SEPT. 1907

224 PAGES READING MATTER

15 CENTS

The Popular Magazine

Why Every Man Should Use a SAFETY RAZOR

PREJUDICE is as silly as superstition. One who is prejudiced misses lots of good things because he won't try them. There's no more "fool" phrase than "it's good enough for me." The fatuous croak of the toad in the puddle, that likes it, and means to stick there.

Take *Shaving*—an every day necessity. Thousands who will not believe that a good safety razor is a vast improvement on the old style, voluntarily endure constant bother and expense of which they could be absolutely free, but for prejudice. Either the skeptic has not tried one, or has tried the *wrong* one. There are so-called life-belts which sink, and "cures" which kill. Whether you believe it or not, a thing that is so, *is* so. Whether you believe it or not, the

"GEM" JUNIOR Safety Razor

will give a man, with the toughest beard, and the tenderest skin, as good, clean, close and pleasant a shave as could the best barber living. And here are some reasons why every man should use a Safety Razor:

He is independent of the barber — can shave anywhere, at any time—uses his own razor, soap and towel—runs no risk of blood-poisoning—saves 10 to 20 minutes at each shave, and can keep the price of shave and tip money in his own pocket.

And here are some reasons why every man should use the "GEM" Junior Safety Razor:

It is the simplest, strongest, best made, and will last longest.

The "Gem" Junior Blades

are always ready for immediate use and the steel is so finely tempered that the edge is retained to a remarkable degree. Each blade gives many shaves without stropping, and, with stropping, many more—but, if **you don't want to strop them, or when seven blades are dull, send them to us, with 25c. and we will mail you 7 new, keen-edged blades.** (With stropping, 7 blades will give 100 fine shaves, or more.)

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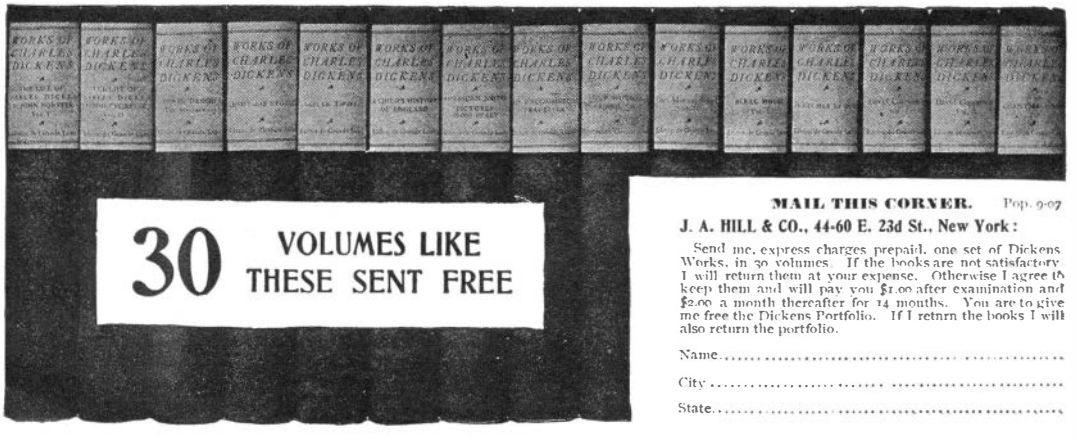

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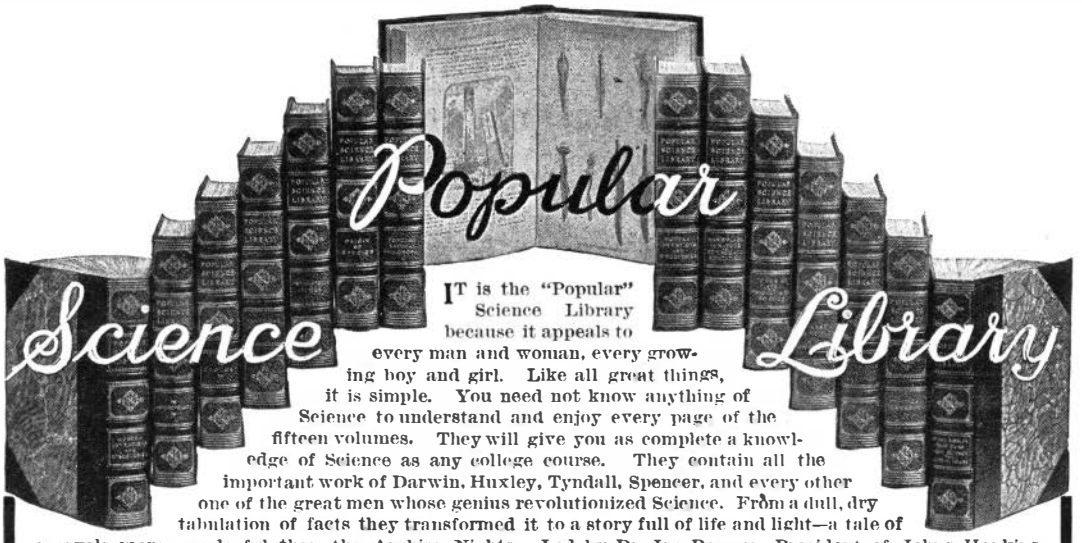

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VOLUME IX | NUMBER 3

The Popular Magazine

SEPTEMBER 1907

CONTENTS

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. IX. SEPTEMBER, 1907. No. 3.

The Door of the Double-Dragon

By George Bronson-Howard

Author of "Plantagenet Hock: Hero," "Norroy, Diplomatic Agent," Etc.

One of these days something is going to happen in China and the big lazy kingdom will awaken to new life and a new energy that will startle the world. Mr. Bronson-Howard presages the awakening, and tells of a rebellion such as history has never before recorded—a rebellion in which the master spirit is a purposeful American. The author held a commission as captain of cavalry in the Chinese army, and his story is intensely realistic.

(*A Complete Novel*)

PROLOGUE.

IT had been snowing steadily all day, the fall ceasing only with the dusk. The Flemish villas and Queen Anne's cottages along Club Road were festooned with the flakes; and in front of the Renshaws' some boys had built a snow fort. The Renshaws always closed their house for the winter and went into town, so that there was no one to disturb the fort-builders.

One of the hoodlums who hung about the gates of the Country Club to hold horses or buckle on skates had joined the youngsters, and was directing their efforts. The snow fort finished, he elected to remain behind it with the larger boys, and to make of the others an attacking party. The latter having suffered severely for some time now suggested that places be changed, and that they become the defenders. This project falling through, proceedings came to a halt, and both sides manufactured snowballs for an emergency.

A number of people passed, but they were members of the club, and personally known to the boys—also to the hoodlum. It was not deemed wise to bombard these. A negro servant, however, was not so fortunate, but fled toward Roland Avenue with smarting face. Much diverted, the hoodlum made a compact ball of snow about a jagged stone.

"Wait till she comes back," said he.

Some of the boys demurred at this. It was not fair to put stones in snowballs. "You might hurt somebody, Jerry," urged a flaxen-haired youngster in a Scotch cap.

"Oh, mama!" jeered Jerry.

The flaxen-haired boy pulled his cap over his eyes and stalked away, followed by several of his friends.

"Let the sissies go."

Jerry, a youth of some nineteen years, large-framed, heavy-jawed, and held in fear as a fighter of ability, laughed mockingly and rolled his snowball the

tighter. The hoodlums were of a different species from the boys who lived in the vicinity of Club Road. They came from Hampden, another suburb a mile or so down the avenue, lured to the Country Club by the promise of occasional odd jobs. Jerry had once been a caddy and a toboggan attendant, but had been discharged for insolence to the club members.

"Say, fellers, here comes *our* meat!"

It was an odd, pathetic little figure that he indicated—an undersized Chinese, in the garments of his race, with white-stockinged ankle showing beneath his capacious garment, and on his head a little black skull-cap, ornamented with a red button.

"See who can knock his cap off first," whispered Jerry. "Wait until I say 'Fire!' Then all to once."

The Chinese approached, his hands huddled up in the long sleeves of his outer garment, his eyes seeking the ground, his head bent, his appearance dejected. He was not aware of the presence of the boys. He seemed absorbed in meditation.

"Fire!"

Ball after ball of the hard snow struck him, stinging his ears, his nose, breaking against his teeth. He saw brilliant lights dance before him. Stunned, he stumbled back, his hand upraised protectingly.

This was a sport after Jerry's mean little heart—the torturing of a helpless creature. He picked up the stone snowball and poised it. The others had gathered each a ball also.

"Fire!"

The Chinese staggered against the Renshaws' brick wall, clutching at the dead ivy. There was a long gash on his forehead where the stone snowball had struck him, and the blood ran into his eyes and mouth. The little boys, seeing the blood, drew back dismayed, looking accusingly at Jerry. But they had little time for reflection, for a whirlwind dashed in among them, bowling them over right and left, like so many ninepins.

"Who did that? Who did that, I say? Oh, you nasty, despicable little cowards! You, Bobby Dahlgren. I see you! You needn't try to hide. I see you, too, Vincent Bates."

"We were only throwing snowballs, Bess. Honest we were. Jerry put a stone in his—that's what did it. We didn't have stones in ours——"

"Jerry! Who is Jerry?"

They pointed out the hulking fellow. The next moment a riding-crop came down full on his head. With a roar he came toward her; again it stung him; again, again, again, in spite of his rushes, until an unusually severe blow laid him out stiff in the snow.

"You've killed him, Bess; you've killed him!"

The girl put out a small booted foot and pushed the body out of the way. "Pah!" she said. "Rub some snow in his ears, and you'll find out whether I've killed him. The miserable coward!"

The jingle of sleigh-bells approaching ceased, and a sleigh pulled up by the curb. A blond young man in an English tweed suit threw off the lap-robe and tossed the reins to his companion. He approached the girl, who was stanching the wound on the Celestial's forehead with a bit of cambric handkerchief. One tan gauntlet had been flung down on the snow while she was performing her act of mercy, and the stained riding-crop lay alongside. The blond young man picked up both.

"Hello, Bess! What's the matter?"

She turned her head, and saw him. "Oh, it's you, Frank Emory. I'm glad you've come. This poor man's in a fearful way. He mumbles, and doesn't seem to understand. The little brutes have been snowballing him; and one of those club caddies put a stone in his snowball—and you see what's happened. Who's in that sleigh with you?"

"You don't know him. He's a West Point cadet. Wrenne's his name. He's in Jim's class."

She did not appear interested. "Well, you and Mr. Wrenne carry this poor man into your sleigh, and take him to my house. I'll ride right in back of

you. Go ahead now, Frank! Don't stop to think about it. We want to get him home *to-night.*"

It so happened, however, that the Chinese could walk. Emory helped him into the sleigh.

"You'll have to get out," said the girl decidedly, addressing the West Pointer. "Go back to the club and wait till Frank has taken him to my house. Will you please hurry?"

The other youth got out. Emory put the lap-robe about the Chinese, chirruped to his horse, and the sleigh was off. The girl's horse, which had been standing quite quietly during the whole affair, looked at his mistress with inquiring eyes.

"Come, help me up," she said to Wrenne.

He made a cup of his palms, into which she put her foot for the slightest second; then, with a salute of her riding-crop, pelted after Emory, leaving Wrenne with a confused vision of tangled brown curls, healthy, flushed cheeks, a thin, girlish form, and magnificent eyes that had no shrinking in them. He watched her as she turned into Roland Avenue, seemingly a part of her brown mare, supple, swaying, then turned to the quiet group of little boys gathered around the prostrate Jerry.

Jerry had a number of bruises and one cut. Industrious rubbing of snow had had its effect, and he was groaning and coming out of his unconsciousness. He arose to look into the eyes of young Hamilton Wrenne.

"Damn that——"

Wrenne had a curiously dangerous look when he chose. Jerry decided not to be explicit in his damnation. He slouched off toward Roland Avenue, and Wrenne went back to the Country Club to join the tea-drinking crowd that sat before the huge brick fireplace, where great logs sputtered and crackled and sent thousands of little red sparks dancing up the chimney. As he sat there, he took from his pocket a bit of cambric stained with blood. He stared at it for some time, and at the monogram in one corner—"E. C." Presently he went below to the lavatory, and washed the cambric carefully in one of the bowls. Wringing it out, he folded it and put it back in his pocket.

With his resumption of his seat by the fireplace, he lighted a cigarette, and continued to meditate. He did not know any of the people at the club, for he was not a Baltimore man, but a guest of Frank Emory, whose brother had been in his class at the Point.

But Hamilton Wrenne was not one of those strangers to go unnoticed. His youth was not patent. He was scarcely past his twenty-first birthday, but he looked much older, due to his excessive darkness and his heavy growth of beard and mustache, which, although carefully shaven, was evident in the hardness of his cheeks and upper lip. He was dark in the manner peculiar to English-speaking races. No one would have mistaken him for a Latin. It was a mere atavism of countenance; the recurrence of the strain of black Danes who had first ravaged, then defended, England. His hair was quite black, his complexion swarthy but clear. He had a hawk-nose and firm lips, and a certain boldness was in his dark-blue eyes. Less than six feet in height, he carried himself with so easy an erectness that he did not appear so.

He had just finished his cigarette when Frank Emory returned, and drew another armchair up beside him. Stretching his arms, he ungloved his hands and rubbed them before the fire.

"Might as well take dinner here now, Hammy," he said. "It'll be too late to get in there in time to dress. They're to have the Yarnells and some others there to-night, and they'll expect us to show some open front. The club for me."

Wrenne acquiesced. They sent a servant for a bill of fare, ordered, and sat back, smoking.

"Who was the girl, Frank?" Wrenne asked.

"Oh! Brown Bess! Miss Elizabeth Courtney, if you like that better. Won't she be a lulu when she grows up? She's only about sixteen now! Why, she's

Austin Courtney's sister. Austin's the paying-teller at the Iron Bank. Awfully good family, and all that—up to their necks in debts. Father gambled most of it away. Relatives had some pull, and got Austin in the bank. He's one of your sporty kind. Chorus-girls and the races, and bachelor apartments in town. Lot he helps the family! Don't know how they get credit. Guess the relatives help some. George Griscom's wife is Mrs. Courtney's sister, and the Griscoms could give every man in Baltimore a couple of dollars apiece and not know they had spent anything. Bess is going to make good, though."

"She's one of the most attractive kids *I* ever saw," Wrenne remarked.

"She sure is. But I wasn't thinking about her looks. She paints, you know. Now, don't make that silly joke—I mean, of course, that she paints pictures."

"At *her* age!"

"Well, I should say so. She's been drawing ever since she was a tot. Original as the devil! Made a caricature of Jim in his first cadet uniform four years ago, when she was twelve. I've got it framed and hung up in my room."

"You mean to tell me a twelve-year-old kid did that! Why, I thought that——"

"Oh, yes, I know. Everybody does. We all concede that Bess is a wonder. She's gone in for technique lately, and works every day at the Charcoal Club. They've got a man there who used to be with Julian, and who took some prizes at the Paris salon. He's enthusiastic about her. Bess is the girl for my money, all right. And she can ride like a clipper, too. She follows the Elkridge hounds every Saturday, and has got the nerve and pluck of any two average men."

They went below to wash up, and later one of the servants informed them their dinner was ready.

"When are you going back to the Point, Hammy?" asked Emory, when they were seated by one of the square-paned windows overlooking the snow-covered valley.

He had met Wrenne at Union Station early that afternoon, and taken him out in his sleigh before going home. Up to now they had not discussed personalities. Emory was rather surprised that Wrenne was not at the academy, for he knew the winter term was on. Wrenne was to graduate that year along with Frank's brother Jim.

"I'm not going back at all, Frank," answered Wrenne. "I was booked through for Washington, but I thought I'd drop off here and let you know about my case. I probably sha'n't see you again for years and years. I've an appointment to-morrow with the Chinese ambassador in Washington."

"With the Chinese ambassador!" Emory laid down his fork.

"Prezactly! He is to give me my appointment as a captain in the Chinese army!"

Emory stared at him, not well pleased. "Chucking the service?"

"Been chucked, Frank. Oh, it was done very quietly! The superintendent was a friend of dad's, and he allowed me to resign. They caught me playing cards after taps. It was my room—the rest skedaddled. Lights up, and Cadet Captain Hamilton Wrenne discovered amid playing-cards, poker-chips, beer-bottles, and cigarettes. Case for court-martial, all right; but the newspapers have been making so beastly much rot over hazing and other things that the court-martial was given the go-by. The superintendent asked me for the names of the other chaps. In case I peached, I was to be reduced to the ranks, lose a lot of points in grade, do 'sentry-go' for a month or so, etcetera *and* etcetera. The others would get the same dose. In case I refused to give up, I would lose the chance of graduating."

"Well?"

Hamilton Wrenne smiled. "Good Lord, Frank!" he said protestingly.

"Of course, old man."

Wrenne drank some coffee. "Well, it was hard lines. Dad and grandad both retired generals, and their son not allowed to graduate! Perhaps it's better they're dead. They'd have taken it pretty hard. But the superintendent

was decent. He let me resign, and recommended that my resignation be accepted. Then he took me aside, and told me the Chinese were looking for military-school men to teach their soldiers to fight in our fashion. I made application, was accepted. To-morrow I see the Chinese ambassador, get my appointment and expenses, and go to Peking."

Emory stretched his hand across the table and touched the other's fingers. "Good boy, Hammy!" he said softly. "But it was hard lines, hard lines. You were pretty near at the top of your class, too."

"Only one man ahead of me." Wrenne sat silent for a minute, then: "Let's have a drink, Frank. I can't sign checks at this club, or I'd order one myself. Don't bother about me. I'm going to have a good time out there in China. I haven't read Kipling for nothing. Always did want to get 'somewheres east of Suez'—was going to apply for a Philippines scouts' commission. Dare say I can climb higher in this Chinese service. I'll have a freer hand, anyhow."

They drank to one another. The dinner finished, they lingered over their cognac, coffee, and cigarettes.

"Where does Bess Courtney live?"

"Only about two blocks from here. Curious her taking in that Chinese, wasn't it, and you going out to China? Do you know what that fool kid did? She took him right into the house, and made their nigger John undress him and put him to bed. Then she sent for the doctor. Curious kid, very. Why do you ask?"

Hamilton Wrenne had taken the bit of cambric handkerchief from his pocket. He was rubbing it between his fingers.

"Like to drop over and call?"

For a moment an affirmative trembled on Wrenne's lips, but it went away when he smiled. It was rather a sad smile, and a shake of the head accompanied it.

"I'd be afraid to, Frank. You see, I've *got* to start for China to-morrow."

BOOK ONE.

CHAPTER I.

TO PAINT THE PORTRAIT OF A PRINCE.

The favor of your presence
is requested on the evening
of the 18th of October at
Holmwood House:
To meet
His Imperial Highness:
Prince Chu'un.
R.S.V.P. to
Mrs. Patterson Corby.

This form of invitation was in the hands of every one of the slightest note in Washington society by October 1. And no one failed to send an acceptance. It was not often that even Washingtonians were able to meet the brother of an emperor; and Prince Chu'un and his imperial Chinese majesty had the same father.

The prince was distinguished in another way. He had been partly educated among white people. Patterson Corby had been his classmate at Oxford, and adjudged him as a very decent sort of chap according to any standard. It was a distinct plume in Mrs. Corby's bonnet that she should, by virtue of this previous acquaintanceship, be able to introduce the prince to the social elect of Washington; and she reduced a check-book to stubs in order that the setting should be fit for the jewel.

Patterson Corby had family, and his wife had wealth. Holmwood House was, therefore, an exceedingly desirable place to which to be invited. It was a huge pile of white masonry in the Renaissance style—stone-walled, irrigated, with a grassy stretch surrounding it, an Italian pergola, and a toy lake. Within, it was distinguished by lofty ceilings, marble pillars, marvelous frescos, and not too much furniture. The Patterson Corbys believed in long stretches of space, in order that their priceless fittings might be properly appreciated.

Mrs. Patterson Corby received in the

Chinese room. This had been one of her pet projects; and on it she had lavished much wealth, attention, and good taste. It now fitted quite excellently into the scheme of things. Its frescos might have been the wonder of Chinese artists; they carried out the Oriental style and color effect, but were executed with the strength and originality of a brain not so old as the Chinese. The painted silk screens were from the same hand. The carved chairs, lacquered columns, swinging-lamps, and rare rugs were only to be rivaled by those of the imperial palace itself. A subtle Oriental perfume pervaded the atmosphere.

The guests began to arrive at a little after nine; and Mrs. Corby received from a raised platform, the prince by her side, and behind him a man in the dress uniform of the Chinese Army—gorgeous yellow with gold frogging, and a crucifix-hilted sword encrusted with topazes. There were several decorations on his breast; and, as he stood bareheaded, he held in his hand a mandarin hat, with peacock plume and crystal button. They saw him to be a European.

Prince Chu'un himself was an exceedingly handsome but weak-chinned Oriental. His eyes were not oblique, nor was his nose flat. His features were as regular as a European's might have been, and only his saffron complexion marked him indubitably a Chinese. He had splendid, enthusiastic eyes, and a thin, straight, high-bridged nose.

Dressed in the imperial yellow, with the Double-Dragon interwoven throughout in gold threads, his gown belted about the waist by a golden-linked belt, clasped with a carven topaz, he was a singularly stately figure. He held his hat in his hand, in deference to the European custom, as he smiled upon each briefly presented one, turning afterward with a graceful sweep of the body to the uniformed man behind him:

"My aide-de-camp, Colonel Wrenne."

And the guests, mixing with one another, and generally failing to catch the name, asked one another who that striking-looking, black-avised man might be.

"His aide-de-camp, Colonel Somebody."

"But he's not a Chinese."

"Who said he was? They have white officers in the Chinese Army." This from the former consul to Shanghai.

"Do you know him?"

But the consul was out of ear-shot.

"His name's Wrenne," volunteered the daughter of a cabinet official. "He called on father the other day."

"Wrenne? Well, upon my soul, if it isn't old Hammy Wrenne?" An army lieutenant speaking this time.

"Do you know him?"

"Rath-er! My cadet captain. Resigned five years ago. Sad story, very. Never mind that. Heard he went out to China and quite distinguished himself. Must have a word with old Hammy."

He took himself off.

But it was not particularly easy to have word with Colonel Hamilton Wrenne about that time. The formal presentation of the guests over, the prince and his body-guard had been surrounded by half a score of gushing débutantes and earnest, purposeful ladies interested in Chinese foreign missions. The prince, who spoke very good English, was trying to answer the purposeful ladies, while Wrenne managed to keep the débutantes at bay.

In fact, it was a toss-up as to which one of the two was really the most interesting. This Colonel Wrenne, with his clear, swarthy skin, his intensely black hair and bold eyes, his tightly fitting uniform and shining boots bringing out every line of his slim, powerful form, was decidedly out of the ordinary. An American, young, the confidant of the prince. There was a smack of the mysterious about him to which his careless air and clear-cut features gave an entrancing touch of the debonair. He was ready with his tongue, too; had many pleasant gallantries and an effective manner of rendition, so that for the moment the recipi-

ent of the flattery imagined that he might have implied more than he said.

He was growing decidedly tired of it, however, and welcomed the news that the grand opera tenor had arrived. He sought the prince, and the crowd followed them to the music-room, those who could not get in making the best of it in the conservatories outside.

It was then that the prince managed to speak privately for a moment with his aide-de-camp.

"You saw that marvelous artistry, Black Wrenne? You saw the clouds and the rice-fields and the dragons? You saw the Buddha face? Eh, my Wrenne?"

"You mean the decorations of the room where you received?"

"No other, my Wrenne. Wonder that we have not the artist at the palace. Chinese he surely is; but in China we have no such artist. What do you think, my Black Wrenne—eh?"

"It's good work," the aide-de-camp responded. "I'll ask this Corby woman the name of the artist when De Kurtz finishes."

The tenor was vociferously applauded. He put one hand on his little fat stomach, bowed so that the lights shone on the pomaded remnants of his hair, and strutted off.

"If he could only sing from behind a screen!" sighed a female voice near Wrenne. He turned, and caught a glimpse of hair like burnished copper, with two little curls loose at the neck. He would have followed, for some vague recognition had come to his mind. The prince's hand on his arm detained him.

"The turkey-cock will again crow!" said the prince.

De Kurtz was back by the piano for his encore. He had a marvelous voice; and the proof of it lay in the fact that, when he had bowed, many took deep breaths. Mrs. Patterson Corby herself had forgotten the prince for the minute; now she was by his side again. But the wife of the British ambassador had claimed his attention, and she was left to speak to Hamilton Wrenne. She said something unimportant about De Kurtz's singing, to which he replied in kind, then:

"Mrs. Corby, the prince admires your decorations in the Chinese room."

She smiled brilliantly.

"Does he? I'm terribly glad. I think they're simply perfect. He must meet the artist. She's here to-night."

"She?"

"Yes. Isn't it odd? A girl did them. And——"

"American?"

"Yes. She's a sort of relative of mine. That is, George Griscom's wife is her aunt. And George is a cousin of mine. Her family's awfully hard up. Nice people, though, very! Baltimoreans. You might know them. The—— Oh, there she is. Come along, Colonel Wrenne."

He followed her as she threaded her way through couples and groups straight to where a girl in a white lace gown was talking to a lean, bronzed Englishman and a thin Japanese. Both had the broad, red ribbon of the Diplomatic Corps across their shirt-fronts; and both wore a multiplicity of glittering orders pinned to the lapels of their dress coats.

"Miss Courtney, let me present Colonel Wrenne. Bess, this is Prince Chu'un's friend. They've been admiring your work tremendously."

Remembering her duty as a hostess, Mrs. Corby then went elsewhere.

"Do you know Captain Abercrombie—and Count Ito Ugichi, Colonel Wrenne?"

He bowed to the Englishman and nodded to the Japanese. "Oh, I know the count," he said. His tone did not imply that he knew anything favorable about him. "How d'ye do, captain? Think we had you up at Shan-hai-kuan once, didn't we? I was sorry I wasn't there. Parker spoke of you."

"Oh, quite right. To be sure. Hamilton Wrenne, eh? Yes, to be sure. So you're old Yuan-shi-Kai's pet—what? The man who put down the rebellion in Cheh-li? I say, come to the club after this is over, won't you? Army and Navy—yes! You've a card, of

course. I'd like to talk over China-way with you. *Chin-chin.*"

This with the smile of those who have a common interest in the Orient. He bowed to Miss Courtney, and went off.

"The prince is looking for you, Ugichi," said Wrenne.

The Japanese did not look very well pleased; but his meaningless smile submerged his expression. With him gone, Wrenne took the girl's arm and led her into the chrysanthemum section of the conservatory, where great balls of yellow, white, and pink nodded at them. He seated her, and remained standing, looking down at her wealth of hair, little curls of which clung about her neck, ears, and forehead.

She had lost the tan of her childhood through long studio confinement, and her face was now as clear white as her rounded shoulders. Lost, too, was the thinness of her form. It had changed to an exquisite slimness. But the eyes were the same—that old red-brown, almost comparable to the darkest of rubies, with slumbering fires in their depths.

"Miss Courtney, you don't remember me."

It was the first thing he had said to her. He had been looking into her eyes for some little time. She had returned his gaze frankly without the least appearance of coquetry.

"I was wondering if you were going to speak. Do you know I was going to quote Tweedledum to you: 'If you think we're wax images, you ought to pay; if you think we're human——' "

"Well, you don't look like most humans."

"The compliment is lost in the insinuation, Colonel Wrenne. Try again."

"I've remembered you for five years."

"That's better; but perhaps you have a mind for detail. Most military people have. In what train of well-ordered thought was I a detail?"

"You were not a detail at all. You were the radiating center."

"Bravo! On the left we have the radiating lady. To the right the boneless man."

She adopted the tone of a circus-barker.

"Seriously, Miss Courtney—Brown Bess they used to call you—you don't remember me, eh?"

"I have a vague recollection of your intense blackness of hair and eyes. I can't conceive forgetting those. I'm a painter, you see."

"You take away with your left what you give with your right. However, my vanity isn't hurt. You only saw me for a minute—maybe less. It was five years ago. The Club Road at Roland Park. Some boys throwing stones at a Chinese!"

"You——"

"No, I wasn't one of the boys throwing stones. You flatter my youth, Brown Bess. I was the man you peremptorily ordered out of the sleigh."

"You——"

"Yes. I'd just been sacked from West Point, and had accepted an appointment in the Chinese Army! The next day I saw the Chinese ambassador, and before night I was on my way to San Francisco to take the P. M. boat for Shanghai."

"Frank Emory's friend!"

"Yes. I must look up Frank, by the bye. I suppose he——"

"He's in his father's office. A lawyer. All the Emorys take to the law when they don't go into the army. They are a family with traditions."

"Yes, to be sure. Well, you can see now how I've remembered you. It was the turning-point in my life."

"I told you I was only a detail." She laughed.

"Let's be serious," pleaded Wrenne.

"Gaiety doesn't come often enough to fling it away carelesslike. We can be serious enough without trying. However, have it your own way. That was the turning-point in my life, too. And also due to Chinese influence. There's a bond of futurity between us, Colonel Wrenne."

"How a turning-point in your life?"

"You remember the Chinese I took home? He was the influence. It so

happened that he was a Chinese gentleman—and an artist in his way. I nursed him through an attack of brain fever, and he took some sort of a fancy to me. Mother was furious, but—well, she gave in. We had a little outhouse on the grounds, and he went there to live. He paid us for it by taking care of our garden. Thanks to him, we have the most magnificent garden anywhere about Baltimore. He could do the queerest things with flowers. He added to it, and finally built a hothouse. The family's awfully glad he's with us now—there's a big demand for his flowers. He's quite the fashionable florist. And we get the money! Nice, isn't it?"

"Very. But his influence on you?"

"He taught me the Chinese color scheme and distance effect. Also the grotesquery. My own instincts supply the realism of face and figure. Occidental technique added to Oriental imagery! It's something quite new."

"You've done wonderful work. This Chinese of yours must be a treasure."

"He is. It's odd, isn't it?"

"Everything connected with the Chinese is odd—to us. We can't get their view-point. The Chinese soul is old; very old. It's been satiated with all the emotions. We are distressingly new and interested. I'd like to see your Chinese treasure."

"You can't. He won't have anything to do with other Chinese, nor with any one who's been in China. I've tried that before. There's some sort of a mystery there."

"Everything Chinese is mysterious—to us. But, Miss Courtney, I want you to meet the prince."

"I shook hands with both him and you. You don't seem to remember that!"

"I must have been saying something to the last person I shook hands with. Will you come?"

She nodded. They left the conservatory. The prince was not in the Chinese room, the music-room, nor the Louis XIV reception-room. They ran him to earth under a hexagonal lantern in the Flemish cell.

Miss Courtney was briefly presented as the artist whose work the imperial one had deigned to notice. Wrenne used the florid form satirically.

"He mocks our customs in his English, this Black Wrenne," smiled the prince. "You know our art, it would seem, Miss Courtney. I had imagined the artist one of my countrymen. A new touch! You preserve our conventions and atmosphere, and add realism. I am very charmed with your work, Miss Courtney."

She thanked him.

"You paint the face—pardon!—the portrait?"

"I have done both face and figure from Chinese models. But it was generally symbolical."

"I have a reason for asking, Miss Courtney. My portrait has never been painted. My aunt, the queen-mother, has had her portrait done by an American woman-painter. She is pleased with it. She has also set a precedent. I may now follow her example."

"You mean——"

She had lost her self-control. She was almost gasping.

"I mean I shall be in Washington for some little time, and I should like you to paint my portrait, Miss Courtney."

CHAPTER II.

THE SLEEPING SERPENT WITH THE STRANGLING TAIL.

The half-light of a drizzling afternoon did little to light up a private cabinet in the Japanese legation where two men sat with the passive calm of the Oriental belying their inward tumult. One was Count Ito Ugichi, special envoy of the mikado to where he willed; the other, whom his countrymen called "Gray Fox"—keen, resourceful, unscrupulous; most dangerous for his original brain. He was in a heavy silk kimono, this Gray Fox; his feet slippered—the count frock-coated, gray-trousered, nursing a walking-stick with gloved hands. Matters of moment had been discussed, plans made, details

arranged. They lingered over personalities, speaking in their own language.

"To us, already in debt many hundred million yen, this is no light matter, Ito-san. Our country groans under new taxation, our customs are mortgaged to the English, our internal revenue to the Americans. We have little money, Ito-san."

"It is to be that we have much when this end is consummated. The treasuries of China—think you, grave one! The stones groan in the Temple of the Son of Heaven; groan under much weight of gold. The darkness alone greets the seven thousand eyes of Buddha. The door of the Double-Dragon is closed. Think you—what wealth, son of the Samurai——"

The other's beady eyes shone greedily out of their red rims.

"Think, too, of taotais and viceroys to be sweated out of ill-gotten gains; of lamas with treasure hid in their monasteries. Kwannon and Shaka shall take for their own the treasure of these heretical Shintos. And Nippon shall play *nakodo"* (middle man).

He grinned. But so long had he made this grin meaningless, that when he would have had it significant, he failed. Too long had he worn the mask for mobility to visit his countenance.

"Think!"

The other man combed his thin point of gray beard with talonlike fingers. His smile was a purely speculative one.

"Almost am I convinced, Ito-san. You make honorable promises!"

Ito Ugichi made a wry face. "Too long have I listened to these Western barbarians," he said. "They have another word for what we would do. 'Honorable' to them—that is different!"

"The Ugichi hath fear of the future?" Gray Fox smiled.

"There are eels that sting as serpents. There are serpents that much resemble eels. I know these Westerners better than the esteemed father's son! At times I have fear of them. Then I say: What chance have they? We, the subtle, the wise of many generations, may outgeneral them at every point. Yet there is a subtlety of eternal innocence; a well-spring fit for drowning in the clear truth. Fuji! there is a certain muddiness in my metaphors which the well-spring might do well in lacking. You grasp me, Gray Fox?"

Quite inscrutable the other, with his wisely smiling face. His benevolent hypocrisy was as much a mask as Ito's meaningless grin.

