BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL, "THE EMPEROR'S EMERALD", BY J. KENILWORTH EGERTON; STORY OF AUSTRIA-HUNGARY

No. 6, Vol. 34 TWICE-A-MONTH 15 CENTS

The Popular Magazine

PUBLISHED DEC. 7, 1914

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1 Popular Magazine=A week's entertainment

VOLUME XXXIV NUMBER 6

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

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THE CHRISTMAS POPULAR ON SALE DECEMBER 23rd

WHY THE "POPULAR" IS POPULAR

BEING A SAMPLE LETTER RECEIVED FROM A READER OF THE POPULAR MAGAZINE.

BRADNER, B. C., Canada, Nov. 1st, 1914.

Editors, *The Popular Magazine*,
79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York.

GENTLEMEN:—I nave been buying the POPULAR for nearly two years, and find it a good investment. In "A Chat With You" the reader is asked his opinion of "Out of the Miocene," by Charles Beecham. Well, here's what I think: *That one story is worth a whole year's subscription to any progressive, thinking individual!*

"Babes in the Woods," "The Saber Tooth,' "The Pool of Pitch," "The Wrath of Lions," and "The Ape Man" were also a valuable course of lessons for anyone who will use their reasoning faculties and study the great evolution of the human being. "Battlers of the North" is another and beautiful lesson.

I enjoy and appreciate your valuable magazine. The splendid stories I have read are too numerous to mention here. Among those which stand out most prominent in my mind are: "Precious Water," "North of Fifty-Three," "Black Gold," "The Son," "Fortune's Football," "Fountain Island," "The Phantom Shotgun," "The Threatening Eye," "The Red Beach," "The Unscrambling of T-C. R.," "A Man's Code," "My Uncle's Money," and "The Film Hunters."

"The Reincarnation of Brother William" was rich. I just loved the "Hill Billy." "The Fabric of a Dream" was fine and dandy. "The Twisted Skein" is a special pet of mine. "The King of the Unsurveyed," by Vingie E. Roe, is the strongest and most beautiful story among my "pets." I am a busy woman, but I have read it three times.

I love beautiful language. I love strong character. I love people who are kind to inferiors, to servants and animals. I find all this in your good magazine. I love noble, high-minded men who can associate with women and girls—out in the woods or any other place—without descending to the animal plane; and I can read so much of that, cropping out between the lines, in some of the noble stories in the POPULAR.

I notice that your writers keep abreast of the current times, and reach ahead progressively. Another thing, I notice that the magazine is broad. Everybody, in every vocation, can get their money's worth many times over in each issue of the POPULAR. And the individual, no matter what his vocation, who is broad enough to read it all, and read it thoughtfully, will find therein a good education.

Here's health, wealth, happiness, and success in life to each and every one that makes up THE POPULAR MAGAZINE.

(Signed) EDNA SQUIRE.

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXXIV. DECEMBER 7, 1914. No. 6.

The Emperor's Emerald

By J. Kenilworth Egerton

Author of "The Perfume of Madness," "The Girl of the Hundred Steps," Etc.

Intrigue, plot and counterplot in Austria-Hungary—a story which gives a vivid illustration of how great a task it is to guard the Hapsburgs against themselves when the peril is complicated with petticoats. Tommy Williams, always an uncanny reader of men's hearts, finds himself unwittingly and unwillingly on the trail of the long lost Archduke John Salvador, who disappeared a quarter of a century ago, and for whom the Emperor of Austria searched the seven seas and all the lands under the sun. In the novel the author draws a striking portrait of old Emperor Francis Joseph, of Austria, a figure majestic yet pitiable, the most tragic monarch in Europe to-day. It is the broken man and not the proud emperor that Tommy Williams and his companion decide to serve. A story of unusual interest, bearing, as it does, upon present-day politics and diplomacy in the countries now at war.

(A Book-length Novel)

CHAPTER I.

IT was in Torlino's—one of the foreign restaurants in the Washington Square neighborhood—that Tommy Williams and I first met Gheradi. At that time we frequented the region not from choice, but from necessity. Pennies were scarce with us; for Tommy had but lately returned from abroad, where he had invested all of his available capital in laying the foundations for his future work, and I was entirely dependent upon the slender stipend of a cub reporter on the *Howler*.

Outside of his modest studio Tommy had none of the customary affectations of his calling; his dress was entirely conventional, and he put away the artistic jargon when he laid aside his palette and brushes. I had no quarrel with editors, for the man who ruled our city room was a roughneck who attended to that little matter for the entire staff. Also, we invariably paid our checks at the end of each dinner, so that altogether we were almost in a class by ourselves among the steady patrons of Torlino's, where the food was rather less bad than at the other joints.

And I think it was to that fact that we owed our first acquaintance with Gheradi, for when he stood in the door-

way and looked through the blue haze of tobacco smoke he smiled indulgently and comprehendingly at the blatant bohemians; but he carefully threaded his way between their closely packed tables and courteously asked permission to occupy one of the two unoccupied chairs at our refuge in the corner.

Personally, I was pleased. He was a striking-looking chap, and in those days I courted the unusual, for in it there always lurked the possibility of that story which was to transform me from a cub to a star. He was tall and slender, sallow of skin, and with jet-black eyes and hair. He might have been of any nationality for all that his features or coloring betrayed; but nothing in his accent or intonation suggested the foreigner as he addressed us in colloquial English.

I can't remember exactly how it came about—perhaps because it was so entirely natural—but within a few days after that first casual acquaintance we accepted an invitation to go with him to his studio. Our host was a painter —of sorts. Very evidently he was not dependent upon the product of his brush for his living, for the quality of the canvases which were scattered about the studio could never have accounted for the rest of the establishment, and no other word could describe the place.

He had purchased a house on one of those queer, twisting streets of old Greenwich Village; a house which had once been the residence of a magnate of Manhattan. Gheradi had transformed it into one of the most remarkable places it has ever been my privilege to visit.

There was nothing of luxury about the studio, which occupied the entire top floor; and from what I saw of Gheradi's work which it contained I guessed that painting was in reality only a side issue with him; but the rest of the house proved him to be an artist to his finger tips. It was a veritable museum, for it was filled with rare and curious things. Many of them were of inestimable value, but in the way they were scattered about they gave one the instinctive feeling that they had been gathered to live with by a man who loved them, not by a collector.

It was a curious experience, our introduction to that house; but not the least curious thing about it was the way Gheradi seemed to fit into this new and sumptuous environment as naturally as he had accommodated himself to the garish and tawdry dining room at Torlino's. He seemed to take the possession of these rare articles as a matter of course, and volunteered nothing as to their history nor his own.

Of course, there was only one world to me, and its axis was Park Row, but from the moment I stepped inside of that green-painted door, still ornamented with the original brass knocker and surmounted by an old colonial fanlight, I began to have my doubts about the *Howler* being the greatest thing in the world and to question the infallibility of its city editor.

Tommy, who even as an obscure art student had gained a remarkable insight of matters of interest to the world at large and had enjoyed the friendship of many men whose names have come to loom largely in European history of to-day, assumed the burden of the conversation, and as he and Gheradi talked together and displayed an intimate mutual interest in and knowledge of a broader world to which I was a stranger I began to realize my own narrow limitations and to appreciate that, measured by humanity's larger standards, I was mighty small potatoes and few to the hill.

I humbly confessed as much to Tommy as together we threaded the maze of streets back of old Jefferson Market, and he chuckled as he looked at me with an irritating grin on his lips.

"Cheer up, old chap; we'll hear the rumble of the elevated in a minute, and that will restore your self-confidence!" he said. "We've both passed a creditable examination, or Gheradi would never have asked us to dine with him on Sunday night."

"Examination! What in blazes are you driving at?" I asked, not without an irritation which his derisive answering chuckle did nothing to allay.

"Well, I figure it out like this," replied Tommy. "On the face of it, Cheradi is a peculiar chap, and—unless I miss my guess—at heart a lonely one. His acquaintance is world-wide and all-embracing, but for some reason of his own he shuns such friendships as introductory letters would give him. He has gone out into the highways and byways, not bidding indiscriminately for companionship, but making his own selection after careful observation. For a man's present condition he cares but little; but, unless I am very much mistaken, he would waste no time on any one in whom he did not recognize the potentiality of a future success. I'll wager that we shall meet no wastrels nor lame ducks at his house, and that's why I say that I am both flattered and encouraged that he should have invited us, old chap. It has been mighty hard sledding since I came back here, and I was a bit disheartened. I can't explain just why, but Gheradi has encouraged me to stick it out to the last gasp."

That was not a convincing argument nor a logical explanation, but not for worlds would I have continued my objections. Tommy possessed none of that trying artistic temperament which is so closely akin to hysteria, and I knew that he spoke in all sincerity.

For hours I lay awake, racking my brains to find a more plausible explanation for Gheradi's inexplicable but undoubted interest in us. I was entirely unsuccessful, however, and so absolute had been Tommy's conviction that he had recognized unsuspected genius in us that I began to feel that I was destined to reach a giddy pinnacle of fame and glory in my chosen calling. And to this day I am unable to estimate just how much of such success as I gained I owe to Tommy's shrewd interpretation of Gheradi's motives in seeking our acquaintance.

CHAPTER II.

When I reported at the office the following morning I was conscious of a new alertness and a feeling of elation. Something was about to happen. I felt it in my bones, and I was not discouraged by the assignment written opposite my name on the city editor's daily blotter, although on the face of it it was a sufficiently commonplace one.

It was an item sent in by one of the news tipsters; the body of a girl had been found in a Pell Street opium joint and sent to the morgue for possible identification. There was no suggestion of foul play; it was apparently just one of the sordid slum tragedies of New York life, and the city editor casually remarked that it might be worth a couple of sticks as he handed me my slip.

There was nothing which promised to be particularly interesting in the case; the clothing found on the body was of the cheapest and tawdriest kind, and suggested nothing but such an unfortunate derelict as finds solace in opium in company with the other dregs of humanity in the filthy smoking dens of Chinatown. The morgue attendants are not sentimentalists, the disordered hair had known the touch of no kindly fingers, and, still wet from the water which had been thrown on her in a fruitless attempt to revive her, it had frozen into stiff and grotesque strands in the ice box. The face was distorted, one cheek so swollen that it suggested

that perhaps the pain from an ulcerated tooth had tempted her to the fatal over-indulgence in the soothing drug. Decently and reverently arranged by loving hands, there might still have been a remnant of beauty in the clay, but as the workhouse "trusties" drew out from the freezer for our inspection the slab which bore it, it was only gruesome and repulsive.

One cursory glance sufficed for my companions of the press; they could find no story there—nor would there ever have been a story if my experience of the previous evening had not stimulated me to a sharper observation. In any case, I lingered for a moment after the others turned away to examine the clothing which hung on the opposite wall. I had glanced at it previously, and now as I looked again at the body I was struck by a curious incongruity; the hands were assuredly not those of a woman of that class to which we had all mentally assigned the poor unfortunate. They were slender and delicate, unmarked by signs of toil, and the nails were perfectly manicured and highly polished. I said nothing, but when my opportunity came I examined the clothing which she had worn very carefully. As I have said, it was finery of the cheapest and tawdriest description, but it was spotless, for the very good reason that every article of it was absolutely new.

Now I am not going to rehearse the history of that case. It was the sensation of the month, for the *Howler* made it a front-page scare-head story for many days, and the murder of Alice Singer is one of the criminal classics of New York. Newspaper work is necessarily anonymous, and no public credit was given to my work, but the poor girl would have been buried as a nameless outcast in the potter's field if a cub reporter had not felt intuitively that no woman dowered with hands like hers could have employed them to deck herself in such clothing as was found on her dead body when the police dragged it from the filthy bunk where it had been placed by her murderer. Those who are curious for the details of how the case was worked up may read of it in the files of the *Howler,* for the bearing which they have upon this part of the present story is that the result of the sensation which I unearthed justified Tommy's prophecy; I was a made man in my trade, and from that time on the biggest and most lucrative assignments were handed to me.

It was Saturday night before the climax came. For five days I had been practically without rest, and I handed in the last of my copy as the foreman was impatiently waiting to close the forms. The city editor grinned appreciatively as he looked at my heavy eyes, vouchsafed a grudging and gruff word of congratulation, and then the more practical observation that I looked about all in and could have until Monday morning to recuperate.

Naturally, I had seen nothing of Tommy and had given Gheradi no thought since I took up the trail. Now my one desire was for bed, as there is a limit to human endurance, and so badly did I need sleep that it was not until after six the following evening that I opened my eyes. Tommy, arrayed in conventional evening dress, stood at the foot of my bed, grinning like a Cheshire cat.

"We mustn't let success blind us to the obligations which we are under to the magician who predicted it, old chap!" he exclaimed. "Dinner is at eight, and it is high time that you were up and doing."

"By Jove, you must have struck it, too, Tommy; you look like money from home," I answered as I sat up in bed and stretched myself. He laughed, and jingled the coins in his pocket significantly.

"My boy, I suppose you've been so busy writing the front-page stories for the *Howler* that you haven't had time to glance at the art columns of its staid contemporaries," he said. "You bet I have struck it, and I've become a headliner myself. I landed the competition for the mural decorations of the Porkopolis Library, and on the strength of that the dealers looked me up and paid me something like real money for a half dozen canvases in which they had never seen merit before. I reckon that Torlino's need be but an unsavory memory for us in the future."

It was a joyful powwow which we held as I shaved and dressed, for elated as each of us was with his own luck, I believe that our mutual happiness was more than doubled by the fact that neither had cause to envy the other.

Gheradi greeted us heartily, and at once introduced us to our fellow guests.

I do not use the word in its narrower sense, for of formal introduction by name there was none; it seemed to be taken for granted that the mere fact of one being there was sufficient guarantee of compatibility, and when we were seated at table the event proved it, for the conversation at once became free and unrestrained, although I, for one, did not know the names of the men who sat beside me. Including our host, there were sixteen of us, and, greatly to my surprise, two of the guests were women. The table was perfectly appointed; the linen of the finest, the silver massive, the china of the rarest. Three well-trained menservants served it.

Now for reasons which will be obvious a little later on, I can give the names of none of those we met there, but this much I may say—the developments of the subsequent years have proved that Tommy's prophecy as to the make-up of the assemblage was in the main correct; there were no wastrels nor lame ducks there, and those who were not already known have since achieved success. A few were already celebrities.

At my right sat a man who seemed to be the only discordant note in the assemblage. He was only a little older than myself, but he had evidently employed his time in acquiring a much larger degree of worldly prosperity. I say acquired advisedly, for it was unthinkable that he could have inherited it, he was so obviously self-made in so far as he could be said to be a finished product.

He was, of course, in evening dress of the inevitable black and conventional cut; but thereafter convention ceased to rule. Two large rubies fastened his shirt front, the eight buttons of his double-breasted white waistcoat each held an even larger one, his cuff links accounted for four more, and his large, muscular hands were literally a blaze of glory as a dozen pigeon bloods set in finger rings caught and reflected the soft candlelight. His smooth-shaven, shrewd, and good-humored face was vaguely familiar to me, and I suppose that it was my newspaper instinct which led me to classify him as "a man about town," a deduction which was worthy of Tommy himself as the event proved; for as "Emerald Bill" he is universally known on the Great White Way. I was later to learn of another and very practical side of this curious man's character—something which makes him of great importance to this story; for when the crisis came it was his shrewd business head which made the continuance of Gheradi's as a going proposition possible.

But that first night, next to his lavish adornment of precious stones, I was most impressed by his keen, epicurean appreciation of the quality of the food and his Gargantuan capacity for storing it away. That brings me to one of the most important features of that curious evening; the wonderful feast

which was the ostensible excuse for our presence. It was the first real culinary masterpiece in my gastronomic experience, and perhaps for that reason every item of it is fixed in my memory. It started, after the menservants had passed trays of mysterious but most appetizing hors d'œuvres, with blue points, followed by a clear soup. Then sole, not the common or garden flounder which so universally masquerades under that name in our restaurants, but the real, delicate sole of England, with a gratin sauce which to my untutored and youthful palate suggested a liquefied and glorified Welsh rabbit.

And then, under a fire of chaff from those who by previous experience knew the custom of the house, Gheradi left his place at the head of the table and donned the white jacket and flat-topped baretta of a chef which the butler held for him as his assistants noiselessly rolled in a table covered with mysterious utensils. A half dozen spirit lamps were lighted under a long silver heating table, and with a dexterity which proclaimed the master, Gheradi set about the task which was evidently a labor of love.

Now a few times before that and many times since I have eaten canvas-back duck, but never anything like the dish which our host prepared that night. It was wonderful, suggestive of all the aromatic spices of the East, and withal so delicate that nothing of the subtle celery flavor of the tender meat was hidden. It was the pièce de résistance of the dinner, and—as I was afterward to learn—it was our host's invariable habit to prepare that course with his own hands.

Had there been anything of restraint —not that I can remember that there was—it disappeared when Gheradi resumed his seat, smiling his acknowledgment of the praises which were heaped upon him. The talk became general, no one monopolizing it, and it was such talk as one rarely hears about a New York dinner table. There were men there whose chiefest business it was to accumulate money, but Wall Street was never mentioned. No hobbies were dragged out to ride, and Gheradi, although he said very little himself, skillfully managed to bring out the best which each had to offer.

It was not until long after midnight that the party dispersed and I found opportunity for a word with Tommy, and then, strangely enough, I had nothing to say, for it seemed like an abuse of the wonderful hospitality we had enjoyed to venture anything which might hint at suspicion or criticism of our mysterious host. For several blocks we walked together without speaking, and it was Tommy who first broke the silence.

"Where Cæsar sits is the head of the table!'" he quoted, almost as if he were speaking to himself and unconscious of my presence. "No other man in New York could have gathered such a tableful, nor, having gathered it, so rule it that no man's talents obscured the lesser lights of his neighbor."

"By Jove, that's right, Tommy!" I admitted. "What's the answer to it all? I'll be hanged if I can make it out!"

Tommy shrugged his shoulders, and hesitated for a considerable time before answering.

"And I'll be hanged if I can, either!" he agreed ruefully. "For the life of me I can't place him. By the way, who was your neighbor at table, that gentleman of the gorgeous garniture?"

"I give it up; I didn't hear his name mentioned and he didn't confide it to me," I answered. "His decorations were certainly gorgeous, but hardly in good taste."

"His presence is easily enough explained if you admit the accuracy of my first guess," continued Tommy more confidently. "He was not by any means

the least promising and interesting of the raw material there, if any reliance can be placed in physiognomy. I don't know what he's after in life; but, whatever it is, he'll get it, or there is nothing in the form of the eye and the shape of the jaw. The man is concentrated energy; he still possesses what Gheradi once had and has lost or exhausted. He is a comer."

"And you think Gheradi is a has-been?"

"You've hit to a nicety—that is exactly what I think! He is a man who has done things—perhaps good; perhaps evil—but assurely big things in the world. I can't put it into words; but he impresses me as a man whose power of initiative is burned out. He is still capable of big things; the power is there, but the stimulus is lacking. Before this he has planned; now he can only execute. Facing a serious crisis, I doubt if he would make good unless there was a guiding hand. If I were not driven by stern necessity to work between meals I should like nothing better than to camp on the trail of the mystery. Time always solves things, if one is patient, though; but I'll bet a nice red apple that it will be many a long day before we hear the real story of Gheradi's life."

CHAPTER III.

I suppose that Gheradi invited us on an average of once in two weeks to his house during that winter, and, save for the changing guests and menus, the occasions were always the same. There were always sixteen at table, always a sprinkling of men who had already arrived, occasionally a woman or two. We were never introduced by name, and when it so happened that we later met our fellow guests in more conventional surroundings there was never mention made of the fact that we had been entertained together in the mysterious house in Greenwich Village. In fact, Tommy and I had even ceased to discuss the mystery when we were alone together. Our vastly improved fortunes had made it possible to attempt to repay Gheradi's hospitality in kind but he had invariably courteously declined our invitations.

For nearly two years after our first meeting Gheradi played exactly the same rôle so far as I could see. At first Tommy and I were always asked on the same nights; later the invitations were for different evenings, and I think that between us we had seen a couple of hundred different people gathered about his beautiful table.

Habit soon accustoms one to anything, and as the months passed we ceased to marvel at those wonderful entertainments. An invitation always aroused pleasant anticipations, and the event always justified them. I had grown so used to them that when the familiar envelope came I did little more than glance at the date which was filled in on the formal engraved card, but there came a day when the envelope contained, instead of the customary invitation, a personal note which, in spite of its curtness, seemed to carry a subtle and pitiful appeal. It requested me to call at his house at my earliest convenience and to bring Tommy Williams with me, and I had hardly finished reading it before Tommy himself knocked on my door. In his hand as he entered was an identical envelope, and when we compared the contents we found that save for the transposition of the names the notes were identical.

"Get into your clothes, old man," he said, "and we'll go over there and see what's wrong!"

We found Gheradi sitting listlessly beside the table in his library. Perhaps one word will convey the impression I received: the man was spineless. Apparently he faced a crisis, and faced it helplessly and defenselessly.

Now in this land of financial careers which are like April weather in their sudden changes it will seem like an anti-climax when I say that Gheradi's crisis was a monetary smash. On the table beside him lay the letter from a famous London banking house which informed him that he would no longer receive the regular quarterly remittances which they had been instructed to send him since he came to America. It isn't easy to surprise a reporter, and I had gone to the house anticipating pretty nearly anything in the way of tragic developments, but as I had always hoed my own row and made my own way in life his depression over a money loss seemed almost childish. Tommy, however, apparently regarded the situation almost as seriously as did Gheradi himself, but he was not given to depression and looked it squarely in the face.

"Mr. Gheradi, I have no wish to intrude upon your private affairs, but we must know a little better where we stand if we are to assist you," he said quietly. "May I ask if this was your only source of income?"

Gheradi nodded hopelessly. "My paintings have not found a ready sale, and that is the only other possible source," he answered, a grim smile on his lips. "Of course, you gentlemen will not even suspect that I look for material assistance from you. I thought that you might perhaps advise me as to the best method of disposing of the contents of this house. They are not without value, but I should be helpless in realizing on them. I can't remember ever having sold anything in my life, and they represent all of my available capital."

"And it would be no small one if worst came to worst, but perhaps there is a way to avoid that," said Tommy. "I'll be perfectly frank with you, even at the expense of appearing uncomplimentary, Mr. Gheradi; I paid little attention to your paintings on the only occasion I have ever been in your studio. I saw only careless and amateurish work in them, and I did not examine them critically because I looked upon them simply as the work of a dilettante. May I look them over again?"

Gheradi hesitated, and I thought a little flush came to his dark face.

"It would be uncivil to ask your assistance and refuse such a request; I grant it reluctantly only because you will be wasting your time," he replied as he rose from his chair.

He motioned to us to precede him, and we climbed the two flights which led to the topmost floor. In spite of his social activities he had evidently found time to work, for the atmosphere was redolent of turpentine, and the pigment on a canvas on the easel under the skylight was still moist. I glanced about the room as Tommy planted himself in front of the easel. There were many sketches and finished canvases on the walls, and Gheradi had apparently tried his hand at all sorts of subjects, for among them were landscapes, marines, figures, and animals. None of them were so bad as to be offensive, but to me they were all absolutely without charm. I wandered from one to the other, wondering why Tommy wasted so much time in the examination of the single unfinished picture on the easel.

"Mr. Gheradi," he said suddenly, "I'm free to confess that this unfinished picture is the most puzzling of any of the mysterious things I have encountered in this remarkable house. Is it all your own work?"

"I alone am guilty; I had no accomplices," admitted Gheradi grimly, and Tommy turned again to examine the picture.

"Then all that I can say is that you possess a more wonderful technique with pigments and brushes than any

other living man!" he exclaimed irritably. "Your drawing is almost as remarkable, and the composition of this thing is so nearly perfect as to be beyond criticism. And yet——" Again he hesitated.

Gheradi looked at him wonderingly. "And yet?" he suggested after the silence had become embarrassing.

"And yet the whole thing lacks a subtle something, and, without it, it can never be more than a confounded chromo!" exploded Tommy. "There is nothing in our artistic jargon which expresses that lack; there is action in the picture, and still it is as dead as a doornail; it is vivid and brilliant, but as dull as ditch water. There is nothing which offends, but it is absolutely unpleasing. I can't find the word, but it seems to be void of soul!"

Gheradi's dark skin grew livid as he listened, and there was something closely akin to fear in the eyes which met Tommy's when he turned from the picture with a gesture of impatience. He jumped quickly to his feet, and I knew that an apology for his almost brutal frankness was on the tip of Tommy's tongue, but Gheradi checked its utterance.

"You are uncanny, Mr. Williams," he said bitterly. "A man cannot give that which he no longer possesses. Fate is niggardly with some of her gifts; the richest of us never has but a single soul. There was a time when I had one; there was a time when I had many other things which make life worth living. I shall not tire your patience by enumerating them; they belong to a past which is better forgotten. I trust to your discretion; if you will come with me I will show you something which will save much explanation."

I held back when he motioned Tommy toward the door, but he quickly included me in the invitation with a gesture.

Gheradi led us to the floor below, and stopped before a closed door which communicated with a room at the back; a door which I now remembered that I had never seen opened, although his guests had apparently had the free run of the house. He hesitated for a moment, and I noticed a marked tremor in the hand which finally managed to slip the key into the lock.

I don't know just what I expected to see when that door swung open; if I had any particular anticipations they would have been disappointed, for it was nothing but a black cavern; I could see nothing. Gheradi, however, almost pushed us in his eagerness, and we entered, standing in impenetrable darkness when the heavy door closed behind us. There was a rustling in front of us, the heavy velvet curtains which had shut out every glimmer of light parted, and I realized that we stood in the anteroom of his holy of holies.

Facing us at the far end was a marvelously beautiful woman, and it required a second glance to convince me that I looked on only the counterfeit presentment in artificial pigment and not the real living flesh and blood. The illusion was heightened by the peculiar arrangement of the lights; the two rows of huge waxen tapers in massive candelabra widening their respective distances as they approached the picture. The windows had been blocked up, and only the light from the candles illuminated the room, or, rather, the picture which dominated it, for the walls were covered with heavy hangings of a neutral color which seemed to have been selected to absorb light without revealing itself. The room had been transformed into a shrine; but, in spite of its great beauty, the face which smiled so seductively from the altar was assuredly not that of a madonna.

The portrait was a full-length life-size, and so nearly full face that the woman seemed to be stepping forward

from the elaborately carved frame to greet us. She was tall and slender; the small, classic-shaped head gracefully poised on the perfectly modeled neck which rose from the sloping shoulders. Her costume was a ceremonial court dress of a delicate canary yellow, and, resting on the elaborately dressed mass of dark hair, was a small coronet of diamonds. Large, dark eyes which held in their depths both gayety and tragedy looked out from beneath the delicate curved brows, the full, sensuous lips were parted in a smile which meant either welcome or invitation. Fair of skin in spite of the dark hair and eyes, sophisticated in worldly knowledge beyond the years which the portrait allotted her, she was a woman while still a girl; a woman whose nationality it would be difficult to guess, but whose career in any land which sheltered her was sure to be spectacular and not without its tragic incidents.

Perhaps the weird and unusual manner of displaying the portrait unduly enhanced the mystery of it and aided in producing a most unusual effect. The fascination of it grew upon me as we stood there in silence for I know not how long; grew so strongly that unconsciously I found myself edging slowly toward it. No one had spoken a word since the door had closed behind us, and it was I who broke the long silence with an involuntary exclamation of relief when Tommy placed his hand on my arm and recalled me to myself by drawing me back behind the line of the curtains.

Still no word was spoken, but in silence Gheradi drew the hangings together, leaving us again in darkness until he opened the outer door and stood aside for us to pass out to the hallway. He locked it carefully, and without speaking led the way to his study.

"The evidence is all in and I am awaiting the verdict," he said quietly after lighting a cigarette which he had selected with tremulous fingers from the crystal box on the mantel. "I can take my medicine, Mr. Williams; I believe that you understand things."

Tommy nodded. "Yes, I think I do," he answered. "I can't tell you how sorry I am, Mr. Gheradi; but your financial misfortunes are not the cause of my deepest regrets. They are in a measure personal to you, but there has been another loss which is a misfortune for the world."

The laugh which came from Gheradi's lips was not pleasant; it was scornful, mocking, almost a jeer.

"We each have our individual standards by which we judge, and ours are assuredly widely separated!" he exclaimed bitterly. "The world would have been little richer for a few square yards of canvas which I might have painted, but a good portion of it would have been better, richer, and happier if——" He broke off abruptly and turned his face away, apparently regaining his self-control at the cost of no little effort.

"I beg your pardon; the past is dead and would have no interest for you," he continued apologetically after an uncomfortable silence. "I have already intruded unpardonably upon your patience and good nature, and we would better return to our mutton. Can either of you gentlemen suggest how I should go about the business in hand? It is fairly urgent, for my needs are pressing, and I know that I shall be unmercifully robbed without advice."

"You have consulted no one else?" asked Tommy quickly.

Gheradi shrugged his shoulders and pointed carelessly to a leather-covered dispatch box on the table.

"No, but I have a few trinkets in there which I thought might appeal to one of the gentlemen whom you have occasionally met here," he answered. "I have asked him to call and see them."

"Jewels?" said Tommy interrogatively, and he smiled when Gheradi nodded assent. "Then I think I can guess the identity of the possible purchaser."

Gheradi, too, smiled. "He is as prompt as yourselves, gentlemen," he said as he glanced at a card which the butler handed to him, and a moment later Emerald Bill entered.

CHAPTER IV.

It was a curious trio of counselors which debated a most curious situation in that curious old house in curious old Greenwich Village; so it is hardly to be wondered at that the solution which was eventually found was the most curious of all.

When Emerald Bill entered Gheradi did not duplicate the frank confidence with which he had honored us, but without stating his reasons quietly remarked that he wished to dispose of a few precious stones and had need of his advice in finding a market. Now I might say right here that even as he stood Emerald Bill would have inventoried several thousands of dollars at a pawnbroker's valuation. It was his day for wearing the emeralds which had gained him his nickname, and they were scattered over his person in gorgeous profusion. He was plainly proud of his collection which it had taken years to gather and match up; it was admittedly one of the finest in New York, but it paled to insignificance when Gheradi casually displayed only a portion of the contents of the dispatch box.

The first tray which he lifted out he placed to one side without inviting inspection. Then I recognized only that it contained the jeweled collars and insignia of many orders; later I knew that among them were many of the most coveted decorations which the European sovereigns had to bestow. I shall make no attempt to inventory the other things which he produced, and I could not guess within many thousands of their value. They were jewels which must have been family heirlooms, for the settings were massive and of ancient design and workmanship, and most of them were adapted only for feminine adornment It was a large and dazzling collection, and its display brought a gasp of astonishment even from Emerald Bill.

"Holy Moses, you must be stringing me, Mr. Gheradi!" he exclaimed as he gazed at the glittering array with fascinated eyes. "You can't be serious—you wouldn't part with these!"

"I have parted with things which caused far more of a wrench," answered Gheradi grimly. "I am entirely sincere."

Emerald Bill looked at him in blank amazement, and then fixed his eyes on the stones. "If they were mine, no one would get 'em away from me except over my dead body!" he said. "What's the answer to all this, anyway?"

"It is an extremely commonplace one. Except for this house and its contents, I'm stony broke."

Emerald Bill received the announcement with a smile in which there was nothing of sympathy.

"That's sure a most useful and handy little exception!" he exclaimed. "It's the finest nest egg in the way of fall money that I ever knew a wise guy to hold out. But maybe there's a way out without giving up."

Even at this late day I hesitate to violate the confidences of that memorable conference which resulted in the continuance of Gheradi's mysterious establishment as the head center of the real bohemia—and, so far as I know, the only real bohemia—of New York. I take little credit for my own part in it; it was Tommy's tact and Emerald Bill's shrewd business sense and knowl-

edge of the world in which he lived which made it possible to batter down every one of Gheradi's natural prejudices and make it easy for him to accept a situation which at first glimpse was absolutely impossible.

Briefly stated, the result was this: Gheradi was to continue to live exactly as he had lived; there was to be no interruption of his dinners; he was still to dictate absolutely as to who should eat of them. He was to remain the master of his house, but those who partook of its hospitality were to pay their shot. Instead of waiting for his invitation, any one of us men was to be privileged to come uninvited by giving advance notice and securing one of the sixteen places, for there was never to be more than the customary number. A man might reserve a place for a guest to dine with him—and in the construction of that privilege was the basis which to my mind formed the corner stone which made the whole grotesque edifice stable. If the proposed guest was a man it was tacitly understood that his name was to be submitted for Gheradi's approval, but any woman for whom a guest would vouch was to be admitted without question.

I do not care to enter into the financial side of it too fully. It was evident that Gheradi had little knowledge of those details, and Emerald Bill volunteered to furnish a reliable man to attend to them. As I remember the details, this man was to pay all of the bills, at the end of the month multiply the total by two, and divide the result according to the benefits which each guest had received. Gheradi was to receive the surplus.

We continued to go to Gheradi's under the new arrangement quite as frequently as we had gone as invited guests, the only difference being that we could not go as often as we wished because more than once we were politely informed that all of the places at table had been allotted and nothing would induce Gheradi to lay an extra cover.

Those days were eventful ones for us, each so full of its own problems that we had little time to puzzle over outside matters. Twice Tommy went abroad in search of inspiration, and the Cuban insurrection and the Spanish war transformed me for a time into a war correspondent. Always when we returned to New York we found things exactly the same at Gheradi's, save that it was becoming increasingly difficult to find place at his table.

Then came the time when Tommy and I left New York for a prolonged absence abroad, and we were speedily too much occupied with other things to give much thought to our mysterious friend. In the former chronicles of Mr. Thomas Williams' curious adventures I have told of how our time was occupied through those strenuous years and only once were we reminded of the mystery of the transformed house in Greenwich Village by running across a startling suggestion of what we believed lay at the bottom of it all.

Circumstances called us to Berlin, and through the delay of friends in keeping their appointment with us we had an idle day on our hands. We were strolling along the Friederichstrasse, Tommy frankly bored, when he came to a sudden halt in front of a shop window near Unter den Linden.

It was the window of a shop which specialized in photographs of celebrities. The Germans are thorough, and every one of the photographs was duly and plainly labeled with the name of the subject. But in the middle of the display the largest picture, a colored crayon enlargement, was without name or title. It puzzled me, and I looked again, and then I knew why Tommy had stopped so abruptly and stood staring at it. It was the likeness of a woman, of a very beautiful woman, of

the woman whose face had smiled at us from its frame in Gheradi's inner shrine!

"There can be no mistake; if is the same!" he exclaimed. "That face has puzzled me since I first saw the painting; I knew that there was a story connected with it; a story of which I have known at least a part. Some place, in a magazine or a newspaper, I must have seen it reproduced before. The shopkeeper would have saved himself the trouble of answering a question if he had labeled it as he has the others."

I was half tempted to put a detaining hand on his arm when he turned to enter the shop; it seemed wiser to let sleeping dogs lie, but my curiosity overcame my discretion, and I followed him in. The proprietor himself stood behind the show case, and after one glance he welcomed us in English.

"To what can I serve you, gentlemans?" he asked, a smile on his ruddy blond face with a miniature mustache trained in a feeble imitation of the kaiser's.

"Information mostly," answered Tommy curtly. "There is a large colored photograph in the window, the portrait of a woman, which bears no name. I should very much like to know whom it represents."

The shopkeeper eyed us suspiciously, and the smile faded from his lips.

"I know it not myselfs, gentlemans," he answered. "You do not make a joke with me?"

Tommy's eyes narrowed. "Certainly not, and I would suggest that it is poor business to try to get funny with me!" he said irritably. "You advertise the photographs of celebrities, and I can't believe that you would give an unknown woman the most conspicuous place in your display. I came in here to do business, but I want to know what I am buying."

The German shook his head; his knowledge of English was evidently limited, and Tommy's rapid-fire had bewildered him.

"You haf been little times in Berlin, *nicht wahr?*" he stammered.

"We arrived this morning, and if we have any luck we'll be able to get away to-night," answered Tommy impatiently. "I should like to buy that photograph if you will tell me why the original is sufficiently celebrated to earn a place in the middle of your galaxy of——"

He broke off abruptly, for every trace of the ruddy color vanished from the shopkeeper's face and fear came to the nearsighted blue eyes. Three police officers had entered the shop, and while one stationed himself at the door another opened the panel at the back of the show window, reached in, and removed the picture which we had been discussing. The third, whose abundance of gold lace indicated high rank in the service, stepped forward, and, pushing Tommy aside most unceremoniously, confronted the thoroughly terrified shopkeeper, who quailed under his threatening eyes.

Our knowledge of German was very limited, but there was no misunderstanding the trend of the conversation, or, rather, of the tirade, for the police officer did all of the talking, evidently threatening his victim with dire pains and penalties. One of his subordinates made a rapid search of the shop and seized a packet of smaller-sized portraits of the same subject, the owner submiting to the confiscation without a protest. I gathered just enough to appreciate that the shopkeeper was being accused of lese majesty, that blanket accusation which in Germany is made to cover every expression or action which is personally displeasing to the kaiser, and I expected to see him dragged over his show case and off to prison, but in the end the officer contented himself with serving him with

a formidable-looking document and striding out with his subordinates carrying the confiscated pictures.

There was nothing to be gained by attempting to extract an explanation or information from the shopkeeper; fright and apprehension had reduced him to the consistency of a jellyfish. His tongue had lost all knowledge of English, and his one immediate desire seemed to be to rid his shop of our presence. Grumbling at everything Teutonic, Tommy led the way to the street, where a curious crowd had gathered to gaze in awe at the disordered shop window.

"I suppose that it would be as profitable to question a graven image as to try to get information out of any of these people!" exclaimed Tommy irritably. "I'm going to find out about that picture, though, and I'm going to the nearest approach to the United States in reach to do it. Billy Michelson is attached to the embassy here, and he usually knows what's going on. I reckon he isn't scared of this lese-majesty thing."

Just the same, when Mr. William Michelson, the second secretary of the embassy of the United States, learned the nature of our inquiry, he led us to his private office and carefully closed the door.

"I'd rather keep you out of jail than to have to pry you out," he explained dryly when Tommy grinned at the precautions.

He listened to Tommy's narration, perfunctorily and officially to the first of it, with keen interest and alert curiosity to the latter part, and when it was finished he so far forgot his affectation of diplomatic poise as to give a whistle of astonishment.

"So little Schwartzfelder really had the nerve to exhibit the girl's photograph surrounded by the pictures of the *hochwohlgeborens!*" he exclaimed incredulously. "By Jove, he'll get all that's coming to him, all right, and you chaps are mighty lucky that you didn't butt into the scrape! She must have made the rest of the bunch look like thirty cents!"

"Rather less than thirty pfennigs, but that doesn't answer my question," said Tommy. "If you'll tell me who the woman is, perhaps I can understand what all the row is about."

Michelson shook his head. "My dear Tommy, if I had the information which would enable me to answer your question I should be one of the best-informed diplomats in Berlin," he said. "I think that the Russian ambassador may suspect, the Austrian ambassador is supposed to know, but I'm sure that none of the rest of us do. All that the general public knows is that she did not appear at the Royal Opera, where she was billed to sing *Juliet* night before last. It was announced officially that she was indisposed, but it is whispered about the embassies that she was arrested at her hotel by the secret police and hurried to the Belgian frontier. Those things happen here, you know."

"I suppose they do, but that doesn't come within a hundred miles of answering my question!" persisted Tommy. "If she was billed to appear at the opera she must have had a name, and that's what I'm trying to learn."

The secretary laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"That's just the point of the joke and you don't see it!" he exclaimed. "Be patient a minute and I'll try to explain it to you—you know that anything approaching a joke in Germany needs a diagram. In America we should look for the fine Italian hand of the press agent in the whole thing, but the police discourage that sort of activity over here. Her forthcoming appearance at the opera was announced two weeks ago; Signorina Nemo, the alleged famous Italian soprano. It

was announced in great and most unusual form, too; the newspapers were well paragraphed, and a small army of hawkers sold her photographs in every café. I expect that it was just a little bit overdone, for people began to ask questions, and, so far as any one could find out, she had never been heard of before. The papers started three or four days ago to ask pointed questions of the Herr Direktor, but he is an autocratic old guy and refused to answer further than that he vouched personally for the quality of her voice and her dramatic ability. She was certainly not a myth, for a week since she engaged a swagger apartment at the Kaiserhof and started rehearsals.

"One of my musical friends who heard her told me that her voice was truly wonderful; I can vouch only for her great beauty. I had a good chance to judge of that, for I met her driving two or three times in the Thiergarten and dined at the adjoining table one evening at the Kaiserhof. Berlin was on tiptoe, half of the young officers of the garrison were constantly hanging about her hotel, and it was rumored that one of the younger sprigs of royalty was dancing attendance upon her. Then, night before last, when every seat except those in the royal box was filled at the opera, the Herr Direktor appeared before the curtain and announced that owing to the sudden indisposition of Signorina Nemo it was necessary to substitute Fräulein Hochstetter in the title rôle. She is about forty, weighs in at close to a hundred kilos, and knows as much about acting as the first walking lady in a ten-twent-thirt, so the performance was given to a half-emptied house while the remainder of the audience adjourned to talk it all over in the cafés.

"Now perhaps you will not appreciate the significance of this; but, save for the bare announcement that Hochstetter had been unexpectedly called to substitute for Signorina Nemo, the papers the following morning made not the slightest comment, although the thing had been the one topic of conversation at all of the cafés the previous night. The photographs disappeared as if by magic, and the gossip ceased abruptly. The hotel people said nothing further than that the signorina had suddenly departed. There's the synopsis of the story, and I can assure you that it would not be wise to make very many inquiries as to the sequel of it until you are on the far side of the frontier. Police spies are abundant and omnipresent."

"I'm not going to make trouble for you, Billy," answered Tommy reassuringly. "I suppose that we can talk freely here, and I'll keep quiet about it outside; but I'd sure like to know the answer. What's your guess?"

The secretary shrugged his shoulders.

"It can only be a guess," he answered. "Perhaps the little princeling was too attentive and his stern papa intervened. That has happened before. It's only a hunch, but I believe that it is something more than that; that the action was taken at the request of some friendly power. There has been a lot of whispering about the embassies."

"She did not come to Berlin alone?"

Michelson shook his head.

"No; she was accompanied by an elderly woman who seemed to play the part of duenna, and a mysterious cavalier who was always in attendance when she appeared in public. They both disappeared with her. There is no question about their having been deported; one of our attachés saw them escorted to their railway carriage surrounded by a swarm of secret-service men. They had a special car, and the chief himself went with them."

"What sort of a chap was the cavalier—what did he look like?" asked Tommy eagerly.

Michelson did his best to describe him, but the art of a convincing verbal description is given to few and he was not of the number. Tommy listened for a moment and then interrupted him by picking up a pad and pencil from the desk. He worked with great rapidity, and in an incredibly short time sketched a striking likeness of Gheradi.

"Did he look anything like that?" he demanded as he handed it to Michelson.

The secretary glanced at it and shook his head.

"No, except for what you might call a racial resemblance," he answered doubtfully. "For one thing, my man wore a full beard."

Tommy smiled as he recovered the sketch, and, with a few rapid strokes, grew a convincing beard on the lower part of the face. Again Michelson examined it, and the effect upon him was most unexpected.

"By Jove, Tommy; who is this man—where have you seen him—where is he now?" he exclaimed, leaning eagerly forward to get a better light.

Tommy gave me a warning glance before answering.

"Suppose that you satisfy my curiosity first, Billy," he said. "Does that make my man look more like yours?"

The secretary hesitated. "Yes—and no!" he replied equivocally. "It increases what I called the racial resemblance—and that is very marked, but this is not the portrait of my man. Why, great Scott, if it were, the mystery which——" He checked himself and a flush of confusion came to his face.

"You'll have to excuse me, fellows," he explained quickly. "I was wandering into forbidden territory. I can't enlighten you any further about the mystery of the prima donna, Tommy; I give you my word that I have told you all I know. Now will you be equally frank with me?"

Tommy shook his head most positively. "No; it happens that that is just as much forbidden ground for me," he answered. "I'm sorry I made that sketch, Billy." He put out his hand to pick it up, but Michelson placed it out of his reach.

"Tommy, I'll make the offer of a fair trade for it," he proposed. "Something that you couldn't buy for love or money in Berlin to-day." He opened a drawer of his desk and produced a cabinet-size photograph of the woman whose portrait had been exhibited in the shop window. "It does not do her justice, but it's worth a premium."

Tommy looked at the photograph with indifference.

"It isn't worth even that insignificant sketch to me," he said. "If it were a later one it might be different, but this must have been taken a good many years ago."

Michelson looked at him, perplexed.

"Are you trying to drive a better bargain by cheapening it, or just what are you driving at?" he asked. "It can't be more than five years ago that she was in short skirts with her hair hanging down her back. She is certainly not more than nineteen now."

Tommy, in turn, was perplexed, and he looked more closely at the photograph.

"Then I guess we'll regard this whole matter as a closed incident, as you would say in your trade," he replied. He handed the photograph back, and in spite of the secretary's remonstrances picked up the sketch and tossed it on the glowing coals in the fireplace. "Just forget that, too, Billy," he continued. "I'll send you something better than that if you wish for an example of my work."

Michelson looked regretfully at the burning paper, and gave the photograph back.

"Take that, anyway, Tommy," he said. "I'm sorry that you wouldn't let me keep the other one. See here, if I send some one to you who convinces you that he has a right to ask the questions, will you tell him what you know about the man whose picture you just drew."

Tommy laughed.

"He would have to convince me of a lot more than that, Billy," he said. "My dear fellow, I have persistently and consistently tried for several years to avoid learning more about that man than he chose to tell me himself—which was practically nothing. It hasn't always been easy, for I know that I have nearly stumbled over his trail a dozen times, and I had to shut my eyes tight. I prefer not to mix in."

The secretary hesitated, evidently debating in his mind as to how much he might say.

"Confound it! I have no right to tell you that you're not wise in keeping out!" he exclaimed. "I'll let it go at that, Tommy, and with just an added word of advice. Don't amuse yourself by making such sketches as you just destroyed while you are knocking about Europe—unless you are prepared to be a lot more communicative about the original than you have been with me—and so long as you are within the borders of the German empire don't appear too curious about this affair of Signorina Nemo. It isn't healthy to know too much, nor to be unduly curious about things which the secret police are trying to suppress. Are you staying here long?"

"We planned to leave to-night," answered Tommy.

Michelson, whose manner had become suddenly official with the inquiry, expressed a courteous regret that we were leaving so soon with his lips, but his eyes betrayed a very evident relief.

After we left the embassy Tommy acknowledged frankly that he was glad that we had been misled by the unmistakable likeness.

"For, of course, it is absurd to claim that a girl who is now only nineteen could have been the original of Gheradi's painting," he continued. "That portrait must have been done at least fifteen years ago, and probably more; it is twenty years since those large, puffed sleeves went out of fashion. But, just the same, that experience this afternoon convinced me of one thing: I am not strong enough to resist temptation, so we'll fly from it. I don't suppose the food at the station restaurant is much worse than at the other places of this sauerkraut-and-pig's-knuckle burg; so we'll take our dinner there to avoid any chance of missing the train. Billy Michelson was too much interested, and I don't care to put too much of a strain on his discretion."

"Tommy, just what would you have done if little Schwartzfelder had been able to enlighten you?" I asked, as we drove to the hotel to pick up our luggage. "I can't quite dope it out that there has not been a mistake. As I remember the photograph which the police took from the window, it was not convincingly like the one you have in your pocket. An exceptionally strong resemblance, perhaps; but I am sure that the crayon enlargement was not the likeness of a nineteen-year-old girl."

Tommy looked at me from the corner of his eye, and grinned as he took the photograph from his pocket.

"I expect that's just what little Schwartzfelder will try to tell the police—and it's the truth," he said. "The picture which they confiscated was never posed for by this girl. If she is under twenty years old, I'll wager that it was taken before she was born, and I'd stake even higher that the original was the same woman whom Gheradi idealized in that wonderful portrait. You know that my memory for faces is

rather exceptional, old chap. I am positive that I have seen another likeness of the older woman, so the fact that I can't readily place it is proof enough that it must have been many years ago. Let's drop it; for if we keep on discussing it that dormant memory will be aroused, and, to be perfectly frank, I'm afraid of it."

Great as was my curiosity, I felt that Tommy's caution was the part of wisdom. Never in words had we pledged secrecy to Gheradi; never in words had he even suggested that he desired it; but that curious, unspoken convention held us none the less firmly, and we should as soon have thought of prying into his private correspondence as of breaking it. But, anxious as we were to avoid even the appearance of evil, that one action which Tommy had taken on impulse was destined to make our resolutions hard to keep. With all haste we gathered up our belongings and prepared to shake the dust of Berlin from our shoes; but when we descended to the hotel lobby we were confronted again by Michelson, who strode through the main entrance accompanied by little Schwartzfelder and a tall, shrewd-faced German whose silk hat and frock coat suggested at once the advocate.

"I'm glad that we are in time to catch you, Tommy!" exclaimed the secretary. "You have already met Herr Schwartzfelder; let me introduce you to Herr von Rahn, one of the leaders of the Berlin bar." Tommy glanced suspiciously at Michelson as he acknowledged the introduction; but the secretary gave him no chance to speak. "Herr von Rahn has been engaged by the shopkeeper to get him out of the scrape which you saw him get into today, and after hearing his story he appreciated that your evidence might be of the greatest value to his client," he continued. "It seems that we must have been talking at cross-purposes at the embassy, and the police have evidently fallen into the same error that I did. They mistook the photograph which he exposed in the window for a likeness of Signorina Nemo."

"Wasn't it?" asked Tommy bluntly.

Schwartzfelder's face fell as he heard the inquiry, but a twinkle came to Von Rahn's shrewd eyes.

"Mr. Williams, it will perhaps save your time if I make a little explanation," he said. "Up to three days since my client did a very profitable business in selling the photographs of Signorina Nemo. Then, by order of the police, he removed them from his shop window and destroyed the copies which remained in his possession. There is no appeal from such an order, arbitrary as it may seem to you; and any disobedience of it is apt to be followed by very serious results. However, my client saw nothing which conflicted with it in exposing this other photograph; for he knew that it was not the picture of Signorina Nemo, in spite of a very marked likeness. He was so confused by the browbeating of the police inspector that he was unable to make effective protest when his shop was raided. When he told me his story, I believed that a statement from you might be of great assistance to him, and accordingly we went at once to the embassy to endeavor to locate you. It was our good fortune to succeed, and I trust that you will be willing to aid the cause of justice. A simple statement from you in the presence of Mr. Michelson is all that will be necessary, and it will save my client a heavy fine and possible imprisonment."

"All right; I am ready to go that far; what do you wish to know?"

"Simply the name of the woman who posed for the photograph which the police seized; it will be necessary to identify her positively to prove that Schwartzfelder was not disobeying the police regulation," answered Von Rahn.

Both Schwartzfelder and Michelson

listened eagerly for the answer; but Tommy was aggravatingly deliberate.

"It seems to me that your client is hardly an expert in his business," he said irrelevantly. "He claims to handle the photographs of celebrities, and I can hardly believe that he would give the place of honor in his exhibit to the likeness of an unknown woman. I can't help you, for I don't know the name myself."

Schwartzfelder started an incomprehensible protest in German, but his lawyer quickly silenced him.

"Then may I ask if you had any particular reason for trying to find it out when you entered the shop?" he said. "There is something of a mystery back of all this, Mr. Williams, and I must penetrate it if I am to keep this man out of jail."

Tommy hesitated and glanced suspiciously at Michelson.

"I have no desire to become involved in it, and I'm not particularly concerned in your client's affairs," he protested. "I doubt if I could give you any information which would serve him; I am quite positive that I shall answer no questions in the dark. Billy, I'm afraid you haven't been playing fair."

The secretary's face flushed. "I knew nothing of any mystery until Von Rahn mentioned it!" he protested. "I came with him as a matter of courtesy, and I did——"

"Excuse me, gentlemen, it will save misunderstanding if I explain what I referred to as a mystery," interrupted Von Rahn. "There need be no secrecy about it. It is simply that this whole matter of the photographs has been most unusual. Those of Signorina Nemo were brought to my client by a stranger, a man evidently not connected with the trade; for he let him have them for a mere trifle. Schwartzfelder thought nothing of that, for he believed that it was part of an advertising scheme. He sold them at the regular price, and made such an unusual profit that he was ready enough to listen to the same man when he proposed an even more advantageous deal for the new lot. He gave Schwartzfelder to understand that this was also part of an advertising campaign; that the subject of the picture would very soon become locally famous, but that first he wished to stimulate a certain amount of curiosity concerning her. The only new condition was that my client should, if possible, obtain the name and address of any one who purchased or made inquiry about the photograph and at once communicate with him. That is the only mystery about it, gentlemen; a very simple one, as you can readily see."

"Extremely simple," assented Tommy dryly. "So simple that I can hardly understand why you bothered to get on our trail. Why didn't your client apply at once to this man and demand the information?"

The little shopkeeper again started an explanation, and again his lawyer silenced him.

"That is the final part of the mystery," he said quickly. "Schwartzfelder—as you may have remarked—was extremely anxious to get you out of his shop so that he might close it and do that very thing. But as he closed the door after you, he saw this man standing in the crowd, and noticed that he watched you and followed close at your heels when you left. That is the last he saw of him; he was unknown at the address which he had left, and he has not been able to locate him. Mr. Williams, has that man communicated with you since you left the shop?"

Tommy glanced about the hotel lobby and then looked suspiciously at Michelson.

"Not to my knowledge—certainly not directly," he said significantly. "Mr. Michelson asked me for certain information which may have a bearing——"

"Which most certainly has a bearing on the identity of the woman!" interrupted the secretary. "I can't go into that, however."

Tommy smiled at the success of his trial shot. "Mr. von Rahn, are you sure that you did not recognize the picture?" he asked. "I am sure that the woman has played a part in history."

"But I never saw it!" answered the lawyer. "It was placed on exhibition only this morning, and the police confiscated every copy."

Tommy took the photograph which Michelson had given to him from his pocket.

"I think if you examine this closely it may put you on the track," he said. "It is not the same; but there is a marvelous resemblance."

The lawyer took it, and a look of perplexity came to his face as he studied it. That perplexity deepened as the moments passed, and then suddenly cleared as he jumped to his feet.

"But this is impossible!" he exclaimed excitedly. "Many, many years since she died! All Europe rang with the story of it; the announcement was official; you, too, must remember——"

"Stop!" interrupted Tommy, his face suddenly white. "I do not wish to remember; I shall listen to nothing which may recall what I should prefer to forget. Fight it out with the police, Mr. von Rahn; if I have suggested anything which may be of value, I am very glad; but I shall not say another word, nor listen to one."

He turned away abruptly to call the porters with our luggage. Von Rahn looked after him ruefully; a moment later he turned to me, evidently with a question on his lips, but I checked it.

"It is useless to question me; I know absolutely nothing about it, and I don't want to!" I said. "All that I know is that we shall leave Berlin as soon as we can get away."

I was absolutely in the dark as to the meaning of it all. The hint which Tommy had found enlightening contained no suggestion for me; but none the less, it served to fill my mind with an uneasiness which verged on fear. From Von Rahn's manner, from the unusual emotion which Tommy had betrayed when he suddenly realized whither the trail was leading, I more than suspected that unwittingly we had stumbled to the edge of one of those mysterious tragedies or scandals which constitute the family skeletons of continental royal houses, skeletons which are secluded most jealously from the vulgar gaze in their most private cupboards and guarded most sacredly with seals and locks in their secret archives.

I was tremendously relieved when Tommy reappeared, followed by a porter carrying our hand luggage; for, knowing his temperament, I feared that curiosity would again gain the upper hand of discretion and tempt him to delay our departure from the danger zone. But, although Michelson protested that we should gain nothing by taking the early train which reached Paris at the same time as the express which left some three hours later and insisted that we should dine with him at the Adlon, Tommy was adamant in his refusal to alter his plans.

"It happens to suit me better to take the earlier train; it will get us across the Swiss frontier in time to get a decent cup of coffee and a pot of honey that is fit to eat," he answered so curtly that his refusal of the invitation verged on rudeness.

Michelson was obviously disappointed, and he betrayed it in spite of his diplomatic training; but he knew Tommy of old, and contented himself with a smile which I realized afterward was ironical as he wished us a pleasant and speedy journey. We drove to the station almost in silence, for Tommy was in no mood for conversa-

tion and occupied himself with sharply scrutinizing every face which was turned toward us.

We stepped from the cab into a perfect web of vexatious delays. The *dienstmann* who took our suit cases strapped the handles together with true Teutonic thoroughness before swinging them over his shoulder, and then in dumbheaded obstinacy or stupidity led the way to a half dozen wickets before we finally reached the one where the tickets for Paris were sold.

Then, after a most tedious wait at the end of a slow-moving line, the ticket seller refused to let me have our transportation until I produced the exact amount in payment, standing upon a perfectly valid regulation which I knew was most rarely enforced with foreigners. By dint of much scurrying about, I managed to change my bills into gold, silver, and copper, only to see him test suspiciously each coin to the last twenty-pfennig piece as the now precious minutes flitted past. There was a bare five minutes left when he handed out the tickets, and then at the platform gateway we were held up by an officious guardian who refused to let us pass until our hand luggage had been measured and declared within the required dimensions for admission to the passenger carriage. In the end I indulged in some rather strong language, for the doors were slammed in our faces as the train rolled away from the platform. I expected an echo from Tommy, but when I turned to him he answered my indignant protests with a smile of resignation and a shrug of his shoulders.

"My dear fellow, it is a waste of energy to cry over spilled milk," he said quietly. "I fancy Billy Michelson has been responsible for our missing that train."

"And are you going to stand quietly for that sort of thing?" I demanded indignantly.

"Without hitching," he answered, with a grin; but in his narrowing eyes there was a dangerous glint which belied the expression of his lips. "You can bear witness that I did my best to break away without any unpleasantness; but if Billy and his friends insist upon dragging us into the muddle I have tried to avoid, I'll try even harder to give them more than they are looking for. Let's see if we can get anything fit to eat in this restaurant."

I grumbled that as we had only three hours we had better pass up the dinner and try to catch the train, but Tommy laughed and shook his head.

"We may as well take things as comfortably as we can," he said. "We shall not be able to get aboard any train until our mysterious friends give the word, and when they are ready to let us depart we shall find the path strewn with roses."

He refused to confide to me the grounds for his belief; but as the train approached, I found that his predictions had been absolutely correct. We met only smiles and the most courteous assistance from the half dozen officials who supervise the passengers' progress from waiting room to platform. The blockheaded *dienstmann* who had been unable to comprehend our fragmentary German suddenly displayed unlooked-for intelligence and a surprising fluency in English, the official interpreter was at our elbows to smooth out all difficulties, and the station superintendent himself escorted us to the platform, apologizing for the overzealous officiousness of his subordinates which had caused us to miss the earlier train and explaining that as a slight compensation he had put on an extra *schlafwagon*, which would permit each of us to have a separate compartment.

Tommy accepted apologies and all of the courtesies which were offered without comment. Our sleeper was most unusually luxurious, and we received a

most unusual service from the perfectly disciplined attendants who seemed above the average in intelligence until I ventured a question as to the hour we should cross the Swiss frontier. Tommy listened, with a grin on his face, to my fruitless efforts to extract information, for they could apparently tell me nothing except that I need have no anxiety; we would not be troubled by the customs. One of them even hinted that if we had anything dutiable or compromising in our possession he was prepared to secrete it effectually, and I had an uncomfortable feeling that he was furtively watching us for the least sign of self-betrayal. When he had left us, Tommy yawned most ostentatiously as I turned to him with a look of inquiry.

"You are quite right, old chap; that delegate isn't a sleeping-car conductor by trade," he said, forestalling my question. "Something in the military or police line, I expect; I couldn't quite decide. Don't let it keep you awake; but take the goods the gods give you and be thankful. I notice that the equipment of this car is all marked with the royal arms, and those steel screens over the windows which were probably originally devised to keep out bombs and regicides would prove quite as effective in keeping in passengers who might be tempted to take French leave."

I jumped from my seat as if I had received an electric shock, and a very short inspection convinced me that Tommy's sharp eyes had discovered the truth. The luxurious car was undoubtedly one of those of the royal train, and the precautions which had been adopted for the security of its inmates made it virtually a prison.

Every window was screened with a network of steel bars so cunningly arranged that they offered but little obstruction to vision from within; but so closely woven that they would prevent the passage of a missile. They were firmly fixed to the steel frames of the sash, and after a futile effort to dislodge them I turned away with a most uncomfortable conviction that we were trapped.

Tommy was methodically unpacking his bag when I desisted; evidently preparing to make himself entirely comfortable for the night.

"The favor of princes is proverbially fickle," he said, with a calm which I found most irritating. "To-morrow night it may be a straw pallet on the stone floor of a dungeon, so I'm not going to miss the chance of to-night at a most inviting spring bed."

"Do you think that we are really prisoners?" I asked incredulously, for in spite of my earlier fears the whole later developments made such a supposition seem ridiculous.

"You can draw your own conclusions from what you found on the window, but if you are still unconvinced you might have a try at the doors," he answered.

I stepped into the passageway to carry out the suggestion, and from the prompt click of the lock behind me I half guessed that he had made it solely to get rid of me and my possible questioning; for still I could not believe that the authorities had taken such elaborate precautions to imprison us when it was quite within their power to throw us into a dungeon with scant formality.

But one trial at gaining exit when the train halted at the next station convinced me beyond reasonable doubt. The doors at both ends of the car were securely locked, and all the satisfaction I could get when I asked that they be opened was a smiling but firm refusal from the attendants and a verbose explanation of which I could understand only that it was *"streng verbotten"* for the *Gnädiger Herr* to leave the car. I tried to emulate Tommy's calm and philosophical acceptance of the inevi-

tables, but while the berth to which I retired was luxuriously comfortable, I tossed about as if it had been a bed of thorns. I waited eagerly for the first streak of dawn, hoping against hope that through my barred window it would reveal the snow-capped Alps; but when at last the sun rose, its rays illuminated a level plain.

The uniforms of the guards at the stations which we rushed through without stopping were of Austrian gray instead of the Prussian blue, and I realized that while we had passed a frontier in the night we had jumped from the frying pan into the fire instead of to the safety of Switzerland. We were in the land ruled by the Hapsburgs, and with that realization there came to my consciousness the recognition of a vague resemblance which I had never been able to place, the suggestion of the royal house of Austria in Gheradi's swarthy face.

And, strangely enough, with that realization there came a certain quieting of the fears which had beset me; for while I realized that we were prisoners, that we had been virtually kidnaped by the servants of one ruler with the aid of the servants of another, I felt instinctively that no grave harm impended. I could not associate that kindly personality with violence or oppression, and our unreal and melodramatic experience seemed but in keeping with the bizarre atmosphere in which he existed.

At last the strange likeness of the photographs and the portrait which he so reverently guarded began to have a significance for me, and I felt that while our luxurious prison on wheels might possibly be bearing us toward a sterner one of stone and iron, it was most certainly hurrying us to an explanation and understanding of all that seemed so mysterious in the mysterious house in far-away Greenwich Village.

CHAPTER VI.

There was nothing in the quality of the breakfast at which Tommy could grumble, and even the Swiss honey for which he had expressed a desire before leaving Berlin formed part of the menu. A glance out of the screened windows demonstrated that we had not reached the safety of the mountain republic, however, for the station signboards bore German names, and the porters on the platforms wore the gray and green of the Austrian railway service. We sped through those stations with a speed which suggested that we were running special, but while the car attendants were fairly obsequious in their service and seemed to anticipate every material want, they were singularly and irritatingly dense when we tried to obtain information as to our exact whereabouts or our eventual destination.

A luncheon as perfect as the breakfast appeared in due time, and it was not until late afternoon that the railway portion of our journey came to an abrupt ending. For hours we had been traveling through a monotonously level country, plains which we judged from the dress of the peasantry and the great herds and flocks which grazed them to be the wonderful Hungarian steppes, and it was at a small village with an unpronounceable name at the edge of the bordering forest that our luxurious wheeled prison at last came to a stop. The village itself consisted of hardly fifty houses, but for the moment the surrounding plain was a populous tented city, for it was evidently the base of a full army corps. Long troop trains on the sidings were unloading regiments of gray-coated infantrymen, and the hoofs of trotting cavalry horses raised a cloud of dust which hung like a veil above the low, thatched houses.

The station platform was crowded with officers of all ranks, from grizzled major generals to young sprigs of sub-

alterns, and we watched the throng with eager interest, wondering what it portended for us that we had been brought to this center of martial activity; but we were not long left in doubt, for the confusion without was suddenly stilled, the throng parted, and every officer, from the highest to the lowest, stood at attention and saluted as a tall, soldierly looking man strode through the divided ranks toward the entrance to our car. He was not in uniform, but in his picturesque Hungarian shooting costume looked more the part of a commander of men than any of the gold-laced generals whose salutes he acknowledged with a graceful gesture.

Tommy's involuntary whistle betrayed his surprise as he caught sight of his face.

"We're flying high, old chap!" he exclaimed, in answer to my look of inquiry. "That is Count Amyar Festonyi, one of the greatest and richest of the Hungarian nobles, and master of the horse to the emperor. I met him in Besnard's studio in Paris last winter. Besnard's most famous work was the mural decoration of the banquet hall of his Hungarian castle, and in spite of the small fortune he received for it, he was always complaining that it was lost in the wilderness."

He had hardly finished when our visitor entered the compartment where we were sitting and advanced with outstretched hand to Tommy.

"I am so pleased to meet you again, Mr. Williams!" he exclaimed cordially, in excellent English. "I fear that you have had a tiresome journey, and it was good of you to come so far out of your way."

"We didn't seem to have very much choice in our route," answered Tommy dryly. "I'm trusting that we shall eventually reach Paris safe and sound."

"But assuredly—why not?" answered the Hungarian. "You will do me the honor to be my guest for as many days as you may find interest in watching the army maneuvers which are being held this year on my estates. Also you may prove to our dear friend Besnard that his masterpiece is not so buried that it is lost to the world."

"When—or if—I see him again," persisted Tommy, a significant emphasis upon the qualification which implied doubt.

Count Amyar's answering laugh was reassuring, and he was frank enough to acknowledge the hit.

"I confess that I have played a rather unmannerly trick upon you gentlemen, but I shall do my best to make amends," he said. "I extend my invitation to you now in all sincerity, and I trust that you will accept it."

"I may seem ungracious, but I should first like to know the alternative," answered Tommy bluntly. "We have been brought here virtually as prisoners."

Count Amyar hesitated for a moment.

"Invitations to Castle Festonyi never go begging," he said curtly. "I force my hospitality upon no one. If you do not care to accept of it, I can only offer you my apologies for having taken you so far out of your way and assure you that this same car will carry you at once to Paris."

It was Tommy's turn to hesitate, and there was a moment of tense silence during which the two men looked squarely in each other's eyes. I knew that the invitation was one to appeal to Tommy. The old Hungarian castle which had for generations been the stronghold of the Festonyis was one of the famous medieval buildings of Europe and one which mere tourists and globe-trotters were never privileged to visit; for the Magyar reserves his home for himself and his friends. We should gladly have traveled the breadth of the Continent to have availed ourselves of the opportunity had the summons had

a more conventional preamble; but after the manner of our kidnaping it savored of the spider's invitation to the fly, for grim tales were told of happenings inside those moated walls, and they were not all of ancient history. But a glance out of the window of the car was sufficient to convince me that refusal would be useless if the Hungarian's assurance of our freedom of choice was a bluff, for the throng of officers had dispersed and the platform was occupied by a score or more of dark-faced Magyars in native costume whom I guessed to be the personal retainers of Count Amyar. Perhaps Tommy, too, saw them from the corner of his long eyes and drew the same conclusion, but there was nothing in his final acceptance to indicate that he was making a virtue of necessity.

"If I hesitate, it is only because I am reluctant to accept anything for which I shall never be able to make adequate return," he said courteously. "Frankly, Count Amyar, I can guess the real reason for bringing us here, and it is only fair to warn you that it has been wasted effort. Neither of us is at liberty to speak, and I can assure you that both of us respect our obligations."

The Hungarian checked him with a gesture and smiled as he extended a hand to each of us.

"Torture is obsolete, gentlemen," he exclaimed laughingly. "I can assure you that the rack and thumbscrews in the old dungeons of the castle are rusted from disuse. You need be under no apprehension that you will be asked to betray a confidence by your host. And now—if you are ready?"

In spite of the final interrogation, it was very evident that Count Amyar had counted absolutely that we should accompany him, for our luggage had already been carried from the car. In the station and around it everything was in confusion, or rather in the ordered disorder of a well-planned military campaign. Mountains of commissary and ordnance supplies were being demolished by the long wagon trains, a thousand sweating and dust-begrimed men attacked them with an energy which told how real a thing is this mimic war which every year has turned Europe into a vast battlefield.

But through all of that confusion a clear lane opened for us as if by magic. Count Amyar's Magyar retainers unceremoniously brushed aside the uniformed guards who lingered in it, and then, leaping on their wiry little horses, surrounded us as an escorting bodyguard as our carriage whirled recklessly through the jam of transport wagons, ambulances, and ammunition vans. The low-wheeled carriage swayed ominously as the postilions urged the four black stallions which drew it to top speed; but Count Amyar, who sat facing us, paid not the slightest attention to our course as we cut corners which swung us on two wheels.

It was, of course, only mimic war; but there was nothing lacking in the atmosphere of a serious and elaborately planned campaign. At first we passed through the ruck of siege guns and baggage trains, then our carriage, with its flying escort, skirted long columns of infantry pressing stolidly forward in the wake of the field artillery and the advance screen of cavalry. It was the "Red Army" of the North, theoretically advancing to check the progress of the "Blue Invaders" who were moving to take Vienna from the borderland of the Balkan States. Castle Festonyi, in the old days when the Turk was a menace to Europe, had been a bulwark of the Cross against the invading host of the Crescent, and as we drove steadily toward it, Count Amyar explained that even to-day it was the most important strategic point in the outer defenses of the Austrian capital.

"It is practically the key to the present maneuvers," he said. "The theory

of the campaign is that all of the available Austrian troops have been mobilized on the German frontier. The Hungarians forming the Blue Invaders are supposed to have been annihilated by the Balkan Allies while guarding the Eastern boundaries. They now represent the victorious invaders pushing forward to attack Vienna. It is conceded that the Danube flotilla bars their progress by the river. The two railways from the East are in the hands of the Reds and can be held or destroyed, and Castle Festonyi dominates the only remaining practicable pass for an army's advance. At present it is supposedly neutral—in fact, the umpires are making it their headquarters—and the outposts of the contending armies are each about twenty miles distant from it. The one which can first reach it with a sufficient force to hold it will have a tremendous advantage. If the Reds win it, they can hold the passes long enough to move an army by rail and the Danube and check the invaders at the pass, while the eastern divisions turn the Blues' left flank. If the Blues succeed in gaining it, they can cut the Red forces in halves and within a fortnight the '*Elgen*' of the Hungarians would echo and reëcho from the Graben to the Prater!"

A flush came to his dark face, and a flash to his somber eyes, as he told us of the effect of the possible victory of the invaders, and I knew instinctively that the thought of the Magyar war cry resounding through the streets of the Austrian capital was anything but distasteful to him in spite of the honors which the Hapsburg emperor had heaped upon him. Tommy was watching him closely between narrowed lids.

"It will be an interesting game to watch; I assume that to make it of practical value, the forces are fairly equal?" he said carelessly.

"Certainly—in numbers," answered Count Amyar. "It is a problem in strategy. Theoretically the forces of the opposing armies start on equal terms. It is a question of leadership. It would resolve itself to that if the mimic game ever turned to stern reality. Of course, the plans of campaign of the opposing armies have been carefully mapped out; on paper there can be but one conclusion—a draw; but there is always the chapter of accidents to be reckoned with and accidents happen to upset the most carefully laid plans."

Tommy smiled as he nodded assent.

"I appreciate that from my own experience; I expected to be in Paris instead of Hungary to-day. Some accidents are so fortuitous that they suggest the premeditated planning of fate."

Count Amyar looked at him with a curious expression of sympathetic understanding in his eyes, an expression which carried my memory swiftly back to the recluse in Greenwich Village.

"As a Hungarian, I am sufficiently an Oriental to be a fatalist; but a large experience with the greater world outside has taught me that even fate and destiny may be in a measure modified and controlled by human effort if the motive which prompts it is sufficiently strong," he said earnestly. "I believe that in spite of your American practicality you will agree with me, Mr. Williams?"

"No; it is because of that same practicality that I cannot," replied Tommy bluntly. "In my experience and observation, Kismet has been blamed only for failures. The man who succeeds rarely admits that there was even an element of luck in his success."

Count Amyar's answering exclamation was unintelligible because it was in his native language, but I guessed that it was in the nature of a curse.

"That may be true—in America," he continued, in English. "It might be true even in Austro-Hungary if it were not for the women!" And with that remark, which meant nothing to me

but evidently was an enlightening confession to Tommy, our host relapsed into a moody and thoughtful silence, which was unbroken for the next fifteen minutes.

The last Cossack post of the Red Army was passed before our carriage with its galloping escort of outriders reached the grateful shade of the forest which bordered the great plain, and there was little diminution of our speed as we commenced our gradual ascent. The road was perfect and without excessive grades, constructed by the military engineers so skillfully that the baggage and artillery trains might be easily and swiftly moved over it with the minimum of power. For mile after mile it twisted and turned through the dense forest which formed the wonderful timber and game preserve of the Festonyis. It was a lonely road, and in the entire journey we met not more than a half dozen wayfarers; but I had the uncanny sensation that every yard of our swift progress was watched by sharp eyes from the shelter of the bordering trees and thickets, and that only the barbaric shouts of the advance guard of outriders prevented a challenge of our advance. Two or three times I caught a flash from the depths which suggested that the rays of the setting sun had been caught and reflected back by a surface of burnished steel, and once a riderless horse with dangling bridle reins and the saddlery accouterments of an officer of the Magyar hussars broke from the roadside thicket, galloping with our escort until one of the horsemen caught it and dropped behind. That startled Count Amyar from his reverie, and he glanced at us uneasily. Tommy met that look with a smile which again brought a flush to the Hungarian's face and two stern little furrows between the heavy black eyebrows; but he was sufficiently tactful to force an answering smile to the lips on which for an instant a curse had trembled. I could not fathom the reason, but I was uncomfortably conscious that the glance which they exchanged was anything but friendly.

A moment later another horse plunged from the forest, and, wheeling sharply at the side of our carriage, raced on ahead of us. The rider wore the uniform of a hussar officer, but a branch had swept from her head the astrakhan kepi and loosed a great mass of dark hair which effectually hid her face. She was magnificently mounted, and her chestnut thoroughbred easily outdistanced the pursuit of the Magyar outriders, although Count Amyar stood up in our swaying carriage and urged it on. His face was fairly livid with passion when he dropped back into his seat after convincing himself that the pursuit was useless.

"You may have many guests at Castle Festonyi for the maneuvers, Count Amyar?" said Tommy interrogatively, ignoring the anger and the event which had aroused it.

The Hungarian pulled himself together at the cost of no little effort, and met the query with a shrug of his shoulders.

"For the moment I am not entirely master of my own house," he replied. "Perhaps you cannot understand—but look!"

The carriage swung around a sharp curve as he spoke, and his hand emphasized the command. It needed no further injunction to rivet our attention, and even Tommy gave an exclamation of surprise and admiration. Across a shallow valley Castle Festonyi towered above us, its crenellated towers and encircling walls gray with age, but reflecting a rich golden brown in the rays of the setting sun.

It was a most satisfying and complete realization of such visions as Sir Walter Scott's tales of the Age of Chivalry had conjured in our romantic days of boyhood. For more than five hun-

dred years it had been the home of the Festonyis, and it was a tradition in the family that never for a single hour since the great portal, with its defending portcullis and drawbridge, was completed had it been without watch and ward of faithful feudal retainers. Its grim old walls had withstood a dozen desperate sieges; more than once the dark water of the encircling moat had been crimsoned with the blood of the fanatical infidels who had attempted to carry the ramparts by assault and had succeeded only in gaining swift entrance to the Moslem paradise from the pike points and battle-axes of the scarcely less barbaric Huns who held it for the Festonyis, their feudal lords.

The mail-clad men at arms had long since vanished, but traditions still held, for we could see a strong guard of Hungarian hussars at the main entrance and sentries from the imperial bodyguard patrolling the ramparts, their presence accounted for by the imperial standard which floated lazily from the staff on the massive square donjon and proclaimed that Franz Joseph had for the time being taken possession of his vassal's house for his residence.

"His majesty has so far honored me as to become my guest during the maneuvers," said Count Amyar; but there was something in his eyes which belied the humility of his words. "That is why I told you that for the moment I am not entirely master of my house, for it is the convention that where his majesty resides he rules supreme."

"And therefore dictates as to those who may be guests beneath the roof which shelters him?" demanded Tommy quickly.

Count Amyar hesitated, evidently vexed at his own indiscretion in having said so much; but with Tommy's keen eyes fixed upon him, he was wise enough to be truthful.

"Then, Count Amyar, there can be but one explanation of our having been brought here!" exclaimed Tommy. "A royal invitation is always imperative, and it must be by the emperor's command that we come to Castle Festonyi."

"Thousands of commands of which he is personally ignorant are given in the emperor's name every day," replied the Hungarian evasively. "I can only assure you that you are heartily welcome; but, since I have said so much, you will not be offended if I offer a word of caution. If you see his majesty and he asks questions of you, refuse to answer if you wish, but do not tell him untruths."

"I am not a liar by habit, Count Amyar!" retorted Tommy stiffly.

A cynical smile came to the Hungarian's lips.

"It is a habit which is very quickly acquired in the atmosphere of a court, Mr. Williams," he answered gravely. "No ruler has ever suffered more from its effects than Franz Joseph, for in the end he has learned the truth only through bitter tragedies which frankness might have averted. Again I repeat that for the moment I am not the master of my house; if I were, there are those within it in attendance upon his majesty whom I would gladly consign to its deepest and long-forgotten dungeons or have hanged from its still-serviceable gibbet. And not the least dangerous of them is at this moment crossing the drawbridge; it would make for the peace and prosperity of the world if the portcullis should fall and break her pretty neck."

His tone expressed a venomous hatred, although he did not raise his voice, and following the indication of his outstretched hand we saw the girl who had so narrowly escaped from our outriders galloping over the bridge which spanned the moat. She had gathered up the floating hair which had betrayed her sex, and Count Amyar cursed as the guard at the castle entrance turned out and gave her the full military honors

due to the officer's uniform which she wore.

Count Amyar volunteered no further information, and a moment later our own carriage whirled across the bridge, the Hungarian making curt acknowledgment of the salute of the same guard which had turned out for our fair predecessor. It came to a halt on the far side of the stone-paved inner courtyard, a square in which a regiment of cavalry might have bivouacked and about which the buildings which ordinarily housed the Festonyis and their personal retainers clustered.

The largest and most imposing of those buildings, and one which contrasted with the ivy-colored donjon and its ancient flanking towers, was fairly modern, and was evidently the temporary home of the emperor and his immediate suite; for troopers of the crack Dragoon Guard Regiment stood sentry at each of the half dozen entrances, and the imperial standard floated beside the regimental colors in front of the main guard at the great portal surmounted by the Festonyi arms. Our own quarters, to which we were conducted by Count Amyar and a half dozen flunkies wearing the Festonyi livery, were in one of the oldest of the square towers which, from its massive walls and narrow windows, I judged to have been one of the original outer defenses built in the days when gunpowder held no terror for masonry. The interior had been modernized, however, and the apartment which was assigned to us consisted of three luxuriously furnished rooms.

"I hope that you gentlemen will make yourselves comfortable here," said Count Amyar courteously. "This much of the castle remains to me, but you will appreciate that I may seem lacking as a host because my time is not my own. Johann will attend to your wants, and I trust that you will be sufficiently rested to dine with me at eight o'clock." He left us to our own devices, and Tommy looked at me with twinkling eyes as the door closed after him.

