and spoke disgustedly—

"They're talkin' about askin' you to resign, Brick."

"Who?"

"I dunno. I heard it mentioned in the Dollar Down."

Brick turned away and walked slowly up the street. He suddenly made up his mind to ride out to the Weeping Tree and see Jean. At least he could tell her he didn't fire that shot. He saddled his horse and rode away from town. Within a mile of the ranch house he met Mrs. Wesson. She drew up her team and looked up at him.

"I—I was just goin' out there," stammered Brick, "goin' out to see if there's anythin' I can do."

"I don't think there is, Brick." Mrs. Wesson shook her head. "Them two clumsy doctors are out there and if they can't kill him, he's a wonder. They didn't tell me to vamoose—not in so many words, but I don't have to git hit with a boulder. I'm goin' home after some clean clothes."

"Is he—has he said anythin'?"

"Not a word. Doc Meyers thought he was conscious, but Doc Meyers knows a —— sight more about ringbone and spavin than he does about human ills. You know that Scott Martin was almost deaf anyway, and I reckon this bullet ruins what's left. He couldn't hear the crack o' doom. And here he comes out there with Doctor Winchell. Where'd that horse doctor get any right to prognosticate on the human form, I'd admire to know?"

"How's Jean?"

"Well, she ain't singin', if that's what yuh mean. I asked her if she didn't think it was funny that you hadn't been out, and she said she didn't think so under the circumstances. She thinks you shot him, I reckon."

"Don't you, Mrs. Wesson?"

"Good——!" Mrs. Wesson's eyes bored into Brick's face.

"Brick Davidson, I'm plumb ashamed of yuh! Don'tcha think I've got any—giddap!"

The ponies sprang forward and the buckboard rattled off down the road, with Mrs. Wesson humped up in the seat, while Brick sat on his horse beside the road watching her disappear. Then the lines of his face relaxed and he patted his horse's shoulder.

"Button, we'll show 'em yet. Didja hear what she said? She was mad at me, 'cause I even thought she believed it. Lafe knows I didn't, and Silent and Harp don't believe it, and now Mrs. Wesson don't. Button, we ain't in the majority, not by a —— sight, but we've got a fightin' nest-egg. Now watch our dust."

Brick headed into the hills. He had no desire to go to Weeping Tree—today. Mrs. Wesson's indignant reply to his question had warmed his whole being. It seemed to clear his mind. He had thought of what Silent had told him, and had almost decided to resign his office, but this meeting with Mrs. Wesson had been like handing a loaded gun to a cornered fugitive.

Brick gave no heed to his direction, and suddenly pulled up his horse at the top of a butte and looked down upon the rambling ranch-house and sprawling corrals of the Star Dot. A spirit of daredeviltry came to Brick. For the first time since he had found Scott Martin lying shot, he became normal. As far as he could see there was no one at the Star Dot. Several head of cattle browsed around inside one of the corrals, while in another were several horses.

Brick shook up his horse and rode straight for the house. He rode past the front porch and around the corner, where he found Jeff Seldon, tilted back in a chair against the side of the building. Seldon had changed clothes and had evidently neglected to wear his belt and gun.

SELDON stared at Brick, as though Brick were a ghost. His thin face seemed to grow thinner and the parchment-colored skin seemed fairly to crack. For the space of ten seconds neither of them spoke; then Seldon exploded a curse and swung his chair away from the wall.

"Nice afternoon," observed Brick seriously.

"Nice ——!" choked Seldon. His hand dropped to his hip, but there was nothing there except sagging overalls.

He swallowed with difficulty.

"You spoke about two Herefords what had been mavericked," remarked Brick.

"You're —— right I did! Don'tcha believe me?"

"Like to see 'em, Seldon, if it ain't too much trouble." Seldon got to his feet and led the way to the corral, with Brick riding behind him. There were several head of cattle in the corral, all Herefords. Seldon pointed out the two mavericks, or which had been mavericks until the Weeping Tree had been run on their right shoulder. They were nearly full-blooded Herefords.

"You could swear that they belonged to you, Seldon?"

"Swear? 'Course I could swear. Any jury in the country would give 'em to me. The Weepin' Tree ain't got no Herefords."

"They were mavericks," observed Brick. "Must be nearly yearlin's."

"Uh-huh. Fellows found 'em way back in the breaks of Piny Crick. They was mavericks, but they're mine, y'betcha. Danged nice pair of animals."

"If you'll open the gate, I'll cut 'em out," offered Brick.

"Cut 'em out?" Seldon was plainly surprized. "What for—cut 'em out?"

"Take 'em back with me. You swear that they belong to you, Seldon, but your brand ain't on 'em. You swear that the Weepin' Tree ain't never had no Herefords. I reckon we'll turn 'em over to the association and let 'em decide whether either outfit owns 'em."

Seldon leaned against the corral fence and grew incoherent. Would he stand for anything like this? Not by several adjective sights. He'd see Brick Davidson skating in a mythical region, where heat is said to be excessive, first. In fact, Seldon exhausted his extensive vocabulary of "nots and won'ts," while Brick grinned in silent wonder that any human being could think of so many curses and have them all fit the situation.

Seldon started for the house, but Brick swung his horse across Seldon's path and asked Seldon where he was going. Seldon informed him that he was going to town, but first he must get his coat. Brick grinned and shook his head.

"From that window up there you could salivate me with lead, old-timer. No, I can't let yuh go into the house—not today."

"—— yuh, I don't want to go into the house!" Seldon's voice was high-pitched in spots, like a youngster, whose voice is changing. "My coat is right there around the corner from the kitchen door."

Brick glanced at the kitchen door. He could watch Seldon get the coat, but what would prevent Seldon from jumping around out of sight? Brick shook his head.

"You stay here, old-timer, and I'll get the coat for yuh." Brick got off his horse and walked to the corner, keeping an eye on Seldon. Just around the corner, leaning against the wall, was a Winchester rifle. There was no coat.

Seldon said nothing, when Brick came back, but his eyes narrowed. He was caught with the goods, and he knew better than to try to lie out of it.

"You've got a good tailor," said Brick, examining the rifle, "but I reckon we'll kinda spoil the fit."

He levered all the cartridges out of the magazine and then motioned for Seldon to go back to the corral. Brick took the rifle in both hands and swung it across the top of a post. After three swings there was neither stock, magazine lever nor mechanism left. Brick threw it aside and motioned for Seldon to open the gate.

It was but a moment's work for Brick to send the two yearlings out of the gate. Seldon was beyond words. His skinny jaws were set, but he did not look at Brick as he rode past, and followed the two maverick animals. Brick headed them straight toward Marlin City. Where the road swung around a high point, about half a mile from the Star Dot, he looked back, and saw two horsemen riding in from another direction.

Brick let the yearlings drift, while he watched the ranch-house. Few loose animals will follow a road, unless carefully herded, and these two Herefords were no exception.

They drifted on for a while and stopped; looked back, and swung back into the hills.

BRICK'S patience was rewarded. In about fifteen minutes three riders left the ranch and swung up the road toward Brick. One of them was evidently Jeff Seldon, as his pinto was easily distinguished at that distance.

Brick rode off the grade and down into a tangle of mesquite, where he was effectually screened from the road. As they rode swiftly past him, he recognized Seldon and Pete Kane; but the third man was a stranger. As soon as they were out of sight. Brick rode back to the grade and went slowly toward town. He had no idea why the three riders were in such a hurry. Perhaps they figured on overtaking him and getting the yearlings. Brick did not make any search for the Herefords, knowing that they now headed into the hills. At any rate, they were of no value to him. They had been an excuse for a visit to Jeff Seldon, and the visit had turned out very well.

Brick did not hurry back to Marlin City. He rode slowly to where the road led off to the Weeping Tree, scanning the road carefully for a sign of the missing toe-calks, but there were none. Seldon, Kane and the stranger had ridden two shod horses and one barefooted one. On the saddled ones the toe and heel calks were plainly visible.

Brick wanted to go to the Weeping Tree, but after due deliberation went on to town. Protesting his innocence would not do him any good. In fact Brick did not want to protest his innocence—he wanted to prove it by finding the guilty parties.

As he rode into town he noticed that there was an unusually large number of saddle-horses at the hitch-rack beside the Dollar Down; but this was Saturday, which would account for that. Brick had intended to go to the office, but when he saw Seldon's pinto at the hitch-rack he changed his mind and went to the saloon.

Pete Kane and the stranger were just coming to the door, as Brick stepped inside. As Brick stepped aside to let them pass, Kane spoke to the stranger. The man turned his head toward Kane, and then appeared to stumble into Brick; his toe striking Brick's ankle. The man had stumbled on a smooth floor and had gone entirely out of his way to collide with Brick.

For a moment they were face to face, but the stranger's eyes held no hint of apology, rather he appeared to blame Brick. Brick made as though to pass on into the saloon, but his right foot swung sidewise, catching around the stranger's ankle, throwing him completely off his balance and he crashed to the floor.

Brick had barely stopped in his stride and now he faced Kane, who had stopped just inside the door, and the fallen man, who was sitting on the floor staring at Brick. The man was taller than Brick, but of about the same weight. His features and complexion stamped him as a Spaniard or a Mexican. He wore a small, well-trimmed mustache on his short upper lip. His nose was prominent and his close-set eyes were very black. He was a trifle overdressed; his range clothes extreme in color and cut. A businesslike gun reposed in a stamped leather holster on his hip, and his heavy, wide belt was well filled with cartridges.

He glanced around at the crowd and got slowly to his feet. Kane was almost behind him as he got up, but stepped quickly out of line with Brick, who was standing easily, feet braced and hand swung idly beside the holster of his gun. He appeared to hold little animosity toward Brick, and his mouth twisted into a semblance of a grin. Then he turned and went out.

"Quitter!" grunted a voice in the group.

Brick turned and looked at them. His eyes singled out Seldon.

"Quitter?" queried Brick wonderingly.

"Started it, didn't he?" asked Seldon quickly. Brick grinned.

"'Pears to me like he did, Seldon. "Who is he?" asked Brick.

"Name's Smith—Jack Smith," replied Seldon. "Horse buyer for the English army."

Brick considered this, and turned back to the door. Lafe Freeman and Bunch Thornton came up to Brick and asked him to step outside. They were both very serious.

"Brick, I'm plumb scared that they're goin' to ask yuh to resign," stated Lafe. "Lot of these snake-hunters think you shot Scott Martin, and nothin' will stop 'em thinkin' that—except findin' the guilty ones."

"I'm for yuh, Brick," said Bunch. "I'll

make yuh foreman of my outfit, if yuh need a job."

"He won't." Lafe Freeman spoke with conviction. "If Brick needs a job, his old place on the Nine Bar Nine is still waitin' for him."

"But I ain't needin' a job," grinned Brick. "I'm goin' to keep right on bein' sheriff."

"BILL VOORHIES is chairman of the board of county commissioners, and he's goin' to take up the matter," said Lafe. "Bill kinda runs that bunch of horse-thieves, and Bill's down on you, Brick. I'll do all I can, but——"

"Bill wasn't in favor of me when Bunty resigned," remarked Brick.

"Sure, sure," nodded Thornton, "and Bill's the worst maverick in the whole county, Brick. He can't afford to have yuh spoilin' his game, can he?"

"When all is said and done, why should I resign? I haven't done a danged thing that was wrong."

"Old Seldon said yuh came out to his place and herded him around with a gun and turned his stock into the hills and smashed his rifle. Said yuh run off them two mavericked yearlin's, likely to square yourself with Martin in case he gets well. Voorhies was there and heard it all. He said there's due to be a change in your office real soon."

"Heard anything from Martin?" asked Brick.

"Paralyzed, so Doc Myers says," replied Lafe. "Can't talk nor hear nor move. Bullet kinda crimped his spine, I reckon."

"Say, who owns the Weepin' Tree ranch?" asked Brick suddenly.

"Seldon," replied Thornton. "He's got a deed from Zell Mohr. He was talkin' about it today. It joins the Star Dot and there's a couple of good springs, which flows well all Summer. Kinda funny that none of us picked up that ranch on account of them springs. Betcha Seldon never paid Zell nowhere near what the place was worth."

"It was worth nothin' to Zell," grinned Lafe.

"So Mohr sold the Weepin' Tree to Seldon before he went to the pen, eh?" queried Brick. "Where does Martin come in on this deal? He's got a paper that Zell gave him, which shows that Martin can live as long as he wants to on that ranch."

"I dunno." Thornton shook his head. "Seldon's got the deed to it, that's all I know."

Brick smiled and turned to Lafe.

"I'm goin' to keep on bein' sheriff, Lafe. Ne'mind them commissioners."

Brick went back to his office and sat down. From a locked drawer he took a legal-looking document and perused it thoroughly. Suddenly he stopped and stared at the wall. Before him came the face of the man he had knocked down in the saloon—the full lips, hooked nose, waxed mustache. Where had he seen that face before?

He had not given the man's face a close study as he sat on the saloon floor, but something seemed to tell him that he had seen this face before.

"Jack Smith," wondered Brick aloud. "That's a —— of a name for a face like that. Spaniard, with an American name, buying horses for England."

Brick wondered why Seldon had said "quitter," when Smith had left the saloon. Was there a frame-up to start trouble with him? Silent came excitedly.

"Whatcha think, Brick? Barney O'Mera just came in from out on Piney crick, and he says that somebody has brought in a herd of sheep."

"Sheep?" Brick stared at Silent, who nodded emphatically. Sheep were the bugbear that haunted the dreams of cattlemen. Sun-Dog had always been free of sheep, but they knew that their coming was inevitable, knew it was only a question of time until the advance guards of that great, gray army would swoop down upon them and drive the cattlemen off the ranges. The cattle interests could not afford to buy up the great amount of range needed for their herds. The coming of sheep meant war. Legally the sheep had the same rights as the cattle, but the cattlemen figured that possession was nine points in the law and that a six-shooter was the best argument.

A sheep war would mean a lot of work for the sheriff; that is, if the sheriff upheld the rights of the sheepmen.

"Did Barney say how many sheep?" asked Brick.

"Not a big bunch. Few hundred, I reckon; but it ain't numbers—it's sheep!"

"I reckon that's right," nodded Brick. "Numbers don't count."

THE next morning Brick decided to go to the Weeping Tree. He had an idea, and when Brick got an idea he gave that idea every chance in the world to bear fruit. The fact that Scott Martin could not move, hear, nor talk did not affect this idea. Silent grumbled at being left at the office.

"Might's well be a chambermaid in a livery stable," he wailed. "Anybody'd think yuh was runnin' a grocery store or saloon, the way yuh act about this danged old office. Yuh even tore down them pictures that Bunty had on the wall, and there ain't nothin' but them old reward notices to look at. Danged old walls look like they had small-pox."

"Ne'mind me," he grunted, when Brick sought to pacify him. "I'll git along. Mebbe I'll git some ol' lady to learn me how to knit. Jimminy gosh, I wish somebody'd git drunk and shoot up the town. Think I'll run for Sunday school principal next election. Hurrah for crime and disorder!" He kicked the door shut behind Brick, who laughed and went to saddle his horse.

Mrs. Wesson was hanging up a washing when Brick rode up to the Weeping Tree ranch-house. Jean stood on the steps and watched Brick stop beside Mrs. Wesson, but turned and went inside. Brick followed her with his eyes until the door closed and then turned back to Mrs. Wesson.

"What yuh got on your mind, Brick?" mumbled Mrs. Wesson, without removing the clothes-pin from between her teeth.

"How's Martin?"

"I dunno, Brickie," Mrs. Wesson removed the clothes-pin and looked back at the door. "He ain't sufferin' none, I reckon; but he can't hear nor talk. Just lays there and looks at the ceilin'. Mebby he knows what's goin' on—I dunno."

"Can I go in and see him?"

"Why, I reckon yuh can—sure."

Brick followed Mrs. Wesson inside. Jean was standing near the head of the bed, looking curiously at Brick, who walked up beside her and looked down at Martin. The injured man looked at Brick and a ghost of a smile seemed to flash across his eyes.

"He don't seem to suffer none," said Mrs. Wesson, in a half whisper, as though forgetting that Martin was stone-deaf. Jean turned away.

"If he could only talk," said Mrs. Wesson. "Them danged horse-doctors——"

Brick nodded and took a sheet of paper and a pencil from his pocket. He wrote on the paper and then held it up for Scott Martin to read: "Can you read this? Shut your eyes once for 'no' and twice for 'yes'."

Martin blinked twice.

Brick turned and explained it to Mrs. Wesson and Jean. "Well, bless my soul!" exclaimed Mrs. Wesson. "Brick Davidson, you're too smart to be a sheriff. Ain't that some idea? We tried that writin' idea, but there wasn't no use of it, bein' as he couldn't make any answer; but nobody ever thought about a wink message."

Brick grinned and wrote again.

"Do you know who shot you?"

Martin blinked just once—"No."

Brick had banked on Martin being able to tell him who did it, and his hand trembled over the next question. Mrs. Wesson and Jean were leaning forward, watching closely. Brick studied Martin's face for a moment and then turned to Jean and Mrs. Wesson.

"I ain't got no right to ask him this question, but I want to find out what he knows." Brick wrote the question—

"Were you branding a calf when you got shot?"

Martin stared at the question, but did not respond. Brick wrote—

"Do you know what I mean?"

Martin blinked once.

Brick turned to Jean.

"Your dad had a paper which Zell Mohr gave him, telling your dad that he could have the use of the Weepin' Tree ranch as long as he wanted it, didn't he?"

"Yes. Zell Mohr gave it to dad after we came here. He said it was legal. Dad always carried it with him, because he felt it was safer than if he hid it away."

"Do yuh know where it is?"

Jean hurried away to make a search, while Brick turned back to Martin and wrote:

"Zell Mohr gave you a paper, which showed you had the right to use this ranch. Did you have it with you when you were shot?"

Martin stared at the question for a moment, but blinked twice. "It isn't in any

of his pockets," said Jean. "Perhaps it fell out."

"Uh-huh, I reckon it did," smiled Brick. He turned to Martin and patted him on the shoulder. A smile seemed to come to Martin's eyes, and Brick turned away.

"Keep this dark, will yuh?" asked Brick of Mrs. Wesson. "You folks can talk to him, but don't let anybody——"

Brick had turned toward the open door and saw Kane and the one called Jack Smith standing in the doorway. Kane nodded and spoke to Jean.

"How's the sick man?" he asked.

"About the same, Mr. Kane," said Jean.

"Shucks, that's too bad." Kane seemed downhearted and his voice was sympathetic. Smith tried to appear indifferent to Brick's presence by half-turning his back. Brick watched the two men closely. It is hard to ignore a person under these circumstances, but Smith and Kane succeeded admirably. Brick looked back at Martin, who was slightly propped up on his pillow, and waved good-by. He turned to Jean.

"I reckon I'll be driftin', folks. Got a sheep deal to look into."

Jean made no move to follow him, appearing indifferent as to whether he stayed or went. Mrs. Wesson watched Brick from the doorway, with a smile, and then shook her head as if to say, "I'm with you, Brick."

Brick rode straight into the Piney Creek hills, heading for the sheep-camp; but he was not thinking about sheep. The face of Jack Smith troubled him. Was it just a chance resemblance to some one he had known?