"Fear!" He stroked the beard-point thoughtfully. "We do not fear what we understand, Ugichi. Had these Westerners remained always innocent they might be more dangerous. Perforce now they add the semblance of cunning which only old races may have. In believing their acuteness, they are delivered into the hand of Nippon. A holy innocent may not easily be gulled. A man wise in his own egotism is but the prey of the truly wise. Kwannon preserve thy intellect among these muddled metaphysics! The deed for the word, good Ugichi!"

Ugichi fondled the cane. "I fear them sometimes—not often. As a nation, never, but individuals—a difference there, gnawing Gray Fox! It is no fault of these Americans that, as a country, they are stupid. The fault is otherwise." He paused. "They have the wrong men at the head of things."

Gray Fox looked triumphant. "My theory, good Ugichi, but rehashed! Spake I not so in Yeddo, several years ago? We had gulled this American nation. As we fought with Russia they cheered and encouraged us; sent for our hospitals money; for our famine sufferers, food."

He laughed mirthlessly.

"They were pleased to patronize *us,* O good Ugichi! We of Nippon! Our good friends they! 'The poor little Jap,' said they——" He quoted in English, mimicking: " 'The poor little Jap fighting the great bearded Russian.' They are one great gallery, these Americans. Of us they made a hero!"

Both took to laughing now, their glee unrepressed.

"We told them how we loved them! Ah, we loved them nobly, good Ugichi! Nobly! Ha! 'We imitate you,' said we. 'Teach us to be like you. We

would sit at the master's feet and learn. We would be the Yankees of the East.' Barbarian fools! That they might teach us aught!"

Into his eyes came a sadness.

"And yet—I would it were not so, Ugichi. My thrice-honored and divinely deceased father—he of the Daimio—he told me much of the old days. A happy people we. Happy in our own islands, with none but our own people, believing most devoutly in our gods, tilling the land; happy—aye, Ugichi, happy. To us had been preached contentment; the pursuit of naught save the spiritual weal; the content of the cot and the palace. Long ago that, my Ugichi."

He lost the mask; was suddenly quite fierce.

"What cared we for these foreigners with their new machinery, their lights of electricity, their hideous clothes, their false modesty, their guns, and their belching ships! We were happy—happy, my Ugichi."

There was a wail in his voice.

"Long we resisted them—forbade them entrance to our shores; forbade that they bring to us knowledge of what we did not need, what, knowing, we might desire and strive for. But their all-conquering greed for money drove them on. They forced themselves upon us with roaring sea-monsters of steel and iron; with iron tubes that sent death-hail among us—and then!"

Ugichi clasped his stick firmly, a sudden gleam in his eyes.

"Then the sleeping serpent opened his eyes. The guileful serpent of Nippon! They had trodden upon his tail, and his eyes blinked upon them. He saw their strength, their superior cunning of instruments. A wise serpent! What then?

" 'By their own standards they set everything, these barbarians.' So the serpent! 'Long have I pondered over the things of the beyond. That I may further dream, let me preserve my peace by besting them in the things of the world. My lack of mechanics is lack of inclination. As brain to brain—you are fledglings; Western materialists.'

"And so he set himself to learn. And now—now the canker has spread, grown. No longer does he desire contentment. A materialist he—he grasps, this serpent. He would wrap the world in his tail and strangle it. For he hath a very strong, supple tail, O Ugichi."

Gray Fox fell back, exhausted. He coughed. Ugichi patted his back.

"Yes," he said, with a certain ferocity, "they brought it upon themselves, these barbarians. They awakened the serpent. He cannot sleep again—not again. He must own all or be scotched—this great serpent of ours. For our contentment is gone; no longer do we believe in our gods; no longer care for aught save conquest——"

Both lost the sadness of eyes—became expressionless again. Gray Fox spoke bruskly.

"And when we have put Prince Chu'un on the throne of China, made him the thirteenth emperor, removed Kwang-Hsu of the 'Great Purity,' and his aunt, 'She of the Western Palace'; when Japanese rifles in the hands of Chinese rebels make echoes through the red-walled city—do we not chance aught? Eh, there, my Ugichi? How then of Chu'un? Fine promises are the prerogative of princes of the succession. How then?"

"With a Nipponese army within the gates? A question unworthy of Gray Fox. Of Prince Chu'un fear nothing. Upon me he leans entirely in this matter. He would be emperor. Tze-Hsi would have the child of Kwang-Hsu and Lu-Keng the future son of heaven—and Tze-Hsi rules China. Well are her palace doors marked *'Sho'* (longevity). She would live forever, this barren, sharp-toothed she-wolf. And succession for Chu'un comes not while Tze-Hsi lives. China sweats under oppression and the inroads of the foreigners. They curse the emperor secretly as a babe in the hands of the unbeloved dowager. We of Nippon have given them strength and belief in the yellow man. Before they had thought the white race invincible. Now with the White Bear fleeing to his Siberian steppes—the Great Fear is gone. Chu'un, with Nip-

pon at his back, would be hailed with *'Banzais'*—but of this discussion what use? Fate has willed. It is the emperor's desire——"

They bowed their heads. Feudality is no dead thing with the Japanese. They had spoken of their ruler.

Ugichi picked up his silk hat, smoothed the nap, and prepared himself to go. "There is but one obstacle; one whom I fear. Not that he will not aid in the plot, for it is to his interest that Chu'un be emperor; for of him Chu'un hath made a companion, a sharer of secrets, an adviser in military law, and other affairs. Black-avised this fellow, and secret in his ways. Some frowning storm-god of Fuji might have fashioned his face."

"The American aide-de-camp?"

"He is the man."

"And you fear him?"

"Because of his great secretness. He holds his tongue well, the Black Wrenne. Of monumental aid to me in my share in the details, for he hath a cunning mind and a great understanding of men. Of conscience—little. No hypocrite, in verity, but his strength and reserve make me fear him. It would appear that he deems a certain amount of subtlety enough for the gaze of others than himself, chuckling meanwhile that they believe it his all. But of him I have no present fear; only later when Chu'un be emperor—— Now he is quite occupied——"

"Another scheme?"

"The painter of portraits. The Spirit of the Cherry-Blossoms—she of pink cheeks and ruddy hair. She paints the portrait of the prince, but her eyes are for Black Wrenne. And when a woman engrosseth a man, plots and counterplots find him not too eager for them."

He flourished his hat. Gray Fox arose and put his talonlike hands on the other's shoulders. His rodentlike eyes searched those of his subordinate.

"I have heard tales of the woman with the ruddy hair. Kwannon hath many eyes. It is said that the Count Ito Ugichi is seen often to enter the house where she paints."

Ugichi dropped his gaze. The talons tightened on his shoulders.

"Remember, it is as you have said: 'When a woman engrosseth a man, plots and counterplots find him not too eager for them.' Be careful! An infatuation with a Western woman is death, Ugichi. We cannot understand them, we of the Orient. There have been among us men who have striven for them. When we desire our own women, we buy them of their parents in proper, discreet fashion. With them is no perturbation of mind; only pandering to our bodily cravings. These Western women have a fashion of setting brain alight, of destroying subtlety, of making of man abject mental slaves while the craze lasts—so beware, Ugichi!"

The count met his gaze, but quickly withdrew his eyes. "To me—why this——" He was not speaking confidently. From this keen Gray Fox even the mind seemed an unsafe place to hide passions unauthorized.

"Remember—you belong to the son of heaven. Forgetting, you may achieve no merit for Ito Ugichi."

CHAPTER III.

BLACK WRENNE BOWS TO BROWN BESS.

Prince Chu'un's portrait was finished. Bess stood off and observed it with critical eye. It was not as good as she expected to do five years hence; but the best that her present power could compass.

It stood, propped against the chair on the model's platform in her Washington studio, which overlooked Lafayette Park. Through the bay windows of the old mansion one caught a glimpse of the White House across the way, and the façade of the State, War, and Navy Building. The house had once been occupied by a prominent Washington family; afterward it had been the abode of successive cabinet ministers. When the tide of fashion swept up Connecticut Avenue way, the lower floor had been let as offices for a branch of the Federal judiciary; while the upper floors had been converted into

studios. Bess had the spacious attic, which had once been the family storeroom. It possessed the facilities of a good north light and a splendid view. There were stairs to climb; but that was nothing to a young, healthy woman like Bess.

She addressed the Chinese who stood gazing at her work—the same Chinese who, five years before, had been taken to her home in Frank Emory's sleigh. At first sight he might have been mistaken for a Japanese—cue gone, hair clipped close to his head, wearing a lounge-suit of brown tweeds. He had deliberately sacrificed the cue—by his action tactily acknowledging that he did not intend to return to his native land.

"Well, Lee, what do you think of it?"

It was his first sight of the picture. He had come over from Baltimore only that day to see his pupil's work before its delivery to the Chinese prince. Bess had told him much concerning the portrait, going to and fro between Baltimore and Washington almost every day.

He answered slowly and in excellent English:

"The hand—here——!" He pointed. "There is too much of it—it attracts the eye from the face by being so conspicuous. You have put into the hand much character—the character of the man—and to it first people will look. This fold of the inner robe is in too sharp a contrast to the curve of the ankle——"

He shrugged his shoulders, and, reaching over, redraped the picture.

"Well?" Bess had disappointment in her tone.

He came to her, smiling softly, and took both her hands in his.

"It is because I fear to make you satisfied that I am lacking in praise, plum-blossom!"

"Then it *is* good—oh, *Lee!*"

"It *is* good, little flower of my heart. But better things you shall yet do. Save the two defects I have mentioned, there are no faults to find. And now I go back!"

He picked up his brown bowler hat and gloves.

"I have no wish to meet the brother of the son of heaven. Nor his American soldier. All things Chinese I have left behind me, plum-blossom. I would not be reminded."

They shook hands.

"Lee!"—with sudden alarm—"you are not looking well. You have been working too hard, Lee. You are not well."

He smiled. "No? You have noticed it?"

He had the head of a Confucius, the puny body of a lama. There was much to distinguish him in feature—the lofty forehead, bulging outward; the high cheek-bones; the face curving to a point. His eyes were those of the thinker, dreamer, and deep hater. The face was thin and very much wrinkled; its yellow skin drawn tightly over little flesh. There were black rings about his eyes; a certain flaccidity of the lips.

"Let me tell you, plum-blossom, I am as well as I may hope. It is the heart." He put his hand to his side. "I had not expected to live as long as I have, little flower of my heart. For years I have been expecting the messenger of the goal. But——"

"Lee!" She shook him sharply. There was moisture in her eyes. "Lee, don't talk like that!"

His face warmed. "You care, little one? You have always cared—for poor Lee. But it is best to be prepared. At any moment it may come—click! And then to the graves of my ancestors—the last of my line! It is true, plum-blossom."

He bowed, sweeping his hat close to the floor. "The gods guide you!" Then was gone.

The girl went to the window and watched him as he emerged from the house and struck through Lafayette Park on his way to the Pennsylvania cars. He walked feebly, a bent-over, shrunken little figure; and she wiped away tears from her eyes as she watched him. She owed much to this Chinese—her philosophy, her training in Oriental art, her broad outlook on life. Then, too, he had recruited the family finances in his inconspicuous

way; making of their gardens a revenue. She sank into the window-seat.

"Poor old Lee!"

That was what he had chosen to be called—"Lee." She knew that was but the English equivalent of "Li," and but one of three names. When necessity had compelled another name, he chose that of "Gordon."

"He was a great general, that Gordon," Lee had said. "I have seen what he did with our soldiers."

Gordon Lee! And that was all she knew of her Chinese mentor. She arose, went to her portfolio, and took out a recent sketch of "Gordon Lee." She had taken the face and pose from an unconscious sitting, when he imagined her engaged on another picture; but had provided the cue, the mandarin's coat and hat, and the fan from her own imagination. Thus she imagined Lee must have looked in his native country. She pondered over it, thinking of improvements; her red lips pursed up, her pretty brows in a frown, her head bent over, so that the sunbeams made an aureole of her hair. One pink finger was pointing accusingly at certain technical defects.

Quite suddenly two strong hands on her shoulders turned her completely around, to look into the eyes of Hamilton Wrenne. She surveyed him with outward coolness. His top hat and stick had clattered to the floor as he seized her; and she noted that his morning coat was smartly cut, his white silk Ascot well tied, a flawless ruby in Chinese gold holding it together.

"Well, Black Wrenne?"

"Well, Brown Bess?"

"It is my right to ask the question," she informed him. "You enter my studio without knocking; you take me rudely by the shoulders——"

"Not rudely—tenderly!"

"If that is tenderness, I shouldn't like to feel your savage mood. However, to proceed. You hold me in a grip which will leave two red marks on my shoulders that will show when I attend the Mason-Carrs' dinner to-night."

He released her. She rubbed her shoulders with solicitude.

"Thank you. And then you have the presumption to say 'Well'?"

"The door was wide open. You made a prettier picture than you have ever painted."

"Thanks for the subtle appreciation of my work!"

"Hang it! you know what I mean."

"I thought I did. When you took me by the shoulders I imagined you were going to kiss me."

He took a step backward.

"Well, so I did intend!" he said, goaded.

"I hate a man who merely threatens——"

He came toward her, but she eluded him.

"Hang it, Bess! you're the most tantalizing creature alive."

"Why? Because I refuse to be the plaything of Hamilton Wrenne, Colonel, I. C. A. and aide-de-camp to his imperial highness, Prince Chu'un; mandarin of the second degree, and Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society; not to mention Don Juan in general to any foolish girl who fancies his sinister type of beauty? Hardly so, Black Wrenne!"

With a sudden rush forward, he had her penned in a corner.

"Now," he said triumphantly, "we shall see, Brown Bess!"

She held up a rosy finger. "I fancy not, Black Wrenne. Listen! We are quite alone in this studio. If I called out, no one would hear me. You are quite safe. You can kiss me as much as you please. But you're taking no chances, Black Wrenne. The game is one-sided. And you're not the sort of man to play that game, are you, Black Wrenne!"

He threw up his hands despairingly.

"Upon my word, Bess, I'm no match for you. I surrender, capitulate, and kiss the chains that embrace me. Please will you give the captive of your wheels some tea?"

She crossed the room, turned down the alcohol-lamp, and mixed the tea and hot water.

"Why aren't you like other girls,

Brown Bess?" asked Wrenne, as he accepted the cup from her hands and watched the slice of lemon circle the rim.

"You mean why don't I show the proper thankfulness for your condescension, and be your doll 'for a week or a month or a day, sir'? Is that it?"

"You make me out a fearfully egotistical ass!"

"No. Simply call your attention to the fact, Hamilton, dear." She smiled at him captivatingly.

"Now, upon my word!" he said, in indignation. "You call me 'dear,' give me a smile that, luckily, came several centuries too late for St. Anthony; and then pulverize me when I lose control of myself."

"I'm penancing you for the sake of the other women. But I expect you're not wholly to blame, Black Wrenne. You've found your sinister beauty a good bait for girls who want the excuse of physical attraction. You believe that most of us only want that excuse. I believe you're right. You most certainly *are* in my case."

"What!" He nearly dropped his cup.

"Most certainly!" she repeated. "You have a very vivid attraction for me. I've often rather wanted you to kiss me. I feel sure I should like it——"

He put his cup on the tray and stared at her.

"——That's my animal, physical self," she continued placidly. "That is just Bess Courtney; Brown Bess, who enjoys physical sensations. But, you see, I'm a painter, Black Wrenne. That's not Bess Courtney. That's a part of the universal soul of things given into my keeping; a precious gem that I must keep flawless. The setting must be worthy of the gem—therefore, Black Wrenne, my self-respect. Rather involved, isn't it?"

He got up, came over, and took her hand.

"Bess," he said, "you're a damn' good sort!"

Crossing the room, he removed the drapery from the picture of the prince. For some time he gazed on it, giving her the flattery of statuelike attention. It was with a deep intake of breath that he turned to her.

"You've opened my eyes, rather, my dear girl. It is indeed presumption that Hamilton Wrenne, a mere foreign mercenary, good for mighty little but a plot or a fight, should seek to make an easy conquest over the girl that painted—that!"

"Thank you," she said simply. His praise was too genuine to call forth a display of false modesty.

"By the bye," he said presently, when the consciousness of having betrayed emotion had passed off, "they tell me Ito Ugichi is a frequent visitor here. Not that they need to tell me—I've seen him here often enough myself."

"He comes quite often," she acknowledged. "He interests me. He is the best liar I have ever known."

"Oh!" He laughed with a certain constraint. "You take the words on my tongue. I'm flattered to think there's a certain telepathy between us. Ugichi insults you with his admiration. You know the Japanese idea of women."

"Is there really much difference between his admiration of me and yours, Black Wrenne?" she asked softly.

The sudden stricture left him flushing with his truth.

"No," she said, "there isn't. Only a difference between the men. Ugichi is yellow, not prepossessing. Hamilton Wrenne is white, and striking—rather! But both admire me in the same way. Is it the better part of me, the part that finds expression in my work, that you admire? My ideals? My striving for better things? No, Black Wrenne. Only these brown curls; the curves of my figure, the redness of my lips! There lies the admiration. And both of you are unmoral—not immoral, for I know *he* never had any morals, and I doubt whether you ever had. But, still, there is a difference between you——"

She paused. Wrenne, shamefaced, did not meet her gaze.

"I am afraid of Ugichi. I am *not* afraid of you!"

"Why?" he asked, in a low tone.

"You, being an Anglo-Saxon, have honor—he, being a Japanese, has not even that!"

CHAPTER IV.

HE OF THE WHITE BANNER.

"This man!"

There was an unusual note in the voice of Prince Chu'un. He held in his hand the sketch of the Chinese who chose to call himself "Gordon Lee."

It was an hour later. Prince Chu'un had seen the finished portrait; had approved of it without reservation. The secretary of the Chinese legation had presented in payment a check for more than twice the sum for which she would have dared ask. There was also his highness' gift: a belt of topazes, with a jade buckle, beyond price. Bess Courtney was somewhat dazed.

She would have returned the splendid present; but Hamilton Wrenne, surmising her intention, warned her that way lay imperial displeasure. It was, he assured her, the privilege of royalty to make such gifts as were compatible with their pleasure. Bess, only wanting an excuse to retain the belt, reconsidered.

The legation servants had been brought to the studio for the weighty ceremony that took place; and the official members of the legation stood solemnly by in official robes. The portrait had been placed in a camphor-wood box, lined with the imperial yellow. This box was inclosed in others similarly lined. The boxes were covered with yellow cloth, painted with the Double-Dragon; and, at last, the picture was ready for transmission to Peking, to be viewed by the august eyes of Kwang-Hsu, thirteenth of the Great Purity emperors, and brother of Prince Chu'un.

A private car had been reserved to convey the portrait to San Francisco, in charge of a gentleman of the legation and two attendants—from thence an O. and O. S. S. stateroom would have the honor of its presence to Shanghai—a C. N. C. stateroom to Tien-tsin, and a very special train from that point to Peking, where a cavalcade would receive it and convey it within the environs of the Forbidden City.

But the part Bess bore in the ceremony was over. Those of the Chinese legation had departed. Remained only the prince himself, Hamilton Wrenne, Ito Ugichi, and Bess Courtney's brother Austin, a handsome, dissipated young man, immaculately garbed, with hair too well-groomed, and an inherent weakness and sensuality of mouth and chin.

They had been startled by the sudden exclamation of the prince.

"What man?" asked Bess. She came forward and noted the sketch of her Chinese mentor upon which the prince gazed. His face was bland and placid again; but Bess knew instinctively that it had not been so when the pictured likeness first came under his eye.

She hesitated before replying, remembering Gordon Lee's avoidance of his own people, his refusal to meet even those white men who had been in China long enough to realize how little of it they understood. A chill struck her. She was at fault. She should not have exposed the sketch. She recalled that she had been looking at it when Hamilton Wrenne had pinioned her shoulders on his first entrance some hours before.

"That man!" she said, her self-control regained, her voice without emotion. "Why, he was a model that I used to have. He's dead now—these two years——"

Austin Courtney opened his mouth.

"Why, Bess!" he began. "You——"

Her look silenced him. Ito Ugichi, observing the byplay, grinned in his meaningless way, and rubbed his yellow hands together. It was with a certain chill Bess noted that the interchange of looks had been observed by the Japanese. Prince Chu'un, however, did not seem to note the interruption.

"You remember," finished Austin, "that we had to pay for his funeral. Out in Loudon Park Cemetery. You liked him."

She smiled at the idea of Austin pay-

ing for anything—also grimly noted his facile mendacity, which had in it the colorature of little things, giving verisimilitude. The prince was apparently convinced.

"Do you know him, your highness?" asked the girl.

Chu'un nodded. "He was master of ceremonies at the court during my uncle's time," he said. "One of the White Banner families, having rank almost as high as my own—which is the Yellow Banner. He was fond of me, I remember; gave me much of my early Confucianisms. A wise man, and in advance of his time, perhaps. Li-Wung-Kih his name. With my august uncle's death, and the reigning of his son, the Emperor Tung, he exercised much authority, and was unfortunate enough to incur the enmity of my thrice-beloved aunt, Tze-Hsi, the queen-mother. He was accused of witchcraft; of having caused the death of the youthful Emperor Tung, and had a narrow lease of life for a space. Then escaped, none knew whither. But this none forgot—he had been, beside master of ceremonies, master also of the imperial treasures. After his arrest, imprisonment, and flight, his palace was searched for the treasure keys. All were found, and in good order—save one set!—the keys to the temple of the Double-Dragon, where the seven thousand eyes of Buddha look only upon the darkness to this day."

"But other keys can——" interrupted Austin Courtney.

"No, young brother of the painter. There is one set of keys to the doors of the Double-Dragon; one set of keys which may let the light shine upon the seven thousand eyes of Buddha. In my country there is tradition, young brother of the painter. There is a tradition that these keys were fashioned at the behest of the invisible deity, and given to the son of heaven that he might prove his superiority over mere desire for mastership of the world. For within the temple of the Double-Dragon there is wealth untold—seven thousand diamonds of the purest stones; two thousand that are blue, two thousand that are yellow, three thousand that are white, and each the size of a pigeon's egg."

His audience gasped. The prince smiled.

"Ha! Your wealthy men appear but ciphers before such astounding value of gems! Perhaps it is better that the keys be lost! Li-Wung-Kih has gone to his ancestors, say you, fair young painter? With his body let the memory of this wealth be buried. Until barbarians——"

He smiled, apologizing.

"I had forgotten. Until foreigners take the Forbidden City wholly for their own, the seven thousand eyes of Buddha are safe behind the door of the Double-Dragon!"

He put the portrait back on the table.

"Come, let us go," he said to Hamilton Wrenne.

CHAPTER V.

THE SEVEN THOUSAND EYES OF BUDDHA.

Bess did not return to Baltimore that night along with Austin. She had a dinner engagement with the Mason-Carrs, and was to be one of a box-party afterward. For these contingencies she was provided, as there was a tiny room back of her studio that she occupied on such nights. The box-party, having been a wedge between the dinner and the Bachelors' Cotillion at the Willard, it was something close to four o'clock before she retired; and very near to noon before she arose. Several calls and talks regarding mural decorations which people wanted of her occupied the afternoon, and did not leave her free to go to Baltimore until dusk. She took a Roland Park car from Union Station, and arrived at home as Austin was fidgeting over his dinner, quite alone.

The mother, being an invalid, occupied her rooms constantly, and had not been below-stairs for nearly a year, except to be carried out to the family victoria and driven about the park. Some asserted her more hypochondriacal than ill, indicating her stoutness and pasty

complexion as evidences of one whose chief trouble is a sedentary life indoors. But Bess had accepted her mother's valuation of her ailment, and did not argue the question.

Going up-stairs, she submitted to a family lecture on the subject of girls who stayed alone in single rooms and disregarded chaperons, which was supplemented by a request for the check which Bess had received for the portrait. The request was denied very gently.

"I owe most of it, mother. I've got to pay my own bills, you know. Besides, if I give it to you, you'll simply have some new-faddish doctor in to call your trouble by some new name."

The mother wept, and spoke of the difference between the respect shown her and the respect she had shown *her* mother.

"And," continued Bess, "what the doctor didn't get would be borrowed by Austin. No, mother, I've got most of the burden of the house on my shoulders as it is. I'm not going to be the victim of Austin's latest fancy in chorus-girls."

Bess discussed Austin quite frankly. She had no respect for him, looking on him rather as a wayward child to be disciplined. Her mother's infatuation for the brother, however, ran to an antithetical extreme. She was willing to deny herself little luxuries to give the money to Austin.

Bess escaped from the parental displeasure, and went to the children's play-room, where her two little sisters were studying their next day's lessons. The children went to convent school, and Bess paid the bills; also she kept them supplied with clothes and a nursery governess. Otherwise they might have grown up little savages. Their mother hardly saw them one day out of the seven.

She had a box of candy for them, which, delivered, was paid for with many hugs and kisses. Later she rejoined Austin in the dining-room. He had finished his dinner, and was scowling over a cigarette. Bess was rather surprised to see him dining home, as he seldom favored the house with his presence; sleeping at his bachelor apartments in the Savoy, and dining either with men at the clubs, women in private dining-rooms, or as a member of some formal party of people whose names were in the social register.

"You took long enough coming," he snarled. "Didn't you get my wire?"

"No."

The servant brought her some soup and went out.

"Oh, you didn't? Well, why don't you stay in your studio without gadding all over town?"

"Drop it, Austin," she commanded. "What's the matter? More debts? Because I sha'n't pay them, you know. The last money I loaned you went to buy a diamond sunburst for a certain Miss Lola Montmorency—and—well, if my money's going for diamond sunbursts, the sunbursts are going on me—much as I detest diamonds!"

"Oh, indeed! You told mother that, too. A rotten, shabby trick, Bess! You don't hear me knocking you about your affairs."

"I beg your pardon!"

"Your affairs, I said—*affaires*, if you like that better. For instance, the black-eyed man Wrenne. You'd better drop him, my girl; let me tell you that. He's a bad egg, and——"

The servant returned, and replaced the soup with something more substantial. When she had taken herself off, Austin continued:

"I've heard——"

"Austin, you're an awfully poor imitation of a man; honestly you are! But for these small favors I must be thankful. If I hadn't a brother like you, I shouldn't have known half so much about how bad men can be. So I haven't had many illusions shattered."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes, *indeed!*" she mimicked. "Now, you keep your nasty tongue away from my affairs, Austin Courtney."

Austin was afraid of his sister in this mood. He covered his fear with sulkiness. Finishing his cigarette, he went to the window and dropped it out, then came back and stood at the girl's elbow.

"What I wanted to tell you," he said, in a different tone, "was that Lee's skipped out for parts unknown, and taken his luggage with him."

Instantly she divined. "You told him about what the prince said!" she accused.

He admitted it. "I thought he ought to know."

She considered.

"Perhaps you're right, Austin. They might have had their suspicions aroused, and sent some one over here to investigate. I didn't like the way that Japanese looked at us when we spoke of the model, either. So Lee's gone! Well——"

She pushed her plate away and rested her head on her hands. The defection of her Chinese mentor meant much to her. His was a place impossible to fill.

"He left a letter and a package for you," continued Austin. "Here they are."

He took them from the sideboard and placed them before her. He was a man lacking the reality of honor with curious absoluteness; but he had those superficialities of the idea which had restrained his curiosity as to contents of letter and package.

Bess excused herself and opened the letter. It was written in English, and in a small, carefully formed chirography.

LITTLE PLUM-BLOSSOM: Austin has told me of the sight which the Prince has had of my picture. It was most unwise, little Flower of My Heart, that such was seen by him, for I am no longer able to remain near you.

All that His Highness told you holds truth in it. I am He of the White Banner of whom he spoke, the exiled Manchu.

There will be no rest now until they have found me and taken from me the Keys of the Door of the Double-Dragon. But of this they shall have no chance, for I leave in the sandalwood box the keys in your keeping.

Guard them as I pray the Gods guard thee.

Thy, LEE.

"What does he say?"

"That's my business!"

"Oh, indeed!" sneered Austin. "Then, maybe, it'll be *my* business to tell Prince Chu'un how you lied to him; and also that Lee left a letter and a box for you."

"You'd *hardly* do that!"

"Wouldn't I? Well, you keep your eyes on little Austin, and you'll see what he'll do. I'm sick of the way you're treating me, Bess—and—well, I've had enough. What does he say?"

He snatched the letter as he spoke, and read it. She watched him coldly contemptuous, and said nothing when he gave it back, his eyes glowing with anticipation.

"Bess," he choked, "do you see what this means? Why, he's left us a fortune. The keys to the treasure-house—to the seven thousand eyes of Buddha—the diamonds! Bess, do you realize that he's made us the richest people in the world? That——"

She was unwrapping the package, cutting the string with the pocket-knife Austin had opened and given her.

"Don't be ridiculous," she said.

With the tiny key that had been inclosed in the letter she unlocked the carved sandalwood box. Opening it, she found reposing on a tray of yellow satin a short squat key of rusty iron, cut into many notches. The second tray had a smaller key of copper; the third, diminished in size, was of silver; and the last, and most diminutive, on the bottom tray over the imperial Double-Dragon, a tiny key of gold, carved and twisted into such an utterly fantastic shape that, had they not known it to be a key, they might have speculated incorrectly as to the purpose for which it was intended.

Bess put back the trays and locked the box. Austin was looking at her, stunned.

"We're the richest people in the world," he said dully.

"Austin!"

"Well?" He roused himself.

"Don't be ridiculous, as I told you once before."

"I'm not ridiculous," he said hotly. "We heard the prince say that tradition kept this place from being opened with anything except the official keys.

We've got the keys, and, consequently——"

"In the first place," interrupted Bess, in a very quiet tone, the quietness that Austin feared, "these keys were entrusted to me to guard. Consequently they shall be locked away in my safe-deposit vault at the Mercantile Bank until Lee comes back and asks for them."

"Wha-a-a-t!" Austin had sprung to his feet.

"In the second place," she continued without noticing his interruption, "these keys fit doors in the Forbidden City in Peking. People who do not belong to the imperial court are not allowed there. There have been only three or four white people in all history who ever lived in the Forbidden City—and two of them died there!"

"But——"

"In the third place, these diamonds do not belong to us or to any one who finds them. They are not treasure-trove. They are the property of the Emperor of China. Consequently to take them would be stealing—wouldn't it?"

She arose.

"And, fourthly, Austin Courtney, if you say anything to anybody about Lee or about this affair, I shall leave this house for good and all, and let you shift entirely for yourself. Now, good night—don't bother me any more."

CHAPTER VI.

THE CLIMAX OF CONSPIRING CIRCUMSTANCES.

"You—a thief!" cried the girl.

For more than a month Austin had been haunting her, haggard and gaunt-eyed. Numberless times he had tried to confide in her, but the words would not out. But at last, thoroughly wretched, he had torn away the veil, exposed the miserable, degrading story.

Two dear old ladies were their maiden aunts. Up to several years before they had conducted a school for little girls; but by an unexpected rise in some inherited real estate they had found themselves the possessors of only a little less than a hundred thousand dollars. On this they retired. Austin had persuaded them to entrust to him the money for investment.

He had speculated with it on his own account—and lost!

The girl was crying softly. She loved them very dearly, Aunt Malvinia and Aunt Kitty. She had always been sure of cake and candy when she went to see them Sundays. They had been in the habit of buying picture-books and keeping them on the library-table just for her to read. They had denied themselves to help her; had paid for her instruction in painting; had—why, she owed everything to those dear old maiden ladies!

There was the little white house, just around the corner from the club; the little white house with the green holland blinds and her great-grandfather's picture in the hall—very gallant that grandsire in his uniform as one of George Washington's aides. There was the much-thumbed copy of "Alice in Wonderland" on her own little reading-table, sacred to her use alone, and with the book-mark that Aunt Kitty had embroidered. The paintings of Austin and herself, side by side, in the little reception-room, dusted every day by loving hands, thin, wrinkled, gentle, patrician hands. Dear Aunt Malvinia and Aunt Kitty!

Everybody loved them! It was to their school that all the débutantes had gone until they were old enough for convent or boarding-school. Everybody had been rejoiced that they were now able to live quietly out the autumn of their lives—for there was no winter for such as they, it was too harsh a term. Theirs was the autumn, the golden-brown, kindly autumn. And now——

"You—a thief!"

"Well, well?" Austin demanded fretfully. "What are we going to do—eh? What are we going to do?"

The eyes of brother and sister met; he shrank at the fire gleaming from behind the tear-stained lashes.

"You low *beast!*" said the girl.

"Well?"

She did not answer him; went, rather, to the studio window overlooking the park, parted the curtains, and stared out across the park. Again her sorrow overcame her, and she fell among the cushions of the bay windows, sobbing, choking out her grief.

Austin came nearer.

"Now, now!" he soothed.

"I hate you. Go away."

"You've got to face it, haven't you?" he asked doggedly. "And how? You can't raise more than a few thousand at the most. I can't raise a rotten penny. Ever since they made me resign at the bank I've been on my uppers, and you know it. I thought I could make good—Bess, I was going to give them half the profits—it would have been a good thing for them, too. And it looked easy, so damned easy; I stood to make fifty per cent. on the investment. I'd have paid my debts and had a goodish lot left. It was a——"

"If I'd only known!" she said, in a low, strained voice. "If I'd only known! But I never dreamed of your having it—never dreamed of it. I thought they had it in bank; safe in bank."

"They did—drawing a miserable three and a half per cent. I got 'em to get it out and——"

She sat up and faced him. Her tone was vicious.

"I wish you were dead, Austin Courtney; quite dead, quite dead."

He laughed recklessly.

"You've got a good chance of your wish coming true when this comes out—no mistake there!"

"It *mustn't* come out—mustn't. It must be paid back. I suppose you understand that, Austin. I can go on giving them enough to make them think the interest's being drawn. After that——"

"Well — what?" he demanded. "That's all in your eye, you know. How are you going to pay it back? Art's no money-maker. If you make six thousand a year you're doing well—and we need all of that."

"We?" Much to sting him in that tone.

"Why, you little——" But he only said that much, for the light in her eyes frightened him. He averted his gaze, and there was a silence for a time almost interminable to both of them; then he spoke suddenly:

"There *is* a way!"