Johann, the valet who had been assigned to us, asked for the keys to our luggage, that he might unpack our clothes, employing such perfect English that we both turned to him in surprise. He stood the scrutiny with the imperturbability of the perfectly trained servant, betraying not the slightest sign of recognition, although I found in his face that vague familiarity which convinced me that I had seen it many times before. Tommy's expression was a study in bewilderment as the valet passed quietly to one of the inner rooms and deftly busied himself with his duties.

"Five minutes ago I could have given you a full and convincing explanation of all the things which have happened in this last surprising twenty-four hours; but the presence of Johann in the personal service of Count Amyar knocks all of my theories into a cocked hat!" exclaimed Tommy irritably, in answer to the unspoken question which rose to my lips. "Can you make anything out of it?"

"I might if I could remember where I have seen that chap before," I answered. "All of his particular class are cast pretty much in the same mold; but I am sure——"

"He served you half a dozen times at Gheradi's!" interrupted Tommy impatiently. "He was replaced by another man just before the smash. That's what upsets my theories; I thought that we had been brought here to be pumped about Gheradi, but Count Amyar must know all that his servants knows, and it's a safe bet that it's a blame sight more than we do. For a long time there has been no question of the identity of Gheradi in my mind; he is the missing archduke who assumed the name of John Orth, put to sea as the captain of a merchant vessel which was never re-

ported from the day it sailed and was presumably lost with all hands on the coast of Patagonia. For several years afterward there were rumors that John Orth had been seen in various corners of the world. He was reported as a monk in a Trappist monastery in Algeria, as a general of bashi-bazouks in the army of Abdul-Hamid, as a secret emissary of the Vatican on a dozen different missions. Austrian cruisers searched the South Sea from end to end for trace of his ship or proof that it had been lost without result, and it is common knowledge in every chancellery of Europe that the emperor has wasted many thousands of florins in running down every rumor concerning him. You remember the sketch which I drew in Billy Michelson's office?"

I nodded, and Tommy smiled at the recollection.

"It isn't every one who can make an archduke out of an obscure individual with a few pencil strokes, but that's just what I did when I grew that beard on the sketch of Gheradi," he continued. "A few minutes before I had seen a photograph of the long-missing John Orth in the celebrity shop; it might well have been Gheradi, twenty years younger and with a beard. Of course, Billy recognized it at once; he was attached to the embassy in Vienna before he was transferred to Berlin as secretary, and must have been familiar with the whole story. He knew that we knew where the original of that sketch could be found, and when he became convinced that we wouldn't give him the information he passed the word on to the Austrian embassy. The immediately subsequent events made that perfectly clear to me; quick action was taken, and the German secret-service officers were instructed to make us miss our train for Paris. That made our subsequent kidnaping a simple matter, and I guessed that it would mean no more than a temporary delay in our journey and the listening to a few questions which we should have refused to answer, in spite of the fact that they would be asked by royalty. Now I'll be hanged if I can dope it out, for Count Amyar is the most trusted personal attendant of the emperor, and he knows the answers as well as we do."

"Possibly, but not positively," I objected. "Perhaps Johann has not——"

"We'll soon settle that!" interrupted Tommy, walking to the open door through which every word must have been audible to the valet. "One moment, if you please, Johann."

The valet came out, his face as stolid as if it were carved from wood.

"Johann, you must have overheard our conversation, so it is not necessary to explain anything. Am I justified in assuming that Count Amyar knows that you were in the service of Mr. Gheradi in New York?"

"Quite so, sir," answered Johann respectfully. "If the gentlemen will pardon me, I would suggest that the name be not mentioned here. These old walls are curious and not always discreet. It is growing late, gentlemen; you have little time to spare if you wish to change for dinner."

His manner was absolutely respectful, in spite of the suggestion of a rebuke of our curiosity in his words which made it plain that he would respond to no further questioning. As deftly as he had served us at Gheradi's table he assisted us in dressing; so skillfully that we were a good five minutes ahead of time when we met in the sitting room.

"Count Amyar will call for you, gentlemen," he said. "You will not require coats; all of the buildings are connected." Then he effaced himself; no other word can describe the manner of his going, for he seemed to melt into the wainscoting of the paneled wall against which he stood. Tommy chuc-

kled at my exclamation of astonishment.

"I am beginning to suspect that this whole thing is a farce especially played for our benefit," he said. "I suppose this old robber's roost is as honeycombed with secret passages as a rabbit warren. They didn't seem to be able to keep house without 'em in medieval times. I wonder just how that sliding panel works." He took a step forward to gratify his curiosity, but before he reached the panel which had noiselessly closed after Johann's disappearance, the one beside it opened quite as silently, and Mr. Thomas Williams, despite his expressed belief in the farcical nature of our adventure, stepped back and whipped out a vicious little automatic pistol. Five seconds later he made frantic efforts to replace it in his pocket unobserved, for such a menace as the old wainscoting framed was not to be combated with firearms.

Our room was brilliantly lighted, and from the darkness beyond the panel stepped a girl, who remained standing on the threshold of the hidden doorway as if undecided whether to advance or retreat. Coming as she did, she would have been a startling apparition to the most skeptical; but to us her appearance was fairly stunning, for she was the living reincarnation of that woman whose portrait Gheradi had enshrined in the mysterious room of that mysterious house in Greenwich Village.

She was not more than twenty years of age, so that portrait surely must have been executed before her birth; but so exact was the likeness that she might well have posed for it, and, strangely enough, her costume, while modern in design, was of that exact shade of canary yellow which Gheradi had depicted on his canvas. The diamond coronet on the dark hair was of exactly the same design, the graceful, proud pose of the head which bore it was identical; but in the glorious dark eyes there was an appeal, a wistfulness which one instinctively felt could never have appeared in the no less beautiful but far more sophisticated face of Gheradi's model.

For just a moment she stood there, evidently so dazzled by the sudden light that she could not see clearly. Then, when she had gotten her bearings and was about to step into the room, there was a scuffle behind her, a strong arm in a blue coat sleeve with the gold piping of the Magyar hussars was thrown about her neck, and she was jerked roughly back into the darkness.

We both sprang forward to assist her, for a cry for help was cut short by the brutal pressure of that arm; but before we reached the wall, the heavy panel was slipped back into place by invisible hands, and though we tugged and hammered at it with all of our strength, it remained immovable. Together we turned in search of something which we might use to batter down the solid oak against which we had vainly bruised our bare hands, to find Count Amyar standing in the doorway regarding us with a most aggravating smile of amusement on his lips.

CHAPTER VII.

Something in our eyes must have warned him that we were in no mood for jesting, for he stepped forward with an apology.

"Gentlemen, I fear that the faithful Johann has been indulging his love of mystery at your expense," he explained. "I don't know for what uses that secret passage was originally designed in the Dark Ages; but in these modern times we find it convenient as a service stairway for this apartment. If you succeeded in battering down the panel, you would find only a narrow passage leading to the servants' quarters, and, in any case, you were attacking in the wrong place; it is the panel to the left which conceals it."

"Count Amyar, are you playing with us, or are you ignorant of what is going on beneath your own roof?" demanded Tommy angrily. "We cannot disbelieve our own eyes nor discredit our ears, and they told us that there was devil's work being done behind the panel which we were trying to demolish."

The Hungarian listened courteously while Tommy rapidly explained what had happened; but his eyes expressed frank incredulity at the ending.

"But I think it is you gentlemen who are trying to joke with me!" he protested; and if his protestation was not entirely sincere, he was indeed an admirable actor. "You may have seen 'The Yellow Lady,' the ghost which tradition assigns to this part of the castle; but I can assure you that no more real person could have penetrated the six feet of solid masonry which——"

Tommy leaned forward quickly, and when he straightened up the hand which he extended to Count Amyar held something which glittered.

"And does The Yellow Lady wear such very real and tangible baubles in her hair, Count Amyar?" he interrupted. "This was on the head of our apparition, and it must have been thrown forward into the room when she was so roughly jerked backward."

The Hungarian snatched it from Tommy's hand, and his face became very grave as he turned it over and over. Then he walked quickly to the panel where the apparition had appeared, rapped on it with his knuckles, and with eager fingers tried every detail of the surrounding carving in high relief in search of some hidden spring.

"Gentlemen, I shall waste no time in apologies for having doubted you," he said, as he gave up the search. "I can only assure you that this is more of a surprise to me than it could possibly be to you, for I believed that I knew every secret of this old rock pile. There is a passage there of which I was ignorant, and your other guess is entirely correct, Mr. Williams: I am very evidently ignorant of what is going on beneath my own roof—and that at a time when it shelters the emperor, for whose safety my honor is pledged. I feel that I can rely upon the discretion and loyalty of you two gentlemen—or you never would have reached here." The assertion was sufficiently positive in form, but there was a suggestion of interrogation in his tone, of inquiry in his eyes.

"I think that I may safely answer for both of us," said Tommy quickly. "Certainly I can vouch for our discretion if entire confidence is given us. As for our loyalty—I would remind you that we owe none, that we have been dragged into whatever of mystery and conspiracy may be afloat here entirely without our own volition."

Count Amyar nodded and glanced impatiently at the watch strapped on his wrist.

"I needed no such reminder; I carried out my orders knowing that the whole affair could end only in disappointment. Your deductions were entirely correct, Mr. Williams; you were inveigled here because the emperor believed that you would disclose the whereabouts of a man for whom he has vainly sought for many years."

"Information which could have been volunteered by his master of the horse and most trusted adjutant," suggested Tommy sarcastically.

"Information which his trusted and faithful servant has in his wisdom concealed from him at no small cost to himself," amended Count Amyar quietly, but his flashing eyes betrayed that he was controlling his temper at no small effort. "I knew that you would not betray the confidence reposed in you by Gheradi's hospitality, or you would never have lived for an audience with his majesty. Sentiment, forgiveness, tender-heartedness have cost the

Hapsburgs and Austro-Hungary dear; my seeming deceit has been a shield and buckler against an unwise pardon and amnesty which would prove fatal. I cannot explain further, Mr. Williams. I know enough of you to suspect that in your own way you will sooner or later learn the whole truth; it is not my privilege to tell it to you, although it would prove me blameless. Now I can only ask for your assistance if you will give it freely and blindly, and my need of it may be very great to serve others. If you refuse, I will give you immediate safe-conduct to the frontier and trust to your honor to keep silent as to what has happened."

For a moment they looked at each other in silence, and, man of peace and lover of the simple life as I am by temperament, I confess that I hoped that what Tommy might read in the Hungarian's eyes would induce him to cast our lot with his, for the curiosity which has caused so much trouble in the world was strong within me.

Perhaps Tommy was influenced by my unspoken wish in annoucing his decision—he always insisted that he was afterward—for in the end he placed our services at Count Amyar's disposal in a half dozen earnest words. The effect was almost magical; for from the moment the proffer was made the Hungarian dropped every vestige of the conventional mask which had hidden strong emotion, and his face grew set and stern as he grasped our hands to seal the compact.

"Can either of you describe the woman who stood there so that I can make no mistake?" he demanded quickly.

Tommy produced the photograph which Billy Michelson had given to him at the embassy.

"This is better than a verbal description; it is a perfect——"

"I was morally certain, but it seemed incredible in spite of the diamond coronet," interrupted Count Amyar, after a glance at the photograph. "I still cannot understand, but it is absolutely necessary that I should see her and wring the truth from her. You are sure that it was a uniform sleeve which you saw about her throat?"

"Yes, the same as the uniform worn by that masquerading young woman who passed us on the road this afternoon," answered Tommy positively.

"And the masquerader was your woman in yellow," admitted Count Amyar, as he jerked viciously at the old-fashioned bell cord which Johann had told us would summon him at any time.

With a celerity which suggested that he had been listening back of the panel, the servant stepped quietly into the room. Followed a few tense moments of rapid-fire questions and answers in Hungarian, and it needed no knowledge of the language to understand that they referred to the passage behind the other panel, and that Johann denied all knowledge of it. He vanished as silently as he had entered, after a curt order from his master, and turning to us, Count Amyar apologized for having spoken in his native tongue.

"Minutes may be of inestimable value," he continued. "Johann, who was born in the castle and who believes that he knows every inch of it, has no knowledge of the passage which undoubtedly exists through this wall. I have sent him for the one man who may have the secret, and you must prepare yourselves for an unpleasant sight, gentlemen. He was my grandfather's body-servant and fell into the hands of the Turks when Ali Pasha led the last attack against Budapest. What was left of him has been cared for in the castle all these years, having the free run within the walls of which he knows every stone when the Festonyi standard floats over the donjon, for reasons which you will appreciate when you see him, carefully secluded when the court

is in residence here. In a moment I could smash that panel and learn the secret which it conceals, but while I realize the necessity for haste, the necessity for caution is even more imperative. I dare not call others to my assistance, nor any one to account, until I know more of what is happening. You gentlemen are armed?"

Before we could answer, Johann was again in the room and at his heels came a pitiable remnant of humanity. Crippled and bent from the torture, he was tenderly assisted and supported by two kindly faced elderly men who wore the Festonyi livery.

Had we possessed a working command of Hungarian, I doubt if we could have understood the answers to the eager questions which Count Amyar put to him; for even his interrogator seemed puzzled by his mumbling; but this much was graphically plain: the queries aroused long-dormant memory, for the old retainer hobbled to the panel, and, after fumbling at it with his distorted fingers for a time, found the concealed fastening which secured it. He gave an uncouth cry of victory as the dark opening into which our fair visitor had disappeared stood revealed; but when we pressed forward behind Count Amyar he raised a mutilated hand to check us. Our host, eager as he had been to solve the mystery, hesitated and listened patiently to the vehement protest which came from the distorted lips, a protest in which his elderly comrades evidently agreed, for they quietly took place on either side of him to block our passage. Only Johann remained passive, his stolid face expressing neither approval nor dissent.

"Gentlemen, feudal service has its embarrassments," explained Count Amyar bitterly, when the old pensioner's protest ended. "They make the honor of the Festonyis as much their concern as it is mine, and they fear that at the end of this passage there may be a blot upon it which they would hide from alien eyes. I warn you that you accompany me at no little risk; many men died that the secret of Meyerling might be kept, and there is still much which is medieval in the politics of Austro-Hungary. I give you fair warning—do you still wish to accompany me?"

We both nodded assent, Tommy's head, I am bound to say, anticipating the movement of mine by the better part of a second, and Count Amyar imperiously motioned his retainers aside. They obeyed, the elderly couple with a sullen humility, the crippled veteran from helplessness, a mumbled curse on his lips and malevolent hatred in his marred face as we passed him to enter the narrow passage at Count Amyar's heels.

The versatile Johann, who seemed to possess a peculiar intuition which enabled him to anticipate the wants of those he served, produced a powerful electric flash light for the count, and as we passed him he offered each of us a revolver quite as unemotionally as he had served us with food and wine at Gheradi's table.

It was only the mystery and tense expectancy which gave the first part of that advance the slightest interest. The passage, not more than two feet wide, was simply an ill-ventilated tunnel in the apparently solid wall of the tower, and without even a loophole to admit light or air. It descended steadily, and in that descent must have made a half circuit of the tower; for when we reached the level of the ground we found ourselves in a small, square room on the side opposite the entrance. Count Amyar's exclamation betrayed recognition of his surroundings as he flashed the torch about, revealing on one side a heavy iron grille fastened with ponderous locks, a grille which effectually blocked entrance to a dark stone staircase which seemed to lead to cellars beneath. On the opposite side was a door

of heavy oak, black with age, iron-strapped and pierced by a small peep-hole through which came a pencil of light.

We had entered the room through a small door which hid the entrance to the passageway, a door whose opening was accompanied by much rattling of iron, and when it closed behind us it was made invisible by a veritable portière of chains which hung from a beam above it—chains rusted from long disuse, but originally cleverly designed for the fettering and shackling of human limbs. Count Amyar glanced at them with evident repugnance.

"Gentlemen, years ago, when I first became the ruler of this house, I ordered this room closed, for I wished the memories which it held and the traditions which it recalled to be forgotten," he said. "I did not suspect the presence of the door which those brutal fetters conceal; this other, which gives entrance to the old banqueting hall now used as an armory, I have screwed fast. This was the anteroom of a private purgatory which after the manner of their times my ancestors maintained; that grille closes the entrances to dungeons so foul that a modern rat could not live in them. I saw them just once, and then I determined that during my rule no one should see them again. Those locks I fastened with my own hands and threw the keys into the moat, and I hoped that no human being would again enter this room through which so many unfortunate wretches have passed to a living grave."

Tommy, whose long fingers had been curiously examining the ancient padlocks on the grille, suddenly turned, with one of them in his hand.

"Count Amyar, your precautions were useless; a file or a hacksaw has been used on every lock, and the bolts which they secured are so well oiled that they slide at a touch!" he exclaimed.

Unceremoniously brushing him aside, the Hungarian verified his statement, dropping the broken locks to the stone floor, sliding the heavy bolts which moved at a touch because of recent careful oiling.

After a few curt words snapped at his retainers, Count Amyar opened the other door and motioned to Tommy and me to precede him into the brilliantly lighted armory.

Some day after the memory of the tragedies of the next few hours has become less vivid, I hope to visit that wonderful room again; for in our hurried passage through it I saw just enough to whet my curiosity. A moment before we had stood surrounded by all that recalled the traditions of cruelty, avarice, and barbarity which clung to the ancient family name; now we hurried through no less eloquent evidence of the deeds which had conferred glory upon it.

It was a great chamber, with a domed roof, crude and rough with its bare stone walls as befitted the crude and rough warriors who for generations had held wassail in it; but dignified by its perfect proportions and the great fireplace surmounted by the Festonyi escutcheon carved in high relief on a slab of Parian marble; possibly a trophy carried back by the horde of Huns who ransacked and plundered the decadent Roman empire.

Ranged about the walls were lifelike equestrian figures, knights and their esquires centering groups of archers, pikemen, musketeers, and all the figures of that medieval warfare which holds so much of romance. Heaped about the various groups were the spoils of their victories, here the camp equipage and damascened armor of a Turkish pasha, there the jeweled saddle and bullion-embroidered banner of an emir. From the high, domed ceiling hung hundreds of captured flags and banners, tattered, bloodstained, bullet-torn, and

faded, the great majority of them still showing the white crescent on a crimson field, the ensign which the Festonyis had done so much to hurl back from the rich plundering of western Europe.

We followed close at the count's heels as he strode through the armory where I should have liked to linger, and then through a maze of narrow passageways from which I was glad to emerge, and which in the end led us to a large room which was apparently the orderly room of the guard which formed the garrison of the castle during the imperial occupancy. A handsome young captain of the Imperial Dragoons on duty as officer of the guard saluted Count Amyar as he entered.

"Captain, you will instruct the sentries to close all of the outer gates and to disregard any order which is not signed by me to open them," said Count Amyar, without preliminary. "No one is to enter or leave the castle without my permission."

He picked up a pencil and pad from the table at which the officer had been seated, and wrote rapidly for a few moments, and when he finished handed it back to the officer.

"These are the only exceptions," he continued rapidly. "If any of the officers whose names are on this list demand admittance, you will grant it, and at once conduct them to my personal quarters, permitting no communication between them, and at any cost preventing them from communicating with any one else."

The captain scanned the list hastily, and there was a puzzled expression on his face as his eyes looked up from it to meet Count Amyar's.

"Very good, sir, but what of those officers who are already in the castle and dining with the emperor?" he asked. "Here is a list of the guests, sir, and you will notice that several of the names appear on yours."

The Hungarian studied it a moment, with nervous fingers making check marks against several of the names. Two or three times he hesitated as if weighing evidence carefully in his mind; but when he finished and handed the list back to the young officer, there was no suggestion of indecision in his manner.

"This list has been unwarrantably enlarged by the court chamberlain since it was submitted to me an hour since," he said quietly. "Captain von Tetlow, you will carry out my orders to the letter. Summon these gentlemen, even from the emperor's table, and inform them that their presence is urgently needed in the armory. I do not anticipate the slightest resistance to the summons, but you will take a sufficient guard to insure obedience. I assume the responsibility."

The captain saluted and turned to execute the order, but checked himself suddenly, an apologetic smile on his lips as he pointed to one of the names.

"Pardon, general, but you have evidently made a slip of the pencil," he suggested. "There is a check mark opposite the name of the Countess Larissa."

Count Amyar disregarded the paper, and his eyes looked searchingly into those of the man who held it toward him.

"No, it is no slip of the pencil, captain; but I do not think it will be necessary to summon the countess," he said gravely. "I believe that after the others have left the table she will follow voluntarily. When she leaves the dining room, you will at once escort her to the armory."

"And if she raises objection?"

"You have your orders, sir; I believe that they are sufficiently plain and explicit," answered Count Amyar curtly.

"You will personally escort the lady to the armory."

The flush which the change in his superior officer's manner had brought to the youngster's face vanished instantly, and his face was ghastly in its pallor as he saluted and in silence turned to execute the most unusual commands. The Hungarian watched his every movement until he had left the room, and there was a bitter, cynical smile on his lips as he turned to us.

"One fine young officer of Magyar hussars died in the Festonyi Forest today, and the woman who caused his death escaped," he said, his eyes glowing with hatred. "Come with me, gentlemen, and you will see how great a task it is to guard the Hapsburgs against themselves when the peril is complicated with petticoats."

He opened a heavy door on the side opposite to the one we had entered, and through it the strains of a *czardas*, played as only the famous Festonyi orchestra of Hungarian gypsies can render it, came faintly to our ears. It became louder and more distinct as we walked with Count Amyar through a broad and luxuriously furnished salon, until he paused with his hand on the knob of a small door at the farther end.

"Mr. Williams, I told you that you would have a chance to see our good friend Besnard's decorations," he said, a queer, twisted smile which it was not altogether pleasant to look upon distorting his lips. "If Captain von Tetlow is diligent, you will have not more than five minutes to study them and another picture possibly more interesting —the preliminary steps which a Festonyi takes to prove his fealty to the Hapsburgs and to prevent the emperor's dinner beneath his roof from becoming a Belshazzar's feast."

He turned the knob, and a moment later from a dusky balcony which had been designed originally for the use of the minstrels and troubadours whose romances enlivened the barbaric feasts of the robber barons we looked down on Franz Joseph, of Austro-Hungary, dining in state with more than a hundred guests recruited from the many diverse races and peoples who by conquest and treaty have been gathered into the vast and turbulent empire which he rules.

It was a brilliant picture, the men either in the full-dress, gold-laced uniforms of the various regiments to which they were attached or the no less gorgeous costumes of their respective court offices. The women—of whom there were perhaps a dozen—elaborately gowned and plentifully bejeweled; the host of servitors in their dark-green liveries forming a sufficiently somber background to accentuate the brilliancy of the wonderfully set table, its elaborate plate and china illuminated by the soft radiance from countless candles. But brilliant and dazzling as it was, after the first glimpse I had eyes only for one detail of it: the master of the feast and the woman who sat at his right hand.

A man well over eighty years, his face seamed deeply by more tragic sorrow than fate usually inflicts upon a single individual, but despite his burden of years and crushing adversities still undimmed of eye and undaunted of carriage. A ruler of men with almost despotic power for more than half a century, a keen gambler in that great game of European politics in which provinces and principalities are the stakes, he had known all of the pomp of circumstance and pride of place of those favorites of fortune who inherit the seats of the mighty; but neither wealth nor power had served to bring him personal happiness. A handful of barefooted, tatterdemalion Mexican peons had laughed at his threats of vengeance and denied his pleas for mercy when they placed Maximilian, his favorite brother, against the adobe

wall of Queratero and riddled him with bullets; his passionate protests had been equally futile in restraining his handsome and brilliant son Rudolph in that erratic and dissolute career which came to such a pitiful ending in the mysterious tragedy of Meyerling. The beautiful Elizabeth of Bavaria, whom he had made empress because of his love for her, brutally murdered by an assassin's dagger; his favorite nephew, John Salvador, because the restrictions imposed by his royal birth grew intolerably irksome when they interfered with his love affairs, voluntarily lost to human ken; notorious public scandals in which most of his male and female relatives had been involved; these were but a few of the tragedies and sorrows which had left their imprint upon that careworn but still kindly face.

And beside him in the seat of honor, in violation of all the strict rules of precedence which even he would have hesitated to break in his own palace, the Hofburg, sat a young girl dressed in brilliant canary yellow, the girl who had masqueraded in a hussar uniform and fled from the pursuit of our outriders that afternoon; the girl whose sudden appearance and no less sudden vanishing had startled us but an hour before. Laughing, animated, able with her sallies to bring a twinkle to those somber eyes which had seen so much of sorrow, a smile to the strong, stern lips from which tragedies had wrung so many human protests; she was the incarnation of that feminine charm and gayety which has ever dominated the Hapsburgs.

When we entered she was talking and laughing with the emperor with a freedom from restraint which implied a close friendship and intimacy, but although I gazed at her, fascinated by her beauty and vivacity, I was conscious that Count Amyar's eyes in which shone a malevolent hatred were fixed on her no less intently. In that dusky balcony we were quite invisible; but it seemed as if there must have been something telepathic in that gaze of enmity from the darkness, for as I watched her she lost her easy gayety of manner, and her eyes wandered furtively and nervously about the great dining table.

The brilliant color slowly fled from her face, and she evidently stammered and became confused in her speech, for the emperor bent forward solicitously and gave an order which sent one of the personal attendants who stood behind his chair hurrying from the room and brought another to the other side of the girl who seemed to be on the point of fainting. I forgot our surroundings and everything but the curious scene before me as I leaned eagerly forward to get a better view, but a warning touch on my arm recalled me to myself.

"She has seen the others summoned —that is all!" said Count Amyar, and a glance down the long table showed that a half dozen chairs had been quietly vacated by the guests who occupied them.

CHAPTER VIII.

The scene in the great paved court which we crossed in our hurried return to our own quarters was a striking contrast to that we had so lately watched in the state banqueting hall with its modern decorations and furnishings hiding everything suggestive of crudity. Within we had breathed the scented atmosphere of twentieth-century luxury and refinement and watched the decorous gayety which characterizes the court of the Hapsburgs, the strictest and most exclusive in modern Europe. But without the very air seemed vibrant with that mystery, intrigue, and treason which stain the most brilliant pages of medieval history.

The moon, shining from a cloudless sky, cast weird shadows of the ancient

towers and battlements on the stone pavement of the court, and the sentries of the bodyguard, pacing back and forth with eagle-crested helmets of burnished steel on their heads and ornate breastplates and gorgets revealed by the parting of their long white cavalry capes, were sufficiently suggestive of the mail-clad men at arms who had patrolled those same posts centuries before. But in the deep shadows cast by the massive buildings other figures flitted back and forth, and in such an environment it took no very vivid imagination to garb them in the sinister cloaks of conspiracy, particularly as Count Amyar noted every movement with suspicious and jealous eyes as he strode beside us. In the very middle of the court we met Captain von Tetlow, accompanied by a single orderly.

"I beg to report that your orders have been executed, sir!" he said, his hand at the edge of his crested helmet in salute. "The gentlemen are all in the armory."

"And the lady?" demanded Count Amyar.

The captain hesitated for a moment, embarrassment registered on his face.

"General, the gentlemen obeyed the summons readily enough, but when they found that it had emanated from you they protested against being detained in the armory, and I found it necessary to disarm them and post a strong guard at each exit," he answered. "I cannot employ force to arrest the Countess Larissa."

"Captain von Tetlow, as the host responsible for his majesty's safety under my roof I command absolutely in Castle Festonyi," said Count Amyar sternly. "You will employ force if necessary, but in any case the Countess Larissa is to be brought to me as soon as she leaves the emperor's presence. I will be answerable for his majesty's displeasure—it is your duty and mine to place his safety first."

The captain saluted and made no verbal answer, but in the bright moonlight the expression on his face was that of the gladiator who saluted Cæsar before entering the arena. Count Amyar watched him as he marched away, his broad shoulders squarely set, his spurs jingling, and the scabbard of his long cavalry saber dragging noisily on the stone flagging. For a moment he hesitated as if more than half inclined to recall him, but in the end he shrugged his shoulders and in silence led the way to the apartment which we occupied.

"Gentlemen, your presence for an audience with his majesty is demanded in a half hour," he said as we entered. "I need hardly tell you the reason; he believes that you will be able to tell him of the whereabouts of a man he dearly loves, the long missing Archduke John Salvador, who disappeared nearly a quarter of a century ago and whom you know as Gheradi. You will violate no confidence in imparting the information, for I now stand ready to tell him myself. Gheradi is no longer to be feared; the men who plotted to use him as a lay figure on which to hang their plots are under arrest in the armory and will be most effectually disposed of; the only stimulus which could inspire John Salvador himself to become dangerous will be in safe custody within an hour. I know something of the plot and have already taken measures to checkmate it, but it is necessary that I act quickly to obtain fuller details. I ask you gentlemen to remain here and to prevent any one from following me behind that panel. I have stern work to do, and the secrets of my house seem common property. Tonight the long-disused dungeons of Janos the Vulture will be tenanted, but not by the emperor and his faithful servants as the conspirators had planned."

He stepped to the panel, but when it

stood open in response to his touch he turned again to us.

"Gentlemen, the favor of princes is proverbially fickle," he continued. "To-morrow I may be powerless to serve you, but to-night I can assure your safety. I must warn you to be ready to leave the castle immediately after your audience; a carriage and escort will be in waiting, the train which brought you is held in readiness for your coming, and you will be safe beyond the frontier before the secret police realize that you know too much to be left at liberty. Perhaps in less troublous times I may be able to show you a greater hospitality, but it is the first duty of a Festonyi to insure the safety of those who have eaten of his salt."

He stepped into the dark passage, and Tommy turned to me with a rueful smile as the panel closed behind him.

"The count is of course speaking figuratively," he said dryly. "I fail to remember partaking of salt or anything but deep drafts of moth-eaten atmosphere and conspiracy since our arrival. I don't find it a satisfying diet. Aren't you feeling a bit peckish?"

"Tommy, I'm not hungering for anything but a satisfying explanation of all this mystery," I answered. "Can you make anything out of it? I confess that it is Greek to me."

"No, just a Hapsburg-Austrian goulash, well seasoned with Hungarian paprika," corrected Tommy, dropping his voice as he looked suspiciously about the paneled walls. "Do you remember the details of the Meyerling tragedy?"

"I can recall the details of at least a dozen explanations, each said to be the only true story. They agree only in the main facts, that Rudolph, crown prince of Austria, and the Baroness Marie Vetsera were found dead together in the hunting lodge of Meyerling, some twenty miles from Vienna. Those were the facts which all the world knew; the accounts of the details of the tragedy have been as varied as——"

"But are those the real facts?" interrupted Tommy quickly, and although the question was apparently put to me I knew that it required no answer; that in reality he was searching his own curious inner consciousness. "This much we will admit to be true—that a gay party, of which Rudolph was the host, drove to Meyerling. The Baroness Marie Vetsera was in that party, and it was generally believed that there were other women and several men. We are sure only of the identity of one, Count Hoyos, the boon companion of Rudolph, who galloped back to Vienna to report the tragedy to the emperor—to tell him that the crown prince was dead and a woman had died with him. Of his identity there could be no question; the right of succession to the throne demanded an absolute identification, and the body was brought to Vienna and with due ceremony deposited in the Hapsburg vault beneath the Stephan's Dome. But the body of the woman was most mysteriously spirited away at midnight, shrouded and sitting upright between two trusted officers. She was buried by lantern light in the garden of the Cistercian Abbey of Heiligenkreutz.

"Three days later the mother of Marie, who had hastily left Vienna for Venice on the morning following the tragedy, made public announcement of the death of Marie in the Italian city, supposedly from fever. Every resource of the royal family was strained to prevent the details of the tragedy from becoming public; how successfully is shown by the general admission that for twenty-five years it has been the best-kept secret in Europe. Beyond those bare and supposed facts everything is conjecture—and how many of those alleged facts are trustworthy?"

I made no comment, for I realized

that Tommy expected none; that he was arranging and rearranging the various theories concerning that long past royal tragedy in his own mind, trying to solve the deep mystery in which the power of the Hapsburgs had shrouded it; eagerly searching for something which would show a connection between it and the present conspiracy against the emperor.

"It is nearly twenty-five years since Marie Vetsera is supposed to have died at Meyerling," he continued, speaking so quietly that I had to lean forward to catch the words. "That time has sufficed to obliterate every physical trace of the tragedy; the hunting lodge has been so effectually destroyed that even its former site can no longer be identified. Count Hoyos was banished after relating his ghastly story to the emperor, two young officers whom rumor identified as guests at that tragic supper were within a fortnight reported to have been killed while chamois hunting in the Austrian Tyrol. The very mystery with which the emperor's orders shrouded the affair has served to keep its memory green, and now in the midst of his court he maintains a constant reminder of it. The Countess Larissa, alias Signorina Nemo; the masquerading hussar officer, our lady in yellow, the favored guest of Franz Joseph, is certainly not more than twenty years of age, and yet there can be no doubt——"

But even in his own mind there must have been a serious doubt, for he paused abruptly, evidently unwilling to voice the deduction at which he had mentally arrived.

"There can be no doubt of this much," I prompted eagerly. "The countess is the living image of the woman from whom Gheradi painted that portrait, of the woman whose photograph caused the little German shopkeeper so much trouble."

"And that woman was the Baroness Marie Vetsera, who was supposed to have died with Rudolph at Meyerling!" exclaimed Tommy. "The portrait was painted by a man who loved her, for the artist was blind to everything but the great physical beauty which had enchanted him, unconscious that his skillful and faithful brush was betraying the deviltry in her eyes. And the artist was the Archduke John Salvador, although his cousin and the woman are supposed to have died together because of a hopeless love!"

Tommy was partial to dramatic effects, and he scored, for his announcement solved for me a riddle which had puzzled me for many a day. I had been groping in my memory for something which just eluded me; I could not place the face of which those pictures vaguely reminded me. Now I realized that I must have had in mind one of the many reproductions of photographs of the Vetsera which appeared in the magazines and Sunday supplements whenever a fresh scandal among the many Hapsburgs gave the greatest of them a new interest.

"By Jove, that's a relief!" I exclaimed. "I don't know anything more annoying than an unidentified resemblance, and I must have been more than usually dense, for never was there a more exact resemblance between two human beings."

And then, as if fate had determined to give me the lie, I stood confounded, for the panel which concealed the service stairway opened and a man who was the living, breathing image of Count Amyar Festonyi stepped into the room. Feature for feature and inch for inch he was the exact physical counterpart of our host, and the likeness was heightened by his costume, a duplicate of that picturesque hunting rig which Count Amyar wore when he greeted us at the railway station.

"Gentlemen, as a Festonyi I am of course incapable of eavesdropping, but

I could not help but overhear a statement which was made by one of you a moment since," he said without preface, and to my surprise he practically ignored Tommy and stared fixedly at me. "Physical likeness is indeed a curious thing; to-day it has served to change the destiny of a nation, for Count Amyar's most trusted lieutenants obeyed my orders, believing that they came from his lips. Therefore the precautions which he took are rendered useless, my amiable cousin is at present keeping company with his royal master in the dungeons of Janos the Vulture, and the man he has delighted to hunt like a wild beast rules in Castle Festonyi. My time is limited; I shall have to postpone the settlement of my old score with you, and it may make the final payment for you lighter if you save me precious moments now. Where is the Archduke John Salvador—John Orth, if you prefer?"

Now had Count Amyar demanded an answer to that question I might have found it difficult to refuse it, for with him one felt instinctively that he was masterful because he had earned the right to lead and to command, that personally he measured up to the great position which he had inherited, that he would do nothing nor ask another to do anything which would violate that subtle and indefinable noblesse oblige which is the foundation of the code of honor. But during the boastful preamble which our visitor had volunteered I had watched him closely, and just as instinctively as I trusted and admired Count Amyar, I distrusted and despised this man who was cast in his physical image.

As like as two peas in features, coloring, bodily proportions, and figure, there remained nothing of real likeness on closer acquaintance. Undoubtedly both were Festonyis, cast in the same physical mold, but Amyar had the bearing and presence of those ancestors who had made their family name a great one by doing men's work and doing it better than their contemporaries and rivals during the centuries it has taken the Huns to develop from barbarism to such measure of civilization as they have achieved. His physical counterpart, on the other hand, had just as evidently inherited from the baser side, the weaklings who had substituted intrigue for force, who preferred the poisoned cup and bravo's dagger to the mailed fist and unsheathed sword in gaining their ends. From their common ancestor, the fierce and terrible Janos the Vulture, Amyar might well have inherited that great personal bravery and executive force which made the old warrior easily chief among the robber barons of his generation, while to Boris had been transmitted the avarice, cunning, and cruelty which had gained him his malodorous sobriquet.

Even in his blatant boastfulness and covert threats of torture there was a strong suggestion of insincerity savoring of the hissing syllables and cheap, sneering cynicism of the deep-dyed conspirator of the cheapest melodrama. There was nothing impressive in his claim of victorious conspiracy; he was still furtive in what he believed to be his hour of triumph, and in the shifting eyes and not too successful attempt at a swaggering defiance I recognized something vaguely familiar, so vaguely that I could not place it, but still sufficiently distinct to convince me that this was not our first meeting and that for some long-forgotten reason he had cause to bear me enmity. In any case I had not the slightest intention of answering his question, but Tommy spared me the trouble of framing a refusal.

"Count Boris, you seem to forget that we are merely guests in the Castle Festonyi," he said quietly. "If you do in fact rule here——"

"Aye, guests such as Janos the Vul-

ture entertained so royally in the good old days!" interrupted Boris, with a sneer. "Little flies which my amiable cousin inveigled into his web at the bidding of his royal master! This is no time to talk of the obligations of hospitality. I know why you were brought here; Amyar made a slip, and the emperor learned that you could give him information which he wanted —information which Amyar himself could have supplied any time these twenty years past if it had suited his book. Amyar could not refuse to bring you here, but he would have made it easy for you to refuse to talk. Now I want that same information, and I intend to get it from you if I have to employ the methods which Janos used to sweat gold from the Jews!" The sneer had changed to a snarl which suggested that the employment of the long-disused medieval implements of torture would not be disagreeable, but Tommy met the threat with an indifferent shrug of his shoulders.

"Count Boris, I was not thinking of the obligations of a host to his guests; but, rather, of the obligations of guests to the roof which shelters them!" he said sternly. "Small cause as I have for protecting you, I would save the name of Festonyi from dishonor and spare the head of the house the painful duty of delivering his own flesh and blood——"

"The present head of the house will not find that duty painful!" interrupted Boris savagely. "Twice since Amyar ruled here has he hunted me from his gates and threatened that if I came the third time he would show no mercy. This is the third time, but I come not as a suppliant but master, and now we shall see who pleads for mercy. I can attend to the Festonyi honor without your assistance; it is for you to answer my question." He walked to the secret panel, and placed a finger on the hidden spring.

"I learned every secret of this old place when I roamed about it as a boy, a humble dependent living upon the bounty of my beloved cousin," he continued. "There is a passage behind this panel, and at the end of it are means to make the most obstinate speak. If I press this button——"

"You will die where you stand!" cut in Tommy, and the Hungarian's hand dropped suddenly from the wall as he met Tommy's eyes over the barrel of a revolver whose business end was within a foot of his head. "You have told me that time is short, Count Boris, and I shall conserve the minutes," he continued contemptuously. "It is well for the safety of your skin that I still have my host's honor at heart. You have made a very grave mistake; Count Amyar still rules in Castle Festonyi, and at the present moment he is at the far end of that passage, not a prisoner in the dungeons of Janos the Vulture, but meting out justice to your fellow conspirtors who were arrested before they could act. I would spare him the necessity of delivering his own cousin to the hangman in his own house; I will give you the chance to fade away through the same rat hole by which you sneaked in."

The face of Boris grew livid as he listened, and in that terror-stricken visage there was something which again strove to arouse some dormant memory in my mind, but I had small time for reflection, for even as Boris cowered back and sought with tremulous fingers for the catch of the panel through which he had entered, the other panel opened, and Count Amyar, followed by Johann and old Stephan, stepped into the room from the darkness.

"I thank you for your good intentions; perhaps it might have been better if this foul bird had been permitted to fly, but now it is too late!" he said, turning to Tommy after one contemptuous glance at his cousin, who was

sidling along the paneled wall as if seeking another means of escape. "Twice I have spared this man who has betrayed every trust which was ever reposed in him; I have consistently tried to shield him from the well-deserved punishments for his infamies, but this time there can be no mercy. Johann! Stephan!"

The two servitors looked at him expectantly, and, pointing disdainfully at the cringing Boris, he spoke rapidly in Hungarian. Without verbal answer Johann stepped forward and grasped Boris by the arm, and for the first time the servant's stolid face revealed a strong inner emotion. Stephan hobbled painfully to the entrance to the passage, and Boris, at the last attempting a pitiful effort at swaggering bravado, followed him without protest.

"Gentlemen, your arrival here seems to have forced the hands of the most desperate conspirators who have ever plotted against the Hapsburg dynasty and the unity of Austro-Hungary!" said Count Amyar hurriedly as the panel slid noiselessly back into place. "Disaffected officers of many of the Hungarian regiments planned to use the maneuvers as a means to force abdication on the emperor before proclaiming the independence of Hungary. The Red Army, composed entirely of Austrian troops, is equipped only for sham fighting, but the Blue Invaders, almost exclusively Hungarian and Slav levies, have been secretly supplied with ball ammunition, and their leaders planned a coup for two days from now. It was absolutely necessary that the emperor should be a prisoner before the signal was given, for the Hungarians would never have resisted his personal appeal for support and allegiance. Through his knowledge of the secrets of the castle my cousin planned to have him seized and imprisoned in the dungeons when the woman who was to be the bait for the trap had enticed him to this apartment. The conspirators knew why you had been brought here, and realizing that the news which you would convey would cause the emperor to forget the maneuvers and hurry back to Vienna they planned to act to-night. I have arrested all of the officers who were concerned in the conspiracy who are within the castle, and my own retainers, who are guarding the roads from the east and stationed in the surrounding forest, will be able to hold any attack in check until the Austrians can be equipped."

Tommy had listened with narrowing eyes, a sure indication with him of intense concentration, and he shook his head doubtfully.

"Count Amyar, your cousin bears all the earmarks of an able liar, but just the same he may have inadvertently spoken the truth when he talked with us for a few minutes since," he said. "He believed that their plans had been successfully carried out within the castle, that the emperor and yourself were prisoners, and he boasted that he had taken advantage of the close physical likeness between you to hoodwink your officers. They took his orders, believing that they came from your lips."

Count Amyar listened at first incredulously, but a moment's reflection must have convinced him that the thing was at least a possibility, for he strode rapidly toward the door.

"I had established a cordon through which a mouse could not have escaped from the castle!" he exclaimed. "If it is true that it has been broken I can trust no one but myself to prevent warning being carried to the Blue Army and an early investment of all the passes. Gentlemen, I will ask you to accompany me—the Countess Larissa must be detained at all hazards, and I trust no Austrian who has fallen under the spell of her beauty!"

A moment later we were running at top speed across the great courtyard,

running because it was only too evident that Count Amyar's misgivings had been fully justified, for in defiance of his strict orders to Captain von Tetlow the guard at the main portal had opened one of the great gates. The captain's charger, a magnificent thoroughbred, was held by an orderly in front of it. Beside the horse stood the captain and a woman dressed in bright canary yellow, and even as Count Amyar gave a savage shout of protest the young officer swung her up to the saddle. It all happened so quickly that before we could reach them the horse had dashed through the open gateway and across the drawbridge, its rider swaying insecurely as she tried to accommodate her most inappropriate riding costume to the military saddle.

At the captain's sharp command the guard slammed and fastened the massive door, and with his own hands the young officer released the mechanism which held the ancient and long-disused portcullis above the vaulted passage which led to it. It fell with a crash, effectually blocking the exit and preventing the immediate pursuit of the Festonyi hussars, who had galloped into the courtyard in response to Count Amyar's shout. And then, convinced that he had done everything within his power to insure the escape of the woman he had been ordered to arrest, Captain von Tetlow turned to us, a smile which was half triumphant, half apologetic on his boyish face, and with his own revolver voluntarily paid the penalty for his breach of trust.

The Hungarian glanced at the huddled body which had fallen almost at his feet, and while his men worked hopelessly at the rusted chains and winches which raised the portcullis he motioned to us to follow him as he walked slowly back toward our quarters.

"No excuse is accepted for keeping royalty waiting!" he said bitterly. "I should be in the saddle, pursuing that girl, for after to-day I can trust no man to resist her. I must recall the permission which I gave to you to tell of Gheradi at your audience; with the Larissa at liberty anything is possible, and I can take no chances. It may take hours to clear that infernal portcullis from the main gateway, but there are a dozen posterns by which you can gain exit, and you must leave as soon as the emperor dismisses you. I know that I can rely upon your discretion."

He paused abruptly as we entered our apartment, for through the open windows we heard the warning challenge of a sentry and then a single shot followed by a perfect fusillade. We rushed to the narrow casements, hardly wider than arrow slits in the thick wall of the tower.

Below us in the courtyard squads of men were hurrying as if to repel a sudden attack from without, but beyond the battlements it was a peaceful enough panorama which the bright moonlight revealed. Across the valley the road over which we had traveled that afternoon lay like a white ribbon in gracefully ascending curves, and at the very top, just gaining the shelter of the forest, I could see a galloping horse, its rider a figure in bright canary yellow.

But on the road which led from the castle to the valley, straight and steep that it might be the more easily defended, bare of bordering trees which might have afforded shelter to an attacking force, galloped another horse at breakneck speed, its rider crouched low on its neck to offer the smallest possible target for the hail of bullets which was sent after him by the sentries on the battlements. Man and horse must have borne charmed lives, for escape they did unscathed, and we saw the rider straighten up in the saddle and wave his hand derisively as his mount breasted the easier ascent on the

other side of the valley. Naturally we had not been able to recognize form nor features in that tricky light, but something in the gesture must have identified the fugitive to Count Amyar, for he shrank back from the casement as if that raised hand had threatened a blow.

"Gentlemen, even royalty must wait until we get to the bottom of this thing, for my house seems quick with treason and treachery!" he exclaimed. "That is my cousin, Count Boris, whom you saw me deliver to the tender mercies of Stephan and Johann, with instructions to give him the same chance to escape the penalty for his treachery which you saw Captain von Tetlow so eagerly accept. If those men, whom I should unhesitatingly trust with my life and honor, have betrayed me, whom can I trust—will you come with me?"

He evidently took our assent for granted, for without waiting for an answer he crossed to the panel which concealed the hidden passage through which Boris had been taken only a half hour before.

We were close behind him, so close that he collided with us when he jumped back quickly as the panel opened, for Johann, his clothing saturated with blood from an ugly gash in his neck, had been leaning against the other side, and, deprived of his support, he stumbled into the room and fell at his master's feet. Bending over him the count attempted to stanch the flow with his handkerchief, listening intently to the words the blanching lips mumbled in the Magyar tongue which we could not understand.

In any case, I would have been but an indifferent listener, for glancing beyond them I saw in the semiobscurity of the passage beyond another figure huddled on the stone flooring, a figure which retained its grotesque distortion even in death.

CHAPTER IX.

Count Amyar rose slowly to his feet, and after a hasty glance into the passage closed the panel and turned to us with a despairing gesture. Johann lay dead at his feet, and before he threw a rug over the quiet figure I saw that in death his face was no more stolid and imperturbable than it had been in life.

"There is so much that you do not know of our family and political history that I can never hope to make you understand all this; even to me—born and reared in the atmosphere which this old castle typifies—it is so barbaric and medieval that it seems hardly credible!" exclaimed Count Amyar. "My cousin has always plotted against the Hapsburgs and for the independence of Hungary; his father was one of the leaders of the last revolution and died in exile after it was crushed. Our house was divided in that terrible struggle. My father gave his allegiance to the young emperor, and I have always stood stanchly for the unity of the empire, for I realize that it is only unity which makes it great. The devious paths of political conspiracy have made of Boris the thing which you saw—a furtive, shifty, unwholesome rascal. Twice I have risked my favor with his majesty, my fortune, and even my life to save him because of the name which he bore. But to-night, when I discovered that he had plotted to kill or imprison the emperor when he was a guest in my house, I could not forgive. I gave him the same chance that his fellow conspirators who are prisoners in the dungeons of Janos the Vulture have been given—suicide to-night or a drumhead court-martial and the hangman's noose at daybreak. He refused to take the easier way, and old Stephan, unwilling that a Festonyi should disgrace the family name by dying on the scaffold, be-

trayed the trust I had reposed in him and arranged his escape from the castle. When Johann found that he had been tricked he hastened here to give the alarm, but Stephan followed and stabbed him while he was fumbling with the fastening of that panel. Then the poor old wretch paid the penalty which Boris was too cowardly to pay and drove the dagger into his own heart. I believe that his only regret in dying was that he could not have killed both of you, that no strangers might carry away the secrets of this house, the knowledge of the stain upon the honor of the Festonyis."

"Truly, the secrets of this house are well kept and the honor of the Festonyis is a sacred thing!" commented a voice behind us, and, turning, we faced the Emperor Franz Joseph, who had entered the room unannounced, and stood watching us with eyes undimmed by his great age, his carriage as erect and soldierly as that of the youngest subaltern of his bodyguard.

Count Amyar's heels clicked together as he saluted, and then unslinging his saber he advanced, again saluted, and, dropping on one knee, held the weapon out with its hilt toward the emperor.

"If your majesty questions my loyalty——" he said, but the emperor interrupted him with an impatient gesture, declining the proffered surrender, and motioned to him to rise.

"I should never question your loyalty, count, but I have just cause to criticize most bitterly the mistakes of your judgment!" he said sternly. "It is hardly a half hour since I learned the truth—that for years you have been in possession of the information which I have so vainly tried to obtain; that you have kept silent when you saw me dispatch fleets to scour the seas, emissaries to ransack the far corners of the earth, secret agents to investigate every rumor which aroused hope. Is my information correct; is it possible that for all these bitter years you could have given me in three words the information which I have so vainly sought; that for all these bitter years you have known where Johann can be found?"

"Yes, sire; it is at least partly true; I have known for several years past," answered Count Amyar frankly and fearlessly. "I was the president of that secret court of honor which gave his highness the choice of three courses; death, voluntary exile—or exposure."

Franz Joseph looked at him with blazing eyes, but Count Amyar did not flinch.

"Then my information was correct!" exclaimed the emperor savagely. "Because of a petty court intrigue, you and your brother officers dared to force banishment upon the one man who might have been a comfort to me in my great sorrow, who might have lightened the tremendous burden which my shoulders have been forced to bear alone!"

"We acted for what we believed to be the best interests of Austro-Hungary and the honor of the Hapsburgs, your majesty," answered Count Amyar quietly, but neither in his voice nor bearing was there anything apologetic. "His highness had nothing of which to complain in his sentence; he was just enough to admit that it was inevitable. Had he remained in Austria after exposure the people would have torn him to pieces."

The emperor smiled incredulously.

"I have not found in my long experience such vindictive bitterness in my people against those who have plotted against the throne," he said. "At the very worst, Johann's fault was a venial one; a word of censure from me would have been adequate punishment for the petty conspiracy into which pique over my scolding for his devotion to the Stubel had led him; a plot of which I knew every detail as

it was hatched. Count Amyar Festonyi, I believe that you were actuated by honest motives; because of that and the love I have borne you and your father before you, I disregard the advice of those who told me of your mistake. I do not place you under arrest; I condemn you to a reparation, rather than a punishment. I relieve you from your military and court duties. You will at once and with all possible haste go to America and convey to his highness, the Archduke Johann Salvador my full pardon and forgiveness for offenses which I have long since forgotten. And on the day that you bring him back to me, that pardon and forgiveness will include yourself."

Then in his courtesy the emperor turned to us, and in a few simple and kindly words thanked us for coming to Castle Festonyi, ignoring the fact that we had been brought there virtually as prisoners. It was perhaps as well that he had looked away from Count Amyar, for the Hungarian's face expressed such a variety of emotions —amazement, chagrin, rebellion, and, at last, a great relief, that his majesty might have been suspicious that he had not learned all of the truth, but in the few minutes in which the emperor chatted with us he regained his self-control.

"Count Amyar, I have learned to forgive in a hard school," continued the emperor after again thanking us and apparently dismissing us forever from his mind. "You will be good enough to emulate me and at once release the gentlemen whom you have placed under arrest. The Countess Larissa explained to me the very natural mistake into which you had fallen and confessed her share in hoodwinking you."

"And your majesty remains here?" asked Count Amyar quickly.

The emperor shook his head.

"No, I am returning at daybreak to Vienna," he said. "The discovery of Johann and the probability of his quick home-coming make many changes imperative. If I did not begrudge every moment which prolongs that separation I should ask you gentlemen to accompany me for the first part of your long journey."

"Sire, I shall beg that privilege of you!" exclaimed Count Amyar eagerly. "Mistakes I may have made, but God knows they have not been willful ones, and I have always been devoted to the service and safety of your majesty. I can set out upon my mission with a lighter heart if I know that I have left your majesty in the safety of the Hofburg."

The suggestion of a smile softened the stern lips beneath the white mustache.

"Always suspicious of conspiracies, my dear Amyar!" he protested. "For sixty years I have reigned in the midst of them, but I am always unharmed. I bear a charmed life, Amyar; an accursed one, for I have lived to see one after another of those I love taken from me. I shall travel with light escort, for I have nothing to fear and the maneuvers must not be interrupted. Only the court officials and the ladies will accompany me." He paused for a moment, and there was a twinkle in the somber eyes when he continued: "On just one condition I am tempted to grant your request; that you will forget the suspicions which the innocent mischief of a young girl have aroused in your mind and that you will devote yourself on the journey to making your peace with the Countess Larissa."

Count Amyar took a step backward, and for the first time there was a look of defiance in the eyes which met those of the emperor without flinching.

"Sire, such innocent mischief when it mixes in the affairs of your empire and corrupts and sacrifices your most faithful servants is too dangerous to be

trifled with," he said. "Good men are sacrificed to it; they forget their allegiance and pay for their forgetfulness with their lives. To-day in the Festonyi Forest the Countess Larissa met young Algar Karonyi, my personal aid who commanded the men I had posted there to insure your majesty against annoyance while you were my guest."

"Certainly; she told me of it—it was a sentimental tryst," said the emperor.

"And did she also tell you that after she galloped madly away from the trysting place Major Karonyi was found with a bullet from his own revolver through his brain, his sabretasche rifled of the sealed orders intrusted to him for delivering to the division commanders of the Red Army?"

"Stop!" commanded the emperor sternly. "You make an accusation, the first definite one, against the Countess Larissa. It is only fair that she should have a chance to answer it. You will come with me, sir, and repeat it in her presence."

Count Amyar saluted, but stood firm as the emperor half turned to leave the room.

"Pardon, your majesty, but we shall have to ride far and fast to carry out your orders!" he said. "I desired to make that charge, and more than one hour since I ordered Captain von Tetlow to bring the lady to me as soon as she left your majesty's presence. Captain von Tetlow betrayed his trust; he opened the gates that she might escape on his own charger, and so soon as she was safely without the walls paid the debt of his dishonor. He lies in the guardroom, dead by his own hand, and the Countess Larissa is at large, bent on God knows what innocent mischief! Your majesty, as seneschal of Castle Festonyi, I have arrested men who plotted against your majesty's safety while my roof sheltered you. Time was short, and to gain exact information I adopted measures long unemployed in the dungeons of Janos the Vulture. I obtained what I wanted, but even my most trusted retainer betrayed me when he had to choose between the Festonyis and the Hapsburgs. He, too, lies dead by his own hand, and this poor devil paid for loyalty with his life."

He threw aside the rug which concealed Johann's body, and the emperor gazed at it with unconcealed horror, but there was something in his face which told me that it was not the sight of the body of this humble pawn in the great game of conspiracy which caused the distension of those pupils, the deepening of the lines of sorrow and anguish between the shaggy eyebrows. Over and beyond that poor clay he was looking at a past of horror into the disordered and bloodstained room at Meyerling, where his only son lay a corpse; at the beautiful face of the Empress Elizabeth, dead by an assassin's dagger; at the grim picture of his brother, Maximilian, fearlessly facing a firing squad of mongrel soldiers in the glorious Mexican sunrise.

He stood before us a pitiful figure as he realized that even in his hours of relaxation he was surrounded by treachery. In spite of his imperial trappings he was only a man; it was the emperor who had known the humiliation of losing the rich Italian provinces, the defeat of his armies, the checkmating of his diplomacy, and he had found solace for losses in one direction, in gains in another. Bosnia and Herzegovina had compensated for Lombardy and Venice, the checking of the Balkan states in their ambitious march to the Adriatic had softened the sting of Magenta, Solferino, and the disastrous Seven Weeks' War which ended at Sadowa.

But, gratifying as might have been the unification of the empire, the acquisition of the long-coveted provinces

and the prosperity of his people to the emperor, there was little which could comfort him in his personal life; not a single high light to relieve the tragic gloom which shrouded his wide family relationship. He stood revealed as a crushed and broken man, living on in lonely grief, and it was the man and not the emperor whom I mentally resolved to serve, vowing to myself that I should do my best to give him such comfort as the return of the long missing John Orth might bring.

CHAPTER X.

It was after midnight when we left Castle Festonyi and started the return journey over that white ribbon of road. The emperor had shown not the slightest sign of fear or apprehension for his personal safety, but Count Amyar had urged him so persistently to accompany us that he finally consented, actuated more, I believe, by his desire to question us as to Gheradi than by consideration of danger.

There was no suspicion in the castle that the emperor was deserting his court; the same carriage which had brought us to the castle was driven to the entrance of the tower, and again it carried three passengers, but Franz Joseph, wrapped to the eyes in a long cavalry cape, had replaced Count Amyar. On the far side of the drawbridge the same escort of outriders awaited us, and no one in the castle suspected that Count Amyar himself was among the riders instead of in the carriage, for he had quietly slipped out through one of the small posterns a half hour before.

It was a whirlwind flight through the bright moonlight, the postilions lashing our horses to top speed, Count Amyar with marvelous skill keeping his charger so close to the carriage door that at any moment in the wild ride he could have touched the emperor's shoulder with his hand, the light riders of the escort surrounding us so closely that stirrups touched, and the Magyars formed a solid living rampart between us and such menace as the bordering forest might hold.

There was not the slightest molestation, however, although I learned later that the Hungarian lancers, who, unknown to us, rode as recklessly through the forest on our flanks, left more than one lifeless man in their wake, and through the whole journey the emperor sat in silence, his face in repose unutterably sad.

It was not until we reached the little railway station that he roused himself, and then until we arrived in Vienna he was as animated as he had previously been inert, but he was deaf to the suggestions of Count Amyar as to the handling of the conspiracy against him and spent the entire time in questioning us minutely regarding our acquaintance with Gheradi and the smallest particulars of his life in New York which we could furnish.

Now to convey even an approximate idea of that bohemian atmosphere of the house in Greenwich Village to the ruler of Austria-Hungary, a man who had spent his life surrounded by the strict ceremonial of the most exclusive and formal court in Europe, seemed an absurdly impossible task. But even eighty years of kingship had not sufficed to crush the wonderful humanity of Franz Joseph, that quality that has made him personally idolized by the very people who are bitterest against the Austrian rule which destiny has imposed upon them, that quality which has led the Viennese to receive him with the demonstration of love and loyalty usually accorded to victors, when he has returned to his capital at the head of the remnants of a vanquished and shattered army. And Mr. Thomas Williams is something of a wizard in getting into sympathy with his fellow

men from the highest to the lowest, and possesses a very vivid power of description, so at the end of that four-hour journey I believe that Franz Joseph had so far succeeded in gaining a sympathetic knowledge of Gheradi's surroundings that he would have recognized at sight most of the habitués of his table and would himself have fitted in as naturally as one of the humblest guests at the feast.

His majesty seemed to take it quite as a matter of course that we should accompany Count Amyar on his mission to America, and it is eloquent proof of his personal magnetism that never for a moment did we think of raising the slightest objection, although the journey upset other plans which we had made long in advance.

The heavy burden of accumulated sorrows on his heart seemed lightened when he bid us bon voyage and God-speed on our journey, and there was even a twinkle in his eye as he pressed a small packet into Tommy's hand at parting and gave him half-whispered instructions concerning it. Now I am not unduly curious, but Tommy's reticence in regard to the packet and his instructions was only a shade less irritating than the sudden reserve which Count Amyar developed in our record-breaking journey across Europe and our passage across the Atlantic in the swift Austrian cruiser which awaited us with steam up at Cherbourg.

Beyond the brief announcement that the Countess Larissa and Boris had both succeeded in eluding pursuit and the subsequent search of the secret-service officers he volunteered nothing save that a constant stream of telegrams and wireless messages which he received on our journey assured him that his quick action had succeeded in preventing further developments in the plot against the emperor.

Tommy, to a casual observer, seemed absolutely indifferent, but I knew him well enough to realize that he was biding his time, patching together in that strange mind of his such things as we had discovered, supplementing them with curious bits of information long stored away in his card index of a memory in an attempt to solve the riddle in advance of the dénouement which we felt instinctively was awaiting us in New York.

On the journey he kept himself sedulously in the background, leaving everything to the very capable hands of Count Amyar, but we had hardly stepped from the cruiser's launch at the Battery landing stage before he demonstrated that on his native heath Mr. Thomas Williams intended to be the star in any production in which he was cast.

"You gentlemen will be good enough to accompany me and perhaps lead me by the quickest route to the Arch—to Mr. Gheradi's house?" said Count Amyar, a note of the imperative in the interrogation which would have seemed entirely natural in Castle Festonyi, but which was just a trifle irritating in the shadow of Castle Garden.

"Count Amyar, for me the nearest route to Mr. Gheradi's house lies through my studio, where I shall write a note asking his permission to call upon him," answered Tommy quietly, but there was an expression in his eyes and a straightening of his lips which made the answer almost a rebuke.

The Hungarian looked at him in surprise, but he was sufficiently wise to realize and accept the changed conditions, and the inevitable change in our mutual relationship, and to accept it with at least a pretense of good grace.

"Pardon me; I had no intention of dragooning you," he said quickly. I thought there was a trace of regret in his eyes as he glanced at the Austrian ensign which hung from the stern of the launch and then at the American flag which stood out brilliantly from

the tall staff in Battery Park. "Only you can hardly realize the importance of immediate action, the necessity of reaching him before that girl or my cousin sees him."

"Perhaps. But if I do not it is only because you have not seen fit to enlighten me," interrupted Tommy. "There has been ample opportunity, Count Amyar; you did not hesitate to use us when our services were of value, and I think we have deserved a certain amount of confidence. In any case, I shall not be one of a surprise party to Mr. Gheradi."

"And if I go alone?" demanded Count Amyar.

Tommy shrugged his shoulders. "That is your own affair," he said as he motioned to a cruising taxi to come to the curb. "This is hardly the place to discuss the matter, and I think you will lose nothing by coming with us. We have traveled so fast that we must have several days the advantage of the people whom you wish to forestall, for they could hardly have had the same advantages in smoothing their path."

Count Amyar's first reply was something which I strongly suspect was a round Hungarian oath, and after that relief he lapsed into English.

"It would be a brave man who ventured to assert that anything was impossible for that pair of devils!" he exclaimed. "Boris is a human flea; you think you have him safely between your finger tips, but he always escapes to appear in the most unexpected place. As for Marie——"

"So her name, *too*, is Marie?" said Tommy when the Hungarian paused as if to find words to express his opinion of her vanishing ability.

"Yes, her name, too, is Marie," he answered, but he was careful to omit the emphasis which Tommy had employed. "You are right, Mr. Williams; this is hardly the place to discuss matters, and I can see that you will not yield without discussion, so I will accompany you."

"Not discussion—rather explanation," amended Tommy, and there was a suspicion of triumph in his very expressive eyes as he smilingly invited the Hungarian to precede us into the taxi.

Duck Sing, our invaluable and imperturbable Chinaman, opened the door after we had climbed the long stairs which formed the most uninviting approach to our studio apartment, and Count Amyar gave an exclamation of admiration as he glanced about the treasure house which Tommy modestly called his workshop.

"But, my dear Mr. Williams, I made a most grievous mistake when I selected the artist to redecorate my old dungeon of a house and try to bring it up to the standards of modern civilization!" he said. "Why have you hidden your light under a bushel? Why have you concealed your genius from the world? Only genius could have conceived such a room as this—you have achieved that for which I have striven unsuccessfully, although I have paid liberally to secure the world's greatest artists. You have given to a veritable museum of treasures the atmosphere of a home—I have succeeded only in making the museum!"

Tommy was too human to be unsusceptible to flattery, and he grinned like a Cheshire cat.

"Perhaps the world remains ignorant of my talent because I have a perverse habit of getting hold of the wrong end of things," he answered. "There were two possibilities in Castle Festonyi, for example—one that I might be called there in my professional capacity to do work which any real artist would risk a limb to get a chance at—the other that I might reach there only to risk my neck in a mystery and conspiracy which was absolutely none of my busi-

ness. Well—you know which end of it I drew."

"But there is always the possibility of the other opportunity!" exclaimed Count Amyar eagerly, and, strange as it may seem, I realized that he was perfectly sincere; that for the moment he had forgotten everything but the old rock cradle of his race. "The castle is too awful; every tower and room in it is associated with tragedy or violence, and it would need the hand of such a master as yourself to hide all of that, to banish the memories. You would have a treasure house with which to work, you could name your own reward, and you could give it such an air as this place has acquired—for this building is old enough to have known its tragedies, and yet no suggestion remains."

"Yes, even this particular room has known rather tragic happenings, but no man ever got anything more than was justly coming to him here, so it isn't haunted," answered Tommy grimly. "But before we would consider any new proposition I would remind you that there is still unfinished business before the house, Count Amyar. Do you wish me to write Gheradi and ask his permission to call?"

The Hungarian returned to the subject with evident reluctance.

"Mr. Williams, to be perfectly frank, I am undecided at the moment as to just what I want," he said slowly. "You have heard the command which was laid upon me, a command which my position obliges me to obey, but which my experience and judgment urge me to disregard."

He paused, and after watching him expectantly for a moment Tommy summoned Duck Sing and ordered luncheon.

"You will indeed have to be perfectly frank if you are going to convince me that you should listen to your judgment instead of your duty," he said when the Chinaman, with a smiling "Can do!" padded away to his kitchen. "Perhaps it will make it easier for you if I tell you that I have already reasoned out what I believe to be the main facts. In the last analysis you fear that should Gheradi be restored to his proper place in the world he would become the focus of renewed plots against the emperor."

"Rather, a stimulus to those discontented Hungarians who constantly plot for a division of the empire and the independence of Hungary," amended Count Amyar. "You saw the most desperate and most nearly successful of their plans frustrated by a hair's breadth; but the organization still exists, and with a capable Hapsburg head would be successful and would reduce Hungary, which is great and powerful only in combination, to the unimportance of the individual Balkan states. The Archduke John Salvador is capable."

"Was!" corrected Tommy dryly. "You have not seen him in many years."

"But he has not made a move in all that time of which I have been ignorant," protested Count Amyar. "I know of your association with him, but things have happened in his house of which you are ignorant, although I knew of them. I was responsible for the cutting off of his income; it was a measure directed by prudence when the Countess Larissa appeared in Budapest and Vienna. She was only a little girl then, but I recognized the peril."

"Count Amyar, who is the Countess Larissa?" asked Tommy bluntly. "I am not trying to force confidence, but she bears a title, and that can hardly be spurious, as it is recognized at the Austrian court."

"It is a Bohemian title—genuine, of course; but I doubt if her right to it would stand serious challenge," answered Count Amyar. "Count Larissa was an officer in the Imperial Bodyguard many years ago, a member of

the gay set which surrounded the crown prince. After Rudolph's death the members of that coterie lost favor at court, and Count Larissa was reported to have lost his life by a fall while chamois hunting. But after an absence of several years he reappeared at Prague, bringing an infant whom he acknowledged as his daughter. He had large estates which after his death a year later descended to her, together with the title; there were reasons for not contesting the claim and reopening an old scandal, but I know that the usual certificates of marriage and birth were never produced."

"Count Amyar, has her appearance at court caused no comment—has there been no recognition of the wonderfully close resemblance to——"

"Please!" interrupted the Hungarian quickly. "We are treading on dangerous ground; there is one subject which I dare not discuss, but that very resemblance is the thing which makes her dangerous. You knew of her masquerading in Berlin as Signorina Nemo—it was because of that marvelous likeness that that campaign was planned. Mr. Williams, it is only within the past three years that the Hungarian revolutionary party has known that John Orth did not perish on the Patagonian coast, but they have been unable to find him. They hoped through that marvelous likeness to bring him from his hiding place, and that is why they planned to make the Countess Larissa a public character under another name. She has a remarkable voice, and her public appearance in the European capitals would make her face familiar to the world. John Orth, even in hiding, would be sure to see a reproduction of her picture and betray his identity.

"You know that the scheme was blocked, but it was only by using all of the influence of Austrian diplomacy that we caused her banishment from Berlin and the confiscation of the photographs which had been sown broadcast. They achieved one purpose, however; they must have satisfied themselves that John Orth was not hiding in Germany, and then your accidental involvement in the photographic tangle and the subsequent events must have given them the clew. They must have guessed that you were brought to Castle Festonyi to give the emperor the very information which they wanted, and that would not suit their book. The archduke, Johann Salvador, pardoned by the emperor and restored to favor and his estates would be one man—John Orth, rescued from obscurity and with the crown of Hungary as a reward for the aid of his name to the revolutionary cause would be another—and the one they were after."

Tommy had listened courteously to the explanation, but it was evident that it possessed none of the intense interest for him that it did for me, and he smiled as Count Amyar settled back in his chair as if satisfied that he had told everything which was necessary.

"That is all very well as far as it goes, but you have told me nothing which I had not already reasoned out," he said quietly. "There is the one vital question which you have not answered. I shall not intrude on forbidden ground; that is a matter of twenty-five years past; the subject of our question is not more than twenty years of age, so there can hardly be a connection. In a nutshell, Count Amyar—who is the Countess Larissa?"

The Hungarian straightened up in his chair, an expression of irritation on his face. I suspected that an angry retort trembled on his lips, but from them came only an exclamation of surprise. He was facing the entrance door to which our backs were turned, and his eyes looked steadily beyond us. Tommy and I both turned to confront Emerald Bill, whom Duck Sing had

silently admitted, but despite the fact that he was arrayed in a glory that would have shamed Solomon, with priceless diamonds replacing the conventional waistcoat buttons and their fellows glistening in his tie, on his fingers, and even on his walking stick, we had no eyes for him.

For beside him, her eyes sparkling with a brightness which dimmed her escort's jewels, stood the girl whom we had last seen galloping to liberty across the drawbridge which spanned the moat of the Castle Festonyi.

Her cheeks were flushed with the exertion of the long climb, and she was evidently surprised to find such an apartment after the sordid approach, for she seemed oblivious to us as she glanced about the room; but Tommy, advancing with outstretched hand, recalled her to herself, and she took a step forward to meet him. A smile which intensified the marvelous resemblance to Gheradi's enshrined portrait was on her pretty lips, her daintily gloved hand was raised to meet Tommy's; but suddenly both color and smile faded from her face, the gloved hand made a quick movement to her bosom and then dropped helplessly to her side.

Count Amyar had risen to his feet, and as Tommy advanced she saw his face. For just an instant she stood irresolute, and then, gathering up her skirts, she turned and darted through the doorway, so startling the usually impassive Duck Sing that he automatically closed and locked the door after the bird had flown.

CHAPTER XI.

Count Amyar was the first to recover from the astonishment which that unexpected flight caused, and he sprang for the door, almost knocking Duck Sing from his slippered feet. But while he was furiously wrenching at the unfamiliar fastenings, Tommy placed a restraining hand on his arm.

"Your pursuit would be as hopeless as the search for a needle in a haystack, and if by a miracle you succeeded in overtaking her you would probably end up in a police cell after your head had been cracked by a nightstick!" he protested. "This isn't Austro-Hungary, Count Amyar."

"But first I should make it impossible for her to reach the archduke!" exclaimed the Hungarian furiously. "At all hazard I must see him first; the fate of an empire——"

Emerald Bill, his eyes glistening as dangerously as his diamonds, jumped forward and confronted the Hungarian.

"You go way back and sit down!" he said, and never had Count Amyar among his feudal retainers given a more peremptory order nor one which it would have been more dangerous to disobey. "No skirt under my wing is going to be chased by a mess of goulash and I'll give you something hotter than paprika if you——"

"Steady there!" said Tommy as he stepped between them.

Emerald Bill gave back grudgingly, and Count Amyar stared at him in amazement, as little able to understand the gorgeous garniture of jewels as the reason for this singular person's anger.

"I expect that there will be no misunderstanding after the explanation which I am sure Mr. Bradley will be glad to make," continued Tommy quietly. "Let me introduce you—Count Amyar Festonyi, Mr. Bradley—alias Emerald Bill."

There was an interval of strained silence in which anything might have happened, for Emerald Bill's resentment had not cooled and the Hungarian was only just beginning to realize that this curiously attired person threatened him, but Tommy's magnetism made him a wonderfully successful peacemaker. And as the two men,

as opposite as the poles in race, tradition, and all the development which environment and breeding imply—looked into each other's eyes I think that each recognized in the other a big man, a strong man, and, above all, a square man.

"I suppose the humble-apology stuff will be up to me, and I'll pull it if Mr. Williams tells me that I'm in wrong, count," said Bradley frankly. "If you are peeved because one good looker beat it I can make that square—I'll introduce you to twenty that are right up in the same class with the signorina, and, believe me, that's going some!"

Count Amyar looked at him helplessly; the patois of Broadway was Greek to him.

"You are most certainly getting in wrong now, Bill, and the quicker we set things straight the less there will be to explain," interposed Tommy smilingly. "You gentlemen will lunch with us and we will talk it all over."

"If it's up to me, I'll shoot first," said Emerald Bill after he had helped himself to a most generous portion of the tempting assortment of hors d'œuvres which Duck Sing offered to him. "I didn't even know that you had returned until the signorina wised me up and asked me to bring her here. She had pulled a lot of stuff about a long-lost brother or something of that kind on me, but I couldn't help her out and she said that you could—a guy named Salvador or some such moniker that I've never heard of."

Tommy interposed quickly after a warning glance at Count Amyar.

"But tell us about the signorina—who is she? Where did you meet her?" he asked.

"Why, from what she told me I doped it out that you had almost been boy and girl together!" answered Bradley, and then he hit the table with his jeweled fist so hard that the silver jingled. "Say, when I come to think of it, that isn't quite right!" he corrected. "I don't believe that she ever claimed to know you, but she seemed to have you so dead to rights that I took it for granted—said she had lamped you very recently in Europe and that you would probably be here to-day. Knew that we were friends, too; that's why she asked me to bring her here."

"Never mind that part—who is she?" reiterated Tommy.

Emerald Bill chuckled. "Unless you're trying to string me I expect you haven't had time to look over the papers!" he protested. "Amberstein's press agent pulled a good stunt—had a delegation of newspaper boys and snapshotters to meet her on the *Olympic* at quarantine, and she had a half front page in all the evenings and a smashing write-up in the morning editions. She took supper with me last night, and I'll bet that ninety per cent of the people in the restaurant recognized her from her pictures, although she doesn't go on until Monday night at Amberstein's. Abe took me to call on her at her request—she told him that she knew I was a friend of yours."

"She is billed to appear Monday night at Amberstein's?"

"Sure—Signorina Nemo, the wonderful contralto who is unable to appear in Europe because she is of royal birth and all that good old press-agent bunk. Abe will have easy little old New York going sideways before Monday night, but he says that she's there with the goods when it comes to singing, and she's sure got the front row of the pony ballet backed off the stage when it comes to a show-down on looks. Now, with your kind permission, I'll sample this chop suey while you do the spieling."

Count Amyar had listened in bewilderment.

"Is it that her photographs appear here as in Berlin?" he asked, his own

ordinarily perfect idiom affected by the unaccustomed jargon.

Tommy nodded. "Just that—only more so—and if they escape Anthony Comstock there will be no lese-majesty thing to suppress them," he answered grimly. "You were right in one thing, Count Amyar; she had the heels of us in crossing, but it has apparently done little good—she has found the city, but she can't locate the street and number. Also, the intelligence department must have broken down, for she did not know that you came with us."

Emerald Bill had finished his hors d'œuvres, and he looked at Count Amyar with twinkling eyes.

"There's no use in trying to string me, Williams," he protested. "I saw your friend last evening; he was leaving the signorina's apartment when I called for her."

"Pardon me; I arrived only an hour since in his majesty's——" began Count Amyar, but Tommy cut him short with a single word.

"Boris!" he exclaimed, and the smile which had been on his lips vanished, his twinkling eyes were almost hidden by the suddenly narrowed lids.

"Count Amyar, if your amiable double is acting as Signorina Nemo's impresario it is really time that we get busy," he said after a moment's silence. "You will let me make arrangements?"

Count Amyar bowed. "Gladly, since you at last realize the necessity for haste."

Tommy grinned at me. "Sometimes my friends grow impatient when I take my own time to begin to commence to get ready to start, but they complain that they can't even see my smoke when I get under full headway," he said laughingly. "I don't think you will have any cause to complain at the pace from now on. Bill, what are the chances for seats at Gheradi's to-night?"

"About as good as the Brooklyn's chance of playing in the world's series," answered Bradley. "My boy, the house is always booked full two weeks in advance, and Gheradi's fire regulations don't permit standing room."

"You can get a list of the guests?"

"Sure, my man is still on the job as business manager, and I cast an eagle eye over his accounts to see that the house gets a square deal. In a question of dollars and cents Gheradi would be easy fruit for——"

"Yes, yes! I understand all that, but I want you to get that list!" interrupted Tommy impatiently. "Then I leave it to you to see that every one on it is notified that they cannot be received to-night."

Bradley started to protest, but Williams went on: "When our friend was in trouble he called us in and we helped to pull him out when he was vainly tugging at his boot straps. Now a worse trouble of which he is ignorant faces him—a serious danger—and we shall do our best to save him in spite of himself."

A strange silence fell over the luncheon table. It was Emerald Bill—or rather Mr. William Bradley—who spoke first.

"Boys, I've played every game I ever got into to the limit, but I've always played fair and according to the rules," he said slowly. "I'll do what you ask, Williams, and I won't ask questions—I've never asked questions of Gheradi, and I take it that you're all his friends. I had planned to dine there myself to-night, and to take the signorina as my guest. Do we get stalled off by those little notes, too?".

There was not the slightest hesitation in Tommy's answer, and I suspected that it was made so quickly to forestall possible objection from Count Amyar.

"I had counted on you; it will just complete the table," he said. "Does

the signorina know where she is to dine?"

"I told her that she would have the best dinner and meet the best bunch she could cut into in New York," answered Emerald Bill, grinning. "I think she'll make a hit with Gheradi—she seems to be in his class."

"Yes, I believe she will make a hit, all right," answered Tommy gravely. "Don't enlighten her in advance, Bill."

Our guest looked at a gorgeously incrusted watch, and then regretfully at the wasted chicken on his plate.

"And I must be on my way if I am to get this business at Gheradi's over!" he exclaimed.

"Just a moment; don't go there, please!" said Tommy as he pushed back his chair. "Don't travel—telephone; it would be wiser to have your man come to you."

"I get you," answered Emerald Bill curtly. "I'm so used to the spotlight that it doesn't come natural to do the modest-violet act, but me for the deep shadows until you give me the office to come up and breathe."

"But, Mr. Williams, is it necessary to admit this most extraordinary individual to our confidence?" asked Count Amyar protestingly, after Duck Sing had given Emerald Bill his hat and stick, a service for which he received largess which made his slant eyes fairly pop from his head. "Remember that all sorts of skeletons may be exposed; that the honor of——"

"Count Amyar, I would remind you that you left all arrangements to me, and I know what I am about," interrupted Tommy. "You are right in calling him an extraordinary person—he is more than that—unique—sui generis—I can't find words to explain him. You trace your ancestry for generations; he would probably be hard put to it to name his great-grandfather. You are entitled to more than a score of quarterings on your coat of arms which you conceal with native modesty; he flounts the visible evidences of the self-made man in his ostentatious display of jewels. Yet I would as readily accept his word as yours; as soon trust to his discretion as to my own. There may be strange developments to-night, Count Amyar. As you say, skeletons may be exposed and dry bones of mysterious tragedies rattled; but there will be no fear of his talking."

Count Amyar gave an expressive shrug of his shoulders.