BRICK had been born and raised in the range country, where there is small chance of meeting a man without at least a short acquaintance. Brick couldn't remember any one who looked like Jack Smith. Very few Mexican or Spanish cow-punchers ever get to the Northern ranges, and Brick knew he was not confusing Smith's likeness with any other dark-skinned cowboy he had known. Still, Smith's face was familiar.

Brick was satisfied that Scott Martin was not branding the calf when he was shot. He felt sure that Martin had been shot from his horse while traveling on the road, and that the would-be murderers had framed the rest of the evidence. It looked as though their idea had been to fasten the crime to Brick, but Brick felt that there was more to it than merely trying to get rid of the sheriff. They had, no doubt, believed that Martin was dead, or they would have finished the job.

"Somebody," muttered Brick aloud, "somebody is goin' to lose a lot of sleep pretty soon, and it ain't goin' to be me." He had no trouble in finding the sheep-camp. The herders had moved into a small cabin at the mouth of a small cañon. As Brick rode up to the door of the cabin, the two herders came out.

Brick noted that there were no sheep-dogs in evidence, which proved that it was not a well-organized outfit. The men were a hard-looking pair; unshaven and unwashed. Brick mentally classed them as "range-thugs," rather than regular sheep-herders. There was neither surprize nor friendliness in their faces.

"Whatcha want?" growled the larger of the two.

"Whatcha got?" grinned Brick.

The big man growled something deep in his throat. Brick glanced around.

"Sheriff?" asked the smaller man. Brick nodded.

"Uh-huh. Thought I'd see yuh before the cattlemen did."

"Whatcha want?" growled the big man again.

"How many sheep yuh got?" asked Brick.

"Couple hundred."

"Won't take yuh long to round 'em up and drift back where yuh came from, will it?"

"We've got a right here," whined the small man. "You're the sheriff and you've got to see that we git a square deal."

Brick grinned.

"Who told yuh that?"

The two men exchanged glances. The big one shrugged his shoulders and spat copiously.

"Anybody knows that, sheriff."

The small one began to tirade against the injustice of the range country, but Brick was not listening. Hanging on a nail, driven into one of the corner logs of the cabin, hung two horseshoes — two worn horseshoes, made without toe-calks. The smaller man broke off his discourse and followed Brick's gaze.

"Herd sheep on horse-back?" asked Brick.

"Naw."

"Who left the horseshoes?"

Neither man spoke for a moment and then the big one said, "We dunno."

Brick rode in closer and examined the shoes. To all appearances one of the shoes had come loose from the hoof, and the other had evidently been pulled off.

"Yuh don't know who owned the horse that wore them shoes?"

"Nope." The big man was very positive.

"You two own the sheep?"

"Kinda looks like we do. Anythin' else you'd like to ask?"

"Uh-huh," nodded Brick. "Lots of things I'd like to ask, but gettin' a honest answer is a horse of another color."

Brick reached over and took the horseshoes.

"Mebbe I can double my luck," he grinned, and tied them to his saddle. He swung his horse around and headed for the cañon. He knew there was no use trying to find out anything from the sheep-herders. He guided his horse into the brush, angling up the side of the canon. He had traveled about three hundred yards from the cabin, and had just swung sidewise in his saddle to turn his horse to the left up the hill, when there came a thug, a yank at his belt, and from down the cañon came the whip-like pop of a rifle.

BRICK threw himself out of the saddle, pulling his Winchester out from its scabbard as he went down. The brush masked him from the cabin now, and he investigated the effects of the bullet. A neat notch had been cut through the right side of the cantle of his saddle, and the bullet had ripped a chunk of leather from the inner side of his pistol holster. If Brick hadn't thrown himself sidewise at the right time, the bullet would have ripped through his hip or thigh.

Brick considered this and his blue eyes snapped. It did not appear that the sheep-herders needed his assistance to protect them from the cattlemen. He slipped down the hill and started angling down toward the cabin, when he caught a glimpse of the smaller of the two men coming cautiously up the hill.

The man was taking no chances, but investigating every inch of the brush in front of him. Brick grinned. The man felt sure that he had killed Brick. He darted from one clump of brush to another, cutting the hill above Brick. He passed out of view. Brick watched closely. Finally the man reappeared, but this time he was more cautious.

His head snapped from side to side and he fingered the trigger of his rifle nervously. His nerves were almost gone. He had no idea of Brick's whereabouts. He had shot and missed. Brick grinned. He knew just how the man felt. Suddenly the man's nerve broke and he ran down the hill, jumping from side to side, as though to disconcert any one trying to shoot him. Once he tripped and fell, flinging his rifle far down the cañon, but he did not stop to pick it up. Brick wiped the tear out of his eyes. The man disappeared, still running and limping.

Brick got up and started for the cabin, but taking no chances on another shot from the sheep-herders. Then he saw the big man. He was across the cañon, nearer the cabin, standing there with a rifle in his hands. He turned toward the cabin, and evidently saw his partner. He turned and hurried down there, while Brick sneaked into the cañon bottom and came in at the rear of the cabin, which was well masked with brush. The two men were in front of the cabin and their voices were very audible.

"—— ain't there, I tell yuh! Cut a notch in his saddle, that's all."

"You're a —— of a crack shot," grumbled the other. "Never miss 'em, says you. Shot with a rest, too, yuh did. Now what will we do?"

"Git to —— out-a here," whined the other, which Brick recognized as the voice of the small man. "Didn't he say the sheriff was a shootin' hound? I missed him, and he's some'ers in that brush—Do yuh think I want him to line his sights on me?"

"What about the sheep?"

"Aw, —— the sheep! He said he'd likely lose 'em, didn't he? He can afford to lose 'em."

"You shot too soon," argued the big man. "You've spoiled the whole —— deal. The sheriff was fallin' for our game, but you spoiled it all."

"Him?" There was a world of scorn in the little man's voice. "That red-headed *hombre* fallin' for any game? Oh,

yeah! Whatcha reckon he took them horseshoes for?"

"Well, what'll we do?" asked the big man. "Stand here and argue?"

Brick had sneaked to the corner of the cabin and he answered the big man's question—

"Stand still and hold up your hands!"

The big man dropped his rifle and they both put up their hands.

The small man took a deep breath and expelled it slowly—an audible sigh of relief. His face plainly showed that he would rather be a prisoner than a fugitive.

"Now what do we do?" asked the big man.

"You're full of questions, ain't yuh?" grinned Brick. "I reckon I ought to give yuh both a hundred yards runnin' start and then fan yuh with lead."

"Yuh won't though, will yuh?" The small man was still apprehensive.

"No-o-o, I reckon not—not unless yuh deserve it, but yuh never can tell what I think about a man who misses an easy shot like you did."

Brick's face was serious, but he knew that the little man was a good shot. He had grown panicky when he found that he had missed, and the distance was at least three hundred yards.

"Whatcha goin' to do with us?" asked the big man.

"Well, Mr. Question Mark, I reckon I'll ask you two jaspers to hoof it to Marlin City ahead of me. It's only about twelve miles. I've got a nice little house to put yuh in and I've got her fixed so that nobody can bust in and hurt yuh. Like the idea? No? Tell me what the little game was—the one I didn't fall for, and I might let yuh go your own way."

The two men seemed surprized, but their surprize was not genuine. The small man acted as though he thought Brick was joking. Brick smiled and pointed across the hills.

"Twelve miles; forward march!"

THE two men turned and plodded ahead of him, while Brick rolled a cigaret and smiled to himself. His idea was working out slowly, but Brick did not mind the slowness. He really held no animosity against the two sheep-herders for attempting his life. A few days in jail wouldn't hurt them. Brick did not believe in jailing a man for missing his shot, but he felt that jailing the two sheep-herders might make a change that would expose something he wished to find out.

It was hard traveling, but neither of the men complained. Brick herded them across the hills and struck the road near the spot where Brick had left the Hereford yearlings. They had followed the road about a mile, when a body of horsemen swung around a curve and rode up to them. The two sheep-herders crowded to the side of the road and sat down. It was a representative group, Bill Voorhies and Lynn Barnhardt, of the Lazy H, Jeff Seldon, of the Star Dot, Dal Melchior, Barney O'Mera, and "Slim" Hoskins, of the Bar M, and Lafe Freeman, of the Nine Bar Nine. Voorhies reined up beside Brick and looked at the two tired sheepmen.

"Who yuh got there?" he asked.

"Couple of sheep-herders." Brick's voice was just as belligerent as Voorhies'. He was not going to let Voorhies get away with any bluff talk.

"Sheep-herders, eh?" Jeff Seldon urged his horse forward and looked at the two men. "Puttin' them in jail for herdin' sheep?"

"No-o-o," drawled Brick. "Puttin' 'em in for makin' a mistake."

"How many sheep did they have?" asked Lafe Freeman.

"Said they had two hundred. I don't reckon they've got more than that, Lafe."

"Mistake?" asked Voorhies.

"Uh-huh," nodded Brick. "Shot at me and missed."

"Thought you'd run 'em out all by your lonesome, eh?" sneered Seldon.

"What did they shoot at yuh for, Brick?" asked Lafe.

"For money, I reckon."

"Money?" Voorhies seemed amused, and his amusement was shared by Seldon, who laughed in a rasping manner.

Brick's eyes narrowed and the freckles showed like rust splotches on his white skin.

"Hold her, Brick!" cautioned Lafe. "Don't git sore, old-timer. I'm —— glad yuh arrested the herders. It makes things easier for us. We'll just razoo that herd of sheep so far they'll smother to death in wool before they ever find a man to clip 'em."

"Goin' to jail 'em for shootin' at yuh?" asked Seldon. He emphasized "shootin'," and the tone of the question was sarcastic.

"Was yuh thinkin' of takin' 'em away from me?" queried Brick, but Seldon did not answer.

"Brick sure is organized," observed Lynn Barnhardt, pointing at the two horseshoes tied to Brick's saddle.

"Whatcha do, Brick—put 'em on your bronc when yuh get ready to start down hill? Betcha he's got the uphill shoes on his bronc now."

"Barefooted now, Lynn," smiled Brick. "Level goin'. Some system, eh?"

"This thing has got to be kind of a —— nuisance," observed Seldon. "What I figured on was to warn them sheep-herders to take their sheep and vamoose. We can't go chasin' them sheep all over the country, can we?"

"Reckon I ought to turn 'em loose and kindly ask 'em to take their sheep away?" Brick laughed at Seldon and shook his head. "Nope, your idea is all wrong, Seldon. I'm goin' to put them two specimens in jail; *sabe?*"

"There's no need of a warnin'," said Dal Melchior, "bein' as there ain't nobody to warn. It won't take us long to dispose of two hundred sheep."

"I know a high cliff," observed Barney O'Mera meaningly.

"Do yuh think it would be legal for us to kill off them sheep?" asked Seldon seriously.

Brick looked at Seldon and then around at the other men.

"Well, I ain't no lawyer, Seldon. I swore to uphold the law, yuh understand? If the owner of them sheep will ask me to protect 'em——"

BRICK looked at the two tired prisoners, but neither gave any sign that he had heard. Brick shook his head.

"I reckon they're willin', gents. I'll ask the first lawyer I meet for rulin' on the case. Somehow these two sheep-owners act plumb willin' to get a divorce from them woolies. I'm goin' to have a little talk with 'em soon."

Brick motioned to his two prisoners and they got up. Brick grinned at Seldon, and then rode past the horsemen, following his prisoners, with never a backward look. Then Brick enjoyed his first good laugh since Scott Martin had been shot. The two prisoners looked back at him and exchanged glances of wonderment.

"I ain't been so tickled since I wore a knit shirt," chuckled Brick. "Didja notice the look on Jeff Seldon's face? He's goin' out and help kill his own sheep. Ha, ha, ha!"

The prisoners stared at him, and the big one spoke.

"Which one was Seldon, sheriff?"

"Don't try to be funny," advised Brick. "You know him —— well."

"Honest to —— we don't," stated the little fellow. "You're wrong there. I never heard of Seldon." The man's voice and actions were convincing. Brick studied the two men and then motioned them to go ahead.

"Will yuh tell me who owns the sheep?" asked Brick.

"No—not unless you'll believe that we do," said the big man.

"I don't," said Brick. "You fellers ain't sheep-herders nor cow-punchers. I don't know what you are."

"I do," said the little man.

"What?" asked Brick.

"Pair of —— fools!"

"We all have our little failin's," said Brick, but he was not thinking of the sheep-herder's reply. He had been sure that Seldon owned the sheep.

Seldon hated the cattle association—hated cow-men, although a cattleman himself. He had told Brick he hoped the sheep would run the cattlemen out of the country. All the cattlemen knew that the sheep must come eventually, but they were determined to fight the issue as long as possible.

"Who else could it be?" wondered Brick. "Seldon hates the association and would do anything to put 'em out of business in Sun-Dog. Seldon hates me. Does he want to mix me up in a cattle and sheep war and get me killed off?"

Brick wondered over these problems, as they went slowly along under the hot sun. The herders had denied knowing Seldon, and Brick felt that they were not lying. There was no question in his mind but that it was sort of a test case on the part of some Sun-Dog rancher. The men had said there were two hundred head of sheep in the band.

"Voorhies hates me, too," grinned Brick to himself. "Voorhies don't want anybody that he can't boss. Voorhies don't like that maverick idea, a-tall—and Voorhies has sold a lot of beef in the last few months."

Brick herded his prisoners down the main street of Marlin City; thereby causing

much interest. He noticed that Kane and Smith were among those present. Silent stood in the doorway of the office and grinned expansively. At least it meant that he would have company.

" 'Lo, Sharpshooter," called Harp Harris.

The smaller of the prisoners turned his head and gave Harp a sharp glance, but did not speak.

"Know him, Harp?" asked Brick.

"Yeah. Used to was up around Fort Benton. Heard he deserted from the cavalry. He sure did clean up their best shots in that country, and they calls him the "Sharpshooter."

The Sharpshooter did not seem interested in Harp's description of him.

"Shall I put 'em in the little wickiup?" asked Silent. Brick nodded and the two sheep-herders filed in ahead of Silent. Kane stepped over to Brick.

"WHAT did yuh do with the sheep?" Kane asked.

Brick elevated his eyebrows at Kane's question.

"Sheep? Did I mention sheep?"

"Well—uh—they're—uh—" Kane stammered in his confusion.

"Funny that you thought they was sheep-herders," grinned Brick. Kane turned away to hide his confusion, as several men laughed.

"Ba gar, I'm bet dat Breek—" began Le Blanc, but broke off his exclamation to examine the horseshoes tied to Brick's saddle. Others stepped in to see what the blacksmith had discovered. Kane and Smith turned and walked back to the saloon paying no further attention, but Brick saw Le Blanc look from the horseshoes to the retreating Smith, with a quizzical expression on his face. Brick picked up his reins and led his horse to the stable, while the curious crowd went back across the street.

Silent was jubilant. He did not know why Brick had arrested the two men, nor did he care. It meant something to talk about and a possibility of action. He was overflowing with curiosity, but did not ask any questions of his prisoners. Neither of the prisoners made any comment when Silent generously supplied them with tobacco and cigaret papers. This was Silent's idea of true hospitality. They were prisoners, it is true, but their coming broke what Silent termed "a terribul lonesome year," and he was willing to entertain them as much as possible.

Harp separated himself from the crowd as they dispersed, and proceeded to jackknife himself into the doorway, where he began to regale the jail and office with sonorous strains.

"May lightnin' strike yuh in two places to once!" swore Silent disgustedly. "Every time I gets to feelin' glad, you comes along and sinks my feelin's. Can'tcha never do nothin' but hong, hong, hong? My ——, that ain't music!"

Harp wiped the back of his hand across his lips and looked up at Brick, who had come up to the door. Brick motioned to Silent, who had to step over Harp to get outside.

"Them two are the shepherds," exclaimed Brick. "I had a wau-wau with them, and when I was pullin' out they took a shot at me—the short one done the shootin'."

"You're lucky to be tellin' of it," drawled Harp.

"I noticed the notch in your saddle," nodded Silent.

"What kind of a rooster is the Sharpshooter, Harp?"

"They runs him out of Dry Lake," said Harp. "Dead shot with a rifle. Yuh hadn't ort to put him in jail, Brick. His kind belongs in Boot Hill."

Brick grinned and told them what happened after the shot was fired, but Silent and Harp could see no humor in Sharpshooter's predicament when he found that Brick had not been hit. Brick described it with a wealth of humor, but the two cowboys failed to see anything funny about the incident.

"And yuh let him get away with it," wailed Silent. "Wouldn't that rasp yuh, Harp? Brick, you ought to have a job as mish'nary to the Pecan Islands. Lettin' that pop-eyed murderer run circles in plain sight, fall down, git up—all in plain sight. Huh!"

Silent was disgusted. There was nothing savage nor hard-hearted about Silent, but he had his own ideas of visiting judgment on men who shot from ambush.

"Whatcha arrest 'em for?" asked Harp.

"Moral effect," grinned Brick. "Killin' 'em would 'a' put me in bad, don't yuh know it? They ain't so much to blame, 'cause they just work with their hands."

"I know what yuh said," nodded Harp;

but I'm —— if I know what yuh mean."

"Don't ask him," begged Silent. "Brick's a danged Injun, with a Greek tongue, when it comes to lettin' folks in on somethin' that might interest 'em. I ain't no deputy—I'm a chambermaid in the jail. Everything Brick says to me sounds like them conundrum things which you're supposed to guess at.

"I'm all through guessin'. Here he comes skyshootin' in with a couple of prisoners breakin' trail for him and a couple of rusty horseshoes tied to his saddle. 'Moral effect,' says he. Work with their hands. Huh!"

"Give Brick two shepherds and a couple of horseshoes and he sure can compose some tune," drawled Harp. "I ain't no puzzle rustler, but I trails my bets with Brick."

An hour later the sheep-hunting cattlemen rode back into town, and with them came Doc Meyers in Wesson's buckboard. Brick stood in the doorway and watched them drive up to the saloon hitch-rack. Silent and Harp were quarreling over a two-handed game of seven-up.

"One man shy," observed Brick, noticing that Lynn Barnhardt was not with them.

Silent and Harp left their game and came to the door. Lafe Freeman rode away from the rest and came straight to the office, where he dismounted slowly and came up to Brick.

"Scott Martin died about an hour ago," he stated softly.

"Died?" gasped Brick.

Silent and Harp moved in closely, their faces expressing disbelief.

"Uh-huh," nodded Lafe sadly, looking back at the men going into the Dollar Down.

"For ——'s sake!" breathed Brick.

LAFE turned and put his hand on Brick's arm.

"I ain't advisin' nothin', son, but under the circumstances I wish you'd come out to the ranch tonight. Kinda give 'em a chance to cool off, yuh understand."

Brick looked queerly at Lafe.

"Do I look like a runner?"

"It ain't that," faltered Lafe. "Lord knows you ain't no front-runner, Brick. But look at this right, can't yuh? You ain't got no alibi, have yuh?"

"No-o-o. I can't prove nothin', Lafe, but I ain't goin' to run away. I thought a lot of Scott Martin. Would they try to hang me? None of them cared for Martin. Ain't they goin' to give me a chance to prove that I didn't do it?"

"Human bein's ain't no better than wolves, Brick. Will yuh come out to the ranch and let 'em cool off?"

"After I resign," said Brick slowly. "Voorhies is the boss of the county commissioners, so I reckon he can accept it."