She waited for him to explain.

"How about the keys that Lee left? A handful of those diamonds would pay the whole hundred thousand—and a hanged sight more! Not many—not enough to be missed—just a handful, Bess. Why, what good are they doing anybody where they are? And they'd never be missed."

"No," she said; and sat silent. He became angry, and mocked her.

"You're afraid! Sunday-school scruples say it's wrong—wrong to take something that nobody has any use for, to keep a whole family from disgrace, to keep me from shooting myself, to keep your aunts out of the poorhouse!"

She bit her lip and breathed heavily. This was her brother speaking, her brother!

He went on, not realizing his peril.

"You'd rather see our Baltimore friends take up a collection to keep the old tabbies out of the poorhouse, would you? Oh, yes, I dare say you would. That's better of you—why, you devil!"

For, with a sudden swing of her arm she had struck him squarely in the mouth with clenched hand. He almost fell. Afraid to face her, he covered his face with his hands.

"Don't, Bess!"

The angry crimson in her cheeks faded out into whiteness. She paused, her fingers relaxed.

"No, I *won't!*"

It was that very quiet tone that Austin had heard before and which showed him the naked unmanliness of himself.

"No, I won't touch so poor a thing as you, Austin Courtney! A *thing* that steals from helpless old women and foists its burden on another woman.

Women! They've been very good to you, *haven't* they, Austin? They like the way you smile at them, the way your hair waves! They like you, *don't* they, Austin? Men *don't,* do they? Because men know men; and you aren't a man. No, only a *thing* that finds women useful—and a *thief!* And you want me to be a thief, too—to save you!"

"Bess!"

"Yes, that's the naked truth, isn't it? You want me to save you! Do you care what becomes of Aunt Malvinia and Aunt Kitty? Not the tiniest little bit, Austin Courtney. No! That's the lever to work me with. Because you know how I care for them, how terribly fond I've always been of them. So you try to use that to save yourself—and—you've a good conception of women's weaknesses. For I *would* steal those jewels for Aunt Kitty and Aunt Malvinia."

Her last words dissipated, to his mind, all the contumely. He had won. She would do it.

"You—you *will?*" he stammered.

"I said I *would,*" she returned quietly. "But there's no way—no possible way. The jewels are in the Forbidden City. How am I—to——"

He interrupted, eagerly suggesting.

"Split it with Wrenne. He's not the kind to turn down a proposition like that! He's going back to Peking. He's got the run of the Forbidden City. You give him the key and get him to do it for you; and let him take his share!"

"Impossible!" burst from her.

"Why?"

She was at a loss to fitly answer him. The idea advanced represented surely the sensible thing to do. She had no reason to believe from what she knew of the gentleman adventurer that he would do anything save eagerly accept such a chance for wealth. His casque of reputation bore no stainless white plume. He was plotter, intriguer, hired mercenary. As a boy dismissed from the service of his own country for evil habits, he had seemed to carry out the future prophesied for him. Why not, then?

She reasoned this very thoroughly; but still she repeated her negative when Austin would have convinced her.

"You want him to think you're a little tin saint, eh?"

Rightly had she named Austin's influence. He had little brain, less reasoning power, no moral standards; but a keen intuition where the other sex was concerned stood him in lieu of the first two lacks and abetted the last. Bess tried to disguise her angry, labored breathing by holding her breath; and she dared not risk speaking at all.

Until Austin had made his comment, she had not known herself. But it was truth. She *did* covet this man's belief in her goodness, or, rather, her striving after the better things. She liked to believe that she was an influence for better in his life. It was quite plain to her that if he became her copartner in the scheme to take the diamonds there would come the shattering of the standards she had set for him to measure her by.

Austin continued, with an angry sneer:

"That's your style. Get a goody-goody boy and you try to make him bad—look at Tommy Worthington that you used to call prude because he thought it a sin to bet on races and be a game 'un. Then you get hold of this chap who is an out-and-out rake and tell him how wicked he is, and——"

"That's enough!" she said, rising. "Quite enough. You'd better go down to the station and take the train home. I sha'n't be over to-night. I'll stay here and try to think this out, somehow, then——"

She stopped. Some one was coming up the stairs, two at a step. She waited until she heard the knock on the door.

"Hello, Bess! In?"

"There's Wrenne now!" said Austin, in an excited whisper. "Let me stay and arrange the whole thing right now."

But she had been abruptly reminded of another reason she had forgotten. The keys that she held had been entrusted to her by Gordon Lee. She had no ownership in them; they were

not even hers by right of the person who had stolen them.

"Austin, I can't," she said, in a low tone. "I'd forgotten about Lee, too. He trusted me with the keys. I can't go back on him. It's off, Austin, all off——"

He flung out a furious curse.

"Heavens, how wicked!" remarked the man on the other side of the door politely. "Want any assistance, Bess?"

"Come in, Colonel Wrenne."

They heard him open the door; and heard the clatter of his stick and hat on a side-table. It was too dark to more than vaguely distinguish his form.

"Who's here? Oh, you—Courtney! I thought I recognized your style in that remark I caught."

"Look here, Wrenne," said Austin shortly. "You're not personal supervisor of my manners, you know. Nor are you in any way entitled to call me down as often as you do. I want you to remember that!"

Wrenne answered him coolly:

"You can be as boorish as you like to other people—and to me. I don't mind! But it strikes me you aren't sufficiently impressed with the fact that you are pretty much of a lucky dog to have Bess for a sister. Therefore——"

Bess interfered. "The discussion isn't in very good taste," she said coldly.

"You're right, it isn't. But I wasn't harking back to old things. Something's happened to-day — something that gives you somewhat of a laurel wreath—did you know that, Bess?"

"No. What is it?" She was not greatly interested.

"I don't know that I should forestall the prince. You see, he's coming here in a few minutes to tell you himself. So when he does you want to make him believe you haven't heard it before. But I wanted to be the first person to bring you the news!"

Now she was aware that the matter was of importance. But her head was too full of the other affair to give her a clue to his meaning.

"Your painting arrived in Peking a few days ago. The emperor inspected it yesterday, and immediately wired to the prince to bring you back to China with us to paint *his* portrait! Now, what do you say to that? To paint the portrait of his imperial majesty, Kwang-Hsu!"

It was fortunate for her that it was dark. As it was, he did not see her face nor her gestures, nor the greedy eyes of Austin Courtney lighting up.

"I—I can't accept," she said presently.

"Can't accept!" shouted Austin. "Can't——"

Wrenne broke in.

"My dear girl," he soothed, "that's foolish. Chu'un and I are returning to China next week. We have a special train across country, and a special section of a liner reserved for us. You will have every convenience and will be looked after absolutely. Think what it means! You'll have the run of the Forbidden City. You'll paint the emperor's portrait, get an inside view into a life that will be invaluable to you in your work—and, besides, I want you to come."

She knew that he did. She did not tell him that was one of her reasons for refusing. The other was Gordon Lee's trust in her. A third might have been found in the fact that she could not accept the hospitality of those from whom she intended to steal.

"Of course you'll accept," Wrenne went on. "Now, if you will pardon me, I'll go out into the hall and telephone the Willard. I want you to dine with me to-night and talk arrangements over. I dare say the prince will be here in a moment or so."

He left brother and sister alone again. Austin gripped her arm.

"Think of the chance! Think of it! The way's wide open. You don't have to call on Wrenne. You can do the trick yourself—yourself. Think of it! And you're refusing! You don't mean it, Bess, you don't mean it. Do you want to see Aunt Malvinia and Aunt Kitty——"

"That's enough!"

"Well, it isn't enough," he continued furiously. "Not enough for me, at any rate. I'll see whether you——"

"I can't do it, Austin," she said.

Having regained her composure in all seemingness, she switched on the electric lights which glowed out of Bohemian glass vases on mantels and filigreed lamps swung from the ceiling. The glow fell warmly on rugs and carved furniture, on the walls covered with pictures, framed and otherwise, sketches in inks, studies in water-colors, a few small oils. Looking down from his place by the window, Austin saw a carriage draw up before the curb of the house. A robed figure got out, followed by several others.

"Here comes the prince," he said, with savage intensity. "You'll be sorry every day of your life after this if you turn this thing down."

They waited in silence for the prince's rap. When it came, Bess opened the door for him, greeting him and the Japanese, Ito Ugichi, who followed with several of the legation attachés whom Bess knew only slightly—gravely smiling Chinese with intensely indifferent countenances.

She asked the prince and his companions to have tea. He refused, with formal politeness.

"This—it is official, Miss Portrait-Painter," he said. "Wung-Han, will you give to the young lady the scroll you have prepared?"

One of the legation attachés handed her a formal-looking roll of parchment from which dangled several seals. For all the solemnity of the occasion and the issues involved, her sense of the ludicrous harked forward a simile of her childhood. Wung-Han marvelously resembled the Frog Footman.

Following the delivery, the attaché indulged in the peroration prepared for the occasion, a seemingly unending affair, which brought in all the titles, appellations, and similes adverting to his imperial majesty. Prince Chu'un's explanation, which followed in English, summed the matter up much as Hamilton Wrenne had done.

The emperor was pleased with Prince Chu'un's portrait. He wished the same hand to paint one of himself. He tendered to the painter the freedom of the sacred city, and would have a palace put aside for her special use. The remuneration was to be whatever she desired, her expenses were to be paid, and, in conclusion, the emperor wished her long life and many male sons.

All in a daze, she thanked the prince, trying to lead up in some way to a refusal. She knew she must refuse; but, somehow, the words stuck in her throat. She looked dully across to where Austin glowered at her.

The silence that ensued was broken by the shrill whistling of some popular street song on the part of some one ascending the stairs. The whistling came to a close when the whistler knocked sharply on the door.

"Come in!"

A boy in the blue of the Postal Telegraph stopped on the threshold, gazing at the various dignitaries in no evident embarrassment.

"Gee!" he said.

Bess looked at him. "Well, little boy?"

"You Miss 'Lizabeth Courtney?"

She nodded. He came across to her with a queer side-step of a gait, and gave her a telegram. She signed for it, and, excusing herself to those present, broke it open.

MAYANALAINE, BERMUDAS,
The seventh.

MISS ELIZABETH COURTNEY,
Washington City, U. S. A.

Chinese known as G. Lee died here to-day, leaving unofficial will bequeathing a thousand dollars and other properties to you. Wire instructions.

K. L. HAYDEN,
Vice-Consul, U. S.

She put up one hand to loosen the ruching at her neck. The room seemed hot, she was gasping for air.

"The window, Austin," she choked.

It was a genuinely alarmed Austin who allowed the air to come through the room. The girl sat down and folded the telegram with trembling hands, putting it, for security, in her belt.

"Any answer, lady?"

She shook her head, and the Postal Telegraph boy went out. He picked up the strain of his song where he had left it when he entered, and the assembled

company heard it until he slammed the door below; even then the echo of it floated up from the street through the open window.

Gordon Lee was dead! He had left everything to her—including the keys to the doors of the Double-Dragon. It seemed that circumstances were conspiring to make of her a thief. She had no excuse now, none! Each one had been swept away by the conspiring circumstances!

"Little Miss Portrait-Painter," said Prince Chu'un, "you are very ill—we do not trouble you more. We go."

He made a sign to his companions. They moved toward the door. But it was opened for them from the outside, and Hamilton Wrenne entered. He saluted the prince gravely, and turned to Bess.

"Well—the prince has told you?"

She nodded. Somewhat taken aback by her appearance, he came forward and put a hand solicitously on her shoulder.

She looked up. The prince was smiling in kindly fashion, but there was a certain amount of expectancy in his glance. Austin was glowering at her. Black Wrenne was tender.

"So you're going with us, Bess?"

The girl got up and crossed the floor to where the prince stood. She bowed her head and made a motion of carrying Chu'un's long, clawlike hand to her lips.

Turning, she looked at Wrenne.

"Yes," she said.

BOOK TWO.

CHAPTER I.

AN AUDIENCE WITH THE SON OF HEAVEN.

Prince Chu'un and his escort had entered the imperial city the night before, leaving Bess at the American legation in the Tartar city. It was arranged that she should have her audience in the morning.

The American legation held forth in a former Chinese temple, just under the red walls of the imperial city, named "forbidden" by the foreigners. The official green chair that came for Bess had, therefore, not far to be carried by the palanquin-bearers, sturdy coolies in the trappings of imperial servants. Before the chair went soldiers of the Palace Guard, driving the staring natives out of the way; on either side of the chair were more of the military to prevent the lower orders from crowding the chair; and behind marched yet more for the same purpose.

Bess did not fancy the Tartar city. It was picturesque, but very dirty and smelly. Water, long stagnant, lay in broken places of the causeway, and heaps of refuse cried aloud to heaven. She found her relief in inspecting the lacquered fronts of the shops and the red signs and pennants which swung with the wind, advertising in up-and-down ideographs the merits of various brands of edibles. But this was all much of a sameness; and she breathed a sigh of relief when they reached one of the great gates in the wall surrounding the imperial city.

The officer of the guard cried, gutturally, to the guardians of the gate, and it swung open. Bess had a little shiver of apprehension She wished suddenly for the presence of Hamilton Wrenne. She remembered that she was entirely alone and about to go within the mysterious city of which she had heard so many gruesome tales. The thought of why she had come suddenly chilled her.

The palanquin had passed over the stone bridge of the canal while she was in the grip of her terror. Looking from the windows, she saw the battlements, turrets, and moat of the Winter Palace, its walls, once red, now softened to a pale cherry hue. Hamilton Wrenne had described the palace so often to her, en route, that she could not fail to recognize it.

The raised road over which she was being carried was a picture of animated color, with its official chairs of green, bedizened carts, and splendidly trapped

horses. One must go gaily attired into the imperial city; and all were obedient. Here Greater China was represented; the melancholy, mustached Tartars, the apparently noseless Mongols, fur-dressed and leather-booted, the nobles among them riding on gaudily hung camels, the yellow-gowned lamas from the temples, the Cantonese striving to make up in color for what they lacked in stature, the strapping Manchus, seldom short of six feet, striding majestically as though conscious of the fact that their dynasty ruled. Here one had attachés of the Foreign Office and the yamens, taotais, and viceroys come to "save their faces"; officers of the army riding white horses—all Chinese these officers with two exceptions, a rather large-statured Japanese, who passed, talking with a fresh-faced young Englishman who looked as though he might have been a Sandhurst boy.

And now the great gate of the palace itself!

Bess was not prepared for the intricate array of winding passages, high walls, heavy gates, and huge, iron-spiked doors through which they passed after entering the palace gates. She reflected, with a shudder, on the impossibility of Bess Courtney, stranger, finding her way out of the palace without assistance. More keenly than ever she regretted her resolve. Her face was very white, her lips pale. To embark on such a quest in a country where the Chinese are much mocked and little feared was a different thing from assuming nonchalance as to the same purpose when the mystery, secrecy, and strength of the Ming dynasty was made manifest to her.

Her green chair had been changed for a red one, after entering the great gate, and in this she was carried through a labyrinth of white, paved courts, until she came to a very central one, where a number of cedar-trees sheltered the stones from the heat of the morning sun, and where beautiful shrubs, plants, and flowers almost intoxicated her with their perfume. She found that her chair had been lowered to the ground. She stepped out.

A number of palace eunuchs in embroidered robes of office were bowing to her. Three of them preceded her, making signs that she was to follow. The others took up the rear. The plate-glass doors of the palace, resplendent with a huge character enameled in red and indicating longevity, swung back without noise. She entered, and found herself in the throne-room.

It was a long hall, paved with blocks of black marble, having red walls and a dome-shaped roof, that glinted gold in the morning sunlight. In the center of the south side were the great doors through which she had entered, directly opposite a red-lacquered throne, approached by five steps of varying widths. Near the throne were gathered the ladies of the court, splendid in their gold-embroidered costumes, with gems on their capes and flowers in their hair. As the eunuch stood by the door calling out in low gutturals, several of these court ladies approached Bess, and one of them spoke to her, quite prettily, in English.

"You are the portrait-painter. I am Na-Leng. My father was minister to your country at one time——"

She spoke a trifle stiltedly, and had the usual difficulty with her r's. Pretty she was not, according to European standards, but Bess, familiar with the Oriental idea, knew that Na-Leng was most greatly desired. She was in a long loose gown of rare satin stuff, painted with bird-and-sky effects, wore a profusion of jewelry and ornaments, and had on satin boots with white kid soles. Bess knew her at once for a Manchu girl and one of high rank.

"I want to be your flend," said Na-Leng. "You remember me—now I go back. Come. She approaches."

Some cymbals and flutes sounded the Imperial Hymn, preceding the coming of majesty. The doors were thrown open. Two lines of gorgeously vestured eunuchs walked stiff-legged into the court. In the sudden quietness an open chair was carried to the center of the hall. Another chair followed. It was put down alongside the first. Behind the first chair stood a maid of

honor, behind the second was Hamilton Wrenne in the full dress of the Chinese Army.

Their majesties alighted. The dowager empress took the throne-seat, her nephew, the emperor, seating himself on a hassock by her side. Bess surveyed them both with eager eyes.

The much-discussed Tze-Hsi was in a gown of stiff, transparent silk, embroidered with pearls and fastened on one side from neck to hem with jade buttons. About her neck was a rope of pearls having for pendant a large, pale ruby. Her hair was parted in the middle and brought over her brows. The third and fourth finger-nails of either hand were like talons, and were protected by gold guards. She wore no paint, and her skin was fresh, having the appearance of youth. Her eyes had in them a contemptuous kindliness; her small mouth had cruel lines about it.

The emperor looked to be little more than a boy, although Bess knew him to be nearer thirty-five than thirty. He was slim, slight, and short, and had the face of a monk or a priest, the ascetic type. His mouth and chin were not lacking in strenth; but his gaze was aimless, his eyes without concentration. He was simply dressed in a gown of yellow brocade, belted tightly about a waist, the smallness of which, in common with his hands and feet, he was quite proud of. Looking keenly for the signs of weakness she sought, Bess discovered that his forehead, while high, receded as it neared his glossy hair; also that his hands and lips had an odd habit of twitching nervously.

Wrenne acted as interpreter, and Bess was greeted graciously. She formally accepted the offer of the emperor, and was requested to name her preference of abiding-places while she dwelt within the "violet city."

She trembled before she answered. She knew, from stealthily questioning Wrenne while on shipboard, that the Temple of the Double-Dragon was a small one, erected within the Gardens of the Invisible Deity; knew also that a small pavilion, the Arbor of Buddha's Hand, overlooked the temple and gave access to it through the gardens. Without mentioning specifically the place she wanted, she described the pavilion to Wrenne, who translated her remarks to their majesties. The Arbor of Buddha's Hand occurring to them, the emperor inquired of the head eunuch as to its tenancy, and was answered that it was closed. It was ordered to be opened, refurnished, and heated, being made in all ways ready for the portrait-painter.

The emperor rose. The arbor, he informed Bess, would be ready the next morning. He begged that at that time she take possession of it, and at eleven o'clock be ready for his first sitting. He would come to the Arbor for his sittings, that the Sacred Picture might not be touched unnecessarily by the hands of servants.

The empress arose, also. The audience was ended.

"Go back to the legation," Wrenne whispered. "I shall see you this afternoon. To-morrow a chair will bring you here and a cart will bring your belongings to-day——"

He was quickly on salute, and stepped behind the chair of the emperor, waiting until the imperial pair had been borne away, then attaching himself to Prince Chu'un, who had sat throughout the ceremony on the lower steps of the throne in company with several cousins of the royal house. Bess, recognizing him, thanked him again for his good offices.

The prince smiled, disclaiming, and asked if she cared to inspect the palaces of the imperial city. If so, he would put his servants at her disposal and ask the court ladies to accompany her as escort. But the excitement of the morning was enough for the girl; and she asked that he repeat his offer at some later period.

He went away with Wrenne; and the eunuchs, conducting her to her chair, she was taken to the palace gates, her chair changed again, and carried from out of the imperial city back to the American legation. On arriving at the latter place, her first act was to send the servant assigned to her for brandy;

and of this she took more than she had ever permitted herself before. Her nerves in a normal state, she went down to lunch with the American minister's wife and family.

CHAPTER II.

CAPTAIN KOMOTO IS PROMISED THE GOLDEN KITE.

Ito Ugichi and he whom his countrymen called Gray Fox were once again in conference. The room in which they sat might have been the same as the last meeting-place in furnishing and general appearance; but instead of overlooking the yellow Connecticut Avenue cars, whirring motors, and fashionable crowds of Washington's thoroughfare, it looked out on the inner court of the egation in Peking. Gray Fox was again in the costume of his country, his gray kimono embroidered with cranes, his obi-sash blood-colored. His feet in *getas* were stretched out before him, and he contemplated them without expression.

Ugichi, in the frock coat grown habitual with him outside his native country, was smoking a cigarette and watching Kitsune-san. The Gray One had not spoken since the greetings had passed between them.

"Is thy thesaurus of speech depleted that thou grudgest of its contents to me, Samurai?" asked Ugichi.

Gray Fox looked up.

"I have seen to it that the rifles, the ammunition, and the supplies have been landed," he said slowly. "Not fifteen miles from Tongku, there is a cave well known to the opium-smugglers, and this holds the wherewithal of rebellion against Kwang-Hsu. For these expenses Nippon is sorely taxed. Thou didst propound to me in Washington a plan by which the seven thousand eyes of Buddha should refund Nippon—and hast thou so replenished the exchequer of the son of heaven?"

"Truly I have not," answered Ugichi.

"Thou hast not! The servant of the emperor would now have reasons."

"By Kappa! thou shalt have them, gnawing Gray Fox!" The Count Ugichi showed a spot of color on either sallow cheek-bone; his voice was that of a man wronged. "Think you, now, what I have done. Was it not I who months ago, in Washington, detected the falsity of the portrait-painter's speech when she spoke concerning the picture of the exiled son of the White Banner? Knew I not then that she lied; and did I not discover where lay the Manchu, Li-Wung-Kih, who called himself Gordon Lee? He became imbued with thy cunning, that of the fox, and fled me to the Bermuda Islands; but forth on his trail went Yedo, the agent, with my orders to take from him the keys. Yedo returned. He had killed this Gordon Lee with a subtle poison, had examined his clothing when dead, had searched among his properties for the keys of the door of the Double-Dragon. Found he them? No! Kappa (the demon of hell) is in my luck—and then——"

"Then you discovered that the keys were in the possession of the portrait-painter herself. That I remember. Recount not thy own craftiness, Ito-san. Thou art very cunning. Proceed."

"It is as Gray Fox says. She had the keys, wearing them always about her neck upon a chain that was very strong. In San Francisco did not our cleverest agents brush against her in crowds, provoke small riots, do all that might give a chance for the keys to be snatched. But how fortunate they? One is in their jail, another in their hospital. She hath in Hamilton Wrenne a protector—the black-avised man of the great secretness. Knew I well we should be enemies, Samurai. It is so."

"What further attempts?"

"As much as any man, even as much as thee, the wise and most machinating *furu danuki* (old fox). On the steamship I had agents among the ship-boys, all of whom attempted and failed. She wears the keys next her skin and over them a close, very tight-fitting jersey high in the neck. Once I had nearly won. By great secrecy and caution that same agent, Yedo, serving as a ship-

boy, had entered her cabin late in the night; had with his knife slit open the night-dress that she wore, only to find naught save bare skin—for she wore the jersey not at night, nor the keys about her neck. He searched most secretly among her bags and boxes, finding nothing, and was interrupted in the task by her awakening. Ever afterward a soldier of Prince Chu'un slept outside her door—what chance, then?"

"Bribery!"

"'Twas tried, and failed. To his master Prince Chu'un the soldier told the tale, and my Yedo was landed at Honolulu ironed and manacled as a criminal. He is also of the Samurai, this Yedo-san."

The Gray Fox nodded. "And further?"

"Her room was entered while she slept, in the Astor Hotel, in Shanghai. Again naught was found, naught worn. The keys are no longer in her possession, Gray Fox. She hath given them to this Hamilton Wrenne to keep for her. They have been enclosed in a sealed silver box and this swung upon a chain again—for this was done while she waited in a silversmith's in Shanghai and while a guard of soldiers, ordered by the taotai as her escort, waited without the shop. The sealed silver box she gave to Black Wrenne. Samurai, we must rid us of this incubus of a Wrenne. His presence is parlous to the cause of the son of heaven. Besides the keys, much power hath he with Chu'un, much too much, Gray Fox."

"But thou saidst——"

"Said I my power was the greater? Yes, I remember. Kwannon grant I was not in error. *Ijin-san* (the foreigner) hath me in doubt. Very useful he hath been in my plotting, knowing, as he doth, the strength of all the armies of China, and those liable to defection. But his work is done now. He can help me no more. He was well out of the way."

Gray Fox meditated. "And with him out of the way, Ugichi, it might be that the keys——"

Count Ito grinned in his meaningless fashion. "If he is then to see the black Omi-angel, why not in the presence of faithful Japanese who might procure from him the keys to the door of the Double-Dragon? Speak I wisely, Gray Fox?"

They eyed one another.

"Wisely, indeed!" said Gray Fox; and fell to meditating again. Presently he raised his eyes.

"It is for the emperor, Ito-san. What is one man that he should stand in the way of the emperor's desire? We have originated this plan to put Chu'un on the throne; have provided the brains, the money, the rifles, the munitions of war—even the men, in part. Knowest thou that between Peking and Tientsin there are scattered some five thousand of our race, members of the army of the emperor?"

Ito nodded. "Long since I knew that, Gray Fox. Also do I remember that at Shan-hai-kuan among the allied garrisons there is a full regiment ready to write their names in the Bushi Kanjo—and as thou hast said: Are the time, the money, the men, and the emperor's desire to go for naught because one Black Wrenne opposeth the path? Nay, Samurai! Scruples are well enough for a robber Eta who pilfers on his own account—for him there is the law. For those who act at the emperor's wish there is no question of law."

"Light of the son of heaven!" murmured Gray Fox.

He reached for a bell-rope, pulling it. A servant answering was told to fetch Captain Komoto, who would be found below. A surmise as to Gray Fox's purpose lightened the eyes of Ito Ugichi; but he said nothing of it, waiting in silence until a Japanese in the blue uniform and patent-leather top-boots of the army entered and saluted.

"You sent for me, honorable ones," he murmured.

"Komoto, thou knowest a certain *Ijin-san* holding rank in the army of China—one Wrenne, whom they call the Black!"

Komoto assented.

"He imperils the welfare of the mikado, Komoto-san!"

Komoto's hand went to his sword-hilt.

"To the enemies of the son of heaven, what, Komoto-san?"

"Let those of the Akuki be speedily delivered to the maw of the Red Dragon!" answered Komoto symbolically.

"Takest thou service under the Red Dragon, Komoto-san? Wilt be his purveyor?"

"For the glory of the emperor—what not?"

"Let the golden kite be writ large upon thy breast, son of the Samurai! Amadi Butsu guide thy steps to paradise."

Gray Fox discarded the sonorous symbolic syllables, becoming suddenly practical. "Thou hast many men that thou mayest trust, Komoto?"

"All serve the emperor!" answered the captain oracularly.

"It is well. Now it were not difficult to take five of these men and attire them as Chinese coolies; to put false cues upon their heads, and wadded garments upon their persons."

"It were not difficult, son of the Daimio——"

Gray Fox raised his hand, regarding him sternly. "The days of Daimios are past. There is but one ruler—the emperor! Forgottest thou, Komoto?"

The officer seemed humbled. "I crave pardon, Kitsune-san (Mr. Fox). It were difficult for me to forget, I who was born in a humble *shoji* very near the palace of thy illustrious father. Again I crave pardon."

"Offend not again, Captain Komoto. Touching on the matter of the five mock Chinese. You said it were not difficult?"

Komoto bowed.

"Nor would it be difficult if these five mock Chinese met with this Black Wrenne in the purlieus of the Chinese city, whither he goes each night to inspect his soldiers keeping guard upon the walls?"

Komoto bowed again.

"And should accident occur to this Black Wrenne—should he tumble from a wall and be utterly demolished, there could be no harm in opening his garments and finding hung about his neck a silver box on a chain, eh, Komoto-san?"

"There could be no harm, Gray Fox," echoed the soldier.

"Keep thou and thy five mock Chinese sharp watch, then, for his fall! And when thou hast the silver box bring it to thy unworthy preceptor. For this watchfulness of thine, thy name shall be recorded in the unwritten book of noble deeds. *Sayonara.*"

The officer hesitated.

"Were it better for the emperor that this Black Wrenne fell from his perch this night or a later one——"

"The emperor liketh ill the song of the black wren. This is a bird of ill favor with him. Shall the emperor's ears be longer offended than his servant may compass?"

"I am ashamed, Gray Fox!"

"No need of shame. That only when one has failed. And should the light shine upon a deed which thou hast committed outside the laws of nations, wouldst say it was in thy emperor's service, Komoto-san?"

The captain drew himself up stiffly.

"Hath not Komoto-san private revenges that he may wreak, son of the Daimio? Hath he not a tongue to cry aloud these satiations of revenge?"

Gray Fox gave him his hand. "Thou shalt yet be read of in the Bushi Kanjo, Komoto-san. Thy very excellent good health. *Sayonara!*"

"*Sayonara,* honorable ones."

He saluted and went out. Gray Fox rubbed his hands. The Count Ito Ugichi grinned in his meaningless way.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE GARDENS OF THE INVISIBLE DEITY.

The Arbor of Buddha's Hand was so called because within the precincts of its garden grew numbers of trees bearing the fruit which has been given the religious name—fruit much of the same variety as a lemon but more fragrant and shaped in such a way as to vaguely resemble a hand. In the center

of the garden was a lotus-covered lake, on the edges of which grew quantities of asters and peonies, also several variations of the orchid family. Cedar-trees flourished there having dwarfed cypresses for companions. From the marble terrace of the pavilion Bess could note the Temple of the Double-Dragon rising above the tops of the cedars, approached by one hundred steps, flanked on four platforms by small outhouses with curving crenellated roofs. The sight was an obsession with her. Many times she found herself leaving her work and drifting to the terrace to gaze at the temple with its lacquered columns and porticos, and the great golden Double-Dragon sprawling across its door.

Behind the temple rose a great wall, ten feet in thickness, gray-pink in hue, and this same wall extended on all four sides of the garden. His majesty gained access to the pavilion through the imperial archway on the south side, and Hamilton Wrenne came through the little door on the north. It was by a special dispensation only that this was allowed, for the Arbor of Buddha's Hand flanked the ladies' precincts of the palaces, to which no male was supposed to come save on ceremonial occasions.

There were five rooms in the pavilion, separated by walls of carven wood, in which were panels of white and blue silk painted with poems and representations of cranes, peacocks, dwarfed trees, and demons. The entire front facing the Double-Dragon Temple was a concatenation of plate-glass windows which might be released and swung outward by pressing ingenious catches. The lower windows were provided with blue silken curtains that rolled into graceful folds.

In the front room Bess had set up her easel and canvas and arranged her painting paraphernalia. Here, also, had been brought one of the great red lacquer thrones on which the emperor sat while posing. Several European chairs had been brought in for Bess' comfort; but she preferred the couch built into the wall, when tired. The second room was her boudoir, the third her sleeping-apartment, the fourth her dining-room, while the fifth was used by the servants as a pantry, the cooking being done in a little outhouse. The pavilion was heated by porcelain stoves and fires built under the floors.

Nearly two weeks had passed since Bess had come to live within the violet city; and during that time she had not ventured forth from beyond the high red walls. Every morning at ten Kwang-Hsu came for a sitting of half an hour, and during the rest of the day she worked over what she had blocked in. Sometimes Na-Leng or some of the ladies of the court came for her and took her on tours of inspection. On several occasions she witnessed performances of the Royal Players; and three times she had lunched with the young empress and her maids of honor. But the days were mostly taken up with work and the visits of Hamilton Wrenne, who came every afternoon through the small gateway at the south.

He came generally at sundown and remained until the Gardens of the Invisible Deity were hung with the black wings of the Night-Dragon under whose protection fluttered the good ancestor spirits, waving their silver lanterns—she recalled the picturesque simile of the Lady Na-Leng, as she sat there this night and watched Wrenne in the starlight.

She had begun to know that his presence was necessary to her, and without his visits she would be like the little nightingale in the silver cage that hung by the windows. The simile called to mind the fact that the little bird's head was drooping, his feathers ruffled. She arose and opened the door of the cage; gladly he fled into the night, and from the near-by branch of a cedar-tree poured out a flood of song.

"Hello!" said Wrenne. "You don't seem to appreciate the value of that little songster, Bess."

She shook her head. "Oh, yes, I do. But the poor thing was so unhappy when I first got him. I let him out twice a day. He'll always come back. See!"

She stepped on the terrace and whistled softly, cooingly. She, too, was in the starlight now; and it touched her golden-brown hair, seeming to fondle it. The stray curls at ears and brow and neck fluttered in the early night wind, fluttered against that pure, white skin, and brought the tint of wild roses to the cheeks. The nightingale's song ceased; he fluttered uncertainly on his perch, then came flying back and perched on the dainty finger outstretched toward him. The girl stroked its feathers and bent her head over, whispering to it. Instinctively it rubbed its feathers against the soft cheek.

"Coo-ooh," she breathed to it again. It turned its wise little head, surveying her with attentive eyes, then, released by the motion of her hand, flew away again.

She turned to Wrenne. "You see?"

He saw more than she had intended: the brown eyes soft with the mystery of the thoughts of nightfall, the thoughts that her conscious mind hardly read. There was perfume wafted into his face, perfume he knew to be of the garden; but sweet in the thought that it was no sweeter than she.

"Whispering trees, soft summer breeze,
Moon shining bright from above——"

She had begun to hum the song, hardly remembering the rest of it which dealt with lover's arms and other accessories of a divine night. It was a tribute to the evening that nature had provided; and to the man himself, in that he provided no jarring element.

But he had not forgotten the words of the song, if she had. There was color in his cheeks, too, as he came forward, nearly touching her. She was subtly entrancing, a creature for the evening mists, for rose-gardens and mystic moons; her charm as pervasive as the perfume of springtime, as delusive as a stray moonbeam. She was too daintily ethereal for the workaday world of every-day. Here in the temple-grove on the marble terrace, with the moon and stars silvering the night, and the great, mysterious temple's gold roofs towering beyond the cedar-trees, she was the sprite of the illusion,. the key to the picture.