"You must have known him a long time to be so sure of him," he said sarcastically.

"I could give you almost the exact time if I did not have such a wretched memory for dates," said Tommy irritably. Then to me: "I expect that you can help me out, old chap."

"Almost to the hour, if that will help you," I answered. "I must consult the archives."

Now I suppose that every cub reporter who ever broke into Park Row from the provinces started a scrapbook, resolved that he would preserve for future generations the pearls which came from his pencil. I had been no exception, and until I became more interested in pasting the cut-out columns together to prove my space claims to the cashier, I had religiously preserved what the copy readers had left of my early efforts. About the last was the full account of my first important story, the Chinatown murder case, and in the dust-covered scrapbook I found it, knowing that the date would fix that of our first visit to Gheradi. It was all there, including the illustrations which had adorned the text, and as my eye caught those long-forgotten pictures I gave an exclamation which brought Tommy to peer over my shoulder.

There were many half-tone reproductions of everything connected with the crime, the interior and exterior of the house where the woman's body was

found, of Chinamen entangled in the police dragnet. But the thing which had startled me was the reproduction of a pencil sketch by a clever and imaginative newspaper artist whose talents have since won recognition in a broader field. He had made a careful study of the distorted face, and then had called in his imagination to reproduce his conception of what she must have looked like in life.

I remembered that witnesses who had seen the woman alive had told me that the imaginative picture was wonderfully near the truth, and now other memories crowded in, memories which explained much which had puzzled me, for that sketch bore a most remarkable resemblance to Gheradi's enshrined portrait and the living face of Marie, Countess Larissa.

Tommy snatched the book from my hand, and his long fingers rapidly turned the pages as his eyes scanned the columns which represented my literary efforts.

"Count Amyar, my irritability was not altogether unfortunate, in view of the results!" he exclaimed. "It has led to the discovery of something which may be important. It fixes a date just twenty years ago. At that time there was a sensational murder in New York."

"Such things do not interest me," answered the Hungarian coldly.

"Perhaps not, but this one may," continued Tommy. "Here is the report of the autopsy which was read at the inquest. The woman was supposed to have died from excessive opium smoking, but examination and analysis showed that she was killed by a large dose of morphine administered hypodermically. There were no marks of needle punctures to suggest that she habitually used the drug in this manner. Her face was swollen as if from an ulcerated tooth, but examination showed that the distortion was due to a wad of cotton jammed between the jaw and the cheeks after death. That so effectually destroyed the contour of the face that identification would have been difficult."

"Those details are most unpleasant—why harrow ourselves with them?" objected Count Amyar.

"I'm not doing it for pleasure," continued Tommy grimly. "Remember that this woman was killed twenty years ago, soon after Gheradi appeared in New York. There is another point in this report: the autopsy showed that the woman had borne a child but a few weeks before her death. Just a moment, count; here is a picture of the victim."

Count Amyar flicked the ash from his cigarette as he glanced indifferently at the books, but a moment later he leaned eagerly forward and the cigarette dropped from his fingers as he shrank away, covering his face with his hands.

"My God, it is Marie!" he exclaimed. "Impossible, she was dead before this—I had the proofs!"

Tommy made no answer for a moment; his eyes were fixed on other drawings on the same page. It was a motley collection of faces captioned "Types of witnesses and spectators at the inquest in the Chinatown case," all drawn by the skillful pencil which had depicted the portrait. But there was one among them which had caught his eye, and I looked over his shoulders as he had looked over mine. Allowing for the difference of twenty years, replacing the well-cut garments of a first-class tailor with the shabby raiment of a courtroom lounger, the sketch might well have been drawn from the man who faced us.

"Count Amyar, have you ever been in America before?" demanded Tommy.

The Hungarian's hands dropped from his face, and he stared at Tommy helplessly.

"Of course not—why do you ask?" he said.

"If you look at this picture, perhaps you will understand," answered Tommy gravely. "Count Amyar, I have suspected that the developments to-night might betray the carefully guarded secret of the Meyerling tragedy. That is none of our concern, but this tragedy may be. The murderer of the woman who was buried under the name of Alice Singer has never been brought to justice, but the statute of limitations does not cover capital cases."

"But I do not understand—this is all nonsense—it has nothing to do with my mission," stammered the Hungarian.

"Perhaps not—and then again, perhaps yes," replied Tommy, with a shrug of his shoulders. "My own guess is that it may have a great deal to do with it—that it makes the chances that Gheradi will return as the emperor's friend a great deal better than the bet that he goes back as the tool of the Hungarian conspirators—always providing that he goes back at all."

"But still I do not understand," persisted Count Amyar.

Tommy smiled as he pushed his chair back from the table. "My dear Count Amyar, you will find that America is a land of surprises. The secret passages, dungeons, and torture chambers in your ancestral castle did not surprise us, for we were brought up on Walter Scott and G. P. R. James. America is too new for that, and still everything comes to it—perhaps even the real truth of the Meyerling tragedy—the story which even Franz Joseph does not know—may be found here."

Count Amyar looked at him in bewilderment.

"Is there another story?" he said, half aloud.

CHAPTER XII.

The afternoon in the studio seemed incredibly long, and Count Amyar chafed visibly at the inaction, but Tommy resolutely combated his suggestion that we were losing valuable time.

"Just remember that our inactivity imposes the policy of watchful waiting on the other fellows," he said, an aggravating Mephistophelean grin on his face as he brewed the Turkish coffee after luncheon. "While we do nothing, we hold them in check, for they can only find the man they are seeking by following us to his lair, and I don't intend to betray the hiding place until we are ready."

"But we are ready—why delay?" protested Count Amyar. "The cruiser can sail at a moment's notice, and there will always be a launch waiting at the landing. I could get the archduke safely on board before they were ready to act."

"Pardon me, but we are not ready," answered Tommy; "I have many and very important preparations to make, and we'll remain right here until dinner time—or you can go ahead and play your game alone." He added the qualification as Count Amyar was on the point of making protest, and it was effectual, for the Hungarian sank back on the divan and docilely accepted the cup of coffee which Tommy offered him.

Now I was utterly in the dark as to what preparations Tommy had in mind, and while I was irritated by his reticence, I was not a little flattered by the fact that interest in my early literary efforts apparently made him forget them, for, after finishing his coffee, he picked up my scrapbook and became so absorbed in its contents that he was oblivious to the flight of time and the impatient movements of Count Amyar, who paced nervously up and down the room like a caged animal.

"Tommy, I'll wager that you never read that stuff so carefully when it was hot from the press," I ventured, irritated by his lack of comment.

He lighted a cigarette and looked at me through the smoke, an aggravating grin on his lips.

"I had troubles of my own at that time, and never more than glanced at the headlines," he answered. "Your first discovery must have been an inspiration, for you never measured up to it in the rest of the case."

"Then it was lucky for me that I had less clever superiors in the editorial room," I answered, and the flush on my cheeks must have told him that his criticism hurt, for my success in that case had laid the foundation of my journalistic fortunes.

"No, that is where you were most unfortunate, for their insistent demands for sensational developments which would justify a scare-head extra drove you to follow any path which promised a thrill instead of sticking resolutely to the evident facts and following where they led. The condition of the body made positive identification impossible, but the discovery that a girl named Alice Singer was missing and that the general description fitted the general description of the murdered woman was enough to bend all of your energies to establishing that identification—and I must admit that for journalistic purposes you did it most effectually. Every man who had known the unfortunate American girl was dragged into the limelight, and a half dozen who were arrested were publicly disgraced, and for twenty years have probably remained objects of suspicion; but the *Howler* got an extra out of each one."

"That's all right, but no living Alice Singer was ever produced to destroy that identification," I objected. "She would have appeared had she been alive."

"Not necessarily. She was of a good family, and the facts which the *Howler* printed concerning her progress along the primrose path would hardly tempt her to appear in the limelight, especially as no man stood in jeopardy of his life through her disappearance. She disappeared as hundreds of such derelicts disappear yearly in every great city, probably relieved that the false identification shielded her from the importunities and constant pursuit of her family."

"Until the infallible Mr. Tommy Williams, after twenty years of silence, leaps into the center of the stage and produces the long-missing Alice Singer alive and smiling, and draws the papers which explain the whole mystery from his sleeve!" I exclaimed irritably.

Tommy smiled soothingly.

"Not at all; I haven't the slightest interest in the fate of Alice Singer," he said quietly. "That identification was the red herring which was drawn across the scent. I am, however, tremendously interested in discovering the real identity of the murdered woman and the cause of the man, who resembles Count Amyar so closely, haunting the room where the inquest was held."

"Haunting it—that was only a thumb-nail sketch. Darian made dozens of them, and it never took him more than a minute or two."

Tommy's grin was again aggravating as he glanced at the group of faces.

"Every man to his trade—and mine makes me a better-qualified judge in this particular instance," he said. "The other faces are almost caricatures, the types of courtroom loafers that every newspaper artist can draw with his eyes shut, just as he can a policeman or a fireman. Possibly the actual execution of this portrait took no longer than the others, but it was made after repeated observations and study. There is individual character in it—it isn't a type."

"Well?" exclaimed Count Amyar eagerly. He had listened at first perfunctorily, and then with interest to the discussion.

"Well, why should you or your Cousin Boris haunt a coroner's inquest over

the body of Alice Singer?" demanded Tommy; and Count Amyar drew himself up haughtily.

"Mr. Williams, I have told you that I was never in America——"

"Certainly, and I believe that statement, of course," answered Tommy. "That leaves but one conclusion possible: the sketch was made from your Cousin Boris."

"And then?"

Tommy lighted another cigarette before answering.

"It is just this, Count Amyar," he said slowly. "I am not one of your feudal retainers; I am not an Austrian subject, and I have a rigid code of my own which prevents me letting personal friendship or sympathy stand in the way of exact justice. There may be strange developments to-night, developments which if they affected Austrian and Hungarian affairs alone might well be kept secret. But if anything happens to betray the murderer of this woman who has been unavenged for twenty years, he will be handed over to justice, even if it implies a stain on the Festonyis' honor or the baring of the secret of Meyerling. Do you still wish my assistance?"

Count Amyar, his face white, his hands clenched, looked Tommy steadily in the eyes.

"At any cost—in the real service of the emperor," he said defiantly.

CHAPTER XIII.

Never with the same feeling had I threaded the narrow, twisting streets which led to Gheradi's house as on that night. Before it had always been a pleasurable anticipation, but as we three men walked there together, literally obeying Tommy's instructions to look neither to the right nor left nor behind us, I was half tempted to desert, and only curiosity led me on. We knew that we were followed; our watchers were so brazen that it could not be called shadowing; and when Tommy raised the old brass knocker on the familiar door, they were less than a half block behind us.

The door opened quickly, but the servant who had known us well seemed half inclined to refuse us entrance, for he must have known that our names were not on that evening's list. I think a courteous refusal was on his lips until he saw Count Amyar's face, and then with his own a picture of dumb amazement he stepped back and we walked in.

"It is not necessary to announce us, Anton," said Tommy quickly. "Also you will admit no one but Mr. Bradley and the lady who accompanies him."

It was significant that the servant looked at Count Amyar, and at a single word in Hungarian from him he bowed respectfully.

"Very good, sir; no one but Mr. Bradley and a lady," he said, and I noticed that he crumpled up the list which he held in his hand. "You are early, gentlemen; you will find my master in the study."

Nothing was changed; the same atmosphere of luxurious and tasteful elegance pervaded the house, and we found Gheradi just a shade stouter, just a trifle grayer about the temples, sitting reading beside the library table. He rose as we entered, a smile of welcome on his lips as he recognized Tommy.

"This is indeed a surprise; so pleasant a one that I regret my ironclad rule," he said, as he extended his hand.

I looked at him a little apprehensively as he turned to me, but there was no change in him which suggested that rumor had aroused ambition or energy. He was the same grave, courteous gentleman I had always known, the man who was content with the day, who evinced no interest in to-morrow because his energies had been exhausted in a land of yesterdays. He gave me a

few civil words of greeting, and then for just one fleeting moment a trace of one of those yesterdays showed on his face, for in a quiet, matter-of-fact introduction Tommy had pronounced the name of Count Amyar Festonyi.

The Hungarian bowed low, but the "Honored, your royal highness" which came from his lips was disregarded. In an instant Gharadi had regained his entire self-control, but I saw that he acknowledged the introduction with a bow and without offering his hand.

"I am pleased to meet Count Amyar Festonyi as Mr. Williams' friend," he said courteously, not a trace of emotion in his voice.

Count Amyar stared at him in bewilderment.

"But, your royal highness, I do not come here as Mr. Williams' friend, but as an emissary of——"

"Excuse me, there is apparently a mistake," interrupted Gheradi quietly; "Mr. Williams neglected to mention my name; I am Mr. Gheradi."

For a moment the two men faced each other, looking squarely in each other's eyes. Gheradi's face was absolutely impassive, and I realized that in spite of the disadvantage of surprise he was the master of the situation. Count Amyar was dumfounded and speechless, and I expected a violent outbreak; but at the moment the door was thrown open and Anton announced Mr. Bradley and the Signorina Nemo. With the suggestion of a shrug of the shoulders which seemed to dismiss the whole matter as a closed incident, Gheradi turned to greet his new guests and then a cry as I hope never to hear again came from his lips.

Standing in the doorway, framed by its massive mahogany as a portrait, stood Marie, Countess Larissa. In just such a yellow gown as she had worn in Castle Festonyi, with a diamond coronet on her elaborate coiffure, she had unwittingly taken the exact pose of the subject of Gheradi's enshrined portrait, and the resemblance was marvelous. And this time she did not vanish, but, advancing into the room, she walked toward Gheradi and made an elaborate curtsy while he watched her with fascinated, unbelieving eyes.

"Your royal highness, I come as an emissary from——"

"From Heaven—or the grave!" he interrupted, every word distinct, although his voice was scarcely above a whisper. "You are Marie—come back after all these years."

"Yes, I am Marie—who has searched vainly for you for many years; but I am an emissary from the emperor first, an emissary who begs you to come back to resume your titles and estates, to comfort a lonely and broken old man who has mourned for you for many years."

Gheradi stepped back, his eyes still fixed on the girl.

"Titles—honors—estates," he said slowly, as he passed his hand over his forehead. "He knows the truth—and yet he would forgive and restore all?"

The interruption of that intensely dramatic scene was a descent from the sublime to the ridiculous, for it was a melodramatic "Ha, ha!" from the lips of Count Boris Festonyi, who stalked arrogantly into the room.

"So you are an emissary from Franz Joseph, of Austria, my pretty accomplice!" he exclaimed scornfully. "It is well that my cousin selected the spies he has had in this house from our family retainers, or I might never have gained admittance to save your royal highness from this trap. They dared not refuse a Festonyi." He spoke with unmodulated voice and with scant ceremony, and, watching Gheradi, I realized what a remarkably accurate estimate Tommy had made. The lacking stimulus had been found, and in Gheradi the dormant archduke had been aroused.

"Count Boris Festonyi, I do not need

your services to save me from a trap," he said, and while he spoke quietly, there was no mistaking the authority in his voice. "The emperor rules in Austria. His word is sufficient."

"And would his word remain pledged if he knew the truth; that you fled the country because you had been condemned to exile by the honor court for the murder of the Crown Prince Rudolph!" exclaimed Boris. "My good cousin was the president of that court, he can bear witness to its findings."

"Count Boris, you lie!" said the Countess Larissa quietly. "I have the sworn confession of the killer of Rudolph—it was not a murder—it was justice."

For a moment Boris was disregarded, and both Count Amyar and Gheradi turned to her eagerly.

"Is this possible?" they exclaimed together.

"It is positive," she answered quietly. "The written confession, duly attested, was given to me by Cardinal Rampolla. It confirmed the verbal one which had been made to him as a priest, and which was, of course, sacred; but he was instructed to give it to me when I became sixteen. For four years I have vainly searched for the man whom it would exonerate. I have lent myself to every wild scheme; I have played a part in every conspiracy which might lead to his discovery."

Count Amyar and Gheradi looked at each other questioningly, and then together they demanded his name.

"It was Count Larissa, my reputed father, the cousin of my mother, Marie Vetsera."

That quiet announcement fairly stunned Gheradi and Count Amyar, but it evidently convinced Boris that his hand was played out. He moved furtively toward the door, but Tommy, who had listened as quietly and alertly as a cat watches a mouse hole, had made a motion to Emerald Bill, who stepped in front of him and barred his progress.

"You gentlemen cannot understand, but Count Larissa did his best to atone," continued the girl quietly. "He fled to a safe hiding place after the tragedy; but when he learned that an innocent man was suffering for his act, he searched the world for him. Then here in New York he received what he believed to be positive proof of his death, and I have reason to believe that those manufactured proofs were supplied by Boris Festonyi. That was five years later. There was much I do not know; but I believe that he found me here, a nameless orphan. My mother was dead; he believed that my father was, and he took me back home with him as his daughter. It was only five years since that I learned the truth, less than that when I received a hint that the father I had never seen still lived."

Gheradi stepped forward and took her hands in his, looking down into her eyes and speaking like a man in a trance.

"And it is twenty years since your mother was lost to me, child," he said. "The world never knew the true story; of how Rudolph, madly infatuated with the girl for whom I was willing to renounce everything, inveigled her to Meyerling on the pretext that I was to be there. Another woman, mad with jealousy, betrayed his plot to me, and with her I rode like a madman through the night to Meyerling. A woman's scream attracted us to the pavilion, and with nothing but a red glare before my eyes, I broke in. Marie was struggling in the arms of Rudolph; that is the last that I remember clearly until I was again galloping through the night with Marie beside me. I was armed; there were shots, and I saw Rudolph fall."

"Yes, but your hand did not fire the shot which killed him," said the girl, with a shudder. "Count Larissa, too, had been warned, and he arrived just

as you did, to protect his cousin's honor. Rudolph, maddened by drink, revenged his betrayal by shooting the woman who had accompanied you, and before you could act Count Larissa fired over your shoulder. Your pistol was found on the floor by Count Hoyos, every chamber loaded."

Count Amyar stepped forward and bowed ceremoniously.

"But your royal highness confessed," he said apologetically.

"I believed that I had killed him—I meant to," answered Gheradi. "But that is past; I have never felt remorse. There is so much that I cannot understand. Marie perished childless, and yet this child is cast in her image."

"Your highness, there are four years after your disappearance for which I could never account," said Count Amyar. "From the time you left England with the woman supposed to be Ledmilla Stubel——"

"For four years I led a heavenly existence," interrupted Gheradi passionately. "Marie and I were content to be lost to the world—she was supposed to lie buried in Heiligenkreutz, I was reported lost in the great hurricane which swept the Pacific after we left Montevideo. In reality we were together on an island of the South Seas. We were ideally happy, but there came a time when I feared for Marie's safety and realized that we must for a time return to civilization. She was about to give me a child. Europe I dared not attempt, but I brought her to Honolulu, leaving her there while I came on to San Francisco to arrange a retreat which would be safe from discovery. There I was recognized by some of the Hungarian exiles who attempted to interest me in their conspiracies, but I eluded them and came to New York, cabling to Marie to join me here. The ship on which she sailed was lost with all on board, and, crushed by that blow, I became the recluse that you found me. I cannot understand—this is Marie's daughter, my child; but her mother died at sea, our child unborn."

It was Tommy who broke the silence which had fallen on the room.

"Was this one of the exiles who spoke with you in San Francisco?" he asked, pointing to Count Boris.

"Yes, the leader of them; he offered to make me king of Hungary if I would renounce Marie and join them."

"And did he know where she was?" asked Tommy eagerly.

Gheradi hesitated a moment. "I have sometimes suspected that my dispatch box was tampered with; if he gained access to it, he must have known."

"If he did, he probably had a chance to copy your private code?"

At the question, Boris again tried to leave the room, but Emerald Bill pushed him back with no gentle hand.

"Yes, undoubtedly; but I cannot understand——"

"Then I'll try to make you!" interrupted Tommy, his eyes snapping with excitement which told me that he had found his solution. "Boris knew that he could not tempt you so long as Marie Vetsera stood between you and ambition. He had no scruples—she must be removed. In your own code he cabled in her name that she would sail on a certain ship—and that ship was conveniently lost at sea. As a matter of fact, she was not on board; she was already in San Francisco, intrusting herself to his care because she had received a forged cable, signed with your name, instructing her to do so."

Now I knew that Tommy was shooting in the air, giving his deductions as facts; but the expression on Boris' face was eloquent proof that he was making bull's-eyes, and he missed nothing out of the corners of his long eyes.

"I expect that Boris planned to do away with her in San Francisco; I suspect that he had Chinese highbinders

engaged to do the trick," he went on rapidly. "But her condition gave him an inspiration; if she should bear you a son, you might be influenced by ambition for his future. We are naturally ignorant of the exact details, but knowing Boris I think we can guess at them. Marie Vetsera traveled under his protection, trustingly listening to his lying tongue because she had been deceived by forged messages. Professional conspirators develop vivid imaginations, and are by nature ready liars. God knows by what possible inventions he deceived her; God knows in what wretched hole she was kept prisoner until her baby was born—and with that birth the doom of Marie Vetsera was sealed. The baby was a girl; she has developed into a beautiful woman; but the Salic law is not to be gainsaid, and for Boris' purpose a female heir was useless."

"It's a lie!" screamed Boris, his terror overcoming his discretion. "No one can prove that Marie Vetsera is dead."

"Perhaps not; but the name of a murdered woman is only a matter of detail—it is the murder that counts," answered Tommy grimly. "Forget that name, Boris; just remember your associates in San Francisco, the Chinese with whom you smoked opium and who passed you on to their yellow brothers in Mott Street. Then remember what happened here—and tell me why you were so interested that you haunted every session of the coroner's inquest on the body of Alice Singer!"

I knew that Tommy staked his all on a mere deduction; that he was doing the very thing for which he had criticized me, fitting his facts to the theory he had formed; but the results left no doubt that he was right when I had been wrong. Boris' expression was enough to hang him without corroborative evidence. His face was livid, and he looked about for a possible loophole of escape, but finding none, he faced us with the snarling expression of a cornered rat. Strangely enough, he singled me out for the first victim of his rage, and the look of venomous hatred which he shot at me carried my memory back twenty years; I recognized the face which I had met at every turn when I was earning my journalistic spurs in the great Chinatown murder mystery.

"You devil!" he screamed, and only a quick movement of Emerald Bill's hand diverted the bullet which was aimed at my head to the crystal box on the mantelshelf behind me. But, quick as he was, Emerald Bill could not spoil the marksmanship of the second shot, and Boris fell dead at his feet.

Again it was Tommy who broke the horrified silence which followed the two pistol shots.

"Suicide is always confession," he said quietly. "Your highness, there is a dead man to be explained here; perhaps it would be wiser to leave the explaining to us. Count Amyar, the cruiser is ready to sail, is it not?"

"At any moment," answered Count Amyar.

"Then it may save complications if you three leave at once," said Tommy, glancing significantly at the body.

Count Amyar hesitated, looking at the girl with eyes from which distrust had not yet vanished.

"Mr. Williams, the law of Austro-Hungary also demands satisfaction," he said sternly. "You saw Captain von Tetlow die by his own hand; you know the cause."

The girl stepped quickly forward. "Von Tetlow dead—by his own hand?" she asked.

"Before you had fairly crossed the drawbridge," answered Count Amyar coldly. "He listened to your pleading and forgot his duty—and paid."

"But that cannot be; I told him that it was by the emperor's order, that I was commanded not to lose a minute.

I knew that you had ordered my arrest and that it would take hours to convince you, and so I escaped."

Count Amyar looked at her incredulously. "But *he* did not believe you!" he exclaimed bitterly. "He believed that he had betrayed his trust for love of you."

The emphasis stung the girl, and she stood back facing him defiantly.

"The emperor still lives; perhaps Count Amyar Festonyi will believe when his word corroborates mine."

The Hungarian bowed. "Most certainly; in any case, you could not be held legally responsible for that death. But there is another, Countess Larissa. You had that same afternoon a rendezvous with Major Karonyi in the forest. You fled from that rendezvous like a hunted deer."

"Before the sleuthhound who had pursued me for the last two years," she retorted.

"You fled before us after you had shot Major Karonyi and rifled his sabretasche," answered Count Amyar sternly.

The angry flush faded from her cheeks, and horror drove the defiance from her eyes.

"Karonyi shot?" she faltered.

"Killed," said Count Amyar tersely. "It was a fatal day for men who loved you, countess."

"And you say I killed him?"

"I say that you fled like a frightened criminal from the place where he lay dead—these gentlemen will bear witness."

"How you must hate me!" she exclaimed, after looking at him silently but unflinchingly for a most uncomfortable minute. "You knew why I was there; I tried to get Karonyi to intercept these gentlemen before they reached the castle, and before you had a chance to seal their lips. I knew that they could tell me what I wanted to know; I feared that you would make it impossible for them to speak. When you interrupted us I fled; I knew that you hated me, that you would hesitate at nothing to——"

"When *I* interrupted you?"

"Certainly; I recognized you before Karonyi did, for I had seen you leave the castle and knew that you had discarded your uniform for your hunting costume. Then I hoped that I could speak a word with these gentlemen before you returned, and I tried to reach their apartment, but——"

"*I* interrupted you? *Before* I returned?" broke in Count Amyar. "I was in the carriage with these gentlemen—I entered the castle with them."

"You were on horseback—you galloped up to where Karonyi and I were talking in the forest," persisted the girl. "I left you together when I fled and Karonyi was alive."

Tommy stepped between them as they faced each other defiantly.

"Count Amyar, your Cousin Boris was in the forest; his costume was a duplicate of yours," he said quickly. "The explanation is obvious—and there is necessity for haste."

Ten minutes later Emerald Bill looked at us mournfully across the table where we had so often eaten food fit for the gods. We had adjourned to the dining room to wait for the police whom Anton had summoned.

"Williams, if any other man had done what you've pulled off to-day, I'd wring his neck!" he said, with the bitterness of a hungry man. "You've cheated me out of a luncheon, and now you rob me of my dinner."

Tommy grinned good-naturedly as he drew from his pocket the packet which the emperor had given him.

"But, my dear Bill, you are lucky enough to be rewarded in advance," he said, as he tossed it across the table. "I was told to give you this for having

kept Gheradi on the job until Franz Joseph could put salt on his tail."

Emerald Bill fingered it curiously.

"No little old hunk of wedding cake is going to make me break even," he grumbled, as he cut the ribbon with a knife which he picked up from the table; but when he opened the satin case which the wrapper had hidden, he gave a gasp of astonishment, for, glittering in the candlelight, was an emerald which shamed the finest stone in his wonderful collection. For a moment he gazed at it, fascinated, and then looked helplessly at its more modest sisters which adorned every available spot on his costume.

"Hully gee, where can I wear it?" he exclaimed helplessly.

Now in pure deduction I think that Mr. Thomas Williams fairly surpassed himself in this case; but there is one fact of it that is even more interesting to me, for it shows how keen a judge of human nature he is. If you wish to prove it, look up Emerald Bill. You will find him at any first night of a girl-and-music show on Broadway, or any head waiter in the Broadway lobster palaces will point him out to you, for he is no modest violet. He prides himself on knowing all of the gossip of the town; he glories in having the center of the stage; but ask him what he knows of the tragedy of Meyerling, of the mysterious Gheradi, of Greenwich Village, and you'll have your trouble for your pains. But if it happens to be his emerald night, you will notice that he wears but a single gem on his broad shirt front; for he is wise enough to realize that no other emerald in the world can stand comparison with the gift of the Emperor Franz Joseph, of Austro-Hungary.

The Gentle Jests of Fantail

By A. M. Chisholm

Author of "A Dozen Eggs," "The Winning Game," Etc.

The ways of Yellow Horse in the early days were not always those of pleasantness nor her paths of peace. Yellow Horse's sense of humor, such as it was, was grim. With this hint you may understand that Fantail McInnes was playing a mighty dangerous game when he began the perpetration of a series of practical jokes. He got his reward, unexpected but well-deserved. This is one of the funniest stories Chisholm has written for us.

AT one time the old placer camp of Yellow Horse possessed a humorist known as Fantail McInnes. The name McInnes was his by right of birth. To it righteous and hopeful parents tacked "John Wesley" by the rites of infant baptism. Yellow Horse, for whom baptismal names possessed no significance historical or otherwise, rechristened him Fantail by reason of an episode in which John Wesley, humorist as he was, discerned nothing whatever amusing.

To digress very briefly, the cabin which was as home to Mr. McInnes took fire in the small hours. Mr. McInnes, always a sound sleeper, awoke surrounded by flames through which he made a frenzied dash for the door, being at the time clad in one garment only; to wit, a shirt. Rapid as was his progress the flames, snatching greedily at his bare limbs, secured a hold upon the nether and posterior portion of the shirt aforesaid. He burst from the door into the glare of firelight and publicity frantically slapping at the burning drapery which pursued him as the tail of a comet. And thenceforth in Yellow Horse he was Fantail.

It would be untrue to say that Mr. McInnes, humorist as he was, was pleased with the sobriquet. But the sentence of the camp was final. Fantail he was destined to remain, not only there but anywhere in the wide, wild West of that day, for a nickname pursues a man even as a guilty conscience, and there is no escaping it. Realizing this, after a period of disgust, Mr. McInnes accepted fate and his nom de feu with resignation, and pursued his way cheerfully, extracting the sweets from life as he went along much as the humming bird sips the delicate fragrance of the flowers.

Mr. McInnes' humor was catholic and all-embracing. He refused to take life seriously. He loved to befool his fellow man, to "take a rise" out of him, as the phrase goes. He was exceedingly fond of and esteemed himself an adept in practical jokes of varying degrees of enormity; and generally there was no sort of horseplay and foolery that he would not enter into with the zest of a puppy worrying a root.

Now the ways of Yellow Horse in those early days were not always those of pleasantness nor her paths of peace. Yellow Horse's sense of humor, such as it was, was grim. Yellow Horse took

itself seriously. It was tolerant in many things, but presumption upon that tolerance was unsafe. The line between what one might do with impunity and immunity, and what might be done if one could get away with it, was ill-defined. Humor, unless very plainly labeled and carefully placed, was risky. Jokes, especially of the practical kind, were apt to have an unpleasant recoil. Nearly every citizen wore at least one gun, for use rather than for adornment, and some affected a veritable park of field artillery reënforced by cutlery of formidable dimensions; though it did not follow that he who packed the most imposing lethal outfit was the worst man. Indeed, with the possible exception of "Bad" Bill Stevens, who wore two ivory-handled cannons low down on his thighs, and was quite as bad as he said he was, the deadliest gentleman the camp ever knew was a frail-looking consumptive who carried a derringer in either coat pocket and dispensed altogether with the formality of drawing when he went to war. So that on the whole the path of a humorist in Yellow Horse resembled the ancient ordeal of red-hot plowshares.

But nevertheless for a time Mr. McInnes walked luckily, if not safely. Often threatened by victims of his facile wit, he survived. He himself wore two fairly reliable guns, which perhaps assisted in an appreciation of his humor, or, at any rate, gave others pause before resenting it. And so Mr. McInnes went his way, flinging the confetti of his wit on either hand, quite heedless of whom it struck. Emboldened by immunity he gradually advanced the spark of his pleasantries to a point at which the engine of public opinion began to pound.

"If I'm this here Fantail," remarked Bad Bill Stevens to his friend, Ed Tabor, "I'd give the camp a rest from myself for some moons. The way I read the signal smokes if he keeps right on bein' funny without no intermission he won't last longer'n this year's grass."

"It's a wonder to me he lasts as long as he does," Tabor agreed. "I s'pose it's because he gives it out how he's a humorist and don't mean nothing thereby. If it was you or me we'd been plugged plumb full of holes."

"Or hanged," said Bad Bill. "These here pleasantries of his is due to turn out fatal for somebody."

Only a few days afterward the attention of Yellow Horse was focused on the sportive Fantail by a double killing in which he figured prominently. Not that his guns ushered the deceased into eternity. But his idea of humor, striking an unfortunate coincidence as flint upon steel, produced a deadly spark between two strangers. Mr. McInnes emerged somewhat startled from a cloud of white gun smoke stabbed by pink flashes, which, lifting, revealed two gentlemen mutually perforated to an extent which prevented any antemortem statements concerning the casus belli. Wherefore it seemed that Mr. McInnes alone, who had been observed in conversation with the victims aforesaid, and had hastily removed himself from the lead-swept zone upon the outbreak of hostilities, could throw light upon the tragedy.

"Bein' as they're both dead," observed old Zeb Bowerman, leading citizen of Yellow Horse, who on occasion acted as coroner, "I dunno's there's a whole lot for this court to git action on. For if it was a feud it stops right there; and if only argument the result is similar. 'Red' Mike Shea belonged to this camp, and while we regret his loss, far be it from us to murmur at the Providence which calls him hence. The other victim is a stranger callin' himself Hobbs. Bein' a stranger we ought to know the why of the killin', so's we can explain to his friends, if he's got any. Fantail, bein' the closest witness,

can maybe tell us what it was about, and what started it."

"I reckon," said Mr. McInnes, finding himself the center of attention, "that it's lack of a sense of humor that's entirely responsible for these corpses. The size of it is they wasn't able to see a joke which probably they're now laughing at with the angels."

"From which," said Bowerman, frowning, "the court would infer that you yourself understands and appreciates the humor of a situation which is beyond the comprehension of the deceaseds."

"I'm endeavorin' to point it out to them when the shootin' occurs," Mr. McInnes admitted.

"S'posin' you let us in on this here humorous situation," Bowerman suggested. "And while I'm about it, I may as well caution you that I've saw jests that's ended in hangin's."

"This ain't that kind," McInnes replied confidently. "In the first place Red Mike is Irish, and as such may be presumed reas'nable to have a sense of humor. Ain't that so?"

"Sorter approach the point," said Bowerman. "Them remarks don't bear on it."

"I claim they bear direct on it," Mr. McInnes stated. "It's because I'm bankin' on Red Mike possessin' the sense of humor which distinguishes his race that I ventures to show him this here funny paper, wherein is depicted an Irishman and a monkey regardin' each other through a winder. The point is that the Irishman mistakes the winder for a lookin'-glass, and the monkey thinks he sees another monkey. The artist has drawed the faces of man and beast that alike they might be twins, and the words which accompanies the picture is laughable in the extreme. It's then that I perceives Shea to be lackin' in humor. He not only don't laugh, but denies the resemblance, and don't see nothin' funny whatever in it. To make my position good I offers to leave it to the first man passin' which happens to be this Hobbs. I asks Hobbs if in his unbiased opinion the faces resemble each other, and he allows that they do, but that they're both monkeys. 'Either of 'em,' says Hobbs, 'is a heap too good lookin' to be Irish; also too intelligent.' Whereat Red Mike reaches for his gun, and far's I can tell they get an even break. That's all I know about this killin', and as I say it's primar'ly lack of a sense of humor that enrolls 'em among the blest."

"If you had the sense of a settin' hen," said Bowerman severely, "you'd have remembered that the Irish has other national characteristics besides humor. While I don't express sympathy with Hobbs' views it's my opinion that Red Mike downed the wrong man. Jokes like this here is comp'rable only to pointin' a loaded gun. You're like a terrier that starts two sure-'nough dogs to fightin' and stands off and barks. Hangin' you, Fantail, would do the community a heap of good, and you make a note of it. Only in this case I dunno's we can. However, I'm plumb willin' to be shown."

"Why, sure," said Bad Bill Stevens resourcefully. "Fantail's accessory before the fact, and I move we hang him."

"That's it," said Tabor. "Second the motion."

"I object to that there motion," put in a cantankerous gentleman named Soames, "on the ground that Fantail don't go about it deliberate to produce these corpses and so ain't no accessory."

"What do you call deliberate?" Tabor demanded scornfully. "Don't he show a man named Shea a picture which tries to make a monkey of an Irishman? That proves conclusive that his intentions was either murderous or suicidal."

"Not at all," Soames argued. "As he himself tells you that's merely his

idea of humor, his intentions bein' good, pure, and hon'rable."

"On the contrary," Tabor retorted, "I claim his intentions is crim'nal, sinful, and depraved, and on a par with mistakes concernin' ponies, brands, and aces. He don't show hoss sense, even."

"You don't expect hoss sense in a humorist," Mr. Soames pointed out. "A humorist ain't long on sense, or he wouldn't be one, and most of 'em is deficient mental. Fantail's brain ain't so much, but his heart is open and innocent as a child's. In his innocence he goes out to share a harmless jest with Red Mike, and all unexpected he bunts into a killin'. The responsibility is Mike's and Hobbs' alone. Fantail ain't to blame, and talk of hangin' him is uncalled for."

"A humorist," said Mr. Tabor, "is dangerous in a camp like this here. When humor gets two men at a clatter it's time for a new deck without a joker, or maybe the next time it manifests itself it results in a holocaust. And as hangin' Fantail seems the easiest way out I once more second Bad Bill's motion."

"The court regretfully denies the motion," said Bowerman. "At the same time it wishes to put itself on record as bein' agin' humor in this camp. Life, as the poet says, is real, likewise tough. The bulk of our citizens are a heap earnest and serious-minded. To introduce humor among 'em is like proddin' a nest of wild cats with a hand awl. Hereafter it don't go. A repeat of an incident like this here, Fantail, will bend a limb with you."

"As I explains to you before," said Mr. McInnes, in injured tones, "if them deceaseds had been able to see a joke all would have been well. It's their deficiencies that's to blame for their untimely takin'-off. Though I regret the incident, still a man without a sense of humor don't really enjoy life, and accordin'ly it's of less value to him. Humor and jokes comes natural to me, and it ain't to be expected that I can change my nature."

"Well," said Bowerman, "my advice to you, Fantail, is to restrain them natural impulses in and around Yeller Hoss. When the desire to be funny seizes you, go 'way off by yourself somewheres and wrastle with temptation, and your days'll be a right smart longer in the land."

Good advice, which Mr. McInnes accepted in the way in which such counsel is usually received—that is to say, heedlessly.

"Of course," he observed later to Stevens and Tabor, "I can take a joke even when it's agin' me; and when you boys in makin' that motion to hang me I'm aware that it's pleasantry merely. Your ideas of humor is crude, but bein' meant as such they go, and I don't resent 'em. Similarly Bowerman's remarks, which is merely attempts at bein' funny."

"If I was in your moccasins, Fantail," said Mr. Stevens, "I'd consider them words of Bowerman's about as humorous as a dry water hole in the desert."

"And so far as Bill and me is concerned, Fantail," put in Mr. Tabor, "we'd regard hangin' you as diversion. Not that we've anything against you, personal, but you ain't safe to have round. You're as dangerous as a gun in the hands of a pilgrim. There ain't no tellin' which way you'll shoot."

For the first time the cheerful countenance of Mr. McInnes clouded.

"Any gent that comes at me with a serious hangin' proposition," said he, "needn't be in doubt which way I'll shoot. Which I'm ready to elucidate to him now or any time."

"Don't let your sense of humor lead you into no sudden gun plays, Fantail," said Mr. Stevens, eying him narrowly. "As a humorist you may outclass me; but not with a six-shooter."

"I don't allow to start no gun play unless it's crowded onto me," said Mr. McInnes bitterly. "But I'm gettin' powerful tired of havin' my hangin' alluded to in my presence like I was a captive holdup or hoss thief. This here camp is about as cheerful as a mourner's bench, and when a sport like me tries to liven it up by a little innocent fun there's talk of hangin' me. It's surely discouragin'."

"Which it's meant to be," Mr. Stevens told him grimly. "Hereafter if I was you I'd hobble and bell my humor before I turned it loose."

Mr. McInnes finished his whisky gloomily and rose.

"I git plumb weary," said he, "of bein' blamed for accidents arisin' from other people's failin's. Some day when the signs is right I'll fool this camp to a finish. I'll just naturally shake her together and roll her forth like she was poker dice. And when I do you can gamble the drinks won't be on me. That's what! When the notion takes me I'll run a joke onto this camp from which she'll date time."

But in spite of these brave words Mr. McInnes' spirit seemed to be affected by the expression of public sentiment. He attended strictly to his own business, forbearing to intrude upon that of others. And Yellow Horse, having other things to think about, dismissed him from its mind.

This inaction of Mr. McInnes', however, was due less to discouragement than to the fact that for a time he found nothing upon which to exercise his talent. But one evening he chanced to overhear a conversation between Mr. Soames, the cantankerous gentleman who, principally from innate contrariness, had opposed Bad Bill and Tabor, and an ancient mule skinner known as "Uncle Billy" Webster.

Uncle Billy, so said tradition, had been born aboard a prairie schooner. He had been a nomad ever since. He was patriarchal as to hair and beard, virulent as to language, and he owned a perennial thirst. He drove an eight-mule freight team of picked animals, and was popularly supposed to know more about mules than any other man in the West. To Uncle Billy, then, Mr. Soames was speaking of the demerits of a certain gray mule which had come to him in an unlucky trade.

"That mule," quoth Mr. Soames, "is big and able, but he's surely one ornery son of an ass. He's meaner'n cat fits. He's quiet till you go to hitch him up, and then look out. He bites like a wolf and he strikes and kicks. Looks like I've been stuck with that critter."

"Mules," returned Uncle Billy, with alcoholic solemnity, "is funny people. They got their own ways, same as humans. I reckon you don't savvy mules. Now I been brung up among 'em. I was drivin' mules, son, before you raised your first long yell. I'll bet fifty dollars this gray outlaw of yourn pulls for me without trouble. It's all in the way you handle him."

"Maybe you'd like to buy him?" Mr. Soames suggested.

"I got a full team now," said Uncle Billy wisely. "I'm pullin' out right early in the mornin'. When I git back maybe I'll have a look at him."

Now Uncle Billy's eight mules abode, when in Yellow Horse, in a corral. Adjoining it was another corral which held miscellaneous stock including the mean mule of Mr. Soames'. Mr. McInnes, chancing to stroll that way in the dusk, cast an eye upon its occupants and had no difficulty in recognizing Mr. Soames' undesirable property.

The mule was a big gray, gaunt and powerful, and apart from his reputed temper apparently the makings of a splendid freight animal. But what struck Mr. McInnes was his extraordinary likeness to another gray mule in Uncle Billy's corral.

"That mule," said Mr. McInnes to

himself, "is sure the dead spit of Uncle Billy's nigh wheeler, Rastus. If it ain't for brands and harness sores they'd be mighty hard to tell apart." For a moment he pondered. "What for a game would it be to shift the cut on Uncle Billy? It'd sure be funny to see him hookin' up that gray hyena thinkin' he was Rastus. The way he's goin' tonight he won't be noticin' the fine points of stock in the mornin'."

Mr. McInnes looked around. It was growing dusk, and there was nobody in sight. Nevertheless, the enterprise was hazardous, involving unpleasant consequences if detected; for in those days liberties with a gentleman's live stock were even as liberties with his wife. However, Mr. McInnes reflected that he could scarcely be charged with felonious intent in simply shifting an animal from one corral—which also held his own pony—to another alongside it. And so he decided to make the attempt.

Taking a rope from Uncle Billy's wagon he entered the corral and with little difficulty attached it to Mr. Soames' beast, led him into the other corral and turned him loose; making the return trip with Rastus, a sober-minded, wise animal which regarded men in general as his friends. This done, Mr. McInnes vanished swiftly from the neighborhood, chuckling to himself.

In the morning he sauntered down to the corrals ostensibly to obtain his own pony, and his eyes were rejoiced by the sight of Uncle Billy engaged in harnessing his team. There, also, were Soames, Bad Bill, Tabor, and certain other gentlemen who owned horseflesh.

Uncle Billy's potations of the night before had not been characterized by moderation. His head ached, and the bright morning sun struck his eyes painfully. Wherefore, he cursed methodically and heartily as he harnessed his long-eared servitors by pairs.

"Uncle Billy ain't feelin' none too chipper this morning," Mr. Tabor remarked.

"He's drunk last night," said Mr. Soames, and approached the ancient. "I s'pose," he said, "you ain't got time to look at that mule I was speakin' of?"

"Course I ain't," snapped Uncle Billy, throwing the harness at his swing pair viciously. "I ort to be ten miles on the trail right now. Stan' still, you Tom, or I'll shore slam you with this neck yoke! You Crab, stop that, or by the glory I'll flail your sinful heart out! Git over, thar! Git over, you big——"

Pung! Uncle Billy's right boot smote the offending Crab amidships with the sound of a slack drum head. "I'll learn you, you hellion!" roared Uncle Billy, his gray whiskers bristling ferociously. "Whoa, thar, yo' four-legged gyasticus; you move out'n your tracks before I'm good an' ready an' thar'll be a dead mule right hyar."

With which admonition Uncle Billy turned his attention to his dependable wheelers, Rube and Rastus, and slung the harness on the former.

"Go on 'n' git over thar, you ol' camel," said Uncle Billy with confidence and some affection, and the wise off-wheeler obeyed, stepping to his position. "You Rastus, what you doin' over thar? Don't you know nothin'? Come 'long, I'm a-waitin' on you."

The putative Rastus, however, made no movement of obedience. From the corner of the corral he regarded Uncle Billy coldly.

"Come on, hyar, I done tol' you," Uncle Billy commanded. "You gittin' deef? I reckon the hook end of a trace chain'll open them ears of yourn a lot." As the mule stood motionless, Uncle Billy's ire rose. "Feelin' biggoty this mornin', hey!" he gritted, and, picking up the bridle, strode across.

Perhaps the very confidence of his approach made the mule stand still and

submit to bridling, likewise to being led up on Rube's nigh side, where Uncle Billy flung the harness aboard savagely. As he did so, the mule reached back and snapped at his shoulder.

The ugly yellow teeth nipped the flesh, and Uncle Billy, whose nerves were already twittering, leaped backward with a howl of pain. For a moment he regarded his supposedly trustworthy wheeler in amazement mingled with stupefaction. Such conduct on the part of Rastus was outrageous, unheard-of. It was as if your tried old setter, faithful companion of many glorious days in foothill and prairie, had suddenly flown at your throat. The loud, unsympathetic mirth of the bystanders brought Uncle Billy to himself.

"You ornery, low-flung, pizen maneater!" he bellowed. "Bite *me,* would you! *Me!* I'll learn you! I'll just naturally peel the hide off'n you in strips. I'll lam you till you can't crawl. Gorramity, mule, I'll massacree you! I'll—I'll——"

Speech failed to express his indignation. Stuttering in wrath, he caught the bridle and slammed his boot into the gray ribs with all his force, and Uncle Billy had a good leg. But the animal, instead of throwing up its head and swinging away from punishment in a pivoting circle, reared and struck at him with its forefeet, swift and vicious as the striking of a maddened stag. Uncle Billy's hand was jerked loose from its grip on the bridle. He barely escaped the sharp hoofs, and in doing so his heel caught on the wagon pole. He sprawled backward, and the gray villain, seeing him prone, reared to strike again.

A horrified yell of quite unnecessary warning arose from the onlookers. They were paralyzed by this unexpected turn of events, momentarily incapable of action.

But Uncle Billy, in his long life on the frontier, had extricated himself, unaided, from various unpleasant situations. Even as he went down he realized that Rastus, in some occult manner, had been suddenly transformed from a friend to a demon. His experience included instances of men who had been killed by supposedly trustworthy animals. And so he pulled his guns as he fell and from the ground fired twice into the rearing bulk and then rolled swiftly to one side so that the falling hoofs merely grazed his body.

In spite of years and alcoholic tremors, Uncle Billy was still useful with a gun. The mule crashed down, and the deadly hoofs flurried in the dust. The old skinner rose, somewhat shaken, and deliberately fired twice more into the ugly gray head. After which he sat down weakly on the pole.

"Somebody gimme a drink!" said he. "I shorely need it. Thar's a bottle under the wagon seat." He drank deeply and shook his head. "The best nigh-wheeler west o' the Mississippi," he observed mournfully, "and all the years I've had him he's as gentle as a pet dog. I reckon he must have went crazy."

"Looks like it," Mr. Stevens agreed. "A mule can be mighty mean when he takes the notion."

"A mean mule's better dead," Mr. Soames remarked.

"I wouldn't have believed it of Rastus," said Uncle Billy sadly. Rising, he walked over to the dead animal. "You pore ol' cuss," said he, "you've pulled your last hill. I wonder whar in blazes I can git——" Suddenly he broke off, rubbed his eyes, stared, rubbed them again, and appealed to his friends. "I been drinkin' a leetle, boys," said he, "but I can see most things straight. Rastus was branded Bar 3 on the nigh fore shoulder. But when I look at him now he's wearin' a Triangle K."

"A what?" cried Mr. Soames.

"Triangle K," Uncle Billy asseverated. "Look for yourself."

There was no doubt about it. And, though a mule may conceivably undergo a Jekyll-Hyde metamorphosis overnight, by no possibility can he change old brands in the like time. Ergo, Rastus was not Rastus, but an impostor. And Mr. Soames solved the mystery."

"Why, durn it all," said he, "that's *my* mule!"

"Take him," said Uncle Billy generously. "You're plum' welcome to him. But how come him in my corral, and whar's my Rastus?"

"Why," said Ed Tabor, "Uncle Billy, I b'lieve that's your Rastus mule over yonder."

Uncle Billy looked, and recognized the ugly gray head of his own nigh-wheeler in the other corral.

"Why, shore that's him," he observed gleefully, and, walking over, made assurance doubly sure by an inspection of the Bar 3 brand.

"Looks like somebody rung in a cold-hand mule on you," Mr. Stevens remarked.

"For which he gits a durn cold mule in exchange," said Uncle Billy cheerfully. "All's well that don't end otherwise, and I'm shore glad that Rastus' memory is free from stain. Come on outn thar, Rastus. We've wasted a heap of time already."

"Hold on a minute," said Mr. Soames, as Uncle Billy began to let down the bars. "I wishes you to note that the way the deal stands now I'm shy a mule."

"So you be," Uncle Billy agreed. "But as you remarks a minute ago when consolin' me, a mean mule's better dead."

"That mule was merely high-spirited," Mr. Soames asserted. "And, anyway, he was a live mule, and worth money, which a dead one ain't."

"Mules," said Uncle Billy sagely, "is as grass. Mules is mortal, same as we be. And you can bet I'm glad of it."

"That don't help me none," said Mr. Soames. "I'm shy a mule, which ten minutes ago was a plumb healthy animal. It's obvious that I can't go round donating mules for this outfit to shoot up."

"Why, durn it, you don't expect me to *pay* for him, do you?" asked Uncle Billy, in amazement.

"It's owin' to you that that mule is now meat," said Mr. Soames. "You proceed to catch up and harness a critter which ain't your'n; and you bust him in the belly with your boot when he's merely a mite playful. Bein' a high-spirited, intelligent beast he resents this indignity, and you thereupon slaughter him in cold blood."

"The hellion was fixin' to kill me," Uncle Billy protested. "I busts him because he takes a chunk out'n my shoulder. You bet I ain't no grub pile for carniv'rous mules."

"He wasn't yourn to abuse," Mr. Soames pointed out. "And though I'm far from suggestin' that you'd make free deliberate with another man's stock, and I also makes allowance for pers'nal habits which you're the prey of; yet a mule skinner had ought to know his own critters, 'specially his wheelers."

"Why don't you keep your man-eaters at home if you want 'em to flourish?" demanded Uncle Billy. "He's in my corral, and I've got the right to s'pose that any stock tharin is mine, without combin' 'em over for brands and sech."

"*I* don't put him in your corral," Mr. Soames stated.

"Who does?" snapped Uncle Billy.

"Well," said Mr. Soames, "since you ask me, I reckon you're responsible yourself."

"It 'pears to me," Uncle Billy observed, "like the loss of this here mule is affectin' your intellects. You 'pears to sorrow for him like he was some kin

of yourn, which possibly ain't surprisin'. But I'd admire to know how you figger out that I'm responsible for his presence in my corral."

"Whether my intellects is affected or not, I figger that out easy," Mr. Soames stated. "I've never knowed you to be plumb sober, and last night you was drunker'n common. In that besotted state, which is fast becomin' your natural condition, you goes prowlin' round these corrals and drunkenly deals yourself out my valuable mule; conferrin' on me in the same way that worthless buzzard head which you calls Rastus."

Uncle Billy might have overlooked the personal remarks, but at this slighting reference to his favorite his eyes narrowed.

"It may be," said he, "that last night I don't class as a disciple of John B. Gough. But all the same I don't go sortin' out mules in the darkness. This here theory of yourn is ingenious, but it don't go. It's my opinion that, seein' the outward resemblance between them two critters, you makes the exchange yourself, and comes down this mornin' to enjoy the spectacle of me wrastlin' with that man-eatin' monstrosity which you don't know no better'n to take in some trade."

"I don't do nothin' of the sort," Mr. Soames denied, with heat. "You takes it on yourself first to harness and then to butcher my mule, which leaves me shy. I wants another mule or its equivalent in dust, and I wants it quick."

"I wants various things myself, off and on, which I don't git," Uncle Billy retorted coldly.

"I aim to get this," Mr. Soames returned obstinately. "Failin' payment of a hundred dollars for my mule I'll just step in and levy on that Rastus of yourn."

"You will, hey!" snarled Uncle Billy. "Lemme tell you something: You'll find pickin' ticks offn a wolf's ears childish pastime compared to such a levy. You're a holdup and a mule thief, and you git outn my corral!"

With which defiance and ultimatum, Uncle Billy went after his gun, anticipating Mr. Soames' action by the fraction of a second. With the result that the latter's bullet went wide by reason of a forty-five slug which perforated his right arm; and, going wide, it landed in the shoulder of an awe-stricken tenderfoot named Preedie, who had not joined in the general scramble out of line. The shock caused Mr. Soames' gun to fall to the ground, and Uncle Billy, master of the situation, dominated him with his old single action.

"What did I tell you?" said he. "Don't make no move to pick up that gun or I'll shoot *at* you."

But at this juncture old Bowerman, attracted by the rumor of shooting down by the corrals, arrived and took charge of affairs in characteristic fashion.

"You won't shoot at nobody," he declared. "Put up that gun! What starts this here fracas?" Enlightened, he turned a stern and searching gaze on Mr. McInnes. "I reckon," said he, "that Fantail, here, is responsible for these misunderstandin's."

"Who? Me?" said Mr. McInnes, in tones of innocent surprise.

"Yeh, you!" Bowerman insisted. "This looks to me like one of your fool jokes. Also, you was down around these corrals about dusk, because I saw you myself. And I suggest that you'll save time and trouble by tellin' as much truth as the Lord'll let you."

"Well," Mr. McInnes admitted, being thus caught with the goods, "when I hear Uncle Billy braggin' of what he can do with mules, and when I see the resemblance of Soames' critter to his Rastus, it strikes me as harmless fun to shift the cut a little."

"That strikes you as harmless fun, does it?" said Bowerman severely. "It

don't occur to you that maybe somebody gets hurt?"

"Not for a minute," said Mr. McInnes. "Uncle Billy himself bets Soames fifty dollars that this mule pulls for him without trouble. I'm entitled to s'pose he can handle him."

"Handlin' a critter you know is mean is one proposition," said Bowerman sagely; "but handlin' a mean one you think is plumb gentle is a cat of another stripe. It's like introducin' a cold hand into a straight game. And the results of this joke of yourn is a dead mule, Soames with a draggin' wing, and a pilgrim which gathers the erroneous idee that the shobtin' of Yellow Hoss is inaccurate. Which last is serious, bein' a reflection on the reputation of the camp."

"I ain't to blame for that," Mr. McInnes protested. "How could I tell they'd go after their guns? As I framed her up she's a good, harmless joke; and I plays her wide open on that basis."

"She's this kind of a joke," Mr. Soames put in, "that when I can handle a gun again I'll make you hard to find."

"It's plain to me," said Mr. McInnes, in disgust, "that you ain't got no sense of humor at all. A joke goes a little mite against you and you get hostile. Same with Uncle Billy. I'll leave it to anybody if his actions, when that mule reached back and bit him, wasn't as good as a funny show."

"They was, hey!" snarled Uncle Billy. "You think it funny to see me chawed by a mule, do you?" With which, his right hand once more sought his artillery with intent to terminate Mr. McInnes' earthly career. But Bad Bill caught his arm.

"Leggo o' me!" roared Uncle Billy, struggling to free himself. "Leggo my arm, Bill. Gimme my gun and turn me a-loose. I'll send him trailin' up that man-eater he stacked me agin'!"

"You simmer down," said Bowerman coldly. "Fantail, keep your hand away from your gun, or I'll get in on this myself."

"I don't allow to be shot up by no old rooster like him," Mr. McInnes announced.

"I may be old," Uncle Billy retorted, "but no pinfeather bird like you is goin' to cut my comb. My back trails for thirty years is marked by the graves of sech."

"This stops here and now," Bowerman declared sternly. "Uncle Billy, you hook up and pull your freight. Soames, you and this pilgrim go and git the doc to plug up them holes. Fantail, you'll pay Soames for his mule."

"But I don't kill the mule!" Mr. McInnes objected.

"Fantail," said Bowerman gently, "we've stood a heap from you. Messin' with live stock is a serious thing in this man's country. If you had the brains of a fool hen you'd realize that there's other ways of lookin' at your actions, and when you get off by payin' for the mule you're luckier'n a butcher's dog."

And Mr. McInnes from his knowledge of Bowerman forbore further objection.

"The price of a mule won't break *me*," said he, "and I'll pay for the critter if you say so. But all the same I maintain that I ain't gettin' a square deal, its death and subsequent events bein' directly due to lack of humor on the part of Soames and Uncle Billy."

"Well," said old Bowerman, a faint twinkle in his hard, gray eye, "if it helps any, Fantail, you may consider payment for that mule as the camp's little joke on you. With that keen sense of humor of yourn you'll maybe appreciate it."

Nevertheless, Mr. McInnes did not appreciate it. He paid the money to Soames, but a great desire was born in him to play even with the camp in general and Bowerman, Uncle Billy,

Soames, Tabor, and Stevens in particular. If he could only, thought Mr. McInnes, get something really good on these individuals or some of them he would be willing, like the prophet of old, to depart in peace—at least from Yellow Horse. Though a joke of the dimensions which he considered appropriate if played on any of these gentlemen by no means predicated a peaceful departure.

Mr. McInnes was game enough, but the trouble was to find an opportunity. Though he pondered and searched his mind diligently he found no scheme of revenge which was nearly adequate. For good practical jokes, like poets, are born and not made.

"Durn it," said Mr. McInnes, in disgust, at the end of a week's fruitless cogitation, "I can't think of nothin' to get back at them holdups right. I reckon I'll just have to wait till something turns up."

And so for a time Fantail unconsciously imitated the celebrated Mr. Micawber. In the course of this waiting, business and his inclinations took him to Dade City, which as to Yellow Horse was metropolitan, owning an opera house and numerous pleasure resorts of various kinds.

In Dade City, Mr. McInnes lingered, tasting the dubious delights of a higher civilization with others of his own kind, and one night fortune so far favored him that he caused a certain gentleman who dealt faro bank to turn his box on its side. Having thus replenished his depleted exchequer, Mr. McInnes wisely refrained from crowding his luck, and returned to his hotel, where at that late hour he found an argument going forward between the proprietor and several agitated ladies. Their voices were not at all low, and Mr. McInnes gathered that the ladies belonged to a theatrical company which had been presenting a play known as "The Deserted Wife," and that their finances at that precise moment were by no means flourishing.

"Give us a chance for life, brother," the spokeswoman, a tall, determined-looking blonde, was saying. "Don't I tell you we're flat? The price ain't ours, or we'd ante. Carter's blew with the coin, and that's all there is to it. Of course, it's hard on refined ladies like us to be stranded so far from home, but you stake us to the eats and the sleeps and in the morning we'll wire our parents for money."

"Parents!" the proprietor repeated scornfully. "D'you think I'll fall for that?"

"Well, if you won't," the tall blonde retorted, "I'll just hand it to you straight, Clarence, that we sleep here to-night, coin or no coin, because we ain't got nowhere else to go. We ain't stuck on your dump or your face, but we'll put up with them because we're ladies."

"Did I say you weren't?" the harassed host protested. "All the same, ladies, you can't stay here without money."

Whereat the chivalry and the funds of Mr. McInnes came to the rescue.

"I'll put up for these ladies, and deem it an honor," he announced. "Their bills till further notice is on me."

"You won't get a nickel of it back, Fantail," the proprietor discouraged.

"Don't want it," said Mr. McInnes magnificently, eying with approval the youngest lady of the party, whose contours and blue eyes appealed to him.

"Friend," said the tall blonde, "you're surely one game little sport. We'll take your life belt the way you offer it."

In this manner Mr. McInnes made the acquaintance of the tall blonde, Miss Louise Laffeur, on the stage an adventuress; Miss Kathryn Montressor, the deserted wife; Miss Viola St. Clair, her confidante; Miss Joy Hackett, ingénue, the lady of the blue eyes aforesaid; and

Mrs. Whelan, sister of Miss Joy, utility lady and theatrical pinch hitter.

Mr. McInnes had never before adventured among ladies of the stage, but he carried a general impression that they were always anhungered and athirst, and presently he had the pleasure of acting as host at the best late supper which the hotel could furnish.

"And why," asked Miss Joy, "do they call you 'Fantail,' Mr. McInnes?"

"Why—um—you see—I used to keep pigeons—fantail pigeons," Mr. McInnes explained, his modesty being unequal to the occasion. "It don't take much to give a man a nickname in Yellow Horse."

"I'd like to see Yellow Horse," said Miss Joy.

"Come along," Mr. McInnes invited. "There ain't no women in Yellow Horse, nor no kids. She's a bull camp, all right."

"I know a little about camps myself," said the blond Louise, "and I'll bet half you boys have wives somewhere. Some day they'll be showing up there to claim their husbands."

Mr. McInnes stared at her, open-mouthed.

"Why, how you look!" Miss Lafleur exclaimed. "Girls, I b'lieve he's married himself!"

But Mr. McInnes paid no attention to this light persiflage, for an idea—The Idea—had dawned upon his mind. It was brilliant, stupendous, entitled to rank with the greatest concepts and mental feats of history. For a moment he was awed by the sheer sublimity and splendor of it. Briefly, it was this:

Here were five ladies, by profession actresses, out of a job. Why not hire them to visit Yellow Horse in search of missing husbands in the persons of Bowerman, Uncle Billy, Tabor, Stevens, and Soames? A vista of glorious possibilities opened before him. He could picture the panic and consternation of this luckless male quintet. As a joke, it would be in a class by itself. But when he outlined this brilliant idea, it met with many distinctly feminine objections.

"What do you take us for?" demanded the blond Louise.

"It wouldn't be delicate," said Miss Montressor.

"Maybe they got real wives somewhere," Miss St. Clair suggested.

"Or maybe they ain't," said Mrs. Whelan apprehensively.

"And then we don't know what they look like," Miss Joy concluded sweepingly.

But Mr. McInnes had recourse to persuasion. The men in question were hardened bachelors. One and all they were woman shy. They would be panic-stricken. The joke might be easily worked.

"But we don't know anything about them," Miss Montressor objected. "When you claim to be a man's wife you have to have something to show for it, like a ring or a certificate; and, besides, you've got to know where you were married and where you both lived afterward."

"I'll give you lines on all of 'em," said Mr. McInnes eagerly. "I'll buy rings. We'll fix little things like them easy."

"But suppose they stood for it when we claimed 'em?" Louise objected. "Suppose they turned round and claimed us!"

"No chance," said Mr. McInnes positively, after a glance at Miss Lafleur's determined features.

"What d'ye mean—no chance?" that damsel demanded indignantly.

"They're too moral," Mr. McInnes explained hastily.

Miss Lafleur sniffed incredulously.

"Anyway, they're too shy," said Mr. McInnes, getting on firmer ground. "They'll just naturally stampede in a bunch. It'll be the biggest joke in the history of Yellow Horse."

In the end he carried his point; and for the next two days he spent his time with the ladies, allocating to each a prospective victim and coaching them carefully in such personal details as he could remember. Also he ordered five wedding rings from a local jewelry store, to be engraved on the inner sides with appropriate and affectionate descriptions, thereby incurring the grave suspicion of a cynical jeweler.

"Say," said the latter, in amazement, as he heard Mr. McInnes' requirements, "are you out for a record, or what?"

"Never mind," Mr. McInnes replied tartly. "If I can pay for 'em that's all you need to know."

"All right, Brigham," the jeweler retorted.

"Don't you call me no Brigham!" snorted Mr. McInnes.

"My mistake," the jeweler returned. "Excuse *me*, Solomon. I didn't recognize you at first. Lemme show you a few mugs and spoons and things. I'll give you pretty near wholesale prices."

Mr. McInnes told him where to go. Having obtained the rings, he distributed them; and, having added a few final instructions, returned to Yellow Horse well in advance of his fellow conspirators, so that no crafty mind should deduce his connection with them.

On the third day after the return of Mr. McInnes, Uncle Billy, as was his custom when in Yellow Horse, stood watching the arrival of the stage.

"A woman!" said Ed Tabor, who stood beside him. "Gosh! What's a woman doing here?"

"Maybe tryin' to find her husband among you young fellers," Uncle Billy returned sourly.

"She's lookin' mighty hard at you, Uncle Billy."

"Let her look," said the veteran. "There's been a heap of 'em looked at me before."

But the lady, who was Miss Viola St. Clair, suddenly emitted a cry in which surprise and joy mingled, and, running forward, caught Uncle Billy in an affectionate embrace.

"Hyar, hyar, gal, what you doin'?" cried Uncle Billy. "Leggo my neck!" But the lady merely secured a tighter hold. "Take her offn me, somebody," begged Uncle Billy. "She ain't well. She's goin' to have a fit or somethin'."

"My darling husband!' sobbed Miss St. Clair.

"Hey!" shrieked Uncle Billy. "'Husband!' She's crazy. Take her offn me!" And as nobody volunteered assistance, he extricated himself violently from an embrace which was fast becoming a strangle hold.

"Be ca'm, ma'am, be ca'm!" he cried, wiping moisture from his brow. "You're makin' a awful mistake. Look close at me, and you'll see I ain't whoever you take me for."

"I cannot be mistaken!" the lady responded. "Too well I know those features. 'Tis he, muh long-lost husband!"

"I ain't!" gasped Uncle Billy. "I ain't no sech thing. I ain't nobody's husband."

"You are William Webster!" she accused him.

"I be," Uncle Billy admitted, "but Bill Webster's a bachelor, now an' evermore shall be, amen."

"Do you disown me?" the lady demanded threateningly.

"I never owned you, an' I don't want to," Uncle Billy retorted ungallantly.

"Br-r-rute!" cried Miss St. Clair, stamping her foot. "Wr-retch! Villain! Deserter!"

"Oh, Lordy!" said Uncle Billy, backing away. "She's crazy! Talk to her, boys. Say somethin' to her, Zeb. Git the doctor. She ain't fitten to be loose."

"I reckon, ma'am," said Bowerman, "that there's a mistake somewheres. Uncle Billy's square. If you was his wife he'd be proud of it."

"Sir," said Miss St. Clair, with sad dignity, "I appeal to the manhood of this camp. I am his unhappy wife. He lured me from muh happy girlhood's home, married me in New Orleans, and deserted me. This is the ring he placed upon muh trusting hand. Look at it! On the inside are our names and the date."

Bowerman took the ring and squinted at the inscription.

"'Bill to Vi, June 10, '83,'" he read. "Uncle Billy, you took a trip to N' Yawlins in eighty-three."

"S'posin' I did!" snapped the veteran. "I wasn't crazy, was I?"

"You might have been drunk or somethin'," Bowerman suggested.

"I wasn't drunk enough to git married," Uncle Billy protested. "Why, I'm old enough to be that gal's father, or grandfather, maybe."

"There's plenty of old men marry young girls," said Bowerman. "Maybe your memory ain't what it was."

"For the good Lord's sake, Zeb, don't you go back on me," Uncle Billy pleaded. "Don't let this female cinch herself onto me. She'd shorely shorten my allotted days."

"Without meanin' anything pers'nal," said Bowerman, "I dunno why she should claim you for her husband if you ain't."

"She's plumb crazy, that's why!" Uncle Billy declared. "I never saw her nor heard of her."

Bowerman tugged at his beard.

"This here," said he, "needs lookin' into. For while it's in a gent's American judgment whether or not he quits a lady cold which he's married to; yet when she takes his trail and comes up with him he ought to acknowledge the corn, and make good for her. Pendin' a settlement of this question, Uncle Billy, if I was you I'd put up for her somewheres."

"Keep her away from me and I'll board her at the Astor," Uncle Billy declared fervently. "She can have my shack if she wants it. From now on I'm livin' in the corral with my mules; which is a heap safer company, likewise more congenial."

The putative Mrs. Webster, however, tearfully declined the offer of the shack, and was escorted to the Golden Light Saloon, where she immediately retired to her room, and, judging from sounds issuing therefrom, suffered a mild attack of hysteria.

Meantime Uncle Billy proceeded to steady his quivering nerves.

"This here is blackmail, that's what it is!" he declared. "I've allus allowed to spend my declinin' years in peace, and I shorely won't stand to have no woman cinched onto me, not at my time of life. Gimme another drink, Joe! I'm all on aidge."

"She ain't a bad-lookin' woman, Uncle Billy, in spite of the way she's been used," said Mr. Tabor wickedly.

"She's a vampire!" Uncle Billy returned apprehensively. "You can see it in her eye. She's got one of them cayuse eyes that ain't to be trusted. I dunno what she picked on me for, but it don't go. I'll pull out for the desert where she can't foller me. Compared to her, snakes, prairie dogs, and owls is cheery companions."

"Face it like a man," grinned Tabor. "When the chickens come home to roost you'd ought to have a perch ready for 'em."

Uncle Billy glared at him.

"I don't think I'd pull out, if I was you," said Bowerman significantly. "The camp don't want no deserted females unloaded onto it. I dunno but what some of the boys might think it right to fetch you back."

Just then, however, Bad Bill Stevens entered.

"There's a lady outside, Zeb," said he, "that allows she wants to see you for a minute."

"What sort of a lady?" Bowerman asked suspiciously.

"Stranger in the camp," Mr. Stevens replied. "Sorter blondy, battle-ax party. She's askin' for you partic'lar."

"Maybe Uncle Billy's first wife," Tabor suggested.

Curiosity led his friends to follow Bowerman to the door, whence they became spectators of an amazing scene. For Miss Louise Lafleur strode up to the old frontiersman much as if she were assaulting a fortified position, and placing her arms akimbo looked him sternly in the eye.

"Well, Zeb Bowerman," she said, "what have you got to say for yourself?"

"Ma'am!" ejaculated the amazed borderer.

"Don't you 'ma'am' me, you old runaway scoundrel!" cried the lady. "Don't you dare to 'ma'am' your lawful wife!"

"Wife!" gasped Bowerman.

"That's what I said," the lady asserted. "I should think you'd be ashamed to look me in the face."

"But—but I don't know you, ma'am," said Bowerman. "I ain't never seen you before. You're gettin' me mixed with somebody else."

"Not any I ain't!" the lady asseverated. "You're Zeb Bowerman, and you married me in Denver in the fall of eighty-two. That's what he did, boys," she went on loudly to the spellbound audience. "He married me, an' quit me two months after, the ol' sinner, and I've been tryin' to round him up ever since. It wouldn't surprise me to hear he has another wife in camp. Have you?" she hissed at the wretched Bowerman. "If you have, I'll rip them whiskers of yourn out by the roots!" With which horrible threat the lady made a sudden motion as if to carry it out, and Bowerman retreated hastily.

"Go slow, ma'am, go slow!" he begged. "Though I hate to contradict a lady I never had the pleasure of marryin' you. In fact, I never married nobody. Which the more I see of your charming sex the more I realize what I've missed."

"You're a hardened ol' liar!" said the representative of the sex aforesaid. "I got my weddin' ring and my weddin' c'tificate. Also I got a brother that won't stand no foolin'."

"Is he here?" asked Bowerman eagerly. "I could talk this over a heap freer with a man."

"He ain't here, but he'll come if I ask him," the lady retorted. "Now, what I want to know is are you goin' to acknowledge me as your wife and let me go to housekeepin' for you? In which case I'd maybe overlook your conduct."

"Ma'am," said Bowerman, appalled at the suggestion, "if I was your husband, I'd deem myself the happiest of men. But not bein' fortunate thataway naturally this housekeepin' proposition don't go. I ain't the party you take me for. Some other gent, luckier'n me, has placed that there ring on your fair finger."

"You're the ol' pelican that put it there," the lady asserted, "and you don't sneak out of it, neither." She stripped her finger of the ring and waved it accusingly at the wretched Bowerman. See what it says, boys: 'Zeb—Lou. Love. Denver, '82.'"

"You was hangin' out 'round Denver in eighty-two, Zeb," said Uncle Billy.

"I been in Denver a heap of times," Bowerman admitted. "But I don't recall no trip when I accumulated a wife or sim'lar live stock."

"Mebbe your memory's failin' you," Uncle Billy suggested, with a wicked chuckle. "You're nigh as old as me, Zeb. And without intendin' anything pers'nal, I dunno why a woman with good eyesight should claim you for her husband if you ain't."

"Shut up!" Bowerman gritted. "This ain't no time for jokin'."

"Shut up yourself!" said the lady. "This gentleman has you sized up right. I ain't goin' to stand out here on the street all day paradin' your perfidy an' my bleedin' heart to the world. I'm your wife, and as such I'm entitled to support. I know my rights, and I'm goin' to camp down in your shack, if you've got one. If you ain't you've got to put up for me wherever you hang out. And that goes!"

"Ma'am——" Bowerman began, but his putative wife cut him short.

"I told you once not to 'ma'am' me," she said. "My name's Louise. You call me 'Lou.' While you're at it, you can make it 'Lou, dearie,' like you used to. Go on! Lemme hear you say it, or I'll start in to mow that alfalfa offn your chin!"

"Ma'am—Lou, dearie," gulped the harassed leading citizen, "as to puttin' up for you, that's easy; 'specially if you was to take the notion to visit Europe or Chiny, in which case I deem it a privilege to stake you. As to camping in my shack, any one will show you where it is. Only, far as I'm concerned, you'll find it right lonesome."

"I've had enough of this here foolin'," Lou, dearie, returned, with determination. "I should think you'd be ashamed to exhibit your falseness to them solemn marriage vows before all these boys. You catch hold of my arm, Zeb Bowerman, and come along home!"

With this ultimatum, she advanced upon him; but the wretched Bowerman did not wait. Suddenly he wheeled and ran, with the speed if not the grace of a startled antelope. And the lady, unable to keep the pace set by her recreant lord, did not even attempt pursuit.

"I don't allow to live alone in no shack in a camp like this here," she announced scathingly. "Show me some place where I can git respectable female companionship, till I send word to my brother. He'll surely round up Bowerman for me with a gun."

"If this brother is anyways a fav'rite of yourn, ma'am," said Bad Bill, "I wouldn't engage him in no such round-up. But for female companionship, Uncle Billy has a deserted wife right here in the Golden Light, who'll maybe share her room with you."

"I ain't got no sech thing," snapped Uncle Billy.

"Deserted wives seem to be a habit of this camp," said the lady, transfixing him with a glare. "Maybe she'll have sympathy with me in my affliction."

On inquiry, it was ascertained that Mrs. Webster would share her apartment with Mrs. Bowerman, and Yellow Horse for a moment had breathing space.

"This," said Tabor to Bad Bill, "is excitement a-plenty for one day. I'm sure glad my past don't include no matrimonial alliances."

"You bet!" the bad man agreed. "That lady which lays claim to Zeb stampedes him like a prairie fire."

"She goes after him mighty hard," said Tabor sympathetically. "While I don't offer no opinion on what's none of my business, I sh'd say that domestic life with her includes some stirrin' moments. It don't seem to me——"

Mr. Tabor never completed the sentence, for just then a strange lady hove in sight. The lady was tall and willowy. She was clad in black. An aura of sadness seemed to surround her, a gentle melancholy and resignation as of one who has found the world cold and cruel. It was, in fact, Miss Kathryn Montressor, née Maggie O'Brien, in the rôle of Lilian Heatherly, the deserted wife. As she advanced, she passed beside the gloating Mr. McInnes.

"Which is him?" asked Miss Montressor, out of the corner of her mouth.

"The tall one," Mr. McInnes whispered back cautiously.

Thus informed, the lady approached Mr. Tabor and Bad Bill; and suddenly halted before them with quivering lips

and hands clasped on heaving bosom. Already she was the focus of the eyes of a dozen gentlemen, and her emotion was so evident that Bad Bill asked in alarm:

"Excuse me, ma'am, but ain't you well?"

"I suffer!" the lady returned, in tremulous tones.

"Can't I git you maybe a little whisky for it, ma'am?" asked Mr. Stevens solicitously.

"Ah, sir," said Miss Montressor, turning sad eyes upward to where the gallery should have been, "my suffering is of the heart!"

"Plain sody helps them heart pains," suggested Mr. Stevens sagely. "It ain't really the heart at all—it's the stummick. Excuse me mentionin' it, ma'am, but it's gas formin'. Likely something you've et causes it."

"Ask him," quavered Miss Montressor, pointing a trembling and dramatic forefinger at Mr. Tabor, "the cause!"

"Me?" said that individual, somewhat startled. "I ain't the doctor, ma'am. But I reckon Bill is right. Sometimes when I've et a heap of beans——"

"Beans!" the lady exclaimed, in reproachful apostrophe. "Ah, just Heaven, he can look muh in the face and speak of *beans!*"

"I sure beg your pardon, ma'am," said Mr. Tabor contritely. "I wasn't aware you'd turned against 'em."

"Ter-rait-or!" the lady ejaculated. "But this assumed inno-cence shall not avail you. I will proclaim your baseness to the world!"

"Huh?" gasped Mr. Tabor, retreating two steps as the lady advanced one. "I ain't done nothing, ma'am."

"Nothing!" cried Miss Montressor, who was beginning to enjoy herself thoroughly. "He calls it nothing to break a woman's heart!"

"Bill," whispered Mr. Tabor desperately, "sure as shootin' there's a female asylum broke loose. This here is another of 'em."

"You found me," Miss Montressor accused him, "a trusting gyurl, happy in the home of muh childhood, ignorant of the world of men, of e-vil. I gave you muh heart—muh all. I loved you, Edward, and you"—here Miss Montressor interjected a sob so effective that Yellow Horse quivered in sympathy—"you whispered the old, sweet story in muh ears. You made muh your gyurl wife. Heaven help muh, in spite of your desertion I love you still."

"But I ain't your husband, ma'am," Mr. Tabor disclaimed. "Honest to goodness I never saw you before!"

"You deny me!" cried Miss Montressor, now well into her stride and warming to the part. "You whom I trusted, to whom I gave muh gyurlish heart! You, who swore at the altar to love and to cherish muh till death, who placed this ring upon muh finger!"

"I never did it, ma'am!" Tabor protested fervidly.

"I will prove it!" cried Miss Montressor, with the fire of high resolve. "Muh lawyers have the pa-pars. I will bring a score of witnesses from Boise City to prove that we are man and wife. Will you deny this picture of the home that once was ours?"

Mr. Stevens, who knew that his friend at one stage of a somewhat checkered career had resided in Boise City, whistled softly. But, being wise, he said nothing.

"Ma'am," Mr. Tabor protested, "so help me, I ain't never had a home! You're laborin' under a awful mistake."

But Mr. Tabor was far from suspecting the diabolical ingenuity of the author of "The Deserted Wife." Miss Montressor drew forth one of the properties of that drama, namely a locket which was suspended around her neck by a slender chain.

"Behold," she declaimed, in a chok-

ing, tear-laden voice, "the picture of the che-ild!"

Eyewitnesses afterward declared that Mr. Tabor's face was a full and free confession not only of paternity but of infanticide. His knees waved beneath him, his eyes bulged, and his voice, when he attempted to use it, croaked and cracked.

"It—it ain't mine!" he quavered. "I'm an orphan!"

"Unnatural pa-runt!" shrieked Miss Montressor, on the verge of a mirthful breakdown herself; "whose name those baby lips have learned to lisp! Look, my friend!" she continued to Mr. Stevens. "See the features of the father in the features of the babe!"

Mr. Stevens looked and scratched his head. "Well, ma'am," said he cautiously, "I ain't what you'd call an expert in such matters, and one kid looks a heap like another to me."