Brick went into the office and wrote his resignation; wrote it short and to the point:

I'm through with this sheriff job right now.
BRICK DAVIDSON.

Brick showed it to Lafe.

"I'm goin' to present it right now," he announced, starting toward the saloon.

"Go easy, son," advized Lafe. "Keep cool and don't forget you ain't alone in this deal."

Brick smiled. Lafe Freeman was more like a father to him than any man had ever been, and the old cattleman's cool head had saved Brick from making a fool of himself many times. Brick walked into the saloon and up to Voorhies, who was at the bar. The conversation stopped as Brick came in. He and Voorhies faced each other and Voorhies was the first to turn his eyes away. Brick handed him the resignation, and watched Voorhies read it.

"Saves askin' yuh for it," remarked Voorhies, and then turned to the crowd. "Davidson has resigned as sheriff of Sun-Dog County."

Seldon grinned.

"Mebbe we'll get a sheriff now that won't insult folks."

"Maybe," nodded Brick good-naturedly. "Of course it all depends."

"Yuh heard about Martin, didn't yuh?" asked Voorhies.

Brick nodded and walked outside, followed by Barney O'Mera, who had stood near the door.

"Brick," he said; "it ain't none of my business, but I heard Kane tellin' Voorhies and Doc Meyers that you was out to the Weepin' Tree this mornin', and that you got Martin all excited over somethin'. Doc Meyers said it was likely the excitement that made Martin worse; *sabe?*"

"Well, I was talkin' with Mrs. Wesson and she said that Kane saw how you talked with Martin and that he pestered Martin for an hour or more, asking questions on paper. She said that Martin had to keep his eyes shut to make Kane quit. It ain't

none of my business, Brick, but I thought yuh ought to know."

"Much obliged, Barney," said Brick. "Mighty good of you to tell me this."

"Not so danged good," smiled Barney; "but I want you to get a square deal as far as I can help yuh."

Brick went to the stable and found Silent saddling both horses.

"I don't need to write a resignation, do I?" asked Silent. "I just natcherally quit and that's all there is to it. That was the worst —— job I ever had."

Lafe and Harp met them at the front of the office.

"Will yuh do me a favor, Harp?" asked Brick.

"Hope to die," drawled Harp.

"Stay here in town this evenin' and find out what they're aimin' to do, will yuh?"

"Be home by ten o'clock, bustin' with news," nodded Harp, and turned his horse back to the hitch-rack across the street. Brick, Silent and Lafe rode out of Marlin City, heading into the sunset, silently, except for the soft thud thud of horses' hoofs in the soft dust, the creak of leather, jingle of bit-chains. From the side of a little butte came the sharp bark of a prairie-dog. Overhead came the shirl of a bull-bat. A great owl flapped softly across the road in front of them; a flying ghost, headed for an indistinct cottonwood clump.

"What did yuh do about them sheep?" asked Brick softly. Lafe jerked up his head as though Brick's question had jarred him from sleep.

"The sheep? Voorhies decided that we might be liable for damages if we destroyed 'em. We argued it out, and finally agreed to have Barnhardt and Breamer take care of 'em until we can find the owner and make him take 'em away. They're goin' to hold 'em on the Weepin' Tree ranch."

"Seldon tell 'em he'd allow sheep on the Weepin' Tree?"

"Uh-huh, kinda funny, Brick. Seldon and Voorhies both talks big against the sheep, but after they meets you today they kinda gets cold feet."

"It's to be expected," grinned Brick. "Who do yuh reckon they'll appoint for sheriff?"

"Some friend of Voorhies, you can bet on that," replied Lafe.

"Voorhies is gettin' too much to say about things. Somebody will come along and cut his comb some of these days, and there won't be no mourners from the Nine Bar Nine."

"He's sold a lot of cattle lately," observed Brick.

"Mostly everything he's got," replied Lafe. "I dunno what he means by sellin' out so short. Maybe he's goin' to sell out."

Brick grinned and shook his head.

"He'd better hurry, Lafe, 'cause there's a big dust-storm gatherin'."

Lafe looked curiously at Brick, but asked no questions.

IT WAS a few minutes after ten o'clock when Harp rode in. Brick, Lafe and Silent were sitting on the ranch-house steps, and Harp delivered his news before stabling his horse.

"Voorhies got hold of Steve McLean and Sam Boyle, two of the commissioners, and they accepted your resignation, Brick. Then they proceeds to appoint Pete Kane sheriff. They're goin' to hold a coroner's inquest tomorrow, and they've got it framed to swear out a warrant for you as soon as the jury brings in a verdict. Voorhies said there was no use holdin' them sheep-herders so Kane turned 'em loose."

Lafe grunted his disgust, but Brick made no comments.

"Sun-Dog County's goin' to the dogs," complained Lafe. "I'm goin' to oil up my old six-gun, y' betcha. I ain't acted foolish for a long time—years. Are yuh goin' to fade out of the country, Brick?"

Brick got to his feet and leaned against one of the porch posts. A big, pale moon was just peeping over the mesquite-covered hills, casting a soft blue mist over the ugly corrals and low, mud-covered barns, and making them things of beauty. From the corral came the low bawling of a calf. Brick touched a match to his cigaret, and Lafe noticed that Brick was smiling. Brick snapped the match away and shook his head.

"No-o-o, I don't reckon I will, Lafe. Fact of the matter is, I reckon I'm goin' to become prominent, like a boil on a pug nose. Any time I run—I'll be the one behind."

THE next morning after breakfast, Brick, Silent and Harp saddled their horses. Silent and Harp asked no questions as Brick tied the horseshoes to his saddle. Both of them had rifles in their saddle-boots and their belts showed no empty cartridge-loops. Lafe Freeman came

down to the corral to get his horse and Brick observed that the old man was wearing his gun and belt. Old Lafe patted the gun and grinned foolishly.

"Feelin' kinda chipper," he chuckled. "Ain't got a speck of old age in my system. Look!"

Came a snap of a palm against leather, and the old Colt seemed to hop from its holster into the old man's hand.

"Trained that gun myself," grinned Lafe, flipping it back into the holster with a twist of his wrist. "Could teach some of you young fellers a trick or two if I tried, y' betcha. I'm goin' to town now, and I reckon I'll go heeled. Feller feels free to prognosticate when he's got somethin' on his hip besides the weight of his overalls."

Brick slapped the old man on the shoulder and mounted his horse. Lafe did not ask where they were going; merely observed that they went across the hills toward the Weeping Tree instead of going around the road. He caught his horse, threw on a saddle and galloped down the road toward Marlin City. The trio rode slowly into the mesquite-covered hills, with Brick leading the way. Finally he broke the silence.

"Did either of you fellers ever see that Jack Smith before?"

"Not me," said Silent.

"Nor me," added Harp. "He's buyin' horses for the British Government."

"Has he bought any?" asked Brick.

"I ain't heard of none. Whatcha know about him, Brick?"

"Somewhere I've seen him, Harp. Where was it? I've been wonderin' and wonderin', and I can't place him. If I had any brains I'd get a headache wonderin' about him."

"What does he amount to?" inquired Silent. "Forget him."

"That's why he amounts to something," complained Brick. "I can't forget him. That *hombre* amounts to somethin', Silent. He didn't stumble into my ankle that day accidental. He went plumb out of his way to walk on me, and he hit the floor so hard he forgot what he was to do next. Jeff Seldon called him a quitter. I wonder if—if he was tryin' to pick a quarrel with me."

Silent turned and looked at Brick's grinning face.

"Now he's happy, Harp. He's happy to think that this horse-buyer wanted to pick a fight. It don't take much to please our pink-topped friend."

Brick humped over his saddle horn and frowned under his low-pulled hat. He concentrated on Jack Smith. Feature by feature he analyzed that face; trying to remember where he had seen it, but in vain. Recognition was just beyond his grasp.

There was no sign of life at the Weeping Tree ranch-house, but when they rode into the quadrangle of the old buildings they saw Jeff Seldon coming from the door to his horse, which was tied at the old willow, which gave the ranch its name. They rode up to him and he looked up.

Seldon resembled an old buzzard more than ever, with his old faded Prince Albert coat which flapped around his thin shoulders and the once-white celluloid collar surmounting a dirty shirt.

"Lookin' fer somebody?" he asked, and added, before they could reply, "There ain't nobody home—but me."

"You ain't home," said Brick.

Seldon bobbed his lean head.

"Yes, I am too. This here ranch belongs to me, if anybody asks yuh."

"Where's Miss Martin?" asked Brick.

"I dunno. She went home with Mrs. Wesson last night. Reckon she's downtown. Goin' to have the inquest today, yuh know."

Brick's face hardened as he looked down at Seldon. He noticed that Seldon wore a holstered gun under his flopping coat. For a few moments Brick looked at Seldon, then turned his horse and rode away, followed by Silent and Harp. They rode straight away from the ranch, into the hills, while Seldon mounted his horse and rode the other way—toward Marlin City.

BRICK pulled up and looked back at the ranch-house. Far down the road he could see a tiny dust cloud kicked up by Seldon's horse, as its owner raced to town. He would lose no time telling which way Brick had gone, and a posse would be on his trail as soon as the coroner's jury brought in a verdict. Brick was positive there could be but one verdict.

Harp and Silent watched Brick sitting silently on his horse, gazing back. Finally Brick shook his head sadly.

"I reckon I'm due for trouble, boys. You fellers better go back now. It won't be long before you'll be reading reward notices——"

Brick stopped in the middle of his sentence and his hand went slowly to his forehead. He leaned forward in his saddle staring at the ground. Silent and Harp both leaned forward, seeking what Brick appeared to be watching, but there was nothing except bare, sandy ground. They exchanged glances, and then Silent spoke softly:

"He's thinkin', Harp; he's thinkin'. Give him air, cowboy."

Brick did not hear Silent. There was a deep crease between his half-shut blue eyes and his mouth was partly opened, as though panting from exertion. Suddenly he threw up his head and laughed aloud—a laugh of joy. His eyes flashed from Silent to Harp and he spurred his horse in a quick circle, headed down the hill.

"Come on!" he yelled. "I've got Jack Smith!"

Silent and Harp swung in behind him, and the three horses pounded down the hill past the ranch and swept into the road toward town. Silent and Harp did not know what Brick meant, did not know what lay before them, but they were willing to follow Brick wherever he might lead.

They rode straight down the main street of Marlin City to the sheriff's office. The hitch-racks were filled with a motley collection of saddle-horses and vehicles, but not a person was in sight.

Marlin City did not have a court-house nor city hall, but held court in an old dance-hall above Wesson's store. Brick knew that this was where the crowd was congregated, making a big event of the coroner's investigations.

At the front of the sheriff's office they dismounted. Marlin City was very quiet. Suddenly a door banged shut. The three men whirled quickly, but it was only Le Blanc closing the door of his shop.

Le Blanc was dressed in his Sunday clothes and was smoking a cigar. He smoked three cigars a year: one on Christmas, one on the Fourth of July and another on his birthday. This day was none of the three, which proved the importance of the event. He fastened the door and then stared across at the sheriff's office, shading his eyes with his hand.

He looked toward the front of the hall and then walked swiftly toward the office. The office door was unlocked—probably for the reason that Brick had forgotten to hand in his keys, and spring locks were still unknown in Marlin City. There was no one inside. Brick stepped in, while Silent and Harp leaned against the doorway and watched the street.

Brick went swiftly along the walls, glancing from face to face on the old reward posters. Many of them were torn; the faces obliterated. Suddenly Brick stopped and felt of a certain old poster, but it was pasted tight. He took out his knife and cut out the section of sagging paper.

For a moment he studied the paper, and then put it in his pocket before coming to the door, where Le Blanc had joined Silent and Harp.

"Hello, Le Blanc," smiled Brick.

The blacksmith slowly removed the cigar from between his bearded lips.

"H'lo, Breek. Me, I t'ink you be 'fraid for scare to come here today."

Brick laughed.

"As bad as that, Le Blanc?"

"Ba gar, I'm t'ink she's bad." Le Blanc's face was grave. "She's —— bad, Breek. Everybody she's say bad t'ing about you."

"Le Blanc, do you remember telling me about shoeing a horse in Dakota—putting on shoes without toe-calks?"

Le Blanc stared at the ground, rolling the cigar between his fingers. He looked up and nodded.

"Would you know that horse if you seen it?"

Le Blanc scratched his head, while he studied the matter.

"I'm don' know, Breek. I'm shoe plenty cayuse—me. I'm be-lieve for sure dat she's wan leetle brown mare. Mebbe two 'year ol' by dat time—four year ago. De leetle mare she's keek! Ha, ha, ha!"

Brick untied the horseshoes from his saddle.

"Come on," he ordered, and the three men followed him to the saloon hitch-rack.

BRICK circled the horses to the far side of the rack, where he went in between two of the animals, boosting one aside with a heave of his shoulder. He pointed to a brown mare, wearing a high-forked, beautifully stamped saddle.

Le Blanc cocked his cigar at an angle and walked around the mare. He examined

its teeth; half-knelt and felt of its forelegs; and then grinned up at Brick.

"You feel, Breek—here. De leetle cayuse got plenty scar from de toe-calk. All heal up now, but she be dere for sure."

"Is that the mare?" asked Brick.

"I'm bet you my life," Le Blanc was positive.

Silent touched Brick on the arm and pointed across the street.

Mrs. Wesson and Jean were just coming out of the hall entrance. They did not look toward the hitch-rack, but turned and went around the corner toward Wesson's home. Brick watched them disappear. He turned back to Le Blanc, who was still looking at the brown mare.

"Did you know anything about the man who owned this mare?"

Le Blanc puffed on his cigar and shook his head.

"No, I'm no t'ink so, Breek. She's jus' have de job for me."

"You've see the cowboy with Pete Kane?"

"De black wan? Ba gar—" Le Blanc removed his cigar and stared at Brick. "Ba gar, I'm t'ink I see dat face be-fore." Brick took out the piece of paper which he had cut from the office wall, and let Le Blanc see it. For a moment the blacksmith stared at it and then laughed.

"She's de man, Breek—sure t'ing. W'at de paper say, Breek? I'm can't read de English."

"Come on and I'll show yuh," replied Brick, and hurried for the hall entrance, with the three men trailing at his heels. At the bottom of the steps he stopped.

"Boys, there's liable to be —— turned loose for noon. I'm tellin' yuh in time."

"Hurrah for crime!" grunted Silent. "If you disappoints me, Brick, I'll massacree yuh. Let's start the dance."

"She's beeg day for me," grinned Le Blanc. "See—I smoke de see-gar."

Harp did not make any statement; merely shifted his holster and started up the stairs.

"Take things easy," cautioned Brick. "Remember they're most all against us, but don't spill any lead without yuh got a good reason. Watch me."

"I hope somebody gits brave," said Silent. "I do hope that much, 'cause I'm gittin' rusty."

Neither of the cowboys had seen what Brick cut off the wall of the office, but they knew that Brick had a reason.

The hall was about sixty feet long by thirty feet wide. At the front of the hall was a slightly raised platform, which held the judge's table and chair. Just in front of this platform stood a table, for the use of the lawyers.

The seats were, in the most part, made by placing a board between two backless chairs or between boxes. On the left side of the hall, as you came in, the seats extended against the wall. Down the center was a narrow aisle, and between the next row of seats and the opposite wall was another aisle.

On the platform sat Judge Grayson, the local justice of the peace, a dignified personage, but lacking any great amount of judicial knowledge. His pudgy hands were clasped around his flowered waistcoat and his florid countenance was cocked upward and sidewise above an all-too-high collar, as he followed the proceedings. About fifteen feet in front of him was the first row of seats. To his right, as he sat facing the door, was another row of seats, presumably placed at that angle for the use of a jury. Behind this row of seats was the doorway to a small ante-room.

As Brick led his men inside the hall, six men were just coming out of this anteroom. It was the coroner's jury, bringing in their verdict on the death of Scott Martin.

Every available seat was taken and standing room was at a premium. Women did not attend court in Marlin City—probably for the reason that nobody knew just what might happen in a Sun-Dog court room. Mrs. Wesson and Jean had left, after giving their evidence.

Every eye in the room was focused on this jury, and none saw Brick Davidson moving softly up the outside aisle, going to the front of the room. Silent, Harp and Le Blanc separated and followed over half-way up the aisles, attracting no attention. Brick moved up the room until he was near the table in front of the judge, and facing the jury. On the front row of seats sat Lafe Freeman, sitting between Bun Partner and Barney O'Mera.

On a chair, which had been moved out beyond the front row, and near the jury seat, sat Pete Kane, the newly appointed sheriff. On the second row of seats Brick

could see the swarthy face of Jack Smith; eyes half-closed as he watched the jury.

Seldon, Voorhies, Jack Sloan, a gambler, Mel West, owner of the Emporium hotel, Frank Padden, a cattle-buyer, and "Tiny" Taylor, a Bar M cowboy, composed the jury.

Doctor Myers had been sitting on the front row of seats, but now he got to his feet and faced the jury.

"Have you arrived at a verdict?" he asked.

VOORHIES got ponderously to his feet and nodded.

"We have, Doc. We finds that Scott Martin was shot by Brick Davidson, the sheriff, actin' in—uh——"

"Excess of his duty," prompted Mel West.

"Excess of his duty," parroted Voorhies. "And we asks that Brick Davidson be arrested for mur——"

Voorhies, stumbling over his verdict and request, had lifted his eyes and looked straight at Brick Davidson. Brick was looking at Voorhies, a half-smile on his lips; his right hand resting on his hip, while in his left hand he dangled the two horseshoes.

Seldon looked up at Voorhies, as did West, who again prompted—

"Murder."

But Voorhies did not complete his sentence. He started as though to sit down, but straightened up again. Every one was watching him closely. West touched him on the arm, but Voorhies did not respond. Then Judge Grayson turned and looked at Brick, who was only a few feet away. For an instant the judge stared. His hands unlocked from around his fancy waistcoat, and he took a deep breath—a breath that was audible to all.

Then every man in the hall looked at Brick. Pete Kane half turned in his chair and looked at Brick, his mouth open in astonishment. Kane had visions of a man hunt in the hills, in which he would be the leading character.

Not a man in the audience, except those who came with Brick, and possibly Lafe Freeman, ever expected to see Brick at the inquest. Not a word was spoken. The crowd leaned forward. This had put a new light on what was to have been an ordinary inquest, in which every one seemed to know the verdict before the jury was even drawn.

Brick let his eyes drift over the audience and then back to Voorhies.

"Murder, eh?" Brick's voice was softly pitched. "Found me guilty of murder, did yuh? Well, well!"

Voorhies wet his lips with his tongue.

"The evidence—" he began hoarsely.

"Set down, you sheep owner!" snapped Brick, and Voorhies dropped back as though from a pistol shot.

The smile had left Brick's face. He glanced quickly behind him. Chet Malloy, a cowboy, was leaning against the wall, almost in a direct line with Brick and Voorhies. Instead of stepping out of line, which might attract attention to him, Malloy hunched down, slid his feet out and sat flat on the floor. Brick merely flashed the look and turned back, but Malloy knew what it meant. Brick looked at Seldon, and Seldon squirmed.

"Steady, son," cautioned Lafe Freeman, and his whisper was audible to all parts of the room. No one even glanced at Lafe.

"I wasn't invited to this inquest," observed Brick; "but it 'pears to me that I should 'a' been."