"Bess!"

She was not unconscious of his meaning. But at the time, with the enchantment of the good ancestors' silver lanterns in her eyes, she thought of the one word spoken with the infinite tenderness of a lover only as a part of the beautiful night. Looking up and finding him standing so close to her that she could hear the beating of his heart, she was not afraid, only very glad that her soul was light, that it was a glad world, and that he was there.

She looked, lingering over the picture of him, as he stood very gallant in his close-fitting uniform and boots, with the crucifix-hilted sword catching the light. His cap was off, and the rays ran in and out the waves of his black hair and lighted up those intense eyes below the heavy brows. He was at once sinister, debonair, tender, and masterful; perfectly groomed, clean-limbed, every line of face and form betokening breeding and strength—and his eyes love for her. To her mind came vaguely thoughts of Bayards, Rolands, and Oliverss, compelling composites these: commanders, courtiers, cavaliers. Here was such another. It had taken generations to produce the like of that strong, graceful body and handsome head.

"Hamilton!" she breathed.

"Bess, you do, you do love me, don't you, Bess?"

And when he had conquered, a boy again, eager, petulant, winning, awakening also the mother spirit in her. As she lay in his arms she looked up into the shining eyes.

"How can I help it, Black Wrenne?" she said, with a little, helpless laugh, and stroked his hair with gentle fingers. He was hers to love, to mother, to obey; that she might revel in his strange masculine beauty with the thought that it was hers alone.

"And—oh, enough, dear, enough!"

It was a little later when she had freed herself from his arms and caught back her stray curls into prim severity.

"Enough?" he questioned, hurt.

"Enough now, great baby!"

They laughed together, two children for the time.

"And how long have you loved me, Bess, dear?"

"Always, I think," she answered him. Really she did not know; the thing had always been vague with her, an influence that had grown and grown until it had overwhelmed her in the greatness of it.

"Yes, always, I think; ever since I met you the second time. But before that—I had ideals—such a man as you. I wanted him big"—she was enumerating on her slim fingers, after the fashion of a schoolgirl—"big and brave and with black hair and black eyes. Just like you, Black Wrenne. Always b's, you see: big and brave and black-haired and black-eyed. And then I met you and knew I'd been thinking about you all the time."

"Did you?" he said, enraptured.

"But, then—then you weren't nice to me, Black Wrenne!"

Where was the woman of the world in this little girl who talked with her mouth pursed up and her eyes upturned to the stars?

"Wasn't I?" he said disgustedly. "What a brute I must have been!"

"Yes, you were," she said, and she was the woman again as she spoke. "And—and I'll tell you a secret. It only made me love you the more because you were a brute to me, Black Wrenne. That was the woman who adored your strength, who thought it better to have you your own way than no way at all. But the artist in me called for better things from you, wanted you to love me for the better part of me, to bring that better part—there's little enough of it—out into the sunlight and hide the other part in the shadows. But you didn't do that."

"Don't, Bess," he pleaded. "I didn't understand then. At first it was the purely physical man's love for the purely physical woman. And I hadn't had the training to make me very scrupulous. But—that day—I saw *you*—and wanted you a thousand times more. There will always be that of the physical love—that is a part—but besides there is the something you gave me which no other woman did. An utter disregard of self, a desire to do things for you, to make myself spiritually cleaner."

Suddenly she realized that she had bared her heart for the knife-thrust. She had begun this by speaking of her better part—she had begun it. Why hadn't she been content with the fact that he loved her without dragging in ethics, introspection? While he was trying to make himself better for her sake, she was retrogressing. It became unbearable, the thought that he should ever discover that she had come to Peking to steal—and that was why she had come and what she still must do.

"Bess, I've been a better sort since I met you. For the past two years I've been grimy with plots and counterplots, lies and treachery, false smiles, and knife-thrusts in the back—the machinations of Orientalism. I had one great ambition—to be the power behind the throne. For this reason I have cultivated Prince Chu'un, made of him a means to an end. And now the way to my ambition lies open ahead of me, Bess. I can be the real ruler of this country in less than a year—the real ruler of the greatest country on earth, of four hundred million people. Think, Bess! I can be that—through Prince Chu'un. For I *am* Prince Chu'un in the will. My way is his way—and the time is at hand."

The wild-rose had fled from her cheeks, the nightingale was still. Her trembling fingers caught the sleeve of his coat.

"Don't tell me, Hamilton!"

He was strong and big in the moonlight, with his heavy, frowning brows and clean-cut jaws. The fingers trembling on his arm felt the thrill of his hard, vibrant muscles. She was suddenly very much afraid. What would he do when he discovered that he had set up a false idol in her? Would he tear her apart with those strong, brown hands?

"No, maybe I'd better *not* tell you. Because the path to my ambition is a

highway of arson and bloodshed—a shambles of the innocents."

He caught both her white, trembling hands and kissed their palms.

"Bess!" His voice was suddenly exultant. "I'm going to chuck it all for you, dear—going to chuck it all, d'you understand? Because I want you to feel that you can respect yourself when you love me. You've taught me the way to honesty and straight-dealing, dear—the other is hateful to me now. When you finish your picture, we'll leave Peking together. And then—then, my little wife—eh?"

He was laughing boyishly.

"All mine, all of you. Those glorious eyes, and those beautiful curls, and your rose of a mouth—and the sweet, pure soul of you, Bess, dear!"

She lay in his arms, her face hot, her body trembling; but there was a pall on her brain, and her heart was like lead within her. She had set up for this man an ideal of herself, and he had believed that ideal to be what she represented it, had loved the fictitious Bess and diverted his career for her.

"The road to honesty—to straight-dealing."

It seemed that the Fengshui demon on the wall panel was grinning at her as he repeated the words. She who had come to Peking to rob—*she* had taught him that road, she who was not yet a thief only because she had not the courage.

"No, Hamilton," she moaned; "no. Don't talk of me that way. I'm unworthy of it, Hamilton. It was only because I loved you so much that I wanted to have you believe that. But don't believe that, Hamilton—because some day you'll find out it's not so."

But he only laughed and stroked the stray curls.

"Don't, dear Black Wrenne. Don't laugh at me. Indeed, it is so. Please keep on loving me no matter what I am—just love me because I'm Bess, just because I'm this girl that you see—for nothing more except that and that I love you very dearly, Black Wrenne."

"I shall always love you, dear," he said, and bent his head over her.

"But not the ideal, Hamilton, not that. Just Bess. I'm not the stuff to stand the furnace of idealism. Just clay, dear, and that's all. False images won't stand the test. Don't set one up in me, Black Wrenne."

The nightingale was singing again. His notes brought the girl to crying very softly. If Black Wrenne should discover what she had come to do, if he should find that she had stolen like a common thief—would he love her then? Could she dare to hope that he would? Was that fair? When she had dragged him up to a great love with the picture of a woman who did not exist, could she blame him if the love that she had awakened for this mythical ideal turn away repulsed from the woman who was. No, he could not be blamed. Therefore he must never discover. She must do what she had come for: the picture of her two dear aunts was before her eyes. She must do that—and then she would try to be the sort of woman he imagined her.

"It is because you are what you are that you think so little of yourself," he said gently.

"No," she murmured, wiping away the tears. "No, Hamilton, I'm telling you the truth—you don't believe me, thank God! I pray Him that you won't find out!"

There was a fluttering of wings, a feeble chirp, and unconsciously she put out her finger. The nightingale fastened upon it, regarding her with quick movements of his graceful head.

"I'd rather believe the bird than you!"

And his voice was very tender.

CHAPTER IV.

ASSASSINS WHERE SHOULD BE PURVEYORS OF THE POOR.

The great bell of Kouan-Lo, in the Tachung-sz' tower, was marking the hour with its golden tongue, a mellifluous clangor that had in it more of music than of noise; the air was heavy with the odor of lotos and *chu-sha-kih;* from the barred palace windows of the violet

city came the tinkle of the *san-hien* (guitar) and the lute, while nearer the gate of the Fung-Hoang a female voice trilled out a song of Kouei to the gilded dragons of the green roof-trees.

It was a very glad world, thought Hamilton Wrenne.

He had come down the causeway unattended, alone, and on foot, reveling in the beauty of the night, intoxicated with the lingering perfume of the girl's presence, and like one in a very beautiful dream, who was loath to wake again.

He answered the salutations of the gate guards mechanically, and bestrode the white horse which his orderly held for him. Touching his mount lightly with his riding-crop, he was off through the Tartar city on his night inspection of the wall-guards.

There was very little thought for his duty to-night. Bess loved him! He said that over many times, humming unconsciously music to fit the words, turning the beauty of the happening and of the night into the blank verse of the lover's litany.

She loved him! He was surprised how little other things mattered; amazed that the hazy future held no fears for him and that he could so readily abandon his cherished projects because they were incompatible with his thoughts of her. Indeed, he was letting them go without regret, finding that he no longer cared for what might detract from her regard for him.

As he told her, he had not been very scrupulous. Since he quitted West Point an embittered youngster deprived of the fulfilment of a dream that had been his since childhood, he had imagined the world a very cold place, where one kept warm only by the fierceness of antagonism to others. His rise in the Chinese service had been one of those curious sequences of circumstance that sometimes occur to Europeans in foreign countries. Assigned to a post far up-country, he had found himself in the center of a rebellion with but a handful of troops to cope with it. Alone, he was powerless. By enlisting in his cause the scattered bands of brigands and outlaws, he had relieved the province from rebellion, and as reward turned over the rebels' property to the rapacious crew who had assisted him. Bravery, lack of scruples, and calculating cunning had brought him to high places. Now, for the love of a girl, he was to climb down again when his hands were closing about the reins of government. He would be an ordinary soldier of fortune again, a penniless married adventurer.

But married to Bess! That was the recompense.

The Manchu orderly Thsang had never before noted his officer in so uncritical a mood. There were several grave defections of duty on the part of the soldiers of the wall that went quite without rebuke. One soldier had forgotten the password, another had taken too much *sam-shui* and was close to being drunken, another in saluting brought the barrel instead of the stock of his rifle to ground. Thsang did not understand his lack of interest in these things, so apart were they from his drawing of the character of the envoy of the Black Fir, the name given Wrenne by his soldiery to indicate the bird of black plumage which haunts the fir-tree and is all-seeing, writing down in the Book of Fate the misdeeds of the Tsing-jin,* and preparing for them adequate punishment. Wrenne had not risen to his height without having earned the reputation of a disciplinarian utterly devoid of mercy.

Now, inspection over, he stood upon the great walls peering away at the ghostly temples and palaces where the dogs of Fo kept their watch; at the swinging lanterns, the illumined kites, the pagodas, the riot of color, of crenelated roofings, porcelain gargoyles, and lacquered goblins. Below, the tracks of the railroad stretching outside the curve of the walls seemed like the trail of the fire-monster, and the engine itself an unreal dragon puffing fire into the silver night; the bobbing lights of rickshaws, carts, and pedestrians only

*Tsing-jin—Chinese name for themselves—Sons of the Great Purity reign.

the elves and sprites of the marshes making merry in a fairy city of the night; the figures of the soldiers those of giants keeping watch on the enchanted city.

"Hei-song-che-tsoo!" said Thsang, and gently touched his colonel's sleeve, heavy with gold braid. He was addressing him by the name of He of the Black Fir, a *nom de guerre* which had grown into custom. Wrenne turned, nodding to him impatiently, his eyes wandering back again to the scene spread below him.

Borne faintly upward from the mandarin's garden below the way was the sound of the lute played by a master hand, and the voice of a man singing. Wrenne recognized the words of the sage Lao-tseu.

By beauty of face and ravishing form
Come thoughts of a beautiful soul.
The world is deceived by the outwards of love
But——

"Come," said Hamilton Wrenne impatiently. Lao-tseu was an old croaker, even though a sage. Why had this pessimistic occupant of the mandarin's garden chosen to disturb his beautiful dream?

Below, he mounted his horse, which shied violently. From the dust of the road arose a black something, that flapped its wings and cawed dismally. Thsang's teeth showed in the half-light.

"An ill omen, illustrious one," he said. "An ill omen."

"Not for me," responded Wrenne, with a laugh that was gay enough to show the counsel of Lao-tseu to be of no effect. "For, look you, Thsang, am I not the envoy of the Black Fir and a bird of raven plumage myself? How know you that the bird is not the soul of my ancestor?"

Thsang made a wry face. "Not so, Black One. For it was an evil bird, accursed by Gotama to feed upon offal and the carcasses of the dead. It is a sign of ill omen—see, it flies straight along our path. Its way means destruction, Hei-song-che-tsoo. Take the road of Kang-ing-pien to-night."

"The black clerks are my friends, Thsang," laughed Wrenne again, and touched his horse lightly with his spur.

The two made a medieval picture as the light showed them outlined against the white steps of a temple—the slender, graceful, black-avised man in the imperial yellow uniform, golden-frogged, his crucifix sword suspended from a jeweled belt by a golden cord, the peacock's feather of his mandarin's hat trailing out behind him—the picture of a goodly man on a goodly horse, whose whiteness contrasted with Wrenne's hair and eyes; in his rear the Manchu, also in the imperial uniform, belted and booted, and uprearing his six feet three inches over a gray mare. And so they passed out of the light of the thoroughfare and into the Street of the Little Purveyors of the Poor—a mean alley with unclean causeway, where were the shops patronized by coolies, undertakers, and those of the lowest orders. It was an unsavory district through which to pass; but Wrenne knew by long experience that it was a rare Tsing-jin who would raise arms against one in the uniform of the Great Pure Kingdom.

"Hiaii!" called Thsang suddenly, in warning. "Spur thy horse, illustrious one!"

Involuntarily and without asking reasons, Wrenne's spurs came in contact with his horse's flank, and the splendid animal upreared itself on its haunches, stared with dilated eyes, and plunged suddenly forward. Out of the darkness of the street came grasping hands that caught the bridle, and were near to taking it from Wrenne's grasp. Again the spurs bit into the white horse, and with frightened neighs and whinnies—for never was there a kinder man to his beast than Hamilton Wrenne—it galloped madly along the rough street, dragging two men who held tightly to the bridle, tearing its gums until it champed red foam. Wrenne's hand went to his sword, and the blade of the crucifix glinted out of the darkness; but that same moment found a pair of yellow hands clutch his neck from behind. His feet slipped from the stir-

rups, and he went over backward. The owner of the yellow hands was undermost, and it was he whose head struck the stones of the street, sending him into unconsciousness and releasing his grip. Immediately Wrenne was on his feet, his eyes peering for his antagonists, his sword ready.

They came soon enough—the two who had caught the reins, and who had released them with the slipping of the American from his saddle. There was a pink puff, a little gray smoke, a sharp staccato of sound, and a bullet perilously close to Wrenne's shoulder, burning it. But by its light he had seen his antagonist and his sword slashed into human flesh, which quivered at the impact. A man with half-severed neck stumbled on his face into the roadway; another leaped into Wrenne's arms, sending the crucifix sword high into air.

Wrenne felt a sudden strangling, and a hotness overspread his skin. His antagonist's arm was crooked about his neck; the left fist was pounding the pit of his stomach. He grew curiously sick and ill, almost vomiting. Remembrance of his plight came in his violent twist, which freed him and sent the sword-point in the direction of this foul fighter. Only a laugh of derision and an attack from the back; a knee in the small; both hands about the gullet. Wrenne lashed out viciously with his spurred heels, and the grip grew weaker; the laugh changed to a cry of pain. He whirled upon his antagonist, his sword descending upon his unprotected head, splitting it cleanly through. But even as the blood spurted about the blue steel, something heavy struck the back of the American's head, and he went down into the unclean street.

Immediately some one knelt over his body, and a tiny electric torch showed a gleam as the kneeling one tore open the embroidered collar of the coat, the linen one underneath, the cambric shirt, the gauze undergarment. In the light of the torch was a square, silver box, suspended by a silver chain next the skin. The searcher could not find the catch. He pulled at it with eager fingers until the blood came leaping up from the white skin, where the links of the chain cut it—then at a weak place they snapped, the silver box was stowed away; the electric torch went out.

"Cooe-cooe!"

The ravisher of the chain whistled shrilly. The man with whom Thsang was at grips suddenly released himself, and fled up the street fleetly, following the one who had dragged Wrenne from his horse, who had been stunned, and who had come to life again in time to rifle the American of his dearest possession.

Thsang, weak from several wounds, kicked the body of the first assailant whom he had killed, and followed swiftly after the one who had escaped. But remembering, he halted, struck a match, and lighted a torch which he carried at his belt. It was more important that he should find the Black One, his colonel. And he found him with crushed head and matted hair, his neck bleeding where he had been despoiled.

Raging, the Manchu sheathed his colonel's sword, when he had made sure that the other two assailants were dead. Then, raising Wrenne's body in his arms, he staggered along the Street of the Little Purveyors to the Poor, slipping and stumbling among the refuse until he emerged upon the street of the legations. The American legation was close by—he let the unconscious body slip to the ground, while he knocked upon the gate with his free hand, and darted back in the protection of one of the stone dogs of Fo, two of which guarded the gate.

An American soldier, on guard, swung open the gate, and eyed the bloody figures suspiciously. Thsang, who knew pidgin-English, addressed him:

"You savvy my Melican mandalin all-same—all-same you call Lenne——"

"Gwan, Chink!" growled the upholder of American militarism. "Whatcher giving me, anyhow?"

And Thsang, very weak from loss of blood, lost his bland imperturbability, screaming insult in his own language at the soldier, who listened, highly amused.

"You no savvy Melican soldier—officer—take look-see."

The American peered cautiously from behind the bars, and caught a glimpse of the white face, lifeless, in the starlight. Immediately the gate clicked open, and the American and Chinese carried the body within.

"It's Black Wrenne."

The American soldier locked the gate and called shrilly to the legation servants:

"Here, you boys, make qui-qui now damn' pronto; you hear. Qui-qui."

Sad was the plight of Captain Komoto when he, by devious ways, at last crept into the burrow of Kitsune-san. He was in dirty Chinese garments, rent and torn and stained with blood, his hands lacerated, his finger-nails broken to the quick. The back of his head was an unlovely plaster of sticky hair; he carried one hand limp, for the wrist was broken. And it was in this condition that he gained access to the cabinet where Gray Fox and Ito Ugichi sat smoking over their *hibachis,* and awaiting his return.

They noted the plight of him without surprise. They had not expected that their object would be attained without serious hurt.

Komoto saluted them.

"The gods have guarded you, Komoto," grinned Ugichi.

"Little guard, excellency," answered the soldier. "Little guard. I am a mass of broken bones and torn flesh; good for little duty for a month of moons. He was no weakling, excellencies."

"Had he been, 'twould have been unnecessary to put upon his seeking the Captain Komoto," returned Gray Fox. He peered at the soldier with ill-concealed impatience. "Has Kwannon been thy friend, Komoto-san?"

For answer, the addressed one drew from within his torn garments a square silver box, to which was attached a stained and broken chain.

"This I took from the neck of the *ijin-san,*" he replied, without emotion. "The chain is broken. That I could not avoid, for I hasted."

"For this a *kanjo,* Komoto," cried Ugichi, and his eyes sparkled. "A *kanjo* for thee, Komoto. The golden kite shall be written upon thy breast, illustrious son of thy father."

He took the box from the table, repressing his eagerness, and turning it over and over in his fingers. He saw no opening, fastening, or catch; and handed it to Gray Fox.

"Thou art familiar with the cunning devices of the silversmiths," he said. "Do thou find the concealed spring!"

Kitsune fondled the box lovingly. In the silence that followed he sought with pressing thumb for the spring, finding it finally as the center of the flower's petals. It flew immediately open.

Ugichi and Komoto stood tense, watching him as he gazed at the open box; saw first surprise, then incredulity, then anger as he hastily felt with thumb pressed against the interior. Abruptly he threw the box upon a low table, and arose to confront the two.

"That was what he wore about his neck—this Black Wrenne!"

Komoto bowed low. "Yes, excellency."

"You have done well; go!"

Komoto went out. Ugichi and Kitsune faced each the other.

"Thou—the cunning and the subtle one; thou on whose information two soldiers of Japan have lost their lives; upon which I have builded false hopes—look what was within the silver box that hung about the neck of this Ijin-san, the Black Wrenne!"

Count Ito Ugichi picked up the box, and saw it to be but a frame for a small miniature of the face of Miss Elizabeth Courtney, whose eyes met his as he gazed at the painted reflection.

CHAPTER V.

A QUESTION OF ETHICAL RIGHT—AND WRONG.

Bess was never to know that her gift to Hamilton Wrenne had been the cause of the attack made upon him. It was true, as Ito Ugichi had said, that while

in Shanghai she had the keys to the Dragon door enclosed in a silver box, and swung by a chain; true, also, that she had given such another silver box to Wrenne, but without thought of exposing him to danger. She had admired the workmanship of the key-box, and had sent a messenger to the silversmith's to have it duplicated. Wrenne had for a long time begged for a portrait of herself; and in odd moments aboard ship she had painted a miniature. This she fastened within the silver box; and in the dining-room of the Hotel Astor, in Shanghai, had given it publicly to Wrenne. And so, all unwittingly, she had put Ugichi on a false scent.

She was further unaware of the fact that any knew of her possession of the Double-Dragon keys, save only her brother Austin. There had been no hint of foul play in the death of Gordon Lee—she had not given the matter thought. Lee had complained, at their last meeting, of a weakness of the heart; this she naturally imagined had brought about his death. The various attempts of agents to secure the keys she put down only to petty thieves; and after leaving Shanghai she had carried the silver box in a chatelaine-bag fastened to her waist, because she found the weight of the chain was leaving a mark upon her neck.

But, although she did not know herself to be the innocent cause, she was aware of the fact that the attack upon Wrenne had materially changed their plans. In the solitude of the night after Wrenne left her, she had finally determined not to use the Dragon keys; not to attempt to pilfer the diamonds in the temple. She knew that in that act she was forgetting her duty to her aunts, going back on her word; but she loved Wrenne too much to take any chances of losing that love. The picture was to be finished the following week; she and Wrenne would quit Peking together and go back. She would always be in possession of enough money to keep her aunts from want—and she would not need to steal for them.

This plan might very well have been carried out, fresh with the impulse of the moment; might even have lasted a week while the first ecstasy of love endured. However, it happened that Hamilton Wrenne lay on a sick-bed for more than a month battling for his life; concussion of the brain having developed from the crashing blow he had received.

During this time work on the portrait was suspended, and Bess hovered about the sick-room in the character of nurse, wasting herself thin in her anxiety for the man she loved. And during this time she reflected over the situation; and decided that, after all, it would be wisest to take the diamonds. When Hamilton Wrenne quitted the Chinese service—what then? It might be that for the time it would be necessary for both of them to live on the proceeds of Bess' work; and she would not then be able to help Aunt Malvinia and Aunt Kitty. And Bess did not want to be poor again, in that condition of hardly knowing how the expenses of the week were to be managed; neither would it do to have her little sisters and her mother (who were almost dependent upon her) brought to the same straits. Money was necessary, and it was close to hand.

She recalled Austin's sophistry that she was robbing no one; the jewels were wasted there in the darkness; tradition kept the door closed. She was taking nothing from any one who needed it, who would miss it. She was not robbing any one in particular. The gems were not intended to be used even for display.

So the fine frenzy of her moral moment wore off in consideration of the practical things of life. There was only one thing to be considered. Hamilton must not know.

During his illness she had remained at the legation. Now that he was well again, she must return to the Winter Palace and finish the portrait. The first morning he was able to be about, a thin, wan shadow of himself, she said good-by for the time, and returned to her pavilion in the Gardens of the Invisible Deity. An audience with Kwang-Hsu

resulted in the sittings being continued; and, after another week, during which she caught only hurried glimpses of Wrenne by flying visits to the legation, she had completed the portrait to the satisfaction of her royal patron; a levee was held, at which Chinese lords and ladies said many polite things about her work; and the picture was taken away to be framed.

It was on that night that she finally made her resolve to enter the temple of the Double-Dragon and secure the jewels.

Meanwhile she knew nothing of the position in which Wrenne had been placed during a month's lapse of time. Had he, in pursuance of his intention, quitted Peking at the end of the week he had set for himself, ostensibly to perfect some of the mechanism of the plan to seat Chu'un on the Great Purity throne, he would have been allowed to go without question. But the cogs of the plot had been revolving during their designer's illness; and the carrying out of the plan was being deferred only until he could take an active hand in it. Chu'un had been so long his puppet that the prince was at a loss to decide, or give instructions, without Wrenne's assistance and advice.

And so it was that on the same night that Bess finally decided to abjure her moral principles for the sake of both sentiment and practicality, Black Wrenne was summoned by Prince Chu'un to be present at the final meeting of the heads of the rebel party.

He argued the question with himself much in the same way that Bess had done. Just as it had been in her case, his rectitude was much more a thing of the moment than of endurance. He cared none the less for the girl. His love, had it been put to the test of choosing between her and his ambition, would, without doubt, have made little deliberation over the matter and allowed the ambitious projects of the past to take the wind's way, while he clung to the girl.

All of which shows that morals are for the most part inspired by the moment, save only when they bring about the question of hurt to some loved one—which latter is really not morality, only a certain form of sentiment.

It is difficult to condone the moral obliquity of Bess and of Black Wrenne; but excuse is found in the fact that, while the drama of their lives had cast them to play the parts of hero and heroine, they still remained most indubitably human. And in the workaday world of to-day, where ambitious souls strive for recognition, power, and the luxuries, it is not easy to relinquish opportunities for all these things, where only a matter of ethics is concerned, and go out facing poverty and obscurity without regrets for what might have been.

Wrenne was not altogether selfish in his deliberations on the matter any more than Bess had been. Her transgression of the moral code had only been made justifiable in her eyes when she considered the unhappiness that would be brought to a number of people by puritanic scruples. Black Wrenne was thinking as much of his sweetheart as of himself. He had no money and no prospects outside China. All his real life had been spent in the land of Tien-Ha, and with cumulative effect. Remaining behind, he became a man in power—if all went well. Venturing forth, he was again only an obscure adventurer. And as an adventurer with only his sword to sell, would it be possible for him to engage in any foreign service where he would keep that sword clean? Morality was not expected of mercenaries—they were the tools of revolutionists, princes of the succession; intriguers, diplomatic agents. He went away to China to face uncertainty of income without the certainty of straight dealing.

Thus reasoning, when he had reduced Prince Chu'un's parchment to the flimsiest bits of rice paper, which he flung to the wind of mid-afternoon, he decided that he would not withdraw from the plot to seat Chu'un on the throne of his fathers, but would take the reward of his years of waiting.

And so, on just such another beauti-

ful night as the one when they had forsworn temptation each for the other's dear sake, when in the light of the good ancestors' lanterns they had spoken from their hearts, and with all the good that was in them—on just such another night as that both had come to the conclusion that beautiful sentiment and spotless love were for the starlight alone.

BOOK THREE.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOUSE OF CONSPIRACY.

It was the night of Hoa-tchao—The Birthday of a Hundred Flowers—and the spring moon sailed, a serene silver censer, through a cloudless sky. In the streets of the Three Cities men and women in gala dress called upon the flower goddess, Kwan-Yin, flying illumined kites the shapes of the lily and the lotus, and flinging garlands of blooms in air. Paper lanterns—green, red, yellow, multicolored — bobbed about in a fashion so crowded that one regarding the festival from an elevation surmised a frolic of prismatic glow-worms. The air was redolent of apple sprays and orange-blossoms. Out of the uproar one caught many indistinct notes—the tinkle of a stringed instrument, the strain of a song, the laugh of a woman.

Peking was very gay and future-careless that night.

A certain mansion, saw-tooth walled and iron-gated, and overlooking the Street of the Maimed Linnet, claimed attention through its lack of lights and festivity. Maskers passing spoke among themselves concerning it, their remarks to the effect that the mighty merchant, Hao-Khieou, was absent with family and servants, matters of business detaining him in Tien-tsin. Else there would have been mighty rejoicing among the poor, for upon such festivals Hao was wont to throw open his gates and have spread within his gardens a feast of roasted meats and candied confections; and any man, even the veriest coolie, might have his fill, blessing the spring-moon and Hao-Khieou in the same greedy breath. Those who had come this night so hoping went away with the gnawing disappointment of unfilled stomachs; but with no word of blame for Hao-Khieou. For the poor knew him as their friend, this merchant who had sacrificed a year's profits to feed his hungry brethren in famine time.

It was true enough that Hao-Khieou's family and servants were in Tien-tsin. But behind the closed shutters and the drawn blinds, lanterns and candles gleamed in the concourse hall of the dark house; and Hao-Khieou sat, engaged in weighty convention with other men of import. The soft rugs on the polished floors were the seats of fifty people of excellent accomplishment, bearing names reverenced the length and breadth of the Yellow Kingdom—scholars of the universities who had attained much merit; Manchu generalissimos; two Tartar princes, brothers of the blood; many Mongolian mandarins; the viceroys of four provinces, and the taotais of a score of cities; mandarins of the Yellow Banner, henchmen of the royal house; mandarins of the White Banner, their equals in race, only little inferior in power—these the thinkers, schemers, controllers of cities, provinces, and principalities.

Lacking, perhaps, somewhat of the brains and the power, but balancing the score by holding the strings of the money-bags, were the grave merchant princes; and of these Hao-Khieou was the chief.

Two foreigners completed the assembly; the first Hamilton Wrenne, pale after his illness, but very magnificent in his imperial vestments, his cloak, slashed with imperial yellow silk, thrown over one shoulder, his right hand resting on his golden-hilted sword. He sat on the right of Hao-Khieou; the other foreigner, Ito Ugichi on his left.

There had been much speech-making, much adulative rhetoric in speaking of one another, much veiled simile in referring to their reasons for being present in the darkened house of Hao-Khieou; but the metaphor was dropping away as the climax approached, and now they spoke almost baldly.

It was the first time that the heads of the party had been gathered together en masse. The plan had been perfected by working it out in segments. This was the work of Hamilton Wrenne and the Manchu general, Tchin—for Wrenne the planning and segregation, for Tchin the confidence gained to carry on the work. It had been to bring out a general uprising in northern China that these men had striven to make the upper provinces theirs, and most particularly that of Cheh-li. With the majority of the Manchus on their side, the subjugation of the lower provinces would not be difficult. They were ever slaves under the yoke, and it would be no great task to compel them to accept as emperor whoever sat upon the throne in Peking.

According to the Manchus, there was no rebellion in what they intended to do. Chu'un was Kwang-Hsu's brother, and as much entitled to the throne as the puppet of Tze-Hsi. Neither of the two royal brothers was the son of the late monarch, but merely a nephew. When Hsien-Feng died at Jehol, his son, Tung-Chih, had been nominally emperor, with Tze-Hsi, his mother, as regent. But Tung-Chih had died after only two years' actual reign; and Hsien-Feng having left no further issue, the successor was chosen from among his nephews. Kwang-Hsu was chosen, his enemies stated, because he was the weakest-willed of the royal princes; and the empress-dowager had seen in him one through whom she could rule absolutely, as she had done.

They were bitter men who sat in the house of Hao-Khieou; men who had seen their country the despised of all nations during Tze-Hsi's domination—defeated ignominiously by Japan; saved from the Taipings only by European intervention; helpless before the mob rule of the Boxers, and the entrance of their sacred city by heavy-handed foreign troops, who cast down their gods and profaned their most reverenced customs. During Tze-Hsi's quasi-reign, China had been made a mock by Japan, bullied by Russia, insulted by the Anglo-Saxon races, and stolen from by all nations. It was a sore thing this, to these men who loved the land of Tien-Ha.

They were the reformers; nothing more. They saw in Prince Chu'un a gentle-minded prince of European education, who was acceptable to the people because of his ancestry; and to them, the conspirators, because of his foreign training and his desire for progression. They would have little active interference from him. He would do as he was asked, and make little bother over it. All he desired was the title of emperor of all the Chinas. But with his accession, the monuments of greed and imposition which had endured for centuries would go tumbling down; the modern methods would be adopted, and China put in a position to defend herself from the encroachments of foreign foes.

It was true that they had been forced to seek help from Japan in order to carry out their great project. In no other way was it possible for them to obtain the arms and ammunition they needed for their work. Also they needed the assistance of some regiments of Japanese soldiers, in order to inspire their own fighters. Japan was necessary to them; but they had no intention of yielding themselves to the dictation of the pgymy yellow nation, whom, in their secret hearts, they despised as mere imitators.

Yet no echo of these sentiments had Ito Ugichi heard. Secret as he was, he had underrated the Chinese after the fashion of his race. Though Japan could work and wait, China could work harder and wait longer. Though Japan had a great secretness, the secretness of China was vast; and these nobles and scholars of the Yellow Kingdom, knowing that those of Japan had imagined themselves China's preceptors and

mentors, allowed the fallacy to assume proportions by fanning it with the wind of words. Ito Ugichi, Gray Fox, and others who served the mikado, looked upon the anticipated triumph of the rebels as the giving over of China to them. The rebels themselves saw in it nothing for Japan. They meant to promise everything, to give as little as possible.

As for Hamilton Wrenne, the only European in the plot, they had had him so long among them that the color of his skin was not a deterrent. He was of all the most necessary, after Chu'un, a reincarnation of "Chinese Gordon" to them. He it was who was able to lead Chinese soldiers to victory—he who had put down brigandage and minor rebellions with handfuls of troops; who was able to turn a thousand coolies into a well-ordered regiment of automatons in little time; who possessed the confidence of soldiers and officers alike, and whom almost every man in the army would follow unquestioningly wherever he led.

This was the climax of over two years of burrowing under the imperial edifice; this night when the Birthday of a Hundred Flowers was being celebrated in streets and palaces alike; the night when the first blow was to be struck for Chu'un and progress.