"All the same they're a lot different," put in Mr. Soames, who had followed proceedings with silent interest. "And while I don't say it's more'n an unfortunate coincidence for the child, he sure resembles Tabor in forehead, eyes, nose, mouth, chin, shape of the head, and gen'ral expression."

"I can't help it if he does," said that gentleman.

"I ain't sayin' you can," said Mr. Soames. "Parents is plumb helpless in such matters. Science, so far, ain't been——"

"Look-a-here," Mr. Tabor interrupted coldly, "while I can merely tell a lady who accuses me of such responsibility that she's mistaken; yet any man who puts it up that I'm even distantly related to that infant is a liar and an Injun."

"I don't put it up that-a-way," Mr. Soames returned. "I merely note a outward resemblance which may be accidental or otherwise."

"You better note careful that it ain't otherwise," Tabor warned him grimly.

"Edward," moaned Miss Montressor, "you are breaking my heart!" With which speech, being accustomed to faint gracefully into the reluctant arms of the hard-hearted Sir Lionel Heatherly, she swooned skillfully into the unwilling members of Mr. Tabor; who for his manhood's sake could do no less than catch her as she fell. Supporting her, Mr. Tabor swore and called wildly for assistance.

"Don't stand lookin' at her!" he cried. "Catch hold of her, somebody."

"Sorter hold her up higher," said Mr. Soames. "She expects it of you."

Mr. Tabor damned him in terms which under other circumstances would have led to homicide.

"She'll come out of it in a minute, Ed," said Bad Bill, likewise without offering assistance.

"I know it," snapped Mr. Tabor, "and I aim to be absent when she does. I can't stand no more of this."

"Be game," Bad Bill exhorted, "and play the hand out. Don't leave us in a fix."

"What's your fix to mine?" demanded Mr. Tabor. "You can pack her up to them other women. Me, I'm headed for the hills right now." With which ultimatum, Mr. Tabor would have allowed Miss Montressor to slump to the ground, but that her sudden clasp restrained him.

"United at last!" she breathed, opening her eyes. "Is it but a happy dream? Oh, Edward, my darling, say that you are mine once more!"

"I ain't, and I never was!" cried Mr. Tabor. "Please let me go, ma'am!"

"Re-mem-bar the che-ild!" pleaded Miss Montressor.

But at this point the train of events was unexpectedly interrupted by a gentleman named Egan who had just appeared on the scene. Mr. Egan owned a forbidding eye and two guns, one of which he promptly brought to bear on Mr. Tabor.

"Put up your hands," said he, "and be some quick about it."

But Mr. Tabor was unable to comply with this request, for the good and sufficient reason that Miss Montressor, after one horrified glance at Mr. Egan, uttered a piercing scream and fainted genuinely upon him, thus encumbering his arms.

"Go slow, partner," Bad Bill warned Mr. Egan, seeing the plight of his friend. "Where do you get action in this family matter?"

"Bein' this lady's husband," said Mr. Egan, "naturally I get action a-plenty. It's merely force of habit and polite trainin' that makes me tell him to put up his hands; for it looks like it was my duty to fill him full of lead without warnin'."

"If this lady's your squaw," said Mr. Tabor, "you're as welcome to me as a rope in a quicksand. These marital claims she's filin' on me is onexpected as snakes in my blankets."

But Miss Montressor began to show signs of returning animation, and shortly opened her eyes on Mr. Egan.

"Bob Egan," she cried, "what do you mean by surprisin' me like that?"

"I'm some surprised myself," Mr. Egan returned coldly.

Whereupon the situation seemed to burst anew upon the lady, who indignantly withdrew herself from Mr. Tabor's support.

"Take your arms away from me, you fresh thing!" said she.

"Ma'am," said the scorned Mr. Tabor, obeying with alacrity but keeping a watchful eye upon Mr. Egan, "I lets go this holt with the cheerful willingness of a pup releasin' a porcupine."

"Right here," said Mr. Egan, "we'll have a clean-up. If you've alienated any affections belongin' to me——"

"He ain't done anything of the sort," interrupted Miss Montressor, or, rather, Mrs. Egan. "Him? Why, Bob, you don't suppose a feller like that would make a hit with me!"

"Judgin' from what I heard," Mr. Egan replied, "it looked like he'd made not only a hit, but a home run."

"That was a joke, you silly!" Mrs. Egan replied blushingly.

"Who on?" demanded Mr. Egan, not unnaturally. "Maybe I ain't bright, but so far the humor of the situation escapes me."

"It was a joke on him," Mrs. Egan explained. "I was to pretend that I was his deserted wife. One of the boys in this camp put up the josh. And what I was saying to him was simply lines out of my part."

"Part?" echoed Mr. Egan. "You haven't gone back to actin', Maggie?"

"A lot you care!" his wife returned. "I hadn't heard from you in over a year. What did you suppose I was goin' to live on?"

In fact, it appeared that Mr. Egan, while seeking fortune in certain mining camps, had gone upon the principle that no news is good news, and had not written at all; also by some mischance moneys which he had arranged to be remitted had not come to hand. And accordingly Mrs. Egan, piqued by neglect and driven by shortage of funds, had returned to the stage which she had formerly graced. With the story of the stranding of "The Deserted Wife" company, the innocence of Bowerman, Uncle Billy, and Tabor was established, and the perfidy of Mr. McInnes revealed; as also his designs against the peace of mind of Bad Bill and Soames, which apparently were yet to be carried out.

"I'll burn the ears offn him!" said Mr. Tabor grimly. "This time he goes too far!"

"Hold on till I get Bowerman and Uncle Billy," Mr. Stevens suggested. "It ain't likely they've pulled out yet. Chances is they'll want to burn him at the stake."

He found Bowerman and Uncle Billy rapidly organizing transport, and returning with them. Accompanied by Soames and Egan, they moved on Mr. McInnes' cabin in a body.

Their approach was cautious and noiseless, and so they beheld through the open door the amazing spectacle of Mr. McInnes with his arm around a young lady; while a second lady was tactfully absorbed in the view from a back window.

It was Uncle Billy who shattered this idyl by a heartfelt prediction as to his own future state. Whereupon the young lady, with a startled cry, extricated herself from Mr. McInnes' affectionate clasp. That shameless individual turned a grinning face on the intruders.

"Come on in, boys," said he, "and lemme introduce you to Miss Hackett who will be Mrs. McInnes as soon as we can find a salvation scout to deal for us; and to Mrs. Whelan, her sister."

The avengers, dumfounded, removed their hands from the vicinity of their artillery and doffed their hats. Bowerman rose to the occasion.

"Miss," said he, "we wish you all sorts of luck and happiness. And we congratulate Fantail, here, on havin' won a lady like you just when he did. We hope he knows his own luck. And we hope that your lives will now glide on like rivers that water the desert, darkened by shadders of earth but reflectin' the image of heaven, like the Bible says."

"Thank you, Mr. Bowerman," said the blushing Miss Joy. "You talk beautifully."

"You are a good excuse for it, miss," the old frontiersman returned gallantly.

Mr. McInnes followed them outside.

"Maybe I played it on you boys a little strong——" he began, but Bowerman cut him short.

"Let her go as she lies," he said. "The way it stacks up now, Fantail, I reckon maybe we break about even."

"How do you make an even break out of it?" grumbled Uncle Billy, when Mr. McInnes had returned to his fiancée. "It looks to me like it's a hoss onto us, and I'd admire to lift his ha'r."

"If you won't be impatient, and cast your eyes into the future," Bowerman returned, "you'll perceive a herd of events headed Fantail's way which now he ain't got no conception of. In conferrin' partners of joys and sorrers onto us he acquires one himself. Whereby it's an even bet that for him inside a year life ceases to be a joyous p'rade and becomes a forced march; and his feelin's is a heap similar to Tabor's when that lady levels them accusations at him."

LOTS OF WEALTH, BUT NO MONEY

ROBERT DOUGAN, the Washington journalist, was dining in a downtown café one evening with his friend, William D. Hassett, when their attention was attracted by the entrance of a prominent politician who is equally famous for his wealth and his habit of holding on to his money. Speaking with perfect and brutal frankness, the millionaire is careful about his change, pernickety of his coin, crafty about charges.

"That old fellow's as rich as Crœsus," observed Hassett.

"He's got more wealth than he knows what to do with," agreed Dougan, becoming attentive to the steak.

"I wonder how much money he has got," continued Hassett.

"Plenty of wealth—no money," explained Dougan solemnly. "You forget that money is a circulating medium."

The Class Kid

By Edwin Balmer

Author of "Under the 'Orion'," "The Mating Impulse," Etc.

"Born to beat Yale" this son of a Princeton man is trained from childhood to be a football player. You will be interested in his development and the part he plays in the big struggle. When you have finished the tale, Burns's line about "the best-laid plans of mice and men" will occur to you.

BIG BILL WARE'S son was, officially, the "boy" of the greatest class which ever graduated from Princeton. Not only was he the first boy born to any member of that magnificent aggregation, but he had timed his coming to coincide exactly with the great class' first reunion. The telegram announcing his birth came to the college in the middle of the afternoon, while all the returned grads and the undergraduates and their girls and chaperons and fathers and mothers and other friends and enemies were at the baseball field cheering the Tigers as they fought Yale for the final and deciding game of the championship series.

It was, as the newspapers later correctly recorded, the ninth inning, with Yale two runs ahead, Princeton at bat, two out, one man on. Suddenly, above the hullabaloo normal to such situations, a louder, exultant yell of spontaneous joy burst from that section of the bleachers where the greatest class clustered.

The Yale pitcher, supposing the man on first must be stealing second, spun about and hurled the ball wildly into center field. The runner took third accordingly, before the Yale team settled down again, and a megaphoned maniac in front of the Princeton stands bawled out to the thousands and to the man at bat:

"Class boy of nine—born! Big Bill Ware's got a son! Class boy born! Two-oo locomotives! Everybody in it! Two-oo locomotives *and* a Tiger for the class boy and Princeton! Ray! Ray! Ray! . . ."

And the Yale pitcher, rattled, grooved the ball for the batter, who, in the inspiration of the instant, knocked the sphere out of the lot for four bases, tying the score.

"A ten-pound boy! Some son!" the maniac renewed the inspiration for the next batter, as the stands again became silent enough for a strong man with a megaphone to be heard. "A ten-pound boy! So *pickle* that pill for Bill Ware's boy—the class boy—*and* Princeton!"

The box score, preserved in all the papers, attests that the worst batter of the Tiger nine promptly knocked the ball out of the lot again, and won the game.

The greatest class, while still in its delirium, took up the collection for the gift to its first son. The class president telegraphed congratulations, and the great result of the announcement of the class boy's birth.

Far off in Chicago, Big Bill Ware, holding his little son in his arms, read the wire proudly to the class boy and hugged him a little closer:

"Upon hearing your great news, Elis immediately crumbled. We are giving the long cheer for you and the class kid. Yale futures gone glimmering. Here's to the future football captain! No hope for Yale."

Big Bill, smiling, and yet winking some strange wetness from his eyes, continued his lullaby, which the telegram had interrupted:

"Here come the Elis, we'll show them a surprise,
Open wide both their eyes, teach them football.
You can't twist the Tiger's tail, Princeton can never fail,
We are from Old Nassau!"

From which slumber song, as well as from the wording of the class president's telegram, it may be surmised that, though the boy arrived at a moment to powerfully influence a baseball championship, it was with the first of college contests that he was to be connected. Indeed, as Big Bill held his son in his arms, his thoughts were not of the nine on the warm, sunlit diamond; instead, they were with eleven men on a great, gridiron-marked field upon a day chill and sharp and raw, late in November, a year and a half before. It was in his senior year, and he was captain of the team. Yale had scored early in the game, and now, in the last few minutes of play, were pressing the Tigers for another touchdown. His men, so far, had not even threatened the Eli goal.

"Low—under 'em now, everybody! Throw 'em back, Dan! Spill 'em for me!" He was calling upon his men for the extreme effort as a personal favor to him. "It's my last chance, you know. So stop 'em. . . ."

The terrible, smashing mass on tackle—eleven men hurled upon the position of one—came again. At last, with Yale only another yard to go for a second score, the Tigers held and took the ball. On the next play, with a trick long saved up for a desperate situation, Big Bill himself got away for a run halfway down the field toward the Elis' goal; then, carrying the ball himself most of the time, he and his team fought on and on. He was bleeding, and one arm—though always it held tight to the ball when he got it—was numb, and one ankle sent sharp, shooting pains up his leg as he strained and pushed upon it with each plunge into the line. But now the goal—the Yale goal—lay barely a length before him, the heaving, gasping, pawing Blue line in between.

Again, reckless of the hurt to him, he crashed into that line; a smother of men—his own and Yale's—crushed about him, battered the breath from him, hurled him to the ground, and beat him down; but when they were dragged off, he was half his length nearer the last chalk mark. One more yard to the Yale goal!

He knew he was going to make it; the Elis seemed to know it, too. Savagely, as his signal again was called, he seized the ball and sprang at them; they grappled him and tried to throw him back, but, with the supreme effort, he slipped through them. Frantically they hurled themselves down upon him, but, bruised below them, he laughed. They were too late; he had crossed their goal. But what was that whistle shrilling in his ears?

"Off side! Off side! Princeton off side!"

Some one in his line, too anxious, had fouled before he had plunged; his score didn't count; his team was put back five yards from where they had held the ball before. All of that five Big Bill himself regained in one pitiless rush. He had the ball first down again on

Yale's one-yard line, when again a whistle shrilled—the timekeeper's.

"Game over!"

A wild, exultant yell from Yale; and Big Bill, the ball in his arms, yielded it as trophy to the captain of his conquerors as, in every year in which he had played, the Tigers had been forced to yield.

"But next year," automatically his defiance promised, "I'll get you!"

Then the cheers for him from the Princeton stands brought him to.

"The long cheer for Bill Ware!" the leaders were calling. "He's just played his last game for Princeton! So *every*-body in it for Big Bill Ware! Ray, ray, ray!"

His last game. It had seemed to him that the awfulness of the realization that for him there could be no game for revenge, never could pass off, indeed, he knew it never had entirely gone till this moment, when he held his son in his arms, and was singing to him:

"Break through the line of Blue,
Send the backs around the end,
Fighting for every yard,
Princeton's honor to defend,
Ray, ray, ray!
Then fight with a vim
That is dead sure to win,
For Old Nassau!

"So you'll go at 'em for me, will you, kid? You'll beat 'em for me some day?"

The kid, to his satisfaction, nodded.

Young Bill undoubtedly always was willing. He was delighted with the class gift when it came—a porringer of silver and gold in the shape of a football. On his first birthday, at his father's second class reunion, he sat as mascot on the Princeton bench for one inning, during which the Tigers again trimmed the Elis. At Big Bill's quintennial, the class kid—then four years old—alone and unaided, threw the first ball of the deciding game, which again went to the Tigers.

They took him to the trophy room to deposit that baseball, properly painted with the date, the Y of Yale and the score; and there, though he gloated over the glory of other victories, he learned for the first time that—his lullaby to the contrary notwithstanding—the Tiger's tail had been twisted many times, particularly at football. When he asked to see the footballs, lettered with Y, for the years when his daddy had played, his father flushed funnily, and some one said something suddenly. But there, before them all, his father confessed the full truth to him. The Elis—the hated Elis, whose eyes always were to be opened by the Tigers—had all the footballs for those years, each one painted with a P. His father had never beaten, he had not even scored on, Yale. So there and then young Bill understood fully what he was born to do; and, as the defeated Hamilcar pledged the young Hannibal in the temple to eternal enmity to Rome, in the trophy room Big Bill swore his son to beat Yale.

So, as Hamilcar drilled his son from childhood in the military arts, Big Bill early taught his boy the intricacies of the drop kick, punting, blocking, the straight-arm. Evening after evening, when the football season was on, Big and Little Bill scrimmaged together on the lawn. The trainer at college prescribed diet to insure wind, weight, speed, and power. The records of young Bill's growth, his height and measurements each year, proudly were published in the annual class letters. Yearly, as the Yale game came around, Big Bill brought the class kid back to college to exhibit him. It was known not only to the greatest class, but to all the college, and told to the Elis, too, that Bill Ware's kid had been born to beat Yale.

When in grammar school and in prep school—in fact, at every place where there were more than eleven candidates

—the class boy, in spite of his perfect training and knowledge of the game, failed to hold a place on any team, his father simply said: "He's just one of the sort that's slow to show." And Big Bill was fluent with a long list of the greatest college conquerors reputed to have done nothing in their precollegiate trials.

Even Big Bill's old teammate, "Slugger" Kinsey, the college coach, failed to dispel the father's fond illusion. And the Slugger was not one to lightly abandon a candidate. He had been a contemporary of Big Bill. His personal participation in the king of college sports had been during said sport's unregenerate days; and the old conditions made for frankness between teammates. Along with the modern regulations permitting the forward pass, forbidding mass play, requiring ten yards for four downs, and other modifications opening up the game, is a rule which permits an injured player, after retiring from the game, to return to play. In the old days such a rule would have been more than superfluous; the ability of any injured player to renew combat during the same afternoon would have been a most serious reflection upon the man that hit him.

At first sight of young Bill, when the class kid at last came to college, and, of course, appeared on the football field, the coach gave great chortles of joy. He knew young Bill's record—or, rather, his lack of record. But the fact that he had failed to make any team so far seemed only an advantage; it would prevent the swell-headedness which too often spoiled prep-school players come to college. Kinsey knew the boy's father, and was familiar with the kid's bringing up. Everything must be lovely.

Then the coach took out the candidates and tried them in scrimmage. Two weeks later Kinsey wired, collect, to his former captain, to make a run down to the college.

"I give it to you straight, cap," said Kinsey, as they met in the dressing room. "When I first saw him in action—not by himself, but with others—I thought I had 'em. But he's actual. I've measured him up and weighed him. My eyes did not deceive me—six feet one inch, and one hundred and eighty-five l-b-s. And all cheese!"

The father winced. "What do you mean?" he demanded.

"It isn't as if he didn't know the game, Bill," Kinsey continued. "If he didn't know it, there'd be some hope. But he knows it; there's nothing I can teach him; and by himself, he's perfect—a poetry of perfect plays if posed alone before a moving-picture camera. But put him up against something in real play—well, just nothing happens."

"What?" appealed Big Bill.

"Just nothing happens, if he's trying to do something; that's as accurate as I can describe it in mere words," Kinsey despaired. "And if the other side's trying to do something, nothing ceases to happen. That's all."

"Can't you use him," the former captain begged, "even on the scrub?"

"I leave it to you," Kinsey offered. "But isn't the scrub supposed to give the varsity some opposition?"

"Try him in a regular game," Big Bill pleaded. "You know sometimes a fellow in a real game will——"

"I know." Kinsey weakened, as he glanced down the room and saw young Bill's build; so he tried him twice on the freshman eleven.

Lawrenceville Academy was the first opponent; after they had scored through young Bill's position twice in the first quarter, even his father agreed to the signal to remove him. The next week against the Cornell freshmen, young Bill twice was called upon to attempt goals from the field inside the twenty-yard line. The first time he

kicked over his own head for a Cornell twenty-yard gain; his second trial handed the Ithacans a touchdown.

The following afternoon, in practice by himself without a rush line before him, he kicked forty-seven perfect goals out of fifty tries from beyond the thirty-yard line; two of the three which he missed hit the goal posts.

Kinsey, after another fortnight of insomnia over him, finally was forced to give him up.

"I've got to have some sleep," the coach apologized to the father. "And don't think I'm knocking the boy. If I were writing a book about the game, I'd photograph him in every pose to show just how each play should be performed. Bill, he's absolutely perfect—except in contest. He's like a golf player who can drive a ball straight through the air for two hundred yards—except when he's got to cross a fifty-foot pool; or the fielder who could copper every catch through the season except when a world's championship and forty thousand bones or so depended on a catch. He just isn't a contest kid, Bill. Otherwise, he's absolutely all right."

"Put him in against Yale," the father asserted recklessly, "and you'll find everything different. He'll deliver."

Kinsey controlled himself. The modern rule, excluding freshmen from varsity intercollegiate contests, put off that argument for at least twelve months. During those months, hot or cold, snow of rain, daily young Bill continued to train himself under orders from his father. As scrimmaging necessarily is a more or less social activity, young Bill's solitary perfecting of his play was confined to kicking. Every afternoon, though the football season was over, he repaired alone to the gridiron, and, at varying distances and angles before the goal posts, kept up his kicking, scoring results which he summarized and mailed weekly to his father.

The weeks after the football season has closed, and before even hockey has started, are the doldrums for the college newspaper correspondents. These young gentlemen, usually undergraduates, invariably are paid by space. The class boy's daily and solitary football practice offered the sole sporting material to be made into meals. Thus it was kept before the public that Big Bill Ware's son, the official progeny of his father's class, and born to beat Yale, was still living to do it.

After a summer at his father's country place, where standard goal posts had been erected, and young Bill had achieved a practice record of sixty-seven goals without a miss, he returned to college, bigger, brawnier, better looking than before. Kinsey tried him with the varsity in the first quarter against Fordham College. After his second fumble had made the Fordham total score fourteen points, Princeton took him out in time to make sure of winning the game, by hard work, in the other quarters. Against Lafayette, which had a strong eleven, Kinsey dared let him contribute but one touchdown to Princeton's opponents.

"But I tell you, against Yale he'll do something," his father persisted. "I know he'll be all right."

"How do you know that?" Kinsey inquired calmly. Let no one hereafter deny that football teaches self-control.

"That boy was born to beat Yale," Big Bill asserted his simple faith. "Give him a chance, and he'll do it."

With shining eyes, Big Bill Ware read the special and illustrated article in the papers on the morning of the Princeton-Yale football game, a little over a year later:

Playing their last game for the Orange and Black to-day are Keaton, full back, and Perry, right end and captain. In addition to these regular men, it is the end of eligibility for several substitutes. Best known

of these is Ware, the son of the football captain of the nineties and class boy of his father's class. Ware's career has been a remarkable one; coached from earliest boyhood by his father, and brought up as the especial protégé of his father's class, his life ambition has been to play against Yale. No candidate for the team entered college better coached or in finer condition; however, his play invariably has been a disappointment, and, though tried out every year, he never has won a permanent place on the eleven. By incessant practice he has made himself practically perfect at drop-kicking, and, if he could be counted upon to perform in play as in practice, he would prove the most dangerous man on the Tiger squad.

"He is convinced that against the Elis he'll deliver," said Coach Kinsey last night. "The idea may be worth a trial. If the Tigers get the ball within kicking distance, and are unable to advance, you may look for Ware to be given his chance to see what he can do against Yale."

Bill Bill, the paper trembling in his hand, sought out the coach at the training quarters. The game was in Princeton that year.

"Slug," he demanded quiveringly. "Is this true?"

"I've just told the kid so," Kinsey said. "You sold me at last with your talk last night. You think the boy's born to beat Yale; he thinks it; half the class is convinced of it; even the Elis are wondering if there's anything in it. All that preparation can't be wasted, Bill; and I'm not one to pass up such a chance. I give you my word, if there's an opening, I'll use him against Yale to-day."

Big Bill, his eyes dimmed with joy, wrung Kinsey's hand, and did not trust himself to speak. After long indecision as to whether he should watch the game from the side lines, near Kinsey and the substitutes, or from the section in the stands reserved for his class, he finally chose the latter. His boy—his class' boy—was going in that day against Yale. He had to be with the class when the moment came to give the boy the cheer as he went into the game when he should make the play which would win—or, at the very least, score—for Nassau.

With betting favoring the Elis only by the slight odds of six to five, the teams took the field. The thousands on the stands all about were on their feet, incessantly cheering; distinctly, however, Big Bill could hear the reporter in the press stands behind him dictating deliberately to the telegrapher at the key who was sending bulletins each instant to the afternoon papers, issuing extras everywhere throughout the nation, and to groups of Princeton and Yale men gathered in Chicago, St. Louis, and farther away, to follow each play of the game by wire.

The voice named the men of the two elevens as they lined up for practice; now it continued:

"On the side lines for Princeton is Ware, who, it is understood, will be used to-day if Princeton gets a chance to score from the field."

Big Bill settled back with greater satisfaction. It was confirmed again; every one understood it; it must be true. His boy was to be used; he would score to-day on Yale.

The Tigers kicked off; a Blue back caught the ball and was running with it. The game was on.

"Yale makes four through right tackle. Attempted forward pass is grounded and incomplete. Yale adds four around right end; two more through tackle. The officials are measuring, but it is first down, and Yale keeps the ball."

A gain; a halt; another gain; a loss; but then a gain once more. Slowly, irresistibly, the Elis were taking the ball down the field.

Big Bill jumped up with the rest to yell with his class. The Blue eleven bore on; a run around the end; a short forward pass; and the Elis, forcing the play, passed the center of the field; then a Blue end, getting clear, ran almost to the Orange and Black goal before Kea-

ton, diving desperately, brought him down.

No one needed to look down to the field now to know that, in less than five minutes of play, the Tigers were making their last stand before their goal. Already, so early in the game, Big Bill found himself bareheaded, singing aloud with all the other men about him the song *in extremis,* the Alma Mater, "Old Nassau." Under its thrill, the Tigers stopped the Eli attack once, twice, three times; but these new rules gave Yale another chance. Yale, rushing with half a foot to gain, got over the goal line.

"The cheer! The cheer! Everybody in it! For the team! Two locomotives! Two! Ray, ray, ray!"

Big Bill, who had himself four times lined up with his men under the goal posts, while the Elis were preparing to kick their goal after touchdown, led the cheer for his section of the stands. But when he sat down again, his depression came not alone from realizing that, with a Yale score so early and so easy, the game must be gone; this meant also that the Tigers, with a touchdown against them, would not call in a substitute to try a goal from the field if they got the ball into Yale territory. Though the Elis now had failed to kick their goal from touchdown, their score of six remained; the Tigers could not kick, they must have a touchdown to tie or win.

The rest of the first quarter confirmed this; and the second, in which the Orange and Black fought on the defensive, barely succeeding in stopping another Yale score. The third quarter still was the same after both elevens had rested; Yale carried the ball always in Tiger territory; the Orange and Black took it only before it reached their own goal; then Keaton kicked it out to the center of the field, where the Eli backs caught it and began all over again.

Big Bill, physically exhausted from the strain of the game, as though he himself had been playing it, stared down at the eleven black-jerseyed men struggling, spent, on the field. He seemed to be playing his old position, full back, meeting and throwing himself under the rush of the Blue players, his arms straining as he made a tackle, the muscles in his calves stiffening and cracking as he pushed to hold—hold when he backed up his line on defense. But at other moments he was out of the game; he was his son, sitting on the side lines, big, strong, powerful, young, and not trusted to play for Princeton? Yet, if they only put him in now, at least he would score; against Yale, he would score at last.

For the final time—it must be final, with the five-minute warning of the end of the game given several plays back—the Elis brought the ball back before the Princeton goal, and the Tigers took it. Once more Keaton spiraled the ball far down the field; and this time, instead of the quick, accurate catch and run of one of the Yale backs, some one fumbled it, and a Princeton end hurled his body upon the ball.

One rush; two rushes; three, four, under the thunder of the Tiger cheers First down for Princeton on the Yale forty-yard line; another series of rushes; first down on the thirty-yard line. But now, suddenly and absolutely, the rushes were stopped. The first attack of the third series of downs netted nothing; the second even lost a yard; a forward pass, tried, failed.

"Princeton's ball, fourth down, on the Yale thirty-one-yard line, eleven yards to gain!" The distinct, deliberate tones of the reporter told the news, over the telegraph wire, to the nation. Then he added: "Less than a minute to play."

Then: "Princeton is making a substitution. Keaton is leaving the game, both sides cheering for him."

Though for four years—or, rather, since that moment of looking forward when he first held his son in his arms and sang to him of Princeton and football and Yale—Big Bill had lived for this moment, now he could not have believed his eyes, which told him that the supreme instant had come, unless his ears had confirmed them.

"Ware goes in for Princeton!" the distinct, deliberate voice talking to the nation said. "To attempt a score from the field."

Of course, every one knew that. The Yale captain, as he saw young Bill coming, already had spread his men swiftly in defense for the Tiger kick formation.

The class boy, clearing his cleats, took his position behind his line, and looked up and down to see that every one was in position to protect him. He did not know whether his signal had been called or not; he did not need to know; his coming into the game could be for only one thing—to score from the field, in the last moment, to take something from the sting of defeat.

A few on the Princeton side, realizing that, objected and clamored for a last, desperate rush for a touchdown to tie, or win. But the rest were cheering him now, his name at the end of the long cheer, as, in the last minute of his eligibility, he faced Yale.

Strained and tense in position, he stretched out his arms, his fists clenched; when he should open his fingers, the ball would come back to him for the one supreme act of his life—for the deed which, since he had been able to understand anything, he had known he was born to do. Before him in reality, and not merely in his dreams, crouched the line of Blue which he had been born to beat, before him opposed the Elis of his first nursery song. And for an instant he was very sick; the catching of the ball, the dropping of it straight to his foot, the kicking of it over that line of men overwhelmed him as a tremendous task, titantic and impossible. Every test in which he had failed with the opposing line set to spring at him, recurred and weakened him, and made him faint; then the thousand, the ten thousand times that he had made the kick perfectly in practice by himself came back to him, and he remembered that these were the Elis now before him—the Elis which he must be able to beat.

He stared at them and opened his hands. The center, bent over with legs spread far apart, threw back the ball; young Bill saw it start; then—somehow time seemed to have ceased.

He had given the signal, and the ball had started to him; but he had not caught it. Yet he must have it; in this moment, at last opposed to Yale, he could not have failed. He could not feel the ball in his hands; but he must have it. His legs were ready, his body poised for the kick. So he threw with his hands as he had done a thousand times when dropping the ball for a kick, and his foot, timed to the drop, flew forward—and met nothing.

Rushing all about him, the Elis blocked him off and forced him back; they had come through the line everywhere, almost at will. Young Bill, knowing now that he had not had the ball, bore back with them, sick, indeed, now with the sense that at the great moment of his life he had failed—when, far in front of him, he saw some one in a Princeton jersey leap into the air and catch the ball and pull it down, and hurl himself on the ground with the ball beneath him over the Yale goal. And then he knew that, as he had stood hypnotized, certain that the ball was coming back to him, and bringing the Elis through to block his kick in the same certainty, the quarter back had taken the pass from the center, and thrown the ball on a long forward pass to Perry for a touchdown.

Next the crazy, cheering crowds on the Princeton stands—and those on the Yale side, too—got it. About a minute after the goal from the touchdown was kicked and time was called and Princeton irrevocably had won, they all began to get it.

The mob of maniacs who stampeded into the field took upon their shoulders first, of course, Perry, the end, who had made the touchdown, and the quarter who had thrown the long pass. Then they picked up Kinsey; and next, as Big Bill still stood staring, gasping, murmuring over and over to himself, "They didn't use him; they didn't dare use him," the mob of maniacs picked up young Bill, too, and bore him before the section where the greatest class raved.

"They didn't use him?" the classmate next to Big Bill beat and pummeled him to sensibility. "Oh, mother! Come to, you Bill Ware! Lead the cheer for our class kid; or, if you feel too close related, let me! Stuck it to 'em! Oh, was it worth bringing up the kid to stick it to 'em like that? Kinsey didn't use him. Oh, I say, did Kinsey use that kid? Everybody in the cheer for the class boy who beat Yale! Ray, ray, ray! Oh, you Big Bill Ware, wake up! Stuck it to 'em at last! You stuck it to 'em!"

GETTING A LINE ON THE HUSBAND

SENATOR GILBERT M. HITCHCOCK, of Nebraska, was in the editorial rooms of his newspaper one evening when a cub reporter called up on the telephone to report that he had just heard of a sensational shooting scrape. Hitchcock, who happened to answer the call, wanted to know about the details of the shooting.

"The fellow married the girl at four o'clock this afternoon, and at eight this evening he shot her five times," the information came back over the wire.

"Good!" exclaimed Hitchcock, referring to the merits of the story, and not the advisability of the crime.

"And the girl's alive and conscious," pursued the cub. "What shall I do about it?"

"Go and get the story from her at once," ordered the owner of the paper crisply. "Get a big interview from her."

"But I don't know what to ask her exactly," objected the reporter.

At this, the now dignified United States senator lost all patience, jumped up and down in the air three times, and voiced his opinion of bone-headed reporters. Then he said calmly over the wire:

"I don't think you entirely get the point, the big punch in the story. Married at four, shot five times at eight! Go get the story—quick!"

"Well, all right; but what shall I ask her?" persisted the greenhorn.

"Suppose," suggested Hitchcock, with a poor imitation of the patient Job: "you ask her whether she regards the conduct of her new husband as an insult or merely studied indifference."

On Guard

By Theodore Goodridge Roberts

Author of "Master of the Moose Horn," "Strangers in Bully Bay," Etc.

From the farm to the drill grounds. A story of Canada OF TO-DAY, when the call for recruits is being answered by men of all ranks in the loyal Dominion

THE Sixty-ninth Regiment (Victoria County Rangers) got the order from Ottawa to recruit to war strength for home service. This happened on the fifth day of August, in the middle of a spell of fine weather. Old John Smiler was haying at the time; but young Bill Smiler, his orphan nephew, was doing most of the work. Bill was nineteen years of age, and worth his "keep" and thirty dollars a month to any agriculturalist; but as Old John classed himself as an uncle of an orphan rather than as a farmer in this case, Bill didn't draw down the thirty. As to the "keep," it lacked something in keeping quality.

On the sixth day of August, Bill worked from half past four in the morning until half past eight at night, commencing with the chores, and going on to milking, driving the mower, raking by horse and hand, pitching and stowing, and wound up gently, after a hasty supper, with cocking up and a little more raking. Then John Smiler discovered that there was no molasses in the house; so Bill took the jug and trudged a mile to Sam Blaine's store at the Corners. It was when Sam was filling the jug that Bill's weary eyes chanced to turn upon the white poster tacked to the open door:

RECRUITS!

Recruits wanted for the 69th (Victoria Co. Rangers.)

FOR HOME SERVICE.
FOR FOREIGN SERVICE.

The recruiting office for B Company is now open at Kelly's Creek. Inquire for Captain Kelly, Lieut. Carson, or Lieut. Jones.

By order of the Officer Commanding the 69th Regiment.

GOD SAVE THE KING!

Bill Smiler read the strange words slowly.

"Be they figgerin' to have another camp this summer, Mr. Blaine?" he asked. "I alius did want to git to camp, but uncle never let me."

Mr. Blaine corked the jug and came heavily to Bill's side. He regarded the poster for several seconds in heavy silence.

"Camp!" he exclaimed, at last. "A-playin' at sodgerin'! No, Bill, that ain't the idee. Ye've heared about the war, ain't ye?"

Bill shook his head.

"What war?" he asked. "Be them Chinee fellers a-fighting' them missionaries ag'in, Mr. Blaine?"

"They ain't," replied the storekeeper crisply. "Don't ye ever read the papers, Bill?"

"No. Uncle allus likes to see me asleep when I ain't workin'. He don't hold with readin' the papers."

"Well, Bill, I'll tell ye. This here Austria—Hungry Austria they call it—felt like a snack an' tried to make a dinner on some little country over there. The little fellers wouldn't lay quiet on the hot plates, to be et. So the German emperor bust loose, him bein' peckish, too. He cal'lated to chaw France, and when he was gittin' his teeth pushed out all ready for a bite, he sot his feet down kinder heavy on a little country named Belgium. The Belgiums appear to be better nor they look on the map—little an' sassy, like Nat Robison's dog—an' they durned soon started the German emperor a-liftin' and a-shiftin' his feet. Then France buys some duckshots an' goes gunnin' for that onconsiderate emperor; an' she gives the tip to King George, our King George of England and Canada, about some sort of partnership agreement they're in.

"'Right ye are!' says King George. 'We gotter stop him quick. I'll give him an hour to quit in.' But the Emperor of Germany ain't quit yet. So King George is into it; and the Rooshuns are into it; and now Cap'n Tim Kelly's into it. He's all for fightin', is the cap'n. Sot on fightin' somethin'. It ain't long since he was talkin' about goin' to Ireland and helpin' the Naturalists fight agin' the Ulsterists; but now it is them Germans he's after. I was in to the Creek yesterday, on business, and see that the cap'n and Squire Peters has 'God save the king' stuck up everywhere—and they're passin' out the red coats to the boys hand over fist. And Doc Martin is there, a-lookin' the lads over and measurin' 'em."

Bill Smiler's dull eyes brightened, and a quick flush of red appeared in his tanned brow and cheeks.

"And uncle wants a package of soda crackers, Mr. Blaine," he said, with a catch in his voice.

The storekeeper gave him the crackers.

"I ain't takin' the jug," he said. "Uncle will call for it some time, I reckon."

He left the shop then, with the biscuits under his right arm.

Old John Smiler's farm lay to the north of the Corners, and Kelly's Creek lay fifteen miles to the south of the Corners. Bill Smiley walked southward after leaving Blaine's store. His thoughts were bright, but confused, flashing in his mind and bewildering him. He was conscious of the beating of his heart; and for a little while he breathed quickly and with difficulty. His feet felt light, his lean legs tireless.

"Never been to a camp yet," he said. "Never been nowhere. But now I'll go an' lend King George a hand, by jinks, if uncle kills me for it!"

He covered the first five miles of his journey at top speed, the second stage of five miles in an hour and fifteen minutes, the third and last stage in an hour and a half. He halted at the outskirts of the little village of Kelly's Creek, and left the highway in search of a spring or brook. He soon found what he wanted, lay down beside it in the alders, and drank deep. Then he ate about half the package of soda crackers, munching slowly. He topped off the flavorless meal with a handful of wild raspberries picked from a near-by thicket, then lay down on the dry weeds and grasses among the alders. He sank into dreamless sleep almost instantly, and did not awake until the sun was well above the eastern hill.

Captain Kelly's armory was a barn-like wooden building which stood flush with the road in the center of the village. Inside the armory were rooms containing the rifles and clothing for one hundred and twenty-five men, tents and blankets, a small drill hall, and the

captain's office; and behind it, in a ten-acre field, a dozen tents were already pitched. The captain was a prosperous farmer and lumberman, and a devoted militia officer.

Bill Smiley stood at the wire fence, on the plank walk, for ten minutes, gazing over at the white bell tents, the squads of drilling men, and the sentry in his red coat and with a bayonet on the end of his rifle. Could that marching, high-chested, red-coated soldier with the sloped rifle topped with the blade of flashing steel be really Johnny Scott, of Green Ridge? The freckled face under the service cap certainly looked like Johnny's; but Bill had never heard that Johnny was a great soldier.

Bill found a small, very straight man in tight, dust-colored clothing, standing beside the door of the captain's office. Bill didn't know him.

"Good mornin' to you, Bill," said the stranger heartily. "If ye've come to join on, step right inside and tell the captain about it."

Bill took a second look at him and staggered.

"I'm durned if it ain't Jerry Hayward, o' Green Ridge!" he exclaimed.

"Color Sergeant Hayward, my lad," returned the other. "This way, if ye've come to enlist."

Captain Kelly ran keen eyes over Bill Smiler as he shook hands with him.

"How is your uncle's hay coming on, Bill?" he asked pleasantly.

"Don't know, nor don't care, cap'n," returned Bill. "I be through with uncle an' his hay."

"You want to enlist?"

"I cal'late to git into a red coat, cap'n."

"Home or foreign service, Bill?"

"Whichever ye say. I'm cal'latin' on fightin' for King George."

The captain wrote Bill's name and age on a ruled sheet of paper.

"Wait here," he said, and left the room.

He returned, fifteen minutes later, accompanied by Doctor Martin. The doctor measured Bill here and there, examined him from his scalp to the soles of his feet, listened to the working of his heart and lungs, and tested his eyes.

"A trifle dusty, but fit as a fiddle," he said.

Then Bill wrote down his name laboriously, repeated some inspiring words after the captain, and kissed the open Bible, and was marched off to breakfast. After breakfast he took a bath, and got into a red coat, under the watchful eyes of a corporal.

At three o'clock that afternoon, when Bill Smiler and five other recruits were being instructed in the intricacies of the position of attention, Old John Smiler drove up and drew rein outside the wire fence. His small, cold eyes soon alighted upon Bill.

"Hey, you!" he cried. "You, William Smiler! Git outer that there red coat an' come along home."

Many of the volunteers turned their glances upon the old man in the wagon, but Bill was not one of them. The instructor of the squad saw young Smiler's face redden, then whiten.

"D'ye hear me!" yelled the farmer. "Confound you for a worthless hound! Git out of that there dirty red coat an' come along with me, or I'll go in there an' strip it off with this here hoss-whip!"

Color Sergeant Hayward, who was orderly sergeant for the day, ordered a corporal and two men out to arrest John Smiler and march him before Squire Peters.

"Tell the squire that an officer will be around in ten minutes, to make the charge," he said.

And so it was. Old John Smiler was limp as a rag by the time the squire and Captain Kelly had finished talking to him.

"You are guilty of using abusive and insulting language to one of his

majesty's soldiers while engaged in his military duty in time of war, and of insulting his majesty's uniform, but as it is a first offense I'll let you off with the choice between paying a fine of ten dollars, or going to jail for twenty days," concluded the squire.

Old John Smiler paid the fine and went home.

II.

Within a week of Bill Smiler's enlisting for foreign service "for one year, or the period of the war," Captain Kelly's company of the Sixty-ninth went into camp at Milltown Junction, with two other companies of the same regiment, and four of the Seventy-fifth —between eight and nine hundred troops, all ranks. They expected to remain at Milltown Junction a few days, perhaps a week, until they were joined by other foreign-service contingents, and then to move on to the great encampment that was to be established at Val Cartier, in Quebec.

The ground at the Junction was government property, and had been used for years for the summer training of the local militia. It was well situated and well drained, and water was piped into the camp lines from a never-failing spring on the side of a high, wooded hill a quarter of a mile away. A guard of one man by day and two by night was placed on this spring.

Bill Smiler mounted guard on the spring at two o'clock of a warm and windless afternoon. His bayonet was fixed, and a cartridge lay in the breech of his rifle. He stood and regarded the spring, his mind busy with the wording of his duty, as passed over to him by the old guard.

"Challenge any one approaching the spring, and shoot any one who approaches to within a yard of the spring in disregard of your second challenge and your threat to fire; and shoot to kill."

Bill mumbled the words over several times, memorized them, and considered them. "Shoot to kill." He didn't like the sound of it, and hoped that no one would be foolish enough to come monkeying around while he was on duty.

The spring was in the middle of a small, sloping clearing. It was partially covered by old planks. The sunlight struck down from the tops of the little spruces into the clean depths of the water.

Bill Smiler circled the spring several times, then came to rest above it, at the upper edge of the clearing. The air was warm and sweet with the essence of sun-steeped spruce and fern. Bill leaned on his rifle and stared down and across the glimmer of still heat between half-closed lids. His thoughts moved fitfully but slowly and without effort, now concerned with red John Smiler and the thankless drudgery of the farm, now with his new life and duties, but more than all with the face and voice of a girl named Eva Smithers. He was picturing his return from the war, with medals on his breast and foreign words on his tongue, and Eva's astonishment and joy at seeing him, when a swishing in the underbrush at his back caused him to start and turn, and bring his rifle to the ready.

"Stand!" he exclaimed, with a jump of nervousness in his voice. The man in the underbrush halted and recoiled from the bayonet so suddenly presented at his breast. He was a large, elderly man, dressed in a khaki-serge uniform. His face was fat and pale, and his eyes were of an unusual color and daunting expression. He was a stranger to Bill.

"What d'ye want here?" asked Bill, in angry and shaken tones. "Ye can't come nigh to this here spring, mister!"

"Very good, my boy," returned the stranger. "Very good, indeed. Quick as a trap, you are. Smart as paint, my lad."

Bill felt pleased by the stranger's gracious words, but his pleasure did not dull his sense of duty.

"Thank you, mister; but you better go away from here," he said. "I got orders to shoot any one foolin' round here."

A pale light flickered in the stranger's eyes.

"I am one of your officers, my lad," he said. "A colonel."

"I never seen ye before, sir," replied Bill.

"I came through the brush to test your alertness, and to get a drink."

"You can't go nigh that spring, sir; and you better clear out. I got my orders."

"But I tell you, my man, I'm one of your own officers!"

"Can't help that, sir. Nobody ain't goin' near that there spring whilst I guard. An' I never seen ye before. Ye may be a spy, for all I know."

"Step aside! I'll have you before the colonel for this. You'll get into trouble for this."

"I got my orders, sir. Go away, or I'll shoot ye. Them's my orders."

"You fool! Stand aside! Take your orders from me. I command the brigade."

Bill felt embarrassed and frightened. If this stranger had the authority to give orders, to cancel former orders—if this cold-eyed man was in fact a colonel and the commander of the brigade—what would happen to him, Bill Smiler? Bill felt distressed, uncertain as to how to act, fearful of the result of what he had already said and done. This man might be a colonel—he was dressed for the part, at least—but, on the other hand, he might be a spy. As he was correctly dressed as a colonel, therefore he was cleverly dressed as a spy.

Bill was about to step aside, when the stranger dodged and sprang past him and dashed down the slope toward the sacred water.

"Halt! Or I fire!" screamed Bill, bringing his rifle to his shoulder.

The stranger halted and turned, hesitated for a moment, then came storming up the slope toward the sentry. His face was white, his eyes afire.

"You idiot!" he cried. "What do you mean by threatening to fire upon me? You'll suffer for this. Are you mad? Can't you see who I am?"

"Ye got to keep clear o' that there spring, sir," said Bill breathlessly. "If I knowed ye was the colonel in command of this here camp, I'd—well, maybe I'd let ye go down to the spring. But I don't know ye, sir; an' I don't know the colonel in command of this here brigade. I never seen ye before."

"Well, you see me now," retorted the other harshly. "I am Colonel Dunbar. Do you believe me?"

"I do, an' ag'in I don't, sir," returned Bill nervously.

"I'll prove it to you," said the other. "To begin with, I came from Milltown; but I know the whole province. What part of the province do you come from?"

Bill told him.

"Very good," continued the colonel. "I've visited your part of the country more than once, on shooting and fishing trips. I've fished Kelly's Creek several times. Captain Kelly comes from there. Are you a member of his company?"

"Yes, sir."

"A fine fellow, your captain. I was talking to him only a few minutes ago. Rough, of course, possessed of admirable qualities and a considerable knowledge of military matters."

The white pinch of rage had left his face by this time, and his voice was bland; but the expression of his eyes was sinister and chill, and the cock of his left eyebrow ironic. He smiled. He chatted to Bill of places and persons about Kelly's Creek, and of the officers

and men of the regiment, until the lad felt sure that he was who and what he claimed to be.

"And now, my man, are you satisfied that I am not a spy?" he concluded.

"I reckon I be, colonel," said Bill.

"Very good," returned the stranger. "I have convinced you. You have returned to your senses. See that you stick to them. I am going down now to look at the spring and wet my throat."

"I'd rather ye'd go back to camp for a drink, colonel," said Bill apologetically. "It ain't far, sir."

"Do you still doubt my identity? Do you still think me a spy and an enemy?"

"No, sir; but if Cap'n Kelly knowed I let ye go to the spring, he'd sure be mad."

The stranger thrust his face close to Bill Smiler's and grinned horribly.

"I've had about enough of this!" he exclaimed. "I've had too much of it! Another word out of you, my man, and you'll go home in disgrace. You'll not last in this brigade as long as a dog with tallow legs can chase asbestos cats through hell."

Under almost any other circumstances, the words of the colonel's threat would have sounded distinctly and grotesquely humorous to Bill Smiler; but he looked at the colonel's eyes, lost color, and stammered an apology. His mouth and tongue and lips were dry as dust. He ran his tongue nervously between his lips and swallowed hard at nothing. A dry shiver went through him from head to foot.

The stranger turned and went down the slope, without a backward glance. He did not hurry; he did not lag.

Bill Smiler gazed dully after him, daunted and apprehensive. For a time his anxiety was all for himself. He reflected fearfully that he had seriously offended the officer who commanded the brigade, and that this officer showed every indication of being one who would neither forget nor forgive. What was his punishment to be? Would he be turned out of the company, out of the regiment, out of the foreign-service contingent, and sent back to his uncle in disgrace? No, he would never go back to that old man; and he would never again show himself to the folks he knew—to Eva Smithers in particular—except as a hero, or at least as a veteran soldier honorably discharged. Would Colonel Dunbar forgive him his mistake? Perhaps Captain Kelly would plead for him with the brigade commander?

He saw the stranger pause beside the spring, then kneel on the platform of planks which partially covered the surface of the water, and thrust a hand into one of the side pockets of his tunic. Then suspicion flamed again in Bill Smiler's brain as quick and hot as the flash of powder, and a swift faintness of terror possessed and shook him. What of his duty? What of his word and his soldierly responsibility? He raised his rifle and tried to cry "Halt!" but his voice thinned to a whisper in his dry throat. The stranger gave no heed, but stooped forward over the spring.

"Come back!" cried Bill, in a cracked voice. "Come back, for God's sake, or I got to shoot ye!"

He brought the butt of his rifle to his shoulder, and the sights swam before his eyes, blurring and slipping. The whole rifle jumped in his hand. He steadied it with a desperate effort.

"I'll shoot ye!" he screamed. "I got to! Ye're a spy!"

The stranger straightened his back and turned his face across his shoulder; and at that moment the sights of the rifle stood clear and black to Bill's view, and his fingers pressed the trigger. The report of the exploded cartridge was sharp and loud, but Bill's ears were not conscious of it. He saw the stranger slump forward over the spring, and lie motionless. He knelt, dropped his rifle

with a thump on the sward of thin grass and wild berries, and covered his bloodless face with his hands. He had shot a man!

Men came running in answer to the ringing alarm of the shot. Bill, lying prone in the warm, thin herbage of the hillside, heard the brushing of their bodies through the woods, the thumping of their feet, their shouts and calls. He scrambled to his hands and knees, and saw running figures, and half a dozen excited men grouped about the spring, screening the victim of his deed from his sight. He saw a young officer join the group; voices struck dully upon his ears; he was conscious of his own name passing from mouth to mouth. He drew his rifle toward him, and got unsteadily to his feet. At once a dozen faces were turned toward him, shouts rang out, and a dozen men, headed by the young officer, dashed up the slope.

The officer laid a violent hand on Bill's shoulder and thrust a flaming, twisted face close to Bill's.

"Did you do it? What did you do it for?" he yelped.

Bill moved his lips, but uttered no sound.

"You have murdered an officer!" exclaimed the other.

"I challenged him," said Bill. "He wouldn't heed me. Said he was Colonel Dunbar; but, all of a suddint, I thought he was a spy."

The other dropped his hand from Bill's shoulder.

"Colonel Dunbar? The brigadier!" he exclaimed.

"It ain't Colonel Dunbar," said a sergeant. "That man ye shot, sentry, is Peter Benson. He belongs hereabouts, like myself. He ain't Dunbar, nor he ain't a spy."

Bill Smiler sat down heavily, let fall his rifle again, and covered his face with his hands.

"I—I done what I was told to do!" he exclaimed, and then broke into hysterical, dry sobbing.

"Who is this Benson?" asked the subaltern of the sergeant.

"A queer one, sir," replied the other. "Touched in the upper story, an' was sent to the asylum for a few years, long ago, for tryin' to poison his wife—but harmless now as a babe. Smiler should have had better sense than to shoot so quick."

"I—didn't shoot—quick," sobbed Bill. "I give him fair warnin'—at first. I came pretty nigh believin' he was the colonel—until a feelin' come over me suddint, at the last—an' I couldn't help shootin'."

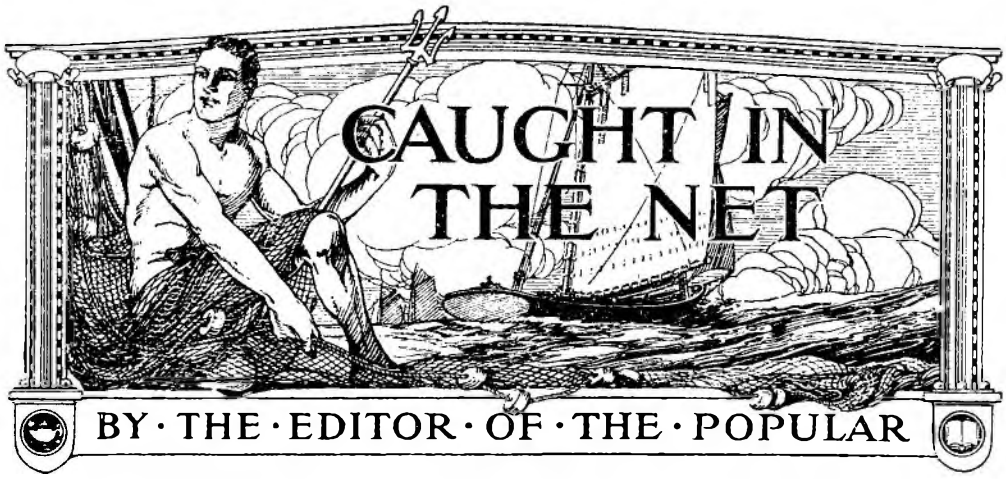
More officers and men had collected about the spring by this time. A private with his right arm wet to the shoulder, and a medical officer, turned and ascended the slope toward Bill. The doctor halted beside the subaltern and disclosed a small, tightly corked bottle, which he held in his hand. It was full of a white powder.

"Arsenic," he said. "Thank Heaven the guard shot quick and straight, before the cork was pulled!"

And that is how Bill Smiler became one of the early, minor heroes of the war. He was made a sergeant next morning; and before he sailed for England he was color sergeant of Captain Kelly's company. He takes no credit to himself, however, for having saved the camp by shooting the insane poisoner in the nick of time—before the cork was extracted from the bottle of arsenic.

"It wasn't me done it," he always says. "I was thinkin' of myself; I was scared to stop him; an' then somethin' h'isted the rifle to my shoulder, aimed her, an' pressed my finger. I reckon it was sense of duty done that—or maybe the ghost of some old soldier!"

"THE ICICLE" is the original title of another story Roberts has written for us. Look for it in an early issue.



LORD KITCHENER'S HOBBY

PROBABLY no one has grown steadily into a world figure with less known of his personality than Lord Kitchener, the "K. of K." of the man in the street. It is not that he endeavors to render himself invisible or shuts himself off behind official barriers. Rather the reverse, for he is not difficult to see, but beyond that there is absolutely nothing doing. The tall, strongly built, taciturn figure seems to set a value on words that would do credit to the shrewdest politician. But once, at any rate, he was known to talk, and that remains an event in the British army. This happened when he was commander in chief in India.

As was his habit, he descended unexpectedly on a certain cavalry regiment. He caught them a bit unprepared. Consequently there was quite a flurry among the officers, and no end of hustle to get the regiment into inspection order. On the whole, it was feared they were in for a bad "wigging." But K. of K. passed down the lines of the parade at least without unfavorable comment.

So far good, for Lord Kitchener never deals in flattery, and the best to be expected from him is an approving nod. To his idea it seems that since high efficiency and discipline are to be expected of a soldier, why shout about it? On this occasion, therefore, the officers were beginning to breathe a bit freely when Lord Kitchener sent for one of the captains.

That captain felt surely he was in for it as he advanced to salute the severe disciplinarian. But instead of "wanting to know, sir," et cetera, to the surprise of every one Lord Kitchener began to discuss Chinese porcelain.

It presently developed that Lord Kitchener was an indefatigable collector of rare old Ming Dynasty ceramics, and that he had heard the captain, recently returned from service in China, had brought back with him some much-prized specimens.

The result was that during lunch Lord Kitchener and the captain talked together entirely on Chinese porcelains, while the rest of the mess had the good sense to hold back on a subject of which they knew nothing.

Finally, since Lord Kitchener had some duplicate pieces not in the captain's collection, and the captain was eager to possess others in Lord Kitchener's ownership, an exchange was made apparently to the great satisfaction of both parties.

Of course, the officers were proud of their regiment, firmly believing it up

to the highest military standard, but other probably envious regiments said that if it hadn't been for those rotten old Chinese porcelains—well, the situation might have been different.

Further by way of illustrating Lord Kitchener's dislike for social formality, it is related of him, at the same period, that he had a unique way of extracting himself from the burden of entertaining possibly distinguished but none the less tiresome guests. His position compelled him to ask wandering princes, dukes, and such folk to dinner, but there was a prevalent idea that these feasts were speeded up in a succession of rapid-fire courses, then the end came suddenly.

Just after the king's health was drunk an aid-de-camp moved mysteriously to Lord Kitchener's side. He bent down and whispered something in the commander in chief's ear. Lord Kitchener was observed to knit his brows, rise, and leave the room thoughtfully. Thereupon the aid-de-camp bowed politely as he made apology somewhat after this fashion:

"His excellency begs to be excused, but dispatches of urgent importance have just arrived. He regrets he will be detained over them for several hours. His excellency hopes his guests will not hasten their departure on this account, but should he not see them again, wishes them good luck on their travels."

GIRL SLAVES OF JAPAN

JAPAN, which hopes one day to be a great manufacturing nation, has adopted few of the virtues and some of the vices of the Occidental industrial systems. Japan is making decided progress in cotton manufacturing. The Kanegafuchi Spinning Company has fifteen mills, and employs twenty-eight thousand operatives. The Miye Mills Company employs nearly fifteen thousand, and the Osaka approximately eight thousand.

Somehow the American has become possessed of the notion that the Japanese are extremely clever. Some—a small number comparatively—are. The vast majority are not. Japanese labor is cheap and inefficient. The bulk of the operatives in the cotton mills, perhaps eighty-five per cent, are women and girls. They virtually are prisoners throughout the years they serve in the mills. Wages in the mills are so low that great difficulty is experienced in getting workers. Recruiting officers travel through the agricultural belt and round up girls as they would sheep or cattle and bring them to town. The girls sign contracts to work three years. They are housed in a barrack inside the mill compound. Twelve to fifteen girls sleep in a room. There are no decorations. There is a straw matting on the floor, but no furniture. The girls sleep in rows, each having her sleeping quilt and wooden headrest. At the rear of the barrack is a cement-lined bath. Here after their day's labor the girls bathe together in water so hot that it would take the skin off a white person. Each batch of girls is under the charge of a matron. To have a visitor or to be permitted to go outside the compound is a rare privilege. The mill owners say they have to guard the girls carefully to prevent them from being enticed away by agents of other mills.

The smallest number of working hours for the girls is twelve. In some mills it is thirteen or fourteen. The pay of the Japanese operative averages twenty cents a day. Out of this the employer takes six cents for food.

The work is so confining and so hard that few girls remain when their contracts expire, so the scouring of the farm districts for recruits becomes more insistent each year.

Either mill work has such a bad name or the supply of girls in the agricultural districts is so small that the Osaka mill has been led to import girls from northern Korea.

The mills maintain their own hospitals, and some have little theaters within the mill compounds in which occasional performances are given, but generally speaking the girl mill hands of Japan have no more freedom in the years of their contracts than did the negroes of the South in the period of slavery.

SCIENTISTS OF CRIME

NOT so long ago an alchemist sold you a love potion, while a chemist was curing you of dyspepsia. A charlatan bled you, while a physician built you up. An astrologer tied your minute personality to the motions of Aldebaran, while an astronomer was measuring the orbit of the moon. Each profession has had its vague tricksters elbowing the foreground, while quietly in the shadow the worthy were conquering chaos. That is just where we find the science of questioned documents to-day. Expert testimony on forged checks, altered wills, anonymous letters, blackmailing demands, suicide notes, poison packages, is of two kinds. Dreamy guesses by venal quacks have fogged the law courts like a warm, wet cloud. And through that heavy mist, like the sharp-cleaving prow of a river boat, has cut the expert testimony of scientists. What they say is based on reasons. It is reached by tests of microscope, filar-micrometer, and micro-stereoscopic camera. Their conclusions are not hazards of intuition, guesses sprung by the leaky brain. Not at all. They are objective facts. They collect the documents, and measure and photograph and compare till the fact leaps clear of the clogging and irrelevant matter where it lies imbedded. For instance, there is a special stereoscopic camera. It carries a single lens. The principle of this camera is that of the two-eyed binocular view, seeing things as they are. The depth is given by the lens taking two slightly different views of the same document. These stereoscopic photographs help to tell whether typewriting was done on a particular machine, when the letters of that machine are bruised. The photographs are enlarged, say, fifty-fold. Whenever you get your third dimension involved—the depth of the given type letter—then this camera gives nice details.

The detective of Victorian fiction was a good soul, who never inhabited reality, because no man ever had the sort of eye and instinct which could pick up scattered traces, group them, and think out the answer. There is no short cut. Those men graced fiction, but never lived. But here, in our generation, we have a set of men who live and work and solve mystery, but who are unknown to our imaginative genius.

It was left for these experts to work out a method which collected the symptoms of crime, diagnosed them, and arrived at a result. Patient, honest scientists, they have lifted the twilight zone of surmise into the lighted area of revealed truth. They have made a science out of the realm of quackery.

Some of their work in ferreting forgeries of handwriting and typewriting and in establishing justice is laden with drama. There was the good-by letter found on the body of an unhappy wife. If she wrote it, she had committed suicide, and her story was ended. But if another wrote it and placed it there to divert suspicion, she had been most foully murdered. Then the husband was guilty, and would start his march to the electric chair. It needed but a

few hours of close laboratory work to prove that the scrap of paper was indeed in her hand. So an innocent man was cleared.

There was the shaky senile signature of a poor, feeble old senator, as rambling as the prattle of a child. On that signature an adventuress had based her claim that she was married to his millions, by filling in the space above with a typewritten statement of the marriage. But she had filled it in later, by her own typewriter. So one more statesman was saved to the nation's glory.

An astute man had gone free, but those who had studied the will of the murdered millionaire knew that it had been forged in favor of the man who had gone free. And there were the signatures to prove it—six of them, all identical. And no human being ever signed his name twice alike in his lifetime. That six-fold identity meant that a clever hand had traced them from one original by means of transparent paper or had built a stamp, which stamped them.

One comes to realize how weighty is the written word. The issues of life and death hang on the scratch of a pen and the fanfare in which the ink spluttered.

THE VALUE OF SILENCE

AN automatic railway signal that does nothing but raise and lower its arm is almost one hundred per cent efficient. It fails once in about a hundred thousand times. It has nothing to distract its attention from its work.

The average man starts out in the morning with a lot of plans for what he will do during the day, but unexpected interruptions make him abandon or postpone most of them. Some persons of large affairs surround themselves with many clerks and secretaries in order to be inaccessible to those they do not know or do not think important to see. Sometimes they succeed so well that they become like machines because they are not exposed to the stimulus of new ideas that cannot get past the barriers. The most successful man is one who is able to concentrate his mind on a subject at a moment's notice and then pick up the thread of his thoughts after the interruption has passed. But some of these men find absolute seclusion or isolation from external affairs necessary at times.

In one of the great banks in New York City there is a room that is in the interior of the building. It is artificially lighted and ventilated, for it has no windows. Its only furniture is a desk and a chair. It is cut off from every sound. There is no telephone. It has various names among the employees, but is usually called the "think room." When one of the high officials of the bank has some hard problem to unravel he goes into that place of absolute silence and shuts the door. He stays there until he gets through thinking. It is an absolute rule that he must not be interrupted under any consideration.

The very bareness and silence of the room conduce to concentrated thought. It has proved a success because there is nothing to distract the attention. The same idea has proved equally efficient in selling certain goods, typewriters, for instance. In at least one large sales department there are several small windowless rooms. They contain two chairs and a typewriting machine. They are soundproof. The possible purchaser of a score or a hundred machines goes in there with one of the salesmen. The artificial light is concentrated on the object whose purchase is being discussed. It rivets the attention of the customer, and the chances are that he buys.

The Amateur Professional

By L. J. Beeston

Let us introduce Mr. Beeston; new to the POPULAR, but an author with a "punch." You're going to like him. He has a good story to tell; and more than that, he is a master of good English. "The Amateur Professional" is the record of the adventures of a man who even at school had earned a reputation as a fighter—"master thrasher of bullies"—and in later years was called upon to use his skill with his fists in the terrific crisis into which Fate thrust him. This initial adventure comes to him on his first afternoon in Turkey

I.—IN OLD STAMBOUL

IN a corner seat of one of those London restaurants where you walk through a string of courses for a shilling and a half I saw Nigel Goldsack—saw him after a five years' severance.

The cheap café is in Queer Street. At least its customers are. Now that five-year-old-glimpse of Goldsack had revealed him inside a railway carriage, first class, at a country station, head and shoulders thrust out, answering with grin and cheer the farewell of the entire upper school of St. Basil's, down Sussex way. The sinuous train writhed round a curve, became a black object, a black speck, a cloud of vapor. Gone was Goldsack, captain of the school, peerless in its chronicles as fighter, master thrasher of bullies.

I dropped into a chair opposite. He was writing in a penny notebook, and the effort of it plowed three lines in his forehead and was visible in the sightless glance he shot at me.

"Goldsack," I ventured, as if answering a question.

His brows lifted a little as he came back into the present.

"You don't remember me—Bowater? In the upper fifth at St. Basil's when you went to Winchester."

"Go on," said he with the mildest curiosity, a poor interest. He sighed and looked about him. "This is a rotten hole. Dispense with the fish course, on your life. What are you doing here?"

"Local color. I'm by way of being a journalist."

"The devil you are! In that case"—he looked at the scribble in the notebook—"you might help me. It is something which happened to me in old Stamboul six months back. The queerest thing. You recall Jevdet Ghazali—Ghazali pasha, and his scrap with the Knuckle-duster and Baby Sammy outside Lavender Meads? No, you don't; you were not at Winchester. Ghazali was—that fighting Turk. He ought to have been lightweight champion of Hampshire. We worshiped him. His famous right-hand cross counter might have knocked

a church down. I stood up to it once. Let that slide. He was fond of practicing on me. When his father died he went to his palace in Ortaksiler, Stamboul; became Ghazali pasha there. Six months ago chance brought us together.

"It was the afternoon of a sultry day in Constantinople, when the yellow dogs lay curled in heaps of five or six in the roadway, in the market place, in the shadows of doorways, in the courtyard of the mosques—hundreds and hundreds of those mastiff mongrels which the Turk's religion will not permit him to house. From a molten sky descended a general stupor upon the hills of worn-out Stamboul, its pestilent alleys. The turtledoves in the cypresses of Eyub uttered languorously their low and mournful notes, which sounded like faint moaning from the countless dead which lay there under the terebinth trees, under the white stones.

"In the shadows of the colonnades the beggars crouched with the dogs, and a dervish or two lay upon his lion skin; and a bashi-bazouk with eyes fierce as flame, muttering and swearing under the effects of raki burning his stomach; and an old Turk or so with an aromatic nut glowing in his long pipe; and a detested Greek bathing his sweating face in the muddy pool of a fountain.

"That was my first afternoon in the city of the Turk, where I had come for pleasure. You must understand that things were different with me then.

"Dazed by the heat, half poisoned by the stench, I reached the end of one of those streets and found myself in a great thoroughfare where life flowed with a less sluggish current, bearing along at that particular moment a military division bearing long lances covered with silk, seated upon horses from which hung a velvet cloth. After them came twelve agas in yellow vests; then a score of pages in crimson caps; finally a carriage magnificently painted in designs of flowers and trees. A single occupant claimed this carriage, his simple attire of fez, frock coat, and light trousers contrasting powerfully with the gaudy escort. His head was turned from me, and I caught but a glimpse of a pale, fat cheek and short brown beard. The procession went by—a glare of gold and silver followed by a swarm of half-naked humanity screaming in a dozen different tongues.

"Some mighty prince had passed. Who was he? I stopped with the question a little Turkish boy in green trousers, yellow vest, carrying a gilded bootblack outfit. He regarded me impudently, yelled 'Giaour!' in my face, supplementing the compliment with a curse that would have done credit to a Teriaki, and vanished.

"An hour later I encountered the great personage. I had strolled into the bazaar to escape the heat and to be stunned by the uproar which bursts upon one there in that dimly lighted covered city of arcaded streets and altogether fabulous riches. A single step under a plain archway takes one back five centuries into time, into a region gorgeous with color and romance. Here was a place which mocked to scorn the treasures of every European capital gathered together.

"I found myself in the jewel bazaar, and almost instantly perceived the potentate whom I had seen riding under an escort. I recognized his garb, for his back was toward the entrance to a little dark shop. The shopkeeper—an ancient Armenian in antique caftan, a dozen vivid sashes wound round his body, his nose of a vulture, his eyes dead with opium, stroked his snowy beard in a highly nervous fashion as he spoke to the illustrious customer. The latter held up a long rope of Macedonian turquoises. He tossed it negligently to a page behind him, who handed it to an unveiled slave, who placed it in a wicker basket hanging from her bare forearm. I must say

that the face of this slave attracted me powerfully. At first I thought she was black—a Croat possibly, but a second glance suggested a strong strain of lighter blood—of Circassian or Persian. She had lustrous eyes as timid and beautiful as those of a doe antelope, full lips of the hue of a damask rose, an exquisitely chiseled nose and chin. A many-folded sash wound a crimson gown about her lithe body. For a full minute I could not remove my gaze from this quite lovely creature.

"Suddenly a terrible thing happened. The great man had just purchased an amber cup clear as topaz and incrusted with Ormus sapphires. The page passed this on to the slave, who fumbled at it somewhat, let it slip through her fingers and smash to fragments on the stones. The purchaser looked round; no word of reproof disgraced the calm haughtiness of his manner, but I saw a flame run over his eyes, which, in any other man, might have sent a shiver down my spine. But astonishment and delight killed any such emotion in me. The man, as you have guessed, was Jevdet Ghazali—Ghazali pasha.

"Yet for a moment or two I questioned my sense of sight. He had changed. It was not merely that he had put on thirty pounds in weight, and that his one-time lean, handsome face was more than inclined to fatness and pallor; it was that his entire expression was so different. Here was a once tame tiger gone back to wildness. That was the idea which flashed through my brain.

"The next moment impulse sent me forward a stride with the old familiar name—'Jevvers!'—ringing from my lips.

"If I had flung a high-explosive bomb the result could not have been more startling so far as the spectators were concerned. The ancient Armenian cowered back, his dead eyes bursting from their sockets, appalled by this frightful familiarity, and an ebony-black Nubian of colossal stature, on guard over the pasha's sacred person, gave one great stride toward me, a 'Bismillah!' croaking from his repulsive lips, and his right hand half drawing a fearful-seeming yataghan from his sash.

"For an instant the pasha's cold eyes met mine. Now let me do him full justice. The old smile leaped into his face. Dignity, power, vanished like a breath. He cried exultingly: 'Goldie, by all that's wonderful!' and our hands met in a long, hard grip.

"Again a transformation in environment. I saw a crowd of bent heads and lowered shoulders, all bowing to this unknown giaour whom the pasha so extraordinarily honored; while my friend the Nubian giant fell upon his knees, his forehead smiting the pavement with an audible crack.

"That interview was of the briefest. A grand pasha must not be seen of vulgar eyes chatting with an infidel in the bazaar. It was arranged that a caïque was to call for me after sunset. I was to have the high honor of sharing the evening meal of my old school friend grown illustrious.

"He departed, taking that handful of his retinue with him, every head bending at his advance like a field of wheat as the wind blows over it. I was inclined to rub my eyes, to doubt reality. Was this the incomparable Jevvers of Winchester—conqueror in a hundred fights, master of the Knuckleduster and Baby Sammy, whom he fought together—twelve rounds of sanguinary battle—in Lavender Meads, in the pale sheen of the moon?

"As I turned to move away in an opposite direction I caught sight of a woman cowering by a sculptured column. It was the Circassian slave. Why had she not followed? Was it that she feared to do so? Possibly. These grand pashas, these royal favorites"—

my tale is before the day of the "Young Turk"—"possessed all but absolute power in their palaces on the hills of Stamboul. The girl's eyes were fixed upon me, those liquid eyes, those eyes of a doe antelope, as if in entreaty. For a moment they urged me to go to her; but I thought better of it: knives are sharp in Stamboul, and the waters of the Golden Horn cover more crimes than they mirror stars."

Goldsack broke off at this point in his story and ordered a drink. I produced cigarettes.

"You find it interesting?" he questioned.

"Profoundly."

He brooded in an absent fashion over his drink of a dark lager in a glass tankard. I was moved by more than his story. I had observed that his overcoat needed a pension; that his collar, though clean, had been trimmed; that his tie had lived longer than a sixpenny tie ought to live. Clearly he had fallen on evil days.

And then I noticed that he had another listener. A man had edged himself nearer and nearer to us in an unobtrusive fashion, and despite his air of preoccupation I perceived strong interest in his black eyes. He was well dressed. An evening coat was visible under his fawn-colored dustcoat, and the fragrance of his cigar suggested fine Havana. His appearance in this shabby café, where cheap vice stared at him from more than one direction, was rather puzzling. He made pretense only of sipping his coffee, and through gold-rimmed folders feigned interest of the blackened ceiling.

Goldsack resumed his story. He said:

"The waters of the Golden Horn and the Sea of Marmora were on fire with the sunset when I stepped into a twelve-oared gilded caïque. A forest of masts, shadow reflections of minarets, leaden domes, rose-colored pinnacles, were brokenly mirrored in the golden water on which the pointed caïques flashed here and there like swallows. The pasha's palace was pointed out to me. It stood almost at the bottom of one of the eastern hills of Stamboul, behind a great grove of cypresses, the shadows deepening over it so that I could see little save a cluster of multi-colored roofs.

"We landed, followed a path through the melancholy cypress trees which brought us to a high wall covered with moss, over which peeped cherry trees. By a door of black marble stood a turbaned janizary holding a banner on which was emblazoned the three-tailed insignia of his powerful master. We were admitted to a courtyard, where a score of fountains filled the air with cool spray; thence into the palace.

"If I had not a good, concrete yarn to spin you I should have a deal to say about that palace and its inmates, for when I passed into the courtyard I took a long, long step into dead centuries, into 'the dark backward.'

"I had hoped for an unconventional tête-à-tête dinner with my old school chum, not for a full-state repast with Ghazali pasha. I was disappointed. A big crowd of gorgeous officials waited about us in the room, which had a dozen moresque windows, a vaulted ceiling, a white marble floor. Do not ask me to describe what I ate—or what I thought I ate. I recall chiefly many ragouts flavored with highly aromatic herbs, and perfumed wines entirely new to my experience.

"Every one spoke in murmurs; every bearded countenance revealed gravity of the most profound order. I was distinctly uncomfortable, and was wishing heartily that the ceremonious function would come to a finish when it was interrupted in a most dramatic fashion.

"First the piercing shriek of a woman in great pain or mortal fear jarred that

solemn atmosphere; the next instant a figure darted through a doorway behind a row of columns, and eluding the outstretched hand of a eunuch in scarlet fez, carrying a long whip of hippopotamus hide, who was rushing after her, she flung herself on her knees before the pasha, her hands uplifted, clasped, in an agony of entreaty, while she poured forth a torrent of words which I could not understand, but which was clearly an appeal for mercy.

"This woman I had seen before. She was that strangely beautiful slave whose careless hand had lost the newly purchased treasure. That was the first thing I noted. The second was that the soles of her unsandaled feet, which I could plainly see owing to her kneeling posture, bore on their inflamed surface the marks of more than one cruel weal. She had been bastinadoed.

"The black claw of the eunuch descended upon her like a hawk and jerked her away with violence. Fear was palpable enough on his own countenance, for he had let the victim escape from an unfinished chastisement and rush into the dreaded presence. He snatched her up, and was in the act of retreat when his master, who had shown not the smallest sign of surprise or anger, said calmly: 'Stop! Set her down!'

"Then he lifted to his bearded lips a crystal goblet filled with a green wine which he drank slowly; and, watching him intently, I saw pass over his eyes that pale flame which had lighted them in the bazaar when he lost his amber cup worth I know not how many thousand golden sequins. He drank his wine slowly, and the silence of the deep grave held the hall. I glanced at the poor slave, and my gaze met hers. Her bosom heaved strongly under the stress of some strangling emotion. She half extended her right arm toward me as if in imploring, then drew it back, pressing her hand upon her cheek, driving the nails into its rounded contour, in terrible fear.

"I regarded the pasha, who continued to sip his green wine. Was this Jevvers of old—this pallid-featured despot who permitted a woman so to be treated? Yet I could understand it; an English education had controlled him while it lasted; but here he was back in the scene of the pitiless power wielded by the long line of his ancestors in a city of innumerable cruelties, of intolerable crimes. It was the ancient call of the blood in him. This man was no more like to Jevvers than his jeweled turban was like his college cap.

"He broke silence at last by a few words of command in his own tongue. Instantly the eunuch, who had been almost prostrate upon the marble, caught up the slave and carried her out. By that time the singularly joyless meal was over. Ghazali rose, motioned me to him, and we went out together, every one falling back to a respectful distance behind us.

"Apprehension that something very unpleasant was about to happen held me to an uneasy silence. We traversed a few corridors, descended some marble steps, passed through a bronze door into a vault with an arched roof supported by a double line of columns. On one side was a latticed gallery; on the other a long pool of clear water kept fresh by two fountains, in which crocodiles reposed still as stone. At one end was a dais covered by a silver-wrought carpet and cushions. At the other end were two cages. A yellow-skinned beast which I judged to be a puma or mountain lion occupied either cage. One paced up and down on velvet paws, turning sharply at the narrow limit of its prison, its long tail switching, its jaws opening and shutting in silent menace. The other was prostrate in the flattened attitude of its species when meditating a leap, its shoulders humped, its hind quarters raised, its ears back.

In front of these cages stood that immense Nubian whom I had seen in the bazaar, a formidable whip in his hand.

"My host seated himself on the cushioned dais and motioned me beside him. Half a dozen attendants had entered with us, and they stood either side of the dais, their heads bowed.

"A circle of silver lamps set with turquoises hung under the arched roof, and from them emanated a heavy odor of perfumed oil.

"'I am going to interest you,' remarked Ghazali in a cold, unimpassioned voice. 'You perceive those two cages. In one you see an animal which has not been fed for twenty-four hours, and which has been trained carefully to perform one task. The other is as motionless as if fashioned from metal. That is not surprising, because it *is* metal. If you stood at a yard's distance you could not discern the deception.'

"He lifted his hand. Instantly the enormous Nubian cracked his whip with a report like a gunshot. The effect was miraculous. The living, trained beast dropped into the attitude of an impending leap—that is to say, in precisely the same posture as the other.

"The pasha raised his hand again. A gong sounded, and somehow I was not surprised to see appear the girl slave who had twice invoked her master's dreaded displeasure. She stood by the crocodile pool, midway between us and the cages, and the lamps' light fell on her dilated eyes.

"In a voice like a roll of thunder the Nubian shouted at her in a language of which I understood no word. She trembled visibly and flung a wild glance of hopeless appeal at my august companion. Careless what vital rule of etiquette I broke I demanded of Ghazali: 'What is going to happen?'

"He frowned, but deigned to reply: 'She has a choice of both. She must enter one of those dens, that is all. If she chooses the safe one—well and good; she is pardoned. If the other—so much the worse for her. Be silent!'

"And for a moment or two I was silent—the blood trickling down my spine in a cold chill.

"First let me say that I am not absolutely sure even now whether the drama would have been carried to its extreme length; it is just possible that my terrible host was merely playing with that poor, scared mouse, although in my heart I fear he was earnest enough. Anyhow, this is what occurred:

"The Nubian, finding that the victim did not at once obey, leaped toward her. She ran back, screaming with fear. Two leaps took me to her side. I got home on the black's bull-like throat with a right-hander that staggered him. His hand flew to the yataghan in his crimson sash. I cannot think he would have drawn it upon his master's guest, but I accepted no risk. I gave him my left in a favorite uppercut under the chin, and down he went, with a terrible crash.

"If that was dramatic, the next thing was still more so. The pasha—the dreaded Ghazali pasha—forgetting time, circumstance, dignity, pomp, let out a shout of absolute ecstasy.

"'You've knocked him out, Goldie! You've knocked him out!' he roared.

"The Nubian lay stunned upon the ground.

"The girl cowered at my feet.