"If you've got any evidence—" began Dal Melchior apologetically.

Brick tossed the horseshoes to the table-top. For a moment the tension was broken, as the audience leaned forward for a view of the horseshoes. A cowboy started forward, as though to come up to the table.

His boot-soles squeaked loudly, and he stepped back quickly, bumping into another cowboy, who had also started forward, and they both sat down awkwardly in the same chair. No one paid any attention to them, but they remained in that position, with the under man craning his neck around the other's shoulder.

Voorhies took advantage of the lull to attract Kane's attention.

"Get your man, Pete!"

Voorhies did not intend to make his order audible to every one. Brick laughed mockingly.

"Any time you're ready, Kane."

But Kane did not heed Voorhies' order nor accept Brick's challenge. Rather he ignored both.

"The law gives a feller the right to be heard, don't it?" asked Brick.

"Go ahead, son," chuckled Lafe. "They'll all listen."

Lafe had slid his belt around when he sat down and the butt of his old single-action Colt was concealed under his folded hands. In this position he could get into action without any unnecessary motion, and nobody could check him by grasping his arms.

Brick glanced around at the crowd. Sitting, humped down in their chairs near the center aisle, were the two sheep-herders. Standing in the aisle, with his left hand resting on the back of Sharp-shooter's chair, was Le Blanc, who nodded toward the two sheep-herders as he caught Brick's eye. Le Blanc was not armed, but depended on his mighty hands for offense or defense. Brick looked at Kane.

"Turned the shepherds loose, did yuh?"

"There wasn't nothin' to hold 'em on," growled Kane.

Brick nodded.

"That's right, I reckon, only yuh turned 'em loose too late to do you any good."

"What do yuh mean?" asked Kane.

"They wasn't hired to miss nor talk. They done both, Kane."

Came a sudden movement, as Sharp-shooter started out of his chair, but Le Blanc's hand clamped on his shoulder and shoved him back.

"She's h'all right here, Breek," boomed Le Blanc.

KANE glared at Brick and then looked at Seldon, who was humped up in his seat; his skinny head drawn down into his collar, like an old snapping-turtle. His eyes flashed like a pair of amber beads, and his hands fussed nervously with the lapels of his coat.

"What about them horseshoes?" asked Sloan.

"The man who shot Scott Martin rode the horse that wore those shoes," declared Brick.

"Where did yuh get 'em, Brick?" inquired Cale Wesson.

"Hangin' to a nail on the sheep-herders' cabin," grinned Brick.

"Tryin' to hang the crime on a poor sheep-herder, are yuh?"

Seldon's question was a whining bit of sarcasm.

"No-o-o." Brick pursed his lips and shook his head, as though he was correcting a child. "Yuh don't need to get nervous, Seldon, 'cause I'm goin' to hang the deadwood right where she belongs. Tell me about this here deed to the Weepin' Tree ranch, will yuh?"

"What's that got to do with it?" growled Seldon.

"Just to prove that yuh own it, Seldon." Seldon took a folded document from inside his coat and tossed it to the table.

"Anybody here know Zell Mohr's signature?" inquired Brick.

"I do," replied Judge Grayson. "Know it well."

Brick handed him the deed, and the judge studied it closely, while the crowd seemed to relax.

"No question about it," declared the judge. "That's Zell Mohr's writing and signature. It is witnessed by Pete Kane and Bill Voorhies. Ain't nobody writes just like Zell did."

"Voorhies, did you witness this deed?" asked Brick.

"I did."

"Satisfied?" sneered Seldon.

"Of certain things," nodded Brick. "Is it recorded?"

"Not yet. I been kinda busy and——"

"You hang onto it, judge," ordered Brick.

Seldon shot to his feet.

"Gimme that deed!" he shouted. "That belongs to me, you—you——"

"Calm down," advised Brick softly, and then snapped, "Set down!"

Seldon dropped back into his seat, shaking with anger. Brick looked at Jack Smith for several seconds.

"Your name is Smith?"

Smith shifted his feet and seemed inclined to ignore the question, but finally nodded.

"Buyin' horses for the British Government?"

Smith was plainly irritated.

"What's the meanin' of the questions?" he growled.

"Would yuh mind coming up on a front seat?" asked Brick. "I want yuh where I won't have to talk over other folks."

Smith's eyes narrowed and he started to fold his arms.

"The red-headed gent asks a favor," said Silent, who had moved in close to the end of Smith's row of seats.

Smith looked up at Silent, who towered

over him. The two men between Silent and Smith obligingly got up and moved into the aisle. Somebody laughed aloud.

"Sh-h-h!" cautioned a voice.

Smith got up slowly and came out past Silent. Brick pointed to a space in front, two men removed from Lafe Freeman, and Smith sat down.

Immediately the men behind him either left their seats or moved aside. The men of Sun-Dog could read signs. Pete Kane sat leaning forward, with his elbows on his knees, never taking his eyes off Brick. He might be able to catch Brick off his guard, but he knew that he would have to contend with Harp, Silent and Lafe.

"Feel better now?" queried Smith uneasily.

Brick nodded and turned more toward the jury.

"I'm talkin' straight to you jurymen, but my conversation affects every man in the room. Seldon, I asks yuh to keep your hands in sight and try to be calm. In regards to your hands—I only asks this once."

Seldon's jaw tightened, but he obeyed.

"You all know that sheep ain't wanted in Sun-Dog," continued Brick. "Legally they've got as much right as cows, but morally they ain't—not accordin' to our morals. If the sheep got protection from the sheriff, with the assistance of a few cattlemen, they might get a start. If they once got started they'd sheep out Sun-Dog inside of a year. To get a start, they've got to have a friendly sheriff."

"Is this a inquest or a speech?" demanded Voorhies. "I moves that we——"

"Overruled," interrupted the judge. "Let Brick talk."

"THERE'S a man on this range," continued Brick, "who hates the cattle association. He's plumb stingy, but he'd give his right eye to see the cattlemen put out of business; and there ain't nothin' as sudden as sheep. Am I right?"

The crowd murmured a ready assent.

"There's another man on this range, who has sold most all of his stock in the last six months, and I'm bettin' that at least twenty per cent of that stock wasn't never bought nor raised by him."

Voorhies sprang to his feet and took a step toward Brick.

"The boot fits him!" yelped Lafe Freeman, and the crowd laughed. Voorhies flushed angrily and stumbled backward into his seat, knowing he had blundered badly.

"That man," smiled Brick, "wants to own the county. He never could be a big cattleman; so he decided to be a sheep king. He bought two hundred head——"

"Prove it!" roared Voorhies, struggling to his feet. "Prove it!"

"Set down," advised Brick. "You've proved it yourself. I wasn't sure until now, but I know that you and Seldon owns 'em together. The Sharpshooter and his pardner were hired to bring in them sheep. You kinda figured that I'd be in jail for the killing of Scott Martin, and you'd have your own sheriff, but you made a mistake when you let Sharpshooter know that you were willin' to pay for my scalp. Bein' a case of two-to-one, they could prove self defense, and my recent reputation would make it easy for them."

Brick smiled at the expression on the faces of the jury.

"Keep talkin', Brick," urged a cowboy joyously.

"What's this got to do with the killin' of Scott Martin?" asked Seldon hoarsely.

"Scott Martin was killed for two reasons; to get me and him both out of the road, and to get somethin' that Scott Martin owned."

The audience watched Brick closely, silently.

"The man who killed him—or thought he had killed him—rode a horse that wore them shoes. Likely there was more than one man. Maybe there was three or four. One of 'em rode a horse, which wore them shoes.

"Do yuh know where that old tumbledown cabin is along the Weepin' Tree road? They bushwhacked him from there. He fell just at the edge of the road. I seen where his hand made a track in the dust. There was blood on the dusty grass at the edge of the road.

"They thought he was dead, I reckon; so they carried him down the canon to where they had the calf all roped and the fire all set. Then they robbed Scott Martin, and left him there to prove that I killed him for maverickin' a calf. Other calves have been mavericked with the Weepin' Tree to cinch things."

"What about this robbery?" asked Cale Wesson.

Pete Kane's right hand slipped slowly off his knee. "Don't mind me, Kane," smiled Brick. "I don't want all the best of it." Kane slowly brought his hand back to his knee.

"The main idea was to make a sheep ranch of the Weepin' Tree," explained Brick.

"That's a —— lie!" shrieked Seldon, starting to his feet, but Voorhies pulled him back.

"They shot Martin in the back with a .41. Yuh see, I shoot a .41. My, my, but they sure did frame me nice! Accordin' to their view of it, I didn't have a chance on earth. Gents, they sure did frame me to a fare-thee-well, but they overlooked one of the big points.

"Their scheme was horse-high, bull-strong, and sheep-tight, but they didn't know that the big gate was wide open. They sure did leave a hole that yuh could drive a team through.

"Zell Mohr got Scott Martin to come to Marlin City. He knowed that Scott didn't have much money; so he let Scott have the Weepin' Tree ranch. He wrote out a paper, which showed that nobody but Zell Mohr could make Martin move off the ranch.

"Zell Mohr, bein' dead, and not havin' any relations—well, it kinda lets Scott Martin stay on the Weepin' Tree, don't it? Scott Martin had that paper with him the day he was shot, and the man or men who shot him took the paper. They wanted to get a sample of Zell Mohr's writin' and also his signature, which no man could make without a copy, and he had to be some hand-writer to do it at all. Judge Grayson has the deed that was made thataway."

"What's this?" gasped the judge. "A forged deed?"

BRICK did not turn, merely nodded his head as he leaned forward, hooking his thumb over the belt above his gun. Lafe Freeman leaned forward, hunching low over his folded hands. Silent stepped a little closer, while Harp shoved away from the wall and rubbed his hands on his hips.

"Yes, it was forged, judge," replied Brick evenly. "I don't blame yuh for mistaking it for the real thing."

Seldon got to his feet and spat contemptuously.

"How do yuh make out a thing like that? That's Zell Mohr's writin' and his signature. You're cinched, Davidson; and you're framin' a cock and bull story to try and clear yourself. Who in —— could write like Zell Mohr? Eh? Tell me that, will yuh?"

"No Sun-Dogger," smiled Brick. "We ain't educated enough for that, Seldon."

Brick was looking at Smith as he talked to Seldon, but now he spoke directly to Smith.

"Smith, you're a clever man." Brick's tone was merely conversational, with a tinge of admiration. "Education sure done things for you. Now, if you was plumb ignorant like the rest of us you'd be safe and happy, don't yuh know it?"

Smith tried to smile and barely managed to contort his features. He was getting more uncomfortable each minute.

"Yuh made a mistake in Dakota, Smith," stated Brick.

Smith's head jerked up and into his black eyes came a hunted look, but he did not blink.

"You kinda had me up a tree," continued Brick slowly. "That deed kinda had me wonderin' a few things, too. I knowed I had seen your face somewhere, but I'll be danged if I could place yuh. No, I never met yuh, Smith.

"I didn't know yuh—not personally, but I sure did need yuh. Did yuh ever set into a game of poker, with a bob-tail straight in your hand? Yuh had everything, except the one card, to make a bettin' hand. You was the filler for my bob-tail.

"Yessir, I needed you—bad. Fact of the matter is, I needed yuh as bad as Seldon did. My, my, but you was a handy man, Smith."

Brick grinned. Every man in the house knew things were drawing to a climax. Lafe Freeman had hunched to the very edge of his chair, and was watching Voorhies and Seldon like a hawk. Brick's eyes shifted from Smith and he appeared to be talking to every one now.

"Gents, do yuh remember that I got a thousand dollars for cleanin' up Zell Mohr and his gang? Well, before Zell was sent on his way to the penitentiary, me and him had a talk. He was kinda sorry about his end of the deal—what he done to Martin. Zell didn't have nobody to leave his property to, and he didn't have no use a-tall for the Weepin' Tree ranch; so me and him

talked turkey, and he sold me the Weepin' Tree ranch for—one—thousand—dollars!"

Brick drew the document from his pocket and tossed it beside the horseshoes.

"There's the hole in their scheme," said Brick, and then took out the piece of paper he had cut from the office wall, and tossed it beside the deed.

"There's an old reward notice for Carl Garcia alias Jack Carl; wanted in Dakota for forgery and murder. He's the man who killed or helped kill Scott Martin, and he's the man that Seldon hired to forge the deed to the Weepin' Tree. He's knowed by several names, but I'll add—

"Jack Smith!"

As Brick snapped the name his hand flashed for his gun.

Smith was game. He threw himself forward, with one hand buried in his coat-pocket, grasping a gun, but Harp's pistol spouted fire and Smith stumbled head first almost at Brick's feet.

Kane threw himself sidewise, shooting from an awkward angle and masking Voorhies and Seldon. Kane managed to fire three times, but his bullets were going wide of their mark—partly on account of his haste, but more because Brick was shooting deliberately and was not missing.

As Kane plunged to the floor with three of Brick's bullets dragging him down, Voorhies, slow of movement, swung his gun forward, but before he could pull the trigger Lafe's old Colt roared for the first time in years and Voorhies crashed back into Seldon, spinning the old man half-around.

Seldon screamed a curse and shot at Brick from his hip. Brick felt the bullet strike like the blow of a hammer, but he braced himself, shot twice at Bun Partner, who was trying to pull down on Lafe, and fired his last shot at Seldon, just as Seldon staggered through a jumble of upset seats and sprang for the open window.

Seldon turned half-around, dropping his gun; but his iron nerve carried him to the window and over the sill, where he fell to the street below. Brick's bullets whirled Partner around and he sprawled across a chair, but his one shot had torn through Lafe Freeman's right arm, inflicting a painful wound.

Brick looked around, dazed. At his feet lay Smith, with Harp straddling his body. Voorhies was sprawled on his back, with one arm over the seat of the chair, almost on top of Pete Kane, who lay face down.

Silent was holding Lafe Freeman by the arm, and the old man's face was very white. In the center of the room was a commotion, and above it all came the roaring voice of Le Blanc:

"Go 'head, Breek! I'm got sheepherd in bot' hand!"

Judge Grayson had fallen backward out of his chair at the first shot, and remained in that position until now, when he got blindly to his feet, groped for his gavel and struck his desk a ringing blow.

"Order in the court!" he cried, but no one gave him a thought. Brick tried to go to Lafe's assistance, but the room began to spin like a top. He heard Lafe saying:

"That's all right, Brick; that's all right. I only got hit in the arm."

Then he heard some one saying:

"By ——, they did hit him!"

Then everything went black for Brick Davidson, but he felt strangely indifferent.

BRICK blinked his eyes and stared at the ceiling. He turned his head on the pillow and looked at the wall, where the dim faces on the old reward posters stared down at him. Near his cot stood a chair, on which were several medicine bottles and a water glass, over the top of which had been placed a playing-card, surmounted by a sticky-looking spoon.

Brick's eyes shifted back to the wall. Slowly he remembered the fight in the hall; remembered that he had been hit by a bullet. But what was he doing in a bed in the sheriff's office. Hadn't he proved his case? Was he a prisoner? He listened. Somewhere there was music.

"Hong-g-g-g, hung-g-g-g, um-m-m, hong-g-g," sounded the doleful humming of a jew's harp.

"Harp," called Brick, and his voice was strangely weak. Came the scraping of feet, as Harp unhooked himself from his favorite seat in the doorway; and he walked up to Brick, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. He grinned down at Brick.

"Gosh!" he chuckled. "Yuh finally did wake up, did yuh, sheriff?"

"Sheriff?" wondered Brick aloud.

"Y' betcha. The commissioners met and refused to take your resignation; and so me and Silent moved yuh in here. You got a slug through yuh, but Doc Myers fished it out and he says you'll be all hunkydory

now. Old Seldon had the .41 that hit yuh. I reckon Smith is goin' to be able to attend his own trial; but Partner won't care which way it goes, 'cause he cashed in quick. Kane lived long enough to go out kinda clean. He said that him and Smith and Seldon shot Scott Martin, but he didn't get time enough to tell which one done the job. Smith handled the sheep deal for Seldon and Voorhies; so that nobody'd know who was doin' it."

"How's Lafe?" asked Brick, suddenly remembering that Lafe was hurt in the fight.

"Goin' around with one arm in a sling and braggin' about how fast he is with a gun. Thinks he done it all."

Harp laughed and leaned closer.

"A couple of ladies have been in to see yuh ever little while. I told Mrs. Wesson that they didn't give you a square deal a-tall by thinkin' you was guilty. Y' betcha, I gave 'em particular——"

Brick shifted his eyes away and Harp grinned.

"Didja ever rub Mrs. Wesson the wrong way, Brick? Don't never do it. Whoo-ee! But say, Brick; they both knowed you wasn't guilty."

"Why—" began Brick weakly.

"Lemme tell yuh, Mrs. Wesson's a wise lady owl. Them two knowed you wasn't guilty. Mrs. Wesson didn't care if you did know how she felt, but she made Miss Martin act like she thought you was guilty."

"But why?" asked Brick.

"Mrs. Wesson told her it would make yuh feel bad for a while and then you'd git mad as —— and start throwin' dust. She said you had plenty of brains, but that you couldn't be happy and be smart all at the same time."

Brick smiled up at the ceiling and shook his head at the wonderful wisdom of some women, while Harp leaned on the edge of the bed and clumsily arranged the blankets.

"Mind if I play yuh a tune, Brick?"

Brick looked at Harp's homely face and smiled.

"Wish yuh would, Harp—thanks. If yuh feel like singin'—go to it."

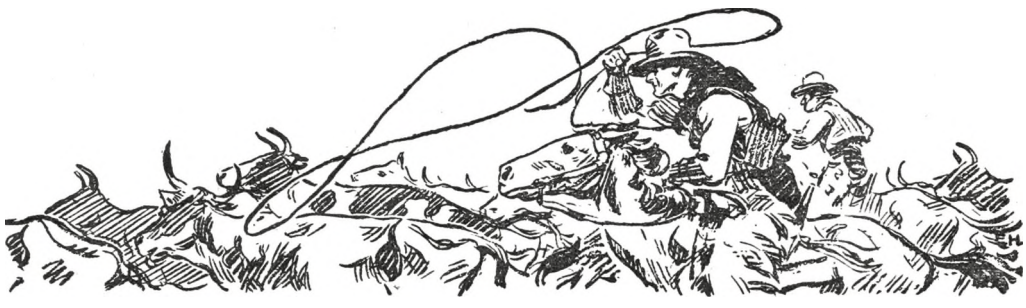
"Gittin' shot sure does create a hankerin' for music," observed Harp. "I could sing, but I reckon I'll stick to the harp."

Harp started for the door, but stopped.

"When yuh git well, I don't want yuh to point out the fact that I picked on yuh when yuh was flat on your back, Brick."

"Go ahead and play," grinned Brick. "I—I don't think I'd mind anything now."

It was neither a request nor a compliment to Harp's musical ability; rather it was a concession, but Harp was hard-boiled, and all he needed was a chance to play.



The CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING-PLACE for READERS, WRITERS and ADVENTURERS

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

ON THE occasion of his first story in our magazine, F. R. Buckley follows Camp-Fire custom, rises and introduces himself. I can add that, since the following was written, he has added the experience of being hit on the head and knocked out by a heavy beam. But for the matter of a fraction of an inch he'd have written no more stories. As it is, while he had a bad time of it, I'm expecting some more tales from him later on. Our thanks to that fraction of an inch.