Prince Chu'un was not present at the gathering. It was unwise for a prince of the blood to leave the violet city at night and journey to a darkened house in the Tartar city. The empress-dowager had many spies in her employ; there were too many private informers in the persons of palace courtiers and retainers who would not be tardy in following up such a departure from the usual. But it was understood that Hamilton Wrenne represented the prince in person; and it was to him that the closing address of Hao-Khieou was made.

"The moment is at hand, Black One," he said, as he approached the culmination of his peroration. "Outside the walls of the Chinese city are a thousand soldiers in the garb of coolies, having concealed near-by arms and munitions of war. These, I understand from the most illustrious Tchin, though scattered, are but waiting the signal to form and enter the city by the imperial catacombs, a plan of which has been furnished their colonel by you, procured from the exalted brother of the son of heaven. Within the city walls are another fifty score, scattered through these two cities, and in command of the worthy Yamachi, of the mikado's service. These, too, but wait the signal. The brothers of the blood in the service of the Yellow Dragon—soldiers whom thou hast trained thyself, envoy of the Black Fir—have been apprised of the situation, and they also wait for the time to strike. They are upon the walls of all three cities; even within the imperial palaces themselves. And they look upon thee, envoy of the Black Fir, as their leader, whose word is command. They will be faithful—you have promised that."

"I have promised, and so it shall be," answered Wrenne, rising.

There was a subdued sound of approving voices.

"Then"—and Hao-Khieou flung his hands outward—"why do we delay when all is ready? Procrastination is like strong wine to drug the soul of action. To-night close upon three thousand men, trained soldiers, wait the commands of the august Chu'un. The fires lighted at Peking will spread through all Cheh-li; to-morrow the province will be ours. Hupeh and Honan are promised; all others will follow. And to-night, when the whole of Tien-Ha is drunk with the spirits of the Birthday of a Hundred Flowers; to-night is the time to fling to the wind the banner of revolt—the revolt against the cruelty, the blood-lust, the covetousness of the hated Tze-Hsi, who, though she be the mother of a thousand emperors, is a menace to the land of our fathers. If China is to be preserved intact, we must be bound by other chains than those of fear and hatred. And so I say to-night!"

Again the hoarse murmur of approval.

"Before my humble dwelling was honored by thy feet across the threshold,

Black-plumed One, there had been agreed among us that to-night there should go up from the walls of the violet city a signal of revolt. Well we knew that Prince Chu'un was undecided, waiting thy recovery. We knew better still that he flinches at the thought of the first blow—but to-night he must decide. Go, therefore, to him, Black Wrenne, taking in your hand these arrows of the night."

He gave to Wrenne a packet containing what appeared to be three rounded sticks.

"Tell him that you have come for his approval; that close upon three thousand men but await the rending of the night by these arrows of flame to arise up, casting down the old régime for a new. Until he has spoken, there will be taken no action; but if he permits this night to pass without the blow being struck, he will hardly chance upon a better one, though he wait for a thousand *Siu-fantis*. Meanwhile those among us will go forth among the armed men who are waiting, inform them that when three golden arrows show against the black wings of the night angel all will enter the violet city, taking the forts in the name of Prince Chu'un, and aiding in securing the persons of the weakling, Kwang-Hsu, and his aunt, the accursed Tze-Hsi. To thee, then, is given the command of all the armies of the new order of things, thou who knowest so well the modern battling of arms. The night is thine, Black Wrenne—thine and the prince's. Farewell. We await his decision. If he hath approved, loose, then, the flaming rockets, and to-morrow's sun will rise upon a new emperor of the Chinas."

All were upon their feet; all bowed low before Wrenne. He, a trifle dazed, thrust the rockets into his sword-belt, and threw his cape of imperial yellow over his shoulder. As he neared the door he drew his sword.

"I will be faithful," he said, following the form of the conspirators, and held the sword in salute.

"I will succeed," he added, and presented the sword at point.

"Or——"

And this time the sword-point covered his heart. With their subdued cheering, he shot the blade into its sheath, turned, and went swiftly from the room.

CHAPTER II.

WITHIN THE DRAGON-GUARDED TEMPLE.

It was just ten o'clock when Bess Courtney pressed one of the window-catches, threw open the window, and stepped out on the marble pavilion of the Arbor of Buddha's Hand. The little Sèvres clock on its porcelain bracket was chiming out the last stroke of the hour as she closed the window behind her. She faced the Gardens of the Invisible Deity, a trembling, wan-faced, white-lipped girl.

There was a flood of moonlight on the lotus-covered lake, on the temple's golden roofs; on the hundred white steps leading to its doors. The gray-pink walls were illumined by it, the cedars and cypresses threw their long, languishing shadows across the beds of asters and peonies. As Bess descended from the terrace to the ground, a spray of white blossoms dropped from a *chu-sha-kih* tree; and she gave a little cry of fright, shrinking back against the terrace. Seeing the cause of her fright in the creamy blossoms, she forced a smile, and crept, a little gray-cloaked sprite, along the graveled walks skirting the lake, and coming to the foot of the temple's steps—a short journey in itself, but to her interminable, fraught as it was with fears of watchers lurking behind trees and walls; even some indefinite, superstitious dread of ghostly wraiths Chinese which looked to resent her profanation of sacred things.

At the foot of the steps she hesitated, crowding close to the little outbuilding, her feet tapping nervously on the marble blocks. After all, what had she to fear? The temple had been locked for many years. Back in her pavilion, her servants had retired to the servitors' quarters of the palaces. The gate to

the southern archway, through which the emperor was wont to enter, was locked; the key to the northern one was in the possession of Hamilton Wrenne.

Wrenne! She shuddered at the thought that he might enter the gardens. But no! It was too late! That was not likely, his entrance.

She nerved herself to the ascent, clutching the keys in one hand. Tentatively she put her foot on the first marble step, then drew it back quickly. Almost weeping with shame for her cowardice, she spurred herself on to a sudden ascent of ten steps without looking back. But, weak and hesitating, her eyes were no longer to be kept to the front, but went around with a sudden turning of her head. She paused, stiff with fright. A broad black bulk lay directly back of her on the steps. Her eyes dilated when she remembered there had been nothing there as she ascended. Her horrified gaze had espied a certain human shape to the black thing.

And, as she realized, she laughed hysterically. "Afraid of her shadow!" How many times had she heard that used as a term of reproach for other women! No one would have imagined it fitting for Bess Courtney. Yet that had been what had frightened her—her shadow!

The impetus of her laughter carried her up several score steps. Looking back cautiously, she saw only the gardens white in the moonlight; the lake shining, the lotus resting serenely on its surface; the blossoms of the mandarin oranges waving gently in a spring breeze. She continued her ascent.

Now she faced the iron doors of the temple itself; a very terrifying dragon sprawled across them—a two-headed, green-scaled thing with staring eyes of clear jade. Those eyes seemed omnipresent and most diabolically alive. So saturated had she become with Chinese beliefs, that she could for the moment imagine this painted presentment to be animated by the spirit of some dead priest, who had served his allotted lifetime as a tender of the shrine. The dragon appeared more than a mere symbol—it was a very real, very inhuman protector of the great treasure that lay behind the entrance it guarded.

She was forced to master herself again before she drew up her hand and inserted the iron key in the door. She turned it to the right without effect; to the left with the same result; and imagined the jade eyes grinning at her. But she had come too far now to be bested by difficulties. They made the task easier for her; taking from her mind the weight of the supernormal. She knew that this iron key *must* fit the door; and threw the whole weight of her body against the fingers that held it. It turned with a loud, crawly screech, very akin to Bess' remembrance of a refractory slate-pencil scratching against a slate. But the physical revulsion that it caused saved her the mental shock; and, pushing her right shoulder against the door, she found it swinging gently backward.

She entered, turning on the pocket electric arc with which she had provided herself in anticipation before leaving Washington. It showed another door and the blood-chilling spectacle of two enormous red eyes glaring into hers. Her affright was so intense that she made neither sound nor movement.

There was barely space enough for three people to stand between the first door and the second one. Bess' arc had disclosed the second to be of burnished copper, with a dragon painted across it with red pigments, its eyes four enormous rubies. She pushed the first door shut, and unlocked the second one after some difficulty, revealing a third shining in its white exterior; the familiar dragon this time silver-scaled, and with diamond eyes, the size of which brought the girl to sudden realization of the enormous value of the treasure she was seeking—these diamonds alone would almost cover Austin's defalcations.

The fourth door was painted yellow, and had a golden dragon with topaz eyes. That pushed behind her, she stood within the temple itself, the dust of unswept years in her nostrils, a coughing, sneezing, frightened girl in

the most sacred precinct of the Forbidden City—The Temple of the Seven Thousand Eyes of Buddha.

With the dust out of her eyes, she saw that she was within a rotunda, the walls of which were composed of intensely yellow tiles, each tile forming a niche for a statue of the squatting, arm-folded presentment of Buddha. The images seemed uncountable. She saw them rising in tiers from every curve of the rotunda, all duplicates, and all of yellow porcelain. In the center, a raised throne served as seat for a great golden Buddha; a hundred-fold augmentation of those in the niches. When the light of Bess' arc fell upon the huge image, she drew back, amazed.

She had seen many of these Buddha images, but this was by far the most beautiful. The folds of the garments, the shape of the hands, the minute accuracy of face and figure, even the formation of the finger-nails, with the two guards to each hand—these had been executed in such a way as to wring envious admiration from her artist's soul. Richly wrought vases of enamel at the Buddha's feet held jeweled flowers; tall golden candlesticks studded with pearls and rubies were on either side of it. The upper part of the throne was hung with a frieze of red-and-gold-clothed saints.

Yet for all the exquisite workmanship, there was no semblance of life in the face of the golden image. Bess, not understanding, came to the foot of the throne, her footsteps attended by clouds of dust from the silken rug of imperial yellow on which Buddha's priests had been wont to kneel. Observing closely, she saw the reason for the lack of expression in the face. The golden Buddha was blind.

Then it was that she turned her arc-light upon the small images in the niches. They, too, lacked the semblance of eyes. She smiled slightly when she saw how patiently the symbolic term had been carried out. All of the Buddhas were blind. No doubt there were three thousand five hundred of them to represent the seven thousand eyes, spoken of in the metaphor. The thing appalled Bess with the thought of the amount of patience necessary to carry out such a whim of fancy.

It was now for her to find the eyes of all these sightless Buddhas—the treasure that had haunted her for the many months that had passed since Gordon Lee gave her the keys to the Double-Dragon doors. She flashed the arc about, but saw no boxes or receptacles of any kind. Momentarily she imagined she had not seen aright, so paced the entire curve of the rotunda. It was quite true. There was nothing that appeared to contain treasure of any kind—only the tiled walls, with their array of imperturbable images and the great throne in the center.

She sat down heavily on the lower step of the throne. No doubt the jewels were hidden in some secret room which required a knowledge of hidden springs. Tears came into her eyes. She had risked all, sacrificed scruples, taken chances of losing Wrenne—for this! Her clenched hand came down heavily on the step. The resultant sound caused her to sit suddenly erect.

It had been hollow, quite hollow, the ring of her hand against the red lacquer of the throne. She sprang up. Yes, there was a chance. The steps of the throne projected slightly over their support. She reached down, caught the edge, pulled it upward, and drew back, dazzled at the lights that shone in her eyes.

There lay the jewels protected from prying eyes and the touch of desecrating hands—at Buddha's feet, indeed. For each step was but a box within which the jewels lay.

She threw open one after another. They were shallow, lengthy boxes, lined with imperial yellow silk, the customary dragon ornamenting it. She put out her hand, touching the glorious gems; letting them slip through her fingers, while she held her breath at the beauty of them—living pieces of light that sparkled and scintillated before her—blue diamonds, yellow diamonds, white diamonds. And this wealth lay in touch of her hands.

When she came out of her gasping

stage she acted swiftly. A silver-mesh chatelaine-bag hung at her waist—a large bag which she had found useful when she went shopping, for it would hold pocketbook, toilet requisites, and any small articles she might purchase. She unhooked it from her belt, and with eager hands scooped up the gems between her white fingers, cramming them into the bag until it was barely possible to close it. She had no idea of the value of the wealth she had taken, imagining it to be, perhaps, double the amount that Austin needed to repay her aunts. She did not realize it quadrupled that sum, and gave a large balance besides.

Now that she had actually done the thing, she looked about apprehensively, with the haunted gaze of the evil-doer. She closed the throne steps, and went hastily to the doors without, finding some difficulty in shutting and locking them securely. Finally it was done, and she found herself without the temple, and making frantic efforts to close the last door—the iron one. The blood rushed to her head; her whole body was strained. The door was gradually closing.

She paused to take further breath, turning as she did to view the moonlighted gardens. And then she stood back, wild-eyed, numb, choking back a scream in her throat, one hand extended flat against the green-scaled Double-Dragon.

A man stood at the foot of the steps and gazed upward at her.

CHAPTER III.

CLASH OF STEEL IN CANDLE-LIGHT.

Wrenne left the house of Hao-Khieou by a rear entrance: a door in the garden wall which had its outlet into a narrow alley. He wormed himself along this, close to the wall, until he emerged upon the Street of the Maimed Linnet, where his orderly, Thsang, walked two horses up and down the causeway, awaiting the return of his master. The varicolored lanterns bobbed to and fro in the street; but the sight of Thsang's imperial uniform kept an open space always before him. As Wrenne joined him, a pretty sing-song girl, bedecked with flowers and jewels, and leaning from a palanquin borne by two coolies, flung a garland of asters about his neck, and invited him with sparkling eyes. He doffed his plumed mandarin hat in mock respect; and the girl, catching sight of the peacock-plume, shrank back in affright, closing the curtains.

As he mounted his horse and rode away toward the violet city, Wrenne did not see the figure of Ito Ugichi, wrapped in a heavy cloak of tan serge, emerge from the same alley, and stand looking after the two as they rode down the Street of the Maimed Linnet. In the shelter of a compound farther up this same street, Ugichi got upon a horse also, and turned its head in the direction Wrenne had taken. By pursuing divers short cuts through mean streets and dark alleys, he came to the imperial city gate before Wrenne and his orderly; was admitted by the parchment of Prince Chu'un which he carried always with him, and left his horse to be cared for by the gate soldiers while he went his way toward the prince's palace.

Wrenne arrived at the gate a little later; and the officer of the guard told him of the admittance of the stranger who bore Prince Chu'un's parchment. It had been impossible to recognize Ugichi. His cloak muffled both face and form, and the officer had no reason to believe him other than Chinese, for the greetings had been made in the Mandarin tongue. Moreover, the Japanese count had fastened to his head a cue, which had dangled in full sight from under the mandarin's hat that he wore.

Wrenne, not thinking of the Japanese, dismissed the matter; and, giving over his horses to the care of Thsang, with instructions to remain by the gate, was about to be on his way. The guard officer—a Manchu from near Yinkow, and a lieutenant of the line—stopped him with a deprecatory cough. Wrenne turned. The Manchu held out his hand.

"Chu'un and progress," he whispered, as he turned Wrenne's wrist so that the palm came uppermost. It was the agreed sign of recognition between those of the conspiracy.

"You?" Wrenne stepped back in some surprise. He knew the man's family to be henchmen of the dowager's father, the old Manchu general.

"I," responded the officer blandly. "And all the men of my gate, Black-plumed One." He paused, then in a lower tone: "Is it to-night that we may expect the three golden arrows?"

Wrenne shrugged his shoulders. "Patience is the heritage of those that achieve," he answered, in Confucian style. "Success is the reward of those expectant and watchful always. How may we know?"

"We are ready," stated the officer briefly; then, saluting, stepped back and allowed Wrenne to pass.

Wrenne did not enter the yamen of Prince Chu'un by the gateway of ceremony. Most Chinese being plotters and conspirators, few houses in the Celestial kingdom are built without secret entrances and exits. It was through one of these—a gateway sheltered by a huge acanthus-tree—that Wrenne entered with his private key, and found himself in Chu'un's outer garden. He threaded his way among the dwarfed trees and shrubs, through a profusion of flowers. The buildings composing the Chu'un yamen were very dark and quiet. The servants and retainers were mostly without in the Tartar city celebrating the Flower Birthday. Wrenne opened another gateway in an inner wall; and, passing through a paved court, ascended a flight of black marble steps to the very private quarters of the prince. He passed through a lofty-ceilinged rotunda, and knocked upon an inner door. A eunuch admitted him.

Remembering the officer's tale of the cloaked person who had entered with a passport from Chu'un, Wrenne asked the eunuch as to whether the prince had had visitors that evening. The eunuch shook his head.

"None, illustrious and powerful servant of the son of heaven"—with a bow only a little less subservient than that which etiquette demanded for royalty. "The exalted brother of the Great Purity has but recently returned from the Imperial Theater, where the players celebrate the Birthday of a Hundred Flowers. He hath commanded that none save thyself be admitted into his dread-compelling presence."

But Wrenne had passed far down the corridor before the eunuch had finished his sentence. A second door and a second eunuch, a third door and the prince's guard of soldiers, a fourth door and his own personal servant; and Wrenne was in the presence of Chu'un, who reclined on a couch built into the wall, eating lazily of Chinese sweets from a little tabouret at his side, and taking occasional whiffs from a cigarette.

He started up at the entrance of Wrenne, dismissing the sing-song girls who had been amusing him. His servant let them through the minor door, and was himself dismissed by a wave from the thin, yellow hand.

"Eh, my Black Wrenne?" Chu'un asked nervously, when the red-walled room held only their two persons. "Eh, it is well? Advise me, my Wrenne. I am stilted and stupid to-night. The hoofs of my horse killed a cat to-day—it is an ill omen. Her eyes were reminders of some I had known. Perhaps a dead relative. You laugh, my Wrenne; you think me absurd—nor believe that the spirits of ancestors may be within the bodies of animals." He smiled patiently. "I am well punished for mixing with my Eastern temperament a Western sense of humor. Myself, I believe the cat was near related to me—therefore is its death an ill omen. The humor of the West obtruding makes a mock of the real ego. And so—but—what of the meeting, my Wrenne?"

His hand closed over his aide-de-camp's wrist.

Wrenne told him in a few whispered sentences, and, finishing, took the bundle of rockets from his belt.

"Three golden arrows they call these.

They are to be shot upward from within the violet city as a sign that the rising to-night has your full approval."

He looked at his watch.

"The night is spending itself," he added.

Chu'un twisted his hands. "Eh—my Black Wrenne? It is to-night, eh? Not too early—nor—but I do not know. I am a poor figurehead—is it not so, my Wrenne? With only you to advise me—you whom I know to be a friend. You I trust. And if it is that you say the affair shall be to-night, then—I give you my permission to pierce the night with your golden arrows—eh, my Wrenne?"

He laughed nervously.

Wrenne arose. "Within half an hour after these arrows go upward three thousand men will be under arms. In less than an hour Peking will acknowledge for its emperor only the Prince Chu'un."

"Enough!"

Chu'un was trembling.

"I go, then," replied Wrenne.

He paused near the painted screen that divided the room.

"To bring you a crown, exalted one." Then, laughing, was gone.

He passed through several doors before he remembered that he had left the bundle of rockets behind; and quickly retraced his steps, the guards at the doors paying little attention to him, dozing as they were, for the most part, in their seats. Wrenne had a peculiarly catlike method of treading, and he reentered the prince's outer chamber without noise, and before the occupant of the inner room realized his presence.

Chu'un's chamber was divided into two parts by a silk-paneled screen depicting a wonderful forest of cypress and cedar-trees, in the center of which the spires and roofs of a fairy city showed. It was the work of an artist of the last century; a marvelous bit of white, silver, and green. One of the panels was a sliding one, and through this Wrenne had passed when he came out, shutting it behind him. He put his hand to it, slid it back with his customary noiselessness, and the key-panel of the screen, the fairy city, disappeared from view.

In its place Wrenne had the view of the red-walled inner chamber, a yellow-robed figure face downward on the floor, and a liquid something trickling crimson on the white marble floor. Over it stood Ito Ugichi cleaning his sword very carefully with a square of silk.

His mode of entrance was quite well known to Wrenne; but for the moment he had forgotten it—a trap-door opening from under a rug seemingly marble, but really painted teak-wood. The secret way led through the palace along a narrow flight of stairs, having for exit the lifting up of the floor of a little summer-house near the wall. Wrenne seldom used the entrance. It was difficult of egress, and the abode of insects, rats, and reptiles. He noted even now that Ugichi was covered with cobwebs.

Very slowly Wrenne realized the facts in the case. It was quite plain that Ugichi had killed Prince Chu'un; but the reasons for it did not come immediately. The shock of the matter was too great for that. Chu'un had grown to be a very personal friend of Hamilton Wrenne; and it was not until he saw the sprawling, lifeless body of the prince that a full sense of his loss came to him. But for all of that he remained calm. Reasons—what reasons?

And then—quite simply they presented themselves to him. Ugichi had quitted the house of Hao-Khieou just after he had left it—had known Wrenne's mission. Entering by the secret way, he had waited until Chu'un gave his consent to the signal of revolt. When Wrenne had gone, he had eliminated the prince. The revolt would go on in the name of Chu'un. When it was too late for the leaders to quiet their troops, it would become apparent that they were dethroning one emperor without another to put in his place. It would be the opportunity for a Japanese dictatorship. Yes, it was quite plain.

The reflections and waiting had hardly consumed a minute's space. Meanwhile Ugichi had looked up and seen the frowning black-browed man, his

cloak of imperial yellow thrown over his shoulder, his hand on his crucifix-hilted sword. In the eyes of the Japanese, Wrenne saw something more of reasons—saw that at one stroke Ugichi had hoped to rid himself not only of Chu'un, but of him, Hamilton Wrenne. No one had seen the Japanese enter or depart. Wrenne would have quitted the chamber the last visitor; and, the prince found dead after his leave-taking, the blame of his murder would be Wrenne's alone. The evidence was enough to damn him, both with the new party and the old. It took from the Japanese the last danger of opposition.

Ugichi only stared insolently at Wrenne. He said nothing. He knew the quick brain under that well-groomed black hair, and realized by Wrenne's expression that his intentions were perfectly plain to his enemy. But he only smiled in his meaningless way. There was no cowardice in the make-up of the Japanese; at least not the sort that made him fear for his life.

He had two revolvers strapped to his waist; but he knew that a movement toward either one meant instant death at the hands of Wrenne. The American was far more proficient in the use of firearms than he; could draw more quickly, and aim without raising his hand above his hip. Ugichi knew also that Wrenne had no wish to have a revolver-shot arouse the sleeping soldiers and eunuchs of the yamen. So he continued to polish the blade of his sword with the square of silk, blowing upon it and rubbing it into a satisfactory glow.

Wrenne came forward, his eyes upon Ugichi, put one hand behind him, and slid the panel into place. Then, quite as the Japanese imagined he would do, his sword-hand drew the thin steel whizzing out of its sheath. Bending the sword by pressing the point upon the marble paving, he took it between both gauntleted hands, and curved it into what was nearly a bow. Apparently satisfied, he allowed it to resume its natural shape again; and with his free hand unloosened his silken cloak. This he tossed on the couch.

"You wish to try a pass of the sword with me?" asked Ugichi politely.

Wrenne said very quietly that he did.

"We are evenly matched," resumed Ito Ugichi, with suavity unexcellable. "You are a famous swordsman—and I am a quicker man. Is it necessary that we fight?"

"I don't see any way out of it," Wrenne answered coldly. "If I had my choice, I should have you strung up and beaten to death with bamboos—after the dowager's favorite practise. I never imagined such a punishment justifiable—until *now,* you yellow rat! It's unfair to Prince Chu'un and myself to kill you honorably, painlessly. But it's got to be done. *There*——"

He lunged. The Japanese parried with perfect ease, and flicked a piece of skin from Wrenne's shoulder.

"And *there!*" he added, still grinning. "Not quite so much lacking in difficulty, eh, Meestaire Black Wrenne."

Sometimes they fought in the light and sometimes in the shadows. A niche in the red walls on either side held two candle sprays, with yellow tapers gleaming out of their golden censers. These threw their light directly across the center of the room, where lay the body of the murdered prince. Wrenne tried to keep within the circle of light. He had been but lately a convalescent, and knew that it would be quite impossible for him to win by strength and endurance. He must have light in order to watch the eyes of the Japanese and to give himself opportunity to execute a very cunning trick taught him by a former brother officer, who had been a famous *maître-d'armes* in Rome before the wanderlust seized him.

But Ugichi seemed to be intent in getting him away from the light.

The American had, save for his first hostile lunge, been entirely on the defensive. It required a certain thrust from the opponent in order to put the *maître* trick of tierce into play; and Black Wrenne left his revenge in abeyance while he waited for Ugichi to make the necessary opening. But this Ugichi did not do. He had a masterful trick o' the fence himself, unhampered

by conventional teachings and strikingly lacking the things that Wrenne expected him to do. His thrusts were, for the most part, half-thrusts, having as complement a quick withdrawal and a turn of the wrist, sending his antagonist's sword splay-wise and Wrenne several steps backward for each time he accomplished the turn.

It was not without a certain admiration for Ito's skill that Wrenne faced him. The fires lighted in his brain by the death of Chu'un and the trick of the Japanese to fasten the guilt of the murder upon him died out, leaving only the cold ashes of desire for adequate recompense. His smile matched the grin of the Japanese in its utter lack of meaning; but it was a smile that drove away the curves of his mouth and made them abruptly cruel. His black eyes seemed to slumber behind his half-drawn lashes, giving the face the effect of a pretending feline waiting her chance to strike, the brows forming a heavy black line across the forehead. With his cloak gone and in the circle of light, every muscle in his lithe body showed quivering under the tight-fitting uniform; and, as he abandoned the defensive, his movements were disconcerting in their apparent recklessness.

He forced upon Ugichi a style of fence to which the diplomat must either conform or feel Wrenne's sword-point. The tricks upon which the Japanese had seemed to place his skill were dependent on the style of sword-play necessitating a long reach. Black Wrenne, abandoning this, came closer and closer with each parry, until they fought with their swords either high in air, or else turning like keys in locks as they came together at the hilts. And then, while in this manner parrying, Ugichi gave the opening thrust which Wrenne had so much desired. Wrenne played his trick with a sudden, vicious baring of teeth—but without effect, and nearly with the result of having the blade of the Japanese pierce his shoulder.

Wrenne leaped quickly to his former position; and again their swords met one another.

"A neat play," commented the Japanese. "But I have learned it, you see, *mon cher Wrenne*. I also have fenced in Rome."

Wrenne was considering rapidly. He was losing breath and strength; and it was quite apparent to him that, his trick exhausted, he was no better swordsman than the Japanese. Nor did he wish to engage in hand-grips, for he knew Ugichi to be proficient in ju-jutsu, before which his own strength would have very little chance of holding its own. The Japanese was a traitor, a murderer—and fair play was out of the question with him.

Again they came closer, and again their swords shot out in air. In that moment, with the points toward the ceiling, Wrenne did a bold thing. He released the hilt of his blade; and before it had clattered to the floor he fastened one hand about the throat of Ugichi, caught the sword-wrist of the Japanese with the other hand, and kicked him viciously on the lower leg. The Japanese went prone, with Wrenne on top of him. The same second found Wrenne planting a knee in Ugichi's chest, and twisting the sword-wrist under his back. Ugichi lay quite powerless. Wrenne's foot was planted heavily on the fingers of Ugichi's free hand, his knee held the Japanese down with sword-hand under him, while Wrenne's two hands choked the air from his gullet. He wriggled violently, pulling the sword from under his back. One of Wrenne's hands shot out and tore it from his numbed grasp. Without pang of pity, Wrenne shortened the blade and thrust it through Ugichi's throat. The Japanese raised himself on his hand with one convulsive effort, then fell back quite still. Wrenne felt his heart, and arose with a satisfied smile.

CHAPTER IV.

THE THREE GOLDEN ARROWS FLY SKYWARD.

For some time after he had killed the Japanese, Wrenne remained quite still, wondering what he should do. His

shoulders bent, his head on his chest, he pondered over the matter. What, indeed, was best? For the moment the fate of China was entirely in his hands. He had but to loose the rockets—but what then? Now that he saw the hand of Japan in the matter, was it wise?

Then his eyes brightened, and he regained his erect bearing. He would go to Bess, confess to her that he had strayed back into the crooked footpaths, ask of her advice. She with her clear, honest eyes must determine for him—he would watch the eyes to know what she thought. And he would do as they bade him.

He pulled away the rug, lifted the trap-door, and pitched what was left of the Japanese head first down the flight of steps. Very tenderly, however, he carried the body of Chu'un down, wrapped in the golden coverlet of his couch, and laid him at the foot of the stairs. Returning, he threw the rug over the blood-stains, then closed the trap-door, and passed out by the usual passage.

The servants and the guards had heard nothing. The eunuchs blinked sleepily as they made him obeisance. He went his way rapidly through the Chu'un gardens to the wall that opened into the imperial palaces, and opened the secret gate with the key given him by the prince long before. The gate closed behind, and he was in the Gardens of the Invisible Deity.

The moon was very bright, limning trees, shrubs, and buildings in lines of frosted silver. Lights were out in the pavilion of the Arbor. He hesitated as to whether he should enter and awaken Bess. She had probably retired. For all her troth to him, he felt a delicacy in intruding upon her at this hour. But he must have her counsel—himself he could not decide.

He walked the length of the gardens while he meditated, and came to the foot of the temple's hundred steps, which shone like a white moon ladder above him. Looking up, he saw something that sent, despite his courage, a cold shiver through him. One cannot live in China and acquire none of her superstitions. The door of the Double-Dragon, closed these ten years, was flung open; and out into the moonlight had come a cloaked figure.

He stared upward; then, the figure turning, a pale, white face was abruptly outlined in the moonlight. He had no suspicion of its identity; only knew himself either to be dreaming or in the presence of an actual psychic phenomenon. Perhaps an omen—if ever man needed advice of superlunary sort, he was the man! He mocked secretly at himself for his paradoxical thoughts; but, his mind made, he bounded up the steps, taking three at a jump, until he came to the level of the doors.

Now he stood within reaching distance of the figure. His eye took in a cape of soft gray, with two little blue tassels falling from the neck. The cape awoke vague recollections. On shipboard—yes—Bess! He looked again. How was it possible? The door to the temple was open—wide open.

He put out one hand, and withdrew it. The figure had its back to him, head resting against the door, rounded shoulders shaking convulsively. His ears became aware of muffled sobbing.

The temple door open—and Bess here! From some recess of his memory came the remembrance of Chu'un's recognition of the sketch the girl had made of the exiled mandarin of the White Banner. It occurred to him that her cheeks had flushed when she said the exile was dead. That mandarin had left China with the keys of the temple in his possession—and——

Bess—a thief!

This time he put out both hands; and the fingers sank deep into the flesh under the soft cape. He turned the figure around. He released one shoulder; and held up the girl's head by pushing against the chin. Her eyes streamed tears. She would not look at him.

"Bess!" he said; and in his blind rage shook her violently. The silver bag that she was holding fell from her grasp, and to the marble platform. The clasp came undone, and a hundred or more white stars seemed to have fallen upon the marble. Wrenne's eyes went

down to them. In that moment he realized.

She was a thief!

In his anger he almost struck her. So this was the girl for whom he had come near abandoning all his schemes for success—because perforce they were unworthy of the man she loved. He laughed, and the mirth had a bitter tang in it. Her eyes, weary, hopeless, met his.

"Don't, Hamilton. Don't—don't——"

She stretched out her arms, beseeching him. He pushed her away with an angry snarl.

"You stole those!" he said; and pointed to the gleaming stones at his feet.

She bowed her head in sobbing acquiescence.

"You did?" he asked, a menace in his tone.

"Yes."

His teeth grated hard against one another. "You did—eh? You did. Oh, my God! *you* did? You *stole* them, did you? You came here and stole them; and you *meant* to steal them all along, I guess. You *did,* eh?" He was snarling again at her. "You *did* mean to steal them all along?"

Again she bowed her head.

He caught her by the wrists, hurting her cruelly. "All the time you talked to me about my better self, I guess? All the time you were posing to me as a little toy angel? That's what, eh? Well, I hope you're glad you've destroyed all that's decent in me—every bit that's decent in me. Why, I was ashamed of myself—I *was,* because I thought of you—how much better *you* were—and all that. And all this fine stuff you gave me was lies—all lies, eh? Every blasted word was a lie, a lie—eh, wasn't it?"

She stood the pain of his twisting grasp, not murmuring. She could have no pain of body comparable with the hurt her soul was receiving from his words. For, as she looked at him—big, black, and sinister in the moonlight—she loved him absolutely, without reserve, for the first time. Before, it had been a love founded on his caring for her; but now there was no thought of self in the matter; only a passionate adoration of the black-avised, brutal soldier who was twisting her wrists until it seemed they must break. But she made no outcry of pain.

"You meant to take 'em all along, did you?" he mouthed for perhaps the twentieth time. "Meant to *steal* them, and you *did it!* Ah, you——"

He checked himself at the epithet. It remained unuttered. Instead, he flung her away from him; and she staggered back against the green-scaled dragon, her eyes entreating him piteously.

He was not of stone. The mute appeal of the eyes sent his head back again to his chest, his shoulders forward. He swallowed hard, and turned his back to her, his eyes falling upon the shining marble terrace of the Arbor over the way. It was on that terrace that he had seen his supreme moment of joy—the moment when he felt he had won the truest, sweetest girl in all the world. And now, in sight of that almost sacred place, he had been dashed down from the heights; had found her not to be the ideal he imagined, but a woman who had stooped to—theft!

She had meant to deceive him, too. Had he not come at that moment, he would not have known—ever. He would have worshiped the ideal always, perhaps; and, while he worshiped, she might again betray. The thought was bitter. His jaws snapped together, blood running from his bitten lips.

To-night he had come prepared to submit to her; to abide by her decision. He had come to her for the *honest* course to pursue—and had found her *stealing.* The thought almost maddened him. He turned and met her gaze.

Unconsciously he made a movement forward to take her in his arms; then sternly checked himself with a sullen curse for his weakness. Was it possible that he still cared? But then, perhaps, she could explain! That was it—he had not asked for an explanation. No doubt she had one, and a good one, too. The frown fell away from his brows. His tone was pleading.

"You can explain, Bess?" he asked.