"I felt Ghazali's fingers gripping into my shoulders. What a transformation! His eyes were cold no more; they danced with excitement. His haughty bearing had dropped from him like a garment. In plain words, he was not, at that minute, a three-tailed pasha of almost unlimited power, but Jevvers of Winchester once again, our idolized fighter. And he shouted in that well-remembered jubilant voice: 'Put 'em up, Goldie! Put 'em up! Man, man, how that pretty jab brings back the old times! I haven't sparred since then. But I'm going to now. I'm going to

floor you just as I did a hundred times. You've made my fingers tingle. Peel, man! Just one—two—three rounds. I'll show you that I haven't gone back since that little picnic with Baby Sammy and the Knuckleduster!'

"When I confess to a sensation of stupefaction, you will credit me. Already he had divested himself of his turban and was dragging off his black frock coat. A transformation, I say; but—how long would it last? And dare I not merely lay a finger upon this dreaded potentate, but a clenched fist—in good, hard, body-breaking blows? Questionable.

"I stammered: 'We have no gloves.'

"'Bah, no bad excuses!'

"'But this isn't the school gymnasium. I—I really cannot——'

"'*Afraid*, Goldie?' said he, with a long, hard look.

"The word stung a trifle, but I hesitated nevertheless. The girl still clung to my feet, and as I tried to push her away gently an idea gave me quick decision. 'Well, I will give you three rounds of it, as you insist,' I answered, taking my courage in both hands, 'but on the condition that you altogether pardon this poor little frightened devil.'

"For a fraction of a second the tyrant showed in a swift glare of his eyes; then he laughed as he answered:

"'Knock me out, Goldie, and I will pardon her and give her a thousand sequins over and above the bargain.'

"'Done!' said I, and commenced to remove collar and tie.

"He waved his arm, and the six astonished attendants took themselves off. The girl crawled away into the shadows. Heaven knows what she thought of the scene! The Nubian had by that time got back something of his wits, and had disappeared.

"I was ready in a brace of shakes, and for the first and last time in our lives Ghazali as pasha and I stood up to each other in that strange 'ring' lighted by the silver lamps which breathed a languorous odor, our feet shuffling on the mosaic as we circled for an opening. I have said that he was ever my superior, and that was true enough. I had never knocked him out, and knew no one who had; but a long spell of enervating luxury had doubtless dulled his fighting, and upon that hope I erected a slender chance.

"That first round was frightfully sensational. I ducked in a forward movement to his left-hand lead, flinging my head sideways, drawing back my left arm. His body crashed against my advancing shoulder just as I got home on his ribs with every ounce of force behind the blow. He uttered a deep gasp and collapsed upon his left side. The next moment something which looked like a mountain propelled itself upon me. But it was not a mountain; it was the gigantic Nubian, with drawn yataghan rushing to avenge the insult to his master. Only a furious leap saved my head. I heard the hiss of the razor-edged steel as it cut the air, and I believe I responded by a yell of something like terror. My opponent was immediately upon his feet and rapped out three words to the black, who promptly fell upon his face in abject obedience, gliding away like a reptile.

"Time for expostulation or recovery was not allowed me. Apparently none the worse for that swing on his ribs, my antagonist was at me again in the grimmest earnest. I must confess that the proximity of the huge black with his bared scimitar was small encouragement. To have one's head hewn from one's shoulders makes a poor prize for a victory, and that was likely to happen should I knock the pasha clean out. My first success at close quarters inclined me to believe that I knew more of the modern art of infighting than my adversary. I went in again, therefore, with a short-arm jab to the solar plexus;

but he was ready for me with a right swing to my left jaw, followed by another to my right, and I toppled over with but a spark of consciousness left to warm me for the next effort.

"There is a big difference between a spark and no spark at all. I found myself on my pins, more than a trifle dazed, and anxious to play a defense game until I could see clearly. All this time, I must mention, the yellow beast in the cage was yelling with fury and dashing itself against the bars. I had an unpleasing idea that, like its keeper, it wanted to be at my throat. However, the occasion did not allow any consideration of such small details.

"I must say that the expression of the pasha's face did not altogether satisfy me. Unlike his self of college days, he had not taken my knock-down blow in the best of tempers. He was very white, and showed his clenched teeth in a nasty fashion. An avoidance of his rushes irritated him rather. A hard lead-off with his right was justly punished by receiving my counter in his face. He staggered back, and I was about to leap in when instinct drew my eyes, for the tenth part of a second, to the direction of the howling brute whose one desire seemed to be my jugular vein. That desire was on the verge of gratification.

"That murderous Nubian was slipping the bar of the cage!

"Almost before the exciting fact was into my brain, my adversary flew at me like a tempest. I had no time to think of anything save to stop him with my left. He ducked and brought into instant operation that dreaded right-hand cross counter which had won him many a battle; but lack of training and lack of abstinence detracted from the power of the blow; it came home true enough, but I recovered, riposted with a furious uppercut, and he went backward as senseless as a log.

"So much for that phase of the drama. I spun round mechanically, dizzily to face a far greater peril—as I believed. It was over and past. I saw a terrible spectacle. My friend, the Nubian, in the very act of freeing that yellow, snarling cat, had been stabbed by the girl, who must have had a weapon concealed in the many folds of her sash. He leaned against a pillar, his hand upon the knife which had pierced his side, his eyes rolling frightfully.

"The girl sprang toward me, pouring out a torrent of words which I could not comprehend, and pointing to a door behind the crocodile pool. Her action suggested immediate escape. I had but a few seconds in which to make up my mind. You are at perfect liberty to term me coward, if you will. The pasha was stunned by my fist, and his Nubian was stabbed by his slave. It seemed to me that an unceremonious leave-taking was among the essentials; at any rate, there was the poor girl to be considered. I followed her almost unhesitatingly. We rushed through corridor after corridor, through a long garden, through a maze of cypress groves, over more walls than I care to remember, emerged at last in the valley of the bazaars, and plunged into that dense labyrinth of arcades which begins where the Mosque of Bajazet lifts its painted minarets.

"Here I parted with my pretty Circassian, whose name I afterward discovered was Leyli. She did not want to leave me—ah, no! But I was in Stamboul, where that sort of thing is more perilous than—than knocking out a grand pasha.

"I saw her once more, two days later, on the great floating bridge of the Golden Horn, her lithe body wrapped in a multicolored shawl from Cairo which almost entirely covered her face. She was selling flowers to a zouave of the imperial army. She did not see me, and I hurried away rather heavy-hearted. And I shall not readily forget that girl who might have stepped from one of the pages of the Arabian Nights, those

pages perfumed with essence, with intoxicating dreams.

"Not wishing Ghazali to believe that I was afraid and had fled altogether, I remained in the city for several days. He must have known it, but he sent me no message of any kind, and I never saw him again."

So Goldsack concluded his strange story. He accepted another cigarette, then said abruptly:

"That was six months ago. Misfortune has dogged me ever since. It is perfectly clear to you that just now I am scarcely in the way of prosperity. I was putting down that yarn when you came up. If you think there is money in it, I'll try to plant it."

"And I will do my best to help you," I assured him.

"Thanks," he drawled. He stretched his long legs underneath the table. "If I can make a guinea or two out of it, so much the better. But scribbling was never in my line. My chief commodity is a certain art in using my fists. I can't turn professional bruiser—or, rather, I won't. Therefore, my principal ware can never find a market."

"Don't say that," interrupted an unexpected voice.

We both turned and met the eyes of that interested listener to whom I have alluded. They twinkled in a most kindly fashion behind their gold folders.

"Pray forgive me for overhearing your story," he continued earnestly. "I could not but listen, for I was enthralled. Permit me to offer you my card. I should be honored by your friendship. We may serve each other a mutual good turn. You say that your chief commodity is useless save to the professional and vulgar market—the ring. I wholly disagree. There is romance in it; the spirit of adventure; incidents both dramatic and profitable—though they are off the beaten paths. And such an adventure—of a strictly honorable kind—I am prepared to offer for your acceptance—now!"

Which brings me to the second remarkable episode in the fighting career of Nigel Goldsack, in which episodes I played a minor part, and which I have set out to chronicle.

The second adventure of the Amateur Professional will appear in the Christmas POPULAR, on sale December 23rd. It is called "The £10,000 Fight."

WHEN A GENTLEMAN WENT TO JAIL

JOHN HAYS HAMMOND, mining engineer, multimillionaire, and all-round good fellow, was sentenced to death by the Boers as a result of the Jameson raid. At the time it seemed certain that he and his companions would be executed; and they were saved only after much work had been done by their families and friends and by the British and American governments. While Hammond was in jail in Pretoria, he was visited one day by Samuel Clemens—Mark Twain—who was on a lecture tour around the world.

After the visit, during which Clemens had recognized several other men whom he knew, the famous humorist made up his mind to intercede in their behalf before Oom Paul Kruger, the Boer president.

"That jail," said Clemens hotly, in concluding his remarks, "is no place for a gentleman!"

Oom Paul's eyes twinkled, and he treated the humorist to a mild jest.

"I didn't know," he said suavely, "that a *gentleman* ever got in jail."

Panic

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "North of Fifty-Three," "The Laying of the Ghost," Etc.

The unwritten law of the North provides a heavy penalty for the man who refuses food when payment is tendered. Here is a strong story of a factor who transgresses this law, and adds to it another crime which could only mean a quick exit from the earth at the end of a rope. Panic seizes him—and such panic! Sinclair follows his flight with a realism that stuns.

THE bent, withered old man picked up his long-barreled trade gun and went out of the store. He seemed a bit more shriveled up, a trifle less certain in his steps, than when he had entered to make his request, but the impassivity of his brown countenance remained unchanged. Neither eye nor feature mirrored any emotion whatever. The stoic blood of his Indian mother predominated over the white strain. Duvalle, the factor, leaned on the counter and looked after him with sneering contempt.

"Get your grub and powder from the free trader you sold your pelts to last spring," he repeated. "Faugh! Am I a charity board? These old, broken-down people make me sick. Furs or money, from them."

This last he addressed somewhat indirectly to a young man standing beyond the pot-bellied stove which warmed the big room wherein trade goods were piled on shelves that rose in tiers from floor to ceiling. He was white, this individual, a pronounced Anglo-Saxon type, blue-eyed, fair of hair, in marked contradistinction to ninety-five per cent of those who trafficked in and about Heron Lake. Even Duvalle himself, the big man of the post, in feature and skin gave faint indications of native blood—though he disavowed this, claiming himself pure French, from Quebec way.

His remark elicited no comment. The other was rolling tobacco in the palm of his hand.

"Eh, m'sieu?" Duvalle persisted. "These breeds they are a poor lot, eh? Lazy good for nothings. *Sacré!* They like me little, and I like them less."

The stranger stuffed the tobacco into the bowl of his pipe, turning a frosty eye on the factor.

"I guess they've a good reason not to like you," he said bluntly. "I haven't run across anybody that does. You're too blamed poison mean for anybody to like, if you ask me."

"Eh? What is that?" Duvalle craned his ears, as if he doubted his hearing. In a long time he had not listened to such plain statements concerning himself—not since he had choked old Julie Lafrombois' ten-year-old son black in the face for helping himself to a stick of candy. Julie had come to the store and screamed a lot of unpleasant words at him. But he had kicked her out the door when she unwisely ventured over

the threshold, and thought no more of it. But this stranger, from no one knew where—he was another matter. "Eh?" Duvalle repeated.

"I said you were too poison mean to live," the man declared, with drawling coolness. "It beats me that some of these breeds hasn't slipped a knife between your ribs long ago. Everybody that has anything to do with you hates you. You beat everybody every time you get a chance. You're as crooked as a dog's hind leg. From all I've heard, you never did a decent thing in your life unless there was a dollar in it. Never gave anybody a square deal unless you had to. You've robbed these breeds an' Injuns in the company's name, an' abused 'em besides; peddled whisky to the men, an' seduced their women. And for all the shady things you've done you've always kept just a little bit within the law, so nobody could get at you. Do you wonder they haven't any use for you? By Jiminy, I'd hate to be in your boots if you ever make a slip. Say, if these people of yours was called to testify against you in a court—wouldn't they snow you under? You'd go up for life."

Duvalle vaulted the counter. He was a wonderfully active man.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" he shouted. "I will—me—I will——"

His hands stretched out before him, opening and shutting like the movement of a cat's claws. The man laid his pipe on the counter and took a step toward Duvalle. He was bigger than the factor, younger by ten years, and no sign of ruffled feelings clouded the half-amused look on his big, round face. He doubled one hairy fist and shook it playfully under Duvalle's nose.

"Don't you jump me, old-timer," he said scoffingly. "I'll maul you to a queen's taste if you go grabbin' for *my* throat with them paws of yours."

Duvalle hesitated. The man's assurance and physical proportions turned the edge of his wrath.

"You joke with me, perhaps, eh?" he uttered thickly. "Eh, M'sieu Tom Hawkins?"

"Joke?" the other snorted. "I should say not. I just told you what I thought, that's all. You give me a pain. Why didn't you give old Johnny Turtle Shell some debt? How's he goin' out to trap without it? He's brought you in many a thousand dollar's worth of fur."

"That is my business, m'sieu," Duvalle returned, falling back on his factorial dignity.

"Your business—I guess it is, and blamed poor business, too," Hawkins retorted. "*I'd* hate to be built that way. Somebody'll hook you good and plenty on that kind of a business deal, one of these days. You bet."

With that he put his pipe back in his mouth and sauntered out of the store.

The factor threw an oath after him. Then he sneered. Pouf! The devil fly away with M'sieu Tom Hawkins and his bald speech.

Duvalle moved to the door, stood there, leaning against the jamb so that he could look out on the score or more of log buildings set haphazard about the main company quarters. The ugly twist of his mouth grew more pronounced. He hated Heron Lake and all and sundry who called it home; despised them rather, as creatures of poor wit and poorer spirit, fit only for the profitable exploitation of superior beings—such as himself. For ten years he had trafficked with them in the name of the company, and his trafficking had not always been straightforward, because while constrained to make a profitable showing as factor of the post, he dealt always with an eye to his own pocket. His salary was only decent wages, and he wanted far more than mere wages. Always he dealt with a view to the day when he could turn his back on the silent woods, the long, iron-bound winters,

the isolation, and go out where he could revel in pleasures that were here denied. But that meant money—money! Duvalle worshiped but two gods—profit and his appetites. That which served either he grasped by any means at his command. But he did not like to be so reminded. Like others of his kind, he desired to infold himself with a mantle of illusion.

"Cattle!" Duvalle snarled, looking to where a group of half-breeds and Indians squatted around a fire before a cluster of tents. "Another year or two. That is all."

The birch and maples were a blaze of color in the slanting sunbeams, pale yellow and deep russet, orange and old gold, and the tints of new mahogany blending on a single bough. Beyond these hardwoods, a fringe along the creek and between the post and the lake shore, ran the somber spruce, unchanging, evergreen, always hushed to cathedral silence, always the same, a melancholy forest.

A faint breath of wind drifted off the lake: Indian summer exhaling a parting sigh. In a little time, at any hour, that soft blue sky might harden, bank with clouds, spit volleys of snow. The barb-toothed frosts would come again. Already there was a premonitory chill in the air, even in the glow of the noon sun. Duvalle shut the door and went back to the stove breathing a sour malediction on the ill luck that had kept him —a man, so he conceived, of vast ability —ten years in a secondary post.

He continued to brood, sucking at his old clay pipe. Tom Hawkins had stung him. The protest or complaint of a breed or Indian he could brush aside without a second thought. He used them for his own purposes, cheated them when he could, and considered that a mere measure of his superior quality. He knew they hated him. What did that matter, so long as he profited by his deeds? But he did not desire that white men should measure him by the native standard. He resented his equals considering him from the Hawkins point of view.

And the sting lay in its truth. If Duvalle's ten years at Heron Lake had been gone over hour by hour, not one decent act, inspired by a generous motive, could have been found to offset the long tale of his petty harshnesses, his quickness to take unfair advantage, his surreptitious debaucheries, his avarice.

Once, indeed, he had stood forth as a benefactor, to the mystification of those who failed to fathom his purpose. Angus MacPherson, a middle-aged Scotch half-breed, had broken his leg in the first weeks of the trapping season. Angus owed the company three hundred dollars. He had a numerous brood—but a sonless brood; thus leaving him sole provider. Duvalle brought him in from the trap line, sent out for a doctor to set the bone, and fed the MacPherson household till the next season's trapping began; fed them rather better than the company's policy dictated in similar cases.

But—Angus MacPherson had a daughter of eighteen, a slim, beautiful wisp of a girl. And Duvalle's ostentatious generosity was for a purpose. It might have befallen that his calculations would have worked out with mathematical exactitude if the Sisters of Mercy had not stepped in to upset. Quietly they spirited the girl away to school at a mission two hundred miles south. So that Duvalle grudgingly charged his kindness to profit and loss, and bided his time. This had happened two years earlier. The net result was that a single person of all who knew him or had dealings with him afforded him a kindly thought. Angus MacPherson considered the factor "no sae bad," defended him weakly when others attacked. The girl's mother, being a woman and gifted with perception, understood, and said nothing. But she saw

to it that Lottie remained at the mission. Angus MacPherson might be blind, but the girl and her mother recoiled from the evil in this hard-lipped man with the bold eyes.

Duvalle got up the next morning to find the wind soughing drearily out of the northwest, fluttering dead leaves across the clearing, piling cloud scud gray and thick over the sky. There was little more trading. Nearly all the trappers were out on their territory by now. Old Turtle Shell asked again for credit, and Duvalle had the petty satisfaction of refusing, of seeing the old man and his decrepit woman pack and hit the trail in the growing storm. Johnny Turtle Shell's offense had been selling his last season's take of pelts to a free trader instead of to the company. There was a silver fox in the lot on which Duvalle could have made a snug profit for himself.

From the store front he could see Hawkins' camp. He had wrinkled his brows at that many times of late. Hawkins seemed to have no particular business in the country. With a crippled breed boy for company, he had loafed at Heron Lake a matter of two months now, fishing and hunting just enough to keep the camp in pot meat. In a native that apparently purposeless existence was understandable—that was their mode of life, the thing which governed their every action; with subsistence assured, there was no other incentive to exertion. But white men usually had other fish to fry when they sojourned in the North. Duvalle puzzled over Hawkins. He was neither trapper, trader, nor missionary. Hence, why did he linger at Heron Lake?

Forty-eight hours later, on the heels of a dying wind, came the first snow. In a night all the earth was blanketed to a depth of twelve inches. The frosts hardened, taking hold of all things liquid in an iron grip. The snowfall continued on to the next day. But whereas it had come in large flakes of a beautiful intricate pattern, eddying gracefully down out of a windless void, it now drove a steady pelt of fine, icy particles stinging the face like blown sand. The wind rose and whistled viciously off Heron Lake through the fringe of leaf-stripped trees.

Three days of this endured. The storm blew itself out, and the long procession of cold days and colder nights began the six months' march. Six inches of ice, hourly increasing in thickness, covered the surface of the lake. The few men at the post went abroad in fur caps and clothing of buckskin. Duvalle kept his stove glowing and lounged, smoking, with his feet on the iron rail. *Br-r-r!* One more winter—and he would turn his back on this land accursed. Fit only for Indians and the beasts that bore fur!

Upon the second clear day Tom Hawkins came to the store, with a slip of paper in his hand.

"Hello, Duvalle," he greeted, with provoking cheerfulness. "I don't like your climate any more. I'm about to quit you. Here's a little stuff I want to load for the trip out."

Duvalle took the list grudgingly.

"M'sieu advances toward the north pole, perhaps," he remarked ironically.

"Not much," Hawkins grinned. "Feel more like I want to head for the equator. But I guess I'll only get as far south as the railroad."

The factor glanced over the list. It was simple enough. A hundredweight of flour, tea, sugar, beans, and dried apples; staples in that region, plain, substantial food for the trail.

"You'll stake me, won't you?" Hawkins waxed facetious. "You always lend a hand to the unfortunate—like me an' old Johnny Turtle Shell."

It was an unfortunate remark. The factor's brows lowered.

"M'sieu," he said, "we have none of these things to spare."

"What?" Hawkins demanded. "What's that?"

"I say," Duvalle repeated deliberately, "that these things are not to spare. The supplies are low."

Hawkins screwed up his lips and looked at the factor. His eyes traveled over the superimposed shelves, the sacks and boxes of such things as he required.

"I'll have my toboggan at the door in about an hour," he said slowly. "You'll sell me that stuff, or—well, we'll see. You're running a public sort of place here, you know. You've *got* to sell necessaries to a man if he needs 'em and has the money to pay. You've got flour and tea an' sugar. I see it. Don't try to get gay with me, Mister Duvalle. I'm no docile Johnny Turtle Shell. Nor you ain't quite such a big chief as you think you are. You bet you ain't. You have that stuff ready."

He walked out. So, too, did Ambrose Wibaux, who had happened in fortuitously to buy a plug of tobacco. It is altogether likely that Ambrose spread the news. Duvalle had many a time, following the company policy or his own inclination, refused to sell goods—but never to a white man with money. What would the *monyas* do? Take to the trail empty-handed and live on rabbits, as the others did, until he reached a more hospitable post? Would he? They thought not. That was never the white man's way—to submit. The white men had no awe of the company nor the company's factors.

They were at the store, or bound there on trifling errands, a dozen strong, when Hawkins halted his dogs before the building, eager to see what the white man would do, to see how he would fare with the local tyrant. Old Julie Lafrombois muttered to her daughter that it would be a blessing if the big stranger should wring the factor's neck.

Hawkins entered the store. Duvalle was serving out a package of tea to a woman. Hawkins waited till he was done. Then he faced Duvalle across the narrow counter.

"Where's that flour an' sugar an' tea an' beans an' apples?" he asked politely.

The factor's face reddened with anger at this pressing of the point.

"Have I not told you once there is none to spare?" he raised his voice to insulting loudness. "The supplies are low."

Hawkins took out a small sheaf of bank notes.

"Flour at six dollars—tea a dollar—um-m-m," he counted up the cost of what he wanted. "Them's your regular prices, I know—and highway robbery, too, if anybody should ask. There's your money. If you say you haven't got this stuff, you're a darned liar."

He laid the money on the counter.

Duvalle grew livid.

"*Sacré!*" he shouted. "You——"

He swept up the bills and threw them in Hawkins' face, lashed out in French vile, scurrilous epithets. And that tongue Hawkins evidently understood as well as those others listening, for his round, good-natured face darkened a trifle also, and, reaching suddenly across the counter, he caught the factor by the throat in a strangling grip, bent his face to the boards, and held him so a matter of five seconds despite his struggles. Then he haled him bodily across the rude barrier, jerked him roughly from side to side, and released him with a savage push that sent the factor staggering. He gasped, gaping to catch the breath shut off by those powerful fingers.

Hawkins picked the money off the floor, laid it carefully on the counter, and walked back to the shelves, took down a sack of flour and threw it across his shoulder.

He walked past Duvalle without even a sidelong glance. And the factor, see-

ing red for the moment, leaped to the stove, caught up the hatchet he used to split kindling, and hurled it after Hawkins. The whirling blade caught him in the back of the head. He dropped like a man shot, falling with his face in the open doorway.

With all his vileness, his years of cheating and abuse, Duvalle had never taken life, never even shed blood—except in a superficial way, with his fist. He was no killer. He lacked the iron nerve to slay. He knew the law, and feared its long arm—he had seen that long arm reach up to the arctic circle and pluck a fugitive back to judge and jury five years after his offense. And when he stood in the shocked stillness that followed and saw the red blood creep in a widening pool across the floor, he cowered and shook with fear of what he had done.

Ambrose Wibaux made the first move. Hesitatingly he approached the fallen man and bent over him. The others drew close, even Duvalle, chilled to his soul. Wibaux turned the white face sidewise, opened his month at the gaping wound, lifted a limp hand and let it fall. Then he got down on his knees and held his hand for the space of five minutes on Hawkins' breast. Presently he arose, crossing himself.

"The man is dead," he whispered. "The heart is still. He is surely dead."

Duvalle backed away. They stared at him, and he saw no gleam of pity on a single face; nothing but hostile loathing in the brown eyes. He stood convicted, and they were glad.

Old Julie Lafrombois pointed a skinny finger at him.

"Ah, you have murdered the white man!" She raised her shrill voice to a hysterical scream. "Now you will hang. The Mounted Police will take you to the jail, where you should have gone long since. And you will hang by your thick neck, M'sieu Duvalle. I wish I could be there to see you dance on the rope. Um-m-m-m!"

Duvalle backed till he was behind the counter, where he kept a rifle. This he leveled desperately.

"Out with you!" he cried. "Out with you! And that—that—take that away as you go."

They obeyed hastily, four of the men raising the lax body in their arms and bearing it away through the snow to Ambrose Wibaux's cabin. Then Duvalle closed the door and put the heavy crossbar in place, shuddering at the pool of blood on the floor. He drew the shutters over the front windows, and sat him down by the stove, quaking at his plight.

There was no loophole, not one. He had brought it on himself, exceeded his authority and the unwritten law of the North in refusing food when payment was tendered. And he had struck the man down from behind in a most cowardly fashion. Done the foul deed before witnesses who would gladly swear his life away. Not even the company could save him. Even now one of the men might be on the trail with the news. A red-coated Mounted Policeman would presently come and take him, Duvalle, away to where a judge and jury would hear and decide. And they would hang him. Hang him by the neck till he was dead! The half-breed woman's words rang in his ears.

Then, as the weak do in their hour of trial, he thought of flight. He might go free that way, and that way only. The North was a land of vast areas, manifold hiding places, and he knew the North. He could travel fast and be far away before the law struck his trail. Other breakers of the law had eluded the officers for months, years even. In the end they had always been taken—but the world was wide. Surely a man with wit and a good start could get away. Duvalle took heart as he reflected. He was a smart man. All

these years he had shaded the law and never been tripped. In any case, if he remained at Heron Lake—well, he would hang, beyond question. And a man cannot be hanged until he is brought to the scaffold. He went over the tale of those he knew who had gone forth with policemen camping on their tracks. There was Anton Noir, who beheaded his squaw. They followed him three years. Bear Robe, the Cree who shot the factor of Holloway House—him they took on the lower reaches of the Mackenzie, two thousand miles from his crime and two years after. There was a white man from Winnipeg, guilty of some great theft, who came into the Churchill country as a trapper, lived there, and bred a mixed-blood family, until one day a redcoat came and took him out.

These Duvalle classed as fools. They had covered their trail, and they should have stolen quietly away to some land where mounted policemen do not go—to the other side of the world, indeed. He would not be as these. For why did a man have greater cunning than the animals, if he made no use of it? Duvalle waxed vain with conceit of his shrewdness. The thing could be done.

In the dim, shuttered store he set about his preparations. First of all he unearthed from its hiding place what funds he had garnered dubiously in the years of his traffic—small sums shaved from the company's profits, larger amounts gained by independent, doubtful ventures, the proceeds of mean, oppressive bargaining. It totaled a goodly sum. This he stowed in a belt next his skin. Then he went carefully about the store, selecting food, clothing, blankets, the fittest for his needs. For months he would have to dodge warily through the forests, avoiding posts, trappers, the beaten lines of travel, cutting himself off from all intercourse, lest betrayal result. He had need to be well equipped.

All these things he made ready in a pile by the rear door. In a shed outside were stored toboggans and dog harness. At dusk he would steal out and select six dogs, the best in the post. No dweller at Heron Lake would stay him, he knew. He had been master there too long. And if they tried he would still be master, by grace of his weapons. He could not afford halfway measures now.

These things done, he sat down to wait, dry-lipped, nervous. The scuffle of a rat in one corner would lift him out of his chair, nerves strung like the gut on a fiddle. Noon passed. The sun went down. And Duvalle went out for dogs.

An hour later he passed into the starlit night with six cock-eared huskies tugging at the load. The rifle lay in the crook of his arm. About his middle a belt glistening with brass cases held the parka close. He took a course northwestward, holding to the shore of Heron Lake, and as the snowshoes lifted and fell and slithered through the dry, frost-hard snow, he lifted his face to the star-studded dome above and prayed for a storm to blot out his tracks.

Heron Lake spread a matter of twenty miles. Urging his dogs to speed by reason of the nervous fear that rode him, Duvalle reached his northern extremity and made camp shortly after midnight. He fed his dogs a small portion of dried fish, and cooked himself a meal. Then he huddled over the fire within the shelter of his canted toboggan and planned the details of his course.

He must avoid all manner of camp or habitation. Once the beginning of his trail was wiped out by a fall of snow, the mark of a dog sled and snowshoes meant nothing unless he were seen and identified. The posts were few and far apart. Trapping lines he must watch out for. To get well away into a region where he would be unknown even if

seen, and where a plausible lie would account for his presence; then double back to the railroad, gain the shelter of some city over the American border; thence by steamer to put an ocean between himself and the untiring search that would follow. That was his only chance. He could stay in the North a long time. But soon or late a constable would gather him in. Europe or South America must be his sanctuary.

After a two hours' rest, he pushed on. He was sure he would not be followed from Heron Lake. They would not dare follow him. But one would go out in haste with word of the murder. He calculated the time. Traveling ever so rapidly, a Mounted Policeman could not pick up his trail from Heron Lake under ten days. By that time he would be lost, swallowed up by the vast woods, his trail completely blotted out by the first storm. Duvalle took fresh heart. The chances were all in his favor. He was no fool, like these others who had been caught.

He made camp in a thicket at sunrise, ate, and got into his sleeping blankets of heavy wool and rabbit skin. The cold went through him like a knife, made his sweat-dampened clothing clammy on his skin. The frost gnawed pitilessly. He was soft, too, from easy living at the post; there was an ache in his limbs which foretold the terrible *mal de racquette*. He could only doze. Against all reason he would start and peer out from under the edge of his blankets, dreading to see a pursuer approach. No matter that he knew himself to have ten days' grace, fear rode him hard.

After a few hours of fitful rest, he sat up, put on the frozen moccasins, struggled with numb fingers to start a fire. *Br-r-r!* That cold! It struck to his marrow, stiffened him. He thrashed his arms to stir the sluggard blood while the flame licked at his kindling. Then he gulped a can of hot tea and felt better, prepared food, hitched his dogs, and bore on.

The sky arched blue and cloudless as the sun went down. No breath of wind stirred. But the cold met him like serried lances. The air shimmered with diaphanous frost fog, like motes in a sunbeam. Always hushed to cathedral stillness, the woods seemed now to him oppressively silent, as if unseen powers held their breath at his passing. Nevertheless he was in a familiar environment, and action eased his fears. He would bear on toward the Churchill River so long as his trail lay plain behind him. If they struck it, they would think he meant to go into the wastes beyond the Churchill, and perhaps bear down into the Eastern provinces, or even get out by way of Lake Winnipeg. Once the snow came, he could bear off at right angles either east or west several days' journey, then swing sharp south, and so by spring come out to the Qu'Appelle Valley. The prospect cheered him. He grew almost lighthearted. Remorse for killing Tom Hawkins he felt none. His sole consideration lay in his own imperilment. Save that he had thereby put himself in the dread shadow of the gallows, he had no qualms for what he had done. The man had humiliated him.

He longed for a storm, but none came. Daily the skies remained steely blue. Nightly the stars gleamed and sparkled above, and the aurora flung its mysterious banners in rippling folds above the pole. He came out upon the frozen surface of the Churchill River, a wide, sluggish stream, frozen now like the floor of a great valley. This he followed eastward. He no longer held to the panic-stricken pace of the first two days—it sapped his strength too much, bred too frequent a recurrence of those fierce, stabbing pains from knee to groin and in the calves of his legs. Already the North had set its mark on him. Thin scabs formed on his cheek bones

where the fanged winds bit him. He had suffered a frozen toe on one foot, not deep, but painful. So he no longer rushed. He had the cunning to conserve his endurance, to husband his strength. A long trail stretched ahead.

Two hours out of camp on the morning of the eleventh day, Duvalle crossed a wide stretch of river, cutting in a straight line rather than skirt the shore. Well out in the middle of the ice he looked back, a habit that was growing on him. And away beyond, on the open stretch, he saw a black speck, so distant that he sighted a line over his toboggan and stared for five minutes ere he was sure it moved. The day was very clear, free of the obscuring frost haze. From that bend the ice level ran in a straight, broad sweep for twenty miles. He had a small telescope. Through this he thought to distinguish a dog team. But he could not be certain. Whatever it was, it moved along his trail.

Duvalle turned his dogs toward the northern bank and crowded them till they panted into the edge of the timber. There he halted for a brief look. Then he bore on into the woods in a fresh access of panic. Some one was on his track. He knew it, felt it in his bones. He was armed, but he thought only of flight.

At first he did not stop to reason how this could be, how a pursuer could be so close upon him, a scant five or six hours behind. He did not reason at all, save that he must make haste, that he must lengthen the miles between. But when weariness, sheer physical inability to keep on, at last called a halt, he had begun to ponder. He must know if he were truly being followed. There was the chance that some business of the force had taken a Mounted Policeman to some point near by Heron Lake at the critical time. They appeared upon itinerant patrols at various points in the Northwest, upon no advertised schedule, ubiquitous, clothed in the majesty of the distant law.

He rested briefly, and drove on again, taxing his own endurance and the endurance of his dogs with a forced march far into the night. When he was sure that it was not in human power to bridge the gap of his lead, he made camp, fed his dogs and himself, and lay down to fitful slumber.

At dawn he was away again, holding straight north. This course he knew would bring him in time to Reindeer Lake, a seventy-mile sheet of water, ultimately, if he held on, to the mossy barrens running away to the circle. He did not reason why he held for that inhospitable area. For the time being he desired a vantage point, and the northerly direction was as good as another. And a little past noon he found a spot such as would serve his purpose —a small lake, a matter of five miles long, thick wooded on the shores. This he traversed, cutting boldly down its center. Reaching the extremity, he camped again, screening the smoke of his fire as best he could in ways known to any woodsman. Through a narrow opening in the brush he watched the lake from his shelter.

The day was nearing its end, and his hope ran high that after all the black speck on the Churchill had been a chance traveler between posts or trapping grounds, when a dark object moved out on the ice from the farther shore. With hands that trembled, Duvalle brought the telescope to bear. A single man driving a team of dogs stood out clear through the lens. There was a flash of scarlet against the virgin snow —the tunic color of these bulldogs of the Territorial law.

Duvalle's hair lifted. A chill beyond that of the winter cold ran over his flesh. He raised his clenched hands and screamed an oath—and fell to hitching his dogs in feverish haste.

When his gear was ready for the trail,

he took a last look at the nemesis on his track. The man's progress was slow. It would take him an hour and a half to cross the lake. Dusk was falling. Duvalle's panic soothed a trifle. If it would but snow!

He drove away through the timber, picking a track through the lesser growth, dodging impassable thickets, bearing always north. When dark closed in with its nebulous glimmer, he held his course by the stars.

For three days he drove like a man possessed, as indeed he was—possessed and ridden with dread. Fancy lashed him with horrible pictures of a scaffold and a dangling noose. Then he came to another lake and waited. Implacable as fate, the man and dog team duly appeared, nosing the factor's trail.

He fled again. The great silence, the absence of a human voice, the cold, the untiring pursuit, harrowed his mean soul into flagrant fits of terror. His eyes sunk deep under frost-rimmed brows. The snap of a twig made his heart rise up and choke him. Every hunted step exacted a penalty. He had frozen another toe. Blood oozed from under the nails as he walked, gumming his sock to the sloughing flesh. But he pressed on, to shake off that patient figure trudging after him with a death warrant.

So he came at last to Reindeer Lake. Skirting its shore for two days, he could look back any time and pick out with the telescope that unswerving black speck. Spurt as he would, his lead remained only a matter of miles. Six hours' delay —and the law would have him fast.

Strangely enough, desperate as he was, Duvalle, though armed, thought neither of resistance nor ambush. He entertained no idea save flight. He felt the noose about his neck already. If that lone figure caught up with him, it would soon tighten. But it would avail nothing to kill. That is the tradition of the Mounted Police. Life is nothing in the face of duty. Where the blood of one constable seeps out, another takes up the trail, and after him yet another, if need be. Once in motion, the machinery of justice grinds on remorselessly till account is rendered. That has been established throughout the length and breadth of the Territories, and that is why Duvalle did not turn and slay. Something numbed his forefinger when he thought of bloody defiance. Inherent submission to established law is not overthrown in a day nor a week. The rat will not fight when the way is clear to run—and Duvalle was of the rat breed.

At the end of Reindeer, a storm whooped up out of the northeast, raged, and snarled through the timber, sent the snows swirling and sifting in choking clouds. Then the wind died to a slow breeze, and the banked clouds delivered themselves of a great burden of new snow. Through this Duvalle struggled on, steeling himself against the blizzard, fighting for yards gained. When he could go no more, he rested, many miles from Reindeer Lake, with the floor of the forest an unprinted page behind him. He felt easier. The man might never pick up that trail again.

But in this he erred. He bore west for a week, and then, when he was just at the point of turning south where safety lay, he crossed an opening in the timber and saw the man and dogs a scant mile away, glimpsed the dread scarlet—even heard a faint call. He cracked the whip over his dogs and headed north again.

And this time he held for the pole like an arrow. Out through thinning spruce and stunted birch, till after many days he found himself in the Land of Little Sticks, where only willows grew scantily, where there was no living thing but snowshoe rabbits, and few of them. What mad idea kept him on this course, not he himself could have said, unless

it was the vain hope that from this barren waste his pursuer might recoil.

A dog went lame. He killed it and fed the lean body to the other five. He traveled light now, a burning-eyed shadow with shattered nerves and frost-marred features, preying on rabbits for food, sitting over scanty fires of little sticks, sobbing over his rotting toes that made walking an agony. And always that black speck hung on his trail.

He killed another dog. Part of the meat he kept for himself. The dominant will to live scourged him on. He passed at last beyond the willows, out to the open moss lands. A black dot crawling over a white, soundless, waveless sea that stretched to frost-bound horizons—and five miles, sometimes more, sometimes less, behind that black speck another object that also crawled.

Duvalle made his fourth fireless camp, munched frozen meat and a bit of dried fish, rooted a hole in the snow, and huddled therein with his bed. In the morning, by the light of cold stars, he choked over his food, ate snow in lieu of water. Then he felt in the snow for his dogs. Only one arose, snarling protest at the urge of his foot. The other three were dead, their wasted bodies stiffened by the frost. He harnessed himself and the remaining husky to the toboggan, and pushed on.

The days were now very short. A scant space between dawn and dusk the sun balanced on the edge of the sky line, a yellow, shimmering globe, a mockery of heat and light. Duvalle could walk, but he snuffled and whined with the pain of every step. Too late he realized the folly of turning his back on the timber.

He huddled in his bed that night, and the frosts bit through and numbed his feet, so that he felt warm at last, and fell asleep. And he wakened at dawn to hear a voice crying his name.

"Duvalle! Hey, man! Duvalle!" it called.

There was an oddly familiar ring in the husky tones. For an instant the factor cowered. Then he lifted his head. In the gleam of the stars and the flare of the northern lights, Angus MacPherson bulked large against the sky—Angus MacPherson, with a scarlet blanket coat over his parka, and four huskies to a sled.

"Duvalle, man!" he cried again. "Are ye alive? There's nought to be feared of."

The factor's head swam. He propped himself up, lifting his head above the snow pit where he lay.

"Is it you, MacPherson?" he croaked. "What is it you say? Where is the policeman?"

"There is no policeman." Old Angus squatted beside him. "'Twas I followed ye. Man, but 'twas a long trail ye took—all these weeks an' weeks I couldna come up wi' ye. The man Hawkins didna die. Ye but nicked his skull. He will no have the law on ye for it. He said so. He is a rare man. He disna believe in jails. Ye befriended me once. I followed ye tae tell ye there was na murder done."

Duvalle looked up at the stars with a shudder.

"I have fled from a shadow, then," he said thickly. "My own evil has done for me. My feet are frozen."

"Tut, tut!" MacPherson returned. "I'll build a fire, feed ye, an' see tae yer feet. There's scrub timber thirty miles westward o' here. We'll mak' firewood t'-morrow. I hae grub enough for a week."

He set to with one snowshoe and dug down to the moss. In the sheltered hole thus formed he built a tiny fire with wood husbanded on his sled against need. He boiled tea and baked a bannock, scrupulously dividing it in two portions. With this sending a glow through their chilled bodies, he turned Duvalle's feet to the fire and bared them.

"Gude Father, man!" the exclamation burst involuntarily. A scared look flitted across his seamed old face.

"Eh?" Duvalle whispered. "They are very bad, eh? But I can walk yet."

"Ye will never walk on yer ain feet again," MacPherson whispered awesomely. "Look ye."

He rapped with the handle of a knife on Duvalle's ankle. It was as if the haft struck wood.

"Froze. Froze tae the knee. Stiff," MacPherson muttered. "Man, why did ye lie an' let this happen?"

Duvalle stared at his frozen feet. He covered his face with his hands, whimpering.

"I fled from a shadow. A shadow. Ah, the cold, MacPherson, and the fear! They would have been glad to see me hang. I was afraid. And all for nothing—the hunger and the cold and the suffering."

He wrung his hands.

"Eh, but you will take me back safe if I cannot walk, MacPherson?" he implored. "Look, I have money. Plenty of money. I will give it all to you. Ah me, me! What shall I do?"

He cowered in his bed, the teeth of him chattering.

"Ye canna walk," MacPherson said desperately. "I will hap ye wi' a' the bedclothes an' drag ye on the sled. Ye must beat wi' yer arms tae keep the blood frae stoppin'. We will mak' the timber, by the grace o' the A'mighty, an' then—an' then——"

"Yes, and then?" the factor whispered eagerly.

"Ye must be rid o' them frosted feet, or ye will die wi' blood poison sae soon as they thaw," old Angus answered pitifully. "'Tis a doctor's job, but I will dae ma best."

Duvalle screamed like a woman.

"No, no!" he wailed. "You will not do that, Angus."

"It is yer legs or yer life," the old man groaned.

He made Duvalle a shapeless bundle of fur and blanket on the toboggan, leaving out his arms so that he might flail them to maintain circulation. The fifth dog he hitched on before his own. So they set out, old Angus ahead breaking trail, the trained team following. At intervals Duvalle whimpered, bewailing the terrible plight he was in. Through that day MacPherson struggled on toward the far-off timber. When he felt weariness growing upon him, he stopped, for he was wise in the way of the North, knowing that a man cannot fend off the frosts when his strength ebbs.

That night he huddled up to the maimed, whimpering thing that had been a man, lying close for the sake of the animal heat in their two bodies. Duvalle snuffled and whined. But at last he fell into slumber. With his querulous voice hushed, old Angus also slept.

And when he waked again, his shoulder pressed against something that chilled his flesh. MacPherson shook the hoarfrost from the edge of his blanket and turned it back. Beside him Duvalle lay rigid in his bed, his frozen eyeballs glaring uncannily up at the cold, sparkling stars.

The Other Film

By W. B. M. Ferguson

Author of "A Man's Code," "The Son," Etc.

"He is so easy to read," said a correspondent, speaking of Ferguson's stories; and we don't know of any better compliment that could be paid to an author. Ferguson certainly has the knack of telling a story smoothly, and when you dip into this novel you will realize the truth of our correspondent's comment. It is a mystery story that Ferguson has to tell this time; and a mystery story had best be left to the author. Enough to say that it will interest as well as mystify you.

(In Two Parts—Part One)

CHAPTER I.

THE house was near the summit of a hill overlooking Inwood. It stood rather well in from the road, protected by a brick wall covered with crimson rambler, and amid spacious grounds that sloped gradually to the Hudson. It was a beautiful house, and everything about it, down to the freshly painted flagpole on the lawn, green and smooth as billiard cloth, was so admirably neat and well kept that at first I thought it the abode of some maiden lady—though why maiden ladies are credited with more neatness and orderliness than other mortals I don't pretend to know.

But I had seen an old lady in the grounds, an old lady who sat in a basket chair, a lavender shawl about her shoulders and a tortoise-shell cat at her feet. She—I mean the lady—had a very sweet, refined, but rather weak, face.

Dwellings of any kind, vacant or inhabited, have always attracted me; not only from an interest in their architecture but from the pleasure I find in imagining what their history must be, and this particular house had engaged my fancy from the moment I first chanced to pass it during my walks. In fact, I came to look forward to seeing it as one looks forward to meeting an old friend.

The brick wall overtopped me, and by standing on tiptoe I could peep over and look down the sloping lawn to where the old lady sat by a rustic summerhouse; always I saw this lady, the lavender shawl and the tortoise-shell cat. And once a fat, mulberry-faced man, whom I guessed to be the butler and general factotum, came out with a tray. Later, I also saw a girl with golden hair, and an elderly gentleman in flannels, who played sedately at croquet. And once I saw a red-headed young man talking in the summerhouse with the golden-haired girl, and I felt —though I don't know why—that he was not a member of the family.

I dare say that if one or all had had any idea that I spent many an idle moment peeping over the wall at them they might well have been indignant, and I have often thought that to a spec-

tator of my strange actions I must have appeared as a respectably dressed criminal engaged on a reconnaissance preparatory to a little housebreaking.

But the house and its inmates had their attraction for me, and on this occasion triumphed over a well-defined plan for spending my morning in another section of the city. And it was with the pleasure of meeting an old friend that I arrived at length at the summit of the hill and saw the brick wall and crimson rambler I had come to know so well.

I peeped over the wall, but the basket chair by the rustic summerhouse was empty; there was no sweet-faced old lady, no golden-haired girl, no old gentleman in flannels, no tortoise-shell cat, no red-headed youth, and no mulberry-faced butler. It was the first time in passing I had failed to see one or all of them, and I felt distinctly disappointed; in fact, rather rebuffed, as if a door had been shut in my face. I waited, standing on tiptoe, but no one appeared.

I had long entertained the idea of taking a snapshot of the place, not merely because of the fancy I had for it, but also because of the really fine subject it made, the house standing out in bold relief against the distant river and the ragged line of the Palisades. But always the day had been too cloudy or the sun in the wrong place, and my vague intention had never become action. This morning, however, presented an excellent opportunity, for not only was the light exactly right, but the grounds for once were vacant, and I could achieve my object without proving myself, perhaps, a nuisance.

Long ago I had picked the spot from which the best results could be attained —a three-quarter view taken from the top of the wall where I could be screened by an old oak that yet did not hinder the view or obstruct the light. This perspective would bring in the beautiful shrubbery flanking the southern extremity of the grounds.

My camera was an expensive one, taking plate or film, and fitted with an exceptionally fine lens; it was loaded with six exposures, five of which I had taken the previous morning. Having also a twelve with me, I decided to take, if possible, more than one snapshot of the house from different angles, but to use the last of the six from under the old oak which I had selected as offering the finest perspective.

Accordingly, I walked to the north angle of the wall, scaled it after one abortive attempt, and, with my legs dangling over the far side, unslung the camera and rested it on my knees. From this elevated position I now saw that a walk, screened from the back of the house—for the front faced the river —by a high privet hedge, lay at my feet, this walk running the length of the wall and thence curving away on my left to the house. The other end of this walk terminated on my right in a pair of closed iron gates midway in the wall. Immediately next the wall, and thus under my dangling legs, was dense shrubbery composed for the most part of laurel and fir.

I focused my camera, bringing in as I had intended the shrubbery to the south and part of the curving walk, and, pressing the bulb, was satisfied I had secured an excellent picture, sharp and true. Though I have used some considerable space in describing all this, I am sure but a few minutes elapsed from my arriving at the wall to the snapping of my camera's shutter.

As yet undecided from what angle to take the next picture, I kept my position on the wall while unloading the camera. The used film I placed in the little tin cylinder provided for the purpose, and, sealing it with the strip of adhesive tape, I entered on the memoranda the subject, exposure, time, light, estimated distance, and date, and

put it with the cylinder in my coat pocket.

I now brought out the twelve preparatory to reloading, but, before I could even open the little pasteboard box I somehow momentarily lost my balance, and the film dropped from my hand, disappearing among the dense shrubbery. It was the only one I had, and I did not intend to leave it there; I must go after it, and, if I could not surmount the wall—it being higher on the inside owing to the sloping ground—I must explain my predicament to the mulberry-faced butler, and ask exit through the barred gate. But no doubt I could open these gates without assistance, and, the walk being screened from the back of the house by the privet hedge—except within a few yards of the gates—I could walk out without causing any unnecessary explanation or trouble.

Accordingly, sheathing the camera and slinging it on my back, I jumped into the grounds, springing far out to avoid the shrubbery. I landed fairly on the graveled walk, rather shaken up, and turned to the particular clump of laurel into which I had seen the film disappear.

I have said the shrubbery was very dense, and I soon found that I must go on all fours, searching more or less by touch, like one groping in the dark. A bramble scratched my face and hands, and I began to lose patience, for the film was proving more elusive than I thought.

Presently I began to feel an unaccountable depression steal over me, and at length this became fear and even horror. I forgot all about finding the film, and, not seeking the why or the wherefor, tried to crawl out into the sunlight. But I was beset by a ghastly sort of fascination which I can only describe as being akin to that which the sight of a snake produces in me. I was held there against my will and the dictates of common sense.

Suddenly my groping hands touched something moist and clammy, and yet at the same time something soft and warm. My heart skipped a beat, and, looking at my hastily withdrawn hands, I saw them covered with blood. In a frenzy I attacked the shrubbery, and the warm June sunlight streamed down upon a man's upturned face, the eyes staring into mine and the mouth set in a hard, wide grin. He was dead, stone-dead, and I recognized him at once as the elderly gentleman in flannels I had seen playing croquet with the golden-haired girl.

I cannot fittingly describe what I felt at that supreme moment of my uneventful life; it was impossible to credit my eyes and whirling senses; to believe that on this bright summer morning, while the birds were calling to one another and the air was heavy with the perfume of flowers, that in this sylvan abode which to me of all places was the personification of peace and happiness and good will toward men, that a fellow being had been cruelly done to death.

But such was the case, and as I knelt, stupidly staring at a heavy, blood-stained club I held in my hand, and from it to the fearsomely grinning thing under the laurel bush, I heard footsteps, and, turning, beheld the mulberry-faced butler, who was demanding, in stentorian tones, why I trespassed upon private property.

Then, without a word from me, he saw what my eyes had mechanically returned to, and, with a cry, he hurled himself upon me, wrenching the club from my passive hand, and, gripping me by the collar, after which he bellowed for help at the top of his leathern lungs.

CHAPTER II.

Why I did not assault my fat captor and try to escape I do not know to this day, for I was quite frightened enough

to do anything, and I saw as in a flash the circumstantial evidence that could be arrayed against me. But I was saved this last, supreme folly simply because my legs refused to work, and when at length the butler's heavy trumpeting had produced the desired result, and a policeman appeared, I yielded up my trembling carcass with the best grace possible.

It is unnecessary to add that by this time the road outside was choked with motors, vehicles, and humanity, and that the top of the wall literally bristled with gaping mouths and staring eyes until it reminded me of an array of heads elevated on pikes—an episode, say, of the French Revolution. For the majority were gesticulating and shouting violently, hurling at me opprobrious epithets of which "bloody murderer" was the least offensive and offering to do me bodily harm; in short, conducting themselves like the vital ingredients of a well-staged mob scene. Bolder and more agile spirits had even vaulted the wall, and, encouraged by this example, others followed, until the grounds became swamped with howling, pushing, swearing humanity, and it was not until the arrival of the police patrol that the place was cleared.

Meanwhile I had been marched to the house, sandwiched between the butler and the policeman, the latter a member of the motor squad. I almost felt like a criminal, and I'm sure resembled one, for I was torn and disheveled, while a well-aimed missile from the hand of a juvenile enthusiast on the wall had raised a lump over my right eye. I was thankful, however, to be delivered out of the hands of these thirsters after justice who, I think, but for the arrival of the law, might have testified to the sincerity of that thirst by hanging me from the nearest tree.

I was brought into the presence of the little old lady with the lavender shawl, also the golden-haired girl, whom I judged to be a few years younger than myself. It was evident that the several domestics whom I had seen mingling with the mob had acquainted their mistress with all that had happened, for she was very pale, and greatly agitated, though making heroic efforts to meet this awful typhoon in the hitherto placid sea of her daily existence. I saw that her daughter—for the girl addressed her as "mother"—had been urging the other not to receive us, but the little old lady, with a sort of weak obstinacy, refused the privacy that was her right, with an attempt at composure that deceived nobody. In what relationship they stood to the victim I could only surmise, but that it was a close one I could not doubt, judging from the effect the news had produced upon them. I could not imagine why I had been arraigned before such a tribunal, and it did not serve to increase my composure to feel that I was rudely intruding upon another's private sorrow.

"Well?" said the little old lady in an excited, whimpering way, while she clenched her thin hands, "he—he is not —dead? Tell me he is not dead!"

"I'm sorry, ma'am," said the butler, in a solemn bellow—he appeared to be unable to lower his voice—"but it's the truth and everythink."

I noticed he had a curious habit of inserting this word "everythink," no matter how irrelevant it might be to the subject-matter.

"Foully murdered, ma'am," bellowed he. "Foully murdered and everythink!"

The little old lady and the golden-haired girl stood very white and silent.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Deering," spoke up the policeman who had me by the arm, "but I must ask if you can identify this man? He has been seen hangin' about the place, an' we caught him——"

"You've made a mistake," said I, finding my voice at last. "I know nothing

about it. I discovered the body, and that's all——"

"I've seen you more than once looking over the wall and everythink!" exclaimed the butler. "You was staring at the house, and I've witnesses to it! I'll take my oath on it and everythink. And I found you on your knees by Mr. Wylder—God rest his soul!—and you had the very weapon in your hand and everythink!"

Mrs. Deering and her daughter looked at me with as much fear, horror, and aversion as their sweet faces were capable of showing.

"Mother, please go!" said the girl gently but urgently. "At least I can save you this."

"No, my dear, no!" said Mrs. Deering, drawing herself up very straight and mastering her emotion. "When I have a duty to perform I perform it, cost what it will. W-we must get to the bottom of this. I must see it through in person. Pendleton," she added, addressing the fat butler, "tell me exactly what happened, and be as brief as you can."

Pendleton complied, talking at the top of his lungs, as if we were deaf. He explained how he had seen me jump into the grounds, and, recognizing me as the person he had noted on former occasions peeping over the wall, had gone out to learn my business.

"He's the person, ma'am, I told you about and everythink," he concluded. "The person you saw yourself the other day."

"That is true," said Mrs. Deering, looking at me closely. "I recognize him now. What have you to say, sir?"

Here I was warned by the policeman that anything I said might be used against me, after which he took down my name, address, and occupation. Then I told my story, explaining how I had accidentally dropped the film, and that if they searched it would be found approximately where I said. During my narrative neither Mrs. Deering nor her daughter removed their eyes from me.

"I'm sure," said Mrs. Deering, turning to the policeman when I had finished, "this young gentleman is quite innocent. I believe all he has said."

And her daughter looked at me very kindly and nodded her golden head.

"I thank you for believing my unsupported word, Mrs. Deering," I replied, "but what I have claimed concerning my good character can be proven easily. I often use the camera in studies of still life, and this house caught my fancy. I'm sorry if I've annoyed you at any time by looking over the wall, but I assure you I didn't mean any harm."

Mrs. Deering and her daughter—whom she addressed as Alice—again expressed belief in my innocence, but the upshot of the whole matter was that I found myself in due course remanded to the Tombs for twenty-four hours pending an investigation of my story and myself.

I succeeded in taking my predicament philosophically, seeing it was useless to do otherwise, and long before the allotted time had passed I was set free, all I had told the police concerning myself being verified. After an interview with a deputy commissioner, in which he apologized for my detention, and explained why it had been necessary, I was permitted to go.

Let me now state as briefly as possible such information concerning the crime as the police had in their possession.

The victim's name was Jonas Wylder, a prosperous, middle-aged bachelor, who lived at the Hermitage—such was the name of the house—with his widowed second cousin and her daughter. Wylder had been credited with making a respectable fortune out of the building and contracting business, his partner a relative of the party boss. About

a month prior to the tragedy the firm of Gorman & Wylder had been accused of profiting through unfair discrimination in the letting of municipal contracts, and, though the charges were not proven, the firm voluntarily dissolved, Wylder retiring to private life while Gorman continued the business.

Wylder had been an educated man, a graduate of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, and the architect of several municipal buildings that were highly commended. He had designed and built the Hermitage, where, after his virtual retirement from business, he had lived a quiet, secluded life, going downtown once or twice a week.

Being of sedentary habits, he had lately taken to exercising, and for this reason maintained no stable or garage, though well able financially to do so. Thus being removed from constant and immediate temptation to take his ease, he always walked to the subway station, and, if it were inclement weather, phoning for a taxi from a neighboring garage. He invariably left the house at ten-thirty, and had on the morning of his death. It had been ten-thirty to the minute, Mrs. Deering and her daughter remembered distinctly the half hour striking as, from the breakfast-room windows, they watched Mr. Wylder traverse the winding path to the gate.

This breakfast room faced south, and, as I have explained, the path circled to the north and east in back of the house and within a few feet of the wall upon which I had perched. Thus a person was soon out of view from the breakfast-room windows. But even from the topmost window in the rear of the house a person would be hidden from view by the high privet hedge, once he entered that portion of the walk running parallel with the wall.

And this was what had happened: Mr. Wylder had waved his hand to his second cousin and her daughter as they stood in the breakfast-room windows, and then vanished round the curving path. Pendleton, in his pantry at the rear of the house, had happened to glance out of the window and see his master disappear behind the privet hedge. Had he continued to watch he would have noted that on this occasion Mr. Wylder did not emerge from behind that hedge and walk out through the gates. Instead, Pendleton had turned away, never thinking for a moment that his master would not reappear at the other end. Some few minutes elapsed before he again chanced to look out, this time to see me jumping from the wall.

Pendleton was unable to state how long a time elapsed before his first and second glance from the pantry window, but, thanks in part to me, the time of Wylder's death was narrowed down to four or five minutes. For Mrs. Deering and her daughter had last seen him at half past ten and Pendleton a few seconds later, while the snapshot I had taken was entered on the memoranda as ten-thirty-five. A minute or so later and I had discovered the warm remains. Even allowing for the small difference in time between my watch and the Hermitage clock—we found a discrepancy of fifteen seconds—this was almost narrowing things down to the irreducible minimum. A few minutes more and I would have been virtually present when the crime was committed, and but for the wall and foliage must have witnessed it. In fact, I had been approaching that wall when the murderer had stepped out noiselessly from the dense shrubbery as his victim unsuspectingly passed and dealt him a single terrific blow at the base of the skull, and Wylder had dropped stone-dead without uttering a cry. For the coroner's physician stated that death had been virtually instantaneous; that Wylder had never seen his assailant, and, in all likelihood, had never known what had happened.

All this bore out my testimony that I had heard no sound of any kind save the twittering of the birds and the stirring of the trees caused by the gentle breeze from the river. Nor had I seen any one within or without the grounds.

It seemed impossible that such a crime could be committed in broad daylight, within a stone's throw of the victim's own house, and but a few yards from a public highway where, though traffic was light at that hour, vehicles and people passed occasionally; and where, in fact, one person—myself—must have been but a few yards off. This and the apparent lack of all motive made the case more than the usual few days' sensation.

I may add that the Hermitage was not isolated; true, there was no immediate neighbor to the north, but to the south was a house whose grounds were separated from the Hermitage solely by a hedge and a row of maples. In this house lived Peter Gorman, Wylder's former partner. Gorman was a widower, and his son, Randall Gorman, was the red-headed young man I had seen conversing occasionally with Alice Deering.

What I have here set forth was learned in part from the coroner's inquest—at which I was an important witness—and in part from the newspapers. And now a brief word as to myself:

My name is Arnold Cummings, and I am an artist, living at that time on Cathedral Heights, my apartment being shared by Willard Latimer, a well-known newspaper man. Latimer covered the Wylder case as only Latimer can, but after all was said and done, after it had been theorized upon and analyzed to extinction, the fact remained that apparently no one but the murderer knew who had killed Jonas Wylder or what had been the motive. It seemed destined to go down on the police records with the single ominous word "unsolved" against it.

Yet after the police and press had virtually pronounced the case hopeless I noticed that it still interested Latimer. I did not know if this was because he hated to confess himself beaten, or whether, due to my temporary involvement, he felt more than a professional interest, and was reluctant to renounce it. I knew him vitally concerned, and yet he did not make me the confidant of his views regarding it, discussing it very guardedly when he condescended to mention it at all.

This noncommittal, secretive attitude was very unlike Latimer where I was concerned, and it served to stimulate my overheated imagination, for though I had not seen the Deerings or been near them since that terrible morning, I felt as if I knew them personally; that their sorrow was somehow my own, in a measure, and that I would give a great deal to clear up the mystery and bring to justice the criminal who had brought such trouble upon them. I felt as if I had known Jonas Wylder, and I thought if by any act of mine I could obliterate the awful deed of that morning and bring back the wonted smile to Miss Deering's and her mother's eyes, how happy would I be! For I had not forgotten that they had implicitly believed in my innocence from the first, and even in the midst of their sorrow and trouble had found time to engage their family lawyer, Mr. Caxton, in my behalf; wishful to help me in any way possible. All this, added to my initial interest in the family, coupled with a healthy native curiosity, kept the Wylder case very much alive for me.

CHAPTER III.

Now, I had left my camera at the Deerings' that eventful morning, and this fact I knew quite well. I had unslung it, I remember, because during

my rough handling by the policeman and Pendleton the strap had become twisted uncomfortably under my collar, and I recollect that while relating my story to Mrs. Deering I had unslung the camera and placed it on a table; after which I had forgotten promptly all about it, the subsequent incidents of that eventful day banishing all thought of it from my mind.

It was not until I was again in full possession of my liberty and had in a measure resumed the day's work that, missing the camera, I remembered where I had left it. I waited a few days, expecting its arrival by express, for I knew the Deerings were in possession of my name and address, and I thought they might forward my property. But I did not actually need the camera, and so did not send for it, being rather glad when the days passed and it did not appear. For I had planned to visit the Hermitage, after a fitting interval, and the camera would supply a legitimate excuse.

And so one afternoon, about a week subsequent to the coroner's inquest, I made up my mind to go. Our apartment was a large one, on the top floor, overlooking Morningside Park, and there was a room having a good northern light in which I did developing and printing; here I also put the finishing touches to such work as I brought home —commercial art for the most, that is, magazine and holiday stuff. For I had a regular studio in a downtown studio building, where I received models and did all my heavy and ambitious work.

Latimer, who sleeps half the day and works all night—sometimes—was finishing a late breakfast lunch or an early supper, when I arrived to dress. He looked surprised when I told of my intention.

"But why bother them or yourself?" he asked. "Why don't you send for the camera? If you'd said anything about it I could have brought it home long ago." For, of course, in company with other newspaper men, he had been to the Hermitage many a time since the crime.

"I'd rather go in person," said I, "and that's why I said nothing about it to you. I didn't want you to bring it home—deprive me of a legitimate excuse for calling."

He eyed me satirically. "And so that's the attraction, eh? I thought as much. I knew you hadn't been peeping over that wall day after day merely to feast your eyes on the house——"

"What are you getting at?" said I. "I merely wish an opportunity to thank Mrs. Deering for her kindness to me. You must remember they believed in my innocence offhand, and even went to the trouble of sending their family lawyer——"

"Oh, yes; those devilish good looks of yours!" said he, with a sardonic grin. "You always had a strong pull with the ladies, and how you manage it beats me. But I wish I had some of your looks—I'll give you half my intellect and virtue for them any time. Be beautiful if you can't be rich. Talk as they like, the best of women prefer something it won't give them the blind staggers to look at."

I may explain that Latimer—and I say this in all fairness—was one of the ugliest men I ever knew. He was big, rawboned, and ungainly; all nose, chin, and feet; and in evening clothes, which he abhorred, he looked more like a dressed-up clown than a human being. He had absolutely no social accomplishments, and in a drawing-room seemed to be all at sea and in dire distress until he found anchor in an obscure corner or some understanding convoy took him in charge and drew him out.

One had to know Latimer and know him well in order to appreciate him, and even though we had been intimate for years there were depths of his nature as yet unplumbed by me. One thing I

knew, he was the soul of honor and the outcast's friend. Given these two virtues, I think a man can be excused the rest. There wasn't a panhandler from the Battery to the Bronx whose whisky-laden "touch" wouldn't have parted Latimer from his last nickel. These facts he concealed under a rough and cynical exterior which I knew to be nothing more than a rank counterfeit.

"Are you insinuating," said I, "that Miss Deering is the attraction? I may not have your intellect, but I think that's what you're driving at."

"Oh, never in the world!" said he, waving his ungainly hand. "I'm fully aware that, like most artists, women only interest you professionally—at least, every artist whom I've approached on the subject has so assured me. I used to think the majority of artists were rank flirts, but I learned differently; it's merely a professional interest. But I quiet agree with you, Cummings, for Miss Deering is a beauty—and an unspoiled one, at that."

"Yes, isn't she beautiful?" I exclaimed. "She interested me because she's such a rare type——"

"Yes, that's the technical term," he nodded, with a sardonic grin. "I know the dope by heart, you old hypocrite! Why, look here!"

He thumbed over the portfolio I had brought home, tossing out sketch after sketch; studies in pastel, wash, and water color. I must admit that—though, of course, drawn from memory—they were one and all creditable portraits of Alice Deering, though I had been unable to do justice to her coloring, especially the eyes and hair. One in particular, a three-quarter head and bust, was the best of the lot, and this Latimer regarded long and critically though cynically.

"Merely some studies for magazine covers," said I brazenly.

"Sure," said he. "I understand perfectly, old man." He eyed his clumsy hands and then my own, laying down the portrait with something like a sigh.

"It's funny what some people can do with their fingers," said he, reaching for his pipe. "It's a great gift, Cummings, and I would like to see what you could do if Miss Deering sat for you. And so you're going up there, eh? You really wish to know them? Then I'll introduce you according to the ethics of the game, and you needn't resort to the subterfuge of the camera. I intended going there, anyway, so come along, my friend."

"That's awfully good of you," I replied; "but do you know them well enough to introduce me?"

"Oh, yes," said he. "I've known them about three years." This was news, and I looked my astonishment.

"What! Why didn't you say so?" I exclaimed. "You let me think that I discovered them; that you had never seen them until given the case by your paper. And here it turns out you've known them socially——"

"There's nothing enigmatic about it," said he, with a shrug. "I knew the Deerings—mother and daughter—rather well about three years ago when I happened to meet them in Portsmouth, where I was covering the Peace Convention. They had a cottage there, and were up for the summer. Of course, I knew Mr. Wylder in a way—practically every newspaper man did—and he introduced me. That's about the extent of my intimacy, for the acquaintance wasn't kept up, and I hadn't seen them again until this affair happened. Yet I think I know them well enough to bring along and introduce a friend—especially one they've met before."

"It's singular," I mused, "they should turn out to be acquaintances of yours. I never thought, when peeping over the wall, that I was looking at people who knew you, and if I had happened to mention your name that day——"

"Well, it wasn't necessary," he

laughed, "and it's much more flattering to be judged innocent on one's own hook. There's one thing, though—you may find that Miss Deering isn't the marrying kind. Of course, I know you have only a 'professional interest' in her, but, at the same time, I warn you not to be disappointed——"

"Why, did you find that out at first-hand?"

Latimer's homely face flushed, and I felt somehow as if I had brutally investigated a raw wound. But he smiled ironically, and lighted his pipe with a steady hand.

"You flatter me," said he lightly. "But I'm not exactly a fool, Cummings, and so long as there remains a mirror in the world I never will be a fool in that respect. The woman who marries me must have one glass eye, and be unable to see very well with the other." He always made fun of his appearance.

"Perhaps I shouldn't have said what I did," he added, "for I'm sure I have no right to pronounce an opinion on Miss Deering's views of matrimony. As you're set on knowing the Deerings, I may as well introduce you, but you may find them a—a trifle odd."

"In what way?"

"I can't exactly say," he replied slowly. "Perhaps," with a laugh, "because some of my views and theirs don't coincide. Come, let us be moving!"

Seeing I was about to meet the Deerings, and that Latimer had at last opened up on the subject, I was prompted to speak of Wylder's death as we went uptown on the subway. I asked if anything further had been done.

"I know no more than you," said he, with a shrug. "The police and all of us are marking time. They haven't discovered anything important that they're keeping secret, for I would have got on to it. But there's one thing—I'm going to stay with this case until I drop, and nothing can shake me off."

His long, sunken jaws set, and his eyes took on such an expression that I suddenly remembered—and now saw some of its truth—his nickname. For in the Fourth Estate Latimer was affectionately and facetiously termed the "Bloodhound"; this name was merited not only by the qualities he displayed when on a big assignment, but by his looks. And now with his pendulous ears, long nose, wide mouth, and with that expression in his small, deep-set eyes, he certainly put me in mind of a bloodhound. They say we all more or less resemble some species of animal, and the name given to Latimer in idle jest survived as only the truth can.

"What is this talk about Mr. Gorman and Wylder having been on the outs?" I asked. "I don't mean what has been hinted at in the papers, but what you must know—things that are said among newspaper men, and never published."

"That's rather a delicate subject," replied Latimer. "If I repeated all the gossip and rumors I hear and run down —— But I know with you it won't go any farther. They say Wylder dissolved the partnership because of the graft charges, and that up to that time he had no idea Gorman was putting his political pull to that use."

"That seems hardly credible," said I. "I mean if there was any truth in the charges, Wylder must have known what was going on——"

"I don't know about that, Cummings. It may seem incredible in this age of graft, but Wylder was not a politician or business man, remember—I mean not one like Peter Gorman. Wylder supplied the real talent of the firm, and it was Gorman who saw to the contracts and attended to the financial end of the game. Wylder had old-fashioned ideas about business honesty, and he was not a business man, but an architect, wholly wrapped up in his work and proud of

the firm's standing. He did all the designing and superintended the constructing, while Gorman hardly knows a compass from a bung starter. And, as a matter of fact, those charges against the firm were true in every particular —and a lot more besides. *I* know that. Gorman, through his cousin, can influence more than one paper, and, of course, we can't publish what we think and suspect but can't prove. But if Gorman hadn't had his pull this thing wouldn't have been quashed, and you couldn't get a judge or jury in this city to convict Peter Gorman of anything unless the evidence offered no alternative.

"If Wylder had been sensible," added Latimer cynically, "when he found out what had been going on, he should have banked his share and kept his mouth shut—which he did to the public. He should have known what was going on, and that it's the keystone of more than one flourishing, reputable concern."

"Of course I suspected all this," said I, "for it's by no means a novelty, and is accepted as a matter of course. But if Wylder quit the firm on that account why didn't he come forward and substantiate the charges?"

Latimer shrugged. "Very likely he couldn't prove anything, as no more can I. But as he gave out that he was retiring on account of ill health, he had some other reason. Gorman and he were close friends for years, and this may have had its weight with Wylder."

"Do you think Mrs. Deering knows anything about his business affairs?"

"Mrs. Deering has proved a very unsatisfactory subject," said Latimer shortly. "She won't talk for publication, and she doesn't wish to be interviewed. I think she knows more than she says, and that's why I'm going up now—to see if I can make her talk. I've been camping on her trail, and I'm going to keep hammering away at her until she does talk. Here's our station," he finished, arising.

CHAPTER IV.

Alice Deering and the red-headed young man were the first ones we saw on entering the grounds. They were in the little summerhouse, talking earnestly and evidently unaware of our arrival until Latimer raised his hat, and spoke, at which they jumped apart, the girl flushing and young Gorman looking very resentful as he turned and eyed us. I saw that Miss Deering was not in mourning—Wylder had been a very distant relative—for she wore a pale-green gown of some filmy material, with slippers and stockings to match, this particular shade contrasting admirably with her coloring. Some tea roses were fastened in her corsage.

"Good afternoon," she said, smiling faintly and none too cordially I thought. "We weren't expecting you, Mr. Latimer."

"I suppose not," he returned, standing awkwardly but speaking quite at ease. "May I see your mother, Miss Deering?"

"I'm sorry, but mother is lying down; she isn't very well. I must ask you to excuse her."

"Oh, there's no particular hurry," said Latimer. "I can wait until she feels more disposed. I hope she'll be feeling better before night; if not, I'll come again."

Their eyes met, and I could see the girl quite understood that Latimer meant he intended seeing Mrs. Deering sooner or later, and that equivocation was useless. She had been eying me—swift, occasional glances in passing—in a queer, appraising manner; and she now flushed a little and bit her lip. Young Gorman was also staring at us with open hostility, and, on first seeing me, I noted that he had given a little, involuntary start, as if he had recognized

me. He was handsome in a fiery, scalded sort of way, his features regular and his fair skin burned scarlet. His hands were capable, freckled, and covered with red hair; his eyes blue, sharp, and pugnacious. Square-shouldered and lean-flanked, he looked an out-of-doors sort of fellow used to giving and taking hard knocks—principally giving, I imagined. It was evident Latimer and he had met before, for they had exchanged a curt nod.

My friend now introduced me, Miss Deering bowing; and, when I offered my hand, Randall Gorman taking it in his hairy fist and giving a squeeze that brought the water to my eyes. This appeared to please him, for he grinned, showing a set of strong, even, nacreous teeth.

"I think we have met before, Mr. Cummings," said the girl, with a shy smile.

"I'm sorry to remind you of the circumstances," said I, "though remembrance cannot be necessary."

"No, we aren't permitted to forget," she rejoined, looking at Latimer. He was standing like a monument, immovable and as if insensate. This appeared to irritate her. Again he appeared to me as a hound sticking to a scent, one not to be shaken off.

"Perhaps," said Alice Deering at length, addressing him with an ill grace she could not conceal, "my mother may be able to see you. Suppose you ask Pendleton."

Latimer bowed, and moved off toward the house, while I, not knowing quite what to do, remained. I felt de trop, and yet not at liberty to follow Latimer. I knew that Randall Gorman and Miss Deering wished to be alone, and that they regarded my presence with disfavor, to say the least; yet I did not wish the girl to think that vulgar curiosity had prompted my visit. She seemed anxious to be rid of Latimer on any excuse; as if his presence grated on her.

"I didn't know you were a friend of Mr. Latimer," said Miss Deering, making an effort, I supposed, to put me at ease. "Why didn't you say so that—that morning? It would have saved you unnecessary trouble, perhaps."

So I told her about not knowing until that day of Latimer's acquaintance with them. "And I wish to thank your mother, Miss Deering," I added, "for the trouble she took on my behalf—sending her lawyer——"

"Oh, not at all," said she. "We felt you were the victim of circumstances, Mr. Cummings. Mr. Caxton is very good, far better than a lawyer you could have selected at random—if you hadn't one. I'm sure we had no wish to drag an innocent person into our trouble."

"Oh," said Randall Gorman, eying me hard, "so you are the gentleman who used to peep over the wall? What did you find to interest you, Mr. Cummings?"

"Merely the house," I replied.

"Oh, merely the house?" he echoed, his blue eyes satiric.

"Mr. Cummings is an artist," interposed the girl, seeing, perhaps, that Gorman and I had not made a very good start.

"But surely not a house painter?" asked he innocently enough.

"No, an illustrator," replied she. "For," turning to me, "aren't you the Arnold Cummings who draws for the magazines?"

"I see," said Gorman, as I assented. "A painter of pretty girls, eh? I know your stuff. And so you are a landscape artist, too—seeing you are interested in houses?"

I changed the subject, as he seemed determined to make it rather unpleasant. I turned to Miss Deering and mentioned about the camera.

"Oh," said she, as I explained about

leaving it, "I'm sorry we didn't forward it, but there has been so much to attend to, and it slipped my mind. I saw it on the table, and meant to send it. I remembered your address. I hope it hasn't been misplaced. Let us find out."

"I must be going," said Randall Gorman, glancing at his watch. "See you later, Alie." And, with a curt nod to me, he turned on his heel, while Miss Deering and I moved toward the house.

Attentive as I was to my companion's small talk, I nevertheless noted that young Gorman did not go out through the gates. Instead, he traversed the graveled path by the wall and disappeared through the shrubbery that separated the Gorman and Wylder properties.

"And how long has the Hermitage interested you, Mr. Cummings?" asked Miss Deering shyly, as we circled the house.

"For about a week or so before——" I did not like to mention the tragedy, but as I hesitated she said colorlessly:

"You mean before Mr. Wylder's death? You need not try to spare our feelings. We must accept it as fact, and I suppose must learn to face all this notoriety. I suppose the public has a right to invade our privacy." But there was nothing submissive in her attitude.

"You are quite justified in resenting it," I said, "but, unfortunately, it's inevitable. And if it results in bringing the culprit to justice—as I'm sure it will—then you won't have suffered in vain."

"Why are you so positive the culprit will be discovered?" she asked, taking a rose from her corsage and slowly pulling it to pieces. "Is that Mr. Latimer's opinion?"

"Mr. Latimer hasn't said very much to me about the case, but I think he's reasonably certain the culprit will be found, in the long run. And he's going to stay with the case until that happens."

"Indeed," said she. "I understand Mr. Latimer has rather a reputation for that sort of thing."

"Yes; and you may rest assured that if any one can solve this mystery it's Latimer."

Contrary to my intention, this did not seem to please her, though she replied, without irritation: "I don't think this mystery will ever be solved, Mr. Cummings, so Mr. Latimer is merely wasting his time and that of his paper. If it were capable of solution it would have been solved long ago. There is absolutely no motive; Mr. Wylder had no enemies——"

"Latimer was saying that Mr. Gorman——" I stopped in some confusion, remembering suddenly that what my friend had said was in strict confidence.

"Mr. Latimer was saying what?" asked Miss Deering.

"Nothing," said I. "I mean," with a brave assumption of indifference, "he merely commented on what the papers said—that Mr. Gorman and Mr. Wylder had had some little misunderstanding."

"The papers do nothing if they don't exaggerate," said she. "Any misunderstanding Mr. Wylder may have had with Mr. Gorman has no bearing whatsoever on this case. They were not enemies even if Mr. Latimer thinks so. Surely," with an ironic laugh, "he doesn't suppose Mr. Gorman knows anything about Mr. Wylder's death?"

"No, of course not. The mere idea is absurd, of course, and Mr. Latimer never even hinted at it."

She looked at me fixedly, and I found that her eyes demanded the best of me. "Of course, the mere idea is absurd," said she slowly, "but I know the mischief malicious gossip can work, and in a case like this every irresponsible person and amateur detective

thinks it's his special privilege to become a—a pest. Our home has ceased to be one except in name, for it seems that any one armed with a little brief and questionable authority can march all over the place and put impertinent questions to his heart's content. And if I hadn't ordered Pendleton to turn the hose on the rabble we wouldn't have a moment's peace night or day. It will be too bad if through no fault of ours we distress a neighbor and make him the target for such talk—make him as uncomfortable as ourselves." There were tears in her eyes and her lip was trembling. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes snapping, and I found myself thinking how well such a display of emotion became her.

"I hope you don't classify me as one of the pests," I said.

"I hope I won't have to, Mr. Cummings," she replied more lightly. "But why should you stare at the Hermitage every day for a week? That's what I've been wondering. I'm curious about it."

"Why," said I, "I've explained I only peeped over the wall when I happened to pass in my walks——"

"But you happened to pass every day. And why should you happen to always walk up here when you live on Cathedral Heights? And why should the house happen to attract you? I should think one look would be enough. Of course, it was no harm—none in the least—but I'm inquisitive."

"Well, perhaps it was not only the house but the people," I replied.

"But we are very ordinary people, Mr. Cummings. There must have been something—something to have first attracted your attention."

"There was, Miss Deering."

"And—and what was that?" she asked, with, I thought, quickened breath.

"That was yourself, Miss Deering," I replied. "I hope you will pardon my frankness, but you would have the truth. The first day I passed I saw you in the grounds and—and——"

"Were overwhelmed with my beauty?"

"Exactly."

She flushed slightly, and laughed, a wholesome, unaffected, carefree laugh I liked to hear, and which made her quite irresistible. "You have a very adroit way of wriggling out of holes," said she. "For after such an explanation—and, of course, I don't doubt its sincerity—it would be ungenerous to cross-examine you further." Yet I saw, though speaking ironically, she believed me; or, in any case, that I had pleased her, and that a weight seemed to be lifted from her mind.

"Of course it was a professional interest," I added. "Every pretty girl I see I wonder how she would look on the cover—or between the covers—of a magazine."

"Indeed. Then I must consider myself honored," she said demurely, "for I'm quite sure you don't go out of your way, day after day, to peep at every girl who happens to interest you professionally."

"No, that's quite true."

"Otherwise," she added, "you wouldn't have time to do anything else."

"Meaning I'm so impressionable as all that?"