After some of the hair-curling autobiographies I've seen in "The Camp-Fire" I'm almost ashamed to give mine; but here it is:

I AM Irish; and, if I had had a physique corresponding to my love of adventure, might have fetched up anywhere. With an eccentric heart-action and cubist eyesight, however, I naturally landed in a newspaper office. I say "naturally," because I have yet to find the newspaper which has not, somewhere on its staff, usually in the reporters' room, one more or less crippled Irishman, getting as close to the fire of life as he can, and incidentally doing darned good work. I don't know whether I was a good reporter or not: but certainly I was enthusiastic. In fact, though I've nominally been out of the game for years, I am still actually a foreign correspondent, and as interested as ever in the procession of men and women whose deeds make newspaper copy. They are a strange lot: acquaintance with them has done much to reconcile me to being a crock. Adventuring personally, I might have seen strange things; as it is, I've knocked about quite a lot, here and in Europe but I could not have duplicated in my lifetime one-tenth of the experiences these people have told either to me, in conversation, or before me, in police-court evidence.

FOR instance, I could not possibly have been in Nanking at the time of the Tae-ping Rebellion, as was the aged man who, in the smoke-room of an Atlantic liner, gave me some of the information I have used in "Yellow Treasure." Nor, in the same life, could I have been captain of a small steamer in mid-ocean with a mutinous Chinese crew, like an old extra-master I knew in a rooming-house on Twenty-third Street—in some respects, the most remarkable man I have ever met. He had been a captain twenty-seven years; he had been a bucko mate in sail; he had seen mutiny, shipwreck, fire at sea and—I suspect—something of barratry; yet he considered himself never to have had an adventure. It was from casual remarks that I had to gain information. The sight of the American liner *New York*, for instance, reminded him that he had once been in the North Atlantic, in January, as second mate of a steamer whose boilers had shifted during a hurricane. Laughing heartily, he remembered that all

hands had decided that they might as well go to hell drunk as sober, and had opened a keg of brandy. So that when the *New York*—then the *City of Somewhere*—picked them up, they were in a state of the wildest hilarity. He was a sea-dog of the type which can not conceive of any one being unfamiliar with nautical terms; and had I not had an officer other, even these rare stories of his would have been unintelligible..

I said, awhile back, that I've knocked about a bit; but most of it's included in the statement that I've been a reporter. I've been a special constable; I've been knocked out with a brick during a strike riot—both as products of newspaper assignments. I've edited a newspaper, a trade-paper, and a magazine; I've been an editor of motion-picture manuscripts, a subtitle-expert, a scenario-writer, a reviewer, and an actor. For a brief and disgustful period, I was somebody's secretary; for another brief period I was a day-laborer, trying to juggle hundred-pound bags of cement without either dying or breaking my glasses. At present, I'm newspaper corresponding and writing stories for magazines when I'm working, and playing the fiddle—with more feeling than skill—when I'm not.

I don't know what else I shall do before I'm finished, but I'm tremendously curious to know. Anyhow, I've come to be a member of the Camp-Fire, and I can assure you that it's a pretty delightful experience to have the sale of a story introduce me to something more cordial than a check.—F. R BUCKLEY.

IT IS, of course, unfair to pass hasty judgment on past atrocities by either Indians or whites. There was justice and injustice on each side, and also it is one thing to judge at a distance, but quite another to witness or suffer from atrocities. The original blame is ours. We took another people's country away from them, as man has done since the beginning. But weighing a particular case is a different matter.

Denver, Colorado.

In reference to article "The Scalp Market" it is stated that Colonel Chwington massacred a band of Cheyennes who supposed they were under protection of the Government. This undoubtedly took place shortly after the Civil War.

AS STATED, these Indians were promised protection but had broken out of bounds for several past seasons regardless of treaty. So after several vain appeals to nearest Army headquarters for relief to outlying farmers and ranchers who were being murdered, whole families at a time, an independent organization was gotten up, Colonel Chwington being put in command for the express purpose of wiping out this band of marauders. The majority of these men were shortly returned from four years bloody fighting to preserve the Union and got home to find Denver in ceaseless terror from Indian raids. Stages from near-by cañons coming in with whole families killed and mutilated and at one time, not having room in the building used for a morgue, the corpses were put outside for purposes of identification. Imagine these men after years of bloody fighting coming home, not to peace but to face a worse condition than they had yet gone through. Is it any wonder they went mad?

My father, D. W. Griffry, commonly known as "Wash," was chief bugler to Chwington and blew the charge. My mother had arrived in Denver *via* prairie-schooner from Iowa in '63 and, although a young girl of only six at the time, remembers the Indian terror. Every few days rumor would start one yelling "Indians!" and the town would literally move to an old barricade in what is now West Denver at about Eleventh and Lorimer Streets.

IT IS true that they killed men, women and children. The squaws would run from center of mêlée and snipe from behind a tent or bush. A ball from a musket will kill as quick whether fired from man or woman. As to children, what else could be done? There were no asylums then and the whites could not assume the responsibilities of the papooses' upbringing. And the scalping I don't doubt but I don't know. I am a very ordinary sort of man and rather timid withal but during my hitch in Siberia in late argument have seen things that, if they had concerned my own flesh and blood, I can easily imagine myself as blood-mad as those early pioneers who had to kill to survive. H. P. probably never saw a baby's brains knocked out against a tree, but those were the sort of things that those old-timers saw. So, without blaming them for these things, let us remember that in times of great mental and physical stress one word or action can turn a docile dog into a roaring lion.

THE political record and correspondence regarding appeals for help from the Government were lost, I believe, in the Cherry Creek flood, so absolute facts will probably never be known. However, there appears no doubt but what the Cheyennes during the warm season of the year, raided and killed around Denver, holding up near an Army post southeast of here some several hundred miles, where they were given protection.

There were no telegraph lines in those days and Denver's terror was not known except by rumor a few miles away.

Use your own judgment about printing above and please excuse my heat to the fact of me having a good old dad implicated in that famous or otherwise affair of Sonderuk. Regardless of everything else, it was men like those old-timers who braved unheard hardships to open up this beautiful country for the old United States.—M. W. GRIFFRY.

WHILE on the subject of Indians, here is a clipping from the New York *Sunday World*, sent in by L. J. Schaefer of Cranford, New Jersey.

One of the most difficult wounds to cure is that of total scalping, such as occurs when a woman's hair is caught in machinery and as used to take place when Indians lifted the scalps of their enemies. In the *Journal de Chirurgie* (Paris), Dr. C. Lenorment describes sixty-seven such cases and their results.

The reason for the difficulty is that the scalp is nourished by arteries that have no connection with those of the skull, and the size of the wound is so great that any growth of new tissue from the edges

will never extend all over the bare skull, or only after years of suppuration.

Doctor Lenorment says that when the scalping is not total every effort should be made to save the flap by sewing it back in place. But when it is total he has found the most successful treatment to be with flaps of tissue cut from other parts of the patient's own body, and grafted over the skull. These flaps should be an inch or more wide and three or four inches long, placed close to each other or even overlapping. He believes in doing this at once, and says some cases have entirely healed in a month though others take more than a year.

THIS Keeper of one of our Camp-Fire Stations, though now settled down as an electrical contractor, is one of those ex-wanderers who wants to renew old days and refresh the memory of old scenes by getting in touch through his Station with those comrades whose feet still wander or who have in the past followed the paths he once followed. Drop in on him when you hit Baltimore or if you live there.

Baltimore, Maryland.

As to Camp-Fire: I would like to sit up a little closer in the light so that some of the comrades can hear a few words of my small experience. During my rolling session (1911 to 1917) I have been to following points: Most of the States of the Union, British Columbia, Hawaii, the East, Panama, Peru, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Venezuela, Colombia, Curaçao and Porto Rico. I can not at the present writing go into telling of what I saw or did (or what was done to me), but if admitted to the light of the Fire I hope to have a say in the near future. Though I think my travels are done, as I have builded a business and tied myself into a knot with a daughter to keep me at home, I hope to keep traveling by having those who come through Baltimore stop and give me a lift, as the latch-string is always out to those of Camp-Fire.—HENRY W. L. FRICKE, 1200 East Madison, corner Asquith Streets.

SANTIE SABALALA, rising and introducing himself according to Camp-Fire custom, will, I think, be welcomed with very unusual interest. Never before has a Zulu stood up in our midst and greeted us as comrades, and few of us have the understanding of native African life that Santie Sabalala is going to give us in these articles beginning in this issue.

These articles, by the way, have given the rest of us here in the office a good deal of trouble with Mr. Anderson. We were all tremendously interested in them, but he has spent a number of years in Africa, among other things fighting against the Germans through the East African campaign, and his interest and enthusiasm have been so keen that we've had to hurry to keep up.

Incidentally, until Talbot Mundy met Mr. Anderson he had thought that the man on whom his *Jimgrim* is more or less based was the only American in the world who had ever held a commission in the British army without giving up his America citizenship or at least lying about it. Mr. Anderson—you've read stories by William Ashley Anderson—made him make it two. How many more are there whose American citizenship was known who held on to it and yet held an English commission?

Yes, *Jimgrim* is drawn from life and Mr. Mundy will tell you about it, I think, at our next Camp-Fire.

By way of explanation, Mr. Sabalala is one of several Zulu boys who at an early age were brought to this country and well educated.

Cleveland, Ohio.

On reading the greeting welcoming me into the Writers' Brigade I naturally ran across a lot of words contained therein that reminded me of different incidents and adventures that I have met through my rather short (though I hope it will be long) journey on this wonderful *mhlaba* that we dwell on, especially when I came across the words "Camp-Fire." That brought to mind the first glimpse I had of civilization.

Wherever you are, fellow beings, here is a short history of another cracked-brained squid-hearted son of a chicken-duck:

I WAS born (so I have been told) in a place named Rini, which is now named and has gone by the name Gohamstown. Being a boy, I was sent away to Rabula, which is about four days and four nights journey on foot, or approximately two hundred and some odd miles. There I stayed with my "small father" (uncle) and grandparents or *Bawo um Kulu* and played about with their many offsprings, my cousins, grand-cousins and nephews. Drank lots of *amasi* and ate *inkobe* and did well, considering everything. I stayed there up until I was three or four years old, all this time never having seen my own parents.

Then came a day when a bearded man came into the community. After coming in with the cattle with some other boys, I was summoned to appear at a certain hut immediately, and like all well trained *inkunkmes* I went instantly.

INTO the low door of that hut I entered. The small dry brushwood fire lit up the soft darkness of the hut, around it at varying distances sat a lot of men eating out of different wooden dishes in honor of the visitor—my father. The meal was mostly meat, goat-meat that had been freshly killed that day. My mouth watered as the smell of the cooking reached my nose. A gruff voice remarked "*Hehl Mfondini nasti i nkabi yako.*" A thick-set man with a beard eating with the *U Bawo* and the "little father." turned around and looked at me with a pair of small eyes. "Ho, ho!" laughed he, as he stroked his beard, "*I zapa*" (come here) "*Kende ku mbone ndi Ku yize*" (let me see you; I am thy father).

I went over to where the bearded man sat eating; having reached him, he looked me over closely, felt my ankles, my chest and looked under my arm-pits for the much detested *Isi cawu se gosha* (sheep-spider) that makes its home under the arm-pits of young boy cowherders. Having made these examinations and found no sheep-spiders, he laughed "Ho, ho" again and asked me did I like meat. I answered eagerly yes. He put his hand into the dish in front of him and fished around in it a second or two and brought out a piece of nice, oozy, dripping black goat's-tripe. Let me say to you that a goat's-tripe is black and not white like a cow's. I cupped my two hands and said "*Msutu*" as he placed it there. I was commanded to sit down and obeyed, and ate the hot black tripe. So far off as it is now, to my childish mind and palate it tasted good. The voices of the men rumbled in different tones of discussion and argument. Expectant of some more meat, I waited patiently but was forgotten. The day had been long and the cattle rather troublesome on the homeward trip, which meant to say that I and the other boys tending them had almost run our little legs off. I was very tired and fell asleep, the rumbling voices being the lullaby that I went to the land of dreams in.

"*Vukal Vukal*" were the next words that I heard coming from that booming voice that I had heard some time. I sleepily sat up, and drowsily looked around me. It was rather dark, yet there seemed to be a sort of a haze about; a girl was blowing the fire to a small blaze, the white ashes hurling around and above her every time she blew a breath. The sticks became aflame in a feeble way; she stopped blowing, yet remained in her kneeling position. The flying ashes settled gently on her head, making her look very old and wise. The bearded-one spoke to me, "We are going to see thy mother. We go far, far away. You will have to sleep in places where the lions and snakes play about and the *u hili* lives. Are you a man enough to go with me or just a very small boy who wants to stay here?" Knowing what was expected of me, I told him I wanted to go, though the small boy wanted to stay very badly.

"All right (*Lungile*)," said he; "Go and get you *intonga* and *impahla* and bring them here." I darted out of the hut and ran to the *nkwenkwes nqugwala* and, treading on my comrades' noses and mouths and bodies, I gathered up my treasured sticks, five of them, a fur bag made of a wildcat, *i ngada*, two *nciyas*. I blundered around on my way to the door, but tripped against some one's arm and fell heavily on top of him. He woke up with a yell of pain. The next instant two boys were fighting each other in the semi-darkness of a hut. A booming voice from the door demanded "*Yi ntoni? Yi notini?*" and the fight stopped instantly. I groped around for my belongings, found them, and made my way to the door and there the bearded man was still waiting.

IT was still dark outside, but there was a blue haze hanging over the earth. The air was intensely cold and the ground unbearable; so, with a "*Masi hambe*," the bearded-one strode off at a moving stride with me tagging behind, past huts that were dark except where some one was blowing the embers of the night before to a blaze. There was no one to bid us good-by. My feet tingled at the pace set. Up a *qina* we went, down into a small clump of trees, where the air was very damp and sharp so one was almost unable to breathe. With a suddenness that was startling the sun blazed o'er the eastern horizon. The heavy dew on the "man high" grass began to shake time and time again. The bearded-one and I were drenched through. The sun went higher and higher and it became so hot that the bearded-one sought out some large rocks under whose shade we sat and ate some *isi kaff*. He propped himself against the rock and, with a nod or two, was soon fast asleep. I watched the sheep-cleaver birds wheel overhead with their constant cry of "Kouliee, Kouliee," got tired of that and began to speculate how far it was to the sky and what it was made of and at that point fell asleep.

A booming voice whispered in my ear "*Vukal Vuka mfan!*" I lifted my head suddenly and collided with the mouth and teeth of the bearded-one. The whiskers tickled my ears. He laughed "Ha, ha! you want to break my teeth?" I smiled and rubbed my ear. It was getting dark; the bearded-one handed me some dried meat and I ate it with relish, for I was hungry. Having finished my piece of meat, the bearded-one gathered up his belongings and I did the same, and in the twilight we began our journey.

THE dark swooped down for a short time, and soon the stars came out, many and many of them. They lit up the small path that we were following. The air was filled with terrible noises, the *waa-whooa* of the owl, the *nya nya nya!* of some hyenas, the terrible screams of monkeys as they were awakened possibly by a snake looking for its supper or a leopard making a meal off one of them. On we went, these sounds all around us. I must say that the very small boy wished he had stayed at the Kraal, and he did walk very closely to the heels of the bearded-one. More than once the bearded-one asked me kindly to keep off his feet, but a sudden noise nearby made me walk on his heels again and again. The stars twinkled above and numbers of them twisted and turned in every direction imaginable. My legs became numb. Down by a Donga we went, and there the bearded-one stopped and knelt down and took a long drink. I imitated him the best way I could. After quenching our thirst we climbed the bank. He told me to stand still while he walked about in a circle two or three times, widening it every time. He reached his starting-point. This was in order to see if there were any snakes about there. He seemed satisfied that there were not any, came back to where I was standing and told me to go to sleep. I sank down to the ground gratefully and in three breaths was in the land of sleep.

EARLY the next morning before the sun was up we started on our journey and repeated what had been done the day before, and did this for four days and nights. At the end of the fourth day my father informed me that we would sleep in the same hut as my mother, if I was a man and not a small boy. I stoutly maintained that I was a man, and so we kept on our way. The sun set for the fifth time, and the road or path became very stony. In my eagerness I found this out, for I had asked to be put in front. I kicked against set stones in the path that I could not see, sometimes loose ones that shot away with a rattle and a ping! I manfully stifled my whimpers and kept my eyes on the path and lifted my feet high, trying to save them from further pain. The path went on its tortuous way and suddenly ended in a broad way—a wagon road. I sighed inwardly. A high hill hid anything further and we

had to walk a certain length when suddenly there came to my eyes the most wonderful thing I had ever seen.

"Father!" I burst out, "this must be the place where all the stars fall?"

There was a chuckle in the dark, then he replied, "No, no, my son; those are things that they light up the big paths with and are not stars."

But I could not understand that these were lamps that I saw, as I had never seen anything like that and did not know what my father meant. He got in front and in a little while we turned into a gate and into the door of a hut. A woman sitting down by the fire with a baby on her back turned her face towards the door as we entered and challenged: "Who is it?"

"*Site*," my father replied.

"Ah!" she cried, "where is he?" meaning me. She called me to her. I went over to where she was sitting, she gathered me to her arms and crushed me to her bosom until I felt stifled, she kissed me again and again, holding me off in admiration and joy with tears of affection in her eyes. I looked at her in bewilderment and saw a person with high cheek bones, hooded eyes that were terribly keen and a wonderful smile that made me smile when it was flashed on me.

SHE asked what did I want, meaning something to eat. I answered instantly that I wanted to go out and pick some stars. She looked puzzled, until my father explained to her about the lights. Like a wise mother she told me to wait till next day and made me eat something that I don't remember to this day. I did not sleep that night. At the first sign of dawn I sneaked out and looked out towards where I had seen the fallen stars shining the night before, and was rather disappointed to see nothing. But it came to me that my mother had said I could go and pick them up to-day. She came out just then with the baby on her back and asked me was I still looking for the stars. I answered yes, and so I was dressed suitably and went into the city with Mazalene. I crossed the first bridge for the first time in my life, then across the railway which was to mean so much in the future. And we came to a lamp which fortunately was lighted—there was the iron pole and the glass case on top with the jet inside, which was lighted. I looked at it with worship and a desire above anything I had known. I started to shin up the pole, but my companion in horrified panic stopped me. Just then a Hottentot lighter came along with his match-stick. He shoved the end of it inside a small hole, gave the stick a twist and the flame went out. I was dumfounded. I felt a strong hatred for that Hottentot lighter, because I had taken such a liking to that star I felt it was really mine. My companion wanted to go further into the city to see the other lights, but I felt too heartsick to want to see anything else that day, so we went home. My mother comforted me in the best way that she could.

And so even now I like to see "Earth Stars" at night-time and it really does seem as if I have fallen amidst some "bright lights" in being welcomed in the writers' brigade and a member of the Camp-Fire companionship.

The pleasure is all mine, but some day soon I hope I will be able and shall extend the feeling of real sincere welcome. As to the future, well—"*Ex Africa semper aliquid novum.*"—SANTIE SABALALA.

HERE are several letters concerning the double-barreled cannon that figured in Farnham Bishop's story, "The Devil in Chains":

Rochester, New York.