"Yes." It was a still, small voice that answered him. "I can explain. That Chinese whose picture I painted was the Chinese whom I took home—at Roland Park that day. The first time you saw me, Black Wrenne; you *do* remember?—long ago. Yes, he was the one Chu'un spoke of—the exiled mandarin. And he gave me the keys. Afterward he died. Austin had taken money given him by my aunts—all they had—and lost it in speculation. We were very poor. I couldn't make it up—and it was all they had. And Austin asked me to—use the keys. I didn't want to use them, Hamilton. I didn't want to; indeed I didn't. But then came this chance to paint the picture—and—I didn't refuse. Can't you see? It was the family shame—and the two old women—my aunts! And so I came. And then I—grew to love you, Hamilton, and I couldn't take them—couldn't. But while you were wounded I thought of our prospects—how little we would have when you quitted China—and things were so unsettled. And there are so many dependent on me. So I came here and took them—not many—only enough to repay Aunt Malvinia and Aunt Kitty, and something over for us to use. Can't you see, Hamilton? Can't you see—and forgive me?"

He raised the sleeve of his coat and brushed his eyes, then stared away at the moonlighted garden. Presently he spoke.

"There must be mutual forgiveness," he answered quietly.

She gasped.

"It seems that both of us promised more that night than we could fulfil. We made a mistake, you and I, imagining that our natures were to be changed by love. When I came out of my illness, I, too, wondered what we should do away from China—saw a black future for both of us. And so I—went on with the plotting. I——"

He faced her.

"Yes, *I* did. I, who raved and frothed a few moments ago because I found out that you were not the perfect being I had imagined. I went back on all I said to you, and continued in the plot. The date of the rising is set for to-night. I wanted *you,* but I wanted power, too. The stars put strange fancies into our heads that night."

She came forward, and put both hands on his shoulders.

"Hamilton," she said, "do you love me?"

He caught her in his arms and kissed her until she breathed heavily.

"You see, Bess," he went on, "it was neither the ideal nor the physical. I couldn't have loved the ideal—for you aren't the ideal any more, and I love you just as much. We have confounded our love for one another with a lot of musty platitudes. I don't love you because you're good, or clever, or beautiful—but just because you're Bess; and you—well, you love me for just what *I* am. We weren't satisfied with the beautiful thing that love is in itself—we had to tack on morals and fine frenzies, and copy-book maxims—when the real expression of the thing is so far beyond us that when we tell one another of it, we've only three little words. The rest doesn't sound very real—does it?"

"The three little words are enough," she breathed. "If—if—you say them often enough—dear."

He buried his face in her hair, and whispered "I love you" over and over again—then suddenly released her.

When she looked up at him he spoke, telling her of the plot, the occurrences of the night, the deaths of Chu'un and Ugichi.

"And now," he said wearily, "it all rests with me. But what to do, God knows! If I send up these three rockets, Peking will be ours before the night is over—and the province of Cheh-li besides. But without a leader, what Japan has planned for will happen—the dictatorship of Japan. But the other way—to risk nothing, to give up all we have planned for—what?"

He shook his head, adding:

"That was why I came to you for advice."

"And do you want it now?" she asked.

He nodded.

"Then I will give it—selfishly, for your sake. You would not be happy if you went away, threw up your career. You must have your chance to strike. You say the rebellion has no leader—why not? It has *you.*"

He thrilled at the light in her eyes.

"Yes, you. And as for Japan, play them a trick with their own cards. Loose your rockets; make Peking yours to-night. You want a nominal head to rule China, you reformers. Why dethrone Kwang-Hsu? Is he not sufficiently nominal. Rid him of the presence of the dowager-empress. Banish her to the Jehol palaces, and let the Reform Party rule in the name of the emperor. Let there be no violence. The city can be taken without bloodshed. You have told me that all are on your side—all that count. Enter the imperial city at the head of your soldiers. Make prisoners of Kwang-Hsu and the queen-mother. Show him the force of the mailed hand. Let him choose between dethronement and death on one hand, and ruling through the Reform Party on the other. Let the terms of his continuation as emperor be the banishment of the queen-mother, Tze-Hsi, and acceding to the demands of the Reformers. While you have him prisoner, let him write a decree banishing Tze-Hsi, and a solemn agreement to abide by the terms you have made him. Then get rid of your Japanese allies, and, with General Tchin and the other Reformers, rule for the weakling, Kwang-Hsu. And, ah, my Black Wrenne, what a ruler you will make! And mine—all mine!"

He had caught the glow of her enthusiasm. His cheeks were flushed with excitement, his hand trembled.

"Bess," he said, and, raising her hands to his lips, kissed them, "you have cut the Gordian knot; have solved the difficulty for me. To-night's rebellion will be such a one as history has never before recorded. A rebellion in which not a shot will be fired; in which, if possible, not a man will be killed. The world at large will never know that Kwang-Hsu was forced, practically, to abdicate his throne. In the sight of the world he will continue emperor—but over a different China. For China will be rid at last of the harpy, Tze-Hsi, who has sucked its blood for so long."

He laughed whimsically as he turned his face to her.

"And so good comes out of evil, little girl. Good for China out of my evil and yours. It's only an ethical thing, this question of right and wrong. We are safe only when we follow our strongest beliefs. If I had abandoned my share in the plot, China would have been given over to Japan. Had you renounced your theft, you would have brought starvation and dishonor on your family. And for what? That a pair of idealistic fools—ourselves—might drift aimlessly about the world and commend our consciences!"

He tore paper and string from the rockets, and held them in his hand, staring at them.

"Thank God we were not ethical, Hamilton!" she said. "Thank God for the good that came out of our wrong! And thank God that what we love in one another is what we are—I just a wilful woman; you a heavy-handed man! And we love one another for just that—*don't* we, dear?"

He took both her hands in his.

"But there's enough good in us to work for the best that is in this country. May God help us to show to China only the best that is in us!"

They stood, their heads bowed over their hands.

Later, watchers on the walls and upon the hills, outside the city and within, saw the face of the moon obscured by a passing black cloud. And, as the darkness fell, a golden arrow of light shot high above the walls of the Three Cities, cleaving the black cloud in twain; and following it two more.

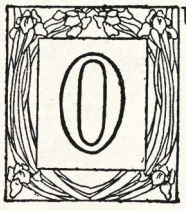
So that when the moon came out there were no longer any watchers. But of grim-visaged men bearing arms there were many; and their faces were turned toward the violet city.

The Norther

By C. T. Revere

Author of "The Wrong Wagon," Etc.

There are two perils that the cowboy never quite overcomes his fear of—the blizzard and the wolf. In this story of the real life of the plains Mr. Revere tells how a Westerner was face to face with both perils



UR acquaintance was brief, a few months, perhaps, not more. Our friendship — that was another matter. Time was not the yardstick to measure it by. A glance, half a dozen casual sentences, and it was accomplished, the bond of the West welded at white heat, even though the forge was an accidental meeting in New York.

It was afterward that we discussed the range days of fifteen years before, comparing the fine points of the Southern and Northern "punchers." He bristled with arguments favoring the swooping horsemanship, the wide loop thrown by the Texas centaurs, while I grew hoarse in panegyrics of the rough-riding Wyoming cowboy and his resource in coping with the unexpected.

In those hours he was to me just "Ham-sandwich Mike," redolent of the chaff and horse-play of the round-up. I would forget the engraved dignity of "Banker and Broker" on his business-card. That stiff rectangle of pasteboard could no more waft away the smoke of the camp-fire and the maddening savor of sizzling bacon than the tailor could conceal the saddle-slouch of those sturdy shoulders. And no amount of money-grubbing and money-getting could cramp the broad spirit of humanity infused—until it became bone of his bone and blood of his blood—by the infinite plains of Texas.

"Maybe it was because people had to depend on one another, maybe it was because the country was flush with the optimism of youth; at any rate, utter strangers in the early days of the West often made mutual sacrifices that would have tested long-standing friendships in almost any other country."

This preliminary generalization was merely the winding up of Mike's story-telling mechanism. He paused only long enough to light a fresh cigar.

"When I was about twenty years old I was riding for the 27 Quarter Circle. Our headquarters was about a hundred miles northwest from Abilene, although Abilene in those days wasn't much more than a bad place in the trail. Late in December I was ordered to ride over to Sycamore Flat, about forty miles away. It was a big stretch of prairie that received its name from the fact there wasn't a sycamore or any other tree within a hundred miles of it. But we had some cattle over there, and if the grass was in good shape we wanted to pasture a few thousand head more.

"It was about four o'clock in the morning when I saddled Corn Bread, the pet horse of my string, and loped off. I had been out about an hour and a half when I felt the sting of snow against my face. By daybreak I was in the midst of a norther. By eight o'clock I confessed I was lost.

"Snow is all right when you are in a warm house and can watch it swirling past the windows. It's beautiful on a clear, crisp day, when you can see how it has put a new suit of clothes on the landscape. It's entirely different

when you are lost in a maelstrom of it, when every sucking, driving eddy lashes your cheeks with tiny particles that feel like splinters off the North Pole. All the poetry in your soul oozes out through your benumbed toes to the tune of a howling gale and the mercury slumping to zero.

"I huddled into my yellow slicker and rode aimlessly all day. By nightfall I was getting hungry, but I was worrying more about a night's lodging than about something to eat. The trouble was I had two to look out for, Corn Bread and myself. I could have dismounted, scraped the snow off the ground, rolled up in my saddle blanket and slicker, and slept as warm as toast under the snow that would have drifted over me. If I staked Corn Bread near me he might get frightened by wild animals and trample on me. If I picketed him farther away than the length of my lariat the wolves might get him, and I would be afoot in the Panhandle with nothing but a pile of clean-picked bones to remind me of as good a horse as ever a puncher threw a leg over. I decided to keep on riding.

"Along about eight o'clock I thought I saw a light. I rode toward it, but I did not see it again. Then I felt Corn Bread pull himself together. It was a warning to me to let him have his head. He turned in exactly the opposite direction and picked his way through the snow as if he knew his business. On he floundered, never once changing his course. He kept up his gait for miles. At last, about an hour from the time he took charge, I saw a light. It was no illusion this time, although I lost the gleam once or twice when it was shut off by the furious gusts of snow. It came from a tallow candle set in the window of a prairie cabin.

"I rode up within fifty feet of the house and gave the usual 'Hello!' A woman came to the door, and I asked her if she had room for a stranger. She said she had, and told me to take my horse around to the barn, next to the horse corral. In five minutes I was in the house sniffing the perfume of ham and eggs and coffee. A bottle of whisky and a glass stood on the table, and the woman half-turned from the frying-pan and motioned toward them.

"'No, thankee, ma'am,' I said, 'but I'd like to get as close to that stove as I can without jumping into it.'

"She nodded and went on with her cooking, while I drew up a chair, threw open the oven-door, and let the heat drift against my feet and shins. I got partly thawed out by the time supper was on the table, and the piping-hot ham and eggs and steaming coffee made me feel that life was worth living again.

"Never have I seen a better instance of the taciturnity of Western folk. My hostess did not ask me a question. She did not even make a remark about the weather. She was good to look at, a woman about thirty, with all the freshness and color of open-air life. Her figure was as lithe as a mermaid's, and her dotted pink calico gown set on her like a Grecian robe. Her face was too severely classical to be pretty. She had features like the lady on the great American dollar, and as I watched her moving quietly around the kitchen I mentally proclaimed her the goddess of Silence.

"Oh, I wasn't so silent. I sat by the stove and smoked a dozen cigarettes while she answered about three questions. It was like using a can-opener, a corkscrew, and a crowbar, but I finally pried loose the information that she and her husband had moved onto this land and started a ranch two years before. He had gone to Buffalo Gap, about eighty miles away, for a load of freight early in the week, and she expected him home at any time.

"All the time she had the appearance of a woman who was under a great nervous strain, and I saw it was a positive relief to her when I began to nod. She rose and put a fresh candle in the stand by the window. There was only one bedroom in the house, divided by a calico partition, and with a bed in each section. She pointed to where I was to sleep, and said good night. It did not take me long to undress and jump into bed, and about the only care I exercised was in placing my holster

with its two pistols where my right hand would fall on the butt of a .44 at the slightest alarm. That is a little formality that has become a habit with me, but it was useless that night.

"I don't know how long I had been asleep, when I felt some one tugging at my shoulder, and I heard the woman's voice calling me to get up.

" 'You sleep terribly sound,' she said, with a note of complaint in her tone. 'I've tried for two or three minutes to wake you. Hurry! I hear some one calling out there in the storm.'

"It was excruciating to get up, but I did it. I dressed, and went to the door, where she stood holding it open. I listened, but heard nothing. I asked her from which direction the call came, but she said the wind was howling so she could not tell. As the cry might have come from her husband, it was up to me to go out and make a search. I figured it out that the man must be within shouting-distance, and this would be nearer the house against the wind than with the wind. So I told her to stand by the window and wave the candle every time she heard me shout. Then I walked to the windward of the house, and when I got about two hundred feet away I shouted. She waved the candle. I went on farther, walking backward so that I would not lose sight of the light. I kept on shouting and walking until finally there was no answering signal. This was my cue to start for the house, which I did in a zigzag fashion, kicking and peering in every direction to discover a fallen body in the snow. I passed the house with the wind but did not go so far in the opposite direction, for the failure of the candle to wave at the window informed me that I was again beyond shouting-radius. While making my tracks through the snow, I stumbled across the body of a man.

"He was alive, but unconscious, and I dragged him to the house, and the woman helped me to get him through the door to the kitchen stove. It took about an hour's work with whisky, hot blankets, and rubbing to get him thoroughly restored. He talked enough to let us know that he had got lost in the storm, and had fallen from his horse when within sight of the house. He seemed grateful, but he didn't thank you with a look straight into the eye, and his sunken chin gave his face the pointed appearance of a rat's. A man was a man that night, however, and we slept together.

"Next morning the stranger's horse showed up at the bars of the corral. We put him in the stable and then sat down to a game of seven-up, which lasted most of the forenoon. It was the same old drama of silence. The hostess and I did not exchange enough words to reveal the brevity of our acquaintance, and I dropped no hint concerning myself. About the only words uttered were those relating to the game, for my opponent was a bit taciturn himself. About ten o'clock he pulled a package of cigarettes from his pocket and offered me one.

"I noticed a slight start from the housewife as she sat sewing by the window. 'Store-bought cigarettes,' as we call them, are a boon to a cowboy. They also possess a certain significance in the land of the cow. They mean that the purchaser has made a recent trip to town, and likewise that he had money. This much flashed through my mind, but nothing more, although I was a bit puzzled over the agitation of the goddess of Silence.

"The goddess seemed to get more nervous as the day wore on. As I looked at that blustering hurricane of snow and thought of her husband, I could see plenty of ground for worry. After our midday dinner, I bestirred myself. Without saying a word, I put on my slicker and heavy gloves, and buckled my spur on my left boot. She did not glance up from her sewing, although she must have seen every move I made. Suddenly I heard her voice lifted in level monotone, as if she were reading a line of poetry:

" 'A live coward is worth a dozen dead heroes.'

"I looked up. Her face was as expressionless as ever. But I saw she didn't want me to go. I couldn't un-

derstand it, for she knew I was going out to search for her husband. It placed me in a ticklish position. If I stayed it would be a gentle hint to the stranger that I didn't like to leave the lady alone in his company, and some men would have expressed their resentment with a six-shooter. I decided to go.

"I saddled Corn Bread and headed him in the direction of Buffalo Gap. The purpose of hunting for lost husbands did not appeal to me, but I had a bluff to make good. Before I had been out two minutes the house had been shut from view. I spurred my horse as fast as he could flounder in order to leave the freshest possible tracks. I covered about two miles at a clumsy lope, and then turned back and let Corn Bread pick his way over the trail. It was about dusk when I stabled him and went into the house. I found the stranger and the goddess sitting just as I had left them. I don't believe they had even exchanged a word.

"It was thrust upon me more and more that the lady was distrustful of my fellow refugee, and I knew it would give her a sense of protection as well as check any intention of deviltry on his part if I could act the part of hired man about the place. But I didn't know her name, and she didn't know mine. I have always been proud of my inspiration. I spied a couple of milk-pails in the kitchen, and took them down.

" 'It strikes me,' I said, with a stretch and a yawn, 'that it would be a good plan for little Mikey to go and milk his cows.'

" 'All right, Mike,' flashed back the response to my cue.

"When I came in she took the ice-coated pails from me and said, with a little chirrup of forced gaiety:

" 'And now little Evangeline will strain the milk.'

"After that it was 'Mike' and 'Evangeline,' and I don't believe we overworked the game, either. It was enough to show her that I was her friend, and I suppose my youth was another thing in my favor. Next morning it was still snowing. I went out and did the chores, and Evangeline strained the milk and went about her housework. By noon the storm had subsided. The unwelcome lodger showed no signs of going, and I stuck by the house as if rooted to it.

"The goddess was beginning to show the strain. I could tell by her tossing on her bed, the other side of the thin calico partition, that she had not slept for two nights. That night about bedtime I turned to her and lectured her with the familiarity of a big brother.

" 'Evangeline,' I began, 'I don't like the way you have been losing sleep. Come out here in the snow and let me give you a little treatment for your nerves.'

"She followed me out with the meekness of a lamb, and I scooped up great handfuls of snow and rubbed them briskly over her face and neck until she was gasping from the shock.

" 'Now, go to bed to-night,' I commanded. 'I'll keep an eye out so you won't have to worry.'

"I listened long enough to find out that she had taken my advice, and was relieved to hear her heavy breathing.

"I felt like giving three cheers and a tiger when I saw the sun come up next morning. There was the majestic stretch of the Panhandle, smooth as a bowling-alley, covered with white satin; and as the sun peeped over the horizon it looked like a huge ball poised for a 'strike' at human ten-pins. The air tingled with zero crispness, and in that clear atmosphere you could look out for miles and miles and see nothing but the edge of the world.

"Still greater was the pleasure of speeding the parting guest. After breakfast he turned to me as head of the house and thanked me for my kindness. I gravely accepted his mumbled gratitude. He nodded to his real hostess, and went out. We watched him ride off, and when it was assured that he actually had gone, the goddess turned to me with a cry of excitement:

" 'Did you see those store-bought cigarettes?'

" 'Yes,' I replied, 'I smoked some of them. What of that?'

" 'Don't you see?' she exclaimed impatiently.

" 'See what?'

" 'That he didn't come here for any good purpose; that he wasn't a cowboy, like yourself; that he wasn't lost from any trail?'

" 'Well—I—maybe.' But it was beyond me, and I gave it up.

" 'He wasn't a cowboy,' she asserted. 'Cowboys go to town on the first of the month. This is the twentieth. No cowboy could stay in town that long and have money enough to buy cigarettes. This ranch is thirty miles from any trail between towns, and he couldn't have got this far off unless he had tried to. That man saw my husband in Buffalo Gap, and came right here with the intention of robbing the ranch. The storm overtook him, and he didn't dare to do anything while you were here. He will be back again.'

"Her reasoning looked good to me, but I didn't dare worry her by admitting it. As for the man coming back, I laughed at her.

"I sat around the house most of the day tinkering on my saddle. The goddess was moving about in her nervous, abstracted way, and, it seemed to me, getting more depressed and haggard every time she looked off in the direction of Buffalo Gap. She went into her bedroom, and as she passed the little window I heard her give a cry.

" 'Look! Here he comes!'

"I gazed in the direction she pointed. Far out on the snowy waste of the Panhandle, fully three miles away, was a small, black speck which I made out to be a man riding toward the house. It was the guest who had left us in the morning. He was coming from the northwest, although he had started off toward the northeast. He had made a détour of at least fifteen miles in order to approach the house from a different direction.

" 'I was right about those cigarettes,' she said calmly. 'He is coming back in the daytime, because he thinks I'll be alone.'

" 'He'll soon find he's mistaken,' I said.

"I went out the back door and walked to the barn, which was fully two hundred feet from the house. After spending about five minutes picking out some white corn for hominy, I returned with an armful.

" 'He's gone,' she announced. 'As soon as you stepped out of the house he turned his horse and galloped off.'

"I watched the black speck growing smaller against the snowy background.

" 'We've seen the last of him,' I said.

"And we had, but I agreed to stay until her husband returned, or until we heard that he would not return. The alternative was a mental reservation, for I did not care to stretch those frayed nerves to the breaking-point. I was getting worried about her. It was the fourth night I had spent under her roof, and I knew she had slept only a few hours. Her beauty took on a strange, weird cast, such as an artist might have given Niobe before her grief found vent in tears. The transparent pallor of her cheeks, the topaz brilliancy of her hazel-gray eyes, and the sculptured, changeless set of her mouth and chin warned me that I had to deal with a woman who was near the limit of her control.

"Sleep was the best remedy. It was an occasion for heroic measures, and I employed them that night.

" 'Go into your room, undress, and put on your nightgown and some warm slippers,' was my first command. 'Then go out back of the house and stand in the snow until you are chilled clear through. I'll have some hot blankets ready for you, and you can jump right into bed. You are going to sleep, or I'll know the reason why.'

"You can search the records without finding a better proof of the confidence the Western woman had in the cowboy than that forlorn, half-crazed wife displayed that night. There was no outburst of mock modesty, no whimper of conventional protest. To her I was a knight of the rope and saddle, and my code of honor was as clean as Galahad's.

"I took the blankets and held them before the stove. I heard her patter out, slamming the door behind her. She took my advice to the letter, and it made me shiver to think of her standing out in the snow with the temperature below zero. At last the door opened.

" 'I'm coming,' she warned me, as she tripped across the floor.

"I turned and threw the scorching blankets around her, carried her to her bed, and tucked her in. She was sound asleep in three minutes.

"Although the sleep refreshed her, I could see in the morning that the burden of suspense had not been lifted. Not a word did she utter as she went about her work. It was the silence, the look of haunted terror, the momentary possibility of a snapping of the rein, and then the shrieks and laughter! As I looked out over the endless reaches of snow, I felt worse than a shipwrecked sailor.

"She got dinner at noon, and we ate it in silence. She washed the dishes and sat down to sew. She got up and looked out the window. She sat down and sewed for two minutes. Then she arose, went into her bedroom, and came out attired in a riding-skirt and a heavy jacket. On her head was a coonskin cap.

" 'I'm going to Buffalo Gap,' she announced.

"I said nothing. What was the use? There was no combating the set of that chin except to rope her and tie her.

" 'My horse is in the corral,' she said. 'I'll have to catch him myself, as there are too many others there, and he wouldn't come for you.'

"I saddled Corn Bread, and in five minutes we were off. She rode ahead, making fair time in spite of two feet of snow. We jogged along for five miles without a word. Suddenly she drew rein.

" 'This is nonsense,' she snapped.

" 'That's what I think about it,' I echoed, as I turned my horse and led the way back.

"She was a little more tractable that night. She became talkative enough to tell me of her fears for her husband, just a few, brief, broken sentences, but that was volubility for her. I told her I would sit up and watch for him, if she would sleep, and she consented. I was still afraid of a nervous breakdown, and I wanted to start a backfire to head off the chief danger. Tears, I thought. I must make her cry. I must make her weep over other folks' troubles, and she might forget her own.

"Ah, the story I told her that night! It was about a little boy that tried to take care of his mother, a tale brimming with bathos, with a sob in every sentence, the kind that children used to get at Sunday-school libraries a generation ago. It was as obvious as Eighth Avenue melodrama, and as potent. It brought the tears in a flood, and sleep came as soon as she got into bed.

"I took up my vigil near the window. I sat there for an hour or two wondering, among other things, what the foreman of the 27 Quarter Circle thought about my absence. When I looked at my watch it was after eleven o'clock. I may have nodded a little after that. Suddenly I heard the faint but unmistakable report of a shot. I leaped to the door.

"The sound that floated to me on the still, tingling air sickened me to the point of nausea. Wolves—scores of them — hundreds of them — all the wolves in the world—lifted their throats in that ravening chorus. Above the fearful ensemble, as it ebbed and rose, came the shout of a man. It may have had its notes of terror, distress, and appeal, but what struck me was its noble challenge, the gage of battle flung to brute creation. It was the war-cry of species against species, and its call was irresistible. I would have gone out and fought for him with my naked hands.

"I shut the door and stepped to the bedroom. It seemed cruel to waken the worn-out creature, but I needed her confirmation of my fears. She was with me in half a minute, fully dressed. I opened the door and let her catch the full force of the uproar. Another shout.

" 'My husband.'

"I stopped only long enough to gath-

er up my hat, saddle, and bridle, but she beat me out of the door, putting on her cap and jacket as she went. I had to let her catch her own horse, and dashed into the shed and got Corn Bread. Then came the agony of waiting for her. It seemed hours—years. As she appeared, riding astride, I drew one of my six-shooters and handed it to her.

" 'You'll need that,' I shouted.

" 'Mine is under the mattress of my bed,' she cried. 'Better get it.'

"It meant more delay, but it was worth the price. I flung her my bridle-rein and tore into the house for the weapon. I found it, shoved it into my holster, rushed out, and vaulted to the saddle.

"That was a ride in spite of the heavy going! It was a biting night, without a moon, and the glint from the snow guided us better than the niggardly light of the stars. A blind man could have played leader, for the ever-swelling din pointed the way. Every variety of yelp, bark, and howl echoed in that awful crescendo, pierced by intermittent shouts. As we drew closer, we heard the jingling of the trace-chains, shaken by the floundering horses.

"We galloped up, whooping and shouting, and the wolves snarlingly slunk off into the rim of darkness. I could see them still, hovering like shadows, just within the range of vision, the leaders, sending their calls echoing out into the spaces of the night.

"No situation could have been more hopeless. There sat the man on the off-wheeler, yelling—simply yelling. He had been yelling all the time we were coming to his rescue, and he did not stop when we arrived. It came regularly, with about every third respiration—the old, defiant Rebel yell—working with the volume and precision of a steam calliope in a circus-parade. His horses, jaded and dead on their feet, were capable only of futile lunges of terror. They couldn't budge the wagon a foot. And such a load as they had! Only an old-time freighter would believe that so much stuff could be heaped on four wheels. The big bed, with its sideboards, held fully thirty bushels of corn, and above were piled boxes, household furniture, and lumber, topped off with the frames of two great iron windmills. In the ghostly half-light it loomed up like a four-masted bark with a deck-cargo reaching to the yards.

"As we drew rein I found that the goddess was only a woman, after all. Those superb nerves snapped, and she fainted. Her horse bolted as she fell. Talk about crowded moments! That situation had me as busy as a bird-dog in no time. I flopped from the saddle, jerked off a glove, and began dashing her face and neck with snow. Corn Bread got his infection of fright, and reared and tugged so I scarcely could hold him. All the time the wolves were howling and sneaking back and forth, and that lunatic of a husband merely sat on his horse and whooped. I could have strangled him.

"Just as she was regaining consciousness, Corn Bread plunged and stepped on her leg. She gave a faint cry. The injury was not serious, and the pain hastened her revival. I got her to her feet, and my first thought was for a refuge for her. There was a step on the wagon-box, back of the rear wheel, by which she might have climbed to safety. A glance showed the mocking futility of considering it. The overreaching bulk of the windmills barred the way as effectually as the projecting eaves of a house.

" 'Are you strong enough to ride?' Although my arm was around her, it required the limit of vocal power to make myself heard above the howling of the wolves.

" 'Yes,' she shrieked back.

"I had her foot already in the stirrup when another possibility flashed across my mind. The moment Corn Bread felt her weight in the saddle he would be gone, with at least a part of that ravenous pack at his heels. Even if she escaped her pursuers, she might freeze to death wandering about on the prairie. I don't pose as a hero, and I will admit that life was dear to me at twenty. I didn't see why I should lay it down for people I barely knew. With

my horse gone, what was to become of me? I couldn't climb up on the wagon. I wasn't certain that a single one of the freight horses, except the off-wheeler, had been broken to ride, and he was so fagged that he couldn't carry two. But I had another reason for jerking her foot from the stirrup.

"While I hesitated a great, hulking wolf stole up on the other side of Corn Bread and leaped for his throat. I whipped out my six-shooter and stretched him, whining, in the snow.

"You probably have seen a shoal of minnows dart for an insect that has struck the surface of the water. Every nostril in that starving pack scented the first spurt of blood, and one might as well have tried to whistle back a tornado as to stay the hunger-maddened onslaught. From every arc of that famished circle they converged upon their fallen leader, and instantly his body was hidden by a rending, snarling mass.

"The first rush nearly swept us from our feet, but Corn Bread's heels cleared a passage to the wagon, four or five yards away. I had dumped the fat in the fire by my first shot, and I decided to go the limit then and there. I emptied my revolver into the writhing tangle, shoved the gun into my holster, and began firing with the one I had got from under the mattress. I leaned over and shouted to the goddess, and told her to shoot. At first she seemed too dazed to understand, but I repeated my command, and in a moment we both were blazing away as fast as we could pull the triggers.

"I had about thirty cartridges in my belt, but the problem of loading nearly drove me to despair. I had taken the glove from my left hand, when I was trying to revive the goddess, and my fingers were paralyzed with cold. Corn Bread's bridle was looped over my elbow, and his furious tugging made it almost impossible to grasp a cartridge and insert it in the cylinder. At last by shouting and gestures I made the goddess understand what I wanted. She was herself again, and almost as soon as one of my revolvers had been emptied she had another one ready for use.

"I don't know how many wolves I killed. It didn't require marksmanship. Those trusty Colts simply bored into that yapping heap as if I had fired into a mound of earth. There was none of the hunter's delight in seeing his game drop, no individual yelp of pain. I was a butcher, not a sportsman.

"All the time reenforcements were arriving, drawn by the deafening uproar. Grisly shadows flitted in from the gloom, and launched themselves at the heaving pyramid. Lord! how I hated them! The ghoulish howls, the grim crunching of stout bones, filled me with a loathing that brought shudders for months afterward.

"In all this time the wagon had creaked along about thirty feet, and the mound of wolves, tumbling, rolling, and growing like a snowball, had covered about half that distance. The Voice was still doing business, ripping out a whoop at regular intervals, and digging his heels into the galled flanks of the jaded wheeler. We fell back with the wagon. Something would have to be doing soon, for I had but two shots left.

"The crisis came swiftly enough. An old wolf wriggled out of the press and limped toward us. He had been nipped, and with his coward instinct he sought to avoid the doom of the unfit. In a moment he would be battling for his life, perhaps at our very feet. Two bullets would be but sorry protection against the swarming brutes. I swung Corn Bread around, and grasped the goddess by the arm.

" 'You must ride for it,' I shouted. 'The minute he feels your weight in the stirrup he'll be gone. Keep your nerve.'

"It was high time, for the heap of wolves was breaking up.

" 'Keep your nerve,' I shouted again.

" 'I will,' she cried, and that last look as she swung to the saddle was enough to satisfy me of her courage. With a snort of terror, Corn Bread whisked her away.

"I fired my last shots at the oncoming wolves and made a dash for the off-leader. With one hand holding to the hames I leaped to his back, just as a ravenous brute snapped at my leg. In

less than three seconds I had occasion to give thanks for being a star bronco buster. Just as I had feared, the horse had not been broken to ride. The senseless beast, too leg-weary to escape from the wolves, was transformed into a bucking dynamo. He reared, and he kicked up his heels; he arched his back like a tom-cat, leaped into the air, and came down stiff-legged; he jumped sidewise, cross-legged, and pranced—and snorted.

"I hadn't been a range-rider for nothing; but I soon discovered that a man misses his saddle after he has become accustomed to it. It was worse than a bareback performance, for the infernal back strap began to peel my skin off in strips. The brute's antics stirred up the other horses, however, and I soon saw that we had the wagon moving. I took off my hat and began to slap the ears of my frantic mount; and then I would lean over and give the other leader a rap. The Voice was still working unfrayed and regular.

"I felt the wagon get off the rough sod of the prairie onto the trail leading to the ranch. Just then the lead line broke. I gathered it up and used it to lash my horse and the other leader. It beat my hat as a whip, and I needed that on my head in such weather. We bowled along at about six miles an hour, and soon had the wolves strung out behind us.

"We were near the house, and I could see the splash of light on the snow cast by the candle in the window. I was wondering what had become of the goddess, when, crash! we bumped into the barbed wire of the corral.

"Don't ask me the details of what happened next. I *don't* know whether I lit on my heels or head. My only memory is of a blind, breathless scuttling for the house. I stumbled over a straw pile; and the impetus of my fall rammed the snow and straw into my mouth as if it had been tamped home by a pile-driver. With those pursuing yelps spurring me on, my halt was little more than an acrobatic flipflap; and instantly my toes were digging into the snow as hard as ever. I met the goddess coming round the corner of the house with the candle. She was shielding the light with the palm of her hand. At sight of that feeble jet of flame the wolves halted; and before they could recover their courage we had bolted through the door and slammed it behind us.

"The last thing I had heard after striking the corral was the usual whoop from the Voice. It chilled my blood to think of his forlorn resistance amid that awful tangle of horses, barbed wire, and wolves. The first thing I saw when I staggered into the house was the Voice, working like a cuckoo-clock. We couldn't stop him. He wouldn't speak to us; he shoved his wife away when she tried to quiet him. He sat in his chair, glaring with a dazed, vacuous ferocity, as if he still saw the wolves, and yelled. Finally I suggested whisky to the goddess, and she trotted out a jug. The only way to quiet him was to get him drunk. For a while his whoops were terrific, but finally they died down to maudlin hiccoughs, and we put him to bed.

"When the Voice woke up I found that he was really a magnificent chap. It took him several days to keep his nerves from dancing; and more than once I saw him reach out to strike at things. That shot I heard at the window was the last one in his revolver; and he had completely abandoned hope of rescue.

"I was in bed two weeks, and it was fully a month before I was able to ride. My legs had been so badly lacerated by that back strap that it was agony to move. When I think of the attention patients receive in our modern hospitals, it makes me smile as I recall the way my case was treated. The salve with which my injuries were dressed consisted of axle-grease and burned linen. It was heroic, but it put me on my feet again. It was toward the end of January before I showed up at the 27 Quarter Circle, and I found that the foreman and the boys long since those who had fed the wolves; but they were glad enough to reinstate me in the roster of the living."