"Perhaps," she laughed. "You are not the first artist I have met, Mr. Cummings."

"What a flattering opinion you have of them," I rejoined. And thus, with the ice fairly broken, we went in to look for the camera.

CHAPTER V.

Pendleton had put the camera safely away, a fact which he now explained, with the help of a good many "everythinks." He addressed me in a very

lofty, distant manner, as if he considered it a strange abortion of justice, over which he had no control, that I had been set at liberty after he had gone to such trouble and personal inconvenience to capture me. I spoke to him about it while Miss Deering was absent a moment, for I intended this should not be my last visit to the Hermitage, and one may better have an old and privileged servant for than against one. Latimer had told me—on my guessing around the compass and casually mentioning the butler as a possible suspect—that Pendleton had been with his present employers many years, Latimer having seen him at Portsmouth.

"I must apologize to you, Pendleton," said I, "for not being all I seemed, but the fact is I really can't help it if I'm not given to homicide. Drink to my lucky escape the next time——"

"I'm a teetotaler, sir," said he severely. But he accepted the bill, after eying me at leisure, and I think I had succeeded in disturbing some of his English phlegm, for he unbent a little, and permitted his face to relax.

"And what about the other film?" I asked, taking the camera.

"What other film, sir?"

"The one I dropped in the laurel bush. Was it ever found?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, sir. There's been such a time, sir, and everythink—as you can imagine. And there was so much to do and everythink, I'm sure we hadn't thought about it."

Miss Deering, reëntering the room at that moment, caught the drift of the conversation. "A film?" she asked, turning to me. "Oh, you mean the one you dropped that morning? No, we didn't look for it—at least, I know I didn't. But I can ask the servants."

"Please don't bother," I replied. "It doesn't matter in the least. Either the police or some newspaper man has found it long ago, and, if not, it would be ruined, anyway, I imagine."

It was evident that Latimer had succeeded in his quest, for I saw nothing of him, and Miss Deering and I, sitting in the breakfast room, now fell into conversation. Presently Mrs. Deering, looking very pale, came in, followed by Latimer, and I saw my companion raise her brows and dart a quick, questioning glance at her mother, who stood behind Latimer. I saw all this in a Venetian mirror hanging in an angle of the wall; I did not mean to spy, happening to glance up just in time to observe what I have set down. And I saw Mrs. Deering, in answer to her daughter's look, shake her head ever so slightly. Neither saw me in the mirror, and, as I have stated, the little pantomime was conducted behind Latimer's back.

Mrs. Deering shook hands with me, and would not listen to any thanks for the trouble and interest she had taken in my behalf. She asked us to remain for dinner—entirely through the dictates of courtesy, I imagined—and did not press us when we declined. In fact, she appeared rather relieved than otherwise. Before leaving, I asked permission to call, which, after some hesitation, was granted.

"But I'm afraid, Mr. Cummings," said Mrs. Deering, "you will find us very dull company. We have always been a stay-at-home sort of family, and our recent sorrow has not made us any more lively, as you can imagine——"

"I quite understand," I replied, "and naturally at such a time one wouldn't wish to receive strangers or make new acquaintances. Yet I thought if, in time, you could go about a bit, it might help you to forget——"

"Yes," said she, "that is the sensible thing to do, if one can bring oneself to do it. Nothing can bring my cousin back—and that's certain—and somehow I feel this terrible mystery will never be cleared up——"

"Which is quite contrary to my opinion, Mrs. Deering, as you know," put in Latimer. "I assure you we'll throw some light on it yet."

"I hope so," said she calmly. "And yet will all the justice in the world bring back my cousin?"

"That's not the point," he replied. "The law must be enforced, and an example to others who may have a like impulse to kill——"

"And then there's your paper, Mr. Latimer," interposed Alice Deering. "It must have the facts, I suppose, at any price."

"Naturally," said he calmly. "But it doesn't pander to sensationalism, Miss Deering; and the innocent have nothing to fear from it."

She smiled coldly, and turned to the window, while her mother said:

"Well, I'm sure I can never believe in capital punishment, Mr. Latimer, as you know. I have always thought so, and even now, when the subject has struck home, I hold the same opinion. I consider it legal murder, and I don't see how it can mend matters. The law should be corrective and not revengeful, and even murderers should be given an opportunity to repent and lead better lives."

"But surely," said Latimer, "you wish to see Mr. Wylder's murderer brought to justice?"

"Certainly," said she curtly; "but the idea of justice in this State does not agree with mine nor do I wish him apprehended merely to even the score and satisfy my vengeance, for I have none. If he is a menace to society, educate him until he becomes a useful member——"

"In the main I agree with you, Mrs. Deering," said Latimer; "but we must take the law as we find it."

This ended the discussion. Mrs. Deering turned to me, saying her daughter and she were thinking of shutting up the house and going away for a while, but that, in any case, they would be glad to see me any time I cared to call.

So we took our leave, and I marched away without the camera; for indeed I had forgotten all about it, my mind busy with other matters among which was some speculation as to the particular color of Alice Deering's eyes.

We had not gone far beyond the gates when Latimer called my attention to the oversight, making a sarcastic comment to the effect that mere acquaintance with Miss Deering appeared to have set my wits woolgathering. "You'd better return for it," he added, "or else they will think you left it on purpose so as to call again, if you weren't specifically invited. That camera has served you well enough, so don't overdo it. Besides, you will see Miss Deering again."

So he walked on slowly, while I returned to the Hermitage.

Now, it happened that Latimer and I wore rubber heels that day, and I think it was in part due to this fact that Miss Deering and Randall Gorman had not heard us approach, for, naturally, we had made no effort to conceal our presence, and we had kept to the walk. But I did not think of this explanation until after what now transpired.

Twilight had fallen when I passed through the gates and traversed the path by the wall. But as I came to the point where it curved and then straightened out again toward the house I heard voices, their owners hidden from me and I from them by the curve. It was at this spot I had seen young Gorman leave the path and pass through the shrubbery to his own grounds, and Mr. Wylder had met his violent death some half dozen yards to the north. I recognized these voices as Mrs. Deering's and her daughter's, and, without having any intention of

eavesdropping, I could not help hearing what was being said.

"And you are sure," Mrs. Deering was saying, "he saw nothing?"

"Quite," said her daughter. "Mr. Latimer——" It was here I began to whistle, and, rounding the curve, came face to face with not only them, but Randall Gorman.

"Oh," exclaimed Mrs. Deering, with a start, "how you frightened me! I never heard you at all."

Alice Deering and young Gorman turned and eyed me in silence, the latter with ill-concealed anger. "You are very light on your feet, Mr. Cummings," said he, with a short laugh. "It's funny I never can hear you approach."

"I've rubber heels," said I indifferently, the thought then occurring to me. "Perhaps that accounts for it."

"Perhaps," said he.

I apologized for startling them, and explained about the camera. Pendleton was called, and he brought it; whereupon I said good-by for the second time, and set out after Latimer. And I could not help wondering to whom Mrs. Deering had been referring and what else her daughter would have said had I not made known my proximity.

"Well, what do you think of our friends?" asked Latimer, as we entered the subway.

"Very nice people," I replied. "But I can't help agreeing with you; I think perhaps they know more about Wylder's death than they've intimated. Don't misunderstand me; I like them exceedingly and I had no intention of playing the spy. And I wouldn't even hint at this to any one but you——"

"I know all that," said he, with some irritation. "I've known them longer than you, and think highly of them. I can't help it. But there's a mystery there, Cummings, and it's my duty to get to the bottom of it if I can, whether they like it or not. It's my duty to the paper and the public," he added doggedly. "I'm glad you came along. I wanted an outside opinion. I was beginning to doubt if I had got the right dope."

"Just what do you mean?"

"I was afraid," said he slowly, "that personal ambition—and perhaps something else—was making me hound them unjustly. I'm ambitious, or, rather, jealous of my reputation, and I'd give a lot to pull off this case—to make a beat, you understand. It would mean a lot for me. Added to this is my pure love of the game, and so I didn't know if the wish was father to the thought when, from the first, I suspected the Deerings. For if they are not shielding Wylder's murderer they at least know or suspect his identity!"

"That's my idea," said I. "The Lord knows I don't wish to think so, but it keeps recurring. And I noticed things to day that, so far as I can see, will admit of no other interpretation. I could not help seeing and hearing——"

"Wait," said Latimer, with a warning glance. "This is hardly the place to discuss it. I must go down to the office, but I'll be home early."

CHAPTER VI.

With Latimer, "early" meant midnight or thereabouts, and it was with ill-concealed impatience I awaited his return. He knew more about the case than he had mentioned to me, and I felt he was ready to make me his confidant, wholly or in part.

He came in about twelve, to find me up and waiting, and, after throwing off his coat, he mixed himself a Scotch high ball and loaded up his old pipe. "And just what did you notice to-day?" he asked, as if the subject of the Deerings had not been discontinued.

"In the first place," I replied, "it was quite evident that Miss Deering resents your activity; her mother, too, I think,

though she concealed her feelings. At first I thought Miss Deering's resentment due to the fact that we had interrupted her tête-à-tête with Randall Gorman——"

"It's quite true they resent my activity," he interrupted. "They don't want me hanging around, and have discouraged me all they possibly could. But I have the inside track, and am using it for all it's worth. In Portsmouth I had the opportunity of doing them a service—in fact, I probably saved Miss Deering's life."

"What?" said I.

"It was nothing," he shrugged, flushing. "She was out sailing, and the boat upset. It was offshore, and, as she can't swim, I went off the dock after her as there seemed to be no one else around. Miss Deering's companion had gallantly climbed to the keel of the boat and left her floundering as best she could. I never knew his name. I happened to see him once or twice at their cottage, and I never met him after that. Miss Deering was under for the second time when I got her. It was a very trivial performance on my part, but the family considered themselves under a great obligation."

"As well they might," I commented.

Latimer got up and paced the room with ungainly, awkward strides, his homely face puckered in thought. "That's really how I met her," he continued, "for up to that time, though I had seen her occasionally, we hadn't been introduced. But Wylder came around to thank me, and, later, introduced me——"

"Quite romantic!" said I.

"Oh, very," he nodded, pulling at his pipe. "I'm just the one to figure in a romance."

He was silent for a moment. Then: "Neither the police nor any other newspaper man knows what I suspect regarding the Deerings; that's obvious. At the beginning of the case neither Mrs. Deering nor her daughter showed what you were able to discern to-day; they are losing their nerve because I've kept hammering at them day after day, and they realize I'm not to be shaken off—and they'll crack sooner or later. See if they don't. Besides, no other reporter has had the opportunity for observation that I have had." He paused, and I did not ask questions, knowing, in his present mood, it might throw him off the track.

"To be frank with you, Cummings," said he, "I was very much in love with Miss Deering—as no doubt you've guessed—and the night before leaving Portsmouth I made the mistake of asking her to marry me. I should have known—and I did know in my heart—that she couldn't possibly love me. But—well, I was in love for the first and last time in my life, and I couldn't help taking a chance. It slipped out before I knew, for I had never intended saying anything. I've neither riches nor social prestige, nor am I the type to inspire a romantic fancy in the heart of a young girl—especially one like Miss Deering. And I didn't wish her to think me cad enough to believe because I happened to save her life I imagined I had a lien on it."

Latimer blew smoke a moment, and continued: "She was very nice about it, letting me down as easily as possible. To spare my feelings, she even went to the point of prevarication, saying she had decided never to marry—quite a transparent untruth, of course, and prompted by sympathy. So we parted, and though after that I happened to see her once or twice in New York I never called, though invited. I wasn't in the least resentful, you understand, but I knew she had invited me merely because they felt under an obligation. Then it would only be distressing to have me around. Among Wylder's strongest characteristics were his charity, generosity, and sympathy,

and the impossibility to forget a favor. I imagine his relatives are the same way. Wylder was always doing something for somebody, and the less deserving they were the more he interested himself in them. Mrs. Deering's views on capital punishment are, I imagine, one of the results of this wide humanity and breadth of view so conspicuous in her cousin.

"Thus it was natural for them all to greatly magnify what I had done, and to feel it quite impossible to utterly discharge the obligation. Added to this is their native courtesy and hospitality. And so that's what I meant by saying I had the inside track, which, of course, I never thought of using until this happened." He knocked out his pipe, only to refill it.

"You can understand my position," he added gloomily, "which is aggravated by the fact of Miss Deering's intimacy with Randall Gorman, for if they are not sweethearts they are at least close friends. On the one hand, there is my duty to the public and my paper—also my personal ambition, for I will not pretend that a beat on this case wouldn't mean a lot for me. On the other hand, there is my sincere liking for the family—I need not mention my regard for Miss Deering. She, I imagine, regards my persistency as a mixture of spite work, personal ambition, and, perhaps, resentment toward Randall Gorman—I may be doing her an injustice, but that's how I feel. And so there you are, Cummings; either I continue to hound and distress them or I confess to my paper that there's no beat forthcoming; that I was on the wrong scent, and have wasted my time and their money. And I let justice and the public welfare go hang; let Wylder's murderer remain undiscovered. But there can be but one decision—go through with it, cost what it will!"

"What did you mean," said I, "by saying you had opportunities for observation which the police and other reporters lacked? You said that initially there was nothing suspicious in the Deerings' attitude."

"At first," he replied, "they received me like any of the other fellows, but when I persisted in sticking around, their attitude changed; and I feel this change was not induced by a normal desire for privacy. As a friend, I should be welcome, but as a newspaper man bent on investigating I'm distinctly not wanted. I was afforded more opportunity than the police or the other reporters for seeing behind the scenes from day to day, and, strive as I would against it, the conviction was forced upon me that not only did the Deerings know or suspect the murderer's identity but the servants, also. These servants—Pendleton, the cook, and the maid—are the same trio I knew in Portsmouth, and are old and faithful servants. No doubt they can be depended on to keep silent."

"It's a horrible suspicion," said I, "and it's the height of absurdity to imagine the Deerings implicated in the crime. And what possible reason could they have for withholding the identity of the murderer?"

"Apparently none at all," said Latimer. "I would as soon believe my own mother implicated in this affair as Mrs. Deering or her daughter. I don't suspect them of actual complicity; never in the world! But Wylder must have been killed for revenge. There's no other motive, and he hadn't an enemy in the world, so far as we can discover, with the possible exception of Peter Gorman.

"And look at the foolhardy business of the crime—killed in his own grounds, almost within view of the house and in broad daylight. The murderer must have been desperate to take such chances or been satisfied he could get away with it. He must have known Wylder's habits; what days he went

downtown and at what hour he left the house. It must have been absolutely necessary for Wylder to be put out of the way that day. You were on the scene a few minutes after the event, and the murderer could not have gone out through the gates or you would have seen him. He must have hidden in the grounds, afterward mingling with the crowd; or slipped through the shrubbery to Gorman's grounds, and thence to the road. Yet no one in either of the houses saw him. Apparently the police are satisfied that a footpad turned the trick and was frightened off before he could rob his victim, but I don't think they really believe this; it serves, in the absence of a more logical explanation. Let me show you something," he finished abruptly.

Latimer reached for his coat, and, pulling out a wallet, rummaged among its contents, finally producing a scrap of paper which he handed to me. It was the fragment of a letter, and I read the following:

——fears are absolutely groundless, so don't worry. The last doubt removed as to possible identity——

I turned over the fragment, and on the reverse side saw part of a coat of arms stamped in green, and half of the word "hotel."

"I found that to-day," said Latimer, "while I was talking with Mrs. Deering. It lay beside the wastebasket, evidently overlooked while the rest of it was destroyed. I picked it up unobserved and there were no other fragments. I hunted up the identity of that coat of arms—that's where I was to-night—and found it belonged to the Park Overlook Hotel, on Fifty-ninth Street."

"Evidently it's a man's writing," I commented, scrutinizing the fragment. "But it may have no bearing whatsoever on Wylder's death."

"It may not," agreed Latimer, "but I think it's only logical to infer that it has. Why should Mrs. Deering have fears—for evidently this was addressed to her—and why should they prove groundless? And the last doubt is removed to the possible identity of whom?"

"Did you ask her about this?"

"No. I wish to first find out, if possible, who wrote the letter."

"You don't know of any stopping at the Park Overlook who knows the Deerings?" I asked.

"Yes. I learned that Mr. Caxton, the Deerings' lawyer, has bachelor apartments there, but I was unable to get a specimen of his writing."

"It's strange," said I, when we had smoked a while in silence, "but this seems to bear out what I overheard when I returned for the camera." And I told of how I had come unexpectedly on the Deerings and young Gorman.

Latimer frowned, and smoked hard.

"I don't know who they were referring to," I added, "and the conversation may have been entirely harmless."

"And it was the Deerings who were talking?"

"Yes."

Latimer arose and began repacing the room. "There may be nothing in my suspicions," said he. "Nothing at all. And, of course, no one but you, Cummings, knows what I've been thinking. It's farthest from my wish or intention to bring any more distress and notoriety on the family, and I will be sure of my position before I say anything even to them. I can't imagine why they should keep silent if they do know anything. Is it through fear——"

"Do you think," I suggested, "that Mrs. Deering's views on capital punishment may have anything to do with it? She's a good deal of a sentimentalist——"

"She is, Cummings, but I can't [illegible]

agine her going to that extreme, and her daughter, at least, has a whole lot of common sense. No, that idea is absurd."

"Well," said I, with a laugh, "perhaps we're wasting a whole lot of thought over nothing. And as for that scrap of letter, we don't know if it was addressed to Mrs. Deering or that it has any significance. Whatever their position, I'm equally positive with you that it's not a guilty one. They aren't the people to conspire against the death of any one, least of all a relative. If they do suspect the murderer and are keeping silent through fear—though I can't imagine why they should be afraid—I hope we'll find out——"

"We must find out and we shall," said Latimer. "I think they've taken a fancy to you, Cummings. At least, Mrs. Deering spoke very nicely of you, and granting permission to call at such a time shows it. Keep your eyes and ears open——"

"I don't like the idea of spying on them," I protested. "If I accept their hospitality——"

"It isn't a time for splitting hairs," said he shortly. "You know how I regard the family, and that I won't make any unfair use of what we may discover. You're satisfied they're innocent, aren't you? Then—if my suspicions are correct—we must protect them from the agency that is responsible for this silence."

This was common sense, and as such I admitted it. "But what precisely is it you wish to learn from the Deerings?" I asked. "And did you succeed to-day?"

"I did not, Cummings. I believe Mrs. Deering to be intimately acquainted with her cousin's business affairs, and that she knows the inside facts of his split with Gorman. So far she has resisted me, but I'll land her yet—perhaps to-morrow."

CHAPTER VII.

The following afternoon, Latimer and I again visited the Hermitage, and this time I was present at his interview with Mrs. Deering. No one was about, and Pendleton showed us into the breakfast room, whither Mrs. Deering presently came. She looked very weary and harassed, though trying to conceal the fact, and I could see her innate courtesy struggling with resentment at these incessant visits on Latimer's part. Owing to courtesy or a knowledge of him she never thought of denying herself, and though in a measure coming to expect his visits and regard them as inevitable, it was apparent she had not anticipated that I would accompany him; so soon avail myself of her permission to call.

She greeted me with a formal graciousness, and, not wishing her to think me a party to Latimer's tactics, I inquired concerning her daughter and, learning she was out, made some excuse about wishing to see her. But at this point I was relegated to the background. Latimer had begun firing questions, and I think both forgot my presence. I looked about me, going to the far end of the long room, interesting myself with pictures and books, and simulating ignorance of what was transpiring. This was not difficult, for Latimer was speaking in a low tone, and I could not catch what he said, Mrs. Deering replying with forced composure.

At this point my wandering attention was arrested by an object carelessly thrown behind some magazines and books that littered a little teakwood table. This object was a little pasteboard box, the cover of a film, and as I picked it up I instantly recognized it as the one I had dropped into the laurel bush. I could not be mistaken. There was the identical initial "C" I remembered idly scratching one day with my stickpin. But now the little box was

empty; the tin cylinder, with its unexposed film, had been removed. Since my inquiries the previous day, Miss Deering must have searched for and found it, but what had become of the contents? And it seemed rather singular to me that though the box, with its contents, had fallen approximately in the spot where Mr. Wylder's body had been found, and that every inch of the locality had been examined by police and reporters in an attempt to find some clew to the murderer, this should have escaped detection until the present. Yet Alice Deering and Pendleton had categorically denied even looking for it, and what possible object would they have in perverting the truth over so trivial and inconsequential a matter as an unexposed film?

Here my attention was redirected to Latimer and Mrs. Deering, who had raised their voices. Evidently his persistent efforts were meeting with success at last, and Mrs. Deering was nearing the breaking point. She glanced helplessly about her, twisting the rings on her fingers, and speaking in a whimpering sort of way, while Latimer eyed her relentlessly.

"I—I won't submit to this persecution, Mr. Latimer! I won't, indeed!" she was saying, a spot of red in her cheek. "You have no right to come here day after day and question me as if I were a criminal! I know absolutely nothing——" She went on in this strain, Latimer quite silent. He stood with folded arms and watched her. And when she had finished, or, rather, talked herself into a state of excited incoherency, he said calmly and inexorably:

"And what about Mr. Gorman? You were saying he had reason to hate and fear your cousin——"

"I beg your pardon! I'm sure I said nothing of the kind!" she interrupted half hysterically. "You put words into my mouth I never said! Mr. Gorman has always been a good neighbor and friend, and I—I've no wish to get any one into trouble——"

"Mrs. Deering," said Latimer gently but firmly, "all this equivocation is worse than useless. You know why I've been coming here, and that I'll continue to come until you've told all you're concealing. I don't wish to bully you, but in the interest of justice I must and will have the truth! You have admitted that Mr. Gorman feared and hated your cousin; you admit you know the inside facts of Mr. Wylder's split with his partner. Come, it should be to your interest to clear up this matter; this incomprehensible silence only aggravates any suspicion that may be against Mr. Gorman. Can't you see that? An innocent man has nothing to fear. And nothing you say now will be made public; no suspicions will be aired until they are proven undeniably true."

She made a helpless gesture of supreme distress. "I—I will tell you all I know," she said finally, drawing a great breath as if her powers of opposition were completely exhausted. "But I have your word, Mr. Latimer, that this will not become newspaper talk. And," glancing out of the window with a display of extreme nervousness not unmixed with trepidation, I thought, "anything I say need not be repeated to my daughter. She must not be troubled; I insist upon that."

Latimer bowed assent, and I started to leave the room. Though anxious enough to remain, I felt my presence an intrusion. Mrs. Deering, however, stopped me by raising her hand. "You needn't go, Mr. Cummings," said she wearily. "Being Mr. Latimer's friend, you may as well hear what I have to say. This is what I know concerning my cousin's difference with Mr. Gorman, and if I have refused to speak of it before, it was simply because I didn't wish to cause any unnecessary trouble or unjust suspicion. But the fact is,

Mr. Wylder and Mr. Gorman were bitter enemies——"

"Who were bitter enemies?" demanded Alice Deering, and, turning, we saw her standing in the doorway. Evidently she had come in by a rear entrance while her mother watched from the window.

Had a bomb suddenly exploded in the room, I don't imagine the three of us could have been more startled; and I, for one, could hardly have felt more supremely uncomfortable. Plainly the girl had overheard much of what had been said, so absorbed had we been as to be oblivious of her presence until she spoke. Latimer and me, after one hostile glance, she ignored, and her eyes were fastened in a challenging, bitter sort of way upon her mother. She was very angry, though composed.

Mrs. Deering, evidently seeing it too late to retreat, maintained her position with a courage that appeared prompted by despair; she spoke in a whimpering, querulous tone that weak characters employ when forced to action.

"I say Mr. Wylder and Mr. Gorman were bitter enemies," she repeated.

"Mother, how can you say such a thing?" cried her daughter, with flashing eyes. "It is not true——"

"It is true!" exclaimed the other doggedly. "I wouldn't say so if it wasn't, and you shouldn't accuse me of telling a falsehood."

The girl bit her lip, standing very white and silent.

"I've had enough of this espionage," whimpered Mrs. Deering, "and I can stand it no longer. I won't put up with it! When I've told what I know, perhaps I will be allowed that peace and privacy which is my right. I object to being eternally harassed——"

"Very well, mother," said her daughter, with studied patience. "If Mr. Latimer will not let us alone on any other terms, I suppose we must yield at the expense of distressing a neighbor and friend. I recognize that we are under a great obligation to Mr. Latimer, so by all means let us discharge it once and for all. Let there be an end to this —this persecution!"

If by this she thought of showing Latimer off the premises, she was mistaken. He merely waited in silence for Mrs. Deering to continue, which, after a half-appealing, half-defiant glance at her daughter, she proceeded to do.

"The charges brought against Mr. Wylder's firm were true," said she, "and he was quite ignorant that such practices were going on, for he never attended to those details——"

"I understand that," interrupted Latimer. "But Mr. Wylder did not resign because of his health?"

"No," replied Mrs. Deering. "The knowledge that the success of his firm had been won through rank dishonesty and thievery—the words are his own—broke his heart. He had been very proud of the business and its reputation. He was a man of the strictest honesty, and to him wrong was wrong and right right. He was not a business man, but an artist and idealist——"

"I understand," said Latimer again. "But did he have proof of these charges?"

"He had," said Mrs. Deering, in a low voice. "I know that for a fact. He told me so. Mr. Wylder was tenacious in his friendship, and Mr. Gorman and he had been like brothers—in fact, it was through Mr. Gorman that my cousin's ability as an architect was first recognized. You can imagine when they bought this property and lived beside each other for years, that they must have been very intimate——"

"But how did Mr. Wylder have proof?" asked Latimer inexorably.

Alice Deering was sitting as if hewn from stone.

"You may imagine," said Mrs. Deering, "that when these charges came up, Mr. Wylder would not credit them, but

how his unwilling suspicion became certainty I don't know. But I do know that one night in this very room my cousin demanded the truth, and that Mr. Gorman frankly acknowledged that all which the papers hinted at was true, and more besides—but that they never could prove it——"

"Mother!" exclaimed Alice Deering.

"It's true; every word of it!" cried Mrs. Deering excitedly. "You never knew, Alice, but I did. Mr. Gorman laughed at Mr. Wylder for what he called his innocence, and seemed astonished he should be so angry when nothing could be proven against the firm. You were at the theater that night with Randall," she added, addressing her daughter; "and the servants, if they heard anything—which I doubt—were much too loyal to talk against Mr. Wylder's wishes.

"Mr. Wylder had a quick temper, and I know that that night Mr. Gorman and he almost came to blows. I heard Mr. Wylder say he would expose the whole contemptible business—those were his very words——"

"When was this?" asked Latimer.

"About a week before Mr. Wylder was killed. The day following this open quarrel with Mr. Gorman, my cousin withdrew from the firm; and Mr. Gorman and he did not exchange another word to my knowledge. Being close neighbors, this was very embarrassing to us, as you can imagine; we had always liked the Gormans, and, in fact, they had been more like relatives. But Mr. Wylder seemed to be nauseated—I can use no other word—even with Randall——"

"Mother!" cried Alice Deering for the third time. She had arisen, tears in her eyes. "You have no right to drag Randall Gorman into this, and—and I won't permit it! It is unjust, unfair, and——"

"But it's only the truth, and you know it," exclaimed Mrs. Deering, with a sort of whimpering obstinacy. "I like Randall, as you know, and don't hold him responsible for what his father may have done. But I must tell the truth, Alice. Mr. Wylder *did* turn against him, and he *did* forbid him coming here, and he *did* quarrel with him and almost forcibly eject him from the grounds that morning he found him talking with you——"

"Surely that need not become public!" exclaimed Alice Deering bitterly. "Mr. Wylder was not himself, and he acted hastily——"

"I'm only mentioning it, Alice," whimpered her mother, "to show how the scandal affected Mr. Wylder. For it did affect him," turning again to Latimer. "He was never the same after that; his heart seemed to be broken, and he had become embittered. I know he struggled for days against the old friendship he had for Mr. Gorman; between that and what he considered his duty—to go on the stand and tell all he had learned. He said that to keep silent was equivalent to compounding a felony—those were his very words. You know there was bribery and perjury involved in the charges, and it touched a ring of politicians—even police officials, I understand, who had permitted obstruction of the sidewalks and other favors. I don't know all the ins and outs of it, but I do know that Mr. Wylder could have caused a lot of trouble not only to Mr. Gorman, but to many others.

"Mr. Wylder, too, had profited—if innocently—by the firm's crooked methods, and that worried him. Yet, under the circumstances, restitution was impossible. I know he was going to sell this property and move out of the city—of course it was impossible to continue as Mr. Gorman's neighbor. I don't know how he would have acted had he lived. Up to the morning of his death he had not—as far as I know—determined on any one course." Mrs.

Deering arose after the manner of one relieved of a self-imposed burden.

"This is all I know, Mr. Latimer, of Mr. Wylder's trouble with Mr. Gorman, and I hope you are satisfied," she said. "Of course, you may place any construction you like upon what I have told you, but don't read another meaning into my words or my reasons for withholding—and at length consenting to give you—the information. I have absolutely nothing against Mr. Gorman, and I would be the last one to cause him any distress. I have not talked for publication, but have tried to discharge an obligation to you, and I know you will not take advantage of it. You seemed to be under the impression that I knew something of a criminal nature, and I simply could not bear it any longer," glancing appealingly and apologetically at her daughter.

"There is one thing more, Mrs. Deering," said Latimer, leaning forward and regarding her fixedly. "Have you any idea as to the identity of Mr. Wylder's murderer?"

The effect of this question was remarkable. Mrs. Deering grew positively ashen; her eyes became transfixed, and she seemed unable to speak.

"What right have you to ask such a question, Mr. Latimer?" cried Alice Deering, arising. "It is an insult——"

"I don't mean it as such, Miss Deering. Why should it be?"

"Because we had denied any such knowledge!" she replied, pale with emotion. "Because you are as good as accusing us of being party to the crime!"

Latimer strove to speak, but she continued heedlessly, her voice shaking: "Let us understand each other, Mr. Latimer, for you have forced me to—to say at last what I would much rather have left unsaid. From the first you have persisted in these uncalled-for and unwelcome attentions. You entertained some ugly suspicion and tried by every possible way to prove it at our expense. You virtually hounded and persecuted my mother, taking a despicable advantage of the obligation we felt ourselves under, until your object was gained—this about Mr. Gorman. You have persistently tried to see my mother alone, because when I was present she resisted you——"

"I admit that," said Latimer, "but you entirely misunderstand my motive, Miss Deering. I am not your enemy, but friend——"

"No, never that!" cried she. "Did you ever come near the house once until Mr. Wylder's death brought you? You are paid to furnish news for the public, and you must furnish it at any price, I suppose! I understand it only too well, Mr. Latimer. I know the nickname you go by, and your reputation. It is not love of justice; it is not so much fidelity to your paper; it is for the sake of the name you've made in your world; for your ambition, for the gratification of your instinct! That's a charitable estimation, Mr. Latimer, for your actions have forced me to believe that had I—I given you a different answer that day in Portsmouth, you would have remained a friend——"

"Alice!" cried her mother.

"That thought is unworthy of you, Miss Deering," said Latimer, his homely face flushing.

It was a very distressing scene, and I wished myself well out of it, for the girl was now choking with tears, yet attempting to defend her position.

"It—it is so! I know it!" she cried. "You try to make it unpleasant for us! You doubt all we say. You hate Randall Gorman—you have shown it in every action! You have made me think what I didn't wish to think; say what I didn't mean to say. I can see no other motive for this—this persecution. And now that you've attained your object and forced my mother to say things about Mr. Gorman—which may be twisted and distorted in a very sinister

way—I hope you are satisfied and—and that in the future there will be no excuse for a further display of such—such friendship!" She broke down, crying, and Latimer, in silence, reached for his hat.

I don't know how we managed to leave, but I remember trying to say something about how sorry I was—I wasn't specific about the cause or object of this sorrow, for, really, I didn't know—and of vaguely apologizing all around. But I did notice that Alice Deering paid no attention to me whatsoever, though her mother, reduced to a like state of tears, remained true to the dictates of her old-fashioned courtesy, and insisted upon seeing us to the door.

For a man who had been trying to make a hit with a family, I had certainly got in wrong, and in consequence I was rather short and snappy with Latimer as we walked to the subway.

"For goodness' sake, let us bury the thing!" I exclaimed. "It's none of my business who killed Wylder, and if they are satisfied, I'm sure I am. He wasn't *my* relative. I'm disgusted with the whole business. I feel like a cross between a head-hunter and a second-story man who's been clubbing two defenseless women to death. Go ahead if you like, but count me out. I'll stake my life on the Deerings' goodness and innocence, and that's all I care to know. I don't want to become a howling nuisance——"

"Then, for the Lord's sake, shut up, will you?" snapped Latimer. "Do you think I deliberately picked out this job because I *liked* it? Do you think it didn't cost something to get that out of Mrs. Deering? Yes, and more than it's worth." He smiled bitterly.

"I'm sorry, Latimer," said I, suddenly realizing what Alice Deering's words must have meant to him. "I didn't mean to be so uppish. But surely you don't actually believe that the Gormans—father and son—know anything about Wylder's death?"

"I don't know anything about it," said he, throwing out his hands. "Search me. But I'll tell you one thing; if Wylder was going to squeal, there would be men other than Peter Gorman who might find it convenient to put him away, and they wouldn't have to turn the trick in person, either. After all, there may be something in this footpad theory, but if there is, the fellow was hired for the job, and his get-away was arranged. And, talk as you like, I *know* Mrs. Deering has a pretty good idea who is responsible for Wylder's death, and you can't tell me different."

I let this pass and asked if he intended making public what he had learned. He shook his head.

"I've given Mrs. Deering my word, so I must pass it up, though it would mean a beat. But I'm going to have the whole thing or nothing, and I won't say a word until I get the entire story—why Wylder was killed, and who did it. And I'm going to get it if it hits friend or foe, or wrecks every home on Manhattan Island! But you keep out of it," he added. "You don't have to pander to a bloodthirsty instinct for the jugular, nor earn your bread and butter by such methods. You haven't a professional reputation to uphold at any price, and you've no petty spite and hatred to vent. In short, you're not a star newspaper man, Cummings, who's been turned down—for which facts you should be properly thankful."

Latimer came home late that night, and from his actions, as he undressed, I imagined he had been drinking. I also missed the pastel of Alice Deering which he had most admired.

CHAPTER VIII.

By no conceivable stretch of imagination—even though I had known them so short a time—could I connect Mrs.

Deering and her daughter with complicity in Wylder's death, and yet, deep down in my inner consciousness, I felt that Latimer's suspicions were right, though in no way did this belief influence my liking for the family. Rather added to it was a deep sympathy, and though in the heat of my first resentment I had vowed an eternal severance with all inquisitiveness and investigation, I found this easier said than done. My thoughts kept harping on the strange case, and I worked out theory after theory while striving to account for those strange circumstances I had seen and heard.

To me the most probable theory was that the Deerings, if they had guilty knowledge, were keeping silent through fear; that some powerful, secret agency had instigated the murder, that the Deerings had inadvertently blundered on the truth, and were afraid for some reason to speak. Careful investigation of Wylder's past had failed—as I have stated—to disclose a hidden enemy; any circumstance, in fact, that would point a reasonable motive. There was absolutely none other than the recent trouble with the Gormans. I use the plural, for naturally Mrs. Deering's admission concerning Randall Gorman's quarrel with Wylder occurred to me. He had been almost forcibly ejected from the grounds, and, if I knew anything of character, he was as violent and hasty-tempered as Wylder had grown to be. I could not imagine him guilty of premeditated murder, but he might have struck in anger, and harder than he knew. That can happen to the best of us.

Miss Deering's last words to Latimer had been virtually an injunction to stay away from the Hermitage; she had let him understand in no unmeasured terms that, since his object was attained, there was no longer an excuse for his visits. And I felt this also included myself, for she would have good reason to think my presence prompted solely by curiosity; to regard me as a sort of amateur detective or jackal for Latimer. And as I did not wish to force myself upon her, or convey that impression, I decided to remain away for a time at any rate.

Heroic words.

For the very next morning, on entering the subway en route to my studio, I spied Miss Deering in the forward car, and by exerting patience, agility, and ingenuity, finally won a place at her side. She seemed rather glad to see me, or, at any rate, evinced no open hostility, and, after a little guarded skirmishing, our commonplaces gradually developed into a perfectly natural conversation.

I was careful to avoid all mention or suggestion of the tragedy which had darkened her life, and, away from the Hermitage and its brooding shadow, she presently displayed an animation more in keeping with her youth. I discovered she had a power of observation and sense of humor gratifying as they were unexpected. Yet at times there seemed to be a forced gayety in her manner; a settled sadness from which she would arouse herself with an effort.

Columbus Circle proved to be her station, and as my studio was within reasonable walking distance of this point, I had a legitimate excuse for prolonging this chance meeting, and we left the train together.

"I suppose you are always very busy, Mr. Cummings," she remarked, as we walked toward the park. "And tell me, do you really use photography in your work? I don't see how it is possible; how it can help you, I mean."

"I knew a famous caricaturist who used a doorknob."

"Seriously?" she laughed.

"Seriously," I replied. "That was the secret of his grotesque effects. He would set up a portrait of his subject opposite the knob, and, of course, being a convex surface, it reflected a laugh-

ably distorted image. The same idea is used in these mirrors you see in the Eden Musee. Art is more mechanical than you think."

"But you are not a caricaturist," she replied, "and I don't see how still life can aid you in portraits."

"Quite right; it doesn't," said I. "But now and then I do a lot of commercial work, and the camera saves time, energy, and imagination. I can borrow from the snapshots. Every artist who does commercial work has a big book filled with all sorts of pictures from which he gets ideas. Sometimes he borrows too flagrantly, and then there's trouble."

"I see," she nodded. "I'm sorry your whole morning's work went for nothing that—that day. I mean that you didn't find that film you dropped."

"Some one must have found it," I laughed, "for yesterday at the Hermitage I ran across the empty box. I found it on a table in the breakfast room."

"What? Are you sure?"

"Quite," said I, "for I had scratched my initial on it."

"How odd!" she exclaimed, frowning a little. "One of the servants must have picked it up. I'll ask when I return."

"Don't bother, Miss Deering, for it doesn't matter in the least, as it was an unexposed film."

"Oh, an unexposed film?" she echoed. "But I thought—I understood you were taking pictures——"

"Yes, but I used a six-exposure film, and it wasn't the one I dropped. I didn't go into details that morning, or you would have understood. I had taken out this unexposed film when I lost my balance, and it was it that was lost; the other one I had finished using was safe in my pocket. So really, you see, it doesn't matter, and my morning's work wasn't lost. I haven't had time to develop them yet——"

"Then I'm glad you haven't been put to any inconvenience," she said lightly. "I won't take you out of your way any farther, Mr. Cummings, for isn't your studio off the park?"

From where we had stopped, I could see the imposing gray façade of the Park Overlook Hotel. I tried to make a definite engagement for seeing her again, but she evaded me.

"We are going away for a while—we'll leave in a few days," she said, "and, of course, there is a lot to attend to. My mother isn't very well, and we need a change. We'll go somewhere in the Berkshires, I think, and I don't know how long we'll stay."

"And won't I see you again before you go?"

She looked away, toying nervously with her chatelaine bag. "No, really, Mr. Cummings, it's impossible. I mean everything is so upset—you understand how it must be. Please don't think me rude," she added apologetically. "I'm afraid I must appear rather unfriendly, but I know you will understand. We wish to be by ourselves until this wears off, or until we have learned to forget."

"But you said I might call," I reminded. "I'm afraid, Miss Deering, you think because I'm intimately acquainted with Mr. Latimer that my friendship may not be entirely disinterested. Come, isn't that so?"

She looked away again, then raised her eyes frankly to mine. "Yes, sometimes I have thought so, Mr. Cummings. Knowing Mr. Latimer as you do, it is only natural for you to be in sympathy with him. And then I know how morbidly curious every one is about Mr. Wylder's death. It's an insoluble mystery, and people love mysteries. You are no exception, Mr. Cummings——"

"Very likely not," I said, "but I'm quite content to let it remain one, Miss Deering, and not trouble you about it. All I ask is to be regarded simply as a friend. And, while we're on the sub-

ject, let me say you have the wrong idea about Mr. Latimer——"

"I'm sorry for what I said yesterday," she broke in, flushing vividly. "I had no right to say such a thing, and especially before you. It was brutal of me, and—and I have written Mr. Latimer an apology. I was not myself—that's all I can say. We had come through so much, and I was nervous and unstrung. Mr. Latimer's persistent espionage had got on my nerves——"

"In a way it was not a breach of confidence where I was concerned, Miss Deering, for I knew about that night in Portsmouth. Latimer told me himself. Perhaps I shouldn't say this," I added, as her eyes darkened, "but I say it in all justice to Latimer. He is one of the finest fellows I know, and very sensitive and high strung, though he doesn't show it. He came to tell me about that night because he was afraid you might think his interest in Mr. Wylder's death spite work; an attempt to distress and worry you. And from what you said yesterday, it shows his fears were not unfounded."

She looked down, poking the toes of her shoes with the parasol. "It was contemptible of me," she said in a low voice, "and you must think very badly of me, Mr. Cummings. I knew Mr. Latimer, whatever else he may be, wasn't that kind. And I knew that however he may have—have once cared, he got bravely over it long ago. I know that."

I eyed her narrowly as she looked away again. "In fact," said I, "I'm quite positive he hasn't got over it at all, and never will, for that matter. He isn't the butterfly type."

She turned to me quickly, and I found my reward in the sudden starry splendor of her eyes. "You—you have no right to say that," she replied, with quickened breath. Then the old brooding sadness settled on her face until, with an effort, she aroused herself.

"At any rate," she added colorlessly, "I am right about Mr. Latimer's true motive; he has a reputation to uphold at any cost——"

"That's true in a sense," I interrupted. "The solving of this mystery would be a very big thing for him, and so sure is he of success that he made certain representations to his editors. I mean, he is secretly at work on this assignment after the others have virtually abandoned it. He *is* jealous of his reputation, and he *is* ambitious, but I think he's to be honored for those qualities instead of——"

"Oh, of course," she said restlessly.

"And, after all," I added, "his private inclinations aren't consulted in the matter; he must do certain things whether he likes them or not. They are all in the game. But at the same time he is your friend, Miss Deering——"

"No," said she, shaking her head. "He is not our friend, Mr. Cummings. What I said yesterday is true; Mr. Latimer left us severely alone until this affair came up. He has not acted like a friend. Why should he hound my mother until he had made her tell that about Mr. Gorman? Mr. Gorman, whatever he may have done in business, has always been a good neighbor. I'm not defending his business methods, but that's no reason why he should be dragged into this case. I admit Mr. Wylder and he were on the outs, though I didn't know all that had happened until mother spoke yesterday. It seems to me, though, that that is nobody's affairs but Mr. Gorman's and Mr. Wylder's. But now, thanks to Mr. Latimer, it will be all exploited in the papers, and very likely a lot of sinister motives and theories——"

"Nothing of the kind," said I. "If that had been Latimer's intention, his paper would have been full of it this morning. He doesn't intend to make public what your mother said."

She eyed me skeptically. "Then why

take the trouble to find it out, Mr. Cummings?"

"Because he thought it might have some bearing on Mr. Wylder's death. All he is after is the solution of this mystery, and, in passing, he must unearth, perhaps, many things which only investigation can prove irrelevant."

She shrugged. "I know he has some ridiculous idea that Mr. Gorman is mixed up in it; if so, he's merely wasting his time. And I can't see why, when the police and the rest of the reporters are satisfied that a footpad killed Mr. Wylder, Mr. Latimer should continue to worry us with his impossible theories. It would be different if he were making any headway; if the mystery promised solution. As it is, he's only distressing us needlessly."

I could not come out and explain that Latimer was positive Mrs. Deering knew the identity of Wylder's slayer, so I laughed and said: "Perhaps it's because he's a bloodhound."

"Yes, a bloodhound," said she, compressing her lips. "And I suppose he must remain true to his instinct." She smiled and held out her hand.

"Good-by, Mr. Cummings, for I won't see you again before we go. When we return, I hope you will call again——"

"This is a very cruel parting, Miss Deering," I objected, "for I feel you mean it to be final. You won't say where you are going, or when you intend returning—and that's not oversight, but intention."

She looked very guilty, and hung her head. "Really, no, Mr. Cummings," she said, in a low voice.

"Really, yes, Miss Deering. I feel I have unintentionally done something unpardonable, and that you don't wish to continue the acquaintance."

"Oh, you mustn't think that!" she cried in distress, and as she looked up I saw her eyes suspiciously moist. "I can't bear you to think that, Mr. Cummings. We value your friendship, indeed we do. You mustn't feel that way at all. But—but we have never had any intimate friends——" She checked herself, adding hurriedly and nervously:

"We aren't like other people. We always lived very much alone. We are so upset, you know. It could only be an inconvenience for all concerned if you called just now. It is much better you didn't—much better. Good-by, Mr. Cummings, and—and don't think too hardly of me. Don't think me unfriendly or rude."

She was gone before I could utter a word, and, mechanically watching her trim little figure clad in tailor-made blue, I saw her enter the distant Park Overlook Hotel.

This meeting upset me for the rest of the day, and to me the Wylder mystery became more black and bottomless than ever.

Nor could I efface from memory her piteous, apologetic expression when she declared: "We aren't like other people. We always lived very much alone. We never had intimate friends." What horrific condition or circumstance lay back of Jonas Wylder's violent death? Had that death been the culmination of some recognized and dreaded condition? Why should a girl of Alice Deering's youth, charm, and undeniable beauty be deprived of her heritage—the heritage of friendship, happiness, and love? Yes, the Wylder mystery had become more black and bottomless; was taking on a deeper and more sinister significance; was touching that corner stone of all nations—the family.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

The second part of this novel will appear in the Christmas POPULAR, on sale December 23rd.

Virtue Has Its Own Reward

By Robert V. Carr

Author of "A Deal in Watermelons," "Man," Etc.

The live-stock commission man comes to grips with an aggressive opponent by name Samuel Virtue. Johnny Reeves conducts his end of the argument in a style distinctly original—and mightily disturbing to Mr. Virtue

TO get your rope on life you got to throw a wide loop. None of this narrow stuff will bring you anything, believe me.

A man on the road learns a heap by just keepin' his eyes open. Show me a man who has traveled over these United States sellin' stuff, or tryin' to swing people his way, and I'll show you a feller that is nobody's fool; he may have his faults, but he has an edge on his mind.

I was just an ordinary cow-puncher when I started in rustlin' shipments for the Dayton Livestock Commission Company, and ignorant as mud at that. The first year on the road convinced me of one thing, and that was that I knew the least of any mortal on earth. The second year I was dead sure I didn't know anything, and the third year I was ready to swear to it. As the years rolled by, and I saw old humanity in smokin' cars, sleepers, hotels, saloons, churches, dance halls, public meetin's, hangin's, jails, and revival meetin's, I begin to get a religion of my own. And that religion can be put in a few words, and here she is: Don't blame any man for what he does, for he does as he thinks and anybody is liable to think wrong. And as a P. S.: What is thought wrong to-day may be thought right to-morrow. And always remember you're human, and that everything you hear or read is put out by a human—a man just like you.

Still, I didn't always live up to my religion. A man that lives up to his religion doesn't need any.

I guess I met every kind of a mortal ever turned loose. I got so I graded 'em the same as you'd top a shipment. Still, that was wrong, for no man can put a label on another that will stick. Any man is liable to be a son of a gun to-day and a saint to-morrow.

But all this ain't gettin' us anywhere. What I has in mind is the time that an opposition outfit put a feller by the name of Samuel Virtue in the field to grab off the business that by rights belonged to the man who was signin' my pay checks. I say that that business belonged by rights to Billy Dayton, but I'm talkin' a little wild. Nothin' belongs to a man unless he can hold it.

This Virtue wasn't no regular road man, but one of them fellers that hoggish commission companies throw into a little district to look after their affairs on the side. Virtue had tried sellin' patent medicines, then took to preachin', and finally got a hold of a bandanna handkerchief full of type and one of them man-killin' George Washington presses, and started to tell the people where to head in.

Samuel was a man about forty, with

a long, thin face, little dead eyes, a pair of them arms that swing on hinges, and a manner of speakin' like a undertaker. He had black hair, and wore a long black coat, and there was always dandruff on the collar. He was a cheerful proposition, if you don't care what you say. And his long suit was personal pull.

Then Sammie was secretive and cunnin' as a mountain rat. He was always whisperin' something in somebody's ear. He'd take a shipper out in the alley, pull a blanket over their heads, and whisper to him that it was a fine day. He always walked around on tiptoe like he was at a funeral.

Well, as soon as I found that Samuel was out to take business away from me, I looked him up in his little two-by-four office, and had a heart-to-heart talk with him.

"Says I: "Son, it ain't my style to not want every man to have a show to get all the bets down he can in the game of life, but in a matter of cold business the rules are a little different. You want to make a showin' for your outfit, and that's O. K.; but you must play fair."

He folds his hands, and draws his face down more than usual.

"Of course you realize, Mr. Reeves, that my life in this community has been as an open book, and that our people are in favor of standin' by a home man in all matters."

"The last is correct," I agrees, "but as for your life bein' an open book, I have only your word for it. There's a heap of men whose lives are open books, but some of the pages are torn out. I'm not here to pass the bull to you; I'm here to tell you to play fair."

Then I gets up and leaves his office.

But I overlooked a bet. I didn't give Samuel credit for havin' any nerve, but it seems he had a little. At least he opened up on me with a roast in his paper—a dinger, take it from me; a dinger!

I can repeat what he wrote:

> The so-called representative of the Dayton Livestock Commission Company, a concern that we have reasons to believe is facing bankruptcy, called at our office Tuesday afternoon, and unloaded his vile mind. He is a creature who habitually haunts the saloons, smokes cigarettes, and associates with low people.
>
> The clean, respectable element of this section will not long endure the presence of this barroom rowdy, who assumes to represent a reliable firm. We advise our subscribers to beware of intrusting their business in the hands of such a creature.

There was more of it, but that's enough to show how Samuel could splatter ink.

Naturally, when I read that cactus bouquet, I called on Sammie the second time.

I didn't help myself to a chair when I came in his office that time. No, I wasn't mad; just had a job to do and was ready to perform.

"Now, Sammie," I said, as kind and pleasant as could be, "you seem to have forgotten what I told you about playin' fair. You know that I have no newspaper to talk back to you in, and that you're not playin' a square game by tryin' to put me in bad with the people of this country."

"Mr. Reeves," he jerks out, rubbin' his bony hands nervouslike, "I'll thank you to leave this office."

"You have spoken a truth," I tells him nice; "you will 'thank me' to leave this office before I get through with you."

He stood up back of his little table, pulled himself up like a Fourth of July speaker, and pointed at the door. I come around the table and got close to him, my right arm swingin' loose.

"Virtue, do you know what you are?" I asks him, still pleasant and nice. He didn't answer, and so I told him.

"You're a cross between a coyote and

a skunk, and your name is a joke. You bean-headed, button-eyed liar, you; you'd rob your own mother, steal from your best friend—if you ever had one—and the devil himself wouldn't own you if you'd pay him for it. You pretend to be good, but don't know the meanin' of the word. You slip along these streets whisperin' with your snake's tongue, and think you can get by—think you can get by. I say that of all the——" Well, I handed it to him cow-punch fashion.

He grabbed up a piece of iron on the table, and raised it over my head.

"I won't permit such talk—I won't——" He had a kind of false squeak to his voice, like a boy who don't know when he's goin' to talk seprano or bass.

Then I unhitched my right, takin' him fair in the mouth. He staggered back, and dropped his iron. I could have knocked him out, but didn't want to.

"I—I—I—won't submit to such——" he started to bleat.

"Well," says I, "you've got it, anyway. It's all yours. There it is, and here's another."

Then I made a pass with my right, and then swung in my left to bread basket. That doubles him up, and his false teeth fell down, and he with 'em.

I then left him, with a google-eyed printer throwin' water on him to bring him to.

Of course he swears out a warrant for assault and battery, and the justice fines me ten dollars.

"That's cheap," I tells the judge, and offers ten more for a couple more cracks at Samuel.

But the judge had a good opinion of himself, and 'lowed my offer put me in contempt of court, and soaked me ten bucks for that. I see that justice come a little too high for Johnny Reeves in them parts, and kept my trap shut, and anteed like a man.

Samuel reported the trial in full, and as that was news I let it go. But I stuck around the town, keepin' quiet and attendin' strictly to my own knittin'. I see that I had made a mistake tappin' Sammie. Never fight for business; go to figgerin'.

And never let a man hand you anything that's not fair. Take a square knock, but never let up on a feller that takes advantage of you. Get him good, make sure that he's a dead one, and then leave the remains where they lay. But if he's done you in a fair fight, make him your friend and learn his system.

So I stuck around the town, waitin' for a chance to break even with Sammie and the judge that had whacked me a couple of fines.

And just about that time one of them boys, who set up a tent and go to bawlin' for the sinners to come home, struck town. He was a young feller about my age, and, aside from believin' that the world was doomed to sizzle, he was a decent sort of boy.

I sort of threw in with that soul saver, for he stopped at the hotel. And of nights I had a chair in his tent right up front, and when they'd take up the collection, I'd ante strong.

I looked around a night or two, expectin' to see Samuel and the judge on deck and playin' a harp, but they didn't show up. Seems as though Samuel and the judge belonged to a different brand of church to what my little gospel friend did, and it wasn't accordin' to rules for them to butt into his game. They would have been there had he been savin' souls for their church, but, as he was draggin' them into another pen, they wouldn't back his game.

I'm not a man that's strong for this soul-savin' dope, and run along fairly well on the Golden Rule; but, as I set there in that tent and heard this one and that one get up and pray for their

enemies, a big idea come to me. Why couldn't I get up and pray for Samuel and the judge? Take a look at that idea from all sides. If you want to put the everlastin' kibosh on a man, just get up and pray for him. There is no way he can come back.

So one night, when the tent was fairly crowded, and everybody and his brother had prayed for everybody else, I got up and got the young preacher's eye.

"Brother Reeves," he says, mighty glad, for he thought I was comin' into the fold.

Then I started in.

"Dear people," I opens up, mighty sad and solemn, "I see many of the good people of this town here to-night, but I miss my brother, Samuel Virtue. I want to pray for him that he may see the error of his sinful ways. I know that his heart is full of lyin' and deceit, and that he's a poor lost sheep, but I want to pray for him. He is like all sinners; he will not be guided right, but still keeps on thievin' and lyin' and cheatin' his trustin' feller man. He has no decency about him, but that is because he will not come in out of the darkness. I want to pray for him that he may become a white man fit to associate with respectable people."

Then I sat down and mopped my forehead, for I'm not what you could call a public speaker. The crowd was still for quite a spell, and the young preacher looked at me like he was thinkin' about something real deep.

The next night I prayed for the judge who fined me twenty. That old judge was a cute man, and come a-runnin' to me the next day all out of breath.

"Reeves," says he, and I could see he meant it, "I want to talk to you as a common citizen and not as a judge. What has passed into the records of the court can't be undid, but as a common citizen I want to make you a present of twenty dollars, with the condition that you don't pray any more for me. One of your prayers will last a man a lifetime, and kindly excuse me from a second. Also, if you consider the slate as clean, let us repair to my office. A Kentucky friend of mine sent me some rare case goods recently."

I took the twenty, and sampled his Blue Grass snake juice.

"Judge," says I, "you are the wisest man in this town. The only regret I have is that I'll have to use the prayer I had fixed up for you on Samuel to-night."

"Virtue has its own reward," says the judge, and he winked, and smacked his old, dry lips on his licker.

That night I turned loose a prayer for Samuel Virtue that was sure what the exhorters call a clarion call.

"Oh, how stubborn is the heart of a wicked man," I tells 'em, the while the little exhorter looks at me sadlike, for he's now wise to my game. "Brother Virtue," I goes on, "has heard the call, but turned a deaf ear. He is still wallowin' in sin, still sneakin' through the alley of wickedness, still lyin', cheatin', and drinkin' whisky on the sly. There is good in every man; but, oh, how stubborn a hard-boiled sinner can be! Brother Virtue, where are you? Are you soakin' yourself in rum, or sneakin' around lyin' about your neighbor? Come up and confess your sins; come on up, while there is yet a chance. We all know that your intentions are good enough, but your acts are wicked.

"Oh, Brother Virtue, you lied about me in your paper, but I forgive you. All I ask is for you to come up here and confess your sins. You know that you are full of wickedness, and a total stranger to truth and decency. You know that the good people of this town are prayin' for you, yet you will not

listen. Stubborn sinner, bend your neck—bend your neck!"

Don't you see how I had a collar-and-elbow holt on Samuel. He didn't dare peep in his paper nor say a word any way. You can't find fault with a man who is prayin' for you. It is the smoothest, easiest way to hand a man a lemon all done up in gold tissue that I know of. If you want to run a man out of town, pull your face down solemn, and pray for him.

I knew I was on the right trail, and was prepared to go on through to the finish. But the poor little preacher boy somehow didn't like my way of prayin'; it sort of hurt his feelin's. He didn't say anything—just looked at me sad-like, for he was wise to me—wise to me.

Still, Samuel hung back. I put in my time thinkin' up things to call him, and practicin' before the lookin'-glass in my room.

Thinks I: "Pray for him strong enough and he'll pray for you to quit."

So the next night I opened up on Samuel's life from the cradle to the grave, and prayed for him at every breathin' station. I made him the most sinful man in the State and the most hopeless. I called him a liar, a thief, a cheat, a coyote, a rattlesnake, and a few other little pet names, but always prayin' for him.

I got so that I really believed what I was sayin', for, if you say anything often enough, you'll get so you think it's the truth.

And the people got to believin' what I said. Some of them even got up and prayed for Samuel themselves. One dear old lady got up and declared that she had never known that such a wicked man could exist, and then she prayed for him for twenty minutes hand-runnin'.

Samuel Virtue became a load on the public mind. I made it the style to pray for him mornin', noon, and night. Seems like the whole town got an idea, if they could get Samuel in that tent and make him confess his sins, that they could lay back and die contented. Even the boy preacher began to set up and take notice, and throw in a word now and then for Samuel. And every night I was there strong, and in good voice, as the feller says.

After you have been on the road a spell, you pin one sayin' on the inside of your hat, and it's just this: "Never say die!" If it is only for the commissions on two loads of canners, stay with it till you get them two loads. I was prayin' for business, and if you can show me anything better to pray for, you can take the money. Everybody prays for something they want. I was prayin' for Samuel Virtue's goat, and for the business of that section. I had to get his goat to get the business; so it was really straight business I was prayin' for.

You may think I was triflin' with sacred things, but I had nothin' on Samuel. He was triflin' with my reputation, and my reputation meant business, and business meant bread and butter, and bread and butter meant life; and you can't blame a man for prayin' for his life.

So I winds up strong on Samuel, namin' all the things he had done and all the things I thought he would do if given a show. If a man would pray for me the way I did for Sammie, I'd feel compelled to waylay him and rivet a calf muzzle on him. I got so that I made an easy start, the words flowed out of my mouth like from the horn of a phonograph, and I was there with bells on. I believe I could have made a livin' talkin' people to death and bein' a silent partner to an undertaker, if I hadn't gone on the road. I opened up a supply of language in that spell that I didn't know I had. I found words that I wouldn't recognize now if I met 'em carryin' a bell in the center

of the road. I found that I could talk to people in bunches and get away with it. And the funniest thing of the whole business was that I actually began to feel sorry for Virtue, and really want him to brace up and be an honest man. And so I whirled on in my prayer for Samuel.

That last prayer was a stem-winder. The others were good, but the last one swept 'em off their feet. The next day a bunch of the good people called at Sammie's office, and tried to get him to promise to come to the meetin' that night and confess his sins.

He was not wise or he would have come in out of the rain. Instead he flew into a regular fightin' rage and herded the bunch out of his office.

I met them as they come down the street waggin' their heads and battin' their eyes.

"His conduct," I tells them, "only goes to prove what I have said all along. The poor man is in need of more prayer."

Then I goes back to my room to practice up for the evenin's work, for the meetin' is due to last two nights longer.

I hadn't been in my room five minutes when there comes a rattle of my door, and a hurry-up knockin', and I open it to let in Samuel Virtue.

He was certainly wild-eyed and desperate, and his hair was pullin' seven different ways.

"Set down!" I tells him. "You look like you'd been drug a mile."

He flops down in a chair, and looks up at me with the most helpless expression I ever see on a mortal's face.

"Reeves," he begs, waggin' his head like a sick dog, "you must stop this infernal prayin' for me—you must stop it—stop it! I—I—I—can't stand it. The whole town is at it."

"Well," says I, "I'm glad that you realize your sins."

"Stop it!" he yells. "Stop it, I tell you!"

"The only thing to do," I tells him flat, "is to square things in your paper, and then keep off my trail. That is little enough to do for a man who has prayed for you for nearly a week. Then, seein' the error of your sinful ways——"

He jumped at me, and grabbed me by the coat lapels.

"Stop it!" he howled. "You're drivin' me insane!"

"Will you do what I say, Brother Virtue?"

"Yes—yes—yes! But stop those prayers—those prayers!"

I opened the door, and he weaved out.

As he teetered down the hall, I called after him:

"Remember your sinful ways, Sammie."

He turned around and opened his mouth like a stranded fish, and then tossed up his arms hopelesslike.

I shut the door and began packin' my grips, for I knew that I'd have no more trouble with Samuel Virtue. For, as the judge who soaked me twenty, remarked: "Virtue has its own reward."

The Conflict

A TALE OF THE WAR OF THE NATIONS

By Colonel Max Desprez

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

During the occupation of Luxemburg by the Germans, Fairfax Morgan, an American physician, and his chauffeur Healy aid a French airman, Etienne Martin, and are arrested. Morgan is in love with Charlotte, the niece of Robert Cameron, United States diplomat. Also in love with her is Count von Hollman, a German army officer who is chiefly responsible for the plight of Morgan and his chauffeur. Von Hollman turns the pair over to Major von Graf of the military court but they are released. They steal the cloak and busby of Hollman and make a dash for Ostend in an automobile. Luck seems to be with them until they find themselves in the thick of the fighting and are captured by a Colonel Fernbach. Learning that Morgan is a surgeon, however, the German officer eagerly accepts his proffers of service. Being thus well-disposed toward the Americans, and their passports being satisfactory, Colonel Fernbach is about to permit the party to proceed in safety when Von Graf appears demanding their detention, and their possession and concealment of the German military uniform—part of Von Hollman's clothing—confirms suspicion. They are held awaiting Von Hollman, who soon arrives and orders Morgan arrested. Charlotte is also virtually a prisoner in care of an old native woman. But Charlotte discovers Martin, the French aviator, in a clump of woods. He proposes to fly to France with her and save her from Von Hollman. This news she manages to impart to her lover. As planned, she goes to meet Martin just before daylight, but she is tracked by Von Hollman. In turn, both of them are trailed by Morgan who has gotten out of the window of his prison hut. When Von Hollman is about to thwart the escape of Charlotte with the airman, Morgan grapples with him. While they fight Martin gets his charge into the monoplane and they mount into the air.

(A Novel in Four Parts—Part IV.)

CHAPTER XVII.

THE AEROPLANE.

TOTALLY unaware of the struggle so close to them, Charlotte and Martin had made their start. The motor had spun over; in another instant it was chattering in subdued fashion. The compact yet slender Deperdussin monoplane obeyed its pilot's volition as if it could think and feel. It was equipped with the most modern devices. Starting from the aviator's seat without assistance and muffling the exhaust until well aloft were distinct advantages in the enemy's territory—a hint of the thorough preparation of the great allied powers opposing the German advance.

The propeller vanished, save for a dark blur at its hub; the slender fuselage rose from its skid, hanging, suspended and quivering, in the terrific air draft caused by its revolutions. Then, oddly like a swift-footed marsh bird on attenuated legs, it darted across a few feet of the open space. With a hardly perceptible but saucy flip of the tail, it rose with such superlative steadiness and grace that the sense of speed it had already attained was lost.

At a steady incline it topped the trees ahead, banked sharply, flashing its neutral wings to the kiss of the morning sun. A flock of sparrows rose, chattering, from the boughs over which it passed and fled in fear to the deeper thickets. Von Hollman's shot and the sound of the struggle were drowned in the noise of the engine as it gathered

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power. Another turn and the muffled exhaust was already so faint as to be almost indiscernible, while the machine itself had become merely the size of a crow, pointing into the serene sky, bearing with it the hopes and fears of the watcher's soul.

Charlotte Cameron, the instant the Deperdussin monoplane took the air, engulfed in a whirlpool of inconceivably new sensations, by one of those strange, psychic reversions that no theory will satisfactorily explain, promptly forgot the hazard of her position and then the fact herself.

Instead, for an instant, into which was crowded the apparent period of time which the original events had occupied, she was again in the peaceful Château de Herthereaux, watching the characteristic assurance of Count Otto von Hollman, as he brewed the "Waldmeister" bowl the afternoon of Fairfax Morgan's arrival.

Then there was an odd flutter in her breast, and Charlotte Cameron was conscious that she was sweeping upward, the world was physically falling from beneath her as everything had fallen apart that autumnal afternoon.

She was afloat over a huge concave eyeball—the earth was turning inside out—and she was hovering over its dished center, though rising steadily to the diapason of a trumpeting behemoth whose protests at a double load drowned every other sound. Martin had cut out the muffler.

As realization drove fanciful imaginings from her vision, there yet persisted the memory of Von Hollman's attitude that day. Even here in the swift sublimation of the thundering motor whose nostrils emitted oily gases that trailed behind them in a nebulous stream, and despite the confident shoulders of Etienne Martin immediately ahead of her, the girl could feel the mysterious force of the German officer, fighting against this jinni of science—striving to drag her back to the planet still softly falling into the fathomless abyss below.

She looked down.

Already at the height of half a mile, the only way to distinguish between the blotches of woodland and the grass was that the open spaces were lighter in hue. The fields were shrunken to the size of checkerboards, and the roads between them were like thin, brown threads. Little ponds threw back the light into her eyes, as if they were sheets of glass; a railroad resembled two piano wires stretched along the ground. Farm buildings were quaintly foreshortened. They looked like children's toys strewn carelessly over the landscape.

They thundered over the Meuse, a silver thread winding erratically among the lumps that had once been hills. Then they ceased to incline upward, and the fuselage, in which she reclined as luxuriously as in a costly roadster, lifted to an even keel.

Puffs of vapor far, far ahead, toward which they were traveling, popped up and spread themselves out in the refulgent air below. A brownish haze seemed to cumber the horizon, broken now and then by some upheaval beneath which subsided gradually.

Charlotte lifted the binoculars which Martin had hung around her neck, and looked down again fearlessly. Behind the vapor she could distinguish dark motes, from which occasionally flashed minute lights, like the signal of fireflies on a summer night.

As they drew nearer to the great pall which spread out so far as she could see, the powerful lenses gradually revealed the ponderous artillery in more normal aspects, and the deep, far-away booming, like that which she had heard at Luxemburg, floated up more and more audibly.

At last the watcher was peering down upon the cannon. They were slanted

skyward, but slightly forward—spitting fire and smoke with a regularity that was almost monotonous—apparently aiming at nothing in particular. The whole performance was on a par with the incredible stupidity of the war itself—the sudden brawl of several blind giants in a room—each striking frantically at each other, intent only on dealing his antagonist a fatal injury by sheer chance.

The clamor of the mighty siege guns far, far below them now came more clearly, combating insistently the throaty blasts of the motor as if saying "I *will* be heard."

There was a sudden lift to the machine. It darted upward and sidewise, like a horse "shying" at something it fears, followed by a headlong, sickening plunge downward into the air hole left by the shell's unseen passage below them. The monoplane shivered, as if in fear of the imminence of the peril that had just passed, and every wire on it hummed like an Æolian harp.

They dived so steeply that Charlotte could peer over Martin's head at the ground below them, and her first throb of sickening fear was followed by the frightful thought that they were out of control. Still gazing through the glass which she unconsciously clutched, little groups of insects, spread out in thin, opposing lines, were now more clearly perceived. They were industrious little insects, it appeared. Some would rise, rush forward, drop to the ground, accompanied sometimes by quite considerable puffing of still smaller apparatus. The other insects at which these puffs were directed sometimes curled up, or pitched forward and remained prone—not to move again. As they dropped lower and lower, the ludicrous aspect of things gave way to a more vivid and sinister one.

They were volleying onward again, still to the west, but in a slightly different course.

When next she peered down, the first line of insects had been left far, far behind; but another and no less determined contest was continuing beneath them—the grapple, as she could plainly see, of monstrous masses of infantry, artillery, and cavalry—charging and countercharging behind bits of brilliant coloring, battle flags which always somehow managed to keep an erect position, no matter how many of the maddened men around it went down never to rise again.

She focused her glasses on a great battery of field guns in the line on the right. From the uniforms she judged the men must be Germans, perhaps part of some of the very divisions she had seen advancing through Belgium. Then the knot of guns lifted. The men who had been manning them tossed upward, sidewise, or seemed to try to dive through the earth. As they sped directly over the place where the battery had been, the dust drifted away, revealing a great gash in the earth. Shapeless masses were huddled here and there, and Charlotte Cameron knew that the invisible about her was being peopled by the life essence of these men. Their souls were hurtling out into the Great Mystery.

They were sliding softly to the south, the monoplane turning on its invisible pivot—the center of gravity. The wing on her right rose sharply, and it was more convenient for her to look over the lower edge—on the opposite side.

Above the chattering motor, to which her ears were now partially accustomed, the girl could distinguish something that recalled the "long roll" as interpreted on a huge army drum by a veteran who had lived next door to her own home when she was a Dresden doll-child, with yellow braids. The roll intensified as the machine steadied to an even keel. It was heavy and sustained rifle fire.

Then, as a bird charmed by the ser-

pent returns to its fatal hypnosis, so Charlotte Cameron swept the field beneath with the powerful glass. She could see the men more clearly now, although they were flitting like phantoms on a moving-picture screen, whose operator insists on triple speed of the crank handle. The men were frantically shoving the cartridges into their rifles; now and again one would crumple up inertly or collapse, writhing.

There was dulled sound, like the beating of wings of a swarm of bats in some great cave. They were over a cavalry charge against a battery—at the extreme end of another of the quaint, irregular masses of men they had long been hovering above.

Frantic horses fell with sharp screams that shrilled above the now monotonous sound of the faithful motor; sabers flashed. The vision of slaughter faded, and the calm, restful sea of waving branches and trunks of trees that seemed sacred in their calmness leaped into the girl's field of vision.

They sped madly over a huddle of tiled roofs, with open-mouthed people staring stupidly at them for a fascinated instant, then they fled into their shells of dwellings—fear driving them.

Rising again abruptly, but steadily, they swept in a wide circle, and the sun shifted around as if to meet and challenge them for their presumption in daring to intrude into his domain of the impalpable. The struggle below grew squalid and petty—for all its concentrated ghastliness.

Quite without any warning of its nearness another object bulked across their sight. Simultaneously, Etienne Martin turned. There was a whining drone alongside—another and another. As the glare died from the glass which Charlotte dropped inertly after unconsciously receiving the full beams of the sun into her eyes, she descried a silvery, opaque something, like themselves, far above the zone of tidal death flowing on the earth's surface.

It resembled a glass bowl, like those adorning parlor tables, in which goldfish swim. The bowl darted past them and scattered itself into chaotic fragments far below.

Martin turned. His features were distorted, but why she could not imagine. Charlotte felt, however, from his bared teeth and tense expression, that the pilot had suddenly met with unexpected difficulties. A shell had missed them narrowly.

It was another confusing event, so many of which had already charged upon her bewildered consciousness. Then the air churned up through her nostrils as the pilot of the Deperdussin dove, headforemost, and with utter recklessness, toward the ground.

They "flattened out," rose in a swift spiral, and then dropped earthward again. At the next rise Charlotte fancied the droning seemed more spiteful and frequent.

Again they dove, swayed, whirled, spiraled aloft. In a vagrant instant, during which the girl thought they would certainly turn completely over so sharply did Martin "bank" the monoplane, her gaze was almost perpendicularly down upon a great city.

But why was Martin exhibiting such strange eccentricities? Surely there was something unusual about the manner of their descent—they were fluttering hither and yon, like a confused bird, which hesitates to land.

An enormously tall chimney far ahead flung its bricks in a terrorizing shower far and wide, an instant after another of those increasingly near droning whines passed Charlotte's ears.

A sudden and more deafening detonation smothered all other sounds. A sheet of flame leaped up from a splendid spire over which they were darting —lapping eagerly at the space between the frail web of ash and varnished linen

on which two human beings were scuttling dangerously near the roofs of the city, but as Charlotte thankfully perceived, once more on a level keel. So far the shells had missed them.

Her face burned; she was growing dizzy. Black spots floated before her eyes, and there was a ringing in her ears. This she relieved by swallowing. Her thoughts were no longer of what was happening. She was growing so weak that her fingers forgot to clutch the glass. It dangled at the end of the leather loop around her neck, swaying with the motion of the machine.

The swift transition from the clarified atmosphere above to the heavier pressures below was bringing the reaction all aviators know and dread. The air through which she had been speeding at first had been wonderfully limpid and clear. The swift motion of the machine, forcing it in unusual quantities into her lungs, had prevented her from experiencing the usual symptoms of "mountain sickness"; beside she had not been compelled to exert herself physically.

The headlong rush downward with its violent alterations of pressure, the hideous, numbing fear which it entailed, and, above all, the sense of insecurity which comes with realizing that every faculty is powerless, were overpowering her.

The torpor now stealing over her objective faculties was not a fainting spell —Charlotte was still able to think a little. In a way the hypnosis was merciful. It blinded her to a knowledge of the desolation of the burning, collapsing city beneath her whose cathedrals, public buildings, residences, and places of business were being scientifically demolished by the terrible shells of the Germans; it closed her ears to the cries of the earthbound wretches who were trapped by their onslaught.

The straps which Martin had fastened about her before the start held her like the arms of some watchful nurse; the blasts from the still faithful motor, although now and again punctuated by an abrupt choke, as if this insensate bit of machinery was also tiring after its prodigious efforts, faded out.

She was back again in the Château de Herthereaux; her uncle was smiling at her; Morgan's car was coming up the drive; his eager, manly face was very good to see.

Etienne Martin, wondering how long the gas would suffice to carry them, twisted his head to look at his passenger, as the doomed city dropped behind.

Charlotte seemed sleeping.

He would gladly have descended had he dared. But the German army, which he had counted on finding at most perhaps twenty miles from where it had been two days before, was thrice that distance. Confronting it, in brigade after brigade, horse, foot, artillery, were the armies of the Allies.

All Martin had so far done was nothing gained, and he must fly on and on as long as the petrol lasted. There had been none too much petrol at the start. The effort of climbing with an extra person to a reasonably safe elevation had sadly depleted Martin's tanks at the outset. The unexpected distance to the French army had alarmed him. It was because of this that he had attempted to conserve his scant supply by a long volplane.

The mad rush down had carried him directly over the brow of a chain of hills and into the very thing he had been so sedulously endeavoring to avoid —the zone of artillery fire. It was unthinkable, except for the shells, that the Germans had penetrated so far. These enemies of his beloved France were only human beings—they must eat and sleep.

Nevertheless, and notwithstanding which, the shells which he had so nar-

rowly escaped proved they were already many miles across the frontier. Even the city they had just passed had been unprepared, stupefied, defenseless.

To get out of such a terrible ambuscade in the air had necessitated more demands upon his precious petrol. The occasional warning note of the engine signified that he was now nearing the last ounce of supply. Already the air was being drawn through the feed pipe and the mixture almost too thin to keep the machine aloft.

Martin gently turned the nose of his machine downward, and scanned the panorama below him with troubled eyes.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BEHIND THE FRENCH LINES.

Below the now rapidly descending monoplane, as its thankful pilot was soon able to discern, the actual ruin and wrack of relentless conflict had not yet left its mark. As in the air there are no landmarks, and the aviator flying at great heights, must rely largely on maps and compass for even a general knowledge of his whereabouts, so Etienne Martin was unable to recognize the precise place into which he was dropping in enormous circles.

He thanked his stars that his machine was the most modern of types, taut, true, and steady. The terrific vibration of their long-continued journey had not caused even a vagrant turnbuckle to loosen, nor a weakened wire to give way.

"*Bon enfant!*" exclaimed the doughty fellow approvingly to the machine as he cut out the engine, and, relying solely upon the gliding angle of the wings for the balance of the volplane, turned the earth into a propeller by still further inclining the nose of the Deperdussin toward it. Theoretically the gliding angle was "one in twelve"—that is, for each foot of space downward he could travel twelve in distance. But a stiff breeze was encountered a few hundred feet from the ground, compelling him to head into it to make sure of a safe landing when the wheels struck earth. Otherwise a gust from behind might tip the tail until they landed upside down. Besides, with the additional weight of Charlotte Cameron, theory and its percentages required considerable modification of his usual daring methods in actually landing.

"*Mon Dieu!*" gasped Martin, half in reverence and half in fear, as, half a minute later, he sped across the bit of swampy ground now under them, and lifted the machine, in a last desperate endeavor to reach the firm, white road, much as a steeplechase rider sends his wearied mount against the final barrier of the course. He made it, but with not a foot to spare.

"*Tenez!*" echoed a voice just beneath him, the speaker at the same instant rising from a bit of brush and covering him with a rifle. A shot rang out, but the franc-tireur who had so summarily challenged him miscalculated the speed of the machine, and the bullet sped harmlessly past him.

The next instant the Deperdussin was rippling along the dust of the road, its tail skidding sidewise. With the propeller draft no longer drifting back on the small rudder, control was very difficult. Martin was out of his seat and back at Miss Cameron's side before the dust clouds drifted to the side of the road.

"Are you hurt?" he solicitously inquired.

"Not at all," faintly replied Charlotte, "but I'm awfully glad that we're back on the ground again."

"Keep your eyes closed for a few minutes," returned the pilot, "and then you will be less likely to be giddy. We must thank the good God for our preservation. I thought we were surely gone when that masked battery opened on us near the city."

He dropped his hand carelessly on his jacket pocket as the fellow with the rifle came importantly across the marsh.

"You should be more careful, *mon ami,*" chided Martin gently, "at whom you fire. A machine about to land is probably a friend. At least you may be more sure of its occupants when they are on the same earth with you. Remember that hereafter. Where is the nearest division chief?"

"Who are you?" sullenly returned the man, eying him suspiciously.

"A servant of France, on special detail," said Martin. "Come, come, my fine fellow; do not assume airs to which you are not suited. Where is the nearest division chief?"

"There are troops at Le Catelet."

"Bien!" Martin's face glowed with pleasure. He turned toward Charlotte. "If I only had some smelling salts, mademoiselle, I would know what to do with them. As it is, I may only say that we are perhaps thirty miles beyond the frontier, although not exactly where I had hoped to be. When you are able to stand, we will go on to the cottage over yonder, and from there to the city."

Charlotte was more upset than she wanted to admit, even to herself. For one thing, she found it very hard to accommodate her eyes to the inertia of the ground. It seemed to want to race past—even the sedate trees displayed an impish impulse to run toward her, as if the blasts of the cannon she had heard were a signal for their release.

She leaned on Martin's arm, after he has pushed the machine out alongside the road, and watched him fling a coin to the still moody franc-tireur.

It was of gold, and the man pounced greedily upon it as if his disappointment at not discovering a German spy in the machine were partially assuaged.

"There is more where that came from," said Martin lightly. "If I find the machine unharmed when I return again, it shall be yours. If not——"

He paused significantly.

Charlotte Cameron, despite her "all-gone" feeling, realized that the snapping eyes of the little pilot held a menace that it would not be wise to ignore.

"As you see," said Martin, still addressing the man, "it has the official stamp of the war department. Let that be enough for you."

They walked on a few steps, Charlotte lagging in spite of herself.

The fragrant breath of the piny woods bordering the road, the upturned faces of the flowers, the moss-covered rocks in the neat wall, and the little hill up which they were plodding, were all the same, yet somehow different. It was not alone the suspense of their wild ride on the magical thing or the tremendous heights to which they had climbed, nor yet the perilous gyrations which the pilot had been forced to assume to maneuver his craft safely past the masked battery bombarding the city.

It was all of this, and more.