I've been sitting back in the shadows of the Camp-Fire listening to the rest of you chatting about the highways and byways of this old earth of ours and of the different things that come and go, all this time silent. Now I'll try and answer Mr. Farnham Bishop's query in the first September issue of the year just ended, in regard to his story "The Devil in Chains."

DURING the Civil War, the Fourth Michigan Cavalry, who won the distinction of having captured Jefferson Davis, while on a scouting expedition near Macon, Ga., captured a battalion of Confederate cavalry. Entering Macon, the Fourth was informed by negroes that some pieces of artillery had been buried by the Confederates in the smallpox cemetery on the approach of the dreaded Yankees. Search was made by the commanding officer and some of his men who were immune from the dread disease. In a grave marked smallpox a double-barreled cannon was found and duly disinterred, showing no symptoms of that much-feared disease. The cannon was beautifully made of bronze, and weighed about one hundred and fifty pounds. The gun was invented by Captain Travis, a Confederate ordnance officer, who sent the design to London, where it was manufactured and sent back to Richmond and then to Macon. There, before a board of experts, it was tried out with satisfactory results, and probably would have proved a terrible engine of destruction had it been used in action in the field. But it never had the opportunity, as it was captured as stated above. It was made of the finest bronze, and finished in the most elegant manner.—FRED. L. HOLDEN.

Manassas, Virginia.

The only double-barrelled cannon in the world is owned by the city of Athens, Georgia, It is mounted on a gun-carriage in front of the city post-office, and is used occasionally by the students of the University of Georgia to celebrate a baseball or football victory over some rival college.

IT WAS made in the Athens foundry during the Civil War, where arms for the Confederate Army were manufactured, the name of the inventor was Epting, some of whose sons are living in Athens to-day. The idea being to connect two balls with a chain and fire together. Tradition has it, the gun was fired in action, or tried once, only one barrel going off and the chain swung around and killed the gunner.

For years it lay in a junk-shop in Athens, until 1907 when a large office building was built by the Southern Mutual Insurance Company. The foreman, a Mr. Bishop, who had been a gunner in the Royal Horse Artillery, learning of this unique gun, rescued it from the junk-shop, built the carriage for it and set it up where it now stands.

The late Mr. Bannerman never owned it, although I'm told he and several others have tried to purchase it. Postal picture-cards of it can be bought two for five cents from Mr. Lloyd Palmer, care of H. R. Palmer & Sons, Athens, Georgia.

I lived in Athens from 1908 to July 1, 1920, and

you can rely on this account being as nearly accurate as it is possible to get it *now*.—M. P. O'CALLAGHEN.

Valdosta, Georgia.

There was in 1916 a double-barrel cannon standing on the street in Athens, Georgia, that was made in Athens during the Civil War and the building is still there it was made in. It was never used, as they could never get both barrels to fire at the same time. They had a post-card of cannon on sale in stores there.—R. K. SMITH, M.D.

Berkeley, California.

Here are the few facts I have been able to find out about the original double-barreled cannon on which I based my story "The Devil in Chains." Instead of being in New York, as I had supposed, this extraordinary piece of ordnance is standing in front of the city hall in Athens, Georgia. It was invented and designed by John Gilleland, of Athens, during the Civil War and was cast and mounted at Bailey's Foundry in that city.

Several residents of Athens have been kind enough to send the above information in response to the appeal in Camp-Fire. Several have enclosed picture-postcards of the gun. So far, however, no one seems to be able to tell the exact date on which the freak field-piece fired its only round, and no two accounts agree on what happened when it went off. Some say that the chain broke, others that it remained intact while the conjoined balls whirled around. Some say that twelve men were killed, others that no one was hurt. Probably none of the eye-witnesses lingered to take notes.—FARNHAM BISHOP.

THREE new men join our writers' brigade in this issue. Wilbur J. Watkins rises and introduces himself, in accordance with our Camp-Fire custom. Did I ever tell you that when a new writer joins us he always gets a letter of welcome in the name of Camp-Fire?

Long Beach, California.

I thank you for the letter welcoming me to the fellowship of *Adventure's* "writers' brigade," and am proud of being one of them. I will follow the time-honored custom and briefly introduce myself.

I WAS born twenty-nine years ago, in Montana, on a ranch in the Yellowstone Valley, and was raised on a ranch in Wyoming, near the town of Cody. I graduated from a California college as a mining engineer (just a hare-brained kid) and was educated in Alaska, in the school of hard knocks. The Spring that I finished college I went as an assayer to the Treadwell mine on Douglas Island, Alaska, where I found the air reeking with the potent germs of "Gold Fever." I worked a week, contracted the disease, and was carried away on the crest of the new stampede to Ruby City, the latest gold-strike in the great "inside."

I found no gold, but I did find what I will always believe to be the most fascinating existence for an adventuresome spirit that exists anywhere in the world to-day—that of trapper and trader in fur in the vast, little-known wilderness stretching from the most northern bend of the Yukon River north to the Arctic Sea. I remained there four years, and left only after the war came and knocked the bottom out of the fur market, when I went down to Dawson to enlist in the Canadian Army. They would not have me—their company of a hundred men was full and the war would be over anyway before they ever got across! (Most of those fellows, I understand, were killed at Saloniki.) I came outside, back to Wyoming and the ranch, and when the U. S. A. took a hand in the game I went to France as a lieutenant of infantry. After the armistice I had an opportunity to spend several months as a student at the French University of Toulouse, and there became interested in the study of journalism. On my return to the States I took up newspaper writing as a profession and became a correspondent for several Eastern papers. That is my present vocation, with an occasional short story as a side issue—at the writing of which I am very much a novice.—WILBUR J. WATKINS.

IN OUR April issues we republished, by permission, from "The Life of Colonel David Crockett," by Edward S. Ellis, to John C. Winston Co., Phila., an account of Rezin P. and Colonel James Bowie, most of which was in turn quoted from a sketch by William H. Sparks. The article seems to me to present the famous Bowies in an extremely favorable way, but Dr. J. M. Soniat of New Orleans, a descendant of Rezin P. Bowie, takes strong exception to statements made and of course Camp-Fire is always glad to get the true facts on any subject.

Naturally I have no first-hand knowledge of the Bowies, but on at least some of the points raised Dr. Soniat should be sound authority and his information on the subject in general should be such as to command attention. He takes issue as follows: In some cases he seems to have misinterpreted Sparks and some of the other points do not seem essential ones, but we'll take his case as a whole, since even unimportant points may have value as bearing upon the general accuracy of the article.

Neither Rezin Bowie or any of his family was an intimate friend of Sparks; barely acquainted.

Rezin was better educated in English than in French or Spanish.

Was not slovenly in dress, and careless as to associates. Moved in highest social and intellectual circles and noted for care he gave to his attire, which was marked among the best dressed of his day.

Invented Bowie-knife for hunting, not for taking human life. (Ellis corroborates this in a quotation from a lady friend of the Bowie family.)

Was never a business associate of Lafitte's. (I can find no statement by Sparks or Ellis contrary to this.)

Rezin and James never engaged in any duels, combats arranged or accidental, save the unnecessary Natchez affair which has been given a false romantic value by uninformed writers. All their battles were with Indians and Mexicans, fighting for freedom of

the Southwest. They were not bullies or professional brawlers.

James did participate in fight after duel.

Rezin never was in slave trade in Havana under an *alias*. That he was opposed to slavery shows he never trafficked in same.

Refutation of the phrase "without inquiring . . morality" in this passage from Sparks:

"(The Bowies) despised a man who would defraud a neighbor or deceive a friend, but would without hesitation cooperate with a man or party who or which aspired to any stupendous scheme or daring enterprise without inquiring as to its morality. Their minds, their souls and aspirations were all grand, etc." (As the scheme Sparks quite evidently has in mind is the freeing of Texas and as Sparks heartily approves of this scheme, evidently his intent was to pay a compliment, not to cast a slur.)

Sparks kills Rezin three years before he really died.

That Rezin never owned a small farm on the Mississippi, but a large plantation.

He did not leave two daughters, but three, highly educated, of great beauty and refinement. They were not fond of rough sports (shooting, riding) one being too delicate for much exercise, another too young, leaving Doctor Soniat's grandmother—"than whom God never made a better woman—if she was the least bit rough in any way, what must have been a refined lady?"

It was General Cuney, not Currie, in the Natchez affair.

I regret that we have not room for the thirty-one pages of notes Dr. Soniat enclosed with his letter. Suffice it to say, that in them he quotes such authorities as Colonel John Henry Brown of Texas ("Encyclopedia of the New West"), Captain James Lacy, Henry Clay, Captain Wm. G. Hunt. From these notes I hope that later on we can have Dr. Soniat's account of the fight at Natchez and something concerning Colonel James Bowie's campaigns against the Mexicans.

HUGH PENDEXTER gives us the historical background of his serial starting in this issue. As you'll note, we followed his P. S. suggestion and omitted the names in his third paragraph.

Norway, Maine.

"*Lost Diggings*" was suggested by Bancroft's mention of a member of the '45 immigration stumbling upon an unusually rich placer in the Snake River basin while hunting for lost cattle. Specimens of the gold he brought back to the wagon-train were thrown into a tool-box and ignored until the immigrants reached Oregon. Other facts which impelled the story were Governor Lyon's introduction of the diamond craze; a western Indian who lost his medicine; the activity of counterfeiters of gold-dust; the unusual political disturbances, etc.

GOVERNOR LYON met a man called Davis in New York City and was shown some small diamonds which Davis claimed came from Idaho. Davis sold one for a thousand dollars and others for lesser sums. They agreed to return to Idaho and profit by their secret. Lyon returned first and went to Owyhee and told D. H. Fogus, who gave him a $500 bar of silver for a small stone. After that the two men made several trips by night, usually dogged by a small army of diamond hunters. Barrels of quartz and shiny pebbles were collected. Many men were ruined by this new craze. After six months of maladministration Lyon quit the territory. In my story I have him back in Idaho in late Summer. In fact, it was late Autumn. It is a matter of recollection that Lyon was killed in a railroad wreck while on his way to Washington to explain the disappearance of $50,000 out of the $70,000 sent him for distribution among the Indians. Lyon's peculiarities would convince us that he was mentally unbalanced.

SOME of his associates in office were sane enough, however, and rather scampish. First U. S. Marshal —— was removed for corruption in office ——. ——, treasurer of Boise County, '65, was arrested for defalcation in the sum of $13,000. —— ——, treasurer of Boise County for the preceding year, failed to account for six to seven thousand dollars. ————, acting-governor in '66, skipped to China with $30,000. This list is not exhaustive.

In April, '66, David C. Updyke, ex-sheriff of Ada County, and John Dixon, of Shasta County, California, were hanged on a tree beside the South Boise road. Updyke had resigned office after being caught in trading in county warrants and failing to pay over the tax money collected. Two indictments were returned against him. *Nolle prosequi* entered, and the matter was dropped. Retaining the county's tax money was nothing in David's young life so long as powerful and crooked friends were running the county. The vigilance organization, operating smoothly from Boise to Salt Lake City, became peeved. These vigilantes were largely composed of Ben Halladay's stage route employees. It was proved that Updyke belonged to a band of road agents that robbed a stage within six miles of Boise City, wounding a passenger, and robbed another stage in Port Neuf cañon, near Fort Hall, killing the driver. Despite these and other robberies, usually accompanied by violence, often by murder, Updyke might have escaped the noose for a time had he not burned some of the stage company's hay-stacks just to be malicious. That was too much. He was trailed and caught at the gang's rendezvous and confessed. He furnished the names of the gang. Dixon was a counterfeiter, a road-agent and a horse-thief. The customary cards, signed XXX, were found on the corpses. Another well-known horse-thief and highwayman was Harry J. Talbot, known as "Cherokee Bob." He was shot to death by a crowd in Florence after he and Bill Willoby had ambushed and killed a citizen. It was Cherokee Bob who used to warn his victims always to carry plenty of gold-dust and not disappoint him again.

AMONG the more sensational killings was the murder of Lloyd Magruder, a prominent Lewiston citizen, and his four friends, by David ("Doc") Howard, James Romaine, gambler, Christopher Lowry, blacksmith, and William Page. The murders were committed eight days' journey from Bannack City, as Idaho City was then called (October, 1863). When the murderers entered Lewiston with a large amount of gold-dust Hill Beachy

recognized the saddles as belonging to Magruder. They escaped to San Francisco, were pursued by Beachy and brought back to Lewiston. Page had no hand in the actual killing and was let go after turning state's evidence. The others were hanged. Page was shot two years later by Albert Igo.

THE Payette Valley Committee was organized in the Winter of 1864-65 to clean up the horse-thieves and counterfeiters of gold-dust. The *Ben Riply* of my story is patterned after John X. Beidler, a small, slight, frail man, yet the most daring and active of the Montana vigilants, and universally known as "X". W. J. McConnell, a Payette gardener, found his stolen horse in Boise City and after identifying it was taxed more than the animal was worth by the court hearing his claim. The crowd jeered him when he was quitting the court room and he told them, "The next one who steals a horse from me is my Injun." Evidently the gang didn't believe it. A few days later he and his immediate neighbors lost $2,000 worth of stock. McConnell pursued, caught up with four, shot three dead out of their saddles, captured the leader in a box cañon near La Grande and shot him after securing names of men in the organization. An item in the *Idaho Statesman* (April 22, 1866) in part says: "For more than two years this territory has been ridden and ruled by organized bands of men, who have made highway and private robbery, burglary and murder when necessary, their profession. Jurors and the court officials are terrified. The villains' own tools are sometimes elected to office. The express and stage companies practise secrecy to avoid robberies. It is known that bandits are in their offices daily and are on their stages. Merchants conceal the time of their departure when leaving town."

THE climax of evil came in Boise County in July, 1865, when Sumner Pinkham was killed as told in my story. The first grand jury failed to indict. The case was resubmitted. Kingley, a Methodist minister, called the first meeting of those who wished the law enforced. The organization resulting was patterned after the Payette Committee. The first meetings were held in an underground warehouse. The citizens voted to hang Patterson. Sheriff James T. Crutcher was sheriff at the time and rallied the rough element. Threats to burn the town were made, and the case was allowed to go to trial. After a long delay Patterson was acquitted. He fled to Walla Walla and was killed by Tom Donovan, night-watchman in a hotel. Donovan was tried and acquitted. It was said that the killing was by order of the committee. Bowen, who was Crutcher's predecessor in office, I continued in office a bit as he was the willing tool of the lawless. Jem Helm did not develop as I expected when beginning the story. I intended to pattern him after Boone Helm, a monster, who was hanged with the Henry Plummer outfit at Virginia City after a long record of the most atrocious crimes, including that of killing and eating his companions when lost in the mountains.

THE greatest discovery of '63 resulted from a search for the famous "Lost Diggings." In early Spring 29 men started from Placerville and crossed the Snake near the mouth of the Boise River and camped on a stream to the south called Reynolds' Creek. A. J. Miner and W. L. Wade scouted to the west, ascended the divide and discovered evidences of a large river—*i. e.*, land formations. They followed a creek toward the unknown river and found Discovery Bar, 6 miles below the site of Boonville. They named the tributary Jordan Creek after Michael Jordan. Up to that time the Owyhee River was supposed to head in Oregon. This was the beginning of the wonderful Owyhee mines, perhaps far surpassing the never-located lost gold diggings.

AMONG the books consulted in building up the story are various U. S. bulletins on geological surveys; "Confessions of John Doyle Lee, Danite"; Bancroft's "History of Idaho;" Bancroft's "Popular Tribunals;" excerpts from early Idaho press; magazine and newspaper miscellany. The liberties I have taken with the historical background are very slight and taken solely to permit continuity of plot.—HUGH PENDEXTER.

To the Editor: If thought desirable, because of possible descendants, the names of officers who embezzled, given on page 1, may be omitted. Their crimes and identity are matters of history and record, but I am always slow to rub it into any innocent relations. I leave it entirely to your judgment. —PENDEXTER.

NEVER mind an argument as far as I'm concerned; all I want to know is that if I'm not bitten that's one thing more I can't die from. An extract from a letter written by E. E. Harriman to an "Ask Adventure" correspondent who wanted to know something about snake-bite:

I have known a full-grown man in perfect health to die from rattlesnake-bite. I have known horses, cows and dogs to die from the same thing. But I have known a girl to be bitten and live—because her father cut the wound and sucked it for a long time.

I have known a boy to die from the sting of a white-faced hornet. It caught him directly in a large vein, and the poison reached his heart very quickly. I have known a man to die from the bite of a black spider, but the bite came in a peculiarly vulnerable spot.

You can't tell—always—just what the result will be of such poison. Much depends upon the condition of the blood. If it is heated beyond normal the poison is more virulent in its action.

I was once stung on my upper lip by a white-faced hornet and very nearly died from the effects. I was only nine years old and had been running a long distance. I ran on a half mile farther and pitched on my nose, unconscious. They saved my life with some difficulty.

No man has the right to say this and that will surely happen in case of snake-bite. It may turn out the other way. But when a big fat rattler can kill a horse by biting him in the nose, I shall go on protecting my legs against them.

I saw a man teasing a husky rattler one day. He laughed at me and said the fangs had been extracted. I passed on. A few minutes later the rattler got him close to the artery at the base of the thumb. Its fangs had grown again, and they buried him two days later.

Don't monkey with a rattler on the strength of any man's skepticism.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure* are free to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules**, thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of the last issue of each month.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL BUY: *Adventure* for 1910, 1911, 1912, 1913. Must be in good condition with backs and covers not torn.—Address PRINCE PEARCE, Hugo, Oklahoma.

WILL SELL: Any issue of 1919, 1920, 1921 and most of 918, at five cents each, postpaid.—Address FRED E. WILKINS, 24 Cherry St., Danvers, Mass.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

In their homes or shops some members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to—maintain Stations where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bear the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making in itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, 1508 Columbia St., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

3. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. ★ New Zealand; and South Sea Islands Part 1
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

5. South Sea Islands Part 2
CHARLES BROWN, JR., 213 E St., San Rafael, Calif. French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn). Natives, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

6. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Sydney Press Club, 51 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

7. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, natives, history, institutions.

8. New Guinea
DR. ALBERT BUELL LEWIS, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, natives, history, institutions.

9. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, 5444 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, Calif. History, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

10. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 103 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

11. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

12. Asia, Southern
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine Street, New Orleans, La. Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Borneo. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

13. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), care *Adventure*. Petrograd and its province; Finland, northern Caucasus, Primorsk district, island of Sakhalien. Travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

14. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, Niger River to Jebba, northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora, tribal histories, witchcraft.

15. Africa Part 2 Morocco
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

16. Africa Part 3 Tripoli
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine St., New Orleans, La. Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

17. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East Africa
R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. *(Postage 3 cents.)*

18. ★ Africa Part 5 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. *(Postage 12 cents.)*

19. Africa Part 6 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
CAPTAIN P. J. FRANKLIN, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

20. South America. Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

21. South America Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

22. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, language, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

23. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 West 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexio—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

24. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, Apartado 168, Mazatlan, Sinaloa, Mexico. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natvies, business and general conditions.