The Devil's Pulpit

By H. B. Marriott Watson

Author of "Hurricane Island," "Twisted Eglantine," "Captain Fortune," "Galloping Dick," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Captain Mark Wade and Ned Herapath, chief engineer (who tells the story), are offered berths on the English tramp steamer *Duncannon* by a smooth-talking American, Vincent Halliday, and his friend Davenant. The probable destination of the tramp is Baltimore, but there is some mystery about the cruise—a mystery that appeals to Captain Wade, who is something of a free-lance. Arrangements are concluded, and Wade and Herapath board the tramp and put to sea, accompanied by Halliday and several of his friends. On the way out from Southampton they run down a yawl and rescue Jean Carvaulx and his niece, Miss Sylvester, who, at their urgent request, are allowed to remain on board. When well at sea Halliday takes Herapath and Wade into his confidence and tells them that the *Duncannon* is on a treasure cruise, with an island in the West Indies for her destination. Following his discovery of a chart indicating the location of the treasure he had organized a company and with his partners had chartered the *Duncannon* to search for the treasure. This chart, he declares, has been stolen from his cabin. McLeod, the ship's surgeon, is accused of theft, and despite his denial, is put in irons.

CHAPTER VII.

CONCERNING THE CHART.

"I DON'T know, gentlemen," remarked Wade carefully, "if this is going to do us any good. We've got the thief, but I don't quite see what we are going to do with him. It isn't as if we were able to hand him over to port authorities. We're not likely to trouble port authorities much at present, as far as I can make out. Anyway, the gentleman is better where he is for a time."

This was admirably self-restrained, but I think that blow on the head determined a good deal for Wade, and for the rest of us. Up to that point Wade had been a shipmaster beyond reproach, holding his position with exemplary manner. From this incident dates the development of his bravado which was characteristic of one side of his nature. The unusual conditions of this curious expedition had hitherto just failed to divert him from his course; now he fell. And the first sign of his changing demeanor was apparent the very next morning.

News had gone about the ship, and even our passengers were acquainted early with McLeod's disgrace. Something unintelligible in the nature of woman, perverse and irrational, but sympathetic, stirred Miss Sylvester to a display of agitation, and even indignation. It was horrid; it was unjust; it was cruel. She knew there must be a mistake. And if McLeod had hit the captain, any one with spirit would do the same if he were accused of stealing.

This you might have looked upon as the amiable but embarrassing complaint of a child. It was to me she pleaded thus, distressfully and angrily, and a sense of her vivacious beauty moved me.

"It's the gravest nautical offense," I said. "To look over it would be to dis-

This story began in the July issue. The back numbers can be obtained from any newsdealer. Price fifteen cents each.

solve the whole discipline upon which the safety of crew and passengers depends."

"It was Captain Wade's fault," she repeated vehemently; "and I'll tell him so. And I'll ask him to release Doctor McLeod from his shameful position."

And Wade making his appearance negligently at that moment, she fulfilled her promise by rushing upon him.

"Captain Wade, you must just release Doctor McLeod. It's abominable of you to have put him in irons. He was quite justified in striking you when you told him he was a thief. And he didn't hurt you much, anyway."

Wade's eyes lighted up with amusement. "Not much," he assented. "But it might have been awkward if he had caught me a little lower, say just there, Miss Sylvester"—and he indicated a spot above his ear. "I don't think a week to cool down will harm him."

"A week!" she shrilled, horror-struck.

Wade's eyes admired her. "Oh, my dear Miss Sylvester, he's a lucky man to have enlisted such an advocate. Say six days."

"Six days!" She looked despair at him.

"Five," he relented; and she shook her head decisively.

"Come, then, four," he pursued, smiling.

"I won't consent to four," said the girl, displaying now in her change of voice a recognition of her intervening influence.

"If you are going to be very kind," I heard Wade say, in his most wooing voice, "I'll make it three."

Again she shook her head. The affair had dropped for her straightway out of the category of tragedy, and was becoming a mere nothing, owing to his treatment of it. She had expected a grim tyrant and an executioner's cell, and here was a pleasant cavalier ready to grant a lady's whim. With that her own portentous emotion vanished, and she returned his smile.

"It was very cruel of you," she said. "You oughtn't to have done it at all. Doctor McLeod——"

I passed out of hearing, and I never heard the end of that haggling, but it represented the new order in Wade. McLeod was not released that day; and even I was disposed to think he had been hardly treated. After all, we had no proof that he had rifled the bureau, and his violent outbreak seemed to indicate his good faith. Carter might have been mistaken. Anyway, we had not tried him, and, though it was for his assault he had been sentenced, he went to jail, so to speak, with the stain of a crime on his reputation which had not been demonstrated.

Wade was about with Miss Sylvester most of the day. He had a very facile gallantry, and took to it naturally. Women were to him objects of flirtation. His sentiments never soared higher than this. And with these ideas he kept himself and, as a rule, the ladies very well amused. As for Miss Sylvester, I thought she exchanged the company of the imprisoned man for the man who had imprisoned him with surprising indifference. To all accounts, and to judge by her laughter on deck, she had wholly forgotten the victim languishing in his cell—an odd contrast with her emotion in the morning on learning of his fate.

The striking down of McLeod thus promptly had its effect on the boon companions. If I may say so, it sobered Clifford; and Byrne lost his smile. I dare say they had begun to wonder whose turn would come next. They "let up" on the bottle, as Marley phrased it, if they did not alter their general mode of life. They associated together, and were to be seen in conversation much; they did no work; and they lolled on deck in slovenly attire, or slept in their cabins in still easier garments. For the sun was now quite strong in heaven, and the weather was summerlike. Halliday, recovered sufficiently in the smoother water, once more took the stage, full of notions which he had elaborated in his seclusion. But first he must learn our news and McLeod's downfall.

"Well, I shouldn't have thought it of him," was his comment. "But he's

a cantankerous chap. Anyway, I've thought this out; and see here, I reckon those three are in it together. They've got my agreement and the chart, and I stand to lose a lot unless I can square it up. Oh, I'll get there, all right. I'm not feeling soft over it."

"It don't matter to you more than the sentiment of it," I told him. "You've lost your agreement, but Marley and Davenant and Digby have theirs; and they can be produced in evidence."

"Yes, I thought of that," he answered. "But I guess it ain't so easy. It's all right about those three, but where do the other three come in? They may claim a verbal agreement, defy me to produce mine; and they're three mouths to one. Not but what it's risky for them. But blamed if I can see," he went on, frowning, "what they want that map for! I've been puzzling on that all the while I've been laid out in that bunk there. I guess they think I knew all about it, and have a copy."

"Well, I don't know anything about it," I said. "But I'll go bail that they don't mean the square thing by you—unless, that is, it's mere drunken wantonness and folly. It's possible it's that. One might as well live in Bedlam as with some of these folk. If I were you, Mr. Halliday, I would have chosen better."

"That's so," he said. "I'm not going to say if I hadn't to do it over again I wouldn't. But I can't shake 'em now; I've got to make the best of it. And, come to think of it, from my point of view I hadn't much of a chance. I had to hurry."

"Hurry?" said I. "Why, was there any other——"

"It's kind of romantic," said Halliday, crossing his legs as we sat in his comfortable cabin. He had hospitably placed before me a bottle of wine, but took nothing himself; nor did he smoke. He looked pale and languid, but was irrepressibly buoyant. "I don't know but what it's worth putting on record. It's a good newspaper story, anyway. I was doing a line for our company; letting the great British public know that the Union Mutual Insurance Company had come to Europe to stir up things and smooth the path to the grave of the very strongest."

His eyes twinkled, for he had his full share of humor along with his strange intensity. "I guess I've smoothed many paths, and made it easy for them to die. But this one I couldn't exactly see my way to smoothing. One day, when I was in Liverpool, I got track of a big policy 'way up your mountains—Fell Something they called it—and I lit out for it. Settled the contract, and came away pretty content, on a dripping, misty day, with the autumnal flavor hanging around so thick you could cut it. I went bang into the inn on the hillside, when I'd finished with the park, and had something to eat." He broke off. "Say, Herapath, do you care anything for that beer of yours—bitter beer you call it?"

"We all swear by English beer," I answered.

"That's so," he said, rather sadly and reminiscently. "Well, I'm blamed if I can see the fascination of it! I'd sooner chew gum. Anyway, I had some food and a glass of milk, and then it struck me that I might as well improve the shining hours on the business end of a pen; and so I set about a red-faced farmer at the table, who'd been to market from the look of him, and wasn't going to get home for a long time by the same look of him.

"I rained figures and facts on him, like it was raining outside; trotted up all the arguments; reminded him of his children, which, it seemed, he hadn't got; told him of his duty to his wife, who turned out to be dead; and just about snowed him under with the benefits and advantages and privileges of the Union Mutual. When I was done, or very nearly done, and had to come to a stop for rest and refreshment, he opened his mouth, which he had kept closed like a trap all along, and woke up.

" 'Look 'ee, mister,' says he. 'There's nobbut myself depending on me, and I'm not thinking of dying yet. I'll live to drink old October, damme, another

forty year. What you young folks ought to do is to save men from dying, lad, not offer to give 'em money when they're dead. It's encouraging dying, I call it,' he says. 'You come along and tell all you said here to a chap up-stairs,' said he, 'and he'll insure, he will. I'll bet five pound he'll insure,' he cried.

"Well, up-stairs I went into a room of the inn, which turned out to be a bedroom, and on the bed was a man, old and withered and parched, and looking out of lack-luster eyes, and signed all over by the undertaker.

" 'Jarge,' calls out this farmer. 'Jarge, here's a young fellow to insure 'ee.' And off he goes into a fit of laughter.

"I was mighty sick, as you may guess, at the disappointment, but I wasn't going to let the old buffer get it in the neck for a tipsy man's wanton jest. So I took a seat by the bed, and just began to talk in an easy way about the weather and the beautiful scenery, and old Sir Harry up at the park. Never a word said he, but lay looking at me out of his poor, scarecrow face. The farmer had stumped down-stairs.

"Now, there's a little proverb, Herapath—comes in Scripture somewhere, and there's a lot in those Biblical proverbs—that talks about casting your bread upon the waters. I had just done a kind, decent action, and I wasn't thinking of my reward. But I guess this boat's floated out of that same bedroom. Old man listens to me, and then puts out a claw.

" 'Are you the Diggory's man?' said he.

" 'I guess not,' said I.

" 'Then you must be my nephew,' says he eagerly.

"Well, I saw how it was with him then, and how all my polite conversation had been thrown away; and just to play up to him, so to speak, I said yes, I was that nephew.

"He half-rose on his elbow at that, and began searching under his pillow, and presently brings out in his shaking claw a piece of parchment.

" 'That's for you,' he said. 'I kept that for you till ye come. 'Tis what I had from Sawtell of the brig *Dromeda*' (or some such name). 'The treasure's marked,' says he, rising higher in his excitement, and pointing at the paper.

" 'All right, uncle,' said I soothingly. 'It's safe with me. You can bet on your nephew.' And I nodded and patted his hand, and soothed him down, and cheered him up, till he sort of settled down comfortably, and seemed to sleep. And then I went out, but I believe the old man died just then and there. Anyway, he was dead an hour later when they went to look.

"When I came down the farmer was gone, but I entered into talk with the landlord about the old man, and this was what made me study that paper pretty smartly presently. The old man, he said, came from those parts, but had followed the sea for fifty years, and had come home six months before and taken to his bed. He had money enough, but always talked mysteriously of more, and inquired for his brother, who was dead years back, and then for his brother's children. Well, it seems they were gone, too—only one was heard of; 'way in New Zealand, or some place. And the old man wrote to him, but didn't get any answer. Anyway, it hadn't come up till then. The old man talked a lot about money, and of an island, but, says the innkeeper: 'Lord, sir, he's been like a child these three months. There warn't any sense in his poor head, poor Jarge.' Wasn't there? I studied that paper, and came to the conclusion that there was, and I lit out that night for civilization and a deal."

"The paper was the map?" I asked, in astonishment.

"Yes, sir; the paper contained the chart and a story. It wasn't an old parchment of the treasure-story tales, with crosses and skulls and that truck, not by long chalks. It was a business-like document, setting forth how it had been drawn up on such a date, and was a plan of Santo Island, where the Caribbean pirates buried their treasure 'way back. And there was the signature of two or three people who had successively come into possession of the

chart; old man Glasson last of all, with the dates. It was kept like a book, I tell you. And the first name was Rinaldo Corti."

"Is that all you've gone on?" I burst out, in wonder at this amazing faith.

He turned on me the eyes of an enthusiast. "Mr. Herapath, we've all got to take risks, but I reckon this risk was good enough. I lit out at once for fear of that nephew, who might be turning up from New Zealand. I went down the wolds or the falls, or whatever you call them, in a white mist of rain; and I pounded along the track sometimes, I was that pleased with myself. Glasson, by the evidence of the innkeeper, had plenty of money, and there was his indorsement on the paper: 'December, 1861.' I know it by heart. 'Visited island and treasure.' And again this: 'March 5, 1882. Made island sunset, in *Emerald;* was ashore two hours. Treasure all right.' And there was a signature, also: 'H. Sawtell.' It was just as the old man said it; and the ship was *Andromeda.* That looked all right, for Sawtell in 1847 'took box ingots treasure'; and there were other scribblings. Mr. Herapath," he said, his eyes shining, "what was good enough for Mr. Sawtell, of the *Andromeda,* in 1847, and for old man Glasson in 1861 and 1882, was good enough for Vincent Halliday. I know a good thing when I'm on it. I can smell it. It tells like Limburger on the surrounding atmosphere to my nose. And I tell you this is about bursting with goodness."

He ceased. "That's the story. Kind of romantic, ain't it?"

It was more than romantic; it was grotesque.

"It looks to me like a wild-goose chase," I said bluntly.

"You don't size up the proposition," said he earnestly. "It's a fact that the treasure had been tapped. It was there, all right. That's demonstrated by the paper and the old man."

"Why was it not all removed long ago?" I asked.

"Ah, there's a bit of a puzzle," he admitted. "Seems to me that it was not worked systematically; that it was used as a sort of bank on which to draw checks. Come-and-cut-again sort of game. This document has been handed down one, two, or maybe more generations, and the owner was temporarily owner of that island and that store. It's not a place, I guess, where many ships call, and it might be awkward to put in there. Come to think of it, Herapath, any one of these dead men mightn't have cared to face an expedition like this of ours. There's always a risk. They went in for it in detail."

He merged in a reverie, and I observed him. The story had oddly stimulated me, but had convinced me, also, that we were on a madder cruise than ever. This "proposition" had no ethical side for Halliday, who was a "smart man." He had come into possession of his precious document by a mistake, even by false pretenses; but it troubled him nothing. This was business, and it was his business to get ahead of a possible claimant in the Antipodean nephew, who might even now be in chase of us.

He shook off his thoughts. "Anyway, I'm coming out on top," he said.

With the influence of those seas on him he was alive and bright again. Every hour brought his fortune nearer, and he walked the deck with a buoyant tread, as of one who could hardly be contained by narrow confines of shipboard. His soul was aloft, as upon a masthead, in search of his treasure.

The second day saw the release of McLeod, which I could not but attribute to Miss Sylvester. Some bargain had been struck between herself and Wade. The prisoner, his own master, was directed to the captain's cabin, and entered it, sour, sullen, but unresisting.

"Now, Doctor McLeod," said Wade, at whose request I was there, "I want some words with you. As captain of this ship and bound to maintain discipline, I have put you in irons. That's my official appearance in the matter. Well, I reckon that's over. The irons were official. But, as a man, I've got something more to say. You struck me here, and now I'm going to knock you down."

McLeod lifted his head and stared. He had had no strong liquor for nearly two days, and was all the better for it. His face relaxed.

"Go ahead," he said.

Wade launched forth, but met the Scotchman's bony arm in counter. His left followed like a stone, and was dodged with the head. McLeod's returns went short, and then Wade's short, thick arm slipped past the defenses, and he landed on the doctor's skull. Crack went his head against the cabin.

"Quits!" panted Wade, dropping his hands.

A grin dawned on McLeod's face. "We'll call it that," he assented, and marched out of the cabin without more words.

"I don't know that he's so dangerous, after all, Ned," said Wade.

He was, however, viciously cantankerous, for, having thus buried his feud with Wade, he must needs reopen one with me. Down in the saloon we ran upon each other just after the scene described, and he came up.

"It's about time we squared up, Mr. Herapath," said he, with a provocative air.

"I've no accounts open," I remarked tersely.

"Oh!" His voice took on a higher note and accent. "Then I'll take the liberty to remind ye." He lifted his hand, but I put out mine to stop him.

"Don't be a fool," I urged. "There's been more than enough of this already."

"I'll jog your memory," he said, paying no heed, but doubling his fist.

"Well, I don't want to, but if you will have it——" I drove as I spoke. He was not far away, and I got him on the tip of the chin. He went down like a sack of wheat, and sat for some moments on the floor, nodding dazedly. Then he got up, and blinked at me, holding on to the table.

"Which hand was that?" he gasped.

"Left," I answered.

"Then I'm not taking any more," he replied; "and I've got a dentist's job on."

He went away in the direction of his surgery, and I saw him no more till the evening. But of that I shall have to tell later. To say the truth, I had no time to think of him, being fully occupied in the engine-room.

Davenant late in the afternoon ordered me to slow down, and we were going only some eight knots. Wade was asleep in his cabin, for the day was very hot and the breeze had sunk. The calks of the *Duncannon* ran liquid, and the stoke-hole was like hell. Davenant never left the bridge till his watch was over, at eight bells. But before that something happened. Byrne and Clifford, strangely quiet, were on deck, watching the sea, and as the sun went down the latter pulled a flask from his pocket, took a swig at it, and passed it to his companion.

The dusk fell quickly, gathering the steamer in its folds; and then from the lookout arose the cry:

"Land, ho!"

Giving instructions to Collins, I went on deck and strained my eyes through the evening. On our starboard side a long, even shadow was visible against the night. Wade emerged from his cabin to take command. Halliday was visible, a restless shadow among shadows—excited, nervous, confident. And a voice somewhere out of the darkness reached my ears:

"Now the fun begins, dear brethren."

It was Clifford's.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OTHER BOAT.

Wade joined Davenant on the bridge, and I went back to my engines, which were running now quite slowly. Presently they were stopped, and I heard the sound of the capstan. They were letting go the anchor. My duties were over for the nonce, and I went on deck again, where the whole ship's company seemed to be assembled. With the making of the island the public interest in the story of the treasure revived keenly. Knots of men discussed the situation, and cast glances through the falling dusk toward the mysterious

land. Halliday was decisive and triumphant. His voice rose clamant through all the din.

"I reckon, captain, I'll go ashore to-night," he said.

"As you will," said Wade; "though I should advise you to wait till to-morrow."

The American laughed. "Say, that's asking too much," he said. Then in a lower voice: "I'd just like to locate that cache at the earliest opportunity."

Wade nodded. "You must have been wearing out those old engines of yours, from the pace we've made," he said, turning to me.

"On the contrary," said I; "we slowed down this afternoon."

"Slowed down!" he said, in surprise.

"Yes; we didn't make more than eight knots."

"Damn!" said he, and was thoughtful. "I didn't expect to make it for another two hours, anyway," he said.

"Well, Davenant's done it," I said carelessly. "Here we are."

"Unless he's made a mistake—but that he couldn't," pronounced Wade. "I'll have a look at the log presently. They're out in their infernal sealed orders probably."

Meanwhile Halliday was giving his instructions, and a boat was being put out. We lay about three-quarters of a mile from the island, but naturally were ignorant of the shore-line. Wade had never seen the chart, or seen Halliday's transcript, and had navigated only by the instructions he received, which amounted merely to an exact latitude and longitude; so that in approaching a boat would need great precaution.

There was competition for the boats' crew, but Davenant chose it; and immediately upon the boats being lowered, Byrne and Clifford scrambled in.

Wade said nothing to them, but pointed them out to Halliday, who remarked:

"Well, I guess it's due to them, perhaps. They've got money in it. And I'd just as soon have them under observation for the sake of that chart."

"Do you know what sort of coast you've got here?" asked Wade.

"No," replied Halliday. "It don't say on the chart. But I guess we're all right with you."

"Oh, with me!" said Wade, laughing easily. "Marley's good enough."

"Why don't you go, sir?" asked Davenant, who was near. "There's nothing to do here."

"Come along, captain," said Halliday engagingly.

"Right," said Wade. "I don't mind."

He stood beside the gangway, and Miss Sylvester at that moment turned to him. "Oh, please let me go," she urged prettily.

He hesitated. "I'm awfully sorry," he said, "but we don't know exactly what we've got here. There's a bit of risk, and I daren't take you. When we've found out—to-morrow, Miss Sylvester."

He descended the ladder, smiling back his apologies, took his seat in the boat, which was now quite full, and at Marley's word put off. The sound of oars came back to us from the darkness into which she disappeared.

The air blew cool and friendly after the hot afternoon, and the *Duncannon* hardly moved on the smooth sea. There was an indefinite sense of peacefulness, as of a holiday mood, omnipresent in the mind. A concertina struck up on the lower deck, and some one started whistling. A noise of feet rose to us as of dancing.

"A bit merry," said I to Digby, the boatswain.

"Give 'em their heads a bit," he grumbled back. "Beastly bad discipline, but there's been no discipline aboard this ship." I looked at his worn face, and I confess I was hoping that I would not look so battered by fortune at his years. "I'm an old sailor, but I'm not a tar," he said, with a faint, humorous irony. "I had my own boat at the mouth of the Thames for years, when I was on the Stock Exchange. We used to keep her and sail her as trim as a ship in his majesty's commission."

I began in that instant to get the perspective of this expedition. You know how a phrase, a fact, a suggestion will

open up a situation like a key. "Digby, stock-jobber," ran into my mind, and I could see his zigzag descents in my mind's eye right away to the possession of his preposterous whistle. At thirty, maybe, he was partner in a prosperous firm of dealers or brokers; at fifty odd he was reduced to his final gamble, no doubt through the medium of other and exhausting gambles. The concertina wheezed on, and the strains of "Sailing Away" arose on the evening air, and mingled with water noises. Digby and I hung over the side of the vessel and meditated. Presently I was aware that Miss Sylvester had joined us, and I turned.

"Oh, what a sin to be here, when we might be ashore!" she exclaimed energetically. "I don't know how you stand it."

"We have to," said I.

"Oh, nonsense; I believe you don't mind," she said, in her characteristic way. "You don't feel things. I just can't bear to think of that island and the treasure being over there, and me a prisoner."

"The captain must take every precaution," I told her.

She sighed. "I suppose it's right, but—— Is that you, uncle? Wouldn't you like to be going ashore?"

Monsieur Carvaulx peered through the darkness at us. "No—yes—I do not mind," he said absently. "It is pleasant listening to the music of the sailors." He moved off forward, and I heard him descend to the lower deck.

Just before dinner Davenant sent for me. I found him lying down in his bunk.

"Mr. Herapath," he said, in his careful voice, "I have a bad attack of neuralgia, and I should be all the better for a sleep. I should be obliged if you would kindly take charge. Of course, you would call me in case of emergency."

I assented and withdrew, after expressing a polite hope that he would soon recover; and then I descended to the saloon. At dinner we were a small party, Digby, McLeod, Monsieur Carvaulx, Miss Sylvester, and myself; but we were more cheerful than we had been on several previous occasions. The arrival at the island had stimulated our imaginations and our good humor. McLeod was a different man from the person I had hitherto known. He talked fluently and with a certain capacity for conversation, but mainly to Miss Sylvester and her uncle. The latter was abstracted, and said little, but his niece was gay and high-spirited, joining in rallies with the doctor. From their attitude I thought they had some understanding between them, some affair in common, for this was betrayed at once by McLeod's importance and Miss Sylvester's significant asides. And I was soon let into the secret. For as soon as the meal was over McLeod approached me.

"I believe you're in authority, Mr. Herapath," he said not unpleasantly.

"Mr. Davenant is ill," I said.

"Well, sir, I want your permission to go ashore," he went on boldly, eying me with some aggression. Miss Sylvester was, so to speak, in the offing. I glanced at her.

"Is that all?" I asked.

"No," said he promptly, "Miss Sylvester wants to go. If we could have a boat and a couple of hands we should not be gone long."

"You know it's impossible," I replied.

"Why should it be?" he asked, evidently restraining himself. "There's fine starlight, and the coast's quite clear. It's only a quarter of an hour away."

I went to the port-hole and looked out, and Miss Sylvester joined me, eager appeal in her eyes.

"You will, won't you?" she pleaded.

The stars in the sky shed a fine light on the still water, making a luminous mist toward the land. I had no orders from Wade or Davenant; and there did not seem to be any danger. Moreover, I had all along been placed by circumstances in a position of hostility to McLeod, and I was reluctant to seem to oppose him again. And then the girl was importunate. She was evidently anxious to go with this man—oh, no, I read her well enough up to a point. She was determined to land, and she

would have gone ashore with anybody. Her immediate emotions possessed her like a fire.

"If you will take two safe hands," I said, "I think you may go, but I'll get into trouble sure as you're born."

She laughed joyously. "No, I'll make it all right with Captain Wade," she said, with the confidence of youth. "He won't be angry."

I shrugged my shoulders whimsically. "Thanks," said McLeod, nodding, and hurried on deck.

I saw them push off a quarter of an hour later, and, as the oars dipped in the silver water along that fairy pathway of the stars, I was reassured as to the safety of the expedition. The island was plainly discernible; the white shafts of light upon a wooded cliff. Light laughter drifted from the boat upon the nocturnal air.

At nine o'clock I heard the sound of a boat through the open port-hole of my cabin, and I went on deck. The sky was now obscured with banks of clouds, but the night was pervaded by a dim luminosity. As I reached the gangway some figures were coming up the ladder, though I could not make them out. I expected my boat back by now, and I was looking anxiously for a woman's skirt. Then I heard Clifford's unmistakable voice.

"Cut it out, Byrne. You pretty near had me over. Say, I want a drink badly."

So here was the captain back, and I was in for a reprimand. I confess I did not want to see him just then, for I had not expected his return before the others, and I knew enough of his nature to realize that he would be far more angry because McLeod had accompanied Miss Sylvester than because I had allowed the expedition. I was in for it thus on two counts; and so I went below again, whither Byrne and Clifford had already gone. The popping of a cork sounded in my ears.

"Here's how," said the Irishman.

"Here's to success — success and treasure, my dear," said Clifford, winking over the bubbling glass. "Herapath, have a drink?"

I shook my head, but, to be civil, asked: "How's the island?"

Clifford swore profusely. "It's all tommyrot," he said.

"What, the treasure?" said I.

"No; the island. 'Tisn't the island at all. The real island's farther on. We tumbled to that pretty quick when we'd got ashore. You've got to make tracks at once. The old man's got his shirt out."

"The wrong island!" I exclaimed, in astonishment, and then could not keep back a slight laugh. So this was the first fruits of Halliday's expedition. Even his chart was wrong in the initial point.

"That's funny, ain't it?" said Clifford jocosely.

"It is funny," said I.

"I guess it's funnier than you know," he sneered.

Down the steps came the man Crashaw, with his bold eyes.

"Captain's compliments," said he; "and he would be obliged if you'd get up steam at once, sir."

"Where is the captain?" said I.

"In his cabin, changing, sir," said the man.

"Fell into a bog or backwater, or whatever you call 'em in this country," said the jovial Clifford. "Here, I'll trouble you for that bottle, my *fidus Achates*."

I went on deck, and almost ran into Davenant. "I hear we've got the wrong island," he said. "I didn't put much trust in that chart. We've got to march."

"Are you going on the bridge?" I asked. "How's your neuralgia?"

"Pretty bad still. I've got orders from Wade," he answered.

"Well, we can't go at once," said I, feeling now mighty uncomfortable.

"Why?" said he.

"The fact is, Miss Sylvester and McLeod are ashore," I replied, feeling still more foolish.

"What?" he cried sharply, in a voice that was new to me.

"I let 'em go. It was my fault. Now I've got to see Wade and explain."

"What right had you to take the lib-

erty?" he demanded, in a voice of compressed fury.

I had been discomfited, but this was the sort of opposition I wanted.

"If it comes to that," I replied warmly, "I was in charge, and I am answerable only to the captain."

He turned aside quickly, and stood looking toward the island.

"This is certainly awkward, Herapath," he said at last, in another tone.

"I know it," I agreed. "I've got to stand the racket. And I'll go to Wade now."

"Wait a bit," he said. "I don't see, after all, why you should take all the blame. I was in authority. It's my affair. At any rate, let me see Wade."

"No," I replied; "why should you? I don't mind facing the music. I'm responsible." And I swung about to go to Wade's cabin.

Davenant followed me.

"Better not," he urged. "Tell him later. I'll break the force of it."

"My dear Mr. Davenant," I said, "I am much obliged to you, but I have never yet endeavored to avoid the obligations of my own acts. Wade wants to steam off, and he can't, and I've got to explain why."

"All right, my dear Mr. Herapath," he assented, falling away all of a sudden to his old particularity of deportment, and vanished along the deck.

I knocked at Wade's door, but received no answer; then I knocked louder, but still got no reply. I remembered what Clifford had said about a bog, and I concluded that the captain was changing in his inner room. So I pushed open this door and entered his office. The door into the sleeping-cabin stood open, and showed me an empty room.

I wondered if Wade had gone down to the saloon since I left it; and vaguely supposed he might even be on the bridge. But as he was evidently not in his cabin, I left, and encountered the steward at the door.

"Is the captain about?" I asked.

"I think he's forward, sir," said Headon.

I went forward, descending to the lower deck, where the hands were busy. Digby was there, whistle in hand, getting out the sail on the *Duncannon's* two masts.

"Where's the captain?" I asked.

He shook his head. "I don't know," he grumbled. "Some one has made a mess of it. Not the island, eh? I thought Davenant didn't know as much as he bluffs about."

"Davenant!" I echoed.

"Yes, he navigated us here, didn't he? And now we've got to up-anchor at this time of night."

The sound of the capstan had been audible for some time, and Digby, watching, issued an order as the anchor appeared in the bows.

"You don't know where Captain Wade is?" I asked.

"Haven't seen him since he came aboard," said Digby, turning away.

I resolved now to go down to the saloon in my search, and, if that should be drawn blank, to seek Marley. But I had not gone far when a familiar noise greeted my ears, and under my feet rose a vibration. The engines had been started, and the screw was turning.

Uttering an exclamation, I hastened back, casting a glance through the darkness at the bridge, if so be I might make out Wade's figure there. I could only conclude that Collins had received his orders through the tube, and that the captain was in charge. It was a most embarrassing situation, and I ran up the ladder precipitately with a renewal of my discomfiture. "Captain Wade!" I called. "Captain Wade!" And then I perceived that it was not Wade. A silent figure stood wheel in hand, and near him was Davenant. "Davenant! what's this?" said I. "She's in motion, and that boat hasn't arrived. Where's Wade?"

"Didn't you find him?" he asked. "I supposed it was all right. I haven't had any further orders."

"I can't find him," I said anxiously; "and the ship mustn't start till I do."

"I can't interefere with my orders," he said, shrugging his shoulders.

The propeller was moving fast, and we were forging ahead.

"But you must," I said desperately.

"My dear sir, don't talk nonsense," he said soothingly. "You know I'm bound to go on till Wade countermands his order."

"But," I said, "the girl is ashore with McLeod and two hands."

"It's very unfortunate," he said stiffly. "Better find Wade."

"Oh, well, it's no use dealing with a slob of a pedant," I threw at him as I fled.

I rattled down to the deck. If Wade was not to be unearthed, at least I would get hold of Marley; and I hastened to his cabin. It was empty. And just here it was that I began to scent something. I could not clearly think out what it was, for my brain was in too much of a whirl, but I know I had a curious feeling of alarm. Neither Wade nor Marley was to be found, and the *Duncannon* was gathering speed. There was only one course to take, and I took it. I scurried into the engine-room and stopped the engines. Collins, mopping his face with a greasy rag, looked at me questioningly.

"Something wrong," I said. "I can't say what. Who started you?"

"Mr. Davenant," said he.

The whistle blew on the speaking-tube, and I took it up.

"What the devil's this?" demanded Davenant's voice. "What's gone wrong with your engines?"

"I stopped them," I said back.

"How the devil dare you?" he called, in a fury. "You shall smart for this. Blast you! it's insubordination."

His voice ceased, and I heard a shouting on deck.

"See here, Collins," I said. "Don't you start her till I give orders. This is my affair. I sha'n't be long."

I ran on deck. The *Duncannon,* her canvas spread fore and aft, was lumbering slowly away. Davenant, just visible on the bridge, stood with one arm lifted, shouting an order. From the saloon ascended a noise of singing.

"I've made up my mind to sile awy—sile awy."

It was the ribal hilarity of Byrne and Clifford, humorously disguised in a cockney accent. I went back. Where was Halliday? I had seen nothing of him, either. I met the slow-moving Carter near the entrance.

"Have you seen Captain Wade since he came aboard?" I asked.

"No, sir," he said, after a pause.

"Mr. Marley?"

"No, sir," after another pause.

"Mr. Halliday?"

His pause was less this time, and he lowered his voice. "I never seed any of 'em come aboard," he said.

I sprang down to the engine-room and reversed the levers.

"Back her," I said to Collins. "We're in Queer Street." The screw began to rumble, and the *Duncannon* struggled against her sails. The wind was drawing freely in them, but the screw was powerful enough to countermand them. Round she swung suddenly with a loud report of a boom breaking. An outcry arose on deck. No message came through the tube. It was no time now for remonstrance and argument, or even for objurgation. It was war.

I heard the noise first, and had expected it. When I turned, half-way down the ladder was the man Crashaw, and behind him others; one or two of the foreigners in the crew.

"Captain Wade's orders, eh, Crashaw?" I said, grinning.

He sprang down at that with an oath, and was followed by his friends. The space was confined in that small engine-room, and Collins, who was nearer to him than I, dodged by the help of a rail. Crashaw stumbled, and would have fallen, had it not been for the man behind who caught him.