The girl had a feeling that the world would never be quite the same again; that the fearful spectacle of the battle would return unsummoned in the years to come, and that it could never be quite blotted out. Almost she wished she had been content to remain within the comparative peace of the German rear guard. Even Von Hollman's insistence, detestable as it had seemed, was not to be compared to this greater horror she had witnessed.

She was crying gently as they reached the top. The anger-lashed atoms of men and youths dealing death and receiving it with no thought of anything save blind obedience to orders from others, all these had mothers, sweethearts, children who loved them.

Martin displayed more delicacy than one would have suspected a mere spy to possess. He did not appear to see her grief, and wisely refrained from any

attempt at solace. Near the top of the hill he urged her to rest, and brought water from a spring in the gourd hanging by it.

"A few steps more, and we shall be with friends who will care for you," said he.

Charlotte drank thankfully, then laved her face and hands.

"I cannot tell you how much I owe to your skill and courage," said she, as they went on toward the house. "It was something for which I was hardly prepared. The flight alone would have made me squeamish. It seems incredible that we were actually so far above the ground and got back safely."

Martin's smile showed he appreciated the compliment. He was the same assured, alert, nervy chap he was when entering the machine.

"I only wish we might have brought Doctor Morgan with us," said he. "But that, of course, was impossible. However, with you over here, that German will not dare to be too harsh with him."

They entered the gate leading to the house.

Bees were darting to and from the hives, carrying with them the last nectar of the year from the goldenrod along the edges of the neatly tilled fields. From the rear came a homely but under the circumstances a most delightful and reassuring sound—the rhythm of a dasher in a churn.

"*Voilà!*" exclaimed the buxom young matron, as they came around the house.

Martin quickly explained the reason for their presence, and the woman's eyes widened.

"You came over the battle line?"

Her look of astonishment drowned her native courtesy. Charlotte swayed a little, and Martin hastily set a chair for her.

"A glass of wine!" he snapped. "Mademoiselle is suffering. Do you not see?"

With a quick apology, the matron ran into the house. Charlotte needed no urging. The weakness which she had felt on reaching the ground was still upon her.

"Thanks, I will be glad to pay for it," said she.

"Pay? Oh, mademoiselle, surely you do not think that we of Le Catelet are like to the people of Paris! I have heard of their selfish ways. No, indeed, both you and this soldier are most welcome to all that we have. Tell me, are the uhlans really coming?"

The apprehension in her sudden query amused Martin.

"Oh, yes, they are headed this way," said he, with mock gravity, "but some little entertainment which they are unable to resist is being tendered them. I have an idea that they may not get over this far to-day. They seemed very much occupied as we passed them."

With the deft smoothness which he could display when called upon to shift to other subjects, Martin quickly arranged that the woman's husband should take them both into the city.

Meanwhile, they sat down to an alfresco lunch—a bit of cold fowl, some salad, thick slices of bread, and vin ordinaire. Charlotte nibbled, but Martin ate with gusto.

"I may eat again, and then I may go hungry—or worse," said he, with a little grimace, rising from the table. "These be busy days for us of the air corps. Now, mademoiselle, if you will be so kind as to enter the carriage——"

Le Catelet was buzzing with excitement when they reached the town. At the Convent of Our Lady of Emden, Martin took leave of Miss Cameron.

"Here you will be cared for until you feel able to resume your journey," said he, holding out his hand in farewell, as the Sister Superior made Charlotte welcome. "It is not at all likely that the Germans will ever get this far. Anyway, before they do, you will be at Paris, or, if you prefer, and as may

perhaps be the better plan, you will go on toward Calais. I will report to the commander here my own arrival and yours. After he has registered you, your passports will receive a military visé when you are ready to leave. Au revoir!"

With a cheery smile and a respectful bow to the Sister Superior, Martin was swinging down the road, whistling as blithely as the birds piping their matins in the Château de Herthereaux before the boom of the caterpillar siege guns drifted down the wind from Liége.

Charlotte was very downhearted as he left. He was the last tie that bound her to Fairfax Morgan, gallant American and ideal lover that he was. Her thoughts rushed back to the final meeting with him in the forest near Givet. Von Hollman was not a man to overlook a grievance, and Morgan's pertinacity would be likely to result gravely, unless, as Martin had hinted, the German commander would be chary of incurring the displeasure of the United States.

She wanted very much to telegraph to the authorities at Washington without delay and request them to reassure her uncle at Luxemburg, through Berlin, not only of her own safety, but of the peril which yet hung over Morgan and Healy.

She started to rise from her chair.

But the weakness which still clung to her was so obvious that the Mother Superior gently bade her resume it.

"We will prepare a room for you, my child," said she, "and then you must rest. You will be better for it. The war, it is a terrible thing, is it not? How we have prayed that it might not overshadow the nations!"

There was a pathos in her simple words that touched Charlotte deeply. She suffered herself to be led away and disrobed by the gentle hands of the ministering sisters. Then, with one of them within call, she faded away into an uneasy and troubled slumber.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN WHICH MORGAN RECOVERS FROM HIS WOUND.

As another of the interminable lines of smoke-gray uniformed men on horses came into view, Fairfax Morgan was more inclined to smile than he had been for some time. It was not at those perfectly disciplined animals, however, although men and horses seemed a unit as they passed. It was rather at the caprice of events which had persisted in preventing him from reaching the other armies.

Charlotte Cameron was gone, and he tried to persuade himself that she was safe, while his eyes studied the spiked helmets, the gray uniforms contrasting with the black or bay horses, and the polished weapons. They seemed a sinister echo of the words: "You see, after all, you Americans and English are mere barbarians—toying with life. While you played tennis and baseball, we forged guns and swords."

While the sight was no longer novel, it never grew tame nor lacking in a certain fascination. Perhaps it was the grim sureness of these prepared men; their silence. They never looked toward him as they filed by, riding as stiffly as on parade. They were going to death and wounds, perhaps to prisons, but it was very evident that none of them expected anything but victory. Apprehension was never in their thoughts, to judge from their countenances, and Morgan had seen many thousands of men like these in the three weeks which had passed since Charlotte's flight in the aëroplane.

It was hard, at times, to believe that Germany had so many tens of thousands of miraculously ready men. Always they were passing him—artillery, infantry, cavalry—cavalry, artillery, in-

fantry. After a time the real meaning of Von Hollman's inscrutable smile began to dawn on Morgan. It must, indeed, have been mightily amusing to the young brigadier general to watch one lone American flinging himself against this barrier of blood and iron.

The wound on Morgan's head had almost entirely healed. He no longer wore the bandage. There was just enough irritation remaining to remind him of Von Hollman's look of baffled passion the morning Charlotte had clambered into Martin's monoplane. The discharge of Von Hollman's pistol, whether by accident or design Morgan neither knew nor cared, had "creased" his head in such a way that he lost consciousness. Of what afterward happened he had not the slightest inkling, save that when he regained his senses his head was bandaged and he was between two soldiers in a machine, following the hordes of men in gray on marches that seemed endless.

Although his profession had made him familiar with the ability of the human body to bear up under fatigue or disease, the endurance of the German army, particularly of the infantry, was amazing. During the long, weary marches over dusty roads, sometimes fighting in desultory skirmishes or in clashes which took heavy toll of dead and wounded, their automatic obedience never grew lax. They would stand erect when their lines again reformed; the sibilant rattle of voices answered briskly the *"ein, zwei, drei, vier,"* of the roll call; their battle-stained weapons were always clean at inspection time. Only when the order of dismissal rang out did they evidence the physical exhaustion which such prodigious exertions entailed.

Morgan could not understand why they had been detouring so far to the north, nor why they were now in Mons, as the street signs showed when he had been taken to the house. Again and again he asked himself why he was still alive. Von Hollman was in supreme authority of this division. There were plenty of men who would have been glad to exchange places with the prisoner, if only to be as well sheltered and fed. He realized that his position was very grave—far more desperate than in Luxemburg. But of Von Hollman, since that morning when they had grappled like lion and tiger, there had been no sign—nor even of Von Graf.

There were two sentries always with him. Grim, taciturn men they were. They rendered the likelihood of another escape so utterly absurd that Morgan never even thought of it. At regular intervals they were relieved by two others—tall, stalwart men—Prussians, he judged.

Although Healy's absence made him very lonely, Morgan sincerely hoped the doughty little chauffeur was well and safe. He had simply dropped out of sight and ken. Perhaps Von Hollman thought in this way to further break Morgan's obstinacy regarding returning to America alone. If so, the young physician told himself, the arrogant German had failed of his purpose. Single-handed and alone he had helped Charlotte to escape, and all but mastered his rival. The little affair on the lawn of the Château de Herthereaux was avenged, and amply.

The chill of coming autumn was in the air; trees flamed scarlet and gold, or grew gaunter day by day as the frost stripped them. The birds were migrating to the south; squirrels were scuttling anxiously here and there over the trim lawn before the house in which he was sitting; there was more of peace in the air than there had been of late. He had plenty of time to observe and reflect, but he wished that he could get things over with somehow.

At this moment, as if in answer to his thoughts, Von Hollman's armored car drew up at the palings of the fence and

the count swung to the ground. Although Morgan expected the worst since regaining consciousness, as Von Hollman came quickly up the gravel path the prisoner was almost glad. The worst would be better than the uncertainty of the past week.

"How is your head to-day, doctor?" asked Von Hollman, after an exchange of salutations. From his casual but kindly tone, one would have surmised that he came quite regularly.

"Oh, I guess it's good enough to shoot at again," returned Morgan. "If that's what you've been waiting for, pray proceed."

"I don't understand you," said Von Hollman. "The wound was an accident. You must realize that. When you bent back my arms, the flexing of the muscles was quite involuntary on my part. Surely your knowledge of anatomy makes it plain that my finger pressed the trigger altogether without intention."

Morgan shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"I had no time to think of anatomy then," he said. "I had too big a job on hand, as it was. For one thing, I can't be sufficiently sure, after what has happened, to deny that you are right. But what of it? Isn't it ancient history? And in what way is it relevant to my present condition? I am, as you perceive, still very much in custody."

Von Hollman nodded good-humoredly. It was hard to believe that this easy-going person was the half-insane man who had pursued Charlotte early that morning in the Ardennes.

"You seem to regard it as if it were a very commonplace matter," said Morgan. "Why don't you go ahead with the rest of it? I'm ready. I've beaten you. You got me, but you didn't get Charlotte. Why not go through with the rest of the farce?"

"The rest of the farce?"

"The court-martial."

"There will be no court-martial, for the present. Your assault upon me is a personal matter—not a military offense."

Morgan was taken slightly aback. Such an idea had never before occurred to him. He waited for Von Hollman to continue.

"Between gentlemen, Doctor Morgan, there is, even in times of military necessity, a code which I have never yet violated. You struck me—do you remember?"

"I think I did. Why?"

"Then, of course, you will have no objections to according me the satisfaction one gentleman gives to another under such circumstances," said Von Hollman more rapidly and in tones whose brittle quality showed he regarded the matter as already determined.

"You mean you want to fight a duel with me?"

"You divine my meaning perfectly."

Morgan dropped into a chair and laughed derisively. Von Hollman frowned.

"Who's acting childishly now?" demanded the American. "I beat you up—or tried to—simply because I didn't want that aviator shot before he could get Miss Cameron away. Why should I fight a duel with you? Why, it's absurd. I wouldn't fight a duel with any man. I may be an American barbarian, but I'm not a murderer. If I'm to be shot, I rather prefer this 'military necessity' which you have mentioned once or twice as an explanation for my past treatment."

Von Hollman flushed.

"There will be no court-martial, for the present," he repeated, ignoring Morgan's reply. "As I have said, your attack upon me was a personal matter. Owing to what happened previously, I am, of course, compelled for military reasons to still detain you. The delay is because I wanted to make sure that

you had entirely recovered before sending you back to Spandau. You will be locked up there until the authorities can decide what shall be done with you."

"Locked up in Spandau?" Morgan had heard of that Prussian bastile where political prisoners are held.

"I do not see how we may avoid it, doctor. We cannot be dragging you along with the army indefinitely, you know. We need every man for fighting. It takes four to guard you."

"You certainly have my permission to withdraw them, general. I did not request their services. How far is it to Spandau?"

"Quite some distance. We are sending all the political prisoners there. The ordinary chaps we put at work in the fields to replace our own men who are with their regiments. Some, under guard, of course, we put digging trenches, helping bury the dead, and work of that kind."

"I don't blame them for choosing work instead of being locked up," said Morgan. "But what have I done to go to Spandau? I'm not a prisoner in the sense these captured soldiers are. And, as you have just said, the affair between us is a personal one. Do you visit your vengeance on your personal enemies in this official fashion? Spandau, I infer, is the military prison?"

Although he had not the slightest hope of any consideration at Von Hollman's hands, Morgan nevertheless felt a certain satisfaction in thus pinning the German with his own words. After the long, silent weeks, it was good to talk, even if he could expect no relief.

Von Hollman sat stiffly, staring straight ahead with his dark eyes looking through Morgan and beyond him. It was impossible to say of what he was thinking. His prisoner turned indifferently toward the window. He had done everything he could do. He had drawn the admission that he would not be court-martialed; he had refused Von Hollman "satisfaction" on "the field of honor"; now he was resigned. The idea of imprisonment was disquieting, but it might not be prolonged, particularly if Charlotte had landed behind the French lines in safety. Charlotte was most sensible, and Morgan knew she loved him very dearly. Once Charlotte arrived at a seaport, the United States government would be notified of Morgan's plight and Germany could ill afford increasing the number of its foes. Morgan turned to look again at Von Hollman.

"Doctor," began the German suddenly, "you have twice aided the enemy."

"Pardon me," brusquely returned Morgan, "that has not yet been proven. I have twice been accused. I have once been acquitted—and now you propose to lock me up without a court-martial. Let's stop pretending. You have a personal grievance against me. I refuse to fight you because, while I am a young American barbarian, I don't believe in dueling. As an alternative you propose to lock me up. Go ahead! Lock me up! I've got no kick coming. When do I start for Spandau?"

This time the speaker was a little less certain that the shell of his hearer's self-complacency was not pierced. Von Hollman, for all his faults and personal eccentricities, was still an aristocrat, with the aristocrat's code. Without entirely comprehending why it was so, Morgan felt that he had suddenly stumbled upon the weakest point in this arbitrary fellow's armor. It was unthinkable—as Von Hollman's expression so eloquently showed—that he should be sent to Spandau to satisfy a private quarrel between gentlemen.

And, after all was said and done, it was almost equally unthinkable that an American tourist, an admitted neutral, should be stood up before a firing squad for stealing Von Hollman's busby. As the first auspicious surmises deepened

into certainty, Morgan asked himself what Von Hollman would do.

"There is something to your words—not particularly because of their logic, but more because of your point of view," said Von Hollman at last, speaking slowly. "That is what makes my position so hard. Were I merely the commander of an army corps, I could, perhaps, go on with your court-martial. After what has happened, don't you see that is impossible?"

"Oh, never mind my feelings," scoffed Morgan, following up his advantage. "Anything is preferable to uncertainty. Go on with the court-martial. Are you afraid they will acquit me? That would be most embarrassing to your plans. I would be free to go to America as Miss Cameron did, in that event, and you would have to hunt up a fresh pretext for detaining me. Therefore you evoke this 'personal-satisfaction' theory as a reason for sending me to a military prison. I have a very clear idea of the whole situation, general. Perhaps, as you admit, our points of view differ. If I were in command of an army corps, I am quite sure what my decision would be."

"Your second offense of aiding the enemy was not the theft of my busby," said Von Hollman irritably. "You know you assisted the French spy whom I was about to shoot down. He is the same man you aided to escape from Luxemburg the night of our occupation. If Miss Cameron's name were not connected with the affair, I should order the court-martial without delay. As it is, I may not."

"I think you are taking a good deal for granted," returned Morgan. "How do you know the aviator was a French spy, or even the same man? You have no proof that it was even the same aëroplane. If you have none, as I assume, what, then, becomes of this second charge? No, general, I was charged by Major von Graf with stealing your busby. That was why I was detained when near Givet. Miss Cameron was deprived of my automobile and left without any protection whatever. I went out to help her get away. She managed it. You shot me. I may be a young American barbarian, playing tennis when I should be practicing with foils, perhaps, but I am not deceived by this sophistry. I see where you stand. But where do I get off?"

Over Von Hollman's face came another of the flashing changes that Morgan had grown to know. Had the German officer been thinking of him or his affairs at all—or of some one else? There was no one else, save Charlotte Cameron. Healy was negligible. The watching man felt a slow chill creeping over him.

What did Von Hollman's curious expression signify? Could it be that Charlotte was not safe? It was almost unthinkable—yet possible. With Healy blotted out and Morgan immured indefinitely in a military prison, if Charlotte had not escaped, who would protect her now?

During the eternity that seemed to intervene before the German general replied, the steady footfall of the sentry outside the house ticked off the ghostly moments, like the pendulum of a clock.

"I think there is an alternative," said Von Hollman finally.

The words were like a cold douche to Morgan. He straightened up and watched the count.

"The Fatherland, as I have said, needs every man, and you are a skillful surgeon. Although I may not permit you to go on through the lines, after what has happened, I may ask if you will be willing to aid our wounded instead of going back to Spandau. Of course, you will be under guard, unless you prefer to give me your parole not to try to escape."

Morgan did not hesitate.

"Thank you," he said. "I shall be very glad to give you my word, and I'll do all I can to help the wounded."

CHAPTER XX.

VORWAERTS!

Morgan was a marvel of speed and skill, and as compassionate as a woman. He worked unremittingly. If the eccentric but occasionally scrupulous Von Hollman had suddenly annulled the physician's parole within a week following the latter's acceptance of it, and ordered Von Graf to proceed with the court-martial he had threatened, Von Graf could only have carried out the order over the protests and possible mutiny of the German physicians of the hospital corps.

The second week would have found the wounded themselves resisting had such a monstrous suggestion been rumored, and by the end of the third no more popular man was following in the wake of the division to which the young American had been detailed.

There were two reasons for this. Charlotte was safe, and Healy, who had unaccountably dropped out of sight, bobbed up serenely one morning driving an armored car, the same assured, jaunty, impudent Irishman of old, obliterating Morgan's last anxiety.

"Hello, doc." grinned Healy as the machine pulled up near the field hospital. Morgan, extracting a bullet from the shoulder of a wounded prisoner, looked up, delighted. "I've been scoutin' around for you ever since we got parted. You're lookin' fine."

"Glad to see you, Healy. Where have you been?" said Morgan, carefully adjusting a bit of steriiized gauze over the bullet puncture.

Healy waved an indefinite arm. "Everywhere," said he. "I'm drivin' for his nibs. But I heard a lot about you from different parties. You seem to have quite a pull with the sachems of this outfit. Where's Miss Cameron?"

Morgan contented himself with saying Charlotte was somewhere in France. Healy whistled softly.

"I guessed right," said he. "The general got awful nice to me after they held us up that last time. So that's why—he's overplayed his hand and he's tryin' to square himself. Well, here he comes. See you again, doc."

He whirled away in the car, pushing on toward the front, where the victorious arms of the Fatherland were crushing by sheer weight of numbers the left flank of the Allies. Morgan rather envied the lad. Flexible and with a mental energy that quickly assimilated his changed surroundings, the war was already an old story to the ebullient Healy.

Things were different with his employer. He was of finer clay, and although he had plenty to do owing to three weeks of the most confused and bloody fighting which the world ever imagined, nevertheless Morgan could not help seeing much of the wrack and rapacity of war, aside from the streams of wounded and dying men to whom he ministered.

Indisputably, thus far, the victory was with the Germans. They had whirled across Belgium, following the fall of Namur and Liége, and struck at the comparatively unprotected French frontier on the northeast. Mons, Amiens, Lille, Arras had been already overrun, paying heavy ransom to their conquerors, and, from the gossip about him, Morgan gathered that the battles on the Russian frontier also gave no cause for German pessimism.

From the frequent conferences of the commanders of the various army corps he judged the next step was now under consideration and probably intended to be a smashing blow—the end

for which all along they had been preparing.

It so happened, just then, that the hospital division to which Morgan was attached was waiting for orders for its next move forward. He thoroughly cleansed and packed his instruments, looked over his supplies, and sat down for a smoke. It was one of the rare moments, during daylight hours, when he had been given a respite from the arduous and unending labors which the constant fighting entailed.

Just beyond lay a great line of intrenchments. Only that morning the Allies had held the same ditch. Now, crumpled up, rolled back, and, although fighting with sullen and dogged determination, they were again being driven south. The irresistible right wing of the great German military machine was sweeping around from the northeast for another blow.

The fighting was tremendously savage at times, especially when the German infantry advanced. The French, furious at the invasion through neutral Belgium, were so courageous that they were foolhardy. They became maniacs in the numberless encounters, and once Morgan heard a group of officers discussing an incident where a few score zouaves had refused to obey the commands of their officers to retire. Instead they abandoned the intrenchments they had been holding and charged an entire brigade.

Not one man was left alive or uninjured.

"And they had been told to retreat," said Morgan's informant. "If those fellows would only be amenable to discipline, they'd whip us. But they won't. They cannot stay in the trenches without food or water and endure being shot to bits by shrapnel. They must have action—and there is where they have always been at our mercy."

"You forget Napoleon," said Morgan.

"On the contrary, I remember him very well. But he was a Corsican—not a Frenchman. And if you will look at his victories, they were won by the same methods the French are using today—which are obsolete. The Fatherland has made warfare a study, a science, and reduced it to exact terms. The French, for all their unbounded courage, can no more win from Germany to-day than three times six can make seventy-two. It is a matter of mathematics—not a matter of emotions or traditions."

There was much food for thought in the statement as Morgan came to know. The German private soldier never did anything except what he was told to do. He was not even permitted to think for himself. On one occasion the field hospital, although originally some four miles back of the battle line, was in danger from a charge by the enemy. Fleeing German soldiers fell back and back and back, until to the disgusted American doctor they appeared arrant cowards. Then, to his surprise, they turned face, fought back over and regained the ground they had already once won. It perplexed him exceedingly, until he learned that almost every officer of the regiment which had been driven back was either killed or wounded.

"Orders," sententiously explained a young Bavarian surgeon, who appreciated both Morgan's surgical skill and his choice of tobacco. "The men had no choice except to fall back until they reached the reserves. You observed, did you not, that the officers of the reserves led them out the second time?"

That was the secret of the German success thus far—preparedness, overwhelming numbers, and discipline. The human beings who sat back of the battle line and received the reports of the aëroplane scouts by wireless, thought no more of sending a thousand or ten thousand other human beings to anni-

hilation to gain a coveted military objective than they did of drinking a cup of coffee.

Revolting and unspeakably cruel as the war was, Morgan could not help admiring the tremendous strategy which made the continued victories possible. As for the privates, they had no choice. They went into position singing, and they went to their deaths with a stoicism not usually ascribed to men of Occidental birth.

Behind them, as Morgan knew, lay stricken Belgium, and this part of France was also far different from the smiling country they had found on entering it. Civilization had become desolation. Cities, scarred and scorched by the terrible artillery fire of the invaders; peasants, wounded, starving, timorously peering from the wrecks of their homes; endless streams of fugitives of all ages and conditions; devastated crops, desecrated churches—the ashes typifying the ruin of all that men held worth while—and always, just a few miles ahead, the mighty rumble of the war machine!

"Good afternoon, doctor," said a voice.

Morgan roused from his reverie. General von Hollman was looking over at him with dancing eyes.

"You remind me of the painting, 'Marius at the ruins of Carthage,'" went on the German. "What's on your mind?"

"Oh, I guess pretty much the same that was on the gentleman's you mentioned, only Marius was rather a piker compared to you fellows."

Von Hollman laughed boyishly.

"Doctor, I'm afraid you've been working too hard. I didn't make a condition of your parole that you were to exhaust yourself entirely. Suppose, instead, you take a ride out to the lines with me? We're going to have rather an interesting time in the next twenty-four hours."

They walked back toward Von Hollman's automobile.

"This is very kind of you, general," said Morgan as they rolled away. "But what do you mean by a very interesting time?"

The old, peculiar, inscrutable look flitted for an instant over the German's face. Morgan saw in him, just then, a strong resemblance to the man he had seen on his arrival at the Château de Herthereaux. It brought back vividly their first meeting and the animosity which he had felt subsequently.

Somehow, during the three weeks since Charlotte's escape, the young American had lost much of his first feeling of rancor toward Otto von Hollman. Since Miss Cameron's spectacular disappearance, Von Hollman also had undergone a noticeable change. He had become decidedly more genial. The activity of the German forward movement had revealed a different individual and one far more admirable. There could be no denying his sincerity, his uncommon ability, and his all-dominant love of the Fatherland. His voice even shared the change. It was magnetic, and carried the young American along as swiftly as the machine they occupied.

"The real battle is coming now," said Von Hollman.

Morgan stared.

"The others didn't altogether impress me as being insignificant," he crisply returned.

"Merely incidental, doctor, to our real purpose. Do you remember my toast in the château that afternoon we met? I dare say you thought me a rather mysterious sort of a chap, eh? 'To the day!' Well, it's here, although not just in the way I expected."

He grew silent for a little space. Morgan studied Healy's familiar hunched shoulders in front. Everything was much as it had been after they left Luxemburg, only Charlotte,

instead of Von Hollman, had been with him, and this was a different machine. They had come several miles, and still there was an absence of the customary sounds of battle; the country about them, while more thickly settled and flatter in contour, recalled the day of their dash into the Ardennes.

Then, without warning of any kind, a sound altogether new thundered in his ears. It was a terrifying, rumbling roar, very close, and the swirl of the air over their heads was so violent that his hat leaped upward. Morgan grasped it with a subconscious movement as different from his ordinary efforts as the uncanny spell which seemed to have come over Von Hollman.

The German turned to him with a smile.

"Some guns, those beautiful Berthas of ours, doctor. That was one of the shells. You'll hear the report after a little. The range from the position of the battery was about eight or nine miles. Some pointer will get a ragging from his lieutenant presently. It is bad enough for the enemy to be shooting at us. Our own men ought to know better."

"But we weren't in any danger," retorted Morgan a little anxiously. "It was too high."

"Doctor, you will not, I am sure, be offended if I observe that you are, at times, a singularly ingenuous person? When I said 'us' I was thinking of the men in the line. Can you see yourself chatting with me after checking, amidships, let us say, a shell sixteen inches in diameter and six feet long?"

A terrific detonation, far, far beyond them, drowned his voice. Morgan shuddered. The shell had burst about a mile ahead. Rocks, earth, fragments of trees, and a great eddy of slow-circling smoke billowed up into the air.

"Yes, but where are the troops—I haven't seen a man yet."

"Over there."

Following the direction of the finger, the American saw only a green ridge of the range of hills in front of them quivering. The whole crest was perturbed as if it, too, had caught the horrid infection of war, and was about to rend itself apart.

"You remember also, doctor, my poking fun at your tennis and golf? And applying the word barbarian to both the Americans and English? I must have seemed a very insolent person, and that is one reason why I wanted you to come with me this afternoon. I wanted *you* to see this thing just as *I* saw it back there in the château."

"But the men?" persisted Morgan.

He was keenly alive to the necessity of not reopening old sores. For a moment he wondered if Von Hollman, with his capricious ideas, had schemed to get him out of sight of the members of the hospital corps to force him into the duel which he had once declined.

"Those are the men, doctor. While you Americans played baseball and the English played cricket—and you both played tennis as frantically as if the fate of nations depended upon it—we played our game—the 'kriegspiel,' preparing against 'the day.' Those are the picked men of the line. The reason you cannot see them, although they have been pointed out to you, is that they wear the *hecht-grau* uniform. Even their familiar spiked helmets—*pickelhaube*—are covered with cloth of the same material as their uniforms. See how they blend into the ground? It was a German who solved that priceless secret of military strategy—concealing a man even when in plain view."

They drew up at the summit of a hill a little higher than the others. The staff officers, including Von Graf, whom Morgan had not seen for weeks, were chatting and watching the general advance.

The former judge advocate of the court-martial scrutinized Morgan coldly, but his bow was respectful if not cordial.

Morgan returned it with a formality in kind. Evidently, in spite of Von Graf's habitually leaden quality of countenance, he was surprised to see the young American there.

The machine rolled back down the hill a short distance, while Morgan, at Von Hollman's bidding, walked forward to the bomb proof and stationed himself in one of the chairs.

It was almost like being invited out on the deck of a big seagoing yacht to observe some interesting bit of shore scenery. He wondered more and more at the extreme affability which Von Hollman had exhibited. Had the German officer been on his way to church to marry Charlotte he could not have been more amiable. There might be something back of all this courtesy.

Morgan could not drown the little imp of dubiety that danced through his brain, even as Von Hollman, tendering the glass the orderly had respectfully handed him a moment before, indicated the signs, which, to his own practiced eye, disclosed the battle line so far as the turning movement was concerned.

"The Zeppelin has given us the range," muttered Von Hollman. "Watch the poor fellows scamper out in a minute or two. This is the same way it has been ever since Von Kluck's division came up through Belgium. We were delayed there, else I would now be inviting you to share a bottle of Burgundy on the Boulevard des Capucines. Foolish people, those Belgians! I'm sorry for the women and children and aged people. But they would have it. Ah! There they go!"

A squadron of cavalry was galloping along a road on another hill at their extreme right. Morgan knew from the position of the sun that they were facing almost due south. There had been a series of mysterious signals from the Zeppelin, and a big two-seated monoplane with a short, wicked-looking rapid-fire gun mounted pivotwise on the passenger seat, buzzed over them, circled, and came down.

Von Hollman excused himself, and walked back to the knot of officers, among whom was Von Graf. The pilot, grime-stained, his forehead and his shock of yellow hair dripping oil from the exhaust of the engine, saluted smartly.

They chatted a few moments in rapid German. Then, at another order from Von Graf, the boyish-faced officer at the wireless instruments leaped to his feet, saluted, and raced down the hill as Von Hollman came back to sit down again by Morgan.

"Their wireless batteries are exhausted," said he, "so they came in to report in person. They have been all the way to Paris, tossed a few bombs, dropped an ultimatum, fought off three French machines, and returned with a bully report. Already the people are fleeing the city. Let them go—Germany is not fighting women and children—it's the men we're after."

"They flew over Paris, you said?" stammered Morgan. Something was clutching at his heart.

Von Hollman's laugh had in it a certain diabolic quality, he fancied.

"Why not?" he asked. "There's where we are bound for. England will come next. They are rushing troops, so the pilot reports, to help meet our advance. Well, let them come. He flew so low he could hear the 'skirling'—I believe that's the phrase, isn't it?—of the bagpipes of one of the Scottish regiments. We'll let the guns answer them—first. Then it will be hand to hand, and the hour for which Germany has waited is here, Doctor Morgan."

The physician could not reply. It

was not of England's military prowess he was thinking just then, but of Charlotte.

"That river, over there," went on Von Hollman, almost frantically, it seemed to his listener, "do you know what that is? It is the Marne. History will probably give this big battle that name—the battle of the Marne, quite euphonious, eh?"

Morgan raised his glass. Whatever his fears, he must smother them. It certainly seemed that nothing could check that marvelous, perfectly disciplined, overwhelming German onslaught. Emotionless as the indifferent staff officers behind him, and as relentless, it was sweeping on and on and on. He was looking upon the mathematics of war, the integers of which were invisible. The personal equation had forever fled. What mattered valor, courage, and desperate resolve to die rather than retreat against this gigantic, irresistible machine? For years it had been building. For its perfection the industries of millions had been taxed to the utmost farthing. For this had the sun shone, the crops grown, the looms rattled; for this had the vitals of science been probed for the deep-seated mysteries of nature; for this were lives tossed into the arena like poker chips by a drunken gambler.

Morgan looked again through the binoculars Von Hollman had handed him.

Already the cavalry were far out in front, and now the half-invisible blotches of infantry were trekking along the same road; as he watched they had gained the east side of the Marne. The pontoons were shaping on the banks; the men working on them were dropping like flies; others leaped from the trees to take their places, and still others, and yet again still others.

Whenever a man dropped another took his place. Boats were swinging into the river. The clamor of guns, which until now he had not heard at all, broke out with renewed vigor. The great Zeppelin moved sluggishly over toward the opposite bank. A tall building crashed down. The deadly macarite was driving out the defenders from the cardboard refuges into which they had retreated.

Even the phlegmatic Von Graf, Morgan saw, was intensely excited. His cold, bluish face was wet with perspiration. There was no hint of sympathy for the dead and dying in his eyes as he lowered the glasses and fixed his gaze momentarily on Morgan.

"Flanders, Picardy, Artois, and Champagne—those are the fields we drove them over," Von Hollman's voice came, apparently from a long way off. "Meaux and Lagny are over there. They can hear our field guns in the Parisian cafés right now. It is 1870 over again—in spite of Belgium, and not at all bad for a month of fighting. Well, have you seen enough?"

Morgan pulled himself together.

"Outside of those poor devils down on the river there isn't much to see," said he. "This would be paradise, general, for men of my profession after your army has passed, if we could collect the usual fees from the patients."

Whatever transpired, he must treat it casually. The two questions he had been asking himself for some moments now were thudding at his brain with the jarring insistence of a dentist's drill at a tooth. What was Von Hollman's motive in bringing him out here? And, despite what he had himself beheld, was Charlotte really able—in all this frightful wreckage of customs, institutions, and normalities of civilized living—to get safely through to Calais or Havre?

Morgan did not see the curious look of triumph with which Von Hollman watched him. Perhaps it was as well. There was something in the German's gaze that would have recalled their first

encounter at the "Waldermeister bowl," and yet something new and even more puzzling.

But Morgan's vision was introspective. He was trying to picture what the conditions were when Etienne Martin had landed. The telegraph operator, whose consuming ambition had burned its way through all barriers until he had become an expert aviator, was no ordinary man. The hope which his skill and dash had communicated to Morgan that last morning, back near Givet, was with the young American still. Martin possessed the true fortitude of soul with which heroes are endowed, else he would have never pinned his faith to the unseen chances of an aviator's hazardous career. Also he was a typical Frenchman—the kind which brings down fire from heaven in an emergency.

Beside all of that, he had a still greater reason for preserving Charlotte. Gratitude is still more than a phrase in France, and but for Charlotte's fiancé, Martin's rise from the earth would have been at the end of a rope.

Therefore, it seemed quite reasonable to believe that the little aviator had certainly seen to it that Charlotte was safely within the French lines; and Charlotte herself was equally certainly a girl of sufficient good sense and force of character to make her way out of the danger zone.

The little imp of doubt sprang up again.

But were conditions such that she could? What unknown difficulties had sprung up with which a girl might not be able to cope? Society had fallen apart—that is, that for which the name is generally accepted to stand. Only the shell of it remained. The rights of individuals were a memory—the shell of the state was the supreme fact. Charlotte had passports, money; but, for that matter, so had the marooned people in Luxemburg for whom Robert Cameron was probably still caring.

What, then, must things be like in Paris, or the surrounding country? Had Charlotte, with true feminine perversity, foolishly awaited his own coming? It would not be altogether unlike her. He hoped she had not, for, in the event Von Hollman's confident assertion that Paris would be taken in a couple of days was realized, there might be new complications—and more formidable ones, perhaps.

The top of the protected hill was the last place in the world that Morgan would have occupied just then had he been free to choose. It was peopled not alone with the hobgoblins of his growing uneasiness. Von Hollman also was a sneering devil, taunting him at his elbow—but why?

He tried to reason it out impersonally. But his professional instinct was gone. He was the lover—not the physician.

Then he heard Von Graf's hoarse cry of triumph, and the little flag lieutenant out on the parapet turned exultantly, whistling softly but melodiously the same song that Morgan had heard the night before his court-martial—*"Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles!"*

Mechanically Morgan raised his glasses. He had come out here, a man privileged above any other civilian in the world, to watch the unprecedented spectacle of the decisive battle his host had mentioned. Instead of the marvelous panorama he had expected to see, he was merely sitting with a knot of unconcerned men on a dirt-crowned parapet, watching a mass of less fortunate men now rushing across the pontoon on the Marne, and fighting for a toehold on the farther bank. Compared to the pictures of great battles he had seen in the art galleries of the Continent it was like going to a paper mill at home and watching the logs go in one end of the building and the

bundles of paper come out at the other. All of the bloodshed, the hand-to-hand contests, the shouts of the living, the moans of the dying, were hidden from his eyes and muffled from his ears. He saw the ends sought to be achieved. The very men who planned them did not trouble themselves to look upon the means, save when they could not avoid it.

To such base uses had come all the heritage of the dead past, all the conscious realities of the present—a knot of jubilant men on a tawdry, rock-crowned hill.

Morgan recalled the platitudes he had heard regarding "patriotism." Once they had thundered to his ears, filling his soul with ardent resolves, kindling in him the loftiest and most inspiring emotions.

Now they seemed to have been transmuted into meanness, cowardice, and fraud, and the immortal deeds of heroic history were deluding myths.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BATTLE AT THE FISH PONDS.

Brigadier General von Hollman was careful to repress outward signs of his own jubilation at the success of the turning movement, but Morgan, nevertheless, detected it in the carefully modulated invitation to accompany the staff officers to their new position.

His own depression had been so pronounced that it left him calm and stoical. With humanity at the mercy of the merciless he stood like a surgeon looking at a dying man. France was reeling back, mortally wounded.

In such a time his professional instinct was always more alert, and the young American, in the interim until the string of armored automobiles moved forward, began again his dissection of this inscrutable young man where he had left off the analysis at the Château de Herthereaux, a month before.

Von Hollman's first words startled him out of his thought.

"I know where there are some bully fish in a pond over there, doctor. What do you say to a mess for dinner?"

"Are you thinking of going after them yourself?"

"Why not?" The tone of amused contempt was too plain to be misunderstood. "Those poor devils have got enough for to-day. And to-morrow we'll drive them into Paris."

"I think a change of diet would be very welcome. How far are they from here?"

"Just over the river—you can see the ponds once we get in among the trees on the west bank."

It struck Morgan that Von Hollman's remark a while back regarding details was not an empty boast, and he commented on it in a casual way. His companion seemed pleased at the observation.

"We have known, of course, for a very long time that Germany must eventually fight France and England, Russia probably—and, but for a fortunate thing which no human foresight could anticipate—possibly our present ally, Austria."

"You amaze me," said Morgan.

"Of course. That was another reason for my using the term barbarian the day we met. The world does not comprehend anything of the extent of Germany's readiness. I ask you, doctor, could we have done what we have without intellect?"

"Certainly not. But may not intellect, in its highest sense, be devoted to nobler aims?"

"Undoubtedly. But Germany must have room. We are no larger than France. Yet we have many millions more of people. How could we expand? Look at the events of recent years and you will see why we were

forced to fight—to live. Therefore, we prepared. In war, ethics are theories. Batteries, not books, win battles. We shall be assailed for winning, but our revilers do not yet know that the foundations for our heaviest artillery were laid in time of peace."

Morgan saw they were already at the edge of the Marne. Sturdy soldiers, standing waist-deep in the water on either side, minimized the sway of the pontoons as the heavy vehicles crossed. Here and there on the banks was a ghastly heap—what had once been a soldier of the Fatherland.

Morgan shifted his shudder into a pretended yawn, glancing sidewise at Von Hollman's face. It was pale, but still wore the characteristic look of confident pride.

Leaving the preparation of the new staff headquarters to his subordinates, Von Hollman directed his chauffeur to push on. The cavalry was deploying over the fields several miles ahead. More troops were pouring in behind them, and field batteries were taking up new positions. The retreating enemy was resisting stubbornly, but the Zeppelin was signaling constant changes of range to the enormous siege guns on the farther bank, besides pouring deadly shells into whatever cover the fugitives sought in which to make still another of the endless and stubborn stands that a rear guard makes to cover the retirement of an army corps.

"If I were a French general," said Von Hollman, "I wouldn't mind being driven back, but I surely would be thoroughly mortified at losing a supper of splendid fish." He pointed toward a sheet of water screened by poplars. "Doctor, do they bite well toward sundown or before a rain? I guess we're in for a wetting to-morrow."

There was a chorus of lusty cheers as he stepped from the automobile. A regiment of Prussian infantry, marching with swinging stride, flashed helmets aloft on bayonets at the sight of their general. The spontaneous tribute seemed to touch him. His own hand went up smartly in salute, and although his face was cold and proud there was a mist in his eyes.

Morgan's first uneasy feeling that Von Hollman might be tempting fate overmuch died away. The artillery was sending a hissing rain of shells over their heads, demolishing the woods beyond the cavalry screen. How men could still find heart to fight against such overwhelming odds—not alone of numbers—but of science, was beyond him. The cavalry and the infantry were now between them and the scattered remnants of the once indomitable French army corps. It would seem that they were, after all, quite safe; besides Von Hollman should know—he knew everything, even to details.

"Come on, doctor," cried the count. "Let me see if your claim to a sportsman is, after all, justified. Try this net—I packed it in my kit before leaving Luxemburg, for use here."

His boyish enthusiasm was more pleasing than his cold discourses on the best way to kill a given number of men in the shortest time, and Morgan accepted with alacrity.

"Would you mind bringing a few crumbs? There is some lunch under the seat." Von Hollman was walking along the side of the pond, with an eye to some particular spot.

Morgan complied, scattering the fragments on the surface of the water, just now lighted with a sunset that would have been most beautiful were it not for the war. The crimson rays threw great sheets of red across the landscape; the scarlet of the falling leaves bravely flaunted their colors as if flinging back a message to the source of their life; a heavenly calm settled down, for an imperceptible instant, over the little pond, and even the great guns, miles behind, stilled their hoarse uproar.

That hour of dusk on that evening was one that Morgan was to remember for a long time. As the sun set the sounds of war died away completely. The historic fish ponds of St. Estephe, built and stocked forgotten centuries ago by pious monks, were fringed and masked by tall, slim poplars. Elsewhere the poplars had been swept down by artillery fire, but here they stood, still and spectral, against the darkening sky. Von Hollman caught his fish with the net, and his orderly cooked them, and after supper, which Morgan shared with him, they sat there, watching the shimmer of the stars in the gleam of the water. Once a major riding past saluted Von Hollman and suggested that the point he had chosen for a bivouac was not of the safest.

"You are beyond our outposts," he said. "Our cavalry scouts have been drawn in."

Von Hollman laughed. "It is safe," he said. "The Allies have gone. When we marched by night, did we not find them fleeing before us? Perhaps when the moon rises we shall march again."

The major withdrew, evidently dissatisfied, and a short time later a company of infantry of the line passed them and speedily intrenched themselves on the other side of the screen of poplars.

"They are anxious for my safety," said Von Hollman, "but I, somehow, I feel that I am not to die till I see Paris first. And in the meantime, since we have conquered part of France, we shall drink some of the wine of France."

He called his orderly, and he and Morgan pledged each other in Burgundy.

The wine had come from the cellar of one château, and the goblets were part of the service of another. Watching the dark face of the count in the flickering light of a lantern, Morgan reflected that war was much the same through all the ages. So he might have sat and drunk the wine of the conquered country had he followed the eagles of Cæsar, or the standards of Clovis or Charlemagne or the battle flags of Tilly or Wallenstein; and so, countless times this same country had been wasted, by Roman, by Hun, by Frank, by Norman, by English, only to grow anew into fresh greenness and beauty, only to raise once again its vineyards, its temples, and palaces.

Von Hollman was in a discursive, happy sort of mood. Morgan had once had a Scotch nurse who told him that people were "fey"—talkative and happy to an unusual degree—always when the hour of death was close upon them. The memory of it came back to him now. It seemed that Von Hollman was "fey." Morgan had never known him so winning, so ingratiating, so sparkling. He asked hundreds of questions about America and discussed its future. Before Morgan knew it he was telling Von Hollman the whole story of his own life, and Von Hollman was listening, apparently spellbound.

"You Americans," he sighed at length. "Perhaps it was so with us when the first Teutons came from the north. Perhaps then there was the same freedom, the same hope, the same sense of irresponsibility. But now—the humblest American is a happier and freer man than a prince of the blood in Germany."

He rose up, and strode to and fro.

"We are friends to-night," he said, turning suddenly and facing Morgan.

"I hope so."

"We may be enemies again some time, but it is well to remember this one night."

The sun had set long ago, and it was hours till moonrise. Von Hollman's figure was just a darker shadow against the dark of the poplars and the

night beyond. Suddenly his form drew erect and tense, and from some premonition that he has never been able to understand, Morgan also leaped to his feet, filled with a sense of danger, of danger that seemed to be lurking somewhere to the south, beyond the screen of poplars.

They had heard no sound as yet. The intrenched outpost beyond them was absolutely still and quiet. For a tense moment they stood there, shoulder to shoulder, German and American both trying to pierce the gloom beyond. There was a sudden cry in German, the flash and crack of a rifle, and then an unearthly outburst of sound: a crashing volley, a shrill, piercing yell, hoarser, deeper shouts in German, and a scattering fire just beyond the poplars.

Von Hollman started forward, half drawing his pistol, but before he had taken a step the inclosure about the fish ponds was filled with struggling, fighting men and lit with the flash of their weapons. What was left of the German outpost came staggering back to the edge of the water and driven into it by the onrush of the attacking force. Fighting hard with butt and bayonet, dropping one by one, but steadily falling back, knee deep, breast high, struggling and slipping in the water. An instant later came an avalanche of men, a dark bolt tipped with bright steel and yellow flashes of fire. Above the shattering outburst of their rifle fire sounded the shrill, terrific din of their yelling. They were Highland soldiers, kilted and bare-kneed. After the first volley they fired but seldom, but thrust with the bayonet and swore like fiends in a mad abandon of fighting fury. Splashing across the pond they came, catching the retreating Germans in the flank, and for a few moments which seemed hours, the fish ponds, so peaceful a short time before, were turned into a ghastly pandemonium.

Morgan saw Von Hollman's automatic flash out again and again. Through the trees he could hear further shrill yells and the loud, amazing drone and neighing of bagpipes. A lieutenant and a squad of men had rallied suddenly around Von Hollman and himself. The lieutenant emptied his automatic and flung it in the face of a giant with bare knees. His hand went to his sword, but he was too late. The bayonet of the Highlander met him full in the chest, and when he drew it forth again the lieutenant was dead on his feet. As he fell so three others fell, and Morgan and Von Hollman were in the thick of the press. A rifle butt caught Von Hollman across his chest. He dropped to his knees and fell backward. Over him stood another barelegged man with rifle upraised, the bayonet descending on his breast.

The same instinct that had made him turn aside the charge of the uhlan in Luxemburg dominated Morgan now. His hands were grasping the barrel of the rifle, trying to twist the steel of the bayonet away from Von Hollman's breast. As he struggled with the Highlander some one else fired between them so that the powder scorched Morgan's face. Another rifle butt swept down, striking him on the head, pitching him forward, senseless, across the body of the Prussian he had tried to save.

The battle of the fish ponds was over. Already the cannon of the Germans could be heard again. Already bugles and rifle shots told that their main column was coming up to the support of the surprised and raided outpost. British officers were calling in their men, bringing them in, urging them to hurry. The raiding party had delivered its stroke. It was the business of the rear guard to delay the German advance and to drive in outposts whenever possible. Above the fish ponds machine guns and fieldpieces were wheeling into place, and as the British

withdrew, leaving Highlander and German piled together about the still pond, they opened fire and swept the glade with a rain of lead and steel.

The battle of the fish ponds was the slightest episode in a long retreat. The officer who had led the attackers made the briefest report of his exploit, and it was not even mentioned in the general report of Sir John French. It had turned the peaceful spot into a shambles, and it played its little part in the long campaigns of the Marne and the Aisne. For an hour the plunging fire of the artillery continued, for an hour searchlights from armored motor and air craft searched the hills beyond. Regiments of tired troops were called out far to left and right, and the sullen, intermittent roar of guns to the south told where the enemy were slowly retiring.

Undiscovered, as if dead, Morgan and Hollman lay beside the fish ponds.

CHAPTER XXII.

"THE PATHS OF GLORY."

The moon had risen high long before Morgan had recovered consciousness. A thin, white mist drifted up from the winding valley of the Marne, and when he rose slowly to his feet he looked about him, through a silvery haze that made things seem unreal without hiding them. He looked out now on what seemed a new world. The poplar trees were gone. The fire of the machine guns, like the scythe of a giant reaper, had shorn them off about six feet from the ground, leaving rows of blackened stumps behind. Gone forever were the fish ponds of the monks of St. Estephe. More than one shell had burst in them, the dam had been broken, the ancient walls shattered, and all that was left was a muddy hole where a small stream trickled. Beyond the rows of stumps were the trenches filled with dead. Near him was an automobile turned on its side, burned and twisted beyond repair. On all sides lay the dead. Mostly they were Germans, but here and there the bare knees and mustached face of a dead Highlander showed that the raiders had suffered as well. Beside him, shot through the heart, lay the soldier whose bayonet had threatened Von Hollman. It may have been the flicker of moonlight, but it seemed as if there were a faint, contented smile on the dead face.

With head still ringing and bewildered, he turned to Von Hollman, who lay face upward. He bent over him. Von Hollman had been shot through the body, the rifle that had been fired close to Morgan's face in the last struggle had done the business, but his heart was still beating. Morgan rose hurriedly, his mind clearing. His training as a doctor furnished him with an instinct that guided him as well as reason. Not far off through the mist he heard voices, and going forward saw at last a man wearing the unmistakable brassard of the Red Cross. He called to him, and a moment later Von Hollman—all that was left of him—was on a stretcher, and Morgan, who had been stunned, but was little hurt, was being cared for and plied with restoratives. The recent weeks had made many friends for him, especially among the officials of the Red Cross.

The old stone *poste restante* that stood at that time on the banks of the Marne had been there for centuries, but it is there no longer. This battle had spared it with its torrent of steel; but another battle—when the armies fared differently—and the old edifice, sturdy stone, vine-covered, was gone.

It was in a room on the ground floor of this ancient inn that Von Hollman was laid, and it was to that room, hours later, well toward morning, that Morgan was summoned.

He found the count propped up in

bed, but even if his examination on the battlefield had not told him that Von Hollman's sands were running short in the glass of life, one glance at his countenance was enough to say so now. Other hands as skillful as Morgan's had bound him—the best medical skill of the army of invasion had been summoned, but a Prussian general—indeed if all that had been hinted to Morgan were true, something more than a Prussian general and nobleman—had received his deathblow in a trifling skirmish of outposts, not worth chronicle in the history of battle. A chance bullet, fired by an unknown private, and Von Hollman's brilliant mind had only a few more hours to flicker; and his scheming ambition had planned in vain.

The officers on either side of the old four-poster bed drew back at a wave from Von Hollman's hand as Morgan entered the room.

"Come, American," said Von Hollman. "Come close to me. I have not long to live and not much breath to waste."

"I am sorry," said Morgan simply.

"Indeed, I believe you are!" Von Hollman's cheek was pale, but his eyes were bright. "I saw you, my friend, grasp at the rifle with your big hands and twist the steel aside from my breast. Had it not been for you I would not have lived this long. You tried, at the risk of life, to save me. And only a few weeks ago you risked your life to save the spy, Martin—the enemy of the Fatherland. What manner of man are you?"

"I am a surgeon," said Morgan, "not a soldier. My business is to save life, not to take it."

"You are a prisoner of the German army," said Von Hollman. "Suppose I were to say that at my death you would be set free—and that if I lived that you were likely to be shot as a spy, would you still have tried to save me in the fight by the fish ponds?"

"I think so," said Morgan.

"Because you are a physician?"

"No; because of no thought or calculation or profession. Because I can't stand by and see a man killed."

"And yet I was your rival and enemy."

"You were my enemy."

There was silence for a moment. The two German officers who were the only witnesses to this strange meeting drew farther back into the shadows. The fire which had been lighted on the broad hearth leaped up into a blaze, then sank again. Von Hollman's thin, tapering fingers played nervously with the signet ring he wore.

"Come, Dr. Morgan," he said at length. "Do you remember the prinzessin—the gnadige fräulein—Miss Cameron?"

Morgan nodded.

"You loved her, perhaps."

"Yes," said Morgan at length.

"I loved her. Could I have held her by force, would you have fought me for her?"

"I might have killed you, perhaps," said Morgan slowly.

"And yet at another time you try to save my life. Why is it?"

"I might have killed you that night at Givet—to save Charlotte from you—and to save you from yourself."

"From myself! You think I have a higher and a lower nature?"

"Some doctors might describe it in longer words, but that is what I think."

Von Hollman's somber eyes were fixed on the signet ring. The lower nature, the fatal obsession, the insane pride, and the dominant egotism had left him now. The hand of death was already on his brow, and had stricken it away from him.

"You Americans are strange people," he said, "but you have your own code, and perhaps it is a good one." He raised himself a little on the pillows.

"Doctor Morgan," he said, "do you know where Charlotte is?"

"In England, I hope."

Von Hollman signaled with waxy hand. An officer stepped forward, and then drew back again. The door swung open, and a white-clad figure entered the room. It was Charlotte Cameron.

Had she been a ghost Morgan would have been no more surprised, but she was flesh and blood. It seemed the culmination of a terrible and surprising day.

"Fairfax," she said, "it's I, still in the flesh and well—not a ghost."

Morgan glanced back at Von Hollman. The faint shadow of his old satirical smile showed on his face.

"You see, my friend," he said, "I have been deceiving you. Miss Cameron had not escaped the German army, after all. The village she was left in by the French spy was captured by my own army corps, and Miss Cameron has been safe with us ever since."

"And her uncle?"

"Her uncle will be here to-morrow. A message was sent to him an hour ago. For weeks past Miss Cameron has been with the reserve Red Cross. Doctor Morgan—to-night my hour has come and I sent for her."

He dropped back on the pillows. One of the officers stepped forward and motioned imperatively to Morgan, pointing to a table beside the bed. On it lay a hypodermic syringe with the tubes, containing the strychnine and digitalis and sterilized water.

Morgan administered the drug, and a moment later a faint color showed in Von Hollman's cheeks and his eyes opened again.

"Prinzessin," he said, "Doctor Morgan, these are my last words. I am not to live till Paris falls the second time. I am not to live till Germany finds her place in the sun, till her colonies circle the globe, till hers is the world language and the world culture. It has been mine to see the vision, to plan, to work for my imperial master, but not to see the fulfillment of the dream—as you shall see it, prinzessin—and as I hoped to see it with you."

Charlotte's fair head was bowed a little, and her eyes were misty. Von Hollman watched her. There was nothing of the old egotism and cold passion in his face now, nothing but affection and tenderness.

"Fräulein," he said, "do you love Doctor Morgan?"

Charlotte nodded, unable to speak.

"Then be happy with him when I am gone. Von Graf has your passports and more beside. You will find the way clear to America. Germany has no quarrel with children. My hour has come. I had hoped much and planned much, but as your English poet says, 'The paths of glory lead but to the grave.' Gnadige fräulein!"

"Yes," said Charlotte.

"Would you not come near to me?" Von Hollman's voice was feeble. "And take this ring as a gift and token—to you and to the brave man who twice would have given his life for others, and who shall now give his life in happier fashion to you?"

Charlotte took the ring.

"And would you not let me clasp your hand, prinzessin, for the river is deep and the water is swift and cold?"

Charlotte's hand caught his.

"*Du bist die ruh*——" Von Hollman's voice faltered and died away. For a time they thought he had fainted or fallen into a slumber, but presently the officer stepped forward, unclasped his hand from Charlotte's, and folded both hands across the breast of his dead prince and general.

He turned to Charlotte and Morgan with a salute.

"Prinzessin," he said, "and Herr Doctor, quarters have been set apart for you. To-morrow you are to start for Holland."

Charlotte and Morgan left the room together. At the door Charlotte held up the ring Von Hollman had given her and they both looked at it in the lamplight. It was a perfectly plain gold signet. In its head was a crystal stone, engraved with the arms of the family of Hohenzollern.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OUT OF THE MAELSTROM.

So it was that the end of Otto von Hollman, general in the German army, strange descendant of a proud and ancient race, left happier memories and kinder thoughts with both Charlotte and Morgan than they had ever expected to hold for him. His life flickered out at dawn, when vitality is ever at the weakest. Almost at the moment his white hands were folded on his breast, his bugles were awakening his army to another day. Already the Taube aëroplanes had taken the air, and soared high in the first rays of sunlight over the winding Marne, already the cavalry outposts, the first thin tentacles of the advancing monster, were pushing east and south, nearer and nearer to terrified Paris. The newly awakened rumble of the great guns reverberating from the low hills of Epernay were the last sounds perhaps which reached his ear. The army for which he had dreamed and worked was still moving south. It had not yet received its first check, and when Von Hollman died he left Germany serene and triumphant on its march toward its place in the sun.

Morgan and Charlotte, however, were to see no more fighting. Von Hollman's hand seemed as powerful and far-reaching after death as in life; the passports he had left them signed in a feeble scrawl with his own hand were treated with instant respect—even by Von Graf, and his signet ring, the clew to the mystery of his power and identity, made Charlotte an object of almost superstitious awe.

Weak as Von Hollman was from loss of blood, and wrung as he must have been by deadly pain, he left behind him evidences of the thoroughness and clarity of his mind. Whatever had been his plans for the next world he had made an effort, truly heroic, to leave his affairs in this world in good order. A motor car was ready to take Charlotte and Morgan northward, and they were truly surprised and delighted to see Healy on the front seat beside the driver. He had been busy on the inner line of communications of the army and had not even heard of the affair of the fish ponds of St. Estephe. Von Hollman's death was news to him.

"He was a nut," reflected Healy, "but like some nuts, he was clever. But on the level, doc, if he had lived he'd have put you out of the way and Miss Cameron would have had a hard time dodging him. An' you tried to save his life, eh? Why didn't you let the English kid stick it into him?"

"It's just as well that I didn't," said Morgan. "We wouldn't have had these passports now."

"An' yet they say that self-preservation is the first law of nature," said Healy.

"It was self-preservation to save his life," said Morgan. "After he came to his senses he was a good deal more use to me alive than dead."

"After he came to his senses! An' the only way to bring him to his senses was to kill him. An' so he turns out to be a good, tender-hearted guy, after all. The only trouble with him was that you had to kill him to cure him of what was the matter with him. Say, doc, on the level, it's a queer world!"

They were to meet Mr. Cameron at Mons, in Belgium, where it had been arranged by wire that he was to go by train from Luxemburg, and all the

way north their passage lay well within the German lines. A part of Von Hollman's last hour of life had been spent in ordering the messages sent, in ordering the car and chauffeur, and in laying out their route.

Those who have seen the devastations of war in the sun-drenched Mexican deserts or on the dreary wastes of Manchuria, know that it is terrible, but they can form little idea from that of what it has done in Europe. Where Russian and Prussian are facing each other far to the east, the country is thinly settled and deserted, but this land, through which Morgan and Charlotte now passed, is one of the most fertile, and was once one of the most prosperous countrysides on earth.

It was a land of placid, winding rivers, of rich valleys, of cultivated hillsides, and straight white roads. Before the war it was a place of little villages, busy and prosperous, each with its church spires and public square, shouldering each other so closely as to make it seem one great suburban park. Poplars, tall and slender, once grew along each river bank and on either side of the roads, but now black stumps and an occasional blasted tree showed where the green trees once had been.

The roads themselves had been turned into dusty ruts. Fields defaced with trenches, scarred with shell fire, trampled by regiments of horse and foot, black and desolate, showed nothing of the crop that only that August had been tended with loving care. Some villages had escaped—for war, like a tornado, sweeps away one house and leaves the next—but town after town had been turned into a ruin by artillery fire, with nothing but blackened gables and heaps of brick and stone to show where they once had stood. And along every road and in every field were other evidences of waste and destruction. In the hurry of that first marvelous advance, conqueror as well as conquered left shattered and useless equipment behind them. Helmets rolled by the roadsides, abandoned artillery wagons and guns out of order lay in the fields, here and there a wrecked automobile and straggling windrows of accouterments showed where some engagement had been fought. After the first few hours they had passed the reserve lines of the advancing army, the sight of which was stirring in its way, but beyond this it was a dreary and saddening journey. Newly made graves with little wooden crosses, frightened and dejected peasants crawling about their ruined fields, and the occasional column of a supply or ammunition train going south—this was all there was to see, and they were glad at last when night came on to shut it from them.

They found Mr. Cameron awaiting them in the little hotel at Mons. The wire from Von Hollman had been the first hint he had received that they were not safely back in the United States. He was overjoyed to see them again, but his duty called him back soon to Luxemburg. Charlotte suggested going back with him, but he was insistent on her getting to America as soon as possible. They breakfasted together, and he heard the story of their attempted escape and of Von Hollman's death. He looked curiously at the ring which Charlotte handed him.

"In Germany," he said, "what the government declares secret is never published—scarce whispered, not even hinted at in most cases. Wear the ring or keep it, but say nothing of why that shield is cut in the stone, or of what more famous name may be concealed behind Von Hollman's identity. Whether his imperial master is his kinsman or not, he nas served him well and died a fitting death."

In Mons and on the journey across to the coast their passports proved as reliable as ever, and as the first rush

of homeward-bound Americans had gone, there was little difficulty in getting passage from England.

With ports all covered and no lights showing, their steamer stole out from Southampton, past the Isle of Wight, and headed down the channel. It was a dark and silent channel, but it had its guardians.

First from the right, then from the left came the searchlight of a war vessel throwing its glaring disk over the whole ship and dwelling a moment on the signal flags. To right and to left, for miles across the dark sea, stretched the fleets of France and England, and they knew that there was an even greater fleet in the North Sea watching the German coast.

Europe was dropping far behind them—Europe torn and disfigured and in ruins—and the broad billows and sweeping winds of the western ocean were rushing in to meet them. Battleship after battleship cast its great beam across the two figures on the after deck of the liner, and more than one young naval officer envied the two lovers, as he thought them.

They were indeed lovers, but it was a silent, still affection that held them beside each other, and thought and memory came so fast that there was little speech between them. They had indeed seen the pride of power and the towering sweep of racial and kingly ambition. But they had also seen the darker side of the picture, the seamy side of the cloth of gold, the rent within the armor. There were homelier, dearer visions—ideals that seemed nobler far than anything that war could ever bring, men of finer mold for all that they wore no crowns or decoration—all the gentler, truer, higher things that the future holds in trust for us were westward somewhere across the dark sea, and westward they were bound.

For the struggling hosts of Europe fate had not yet made the final cast of the dice, nor would not for many a day, but for them was the assurance of peace and happiness.

"So," said Morgan at length, "I am to marry a German princess?"

"No princess," said Charlotte, "just plain American."

"One who wears the signet ring of Hohenzollern."

"No," said Charlotte. "See!" She held the ring, the token of Von Hollman, out over the rail. Morgan tried to grasp her arm, but she had thrown the ring from her. It disappeared in the dark. "So much for royal families and princesses," said Charlotte. "It was a wonderful ring, but somehow I'd rather not keep it. I don't think it would bring good luck. And don't you like me at all, just as I am, without the ring? And aren't *you* going to give me a ring, anyway?"

THE END.

The Other Fellow's Signals

By Charles B. Couchman

In business as in football if you let the opposing team get hold of your signals the game is already won—for the other fellow. Young Keene, fresh from college, bucks the business line as he bucked the line on the football checkerboard, and if he gave most of his attention to the signals of his rivals the results proved his wisdom

"HERE'S the whole thing in a nutshell, son." William Waller, backer of a dozen gigantic enterprises, feared in many commercial circles, was speaking to young Keene Waller, who just then knew much more of frats and gridirons and clambakes than of high finance. "The Calculator Company, with old man Allwin at its head, has swallowed every competitor in the adding-machine world but one. My Arithdevice Company is that one, and Allwin has his fire all lit to cook us. In fact, the kettle's on and the water's hot!"

"How's he doing it, dad? Got you tied for funds?"

"No; for something to sell! In taking in all those competing companies he got the results of the experimenting each had done, and by putting one thing here with another there he has covered the field on everything in the line of calculating machines. Our experiment department is working its head off, but everything we develop we find has been anticipated. Our present Model K is a dandy, but the business world is about ready for something more advanced and we are not prepared to give it. Allwin is. His company is planning now the campaign for the new multiplying machine they are going to put out next year. Works interest and discount and everything that way. Bonanza for banks, you see. It will open up a regular gold-mine field, and we ought to be in at the opening; but we won't—unless a miracle happens before then."

The young man said nothing, and the father gazed at him speculatively a moment, then continued:

"Now, Keene, I understand you have made quite a reputation as a goat-getter in the varsity; and I am going to get yours by putting you up against some real fighters. The boys at college think you amount to some pumpkins, just because you toddle over a few other infants with your football and racing shells; but now you are going up against some of the hardened old sinners your dad has been scrapping with all these years. You will probably notice a change of atmosphere—but the experience will do you good.

"A man in Chicago claims to have invented just the machine we happen to want. Somebody must get there at once and keep Allwin's men off until we get a chance at it. You are that somebody. The very fact that Allwin's men don't know you will be in your favor. The fellow is suspicious and gives no address but 'general delivery,' but we will find out particulars by letter and wire, and you will be there Johnny-on-the-spot to do whatever there is to do. Don't think there will be any fun about it. He claims to have a machine that multiplies with one pull of a lever. If he has that, or half that, we

want it bad—it will keep us out of old Allwin's kettle—but Allwin and his trust will want it just as bad as we do, and he will go after it hard."

"We'll get it, daddo."

"Perhaps. The probability is there is nothing to the machine. Our mails are flooded with letters from people who think they have invented something; not one in a hundred is worth the cost of the investigation, but we have to keep on investigating for the sake of that hundredth one. This fellow refuses to bring his machine here, so we will have to go to the machine. If there happens to be something to it—then the fireworks will begin! Sonny, you thought you did some scrapping on your eleven—you don't even know what a scrap is! You may have a chance now to find out."

Keene grinned tolerantly. "Who will go with me?" he inquired.

"I think I'll send Peter Wynne. He knows the Calculator people and machines and will be able to size up the value of the invention if he gets to see it."

There followed some discussion on the Arithdevice Company and its needs, and of the unknown inventor who had been content to sign himself "David Ganes," with no more illuminating address than "General Delivery, Chicago." He had not patented his invention, and therein had proven himself wise. The instant patent papers are applied for, that instant the corporations with which an inventor must deal later become acquainted with every point of value about his device, may even beat him to the patent itself, or, failing in that, are prepared to meet him with complete knowledge of every card he holds and with ample opportunity to stack the deck for the contest, which scarcely deserves that name.

David Ganes had written fully what his invention would do, with no reference as to how it did it. He asked that a representative of the company come prepared to make a contract with him depending only on the machine doing what he claimed it would, and that such contract would have to be signed and delivered before any one would get a chance to see the machine. He knew the company would be safe enough in signing such a contract, and was trying to protect himself while he could.

Knowing that a similar letter had unquestionably been sent to the trust, officially known as the Calculator Company, Waller lost no time in replying to Ganes that an Arithdevice representative would meet him whenever he desired.

"If the invention is all he claims, and we get it, we can put the trust very much to the bad, for a time at least—perhaps long enough to get so firmly planted that we can't be put out at all. On the other hand, if they get it—it is good-by to the Arithdevice Company! So, my son, go to it!"

"Don't worry, daddo; that don't sound half as bad as the Carlisle team did, and you remember what we did to them, eh?"

Keene Waller, university graduate, noted therein as an athlete rather than a grind, felt fully confident of himself in the new rôle, and phoned to the plant for Peter Wynne.

Peter had been Keene's chum in varsity, was a skilled diemaker and machinist, and had spent his vacations in the Arithdevice experiment shop. There was little he did not know about the mechanism of calculating devices. He would grasp at once the mechanical value of any new principle utilized in any machine they might see, and would also have a fair idea of its commercial worth to the Arithdevice Company at the present time.

A conference between these two resulted in a visit to the experiment vaults, where they worked for hours, and the

later shipment to Chicago of a very peculiar machine.

In Chicago, after breakfast, they arranged a plan of communicating in case they should have to separate, and set out for the post office. From a recess in the general-delivery section, they found they could readily watch the G window for any one who might inquire for mail for David Ganes. They had no more than taken up their position when Peter pulled Keene back a ways and whispered:

"Don't look now, but there is a man from the Calculator Company—Jack Kennedy—ahead of us. He is watching that window as if his life depended on it."

"Does he know either of us?"

"I am quite sure he doesn't."

"Then you wait here for Ganes. I'll try to get this fellow out of the way," and Keene stepped into the line at the G window. When his turn came, he asked for mail for David Ganes, turning his head as he did so, that Kennedy would be sure to catch the name.

The clerk handed out two big envelopes. On one Keene recognized the bold cornerpiece of the Calculator Company. The other was from the Arithdevice. An intense desire to know what was in the former welled up in him, along with the thought of how easy it would be to find out; but that was not the way he was playing the game; and he slid the letters unobtrusively back to the clerk, remarking in low tone that they must be for another David Ganes.

He realized that Kennedy was watching him closely, but he was able to slip some letters from his pocket, which he carefully opened and began reading with apparent interest as he walked away from the window, the well-known trade-mark of the Arithdevice showing plainly.

As he turned toward the exit, he saw that Kennedy had put away the paper he had been pretending to read and was following casually along the corridor. Down to the quarter of the city where old, half-deserted office buildings are numerous, Keene led his innocent follower. Finding a building with a double entrance, he slipped out one way while Kennedy waited at the other. Then he hastened to the hotel.

Here he soon received word from Peter to join him at once at the La Salle Hotel. Keene hastened there, and found Peter seated in the long lobby, where he could watch all comers and goers.

"He's here," he greeted Keene. "He came up to the window ten minutes after you and Kennedy left. It's a good thing you got Kennedy away, or he would have been right on the trail with me. Ganes came here, and I followed him like a sleuth. He stopped at the desk for a key and took the elevator. I did not follow him farther, thinking it best to find out his room at the desk."

"Did you?"

"No; it occurred to me that if I inquired now, they would want to send me right up with a boy, and I thought best to wait until you came."

"Good! But we don't need to wait longer. Let's tackle him right now."

Keene started to rise, but Peter pulled him back to his seat.

"Kingdom come! Look at that! No, don't look either. Keep out of sight."

"What is it?"

"Ganes is coming down the lobby chatting with Kennedy!"

"What!"

"Yes, and if Kennedy spots us and recognizes you as the fellow who called for Ganes' mail there will be a dickens of an explanation to make!"

Kennedy and his companion took no notice of the two, but turned into the café.

"They are acting like old chums," Peter declared. "I fear me—I fear me the way will be rough for little Willie."

Keene was sitting with a perplexed look on his face. Suddenly he spoke.

"Did Ganes see you this morning, do you think?"

"No, I don't think he noticed me at all."

"Then go in and dine as near them as possible. Hear all you can and report to me at the hotel. If they have stolen a march on us like this, we must resort to desperate measures."

Peter rose and strolled into the café. Keene waited a moment, and then casually left the hotel. In passing the entrance, he caught a glimpse of Peter industriously studying a menu, and a table or so away were the two in whom he was just then so interested. Kennedy had his back to the window, but Keene had a fair view of the other man. There was something about him that gave Keene a vague feeling of uneasiness.

He did not look like a great inventor. Instead of the face showing the result of long, hard strain of thought, of the almost overwhelming fight which is part of the inheritance of every inventor, of the nervousness which would naturally be his when dealing with a representative of the great and fearful trust, holding in its hand the inventor's whole future—instead of all this, which Keene expected to see, the fellow seemed fat and well fed, not overly intellectual, and very much at his ease.

Keene pondered this character all the way back to his hotel.

"If this is the man I have come here to deal with," he muttered, "I'll certainly have to alter my plans. I don't like his looks. There's too much of the 'wise guy' about his manner."

Many puzzling questions quickly developed, and he had not found the answers when Peter arrived.

"Did you learn much, Peter?"

"Not a great deal."

"First I want to know how they got to be so chummy in the few minutes after you followed Ganes to the La Salle. There are several puzzles about it, and that's one."

"They evidently had met before."

"Then, if so, why was Kennedy waiting at the post office, and why did he trail me?"

"I don't seem to figure out their line-up at all," Peter answered. "But you haven't mentioned the real puzzles. In the first place, I have my doubts of that being Ganes we saw. He doesn't look like an inventor, and I heard Kennedy call him 'Rivers' or something like that. The only time I caught the name 'Ganes' was when Kennedy said, 'Ganes will get a wire from them to-day that will put them out of the running.' Sounds interesting, eh?"

"Will get a wire from *who* that will put *who* out of the running?"

"I don't know. Wish I did. But why did he refer to Ganes in that way if Ganes was there with him?"

Keene shook his head hopelessly.

"They were thick as cronies," Peter continued, "and that looks bad for us—if that was Ganes. They did not talk very connectedly, and, of course, I could not hear all that they did say, but they had a letter from the Arithdevice Company. I could see the envelope, and could read 'David Ganes, General Delivery' on it. They were much amused over it—I couldn't see why. I tell you, Keene, there is something crooked going on, and I feel my goat departing this minute."

"Swing onto him, Pete, old boy. Corrall him. Never let him get away! I think I begin to see daylight, but I'm not sure. I have wired for dad, and he should be here to-morrow night. Suppose you keep close as you can to Rivers, or whoever that fellow is, and I will make another try at the post office. There may be another Ganes loose in the brush, and if there is, that's the only place I know of to nab him. I have tried the directory, and I have an idea

that Ganes doesn't belong here in Chicago, but has come here temporarily. Do you suppose the trust is trying to work us with a fake ball?"

"How?"

"I don't just know—that's the trouble. It's bad when the enemy show evidence of knowing a lot more about the affair in hand than we know. It makes a fellow nervous. However, I have been doing some 'supposing' on the case. For instance: suppose the trust invents a new machine and then discovers an improvement which will lay the first carefully in the shade. Then suppose they put up a straw man and call him 'Ganes' and try to get us to buy from him the new machine—not the improved one, of course! Then suppose also that we fall for it, and after we tie up all our available capital and all our credit, putting out what we fondly think is a bonanza in blue ribbons—along comes the Calculator Company with the improved machine, which would make ours a back number even before it hit the market! What would become of the Arithdevice Company then?"

"Whew!" Peter ejaculated. "Your imagination is too robust to live, Keene. Try reducing exercise for it."

"But that theory is not all imagination, Peter. It is the only way I can account for some things; and perhaps you can at least imagine the sublime joy with which Allwin would put that very trick across if he could."

"No doubt of that. It would account also for that man being 'Ganes' at the post office and 'Rivers' when he is with Kennedy."

"It would; and we'll keep this hypothetical question in mind all the time, Peter. If it's true, we will find some evidence of it, now that we are 'on.' Meanwhile, we won't believe it until we have to; and I'm going to look for another 'Ganes.' You keep after Rivers and keep me posted. So long."

Keene had already discovered the favorite bonbons of the lady at the hotel switchboard, and there was no doubt of his and Peter's messages for each other being faithfully reported.

Keene haunted the post office—and in due time he was rewarded.

A sturdy fellow with keen eyes and a long chin and a shock of untrimmed tawny hair stepped up to the window and called for mail for David Ganes. Keene was so near that he heard the clerk exclaim: "Gee, there must be a lot of David Ganeses in town! You are the third to-day that I remember."

Keene could see the startled look that came over the anxious face. Evidently in using "General Delivery" as his only address when writing to the big companies, the man had thought he was fully protecting himself and his invention from premature discovery. Now he realized in a flash how easily this plan could be, and probably had been, turned to his undoing. Any one could intercept his mail, and he could not help himself. He turned suddenly and strode off, and Keene's ability as an amateur "shadow" was severely tested in the few blocks before his quarry turned into the Sherman House.

Keene was undecided whether to go at once to Ganes' room and try to start negotiations or wait and endeavor to learn more of the other's movements. To see him now would be a leap in the dark. If he were empowered to carry the arrangements through, he would not hesitate; but a deal of this kind is not to be begun by one and carried through by another to best advantage without previous planning.

As he turned away, he caught sight of a man reading a paper in the lobby, and immediately dodged out of sight. The man was Rivers, and as Keene slipped out at the side door, he saw Peter enter a cigar store on the corner.

"Old Peter's some sleuth, I guess," he grinned to himself, "and things are

getting interesting, all right. Looks like everybody was getting to position. Guess we'll hear the whistle in a minute."

Keene followed Peter into the store.

"I've got another Ganes," he announced gleefully, "or at least he asked for Ganes' mail; but that don't seem to mean much here. It looks like that was the fad just now. Everybody's doin' it! I think this one is the real thing, though. He looks the part. He is over at the Sherman House across the way, and I found him registered under the name of 'David Ganes.' It's signed much like the signature to the letters we have, so I think he is the man."

"Did you speak to him?"

"Not yet. I thought it better to put you wise to this new man in the play. Now you continue the pursuit of Rivers, and I will go up at once to Ganes' room. If he is the real inventor and not in league with Allwin, the fact that Rivers is so close on the trail means that we have to hustle, I believe."

"You're right, Keene. If they get to him first, they'll keep him. I know them."

"By the same token, if we get to him first, *we* must keep him; eh, Peterkins?"

"By all means. Tackle him low, and take a death grip."

Two minutes later Keene had the hotel clerk phone to Ganes' room that a gentleman wished to see him.

"Send him up!" came the reply, and Keene followed buttons to room three hundred and two. The door opened at his knock, and Ganes looked up inquiringly.

"Mr. Ganes, I believe? My name is Waller. I am from the Arithdevice Company."

"Then that is all I care to know about you. Good day, sir."

He started to close the door, but Waller, although startled by such a greeting, was quick enough to temporarily block that move.

"Wait a moment, Mr. Ganes. You are making a mistake."

"The mistake is yours, sir, in thinking I will have anything to do with a sneak company like yours!" Ganes spoke savagely, and the hot blood rushed to Keene's face.

"Look here!" he exploded, "this is your room, and that gives you the right to order me from it if you choose; but it don't give you the right to insult me or my father's company. You wrote to us to send a man here to inspect your machine, and I am here, but I am not here to be insulted!" It took a great effort to refrain from saying more, but Keene knew even in his anger that he had said enough. The future of the Arithdevice Company was too important to endanger because of Ganes' or any one else's remarks.

"If that's why you are here, why does your company send me wires like that!" Ganes pulled from his pocket a telegram and handed it to Keene. It was signed "The Arithdevice Company" and stated that they would certainly not send a man on a wild-goose chase to inspect a machine which they probably had already. "If you think you have anything worth while," the telegram concluded, "bring it to New York, and we may look at it." The tone was so contrary to that of their usual letters in such cases that Keene was quite taken off his feet.

"There—there is evidently a mistake somewhere," he stammered.

"You have expressed that very sage opinion before, I believe," snapped Ganes, tossing back his tawny mane. "And there was a mistake, all right. It was yours in thinking I would fall for that letter and innocently let you sneak around and steal my machine! Yes, you made a mistake, right enough!"

"Steal your machine! You're crazy!"

"That's right. Bluff it out! Do you

dare tell me that you have not been trailing around after me trying to find out where the machine is so you could steal it or the principle of it for your low-down company?" Keene tried to interrupt, but Ganes would have none of it. "How did you know I was in this hotel except by trailing me to-day from the post office? Do you think I didn't see you? Do you mean to tell me you did not? And do you dare to tell me that you didn't call for my mail at the post office this morning?"

This shot was so sudden it silenced Keene's tongue, and in the brief instant before he recovered its use, Ganes translated the silence as guilty confusion. "That's all I want from you!" he concluded, "and if I catch you around that machine I'll put a bullet through you!" He gave a sudden shove that landed Keene outside the door which was snapped shut and locked.

It was a somewhat bewildered young man who walked slowly down the long flights of steps, forgetting to call the elevator. In the lobby he glanced about for sight of Rivers, but did not find him. He crossed the street to the cigar store, but Peter also was gone. Here a cigar helped to bring him out of his dazed condition.

"Gee! That fellow must have made a touchdown! He was certainly going some when he went over me!" Mechanically he felt his head, as though it might have been a physical instead of a mental knock-out he had received.

He stood staring through the window at the hotel across the way, vaguely wondering what had become of Rivers and Peter and what he should do next, when he chanced to notice a man standing on the hotel steps looking up and down the street, and realized that there had been another man in the room with Ganes, and that this was he. Keene wondered who he was. He had been sitting in Ganes' room with his feet on the bed and tipped back as though he belonged there. Perhaps he was Ganes' partner. If so, it might be well to see what became of him. Keene had done so much shadowing during the day it was becoming a habit.