25. ✠ North American Snow Countries Part 1
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Height of Land and northern Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. *(Postage 3 cents.)*

26. ✠ North American Snow Countries Part 2
HARRY M. MOORE, Desconto, Ont., Canada. Ottawa Valley and southeastern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. *(Postage 3 cents.)*

27. ✠ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Georgian Bay and southern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. *(Postage 3 cents.)*

28. North American Snow Countries Part 4
T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Hunters Island and English River district. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

29. North American Snow Countries Part 5
ED. L. CARSON, La Connor, Wash. Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

30. ✠ North American Snow Countries Part 6
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. *(Postage 3 cents.)*

31. ✠ North American Snow Countries Part 7
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. *(Postage 3 cents.)*

32. North American Snow Countries Part 8
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, backpacking, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

33. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

34. Western U. S. Part 2
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Texas and Oklahoma. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

35. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. The Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. Early history of Missouri Valley.

36. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

37. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
LARRY ST. JOHN, Saugatuck, Mich. Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

38. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating; river tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

39. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Orlando, Fla. Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

40. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Maine. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

WEAPONS, PAST and PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

A.—All Shotguns including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheellock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

MOUNTAINS and MOUNTAINEERING

Especially of New England. Arthur Bent, Appalachian Mountain Club, 1050 Tremont Bldg., Boston, Mass.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. Rowe, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Comm., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents—in Mr. Beadle's case 12 cents—in stamps NOT attached)*
✠ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

The Case of Readers Who Violate the Rules of This Department

MY PERSONAL idea is that our "A. A." editors are too good-natured. This is a *free* service we offer our readers. We're *giving* you something. You value it or you wouldn't ask for it. Doesn't it seem reasonable and decent that any one asking for this service should comply with the simple rules? Yet some do not even read the rules. And if you don't care enough for the thing you ask for to enclose return postage to bring it to you, why write at all? In short, why be a cheap skate and a poor sport?

Luckily, the vast majority of our readers are sensible and decent in this use of "A. A." I hope our "A. A." editors will just let the others go to ——. If some fellow doesn't comply with the simple rules, let him go without answer of any kind. If he kicks, let him. If he gets sore at the magazine, let him. Any one who is stung through his own fault and then blames somebody else isn't the kind we want sitting around our Camp-Fire. It's a mighty fine lot of sports who gather there, and the other kind aren't welcome.

The letter Captain Dingle sends in is a sample of one way in which a minority abuse our "A. A." service. Many of the places he asks about are not in Captain Dingle's territory. Does he expect Captain Dingle to copy these questions and send them on to the proper "A. A." editors for him? And what a collection of questions! Probably he didn't mean the least harm in the world, and I'll say for him that he did enclose 2 cents postage. Postage for Captain Dingle's replies (Bermuda) is 5 cents and is so stated in the magazine, but at least he "meant well."

Mr. Noyes, too, is too good-natured, but I'm good-natured only up to a certain point, so I'm asking him to let me talk a bit in "A. A." These inconsiderate scatterbrains get on my nerves, and I don't mind saying so.—A. S. H.

Here's the letter from Captain Dingle that called forth Mr. Hoffman's remarks above:

Hamilton, Bermuda.

MY DEAR HOFFMAN:

Receipt of the enclosed prompts me to make a suggestion. See where the blighter takes me in one letter? And sends no envelop, only two cents postage, and prepays only two cents, after all the notices printed in the magazine. I get many, of course, but none before which wants for two cents a geography and gazetteer of the world. My suggestion is that a paragraph be run among the letters printed, something like this:

"If you get no response to your letter of inquiry, before you start out with your little ax to swat the Department just look over the few very simple rules regarding postage, districts covered, etc., and ask yourself if you have followed them. Quite a few of you not only expect this free service to come to you without even enclosing your addressed envelope, to say nothing of stamps or cost of postage, but you fail to prepay your letters, thereby forcing a tax on the man you ask for free advice. The eel gets tired of being skinned after a while; can you wonder if sometimes a busy writer jibs at being taxed through sheer carelessness on the part of correspondents and refuses to act the goat any longer?"

You can stick my name to it if you like. I believe it is possible to gouge under the hides of these mental pachyderms if we use a sharp enough goad. It might be well to print this question in the ordinary way, and run my comment by way of reply. I have another by the same mail, but I think one example is sufficient, so I am replying to the other one, simply telling him to apply at the right shop and enclose postage.

Yours very truly,

DINGLE.

And here's the letter from the "Ask Adventure" inquirer that called forth Captain Dingle's letter, above. I may add that the same inquirer has shot off his scattergun at most of the "A. A." men, at some of them several times:

7-8-21.

"DEAR SIR:

Could you give information on the Cocos Islands the climate, natives, language, fishing, minerals, topography, weather, and etc. Is there any hidden treasure there. Are their any mts, lakes, rivers, swamps, forests, animals, burds, plants and etc. their. Could you tell me who the Canary island belongs and is there any bird or minerals found their In what country are the most burds of Paradise found. Is there any large burds or voluable deposits of sodium nitrate. Is phosphate found on the Noura island. What mineral deposts are found in New Caledonia. From what islands does most of the pearls, and coral come from. Are birds of Paradise found in New Guinea. What are the chief industries on the following island Cook, Samoa, Society, Galapagos and etc. From what island does most of the cameos and sulphur come. What is the climate of the following islands Cape Verde, Canary, St. Helena. Do you know if there are any cannabal found in some of the islands. Which islands are the best to go for an exploration trip. To hunt for burds, plants, animals and etc. Are their any pearls found on the Bahamas islands. From what island does most of the rare pearls come from. Any gold, silver, and diamonds found in the Celbs or in Borneo. What are the chief products of New Zeland. Where do most of the coaconuts, gum, flap and etc. come from."— ——, Clairton, Pa.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

16, 24 and 36 Point Deer

A POINT is a tine on a deer's antler:

Question:—"I had a question come up the other day in regards to white deer in the Adirondacks.

One party claims that Mr. W. Rockefeller shot a 24-point white deer on his grounds. Can you tell me what was the largest deer got in this section and how many points he had?

Also, what can you tell me about How's Cave, N. Y.?"—JOHN N. DURNEY, Utica, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—I hadn't heard about the 24-point white-tail killed by William Rockefeller on the Brandon Preserve. I think it is very likely to be true. You could write Supt. of Rockefeller Preserve, Brandon, Franklin Co., N. Y., and ask him. He would probably tell you about it.

Fred Jones, Hinckley, N. Y., twenty years ago killed a 36-point buck while guiding for White on Moose River (Natural Dam). He'd probably give you details. The deer was of course of deformed antlers, somewhat. But a big one. I've seen only sixteen points, I think. Down South the white-tails grow bigger and have larger horns.

I don't know about How's Cave, but I'd suggest that you write the State Geologist, Albany, N. Y., and ask him if the subject was ever discussed in a State or national bulletin of geology. If you give him the exact location, he could refer you to bulletins that discuss the geology of that place.

More about the Arctic Oil-Fields

SOMETHING that supplements the information printed in the Mid-July issue of "A. A.:"

Question:—"Would like to inquire about recent oil-boom near Fort McMurray. Just how long would it take to go from Youngstown, Ohio, to the oil-fields?

What route would be the most direct or advisable? Could a man lacking experience in the oil business pick up work?

Am thirty-five, of medium height, weigh one hundred and forty-five, not used to very heavy work. Know how to handle a team. Have a friend who has been doing farm work who would go along. Could take $500 with us. What would the expense of such a trip be?

Would it be good sense to leave a steady job—but inside work which does not agree with me—bad cough—to make the trip?

Can you give me an idea of conditions of trail and existence in oil-fields? In other words general conditions?"—C. D. M., Youngstown, Ohio.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—The last place on earth for a man like you to start for would be the Fort Norman oil-fields. It will be years before there is any demand for labor in that section, while to go in as a prospector reminds me of a fellow who was stopped from entering Yukon Territory in the Fall of 1898 by the Mounted Police. He asked why he was not eligible for admission and was told that no one might go in who did not have at least a thousand dollars in cash and a ton of food. He looked at the sergeant for a minute and then said—"But any one who had that much grub and money would be a —— fool to *want* to go in."

That is about the situation at Fort Norman. All the promising tracts have been taken up. This means that the oil companies who lease a section from the Government pay down fifty cents per acre or $320 to hold it for the first year. The second year costs one dollar per acre.

Fort Norman lies about nine hundred miles north of Edmonton as the crow flies. The trail is about twice as far owing to the détours. When pumping is actually started it will be after a pipe-line has been put down for a thousand miles where it can connect with a railway. This is my opinion; but it is based on careful observation and a knowledge of the country.

The cost of transportation is such that your $500 would not take you both there, let alone provide you with an outfit.

Send question direct to expert in charge—NOT to the magazine.

Going Foreign in a Little Schooner

A CRUISE that combines fun and profit with a minimum of government regulation. But be sure your passports are in order!

Question:—"It is my intention to buy a two-mast schooner, get a small gas engine for emergency and take an extensive cruise. I will *not* carry passengers nor freight for others, although I intend to do lots of trading myself. Neither will I carry insurance. My pal speaks Spanish and knows the country from Cuba to Brazil. We intend to trade there and make a bit while enjoying ourselves.

But I do not know just what the Government requires. Are we forced to take a captain? Do we have to register? In fact I would thank you greatly if you would advise me what I must do and through what formulas I must go so as to abide by all the laws of this country and the islands we call at.

I expect to get about a hundred-ton schooner. Do you consider that safe for any sea? Any additional information regarding small sailing-boats will be greatly appreciated.

Do you know if one could do better on the Pacific coast or around New Orleans, as to cost of picking up a schooner?"—D. WALLACE, Ogden, Utah.

Answer, by Mr. Beriah Brown:—All vessels over eight tons have to be documented at the custom-house, and all vessels going foreign have to be registered in the custom-house. The vessel which you purchase will already have her documents, and the transfer to you will have to be recorded in the custom-house, where you will get your new papers when you register. You will also get there in detail all of the information which you need.

A schooner of one hundred tons, properly built and found in seaworthy condition, is fit to go around the world. Many vessels of much smaller tonnage have done so.

No licenses are required for officers on small sailing-vessels, and as you do not propose to carry insurance Lloyd's requirements will not bother you. Of course, for your own safety and protection you

must have some competent seamen and navigators on board.

As to the matter of purchasing a vessel, it is impossible to say whether you could get hold of the kind of craft you need to better advantage on the Pacific coast or at a Gulf port. It might pay to communicate with brokers in different ports and find out where you can do the best.

Three Countries to Get Rich In

AND all of them in Latin America:

Question:—"Am writing you a letter full of inquiries about South and Central America. I have written to the Pan-American Union for their booklets, but they don't contain all the information I want.

If I should go down there I would want at least 100,000 acres. Of course I would not buy that much at first—just a little to experiment with or stay in the country a while and learn about it. I have a little knowledge of Spanish; am studying it now.

I will give you the questions now, and want to say I understand that most of these places are selling land cheap because the country is something like our West in old days.

I am interested in the following:

1. BOLIVIA:—Raising sheep, llamas and alpacas for their wool. Some time ago you told a fellow that if you had his experience in sheep-raising and the amount of money he had to invest ($7,000), that you would go to Bolivia and raise these animals and make a lot of money at it. I suppose it's different now since the war has stopped; but please give one the figures of this venture.

Also I am interested in Bolivian land on or near the Paraguay River, or near Tarija, which is six thousand feet high. Besides raising the natural product of the country I want to see if I can't produce a better grade of cotton than they seem to produce. I know they don't produce much, however.

I would prefer to have this land on or near the Paraguay River so as to have a highway for the place. But it seems that cotton grows better at Tarija. However, since cotton has fallen so (which has affected me a lot here in Georgia) I don't attach much importance to it.

I saw in that piece of yours about raising llamas in Bolivia that you said Bolivia was offering land in 40,000-acre plots at 10 cents per acre, but the booklet on Bolivia says that it is 20,000 hectares at 10 cents per hectare. I see a hectare is 2.47 acres or nearly 2½ acres, which would make it about 50,000 acres at 4 cents per acre. Which must I count on?

Also, to get 100,000 acres or 40,000 hectares I would have to get their Congress' consent and pay a Government surveyor's expenses in laying it off. If you are familiar with this section of Bolivia kindly state what is raised and the market conditions and prices as you knew them. I know that there are different prices for land, but in my inquiries I mean Government land.

2. HONDURAS: — What is Government land worth, or how much per hectare does it cost? Would it be better to buy there or Bolivia? State reasons.

I intend to visit both places when I get out of college. I will have a geological course and will look over Honduras for prospecting and looking for this land.

If I knew which was the best place I could use the money for visiting the other place to buy more land. I am going down there if it is only to come back if I can't make anything out of it. Although I want some experiences, such as you call "adventure," and a little hunting and roughing, I would rather make something out of it. If I go there and fail, I go broke."—R. G. STEELHAM, Americus, Ga.

"P. S.—In tramping through Honduras and adjoining countries which would be best, to carry a .30-.30 and a good .45 Colt, or a shotgun and some buckshot with the .45? If I carried the .30-.30 I would also take supplementary cartridges for pistol ammunition. Also noted what you said about shoes while tramping there.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—1. I am not so sure that a man couldn't bring llamas into the highlands of this country and make a success raising them. They range at altitudes around eight thousand feet, but when brought down as lambs they get used to lower altitude. I have seen them at sea-level at Buenos Aires, and they were thrifty-looking in the zoo there. They eat as little as or less than a sheep and get to be many times as large.

The women in the Andes, native Quechua Indians, weave their coarse, heavy wool into cloth for skirts. If they can do it with hand looms it seems to me that American manufacturers should be able to make it into good cloth on modern machines, if only for sweaters, blankets, rugs, and overcoats. Parts of the Rockies would be about what they are used to, and I wouldn't swear that a man couldn't raise them in low country if he brought them down young enough.

Llama meat is about like mutton, only it lacks fat. Many thousand of the wild llamas or vicuñas, from which the llama was domesticated by the Indians, range the highest parts of the mountains of Bolivia and Peru.

Sheep have been tried in the Andes and do fine. There are a number of small herds in Bolivia owned by native Indians and several larger herds owned by companies. Duncan Fox & Co., of New York, have some herds in the highlands of Peru.

The native Indians are good men with both llamas and sheep, working cheap, honest, and understanding the game from dealing with llamas all their lives. During the war a man could have cleaned up some money if he had put a herd into Bolivia and sold at the high prices. Even at the present time markets are good in Bolivia both in the cities and with the camps of the foreign mining companies. Alpaca has a steady market at all times.

2. The country along the Paraguay River is peculiar, being a mixture of swamp and prairie and a fine country for cattle. Tex Rickard has a big ranch down below the border of Bolivia a short ways. This country is reported to be healthy in spite of the swamps it contains, and there is no doubt about it being good cattle country as they raise some fine animals in there farther down the river. There is also a good chance for shipping to market on the river.

3. The country you mention near Tarija is more to my liking, all things considered. In this part of the country and at this altitude you have a climate

that is like perpetual Spring, and the soil in this particular part is productive. Sheep, cattle, horses, fruits, general farm products all thrive here.

There is a little cultivation of cotton in this district, as you have said; but the native people are Indians and just about like our own Indians so far as enterprise is concerned. However, they are very friendly and faithful. When a white man does settle there they flock in and take up with him and work for him for what he will give them.

4. The access to market is better on the Paraguay, and you would have little trouble in getting a boundary of land in this district. The Southern Brazil Lumber Co. have some holdings back there somewhere and are running a ranch; but just where it is I don't know, for they are very secretive about their holdings.

I understand that the Bolivian Government wants a man to guarantee to put twenty families on those 20,000 hectares of land at 10 cents per hectare. This is just one offer. I know they are anxious to get white men in there, and you can get land all right.

5. I also know of another country that is anxious to get Americans. This is Ecuador. After crossing the Andes and hitting the Atlantic slopes there is some fine country in this republic. Governor Babino has sent word to me twice that he would like to get as many as eight Americans over there, and that if he got eight he would get the Government to build a road over. The G. & Q. R. R. is also working on a branch into this country.

There is one American over there. His name is Oscar Felton, and he gets his mail at Napo, Oriente, Ecuador. He has made a lot of money in the past few years by shipping Peruvian bark (quinin) and rubber, and by farming. He also sent word out that he would help any white man get a foothold.

It is quite a hard trip from the Pacific side. It is ship to Guayaquil, railroad to Quito or Rio Bamba and from nine to eleven days' hike from there. The Indians charge five dollars (native) for the full trip with seventy-five pounds.

O. Christenson of New York City was in to see me last week, and he is going back, for he found some good prospects of placer ground over there. He said there was plenty of game and fish.

Governor Babino said he would deed any white man eighty acres if he would build a bamboo hut on it costing fifteen dollars, and would sell him adjoining land for a few cents per acre. I wouldn't be surprised but what you could get your 100,000 cares in this district. It is a —— of a trip from the Pacific side, but is very accessible to market on the other side. The Napo and Curaruy are navigable for river boats and make the run down to Iquitos, which is the head of navigation on the Amazon, with ships sailing for New York and Europe.

Christenson is just an ordinary plug of a fellow (about like myself) who made a tramp trip over there to see what it was like. He says the native people are very friendly, and that the Indians work for nothing or for a few cents per day. I know this also. There is a system of voluntary slavery over there. Felton, who is over there, has taken it on himself to see that the Indians are not imposed on too much.

Walt Johnson brought me the former report from the governor, and his report tallies with that of Christenson. Walt is now walking from the U. S. to South America and has reached Mazatlan. His initials are W. R. He has a large ranch near Rio Bambo which came to him through his wife, who was a native lady. He told me the last time I saw him that he was headed for Ecuador and would give me all the land I wanted if I would go with him. I have known Walt a long time and in many places.

I have been up into this country, but never made the trip across to Napo, but know there is some fine country over there. Also I know there is gold over there, whether Christenson has found any of it or not.

6. HONDURAS:—The war shook things up pretty bad in Honduras, but it has settled down again. There is some good country in the interior of Honduras. Dr. Wm. C. Robertson is living at Galeras and has lived there for the last thirty years. He writes me that land can be got from the Government for about forty cents (native money) per hectare plus cost of surveying.

Thomas Little Bison, a Sioux Indian who was formerly Indian agent for the U. S. Government, has a ranch near Tegucigalpa and has options on several other large ranches. He wrote me he would sell one ten-thousand-acre place for $10,000 with all houses and plantations. There was some coffee and some general farm products. I am not in the land game, but have found Bison a good scout.

He wrote me he would help any man get Government land in his neighborhood just to have neighbors, and whether they bought land he had options on or not it didn't matter to him as he took the options to keep Englishmen from getting them. He can possibly tell you direct if you write him care American consul, Tegucigalpa, Honduras. I knew him before he went down by letter and am merely passing his name along as a mutual favor.

Honduras has a little railroad running inland from Puerto Cortez for about fifty miles; from there it is a mule-trip. There is an auto road from Amapala up to Tegucigalpa and over toward Lake Yohoa. The Tela Fruit Co. have a railroad running inland a short distance from Tela. With these exceptions the country is without transportation.

All things considered, I think your chance is better in Ecuador if you go there and stay for a couple of years, provided you get the right altitude on the slopes, get a herd of Indians and start exporting natural products.

7. I found a .30-30, .38 Colt's and .22 long a good line of guns. A muzzle-loading shotgun might be added. Most of these Latin countries are leary of guns over .38 caliber and often cause trouble at the custom-houses of entry. This is partly why I suggest smaller than a .45.

Down the Indian River

WINTER can strike in as early as it likes, and turn as cold as it can, under the circumstances, without discombobulating this trip:

Question:—"A friend and I are planning on a camping, hunting, fishing and canoeing trip down the Indian River this Fall or Winter and would like to ask a few questions.

First, where is the best place to commence the trip (to last two or three months), and what time of the Fall? About the weather and "bugs" (mosquitoes)?

Wouldn't it be best to buy motor and have it installed on boat? If so, can any one buy boat and motor near starting-place?

Where can I get a good map of Florida on large scale showing most of the little towns? Also license to hunt, which I guess is required.

What size of boat, length I mean, would be best to carry small tent, cooking-utensils and fishing-outfits?

Also as to the game: what can be killed along the route? Are there plenty of fish and fish canneries along the river?

And last, what part of Florida is the best packing and canning district? I mean oranges, all fruit and vegetables.

The idea of the trip is a good outing and then work to meet expenses going and coming."—S. AIKEN, Travelers Rest, S. C.

Answer, by Mr. Liebe:—If I were tripping Indian River, I would get into it at Daytona (it is Halifax River at Daytona, and becomes Indian River after you pass Mosquito Inlet, a few miles below). But a canoe is too light a boat. Indian River is a big boy in places, and sometimes it gets rough. You can buy a boat in Daytona doubtless, and inquiry will tell you what kind of a boat you will need. Yes, it would be best to have a motor, which can be bought with the boat.

A Rand-McNally map, which you can get at almost any book-store for 25 cents, will show you about all you'll want to find as to towns, etc.

You will need a license for hunting, and a license for fishing if you sell your fish. Also your motor-boat must carry a license.

You can kill duck, etc., on your trip. And if you go ashore you can find quail, squirrel, snipe, rabbit, and perhaps a deer or a bear occasionally. Go prepared for possible (though not probable) snake-bite. There is fish in plenty, and fish-houses to buy your fish (not canneries).

Central Florida is the best orange section, and therefore has the most packing-houses, though there are some along Indian River. Vegetables are grown extensively here and there all over the State, and especially around Sanford, Hastings, Bartow, Plant City, Bradentown, and around Palm Beach and Miami.

Now as to the best time to start. The later in the Fall the better it will be, though by going late you will miss fishing for sea-bass, the best sport I know—they get to weigh fifty pounds. October is about their limit on the east coast. If you go too early, mosquitoes will simply eat you at night unless you are well fixed with nets. Mosquitoes are not dormant along Indian River, however, at any time, though they bother little in daytime.

Arkansas' Diamond-Mine

IT'S there, but don't let it arouse any false hopes:

Question:—"I've read in one of the New York daily papers that there is a diamond-mine in Arkansas that has been in operation since February, 1920. Could you tell me exactly where this is located? I am going to eastern Arkansas on a business trip. While there I thought I would spend a few weeks diamond-hunting. Is there any chance of making expenses for those few weeks."—H. LONGENEGGER, Pittsburgh, Penn.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—You can get to Diamond Mine by going to Hot Springs. It is not far from there. But don't waste your time. The product is dark red and useless for anything but glass-cutting tools and hard bearings for delicate machinery. You couldn't make wages.

Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to "Ask Adventure" editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in International Reply Coupons for answer.

Gold-Pans, Sluice-Boxes and Rockers

THE interest in this paraphernalia will likely be only historical pretty soon, because the placer game is petering out, in the Rockies at any rate:

Question:—"Would like a little information on gold-digging and construction of pans and sluice-boxes used by miners in placer mining.

Please do not put my name in print."— —— ——, Rangeley, Maine.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—A gold-pan is made of steel, with wide, flaring sides. The sides rise only about a third as much as their width. The center is flat and about seven or eight inches across. The side is approximately three and one-half inches wide. These measurements are made from memory and may not be very accurate, but will give you an idea of the pan.

The prospector puts some sand and gravel in the pan, then fills it nearly full of water. Then he lifts the pan in both hands and gives it a rotary motion that makes the water climb the rim. This washes out the light stuff—dust, dirt, sticks, leaves, etc.

More water and more swirling, tipping the pan slightly. Pretty soon he picks out the stones with his fingers. He goes on putting in more water and whirling it around the pan till he has cleaned out all the coarse stuff and has only a tiny bit of fine sand in the pan. At last he gives the pan an extra flirt that spreads this along the rim in a thin layer and begins to examine it for color.

A rocker or cradle is made much like a baby's cradle, with a flat and water-tight bottom, set to slope to lower end. On top of high end is a slatted or perforated bottom box, into which the dirt is shoveled. An upright stick at this end gives a hand-hold. The apparatus is rocked like a common cradle, while pouring water on the dirt. Rocks are picked out by hand. Small stuff drops through.

Riffles—strips of wood—are nailed across the bottom and made tight to hold quicksilver. The muddy water runs over these and the gold is held by the quicksilver.

Sluice-boxes are long plank or board boxes, open above. In them are placed riffles, in many cases made of short lengths of log, cut to fit and of varying

lengths. On end they do not wear into splinters, and they save the sluice-bottom.

Placer-mining in the West is about played out, and almost all gold is now taken from quartz mines. Dredgers still do some work, but they are nearly through, as the placer deposits are about exhausted.

Oatman, twenty-eight miles from Kingman, Arizona, has been and still is about the best modern find in the way of gold deposits. Now a new one has drawn crowds—Katherine—in the Union Pass district. It has come to the front with $112 a ton ore at 200 feet deep. Some better, some worse at other levels. The Katherine mine has blocked out 200,000 tons of pay ore already, and miners call it Arizona's greatest gold-mine.

The great majority of mines are shut down or merely pumping to keep the water down, as the taxes take away all profit now. It costs $1.08 to mine $1 worth of gold in some mines, with high wages and taxes.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

Fish of South Africa

THE streams of that country contain even Scotch trout:

Question:—"I wish you would please advise me as to the fishing in Africa. What kinds of fish do you get, and are they used for food there? My reason for asking: Have read White's three books on Africa, Roosevelt's book and many short articles on Africa in the sporting magazines. Strange to say, not one of these authors and writers mentions anything about the fish, or at least it's so little that you learn nothing about the fish at all. Am just curious.

If at any time I can give you any information about Lake County, Florida, will be glad to do so. I was guide for some 15 years for the Jolly Palms, a sportsman's resort here at Mohawk, and know Lake County and the State pretty well."—H. K. STOKES, Mohawk, Fla.

Answer, by Capt. Franklin:—Trout have now been acclimatized in South Africa, and several rivers have been stocked for from five to ten years. The fry grow about one inch a month, at any rate in their first two years.

Most of the stocked rivers are now at their best and will continue to be excellent for five years at least. The Natal rivers, especially the Bushman's River with its many reaches, afford excellent sport, as also do the Big and Little Mooi Rivers. Trout weighing up to four pounds are frequently killed in these rivers. A stretch of water of fifteen miles in extent is preserved by the Natal Anglers' Association, and the trout-fishing compares favorably with any river in Scotland.

The largest trout taken was by a Mr. Dowie, who killed a perfect specimen, weight 6½ lbs. In March, 1912, three anglers from the Transvaal took 563 trout in three weeks.

The favorite flies are the March Brown, Blue Upright, Red Spinner, Butcher, Brown Killer and Hare's Ear, No. 12 hook being mostly used. All trout under 10 inches must be put back. The first of May to July 31st is the close season. The brown trout do splendidly in South African rivers.

The reservoirs of Cape Colony are used for breeding trout, but none of these reservoir trout seem to thrive after being stocked into the streams. Imported Scotch trout do better than any.

Fish are found in almost every river in Cape Colony and the Orange River Colony and Natal.

The fish found in fresh and salt water are:

Barbel, salmon, barracouta, bass, blackfish, rayfish, bream, pike, herring, scalefish, mackerel, shad, moonfish, sholk, mullet, soles, sandfish, flounders, cod, dogfish, eels.

South Africa is noted for its shellfish—oysters, crayfish, turtle, prawns, shrimps and crabs. I have not seen any lobsters in South Africa.

There is a large fishing industry in South Africa and a great number of fried-fish shops exist all over South Africa. What with the grand scenery and the great supply of fish both fresh and salt water, South Africa is a fisherman's paradise. I should be glad to hear from you concerning Florida.

Notes on the Use of a Six-Gun

MR. WIGGINS, our "A. A." expert on the subject, does not get a bit peevish when a real old-timer rises to give us some concentrated wisdom on the management of the Colt's .45 single action. These notes supplement the information given by Mr. Wiggins and Mr. Whiteaker in "Ask Adventure" for October 20th issue:

Take the gun apart and clean thoroughly. Be sure that the bushing between cylinder and cylinder-pin revolves freely. Use the best light oil. The cylinder should spin at the slightest touch.

File off safety and half-cock notches from hammer, and file full-cock notch so that a slight pull will do. This must be regulated to suit the individual touch. (Carry only FIVE cartridges in the gun, with the hammer down on the EMPTY chamber.)

Reduce tension of main-spring so that the hammer falls with just enough force to explode the primer, and a VERY LITTLE more. This is done with the screw at the base of the spring.

Note: If you can load your own ammunition, use a reduced powder charge. The standard load has a bigger powder charge than needed; experiment will show the best.

Carry the gun in a Mexican scabbard, cut away at the top so that the trigger-guard is exposed. Use a loose belt so that the gun is low down on the thigh, and tie or buckle the lower end of scabbard to leg. When you pull, swing the muzzle upward until the thumb is over the hammer, pull it back, then throw down, pulling trigger as you do so.

Experts hold the trigger back and let the hammer fall. Some take out the trigger, or file all the notches smooth.

Fanning is done by holding the gun in one hand, trigger held back, and "fanning" the hammer back with lower edge of open hand. As the hand passes back over the hammer the hammer falls. The rest is a matter of practise. I have handled a six-gun for fifty years and am not good at it yet.

WM. WELLS.

Mr. Wiggins commented as follows when I sent him a copy of the foregoing letter:

I am perfectly willing for this to run, with the exception of a little thing to be noted further on.

Mr. W. is evidently a good practical "six-gun" man, which is a whole lot different from a gunman. I am sure he learned the things he has mentioned by experience; it sticks out all over his letter, and I am very glad to see it, and know it's to be run in the "Ask Adventure" columns.

But I disagree violently with his advice in regard to the safety notch and the half-cock notch being ground off; with the five chambers loaded the safety notch is not really necessary, but sometimes we want all six full, and the loading of the gun, holding back the hammer with the thumb while filling the cylinder, is a blamed nuisance. The half-cock is just right for what it was designed for. And I prefer to leave the mainspring at its original tension; once in a while a hard primer chances to be found. From the word "Fire" with the gun in the holster I can average a shot a second, so that's fast enough, isn't it?

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

HUBBS, JAMES. 5 feet, weighs about 100, 15 years old, dark complexion. Moved to Nettleton, Ark., 1920. Later heard from in Corliss, Wis. Something in view. Write your pal—Address DUNBAR SPECK, Blue Springs, Miss.

LUNDLEY, R. L. Nickname Bill. Last definite address known Stoneville, N. C. Thought to be in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Any information will be appreciated.—Address O. L. ALYEA, care of C. C. ALYEA, 3314 Sheridan Road, Chicago, Ill.

MCGUIRE, CHARLES. Dark hair, dark eyes, weighs 160 pounds. Last heard of in Minneapolis, missing a number of years. Any one knowing his whereabouts please communicate with his mother.—Address MRS. MARY MCGUIRE, 616 N. Greenwood St., Marion, Ohio.

MURRIEL. Your pal would like to hear from you.—Address ORA CROBB, care of Cotton Belt R. R., Yard Office, Hodge Yards, Ft. Worth, Tex.

O'DYER, PAT. Miner, prospector, claim-owner. About 60. Last heard of at Rivertown, Idaho, about three years ago. Supposed to have gone to Canada, Alaska or Mexico. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address B. L. HANNAH, 4635 Delman Blvd., St. Louis, Mo.

POTTER, A. First sergt. of Company A, 17th U. S. Infantry in 1873 and was with Gen. Stanley's Yellowstone Expedition. Would like some information regarding him. Also the present address and a communication from any one who served in the 7th U. S. Cavalry (Custer's Regiment) from January 1872 until 1881.—Address WM. O. TAYLOR, 34 Mechanic St., Orange, Mass.; (late of Troops M and A, 7th U. S. Cavalry).

SARGENT, MABEL. Age 31. Resided in Washington, D. C., about 10 years ago. May have married since. Any information will be appreciated.—Address VALLA KENNETH, 809 Sherman St., Johnstown, Pa.

SHAMBLIN. Last heard of in Virginia. Any one knowing the whereabouts of the above mentioned family please communicate with J. M. SHAMBLIN, Arcade Theater, Lake Charles, La.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February 10th issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

BOYS that served in France in Cos. B and C, 9th Field Signal Battalion: I have something I think would be of interest to you. Please write me at once.—Address FRANK CLARKSON, Bishop, Tex.

CASSIDY, JOHN THOMAS. Sometimes known as Tom Corliss; Roxbury, Mass. Your brother and sister (Sr. Mary John Berchmons) look in vain for you. Write in confidence that your wishes will be respected. Only end the suspense. Any information will be appreciated.—Address SISTER, and EDWARD CASSIDY, care of *Adventure.*

CRANE, E.; Gieze, W. F.; McKeown, E. P.; Senecal, A. L.; or Ristrom, Helmer. Last heard of left Nitro, W. Va. for Kalma, Mont. Would like to hear from the above men. All of them I think are in the Government service.—Address DAYTON PARSONS, Box 150, Dunbar, W. Va.

DE LOY, EDWARD L. or his wife Ellen. Last heard from in Portland, Ore. Please write to your brother George, as he is worried over your long silence.—Address GEORGE F. DE LOY, 109 West 35th St., Wilmington, Del.

ECHOLS, RAY. Left home May 31, 1921. 15 years old, dark-brown hair, dark-gray eyes, 5 feet 3 inches tall, weighs 105 pounds. Was raised in El Centro, Calif., and may be on his way back there. When he left home was riding a very light roan pony with white face, black mane and tail. Anybody knowing his whereabouts please communicate with his mother.—Address MRS. GUY ECHOLS, Gotebo, Okla.

HAPPY JACK. Last seen in Newark, N. J., July 13, 1921. He is a "world trotter," all around the world by foot. If this reaches him or any one meeting him along the road, please tell him that Philip West Thompson would like to hear of his adventures through Camp-Fire as it will be welcomed by the Camp-Fire boys.

HARSELL, B. L., of Bedford, N. Y. About 6 feet 2 inches, weighs over 200 pounds, blue eyes, brown hair, about 48; looks younger. Lost on a walking trip through the Great Smoky Mountains. Was headed for Jasper, Ga. Is supposed to have taken train from Roanoke to near Bristol, then walked Clinch Mountains. May have altered course. Any information will be appreciated.—Address NORMAN HARSELL, Allendale, N. J.

HOPPER, CAL. B. Please write to an old friend of five years ago.—Address M. C., care of *Adventure.*

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SHORTISS, IAMES ULRIC or any Shortiss, Shortes or Shortis. If you know of a Shortiss please drop a line.—Address EDWIN HORACE SHORTISS, 36 Highland St., South Framingham, Mass.

STONE, TED. Servants lost note with your address so could not write you. Would like to hear from you.—Address JACK CENTER, care of *Adventure*.

WEBER, WILLIAM (Bill). Please write to me at once. —Address L. I. ROBERTS, 422 West 26th St., Indianapolis, Ind.

WIGLEY, AUGUST. Discharged from the Army at Camp Meade, Md., September 20, 1919. Anybody knowing his whereabouts please communicate with his mother.—Address MRS. J. M. WIGLEY, 815 N. Ellison Ave., Oklahoma City, Okla.

THE following have been inquired for in either the November 10th or November 20th issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirers from this magazine:

CHAPIN, E. W.; Coffin, Harry or Edward; Curtis, Miner A.; Bowman, Wesley; Brice, Norman; Davis, Harry Bean; Dennis, John A.; File, James; Hughes, Johnnie; Lieder, Joseph; Linds, Ralph; Lobber, Mrs. Eva; Pedersen, Carl; Perry, Samuel G. (Capt. Carpenter); Ross, Sturdy C.; Sramek, J. B.; Smith, Sgt. Albert R.; Wade, Robert; Walker, Oscar Newland; Wild, Harry; Young, Ione.

MISCELLANEOUS—Boys who worked on Caro Ranches in Wyoming in the eighties; Eversharn, Tommy; Hart, Mat; Warren, A. J.; Moffet; Bounafon or any dynamiters who were shipmates with Tramp Rogers, West Coast, 1910-14; Paul; men who served on Sub Chaser No. 37 from Christmas 1918 to May 1st, 1919; soldiers of former 324th Aux. Remount, Sta. Waco, Texas; W. M. C.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity:

ALDRIDGE, F. P.; Barrett, Raymond; Bellinger, C. J.; Bennett, Mr. and Mrs.; Bertsch, Elizabeth; Blighton, Frank; Bonner, J. S.; Buckley, Ray; Butterfield, E.; Carpenter, Robert S.; Carr, John; Casselberry, Lane P.; Chief Hailstorm; "Chink;" Clark, Wilfred J.; Clingham, Charles; Coles, Bobby; Connor, A. M.; Cook, Elliott D.; Cook, William N.; Corbett, Fred P.; Courtlandt, Victor; Craun, Galen E.; DeBrissac, Ricardo; Erwin, Phillip; Evans, B. R.; Fisher, 1st Sgt. R.; Gale, George A.; Gallagher, Owen; Harris, Walter J.; Haskins, S. S.; Hooker, Wm. Francis; Howard, Charlie; Hughes, Frank E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Irving, Thos. L.; Jackson, Robert R.; Klug, Chas. C.; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kutcher, Sgt. Harry; Lafler, Mrs. Harry; Lancaster, C. E.; Lander, Harry; Larisey, Jack; Lee, Wm. R., M.D.; Lekki, Michael; "Lonely Jock;" Lovett, Harold S.; MacDonald, Tony; McAdams, W. B.; McKee, Al.; McNair, Henry S.; Mackintosh, D. T. A.; Mendelson, Aleck; Minor, Dr. John; Nelson, Frank Lovell; Noll, Leslie D.; Nylander, Towne J.; O'Hara, Jack; Parker, Dr. M.; Parker, G. A.; Parrott, Pvt. D. C.; Phillips, Buffington; Phipps, Corbett C.; Pigeon, A. H.; Posner, Geo. A.; Pulis, H. F.; Raines, Wm. L.; Rich, Wagoner Bob; Roberts; Walter; Rogan, Chas. L.; Rudolph, F.; Rundle, Merrill G.; Ryder, H. S.; St. Claire, Fred; Schmidt, G.; Scott, James F.; Shaw, Albert; Sloan, Charles A.; Smith, C. O.; Spencer, Robert; Starr, Ted; Stocking, C. B.; Terry, Lambert; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Gelucke, Byron; Ward, Frank B.; Weintraub, H. W.; Wiley, Floyd; Williams, Roger V.; Woeller, Erich; J. C. H.; T. W. S.; W. W. T.; S No. 77284; L. T. 439; Third Officer S. S. *Lake Elmdale;* W. S. -XV; No. 2480.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address L. B. BARRETTO, care of *Adventure*.

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