"Judging by Ganes' remarks, I must be a bird of a sleuth!" he muttered, "but here goes for another try at it. I've got to bring Ganes to terms in some way. Perhaps this is the way. If the trust is back of this, the sooner we find out the better for us."

It was getting late in the evening, and because of the peculiar hat the stranger wore, it was easy for Keene to keep him in sight without making himself conspicuous. The trail was not long, for the stranger went down a side street which quickly led through blocks of warehouses and cheap office buildings. Here he turned into the old Rookson Building, given over largely to printing shops, publishing concerns, and the like. It was impossible to determine to what nook in the rambling building the man had gone, and Keene turned away and tramped on to his hotel.

It was anything but a jollification rally that night when Keene and Peter reviewed the events of the day.

"I guess dad was right when he handed me that compliment about my ability for this job."

"Oh, I don't know," said Peter. "This is only the first half, and the score is not so bad yet. I've seen many a team pull out of a worse mire in the last half."

"You're right, old man; and if we lose—it will not be by default! If Allwin is trying to put one over on us and sell us a boomerang, he couldn't have picked a better man to play the part of inventor than this Ganes. One cannot look at him and believe him dishonest. Yet there seems to be something crooked going on, and I cannot tell just what it is. Here we find Rivers reading letters from the Arithdevice Company to Ganes; and we find Ganes get-

ting letters signed by the Arithdevice Company which I cannot believe they sent. What do you make of it?"

"I think Rivers called for Ganes' mail, just as we did; only instead of handing it back, he kept such as he cared to. Then he had the Calculator Company send that telegram, signing the Arithdevice name to it. Any one can sign any name they please to a telegram, can't they?"

"I guess so," Keene replied mournfully. "They seem to know a lot more about our play than we do about theirs, and that's bad. Then there don't seem to be any umpire or referee on the job to penalize foul plays. That's one difference I see right now between business—if this is a sample—and the games you and I have been in. Every man his own umpire! How's that for a 1914 ruling, eh, Peter? Now if I hadn't bungled my play the way I did—— But I ask you who would have thought he could have downed me so easylike? Poof!—just like that—and I was gone! But that shot about calling for his mail took all the breath out of me. I couldn't think just what the legal penalty for that might be."

"Do you think Ganes keeps his machine in the hotel room?"

"No. I think he just got that room to hold negotiations in. A hotel room is no place for a secret machine."

"Then by watching him we can probably get a line on where it is, do you think?"

"Not now. He is getting too suspicious and will be afraid some one will trail him to it; but I think that other man I told you of may have something to do with it."

"That must be his cousin. I gathered something about him from Rivers and Kennedy this noon."

"Good! That old Rookson Building, where he went to-night, is the very place to keep a secret workshop. If it is there, we will find it to-morrow."

"If Rivers don't find it to-night!"

"We'll risk that. We'll have to. We could do nothing there to-night."

The following morning found them at the Rookson Building but finding in that great ramshackle structure the workroom of a man who had no desire for publicity was not the easiest matter. They could not go to the management and ask for Ganes' number without attracting attention, for he had probably left word that no information should be given concerning him. Instead, they told the manager they wanted to rent a workroom for a few weeks, and got from him a list of the vacant rooms suitable for that purpose. As he was busy, they said they would prefer looking at all these rooms at their leisure and not bother him unless they found a suitable one.

Right here fortune favored them, for, as they were leaving the manager's office, they saw the cousin hurrying to the elevator which immediately started up. By watching the indicator on the dial below they saw that the car did not stop until the fifth floor. There were but six floors, and the room they wished to locate was most probably on the fifth or sixth. They began with the latter. Carefully they took each corridor. Some of the rooms were empty and the doors open. There was a cheap tailoring shop, an advertising-slide factory, and a half dozen other small concerns. Some doors were closed and locked, with no sign to indicate what might be within. One of these might contain what they were so anxious to locate, but they could only listen for some sound within and pass on.

From beyond one of these unlabeled doors on the fifth floor they heard the sound of metallic filing, and looked at each other with triumphant wink. It was room five hundred and twelve. They stood a moment, listening. The door of room five hundred and fourteen, adjoining, was open. To it they

tiptoed noiselessly, entered, and found two connecting rooms. In the rear one the sound of the filing became more distinct, and they noticed there was a door which evidently opened into the very room from whence came the sound of work. The rooms had probably once belonged to the same suite. Over this door a narrow transom, partly open for ventilation, accounted for the sound coming so clearly. Keene looked at it as though he had half a mind to try climbing up to it and peeking through, but knew that caution decreed some wiser course. They stepped quietly back to the first room and closed the connecting door.

"Peter, suppose you investigate the rest of the floor and see if any other room offers possibilities of being the one. If not, we will decide this is it, and we will rent these next to it. I will stay in here, for he will remember me; but it will make no difference if he does come across you in the hall."

Peter did as requested, and soon returned to report that five hundred and twelve was the only room on that floor that could well be Ganes'. He found Keene preparing to mount a box to the transom.

"This is it, all right," Keene announced. "He took the elevator while you were gone, and I managed to get a glimpse of his back as he went down the corridor." By this time Keene had his eye to the narrow opening. "Take a squint, Peter," he said, after a moment's gaze.

Peter pulled himself up and squinted. When he looked at Keene, there was surprise on his face.

"Keene, I never saw any mechanism like that. I can't see from here just how it might work, but it certainly has original features about it. It is all taken apart and lying around on the table. If I could study it long enough, I might be able to see the principle of the thing and whether it is practical or not. We will fix things up here before that beloved cousin returns."

"Hastily they made their way to the office of the building, and Keene rented suite five hundred and fourteen for a month, and arranged for the immediate delivery of the machines they had brought with them from the Arithdevice factory, while Peter once more took up the part of watching the movements of the Calculator people.

Late in the afternoon, when they again got in touch with each other, Peter reported that a man he took to be Ganes was at the La Salle in session with Kennedy and Ballinger, attorney for the Calculator Company.

"They are probably drawing up a contract," he announced, "but what can we do to stop them?"

"I don't know," answered Keene, "but I'll be right over. I am afraid they are putting one over on us, sure enough."

He was with Peter in a very short time, and explained how he had darkened the back room of the two they had rented and had placed a table against the door so that one standing upon it could get a good view of Ganes' machine without attracting attention in the workroom.

"I have no doubt that one machine is assembled in shape for demonstration, and this is the second in process of assembling. You ought to be able to tell about it, Peter, and I wish you would chase over there while I try to think of some way of heading off events upstairs. We have got to know something about that machine before we sign anything—if we get a chance to sign anything! What room are they in?"

"Kennedy's—number four hundred and fifteen, and they have been there over an hour."

After Peter's departure, Keene sat a while in the lobby trying to figure out some scheme to save the day, but had to reject plan after plan that occurred

to him because of some impracticable feature. If the machine were but a decoy of the Calculator Company to get his father in over his depth, Peter would probably find it out soon, for he was well posted with the progress made by the various companies in the trust. But Keene was already quite sure that Ganes was a real inventor with a real invention for sale, and that the Allwin crowd had the whole field to themselves, and he could figure out no way of butting in successfully.

He knew that to phone would be useless, but tried it and succeeded in getting connection with Ganes; but as soon as he stated who he was, Ganes cut the connection and Keene had to abandon that expedient.

"What's the matter with my thinking machine, anyway?" he muttered. "I've evidently been up against as heavy teams as this before, and I could always get away with it; but maybe my skill had more of the physical than the mental in it. Headwork is essential in sports, all right, but it is the physical ability that carries it through. Here that doesn't seem so important; and my head is not coming up to requirements!"

He wrinkled his brows in perplexity, then ran out to the nearest telegraph station and wired:

Mr. David Ganes, Room 415, La Salle Hotel, Chicago.

Sign no contract until you have conference with me. WILLIAM WALLER.

He knew it was a very futile thing to do, but he could think of nothing better. He returned to the hotel and soon saw his message brought in and sent up to the room. There was a possibility of this postponing things or making it a little harder for the wily Ballinger to have his own way about things. As nothing happened, Keene finally took the elevator to the fourth floor and paused in front of room four hundred and fifteen. He could hear voices within, but nothing intelligible, and knew it was unwise to remain long; so returned to his vigil in the lobby, racking his brains for an effective plan of campaign.

Nothing in any way meeting the demands of the occasion had come to him when he saw a jolly party consisting of Ganes, Ballinger, and Kennedy leave the elevator and saunter to the café. They had scarcely disappeared therein when Peter arrived, and, taking the seat next Keene, demanded what the latter had accomplished. It did not take Keene long to tell. Peter himself seemed excited.

"Keene," he spoke very low, "that man has the most powerful invention that has been made in calculating machines in twenty years. It will actually multiply with one pull of a lever. I doubted if any machine would ever do that. You know all other listing machines multiply by a series of additions, each requiring a separate operation. This was the only way the accumulator wheels could be made to carry the tens accurately to higher columns. He has not succeeded by any improvement on present ways, but by an entirely new idea in accumulators; and I tell you it is practical! There's a fortune in it, and it will be the salvation of the Arithdevice Company if we get it!"

"Small chance of that, it seems. Ganes and Kennedy and Ballinger have been together all afternoon, and I haven't been able to block a single move. Yet games have been won in the last five minutes. They may not have come to terms yet—that is our only chance. They have just come down to the café. Dad should get here in another hour. Perhaps he can handle the situation, if it isn't beyond redemption."

"I left a letter at our hotel for him, telling him what I could of the invention," said Peter, as he rose to investigate the arrangements in the café.

"Couldn't be better!" he announced, returning to Keene. "They evidently

wanted to be somewhat private, so they are dining just inside the alcove at the left. If we take the table on this side, we may be able to catch enough of their conversation to tell how far they have gone toward an agreement. Who would have thought, Keene, that we could turn professional eavesdroppers with such ease?"

"Right-o, Peter; but 'business' seems to have been added to the old proverb concerning 'love and war.'"

"It certainly does; and as it appeareth that we are in Rome, let us therefore do even as the Roman doth. Wow! If we sit as I suggested, Ballinger is the only one who can see us, and he doesn't know us. If you take the far seat, they will not notice you even if they leave before you do."

His plan was immediately followed, but their satisfaction changed to dismay as they heard enough conversation to realize that the contract was fully agreed upon as to terms, whether it had been signed and delivered or not. Of course, the contract would be contingent upon the machine being all that Ganes claimed; but on that score he was perfectly confident and stated so emphatically.

"Then you are as good as a millionaire right now!" Ballinger was in a jovial mood, indeed.

"I'm afraid not," Ganes replied. "I am in awful straits for money this minute. That thousand dollars bonus won't be a drop in the bucket. I need twenty thousand instead of one. Man alive! I've been four solid years—eighteen or twenty hours a day—plugging away at that invention! Don't you think that takes money? Money to buy materials and hire help and pay rent, to say nothing of the folks having to live! Then you beat me down to a thousand dollars cash payment and royalty!"

"It isn't the bonus, Ganes, that counts—that's just an evidence of good faith, nothing more. It's the royalty that's the fortune. Wait until that begins to roll in! Why, you'll laugh then to think that you paid so much attention to a few small bills to-night!"

"Just so it 'rolls in' in time to save the wife's place which she mortgaged to pull me through. That's what I'm afraid of."

"Oh, it will only take royalty from a few hundred machines to wipe that out slicker than grease; and they will sell by thousands, not hundreds! Right off the bat, at that. We'll sell a thousand of them to New York banks alone! Think of it, man! Talk about drops in buckets—why, I think I get some salary myself, but it won't be a drop in the aforesaid bucket to what your royalty will be! 'Royalty' is a good name for it in your case. You'll be king of the bunch in a few years, eh, Kennedy?"

"He certainly will. It's enough to make us all optimists to see a fellow succeed like that after a hard struggle."

"How long do you think it will be before the machines will be put on the market?" inquired Ganes, evidently much impressed by the prospect they pictured, but still thinking of present debts.

"Not many weeks—it's too good a thing to delay."

"What a lie!" Peter whispered to Keene. "I would wager all I have that they don't intend one of these machines to be placed for five years anyway. In the first place, it will take months to manufacture them; and in the second place, they would knock their present model clear out of the market, and they will be in no hurry about that."

"Evidently they are only paying him a thousand dollars cash bonus," Keene commented, "and have made all their talk on the big royalty."

"Yes, and it'll be six years before he'll see a penny of royalty money. Do you suppose they have been over to inspect the machine yet?"

"No, I'm sure they haven't. Ganes

stated positively that no one should see it until they had signed a contract for its manufacture contingent on its practicability. If they have signed such a contract—and I'm certainly afraid they have—it has only been this afternoon, and they haven't had time to see it yet."

"We still have a chance."

"There is always a chance until the contract is signed and delivered and they see the machine. Now if we can only pry Ganes away from them some way and show him the error of his ways we may still make a touchdown. It will be easier now on account of that small cash bonus they offered. We have got to do it some way."

"Have you a plan?"

"Not a one, as yet; but think, Peter, think!"

They did not dare talk much to each other about the subject weighing on their minds, and minute after minute passed in silence so far as they were concerned. Snatches of jovial conversation drifted to them from the alcove table, where Ballinger and Kennedy were endeavoring to make Ganes feel like he had made the contract of his career and was already a millionaire in embryo, and would fully hatch in a few months.

Suddenly the quiet of the evening was broken by the clang of fire engines dashing madly past. Truck after truck went by. Perhaps the clatter and noise was like the clamor of the football field and started Keene's brain to reeling—he was seized by one of those inspirations that had made him famous at the varsity. With a signal to Peter, he got up and went over to the phone booth opening from the café.

"Central, where is the fire?" Every one paused in their eating to listen, as though they expected to hear the reply.

"Halstead and Madison," came from the obliging central.

"The Rookson Building!" every diner heard Keene exclaim, but they didn't know he had twisted central's reply to serve his own ends.

Keene hurried from the booth. "The Rookson Building is on fire," he called to Peter, who had quickly taken his cue and was already halfway to the door. There he was nearly knocked down by a figure that shot past him into the street. He knew it was Ganes, and was after him like a shadow. Ganes never paused at the sidewalk, but landed in a taxi, yelling "Rookson Building!" to the surprised driver. Before that individual could start the car, Peter was in beside him and in a moment they were tearing down the street.

They had gone but a few blocks when they met the fire trucks straggling along on the return trip from what was evidently a "false alarm." Ganes was not going to turn back, however, until he had satisfied himself of the safety of his mechanical "brain child," and they rolled on to the Rookson Building. Peter and Ganes disappeared within.

A few minutes later they reappeared, and Ganes, having apparently recovered from his fit of extravagance, paid the chauffeur and dismissed him.

"Here, let me split the fare with you!" called Peter. "I was as anxious to get here as you were."

"Darned if you were!" replied Ganes, waving away the proffered money. "My whole fortune is in that building."

"So?" said Peter. Perhaps his tone conveyed the idea that he did not think much of the fortune then; and Ganes resented it. He had not got much farther than the rest of us in the gentle art of concealing personal triumphs. He dropped for a moment the caution which he had so patiently built up around himself.

"Yes, my fortune—and I am inclined to think it will be considerable of one before it is through."

"Publishing house?" queried Peter hypocritically.

"Publishing house nothing! It's an

invention! An invention that will revolutionize the calculating-machine business!"

"Calculating machine!" Peter ejaculated. "Then that accounts for Ballinger being here. I saw him at the hotel to-night."

"Know Ballinger?"

"Do I? I hope I never know him better!" There was such bitterness in Peter's tone that Ganes was impelled to wonder at it. "I was an inventor myself, once." Peter was telling the truth, too. "I invented a new listing attachment for adding machines, but Ballinger beat me out of it slick as a whistle."

"How?" Ganes was evidently a man easily frightened, and his question betrayed it now.

"How? Why, simply by getting me to agree to a contract with a joker in it. I was to get a certain royalty for five years and then I was to have the option of selling my interest outright to them or continuing the same royalty terms. Well, after they had tied me up hard and fast and every phase of the thing so patented that nobody could possibly use the principle of it, they very politely went on selling their old machines with the old device and never made one of the new. You see, the new was so much better than the old that if the public could have got it they would have taken no other, and all the machines with the old devices would have had to be worked over. Also my attachment cost more to manufacture, and therefore they will not make it until they are forced to. Meanwhile, by their contract they had shut out all competitors from the improvement, and it had not cost them a cent."

Ganes gasped. This was as like the contract he had signed as two peas. Again his suspicions rose. They had been talking the contract in the café. Perhaps this other supposed inventor had overheard and had concocted therefrom this interesting little tale. Like all his emotions, this change of feeling promptly showed itself on his face and in his manner so plainly that Peter could not avoid realizing it. He quietly pulled a long envelope from his pocket and from it drew a contract signed with the scrawling signature of Ballinger which Ganes recognized even in the light from the street lamp. He read no more of the contract, but handed it back to Peter. Whether he had been slow before or not, he was quick enough now in seeing the possibilities of the net in which he had been caught. He cursed roundly, first his stupidity and then the swindling representatives of the Calculator Company.

"Have you signed with him?" asked Peter.

"Yes. Just an hour or so ago. I have my copy in my pocket now."

"Then I doubt if you can do anything. Why did you ever let them get hold of you in the first place?" Peter demanded.

"Because I had to sell to some one, and they are the only company in the business."

"They are not, by any means. The Arithdevice Company has stood up against them through one of the hardest fights in business history, and they have won at every turn."

"Another bunch of scoundrels, worse if anything than the trust!"

"How do you know? Have you done business with them?"

"No, I have not."

"Then why do you say they are crooked?"

"Crooked! Haven't they been dogging me ever since they found I had anything they might use? Haven't they stolen my mail and spied on my every move, trying to find out where my machine was so they could steal that, too? Scoundrels—I'm getting to believe every man in business is a scoundrel!"

"Don't let yourself believe anything

like that. There are plenty of them, God knows; but also there are honest men, and with big business, too. Old man Waller is one of them—as square a man as ever slid back the roll top of a desk. I know how he treated me, when he could have beaten me the same as Ballinger did."

"You mean Waller, of the Arithdevice?"

"I do; and if any one says he is playing over the line, I'll make him eat his own shoes, spikes and all!"

Ganes drew a telegram from his pocket and handed it to Peter. It was the same he had shown to Keene. Peter read it over.

"This means nothing. Anybody in New York could have sent you this and signed the Arithdevice name to it. Telegrams don't prove signatures."

"What! I never thought of that!"

"There seem to be several vital things you never thought of. Who told you that an Arithdevice man was sneaking after you, as you call it?"

"A fellow named Rivers."

"Side partner of Kennedy's?"

Ganes nodded.

"Ganes, did it ever occur to you that the people who do just such things as you suggest are the first to lay the same things upon some one else? How do you know it was not the Calculator bunch that headed off your mail and had this telegram sent in its place, and prejudiced you all they could against their only competitor so they would have a clear field for their game?"

"But I saw young Waller," Ganes interposed, "and I accused him and he never denied a thing."

"Ganes, if I should suddenly accuse you of something as low down as the things you accused him of, would you deny them, or would you be too mad to think straight?"

Ganes was silent. Peter continued:

"What would you say if I should tell you that yesterday at the hotel I saw Kennedy talking to a man who was reading a letter from the Arithdevice Company? I saw the envelope plain enough, and read on it "Mr. David Ganes, General Delivery, Chicago."

"Do you mean it?" Ganes demanded, clenching his fists as though about to start in search of them.

"I do. Ganes, if I were you, I would give Waller a chance. Of course, the way you have tied yourself up now, I don't know that he could do you any good, but he at least cannot hurt you. See what he says, anyway."

"Perhaps I should," Ganes conceded.

"I am here on some special business with his company, and he is due at my hotel now. Come around with me."

Ganes yielded, and they soon reached the hotel. They found Waller impatiently pacing the lobby floor. He had found Peter's letter describing what he knew of the invention, and realized at once that its possession meant the balance of power in the adding-machine field. With it he could whip the trust into some sort of pacivity. If the trust should get it, the days of the Arithdevice Company were numbered.

He met Peter and Ganes with ill-concealed eagerness, but deferred a private conference with the former, sensing that there was a suspicion, a restraint, on Ganes' part that must be overcome. Suave and magnetic and kindly, as he ever was unless forced to other manners, it was not ten minutes until he knew the situation as far as the two could enlighten it.

"That's what comes of sending varsity kids to do the work of fighting men!" he exclaimed savagely. "Pardon, Peter, I guess you did the best you could, but why in creation did you let Ballinger and his crew beat you to it? Ganes, if I were making a contract with you on that machine—if it is all you say it is—I would offer you a cash bonus of fifty thousand dollars, instead of one thousand dollars, and the

same royalty they offer, only I would make it begin at once, and would guarantee you that your royalty would not fall below twenty-five thousand dollars per year for the first four years. I say I would have done that provided no one else had seen it or knew its principles. By the way, Ballinger has seen it, I suppose?"

"I don't think so. I left the models at the La Salle Café half an hour ago."

"Then rush there. Maybe we can hold them off. I'll try to frame up some way for you to get them to break contract. We've got to do that. We won't let them have a walk-away like that. It's the easiest thing old Allwin ever got away with. There must be some way to break his line-up, if only they haven't seen the thing yet."

Waller rushed them out at a pace that startled the loungers in the lobby, and they sped to the La Salle. There Ganes hurried to the café while the others waited out of sight. In a moment he returned.

"They left at once after I did."

"Did they know where you keep your machine?"

"Yes, I told them while we were at table, but they were not to inspect it until morning."

"Jump back in here, quick!" Waller called from the taxi into which he had again dived. "Tell the driver where your building is. We have a chance—but I'll wager they have been there. Don't you ever think they will wait until morning when they have the head of a competitor within reach. They will be right there to inspect it before you can say 'Scat!'"

As the taxi whirled into the street before the Rookson Building, two men were seen standing in the light of the entrance, apparently waiting. Both Ganes and Peter recognized them. The latter whispered to Waller.

"Get out, Ganes, and talk to them. Keep them there where we can hear, if possible," Waller advised, as the machine stopped. Ganes got out, and as they saw him Ballinger stepped forward.

"Here, you faker!" he fairly snorted. "What do you mean making us all trot across the country and lose half a week for an old discarded junk heap like that! It will not do a blessed thing you claimed it would. It looks like it would, but it won't! We have been trying that principle for two years. There isn't a crook or a turn about it that we haven't already covered tight by patents!"

Ballinger was apparently furious. He did not give Ganes a chance at a word.

"Have you that contract with you?"

Ganes nodded.

"Then give it to me. Here is the one you signed. It has cost our company a thousand dollars already to investigate your miserable scrap heap, and don't you think for a minute that we will pay you a penny on that contract, so fork it over!"

Somewhat dazed by the suddenness of the attack, Ganes slowly drew the contract from his pocket, at the same time reaching out for the copy in Ballinger's hand. He was quick enough, however, in examining the latter to make sure it was genuine before he released the other.

"Oh, it is all right, you bluffer! It wouldn't be worth a penny to us, or anybody else. Go sell your rattletrap to old man Waller. He seems so dead anxious to get it, and it's up to date enough for him!" and the Calculator crowd indignantly stalked off into the night.

Ganes stood for a moment before the gravity of the situation dawned upon him. He had his contract back—and that was what he desired ten minutes before—but the Calculator experts had examined his machine, knew its every working, and he had not so much as a scratch of the pen to hold them from

using it as they pleased. His head sank down on his breast.

Waller slowly got out of the taxi, followed by Peter, and stood a moment, thinking.

"Let us go see it," he said finally. "There may be a chance even yet. We can wire a description in cipher to our man Williams in Washington and have the papers filed as soon as the patent office opens in the morning. There isn't a smoother patent attorney at the capital than Williams, and if any man can beat them to it he can. Yes, there is a chance. Hurry!" and again he was the man of action.

"But Ballinger said they had already covered every point with patents," Ganes interposed, as they began mounting the stairs.

"And you believed him? Holy smoke! Peter, here is a man who actually believes something Ballinger says! I never thought it possible!"

Ganes was too disturbed to wince at the sarcasm.

"That was only a clever lie to get their contract back. Ganes, that makes me think perhaps you really have something worth while. If this machine is one they would want to put out right away, they would resort to just such tactics as they have so that they could add the royalty to their profit account and never a penny of it go to you. I am afraid that we can't do much with them, though, now that they have seen it, even if we do beat them to the patents. They care nothing for patents. Infringement suits are long drawn out, and meanwhile they are raking in the profits and paying the costs of the suit out of what should go to the inventor. Oh, but you varsity kids have balled things! I was afraid of it, afraid of it!" Waller was puffing as they reached the fifth floor.

Ganes led the way down the corridor, glanced at the number—five hundred and twelve—and opened the door. He stepped back to let the others enter.

On a table in the center of the room was a big oilcloth cover, apparently concealing the machine. Beside the table sat Keene Waller, who rose as they entered, and greeted his surprised father effusively.

Waller began hastily recounting how things had been "scrambled," and again expressing his regret that in this, of all moves, he had let "inexperienced varsity kids" try their hands.

"Goat-getters!" he snorted. "A century-old, one-eyed nanny goat, with the rheumatism and the gout and three legs amputated, could butt you all over a barn lot while you were hunting salt to put on its tail! Don't talk to me about goat-getting! I'll buy you a little one at the toy store to practice on. Let's see the machine, quick!"

It did not occur to him to wonder why Keene was in the room, but it did occur to Ganes, who looked around for sight of his cousin. Suddenly he dived at the machine and jerked off the cover —and stared!

"Where is my machine?" he demanded. "Where is my machine, and where is Edgar?" He advanced menacingly at Keene.

Waller meanwhile had stepped to the machine and was looking at it in surprise.

"Is this your invention?" he asked caustically.

"No, it isn't; and I demand you to get it at once!" He jerked a revolver from his pocket and pointed it at Keene. "Get it and get it quick!" he yelled, hastily backing where he could cover all three at once.

"Now keep cool," Keene commented, grinning at him. "No, Peter, keep quiet. Ganes has a right to get excited and demand his machine if he wants to. I suppose, however, that it is in his room, where I understand he keeps it with his

Cousin Edgar to guard it. I suggest, Ganes, that you look there for it."

"Kidding don't go, young fellow! I've had enough of the smart guys to-night. Now I'm only going to ask once more—and you'd better be quick with your answer!"

"Ganes, don't be a fool. You are too quick jumping at conclusions. Your machine and your precious cousin are all right, so far as I know; but they are not in this room, and I don't suppose they ever were. This is my room, and not yours. Look around a little."

Ganes glanced about, and a puzzled look came over his face. He let the revolver sink. Suddenly he opened the door, stepped quickly out of it, and looked at the number. He did not seem to gain much enlightenment from it. Keene laughed.

"I'll have to explain," he said. "You see, I knew, the minute Ganes left the La Salle to-night, that Balinger and his crew would beat it here to get a sight of their purchase. I knew they had sold Ganes completely on that contract, and that if they only gave us a chance we could convince him of it. But if Ballinger once set eyes on the machine it would all be off with us. With their facilities, they would be turning them out on the market before we possibly could, and trust to luck to beat us on the patent rights. So I politely headed them off, traded the last figures on your room and mine so that this temporarily would be 'five hundred and twelve,' and they would come here to inspect the wonder.

"Peter and I had already rigged up this machine which you see—and which is one from your experiment factory, dad, worked over to suit our needs. We had thought it might come in handy. Well, they came and I posed as Edgar, the cousin, and showed them the machine and explained its wonderful powers. Kennedy had seen me once, and thought I was connected with Ganes, so they fell for it all. They were the maddest lot of fellows I ever saw. I thought they were going to feed me into the machine and grind me up with it. Said the whole business was a fake—that there wasn't a thing about it but what they had tried out and found a failure! Sore! Oh, no! They were not sore at all!"

"Didn't they get on to you?" demanded Waller.

"Of course not! Why should they? Didn't Ganes refuse to show them the machine until they signed their contract? Didn't he give them the room number himself and say his Cousin Edgar was in charge? Didn't I know all that, and couldn't I play innocent Edgar to a finish? Hoppin' Roosevelt! Give me all the other fellow's signals and won't I know where to nail the ball? Well, I guess rather!"

"But didn't they see the real machine at all?"

"No, dadolinks, never a 'see' had they! *And,* they don't even know it! That's the beauty of it! They'll go back to old Allwin and report the whole thing a fizzle, Ganes and all. They won't even think of it again, except with deep disgust—unless it will be to snicker up their sleeve if they hear the Arithdevice Company bought it. Meanwhile, we can proceed to lay our plans in all secrecy and peace. Somewhat great? Eh, daddo?"

Waller, senior, stood for a few seconds longer with his mouth open. Then he shut it with a snap and his eyes twinkled.

"Ganes, lead the way to the real thing. You can count on that contract I outlined. Young men"—and he gripped a hand of each—"that new goat scalp, with the stringy red hair, that I see swinging from your war belt, looks awfully like old Allwin's. We'll see to it that he realizes where it has gone, all right!"

Hudsonpiller's Firebreak

By Caroline Lockhart

Author of "Me Smith," "The Full of the Moon," Etc.

When the lady doctor came to town Old Man Hudsonpiller rose up in wrath. You fight a prairie fire with fire. Hudsonpiller employed similar tactics with the lady M.D. The story of his "firebreak" is funny

WHEN "Old Man" Hudsonpiller was so absorbed in his own thoughts that he let the salutations of his closest friends pass unanswered and looked at his next-door neighbor without recognition, it was generally supposed that he was figuring interest which, in truth, he generally was.

Far and wide he was called Old Man Hudsonpiller, because of the thirty-five hundred head of cattle which he pastured on his twenty-thousand-acre ranch and the mortgages he held on farms and live stock for thirty miles around, rather than by reason of the years which had passed over his head.

As a matter of fact, he did not look so much older than his son Ross, upon whom he was building high hopes when he should in reality become Old Man Hudsonpiller.

As is frequently the case with the deaf and dumb and blind, he was more fully aware of what was happening around him than was supposed. He was aware, for instance, as he sat under the shade of the awning in front of "Doc" White's drug store, staring into the dusty street of the little Oklahoma town, that his son Ross was standing on the corner, talking for the third time that day with the new "lady doctor" who had arrived in their midst some months before. Also he was conscious that the embonpoint of his old friend Doc White, whose chair was tilted beside his own, was rising and falling rapidly, as though he were laboring under mental excitement. Now that he thought of it, Doc had been sitting beside him a good deal of late.

"Is she any good, Doc?" The mysteries of mental telepathy were not mysteries to these two old friends.

Doc White hesitated a moment before he blurted out as though the explosion relieved him:

"Not a danged bit!"

"Is she an out-and-out quack?"

"Practically, yes—in the eyes of the medical profession. She has a diploma from a Chicago college which has no standing whatever in the medical world." "Diploma mills," such institutions are called. For a comparatively small sum of money they give a smattering of education, and a diploma to their graduates, which to the average layman is quite as good as those that are earned by years of application and hard work in the best colleges in America.

"Doctor Isabel Jayne knows considerably less than a good trained nurse, and is far more dangerous, for the reason that her diploma licenses her to undertake operations which no nurse would attempt."

"Has she cut into your practice, Doc?"

The blood rose quickly and spread over the old man's bald head.

"Yes," with an effort, "she has."

"How did she do it?"

"Sneers, lies, personal attacks."

"Why don't you go after her, Doc?"

The old man answered simply: "Ethics of the profession. Besides, I can't fight a woman."

"Huh!" Hudsonpiller ejaculated, after a long silence, then he jumped up and walked out into the street to see if there was a rain cloud in sight. He had spent so many years looking for rain that he did it mechanically, whether the grass needed water or not.

While he was squinting at the sky he was startled to observe that his son's head was far closer to that of Doctor Isabel Jayne's than the exigencies of conversation would seem to demand.

He tilted his wide-brimmed hat over his eyes, walked up an alley, and sat down in a favored sheltered spot in the rear of a livery stable, where he could reflect undisturbed. It looked serious. Ross was headstrong; also he was at the age when youth marries in haste and repents at leisure.

Hudsonpiller had not mentioned it to Ross, but he had always had in mind that fine-looking girl over on the Shunganung—Ed Shumate's daughter.

And she was poking fun at Doc White, was she? Making him ridiculous! Huh! And he wouldn't strike back because she was a woman! At frequent intervals he jumped up and stepped out in the alley to see if it was looking any more like rain than it did, which, with Hudsonpiller, was not only habit, but a sign of nervousness.

For the third time in one week Old Man Hudsonpiller had helped his son corner his best driving team in the corral, where fourteen horses stood, eating their heads off, and had lent his aid in hitching up to his best top buggy. Later he had watched his fastest pair doing their mile on the race track south of town, with Doctor Isabel Jayne holding the reins over their backs, and, too, unobserved he had seen the lather being scraped with a chip from their hot necks and sides before they were returned to the barn.

It was another of Old Man Hudsonpiller's peculiarities that when his horses were "warned up" he preferred to do the warming himself. He observed casually now as Ross slipped the bridle over the bay mare's head:

"She'd be a looker if her mouth didn't curve up like half a saucer when she smiles."

Ross stared. He had never seen the bay mare smile, and said so.

"The lady doctor, I mean. I say, if it wasn't for her mouth and the way she toes in when she walks, she'd be——"

"I suppose Doc White has been trying to prejudice you. The old fossil's jealous."

"Probably," Hudsonpiller admitted unexpectedly. "But you can't hardly blame him—it would make a man sore to see a smart young woman come in and get away in a few months with the practice he's been fifteen years building up. He was here when the town was a blacksmith shop and a post office. He ought to be well off, but he isn't. There's no business about him, and while he's a good friend of mine and all that, I can see his faults, and I know he just lives along from hand to mouth, and if it wasn't for that drug store—— Doc's such a poor collector. I've known him to make a seventy-five-mile drive to look at a sick baby, and never send in a bill. He'll never *have* anything; but this Doctor Jezebel——"

"Isabel."

"Doctor Isabel—well, you know Jim Harkness livin' on that little lot west of town? The fellow's had bad luck these two dry years, and sold himself down to nothin' to buy flour and bacon for that big family of his. Two or three months ago one of the youngsters got sick, and they called in Doctor Jeze-

Isabel, because, bein' a woman and all, Jim's wife thought she'd understand children better than a man, and just out of college, she'd be on to all the new wrinkles in doctorin'.

"Somehow the youngster died, and they'd run up quite a doctor bill, so when the lady doctor dunned him and come after him pretty hard, Jim gave her a mortgage on his work team, thinkin' he'd get a job and pay it off before it was due. But he couldn't get the work, and about the time spring plowin' begun she came for the team.

"I hold a first mortgage on the place, so when Jim drove in here, half cryin', I had to let him have the money to pay her off to save myself. I'd rather have my interest and the principal than the farm, and Jim's a hard worker, so I'll get it if he has a good year. But that's what I call business—that woman's a money getter, she is. Your mother never would have had the sand to take a man's team. If it comes around handy, if you get to know her well enough, Ross, I wish you'd tell her that I've got a bunch of bad notes, and if she'll collect 'em for me I'll give her half."

"I'll not ask her anything of the kind," Ross answered, red in the face, perhaps from stooping over to see if the axle needed greasing.

"You don't want to see your old father lose his money, do you, Rossy?" whined Hudsonpiller plaintively.

"My old father can do his own collecting," his son answered shortly, as he twirled the monkey wrench with unnecessary vigor.

Hudsonpiller cleared his throat nervously.

"You won't mind if I speak plain, will you, Ross? Of course it's kind of a delicate subject, but I'd like to say that you couldn't please me better than by marryin' some smart, up-to-date woman with a profession. Look where I'd 'a' been if your mother could have sawed off arms and legs and lanced boils instead of putterin' around the house, cookin' and cuttin' down my clothes to make knee pants for you. Why, I'd have been a rich man to-day, Rossy."

Rossy swore as he sprang into the buggy, and cramped it so short he nearly splintered a wheel.

"Wait a minute till I check 'em up a little," urged Hudsonpiller, running after the buggy. "Women like style. When I was courtin' your mother I had 'em lookin' straight up."

He was out in the middle of the road, scanning the horizon, when his son clattered down Main Street.

"Evenin', ma'am!" he cried, beaming in a kind of senile delight, bowing obsequiously and dragging at his hat brim as the buggy flashed by.

"I know I should learn to love your father," said Doctor Isabel. "He's such a dear old man."

Ross did not immediately reply. He was thinking that her mouth *did* look like half a saucer when she simpered up at him like that. Besides, while he had a proper regard for his parent, he never had thought of describing him as "a dear old man." He answered vaguely:

"Dad's pretty level-headed."

Old Man Hudsonpiller had his head under the buggy, looking at a weak spring, when his son announced his engagement to Doctor Isabel Jayne. A gurgling sound came from under the buggy box, but nothing that resembled congratulations.

"Don't you like it, dad?" The demand was made with some asperity.

"Like it!" came at last. "I'm so tickled I can't speak—I don't know what to say."

"She wasn't sure you'd be pleased."

"Pleased! Why, sonny, you tell Doc Jezebel——"

"Father! Somebody'll hear you, and

you know as well as I do that a nickname sticks like a bur in this country."

"You must learn to make allowances for me, boy," Hudsonpiller replied sadly. "I'm gettin' to be an old man and forgetful. I don't always get things straight."

"Forty-nine isn't so old."

"No, not when you've been able to take care of yourself, but up until the last few years I've had a hard life of it; in the saddle from sunrise till dark, ridin' the range when it was so hot I could feel my brain bakin' under my hat, and the bull bats set on the fence posts with their mouths open, and in winter huntin' strays when my feet was so numb I couldn't feel the stirrups, or the reins in my hands. My money's come hard, and I'll feel easier knowin' that you're goin' to marry a woman that knows the value of a dollar and aims to get all that's comin' to her."

"You keep talking about money in connection with her," said Ross uncomfortably. "You mustn't think she's mercenary——"

"I mean that there's no chicken-hearted nonsense about her when it's a question of dollars and cents. Look at White—poor as Job's turkey, because he's always thinkin' that some of these homesteaders and nesters off in the hills needs it worse than he does. You tell her for me that we'll build an addition on the house where she can hang out her shingle, and I'll get her the best set of tools."

"Not tools—instruments."

"I'm an ignorant man, son. I learned my letters readin' the brands on cattle, and you ought to overlook my mistakes. Well, then, instruments. I'll get her the best set of instruments in the State."

"But she doesn't want to practice after we're married. She hates medicine."

"I'm kinda disappointed to hear this, son. I thought I could toddle around turnin' the grindstone when she sharpened up her knives and help hold down the fightin' patients while she was workin' on 'em; for you know Old Age likes to feel it's some use in the world, even if it isn't. Anyway, I'm glad you've picked out a smart woman, and you tell her so. Wish you'd throw the harness on the black team. I'm goin' to Harkness' farm to see if he's usin' them horses too hard."

It was with a pang that was keen enough to be a knife thrust in the heart that Doc White saw Ross Hudsonpiller whipping their fastest pair down the street, with Doctor Isabel Jayne clinging to the seat beside him, and learned that Hudsonpiller had telephoned that a saddle horse had "throwed" Jim Harkness, and the lady doctor was to come at once.

After all, it was no more incredible than other desertions. He had made no personal sacrifices for Hudsonpiller that he could recall. It was not the monetary loss caused by his dwindling practice that was responsible for his many heartaches and the heavy sadness which he could not shake off, but the loss of confidence in him and his skill, the breaking of the bond which exists between those who have fought for life together. His patients had been like his children to the old general practitioner. Their sorrows had been his own.

Was it because that he had charged so little or nothing for his services that they held them in such small esteem that they changed physicians at the first opportunity? he wondered bitterly.

As Hudsonpiller had said—he was a poor collector. He knew the signs of prairie destitution, and when he heard barefoot children coaxing for just a slice of bread and saw thin cows, thin horses, with their heads drooping spiritlessly in the corral, he never had failed to reply to feeble inquiries as to his fee that there was none, that he was pass-

ing anyhow, and had not gone off his road. But Hudsonpiller—Hudsonpiller —— Unconsciously Doc White rubbed his throat where it suddenly swelled with the lump in it.

Old Man Hudsonpiller went to meet the buggy, which was careening over the prairie at top speed.

"My land, Doc! I'm glad to see you, and I hope you brought your tools. I'm afraid Jim's awful bad hurt. He acts like somethin's broke inside of him."

Sickening groans of agony were coming from a ravine.

Doctor Jayne sprang agilely over the wheel and, carrying her black medicine case with a businesslike air, strode to the side of the suffering man.

Several neighbors from near-by homesteads who had come to see Jim Harkness "top off" a mean horse were gathered where he lay, writhing, on the ground.

"O-o-o-h-h-h!" he moaned, as he beat his heels on the sod. "If it wasn't for my wife and children!"

"Lie still!" ordered Doctor Isabel, as she knelt beside him.

"I can't, Doc! I feel as if I was tore every which way. Oh-h-h!"

"The sight of sufferin' makes me kinda sick," said Old Man Hudsonpiller as he walked off. "I'm funny that-a-way."

The doctor shook her head while she fumbled at his ribs, and in the silence while she "thumbed" him his tenderhearted neighbors turned their backs.

"Am I a goner?" Harkness asked, in a breaking voice.

"There's a fracture of three ribs, with laceration of the lungs." Strangling sounds came from the prostrate man's throat, and the contortions of his face were horrible to behold. "You're going to have a hemorrhage," she added.

"It's all over, Doc." Harkness was showing his teeth like a dying wolf, while the shoulders of his neighbors heaved with grief.

"I'm inclined to believe that there's concussion of the vertebra, and the Gimbernats ligament in the fissure of Rolando is——"

The dying man opened his mouth and let out such a yell from his lacerated lungs that the startled saddle horses lay back on their picket ropes. Doctor Isabel Jayne sprang to her feet, colorless with rage, as James shouted and rolled on the ground.

"I couldn't help it," he gasped, between whoops to Old Man Hudsonpiller, who came forward with streaming eyes. "I stood it as long as I could—besides, I'm ticklish!"

"Oh, this is a joke, is it?" Doctor Isabel stamped her foot at the "dear old man." "You ought to be ashamed of yourself to make a woman ridiculous—a woman that's trying to earn an honest living! I suppose that old back number in town has put you up to this, thinking he'd spoil my practice. Western chivalry! Cowards—all of you—to try and hurt a woman. You'll pay me well for it, and I want my money now!" She glared furiously at Hudsonpiller.

"Right, ma'am, if you'll take my check." He felt for his fountain pen. "And make it plenty, for it's worth the price. Doc White may be a fossil and a back number, as you say, but he never made a break like this since he left Johns Hopkins. It *was* a low-down trick to play on a lady, but when a lady enters a man's profession to compete with men, it looks to me like she ought to abide by the rules of the game, and not hide behind her petticoats when she's beat, or take advantage of them same skirts to say and do things that no man would dare to say or do. Out here, you know, when we see a prairie fire comin' we set another. We fight fire with fire, and I just been burnin' a firebreak, ma'am, to protect my property. Fifty, you say?"

The Silver Eye

By Frank Chase

Author of "The Pretender," "A Case of Painless Extraction," Etc.

The puzzle of the Mammoth Bank robbery. A mystery story in which criminal ingenuity of a high order is pitted against the sturdy common sense and hard-hitting ability of an Irish-American detective

JERRY RYAN, one-time patrolman, and now a detective in the Mammoth Bank, was chatting with the girl who sold magazines and cigars in the lobby that flanked one side of the marble banking room. Through a row of bronze-framed glass doors Mr. Ryan could see the bank's score of bookkeepers already bent over their ledgers in the balcony that overhung three sides of the columned room. Below on the main floor were a dozen tellers' windows, each with an illuminated letter overhead.

The countermen straggled in, some by the Broad Street entrance which separated the paying and receiving departments, and others by way of the lobby, where crowds were hurrying to the elevators from two streets.

Detective Jerry Ryan never tired of watching a crowd. He liked to study human nature at close range. During banking hours he loafed around the floor of the banking room, often mingling with the press in front of the windows. Clad in a gray suit, he might be taken for a prosperous business man who had taken care of himself.

At eight-forty Dick Arlin, who paid at window F, swung across the lobby, carrying an automobile headlight minus its glass. Nodding to Jerry he bought a paper at the counter and smiled at the pretty girl behind it.

With his deep-set gray eyes, Mr. Ryan followed the teller as he pushed through one of the glass doors and walked toward the locker room. There was something about the young man that Mr. Ryan did not approve of. It may have been the baggy set of a new topcoat, the slight swagger of his stride, or perhaps the headlight, which needed a new glass.

"'Tis pla-ain he wishes everybody to know he owns a car," grumbled Jerry to himself. "Or does he now? Maybe the young bantam is carryin' around the shiny thing to show off. 'Tis many a loan has been negotia-ated on less tangible evidence of prosperity, I'm thinkin'. Still, I'm not hiring 'im."

Nevertheless Mr. Ryan strolled across the banking room in time to see Dick Arlin carry the headlight from the locker room and place it on a cabinet for signature cards backing up to his cage.

"That proves me guess," thought Jerry. "He's four-flushin'. He would have his customers believe he drives a car an' only works f' recrea-ation. Belike he bought the lamp in a second-hand shop."

Arlin took up his desk telephone, and Mr. Ryan sauntered to the end of the room to say good morning to Miss Kelley, who ran the bank's private switchboard. Returning, he stopped at window A for his customary chat with Decius Babb.

The senior teller was a methodical man. For thirty-odd years, vacations excepted, he had walked into the bank at ten minutes of nine. Even his talk with Jerry Ryan was a part of Mr. Babb's well-ordered day. As was customary, he polished his glasses meanwhile. At nine o'clock he began the day's work.

The tellers' vault stood at one end of a passage which ran between the rear walls of the six paying cages and the barred windows facing Broad Street. The locker-room door opened from the other end of the passage behind cage A. The door was always locked; only the six tellers had keys. Overnight the tellers' vault was guarded by a time lock. During banking hours the door stood open. Within were six compartments, each a separate safe with its own combination lock.

Mr. Babb had compartment A, nearest the vault door. He switched on the electric light, and turned the combination—so many twists of the wrist to the right, so many to the left, but always the same number to a revolution.

At nine-six Mr. Babb walked back along the passage, carrying a black trunk containing money for the day's disbursements. He placed the trunk on a table desk in the rear of his cage. Next he closed his cage gate. Next he unlocked the trunk. Next he placed his currency till on the horseshoe counter at the right of the paying window.

The currency in the till was always arranged in the same order. A reserve remaining in the black trunk was always piled in the same order. Mr. Babb seldom made a mistake.

In addition to the regular run of counter checks, the senior teller paid drafts, the clearing-house redemptions, and other disbursements running to large amounts.

A line of bank messengers kept Mr. Babb busy for an hour or more. Then came several pay rolls, and about noon two messengers from "clearing" presented a loss voucher for something over two hundred thousand dollars.

Turning to the black trunk, Mr. Babb ran through his stock of "large" bills—denominations of one hundred dollars and more. At length he stepped into the passage and walked toward the tellers' vault, shaking his head. For the second time in twenty years he had failed to gauge the day's payments. Misfortunes never come singly. For the first time in a decade, the combination lock failed to respond to the prescribed number of twists.

Mr. Babb felt annoyed. He tried again cautiously. This time the bolt turned. Swinging open the door he counted off one hundred thousand dollars from various piles of yellow gold certificates.

Halfway back to cage A, Mr. Babb turned abruptly, and retraced his steps. Never since he could remember had he forgotten whether or not he had locked the compartment door. Twisting the bolt to make sure, he dropped some of the yellow bills. Something like a cuss word came from between Mr. Babb's thin lips. His hands trembled slightly as he gathered up the scattered certificates.

Decius Babb hurried back to his cage, suddenly conscious of the toll of advancing years. Trembling hands betokened age; he was getting old.

The clearing-house messengers drummed impatiently on the marble counter while Mr. Babb thumbed off a bundle of gold certificates. Passing the money out through the barred window, the senior teller seemed preoccupied. He wondered if he had recounted the bills he had brought from the vault before lumping them with the money in the black trunk. Feeling uncertain, he hastened back and scanned the vault floor.

"Lost something?" asked Dick Arlin, who was inventorying his cash in compartment F.

"No—er—that is—I'm uncertain," said Mr. Babb. Rather flustered, he retreated to his cage. The senior teller felt vaguely uneasy. It lacked an hour of closing time, but he displayed the "Closed" sign in window A, and set about balancing his cash.

An hour later, Mr. Babb was still checking figures already verified a dozen times. Fagged and bewildered, he followed an aimless circle—from his books to the black trunk, thence to the vault, then back to his books. With each shuffling step his shoulders bent lower under an increasing load of worry and apprehension.

Late in the afternoon Decius Babb entered the cashier's private office. He sank into a leather chair, looking pale and careworn.

"I wish you'd come out and go over my cash, Mr. Dee," he said. "Seems to be short—of course it can't be—no such amount as——"

"How much?" asked John Dee.

"Must be in my figures somewhere," mumbled the teller, looking at the floor. "I've been over 'em time and again, too. Prob'ly overlooked something. Still, don't see how I could—no such amount as——"

"How much?" repeated the cashier.

"Fifty thousand dol——" The old gentleman was crying.

John Dee was a short, stocky man, clear-witted and vigorous. He had known Decius Babb for half a lifetime; they were friends. The cashier laid his arm across the older man's shoulders, and led him back to cage A. With hands that now trembled perceptibly, Mr. Babb unlocked the gate. Mr. Dee entered, and began to check off the totals.

Meanwhile the white-haired teller wandered aimlessly about the cage, searching. He explored the wastebasket and rummaged through dusty drawers. With a solemnity that would have been ludicrous under other circumstances he shook the pages of a small book. At last he sank feebly into a chair, and watched Mr. Dee verify the contents of the black trunk.

Jerry Ryan had spent most of the afternoon making a circuit of second-class hotels, and comparing the names on their registers with the signature on a protested check that had been returned through "clearing." Returning to the bank about five o'clock he was immediately summoned to Mr. Dee's office.

"I've sent Babb home in a taxi," the cashier announced. "His cash is short and the old boy seemed to take it pretty hard. I don't wonder. It's a staggering sum. My own nerves are a little shaky."

"How much is missin'?"

"Fifty thousand dollars! It's embezzlement, Jerry. No other explanation is possible. And yet I couldn't muster courage to say it. Decius Babb is an old and trusted man; it's hard to call him a thief."

"A man's innocent till ye prove 'im guilty," said Jerry Ryan, scratching his bristling iron-gray hair.

"I suppose so," said the cashier dubiously, "but a man gets cynical in the banking business. There was Jepson, who wrecked the City Bank. No bad habits, superintendent of a Sunday school, model citizen—nibbled at the faro game and stole half a million! I tell you, Jerry, in affairs of this kind we have to forget friendships and consider facts."

"What ar-re they?" inquired Mr. Ryan, sitting.

"Briefly, these: Babb was absolute custodian of his cash. To be sure, there are duplicate keys to his cage and trunk, but they are kept in the big vault in a drawer to which only myself has access. Even assuming that I am

the thief, I would have a chance to steal only when Mr. Babb was absent —out to lunch, say. To-day he did not go out to lunch; he did not leave his cage except to go to the vault, thirty feet distant. In compartment A he ordinarily carried about half a million dollars. No one else, not even myself, knows the combination."

"When a teller takes a compartment," continued the cashier, "a new lock is obtained from the factory where the vault was made. The combination is handed to the teller in a sealed envelope. For over thirty years Decius Babb has been the only man who knew the combination to compartment A. Unless, of course, he told somebody, and that seems unlikely."

"No, I think Mr. Babb c'u'd keep a secret," replied Jerry Ryan. "He was never much of a talker. Though he tells me his troubles now and then. Only this morning he confided that it takes a slather of money to send a boy to college."

"Yes, I know Babb has an expensive family; but I'm blessed if I can see where he could spend fifty thousand dollars. That will be your job, Jerry —to see where it went to, to recover some of it if there's any left."

"By the wa-ay," said Jerry, "what does it cost to run a car, Mr. Dee? Or I'll put it this wa-ay: C'u'd ye affor-rd a car on eighteen hundred dollars?"

"Frankly, Jerry, I could not. Why do you ask?"

Jerry answered by asking another question: "An' whin ye brea-ak a headlight glass, what d'ye do?"

"I have them set a new one at the garage. What are you driving at, Jerry?"

Mr. Ryan serenely continued to ask questions: "Thin it is har-rdly customary to unbolt the contraption and fetch it down here to ador-rn your desk?"

"No, of course not, Jerry."

"Your car was waitin' at the Broad Street door when I came in, sir. Would ye mind if I asked the driver to loan me a headlight?"

"You make the most amazing requests, Jerry! But I'm curious to see what you've got on your mind; go ahead."

Jerry vanished with alacrity. Presently he returned, carrying a huge lantern.

"'Tis not the same pattern," Jerry announced. "Belike it will answer. Would ye mind if I put me fut t'rough the glass of it?"

"It's hardly necessary, Jerry. There are clamps which unfasten."

Jerry removed the glass, and led the way to the signature-card cabinet in the rear of cage F.

All of the tellers had gone for the day. A few adding machines were still clicking in the balcony. Squinting across the slight accumulation of dust on the cabinet, Jerry placed the headlight with some nicety.

"Supposin' ye walk out front, Mr. Dee, an' pla-ay ye are a customer," said Jerry Ryan.

While the cashier was making the circuit through the locker room, Jerry stepped into the tellers' vault. Crouching close to the combination of compartment A, he squinted at the headlight, which stared back at him like a huge silver eye. Evidently dissatisfied, he stepped outside again. From a convenient wastebasket, he selected a sheet of stiff paper. Rolling this into a small cylinder he reëntered the vault, and again squinted at the headlight. Presently he straightened up, grinning his satisfaction.

"An' if ye were a customer cashin' a check, Mr. Dee," said Jerry, quitting the vault, "ye would see this shiny thing on the box here. Belike ye would ask me what kind of a car I drove?"

"I don't follow you, Jerry. If I didn't know you pretty well I should

say you were mildly insane. You haven't mentioned the fifty thousand since I gave you the job of finding it."

"That's so," said Jerry. "An' the cashier wants to get home t' supper, belike. So here is the right eye of your divil car-rat, an' a pleasant journey to ye."

Jerry unlocked the barred gate of window F, and passed out the headlight. "As f' the fifty t'ousand," he continued, "a man must consider facts, as ye said yourself. Just let me mull them over a bit. Mr. Babb's at home, quite unlikely to run awa-ay. Aven if he does, ye have bondsmen; I'll wager that."

"Yes; I've notified them," replied the cashier, sighing. "Poor old Babb! I'm sorry for him."

As the cashier whirled away in his car, Jerry wrote three names on a piece of paper. Then he hunted up a telephone directory, and set down a number opposite each name. One of the numbers proved to be the same as number six call on Miss Kelley's record sheet; it was timed at eight-forty-six a. m.

"Sure an' I'll have to pay the gentleman a friendly call," chuckled Mr. Ryan, pocketing the memorandum.

In the locker room, Jerry donned a loose gray overcoat. Having examined the big side pockets, he said good night to the watchman, and left the bank.

Crossing Broad Street, Jerry entered a dingy office building of the ornate type of architecture prevailing thirty years ago. A wide stairway with oak wainscoting circled the well of a small elevator which was not running. Jerry climbed to the third floor. Relying on his sense of direction, he halted halfway down a dim corridor and tried the door of a lighted room. It was locked. He knocked on the ground-glass panel. No one answered. He gazed overhead, estimating the dimensions of an open transom; it seemed a doubtful prospect for a forty-four inch belt. At length Jerry lifted a hinged cover and growled the following through the letter chute:

"Open this door or I'll put me fut t'rough it!"

There was a sound of light footsteps within, and presently a key turned. As Jerry stepped inside the room something whizzed by his head. An instant later a man made a rush for the door. Jerry grabbed the fellow's arm, and received a savage kick in the shins for his trouble. Jerry seized his assailant by the neck, and stiffened him against the wall. Having choked the breath out of him, Jerry propelled his prisoner toward the center of the room. There was a crash, and a slender, dark-eyed young man scrambled to his feet beyond an overturned reading table.

"I dropped in f' a little chat," said Jerry, grinning amiably.

"You're devilish informal," sputtered the other, brushing his clothes. "Who are you, anyhow?"

"My na-ame is Ryan," said Jerry, "an' yours is Fox, Colomy Fox, by the sign on the window. I'm thinkin' you're well na-amed, Mr. Fox."

"You're an insolent blackguard," hissed Fox, backing into a corner. "I'll break a window and call for the police!"

"An' now," grinned Jerry, "I'll trouble ye f' the combina-ation of this dinky little safe, Mr. Fox—though I c'u'd brea-ak it open wid a pickax."

"You go to the devil!" snarled Fox. He doubled his fists, and swung savagely at the Irishman. Jerry closed in, deflecting the blow with his shoulder, and delivering a left hook on Mr. Fox's pointed jaw. That young man returned to a hazy consciousness, lying on his back with his legs projecting under a small safe which stood against the wall. His feet were lashed to something immovable, his hands were

manacled, and some one was wetting his face with cold water.

" 'Tis yourself that's to bla-ame," declared Jerry grimly. "Ye ought never start what ye can't finish. I took the liberty of looking t'rough your pockets, Mr. Fox. I found some numbers in a memora-andum book, an' by juggling a bit I opened your safe. I discovered that it's empty. So ye needn't worry about that. Now I'll snap off the lights and smoke me pipe. I'll sit here close by your head. If ye so much as yip when the other chap shows up, I'll let drive wid me fut!"

Two hours later cautious steps paused outside. Like a shadow, Jerry glided to the door and waited. A wet finger crooned across the glass panel. Jerry turned the key; some one stepped inside.

"You gave me a start, Col!" the visitor exclaimed. "Windows all dark—turn on a light, can't you?"

Suddenly the lights glowed, and Dick Arlin faced the muzzle end of an automatic pistol.

"I beat ye to it, Dick. *Steady!* I'd drill ye like a rat!"

Keeping his man covered, Jerry removed a small revolver from Arlin's right-hand pocket.

"What's the game, Jerry?" inquired Dick Arlin coolly. "Rehearsing for the movies? Or—hello, Col! Oh, I say, that's rough!"

Jerry took up a telephone from a table desk near the window, and called a number.

"This is Jerry Ryan," he said presently. "I've been mullin' over the matther we were speakin' about—— Yes, the sa-ame—— I've struck a couple o' promisin' clews, an' I'd like—— That's fine; I'll be waitin' for ye—room three-fifty-one in the old Mutual Buildin'. An' say, ye might fetch a couple bluecoats wid——"

A heavy book struck Jerry in the face; closely following came Dick Arlin like a human catapult. Taken off his guard, Jerry was forced backward over the desk. Fighting to regain his feet, Jerry's fingers closed around the butt of his pistol. Quick as thought he raised it and fired. Arlin loosened his hold on the older man's throat, and backed away, carrying a bullet in his left shoulder.

" 'Tis only God's mercy that it didn't go t'rough your head," growled Jerry Ryan, pocketing his gun.

"I wish it had!" groaned Arlin, flopping into a chair. "I'm in bad."

"Think o' me!" cried Fox, twisting on his side.

"I am," said Arlin wearily. "It's your game; play it out."

Several men stamped down the corridor. Jerry met them at the door.

"Don't be alar-rmed if the place is a bit upset," said Jerry, with an eye cocked over his shoulder. "Mr. Colomy Fox under the sa-afe, gintlemen. Turn your crooked mug this wa-ay so me friends can have a look at ye. He's a bit shy; I doubt if ye know 'im, Mr. Dee. Although here's a man——"

"Arlin! You don't mean—why, Jerry! This takes me off my feet! What do you say, Dick?"

"God knows; Jerry'll tell the story," said the young teller weakly.

"I meant t' brea-ak it to ye over the phone, sir," said Jerry. "But I was interrupted. Arlin hit me like a whirlwind, and—I had to use me gun. 'Tis a bit of a scratch t'rough the shoulder—not serious. But ye might see that he has a surgeon, officer. As f' this other scalawag, sna-ake 'im out by the heels if ye like. But mind this: Watch 'im; he's a fox!"

"I hope you've made no mistake, Jerry," said Mr. Dee when the feet of the two policemen and their prisoners had ceased to thump on the wooden stairs.

From a closet in the corner of the room Jerry brought forth a leather bag

and a brass instrument set on a tripod. He opened the leather bag and handed the cashier a package of new gold certificates.

"Relieve me of it!" said Jerry. "Sight of so much money makes me forget me blessings. All in spindable new hundred-dollar bills, too! If I got thinkin' about it I might enga-age first-cabin passage to the divil knows where."

"Wait a minute, Jerry, till I catch up with you. How did this money get over here? Who is this man, Fox? How is Arlin implicated?"

"Mr. Fox is a rascal of an attorney who never had a client. This morning he a-aimed this brass tube here, which might be a surveyor's transit, at the reflector of an auto headlight sitting on Mr. Arlin's card cabinet across the street. The two of 'em may have deter-rmined the angles by previous experiments. Anewa-ay, whin Mr. Babb turned his combina-ation Mr. Fox could see every move. He took down the numbers and the tur-ras, and carried them across to window F of the Mammoth Bank. Arlin has a compar-rtment in the tellers' vault himself. Should he hear the click of a ga-ate latch, he had merely to wheel around and fool wid his own combina-ation. He is quick and cool; he got awa-ay wid it. 'Tis easy to picture 'im: a quick grab wid one hand—five straps of a hundred bills each. He took hundreds. T'ousands he couldn't pass; tens would har-rdly be worth takin'. He glided to his ca-age, soft and quick as a cat. He passed out the money to Fox as if he was pa-aying a check. Fox put it in his leather bag like a bank messenger, and brought it back here until they could split it up. Arlin didn't show up for his share till after dark. No doubt he doubled on his tra-ail a dozen times to fool Jerry Ryan who might be following 'im. But, having started from the other end, I got here first."

"That's what I want to hear!" exclaimed the cashier. "Tell me your end of it. How did you happen to strike the trail so quickly?"

"The answer would be pla-ain if ye had puzzled y'r head all the morning as to why Mr. Arlin should bring a big lantern to work wid him, and put it on a box behind his ca-age where everybody could see it."

"I get that part of it, Jerry. The lamp was pointed at Babb's combination; that connects Arlin. But how about this man, Fox? How did you spot him so quickly?"

"Of course I knew it was only a varia-ation of the mirror ga-ame; there must be another end. So I cocked me eye over the combina-ation and squinted back. Me instrument was crude. I could see three windows wid na-ames on 'em, any one of which might be me man. Then I recalled that Arlin had telephoned as soon as he got in his ca-age this mornin'. I guessed he might have phoned to see if the shiny thing was a-aimed right. I looked up the phone numbers of the three possible accomplices, an' compared them with Miss Kelley's record sheet. One of the numbers was the same as a call from ca-age F at eight-forty-six this morning."

"You're a wonder, Jerry. I shall ask the directors to reward you for services rendered. Fifty thousand dollars is a lot of money; it would make a hole in dividends. I'm gratified that we have recovered it. I think, however, that I'm even more pleased that faithful old Babb has been vindicated."

"Sa-ame here, sir," said Jerry Ryan. "Wid your leave I'll drop off at his street on me wa-ay home an' tell 'im the good news. I'll bet the old gentleman is worryin' his head off."

A Chat With You

SOMETIMES we wish that it were possible for us to publish all the letters we receive, and sometimes we don't. A fair sample of a great many appears on another page of this issue. We wish you would turn to it and read it before you go any farther here. Setting aside altogether the fact that it pleases us because it is a tribute to the writers who make THE POPULAR, setting aside also the fact that letters of this sort are more encouraging, and inspire in us a warmer feeling of gratitude and friendliness than the writers could imagine, we were interested especially in this one because it was so well expressed. A man may have the clearest vision of what he is trying to achieve, and yet be so absorbed in the idea and in his efforts to make it live, that he finds it difficult to describe it in words. When some one else comes along and describes it for him, as Miss Squires has done in this case, it's something a little more than encouragement—it's a help.

THERE are other letters we are asked to publish which we cannot. We haven't the space, and sometimes we think it just as well that we haven't. This is a fiction magazine, and it is better to keep out of discussions and controversies. There are many magazines devoted to controversies, but there is only one POPULAR, and we think we are pleasing you best when we keep it as it is. If we print good stories about big questions of to-day we are bound to provoke such letters. We are glad to get them, but while we like to read them ourselves, asking our readers to is a different matter. For instance, Ritchie's story, "The Sandlotters," describing as it did some of the results of Japanese immigration in California, brought us more than one such communication. Miss Squires tells in her letter better than we can the things that THE POPULAR stands for. We think that they are the really big and important things on which there is little to be said on the other side, but which cannot be emphasized and vitalized too often. In matters of politics, nationalities, in the thousand and one questions on which healthy differences of opinion are natural, and indeed desirable, among right-minded people, THE POPULAR is an innocent bystander. Our field is the colorful, stirring spectacle of life, the drama of strong character and brave action. As long as people are true to life, as long as they have the originality and vitality that Mother Nature gives as a birthright to all her true-bred children, they are welcome here. Mountain and desert, forest and city, camp and court, rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief—wherever there is romance and adventure—surely the field is broad enough, and surely the tale is strong enough, without the noise of argument or the bickering of debate. THE POPULAR is the medium by which you free your mind and exercise your emotion and imagination. What people do, rather than what they think about various questions, is what interests us.

SO if you start the novel by Lynde in the next issue of the magazine in the hope that it may contain some discussion as to whether the United

States ought to intervene in Mexico or not, you will be disappointed. If you are looking for any deep discussion of Mexican politics you will also be disappointed. But if you are looking for a good, rousing story, with plenty of action and a number of good, sound, human people in it, you will not be disappointed at all. It is called "The Scapegrace and the Gentleman." It is a story of army life; the scene shifts from the border to a Mexican city, and then to a mining camp in the disturbed republic. Every scene is clear, vivid, and beautifully painted, and every act is strong and dramatic. It is the story of two brothers of widely different temperaments. Stevenson's "Master of Ballantrae" was a great story of two brothers, but since then we have not seen another till we started this one of Lynde's. Heredity is a strong force in human development, but the force that Darwin described as "natural variation" is quite as strong and even more interesting. "The Scapegrace and the Gentleman" is a study of natural variation; in addition to that it is a wonderful picture of life in Mexico to-day. That it is a good, big, book-length novel, complete in one issue, goes almost without saying.

IN the letter we called to your attention a moment ago you will find some mention of a story by Vingie Roe —"The King of the Unsurveyed." There is another story by the same author, written with the same power, touching the same high point in fiction and verisimilitude in the next issue of the magazine. It is called "The Steeds of Summit Pass," and is the tale of a herd of wild horses and the part they played in human affairs. Good animal stories are the rarest things in the world. For one good one, ten are brutal and twenty are oversentimental and false. Vingie Roe is not afflicted with the false sentiment and overcredulity of the nature faker. In "The Steeds of Summit Pass" you will find that the author knows the world of wild creatures as well as the world of men, and that she paints each with a sure touch.

THERE are three great Christmas stories in the next issue of THE POPULAR. "A Matter of Viewpoint," by Raymond Ashley, is about a banker, his son, and a third man whose views on various questions, notably ethics, were at variance with theirs. It is a story of adventure, that is touching at the same time. "Skinny's Sanctuary Suds," by William Hamilton Osborne, has a newsboy for its hero, some pathos, and a lot of genuine, laugh-provoking humor. And "Picking Winners" is a Christmas story with a race-track setting by a writer new to these pages. Each of these three tales has the charm of absolute novelty and originality. Each is free from any mawkishness, and each bears every stamp of being a narrative taken from life itself. Any one of them would be worth opening the magazine with.

IN the next issue of the magazine is a new, strange sort of detective story by Robert Welles Ritchie. We especially want you to read it. It is called "The Bishop and Mister Poe," and if the title piques your curiosity, the story will stir it up still more—and finally satisfy it at the end. There is another good story, "Green Magic," by Albert Payson Terhune, another story of "The Amateur Professional," by Beeston, the first half of a two-part mystery story by G. W. Ogden, and a whole lot of other good things in a great Christmas number.

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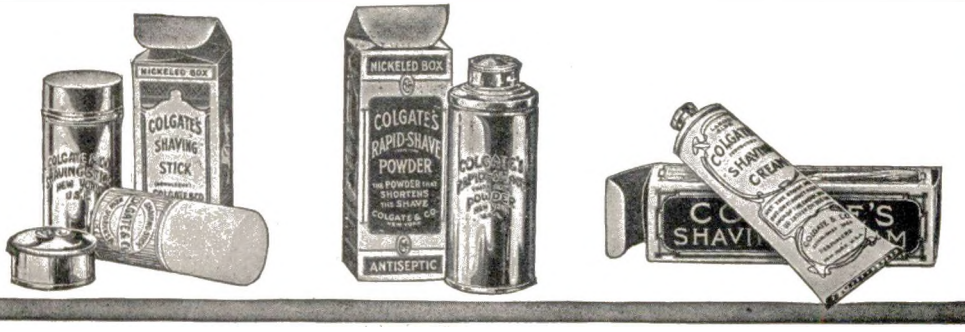

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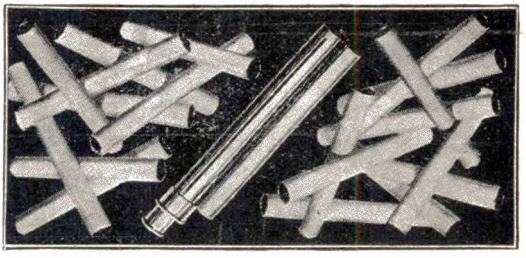

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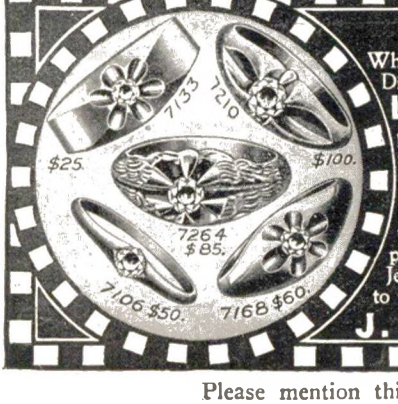

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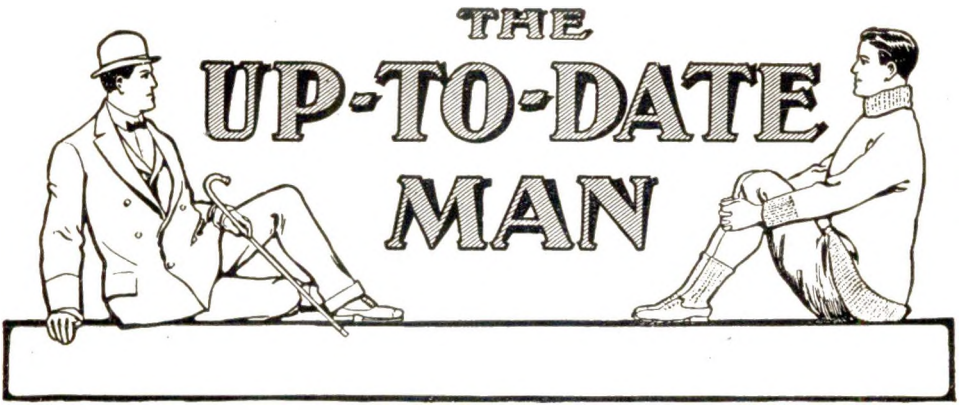

The readers of the magazine may write to this department about any problem of dress. Every question will be promptly answered, provided that a stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed.

IF there were a "Rogues' Gallery" of forbidden customs in men's dress, it could be filled in a twinkling with old offenders who violate the "Penal Code" of good form and good taste. Most of these are misdemeanors, rather than felonies, due to a habit of overdoing it—to a desire to be "dressed perfectly," which is quite different from being "perfectly dressed."

For example—many men wear twirly-whirly watch fobs in the misbelief that they are smart. In truth, the fob has not been in good standing for many years, if it ever was, and the best-dressed men will have none of it. The larger and more jeweled the fob, the more vulgar it is deemed.

Shoes with raised, humped-up, or "bulldog" toes are in doubtful taste; or, to be exact, there can be no doubt about their taste. They give the foot a misshapen, chopped-off look which is unnatural, if not downright ridiculous. The idea behind them—to make the foot seem smaller than it is—is unworthy of a red-blooded man. Like the wearer of a wig, you fool nobody but yourself. The same thing is true of "military heels" intended to increase one's height. They may seem to add a cubit to your stature, but they give you a stilted, clumpy walk, and, moreover, their purpose is as transparent as a newly washed window.

Hats clapped down tightly over the head clear down to the ears are not smart, and never were. They make a man look top-heavy, and convey the unpleasant impression of having on a size too large for you. In London, those who wear such hats are often called "nuts," a serious adoption of a bit of humorous American slang. Nor should one's hat be perched on the back of the head after the manner of a husky auctioneer warming to his work. This hardens the face and lends the pugnacious mien of a prize fighter.

Mid-season Changes in Tuxedo Dress.

Thick watch chains are outmoded. Your chain should be thin and fine-linked, and, preferably, plain gold. It may extend across from upper to upper waistcoat pocket, or from lower to lower, though it

should not be stretched taut, but allowed to droop in the middle. Chains fastened into the buttonhole of the coat and leading into the breast pocket are not correctly worn. This practice has never been approved by the best urban taste. It is provincial. Just now, when all waistcoats are cut with a decided in spring at the waist and an out spring of

Smart "Rig" for Winter Sports.

the bottom points, it is smarter to wear one's watch chain between the lower waistcoat pockets in the groove formed by the waistline crease.

Gloves are no longer flipped back over the wrists, as this looks "fussy" and feminine. They are buttoned or left unbuttoned, as you prefer. Ornate embroidery in contrasting colors on the backs of gloves is also tabooed. This is overshooting the mark. Plain or "self"

If the Burglar Came ToNight

AIMS EASY AS POINTING YOUR FINGER

DEAD of night. Dark solitude. Yowl of dogs; creak of doors; crack of floors; fear "haunts the curtained sleeper."

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But don't buy a 6 or 8 shot automatic when you can get the 10 shot Savage at the same price. Don't buy a hard-to-aim automatic when you can get the Savage which "aims easy as pointing your finger" at the same price. And be sure to get a Savage because it is the only automatic that tells by a touch or a look whether loaded or empty. Therefore harmless as an old cat around the house.

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DEAF

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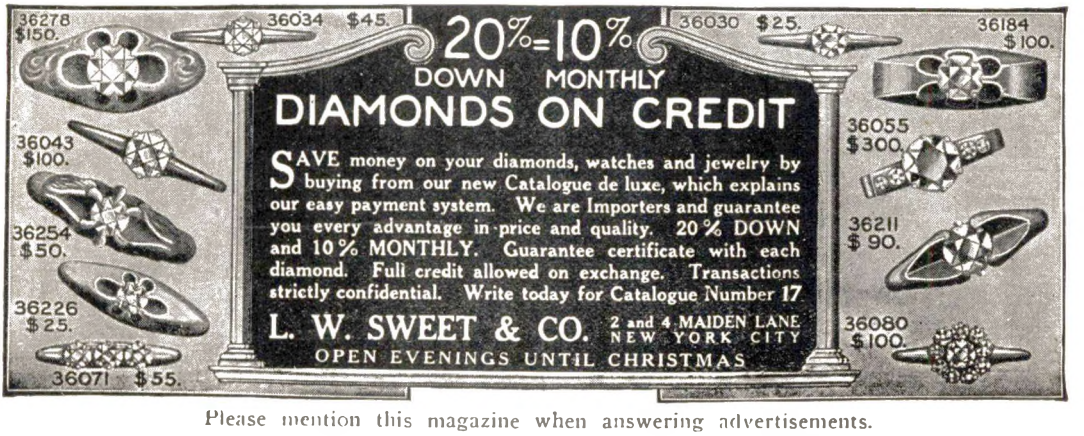

backs are in better form, no matter what your dealer may tell you.

Pins are not usually worn in neck-scarfs accompanying sack suits, though it is not incorrect to wear them. However, the best usage has dropped them. The only cravat in which a pin is worn by well-turned-out men is the afternoon Ascot. With this scarf a pin is necessary to keep the aprons in place. Then your pin should be a simple pearl or cluster of pearls. Diamonds are considered "flashy."

Handkerchiefs should be plain white linen, never colored, though a white center with a modest colored border is not objectionable. The monogram should also be white and the hem rather wide—about half an inch. Silk handkerchiefs are not carried.

Collars may be any shape that is becoming to your face and comfortable to your neck. This isn't a question of propriety, but of preference. Many well-dressed men stick to the same shape for years, regardless of fashion's changes. It all rests with the individual. Don't wear a misbecoming collar just because it is cried up by somebody as "very swagger" or "the latest thing." That argument doesn't count a feather's weight with level-headed men. Of course, change to a new shape whenever you like, but make sure that it fits your face. There are as many shapes in collars as there are bristles on a hairbrush. With an almost boundless range, you can't go amiss.

Collars with open-spaced, cutaway fronts require broad four-in-hands to look well. Collars with closed fronts or fronts almost meeting need narrower four-in-hands. Choose accordingly. The height of one's collar is a matter of personal taste, but fashion decrees right now that a goodly glimpse of white must show above the coat collar, which, therefore, should press down flat on the shoulders.

Cuffs, which should be a part of the shirt and not detachable, must show from one half inch to three-quarter inches below the sleeve rim. Therefore, your coat sleeve should be cut rather short and taper to narrowness from the elbow down. As soft, unstarched shirts like silk are prone to creep up the arm, it is well to get them longer in the sleeve to allow for this. BEAUNASH.

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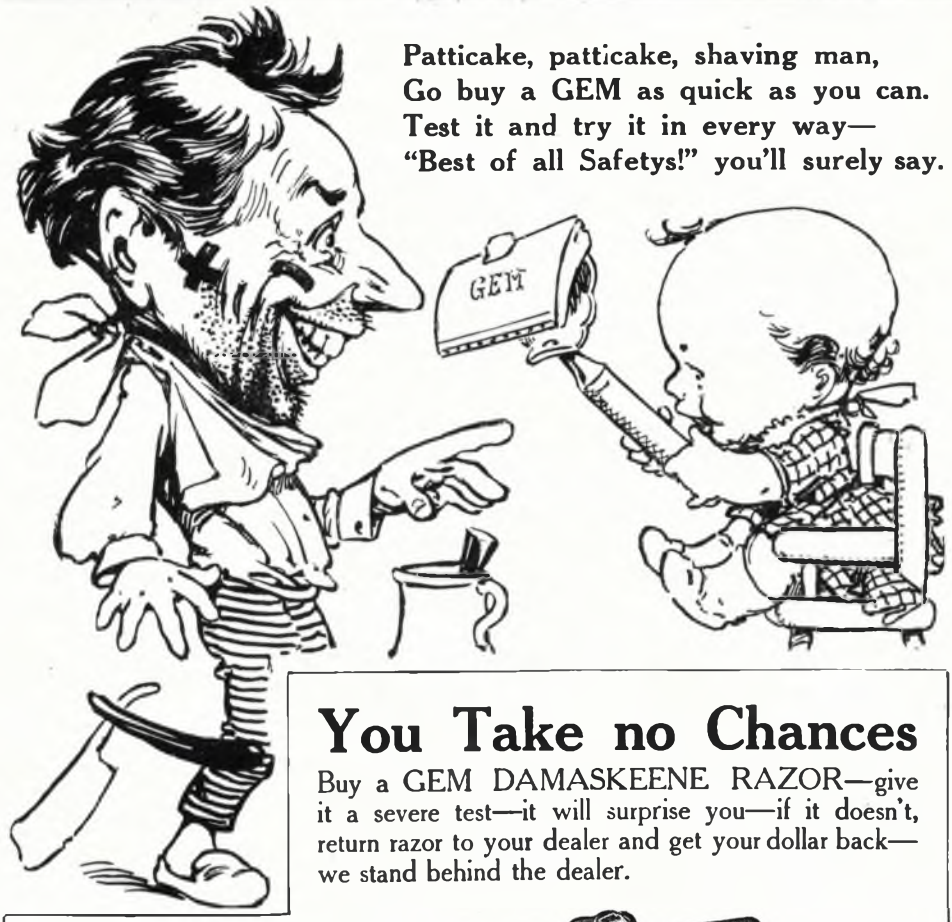

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