"Mutiny, by thunder!" said I, and let my fist drive at him. It took the second man on the forehead, and he went over into a corner, dragging Crashaw down with him. I advanced and lunged right and left, and the men gave way.

"Strike him, you fool!" called out Crashaw; and in the mix-up of bodies I saw a bare knife, though I could not say who had drawn it.

Crashaw rose now and drew toward me, but kept out of range for the mo-

ment. A piece of iron struck me sidewise on the shoulder, and made me stagger; and at that there was a rush forward. I struck out with all my force, once, twice, three times, and cries arose from under the feet of the pack, who were playing football with their own wounded. But to this they were savagely indifferent, being now inflamed with the lust of fighting. A big black Italian made for me, marlinespike in hand; and simultaneously the knife gleamed—Crashaw was edging to the back of me. Then there was a hoarse scream of rage and pain, and the press gave. Yells and oaths ensued. I glanced to where Collins stood, armed with a syringe and a vessel of boiling water. The squirt played again upon their unprotected bodies, and they stampeded for the ladder.

"Bravo, man!" I panted. "Bravo!"

Those in the rear were scuttling up the ladder when, from the grating above, a voice rang out, thin but penetrating:

"What in God's name is this?" It was Davenant, staring down into the cockpit. "Herapath, you're running the boat on the island, man!"

The men slunk past him. I stopped the engines and leaned breathlessly over the railing. I climbed the ladder, and came face to face with him.

"Perhaps this situation can be explained," he said sarcastically.

"I don't know about that," I answered, trying to make out his face, which was like that of a sphinx. "I don't understand all this. I've told you how things stand. We can't leave that boat behind. And you fight me on the point."

"I?" he said, staring, and a dry smile passed over his face. "These men? I suppose I shall get at it presently, when you condescend to explain. Meanwhile, I've managed to get you to spare the ship. And now I want to know where Wade is."

"I don't believe he is on board," I said slowly.

He turned about sharply. "Are you serious?" he asked.

"I told you there was something aboard," I said. "And we've run up against the beginnings of a pretty tall plot, I guess."

"Come out of this, and let's talk," said he quickly, and led the way on deck.

The *Duncannon* was adrift, her sails backed, and only a little way on her; and in the faint light the island was now more plainly visible. I heard in that moment a sound come in from the sea, and went to the side.

"There's the boat," I said. The sound came up now as a hail. It challenged us, and the big port light of the *Duncannon* swung round as if in answer. Davenant stood beside me looking into the water, and presently something was dimly discernible upon it. It drew nearer, and then came alongside.

When Wade came up the side he was speechless with fury, white and dead of face. He handed Miss Sylvester aboard, and marched direct to his cabin.

"I'll see to this—I'll see to this," was all he said, in an expressionless voice.

Marley followed him. "This is the limit," he said, as he passed me. "There'll be murder done."

"Clifford and Byrne?" I asked.

"The whole blamed crew," he returned. "It was a clear case of marooning."

Within two minutes we were in Wade's cabin like schoolboys before a master. His high-colored face was livid.

"Mr. Marley, make sail," he said formally, in a hard, dry voice.

Marley hesitated. "Well, I'll have a shot for it," he said. "But what about these brutes——"

"Those are your orders," said Wade, and turned his glare on Davenant.

"I find the *Duncannon* up-anchored," he said sternly. "What's this?"

"I received instructions purporting to come from you, after the return of the boat," replied Davenant.

"From whom?" snapped Wade.

"Crashaw," he answered.

"Crashaw!" he echoed. "Crashaw gave instructions purporting to come from me?" He rang a bell, and issued a command to the sailor who answered.

"Tell the boatswain to have Crashaw put in irons."

He was going to brave it out, to bluff his way through, though he must have known by now how precariously he stood. Was this hand also one of the mutineers? He saluted and left. Wade eyed us both.

"Listen," he said. "A deliberate attempt to maroon Mr. Halliday, Mr. Marley, and myself was made this evening. While we were absent on the island exploring, the boat put off and left us. If it had not been for the second boat——" he broke off. "Who sent the second boat?" he demanded.

"I gave permission to Doctor McLeod to take Miss Sylvester ashore," I replied. "There seemed to be no risk."

"I won't go into that, as it spoiled the plot," he said. "I want to know why you took authority from Crashaw, Mr. Davenant, to make sail?"

"Well, I heard the boats had arrived," said the second officer, "and I naturally assumed you had come aboard. I was, unfortunately, lying down with bad neuralgia, and Mr. Herapath was in charge. And so, on Crashaw coming to me, I concluded the orders were all right, and I got up and made sail."

It sounded so easy and natural, yet I do not know if it was only his suave voice that irritated me.

"And you?" said Wade abruptly to me.

I almost stammered: "Crashaw came to me, too."

I saw Davenant's smile, and felt furious. We were in the same boat, and we had both lent too ready an ear to this bold ruffian.

Wade looked contemptuous, but he had lost some of his white heat. "The first thing is to see how far this mutiny's gone," he said.

Marley here put his head in at the door. "I say, old man," he said, addressing me, "let the old kettle go, will you?"

"Damnation, Mr. Marley! what does this mean, sir?" cried Wade, his temper flaring up suddenly in an unexpected channel. "Do you suppose you're in a rancid tap-room?"

Marley looked at him good-naturedly enough. "No, I reckon there's more putrid company aboard us," he grumbled. "That boat-load's gone."

"Gone!" echoed Wade.

"Yes, vamosed, invisible—gone like rats to their holes."

"By the Lord, this *is* mutiny!" said Wade, drawing a long breath.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DESERTION.

"I think," said I, as we looked at each other, "that perhaps Mr. Halliday ought to be here."

"That's so, Ned," said Wade, dropping all his official manner. "Marley, let's have him in. This is shaping pretty badly, gentlemen."

"I don't seem to get the hang of it," said Davenant.

"We'll have it all out," said Wade dryly, and said no more till Halliday arrived.

He had a restless, excited look, and carried himself uneasily.

"I was just taking a cup of coffee," he explained; "and then I was coming to consult with you, captain."

"We've got all our consulting cut out for us," said Wade curtly. "Let's figure out the facts first. Herapath, start those engines, and Mr. Marley takes charge of the bridge."

I started them, handed them over to Collins, and returned.

"First," Wade was saying, "your chart's stolen; second, you're marooned. I'll guarantee it don't take long to get the connection between those two facts."

"You are sure about the marooning, captain?" asked Halliday, looking troubled.

"Sure!" he sniffed. "So sure you can sit down in it. That boat was deliberately pulled back, and you and I and Marley were the intended victims."

"It's been very well organized," I interposed. "No sooner has the boat

arrived without you, than Mr. Davenant and I receive orders, supposed to come from the captain, just returned, to get the ship under way."

"That so?" said Halliday, staring.

"And when I refuse to get her going because another boat is out, I am attacked and man-handled by a gang of mutineers——" Davenant's eyes had gone about to me, but I had not mentioned him.

Wade exclaimed:

"What?" he called.

Halliday's eyes bulged out.

"It's time we put it down as serious," I went on. "The object was clearly to get away from the island before you could make your escape by the boat which I had, fortunately, allowed ashore. Whoever is at the bottom of this will not stick at much. We had a narrow escape in the engine-room."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Davenant. "Was that it?"

"It means," said Wade, "that the parties at the back of this want this treasure of yours for themselves, and are not relying exactly on any signed documents."

"It spells all that, captain," said Halliday gravely. "It spells every word of that."

"And the question is, who are they?"

We looked at each other. "We've got Crashaw. He's in it clearly," said Davenant.

"As clearly McLeod isn't," I added. "We have done him an injustice. He was not the thief."

"Tick him off," said Wade. "That missing boat-load's in it." His eyes caught mine. "We're bound to suspect every one."

"Meanwhile, captain," said I, "there's no insubordination aboard now, apparently. The deck's quiet. And we're running away from the island. I don't understand it. Why were you marooned?"

Wade grinned, his formality again lapsing. "It's a pretty good game, I take it, when considered all round. The inventor has a pretty turn for plotting. That wasn't the island."

"Not!" I exclaimed, in surprise.

"Mr. Davenant," went on Wade, "I don't understand how you made that mistake."

"There was no mistake, sir," said Davenant. "The latitude and longitude were all right. You'll see to-morrow."

Wade reflected. "We'll see a good deal to-morrow, or I'm mistaken," he said.

Davenant displayed his fleeting smile. "I should say there was a strong tow off the island," he said. "We nearly backed into her."

He threw a glance across at me, but I said nothing. After all, what was the use of renewing an unpleasantness that was past? We had enough to do in facing the situation as it was, uncomplicated by differences between officers. He and I had both been victims, and the chief offender was in irons.

"They took it pretty easily," said Marley, in relating his experience to us. "They looked on merely; perhaps it's not so bad as we thought."

If we were to judge by his conduct, that was Wade's notion, for he got up presently and reached for his cap.

"Now about this missing crew——" he said firmly.

"Better let it alone to-night," I suggested. I was not convinced, like Marley, of the mild temper of the mutineers.

"Let it alone!" he snorted. "Do you think I'm going to be browbeat on my own ship? I'll have that gang in irons."

Davenant adjusted his spectacles, and said nothing. Marley looked doubtful.

"I'd let sleeping dogs lie," he remarked.

"Very possibly you would, Mr. Marley," said Wade acidly. "But you're not captain of this ship."

He went out, and we followed. Digby's whistle gave the order for "all hands on deck"; and they marshaled docilely enough.

"Hammond—Garsh——" Wade rang out the names. "Step forward."

To this there was no response. The scene resembled that other scene ear-

lier in the voyage. The same silence prevailed, but now, somehow, it seemed more ominous.

"Hammond, are you there?" called Wade. Silence answered him.

He repeated the other names, and still the ranks were mute. Wade's nostrils worked. I touched his arm. This would serve no purpose, and I feared his precipitate temper.

"Get away," he said roughly, and leaned over. "You, Rogers, and you, Vasselli, take what is necessary, and go down into the saloon and arrest Mr. Byrne and Mr. Clifford."

There was a momentary hesitation on the part of the men, and then they fell out, and climbed the ladder to the upper deck.

"Wade, Wade!" I said, in remonstrance. "You have no proof. They were not in charge of the boat. It was Crashaw."

"I'll have my way," he thundered. "We know they're the head and front of it. I'm master here, and I'm going to let them know it."

"A little bit of sugar for the bird," sang a voice behind, and Clifford emerged in the hands of Rogers. Immediately behind him followed Byrne, in the other sailor's grasp. Broad grins adorned both countenances. "Am I a-going to walk the blooming plank?" inquired Clifford.

"What's the joke?" inquired Byrne.

"The joke," said Wade, "is this—that you are arrested by my orders for encouraging and participating in a mutiny."

"Mutiny! Great Scott!" cried Clifford. "Where's the adjective mutiny? We are getting quite interesting characters, Byrne, my boy."

Wade made a gesture with his hands, dismissing the prisoners with their guards, but Byrne asked bluntly:

"Are we to be put in irons?"

"Yes," said Wade. His anger had abated, and I don't think he was comfortable at the way his coup was being taken.

"Crikey!" said Clifford. "We shall perish in a dungeon. Never mind, old cock——

"Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage.

Take it out of that, Byrne. We're blooming conspirators, we are. Off with their heads! So much for Buckingham! Where's the Tower?"

They passed to the lower deck in this grotesque custody, ostentatiously marking time with heavy stamping, a cheerful pair of scoundrels. The whole thing was a farce, and now Wade must have recognized that.

"This tread-mill work's awful, kind friends and Christians," Clifford's irrepressible voice came up to us. Wade's brow clouded, and he turned away abruptly. He had been worsted. But the lower deck was now quite silent. All the indications were those of farce, not of tragedy.

It is not to be supposed that Miss Sylvester could be kept out of all this excitement. On the contrary, she was an interested witness. I had not spoken to her since her return, for she had been in her cabin, and I had been fully occupied. But after the curtain had fallen on this extravaganza, and outward quietude reigned, she came up to me.

"Oh, is it a mutiny, really, Mr. Herapath?" she asked, in excitement.

"I believe there are the makings of one," I said grimly, for I did not understand that lightness of temperament which would regard all events as staged for its enjoyment. She had a dozen questions to deliver, and a dozen fears and hopes to express. It was youth, irresponsible youth, and nothing more. Life had so far appeared to this girl as a drama, which she could witness from the stalls. But life would assume other aspects for her some day, and as I talked I wondered if this very expedition was to be the occasion of her instruction.

She rambled on: "We were just putting off, when Doctor McLeod said, 'Hello, there!' as he heard a noise in the bushes; and then Captain Wade and Mr. Marley and Mr. Halliday burst through and told us. Those wretched sailors had run away with their boat. Fancy! What do you suppose they wanted, Mr. Herapath? And why has

Captain Wade arrested Mr. Byrne and Mr. Clifford? I hate Mr. Clifford, but that Irishman seems amusing. Oh, I should just think the island was lovely. Where are we going now?"

I told her that we were going to the *real* island, at which she remarked: "Fancy that's not being the real island! But I never could tell how you sailors find your way on the sea from a little piece of paper and a compass. I don't mind how it's done, as long as I get there."

She raised her sweet, childish eyes to mine, and once more I felt that I should not criticize her as if she were a grown woman. She had had some acquaintance with life, but no experience of it, and she was obviously as innocent as a kitten, and as simple-minded. She had almost forgotten that she was to get to Baltimore, and with it the loss of her wardrobe. She ate sweets that troubled night, and looked charming in the starlight, as we paced the deck. Wade had retired in dudgeon, and Davenant followed his example.

Marley had taken his place on the bridge. "This is a fine raree-show," he said, as he passed me.

The big machine that is a ship was working noiselessly, placidly, and without the suggestion of a defect; the forecastle was still as a mouse. It was close on midnight when I turned in.

I was awakened by the plash of water on my face. The port-hole in my cabin was always open save in rough weather; and at first I thought that the wind had got up and challenged the sea. Rising on my elbow I peered out. It was quite dark still, save for the stars, and I guessed that I had not been asleep more than an hour. The sea stretched calmly into the night; I put my head to the port-hole, and then I heard voices.

They were voices pitched low, as if unwilling to be overheard, and they came from a boat which I could hear grinding and bumping against the side of the steamer quite near-by. I got up, now fully alert and curious, and, hastily dressing, turned out into the saloon. At the top of the companion-ladder I found the doors locked. Now, afire with suspicions, I roused McLeod, and we tried the doors together without avail. Back I went to my cabin, and looked out by the port-hole. I could still hear the boat bumping, and the voices.

McLeod, who had taken his station at another port-hole, came running to me.

"Man, they're making off!" he said. "They're passing provisions over the side."

I nodded. "They're levanting," I said. "Get Davenant up, and I'll keep watch."

We roused Davenant, who joined us at once in a state of considerable excitement. Halliday's cabin was on deck, as was Wade's. We all watched. The light was too dim to make out much, but it was clear that the mutineers were going to desert the ship. With what object?

Suddenly our query was answered. Up till now we had not been sensible of the screw, but now we were made so, for it stopped. Every one knows that the only time the screw makes itself felt is when it ceases. It ceased now.

"By thunder!" said McLeod suddenly, whacking his thigh in his tempestuous manner. "By thunder, I can guess! Here's the island! That's their little game."

"And they have the chart," said I.

We looked at each other.

Just then a noise came from the saloon, and I hurried in. The cessation of the propeller had wakened the Frenchman and Miss Sylvester.

"Is anything the matter? Oh, is it all right?" she cried, and through the half-opened door I could just see her white-robed form, the bronze hair about her face. It was the piteous cry of the child who has awakened to fright. I soothed her fears.

"Only that we've reached the island," I said.

"The island!" she exclaimed delightedly, and impulsively threw open the door and took one step forward. I knew she had forgotten everything in her delirium of delight. She had the

supreme faculty of losing herself, her self-consciousness and all, in the intoxication of the moment's emotion.

"But it is dark, and you can see nothing, and I advise you strongly to finish your sleep," I said prosaically. She stopped; then remembered, and retired in a little, pretty confusion. I rejoined the others, anxious now that something should be done.

"It's impossible to break down the doors," McLeod was saying. "Herapath and I tried."

"It's devilish sitting here and doing nothing," said Davenant restlessly. "If we could only get out, we could soon bring them to their senses."

"Do you think so?" I asked. "I guess it's gone deeper than that. This is a big sore—it's gangrene."

He eyed me. "Why do you think so?" he inquired.

"Oh, symptoms," I said carelessly, for that was not what mattered just now. Our business was to get out of our prison and alarm Wade. Then an idea came to me. "If you'll hold on to my legs, I think I can get through and climb up," I said.

McLeod's eyes took my measure. "You'll never get through with those shoulders," he said.

"I can manage it by edging and coaxing," I answered.

"Right!" he said suddenly, and pushed open the window farther.

I jerked myself upon the upper bunk, and put my head out of the port-hole, taking the strong sea-wind that stung in the nostrils fragrantly. Then I began carefully to wriggle. As McLeod had suggested, my shoulders were the difficulty. If I could get them through, the long length of my limbs would clear the opening easily. I turned, rolled over, shifted and screwed one shoulder higher than the other in the attempt to go out, as one extricates a table from a room—crosswise. I wrenched one arm half-way out, and then I stuck. My legs were shoved hard at me, as if McLeod and Davenant would ram and batter me out. I had the most discomfortable sense in the world at that moment—that I should never be released from that "jam." And then I put forward all my strength. If I was to be got free it might as well be on the outside as the inside. The sash bit into my flesh; my chest contracted painfully; there was a rip, and I was free——

I was more than free. I had overdone it; or, at least, my coadjutors had. As I went through, I felt a tremendous thrust of my legs, and I shot out like a pellet, wildly flinging forth my arms. I was bound for the sea, beyond a doubt; and I struck it just slantwise below the port-hole. The cold, fresh salt of the sea rose to receive me, and I went down into that hospitable bosom. When I rose again it was some distance away from the bow of the *Duncannon,* for which I struck out. The ship was adrift, evidently, and was making for the island on a strong tide. When I reached her side I began to swim softly round, looking for some means of boarding her. The boat was forward now, and was still being loaded, as I could gather from the light on the bulwarks. Aft I hit upon a trailing rope, and by its assistance gained the deck unobserved. After a moment's pause to recover myself, I made for the captain's cabin—I could make out the dim mass of the land on the starboard quarter.

Wade's door was locked, and his windows were barricaded from the outside. The mutineers had taken every precaution. He was a close and helpless prisoner. The jamb of the door, which opened inward, would effectually prevent Wade from breaking out, but it would not prevent me from breaking in. I put my shoulder to it steadily—the unbruised shoulder—and gradually pressed. It gave with some little cracking noise, and I heard Wade's voice:

"I am armed, and, by thunder, I'll fire!"

"It's me—Ned," I called back to him in a whisper, and he exclaimed. I stepped through the ruins of the door and pushed it to. "Have you a light? It won't be seen from the inner cabin."

We felt our way there, and Wade struck a match and lit a lamp. "They're through," he said grimly, indicating the

barred window there also. "But it keeps our light from them."

"We're barred in below, too," I said, and I told him our adventures.

"It's a bigger business than I expected," he remarked quite coolly. "And now for action."

I pulled him roughly back, for he was on his way to the door. "Good Lord, man! what are you at? It's running on your own fate."

"Oh, they'll never go as far as that. Besides, I'm armed," he said bluffly.

"Won't they?" I returned. "Don't you depend on that. They've put their heads deep enough in the dock already, and they can't turn back. The odds are they'll go to the logical end of their recklessness now."

"Damn it, I can't do nothing!" he said angrily; and then: "It's well organized. I wonder who's at the bottom. It can't be that drunken scoundrel, Clifford."

"It might be Byrne," I said. "I don't seem to know much of him. How did they get you locked up?"

"I turned out at two bells and was seized as I opened the door, and bound until they'd done this carpenter's job. Then they thrust me in, blast 'em!"

He scowled, and looked at his pistol again. Just then a heavy splash sounded in our ears. "There's the anchor," said Wade. "That'll keep us off the shore, anyway."

I went cautiously to the broken door and peered out. The light was still in the rigging, but the boat had gone. I could hear the sounds of oars borne on the night air. I went back.

"They've gone," I told Wade. "Now we can do something. Wade, there's poor Marley. What's come to him?"

"Huh! he may be in it, too, for all I know," he retorted savagely.

"No, he's not," said I; "and I'm going to look him up. Meanwhile you'd better do the same by Halliday."

I left him, and stole along the deck to the foot of the bridge without being challenged; and, indeed, without hearing any human sound. I ascended, and found Marley's body lying flat below the wheel. He was bound and gagged, and I released him. He sat up weakly.

"That you, old man?" he said, in a dazed voice. "They landed me well. Great Scott, they socked it me hard!"

"What happened?"

"Why, this darned son of a gun at the wheel got me on the head, and I went down like an ox. I don't remember any more till I came to with this bridle on. Sakes, it aches!"

I helped him down, explaining the situation. It appeared that no sooner had Marley made the land than the mutineers acted. They delivered their blow at once, and effectually; and now they were gone ashore with a large store of provisions, and—the chart.

That was the point on which we had to fix our eyes, and we did. Wade had released Halliday, and went forward to make investigations with his revolver in his hand, while I went to the saloon to free the others.

"After all," said Wade, "there must be some who drew the line at mutiny, though I'm sure I couldn't guess who."

By the time I had broken into the saloon I heard his voice above, calling on me.

"It's a bit better than we thought," he said, when I had joined him. "There's some faithful hands yet. The forecastle was untenanted, but a knocking came from the men's quarters. Ten of 'em had been locked in—same old wheeze—they said they'd been aroused, to hear hammering, and to find Crashaw in charge."

"What! is that beast free?" said Marley.

"What do you think?" returned Wade. "I don't believe they put up any fight. They look as mild as milk. Ugh! It's sickening! Well, Mr. Halliday, this is a nice bean-feast," he broke off, to greet the American, whose eyes were unnaturally lighted, and who had something in his hand.

"I've brought this duplicate I drew up myself," he said, "and I reckon, captain, you can make up with it."

"It's a bit late in the day," said Wade carelessly; but he looked at the map

which Halliday unfolded. "Now, my dear sir," he said, with studied sarcasm, "why the devil didn't you trot this out at the beginning? We shouldn't have tumbled into the wrong island, and I reckon we should have had a good chance of being out of the present dilemma."

"I didn't exactly guess that those markings signified anything particular," said Halliday deprecatingly; and went on in another vein: "But say, captain, don't you get it into your head that I'm low-spirited any, because I ain't. Not by a long way."

"I don't know about you," said Wade shortly. "But I'd like to see what's raising your spirits in the situation. These men have gone off with your map to find your treasure."

"We've got to stop that, captain," said this pronounced optimist, earnestly admonishing him. "Captain, we've just got to head 'em off right away."

Wade looked at him steadily, as if he would retort on him sharply; and then I believe something in the case appealed to his own reckless nature. At all events, he grinned, and at last burst out into a laugh.

"Why, sure we will, Halliday," he observed. "I'm hanged if we won't! Let's have a look at that map again."

And there in the cabin with the shattered door our conference gathered about the chart, which had been the cause of our extraordinary expedition, and which now seemed to have caused the wreck of that expedition.

"Aim," said Wade, laconic now, "is to get at this spot marked with a cross before the mutineers. It's dark; the coast is unknown; the markings on the map are few, and maybe guesswork. They're the work of an unskilled hand. The job's risky. But you've your choice, Mr. Halliday."

"There's no choice, sir," said the American, with shining eyes. "We're after them."

"Good!" said Wade. "Then we've no time to waste. Have a boat lowered, Mr. Davenant."

When Wade acted he acted promptly, and within twenty minutes the boat was provisioned, and we were taking our places. The hands watched us with some curiosity, but said nothing. There were ten of them, including my friend Carter, and we had, in addition, Collins for our party. When we reckoned up our numbers we stood thus—the mutineers comprised Byrne, Clifford, Crashaw, and fifteen men; on our side were Halliday, Wade, Marley, Davenant, Digby, McLeod, myself, Collins, and ten others. That made us exactly even in strength, but they had the advantage of the start; and doubtless they were well equipped. It was impossible to leave the *Duncannon* deserted, and so we picked our crew. Wade decided that six of the men should remain aboard, under the charge of Digby, who had with him a quartermaster, one Edwards, with a black mustache and imperial. The rest of us were to rush the position.

"What's that you've got?" demanded Davenant, as I packed a case away in the rear of the boat.

"Firearms," I answered.

"What! you don't suppose there'll be any of that sort of thing?" he said, in surprise.

"One never knows," I answered. "Better be safe than sorry."

"Well, it looks like putting a premium on manslaughter," he protested.

I said nothing, for my ears heard a sound through the noises and voices, and I turned my head, and peered through the darkness; but under the loom of the hull it was impenetrable. Yet there seemed to be a lurking shadow in the stern.

"Give way," said Wade, and we shot out. But I still stared, for the sound I had heard behind me was the rustle of skirts. The shadow still lurked in the stern.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The Skewbald Panther

By Edward Lucas White

The capable man, the man who does things, has always been certain of distinction in no matter what age he has lived. Mr. Lucas White harks back to the days of old Rome for his character study of a capable man, and he has written an unusually clever story with the setting of a Roman amphitheater, and with a strong love interest to inspire one of the grittiest deeds ever attempted. The speech of the Romans has been done into twentieth century phraseology.

(*A Complete Story*)

HIS face was the face of a man glad all through, He was standing, his knees against the coping of the inner wall. He looked down into the deserted arena, across it, at the great, sweeping curve of tier above tier of blank, tenantless stone benches, and up at the sagging, saucered, spider-web of radiating or cross-knotted guy-ropes.

Far away on the opposite side of the amphitheater several workmen were busy with those same guy-ropes; had flung some temporary tackle over one of them, and were hoisting up a boy to make repairs or adjustments; otherwise, the Colosseum was empty save for himself. He had the air of a man enjoying its emptiness.

The sun had risen but a few moments before, and its slant rays struck on the gaily painted awning-poles and on their gilded ropes. The interior of the building was coolish with the dawn chill of masonry grown cold under autumn stars, and he kept his new white, crimson-edged toga wrapped about him, both his arms under it to the wrists. Yet he snuffed joyously at the early air, and breathed long breaths of its coolness; turning from side to side his uncovered, curly head, rolling his gaze relishingly about.

As he stood there, another head, a big, close-cropped, bullet-shaped head, raised itself slowly above the top rail of the entrance stairway behind him; a florid, round, moon-shaped, fleshy face came above the rail, and its small, brown, good-natured eyes peered at him. Then there came into view a neck which would have been long if it had not been incredibly thick; nearly as thick as the big head.

The owner of the head moved cautiously, like an overgrown boy playing blind man's bluff. He was a man huge in every dimension, wrapped in a very thin, very white toga, with a very broad crimson border. As he trod softly round the end of the railing, he showed foot-gear of pale-green buckskin, much like Wellington boots, but shorter, with a gold crescent on a little gold chain dangling from the top of each.

He was followed by an enormous fawn-colored dog, heavily built, square-jawed, short-haired, which moved as silently as he. Padding noiselessly up behind the absorbed gazer, he slapped him boisterously on the shoulder. The smaller man turned round.

"Lucius Balbinus!" he exclaimed. "What good luck brought you?"

"Precisely to find out," said Balbinus, "what whim led you in here. I saw you entering, stopped my litter, got out, and followed you. What on earth made you come in here, Quintus? There's no show to-day."

"Show or no show," said Quintus Proculus, "this is the Romanest thing in Rome, and I am just famished for Rome. I've been hungry for Rome for five years."

"When did you get back?" Balbinus asked.

"Day before yesterday. Just in time for a good bath and a good dinner. I paid all my official visits yesterday. To-day I'm my own man until lunch-time at the palace, and I mean to stroll about and just bathe in the sensation of being in Rome again."

"Well," said Balbinus, "while you are bathing, as you call it, you might just as well bathe sitting as standing. Let's sit down."

He settled himself ponderously into one of the ample, heavy-timbered, leather-bottomed, front-row armchairs. Quintus took the next. The dog curled up at Balbinus' feet.

"Were you at the emperor's reception yesterday?" Balbinus asked.

"I was, my boy; and very kind he was, too. 'You're the right sort, Proculus,' said he; 'you do things. You've earned a rest. Hope you'll enjoy it and go back and do more things. No time to talk now. I've sixteen yoke of horses to look over, and I want to get this tedious ceremonial done. Come to lunch with me to-morrow, and tell me your adventures.' Rather gracious for Commodus, don't you think?"

"Most unusual gracious," said Balbinus. "Wish I could extract something like that from him for me. Wish I had been there to hear it. I didn't see you."

"I was early," Proculus explained. "Too early for you. I'll bet you were one of the last half-dozen."

"I was the very last," said Balbinus, with a twist of his face. "And I caught it. Commodus burst out at me: 'Last again, as usual. You are a nuisance, Balbinus; you're one of those unimportant important senators that aren't worth noticing, and must be noticed. You haven't anything to do but eat and sleep, and you do too much of both. I've quantities of things to do far better worth doing than eating or sleeping or ruling, and you keep me here in this everlasting tedium longer than there is any necessity for, when I must be here too long, anyhow. See you're earlier to-morrow, or I'll think of something to make you remember. You're too fat,' said he. I never had such a scolding. That's why I'm up so early to-day. I was on my way to the palace, trying to be first. But I have plenty of time yet to be early enough. There is no hurry."

"You are fat," said Proculus, running his eyes over his friend.

"Not a bit of it," the other denied vigorously. "I'm big. Last time I was at Cossa I climbed into the pan of the bale-shed stilyard at the wool-house. I weighed two hundred and sixty. But I haven't a pound of fat on me. I'm all muscle; stronger than ever. Feel me anywhere. And I keep in the best condition. Swimming Tiber three times is nothing for me. I never make it less than five, and generally six; and when I'm in Rome I haven't missed a day, except holy days, for years. I look suety, but I'm all hard flesh over big bones and sinews, stronger than ever."

"I believe you are," Proculus admitted, after an investigation.

"My wits may be fat, as Commodus says," went on Balbinus. "I can't get over your thinking of coming in here to-day. I might be away from Rome for ten years, and frantic to get back, but I should never think of coming in here when there was nothing going on."

"You think so now," said Proculus, "but if you had had two years of frontier fighting, let alone five, as I have had, you'd have thought over a hundred times everything you could see at Rome; you'd want to see them all at

once, and you'd get around and see them all as quick as possible."

"You've been on the Rhine, it seems to me," Balbinus ventured.

"Rhine!" Proculus exclaimed. "Not a bit of it. I've been in Dacia."

"But there have been no wars in Dacia," Balbinus demurred.

"No wars!" Proculus ejaculated. "Perhaps not—not in the plural, anyway! Just one continuous warfare that keeps you going. The people there have no dreams, no plans, no intentions. They are always on the verge of starvation; never half-clad nor half-housed. It is just raid, raid, raid, summer and winter, wherever they think they see a chance for food or clothing, weapons, cattle, horses, or slaves. They keep us going, as I say. It is exhausting work. If you had been through what I have been through, you'd be wild for a sight of the Colosseum, even with nothing going on. Not but that I'm impatient to see a show, too."

"You'll be here to-morrow, of course?" Balbinus queried.

"If I don't drop dead first," said Proculus fervently. "And I don't know what gate to go to. Commodus has changed the arrangements and regulations, so I don't know where I am entitled to sit. I was hoping he'd ask me to a place on the dais with him. But after all the officers on leave I saw at the reception yesterday morning, I don't believe there's a chance of that, so many outrank me."

"There may be a chance, anyhow," Balbinus told him. "Commodus is a whimmy creature. But most likely he won't. If he don't, come with me. One of Commodus' changes has been granting each senator the right to bring in a guest to a front seat. I sit just over there, where you see that panel of gouged rollers."

"I'll be delighted to come with you," said Proculus. "I can't be too far forward for my taste. I want to see everything."

"You shall." And Balbinus rose. "Now let's go."

"Certainly." But Proculus did not move. "Where did you get that dog? I think he's the biggest, strongest-looking, fiercest-looking, and quietest dog I ever saw."

Balbinus settled himself again into his chair.

"That dog," he said, "used to belong to Fonteia."

"Did she give him to you?" Proculus inquired.

"Not a bit she didn't," Balbinus disclaimed. "She never gave me anything but the cold shoulder. One of her uncles sent her that dog all the way from Tolosa. They had him chained up for a door-dog. He used to growl at everybody. He growled at me every day, going in and coming out. One day he was loose, and sprang at me. You know when you are surprised you think mighty quick. It came over me all in a flash that Fonteia was so determined to get rid of me that she had ordered the dog let loose just so he could get at me; for a hint, you know."

"Pretty positive hint!" interjected Proculus.

"Well, she had nothing to do with it, I found out afterward," Balbinus went on. "But that was the way the idea rushed over me as the dog sprang. Anyhow, it made me so furious that, instead of smashing him on the nose, I just caught him by the throat with both hands, and stood right there without moving either foot, and choked him till he was limp as a towel. I had a half-mind to give him a wrench and break his neck, but I was afraid Fonteia would be angry. So I just flung him into his kennel, and went on into the atrium. They were all out in the garden under the big lotus-tree. Vedia Philotera was there, and Entedia and dear old Nemestronia, and some more; and of course there were three men to every one of them. I couldn't get near Fonteia. They were all listening to an interminable recitation by one of those pestiferous poets Fonteia always has hanging round.

"Presently I felt something under my chair. Do you know, it was that dog! Licking my feet, too! The moment he had come to himself he had crawled after me. Presently Entedia

smelt him; though how she can smell anything but the perfumery she uses is more than I could ever make out. She objected. Nemestronia backed her up; though why anybody that keeps a pet leopard should object to a clean dog is beyond my guessing. When the recitation came to a pause they spoke to Fonteia. She called a slave to take him away. He wouldn't stir; showed his teeth. She sent for the doorkeeper. The dog snapped at him. Then she sent after her slave-lashers. They came, and all five of them were too few to move that dog. Then Fonteia got up and tried herself. He snarled at her.

"Then I said if she would tell me where she wanted him to go I would take him there. And I took him to his kennel and chained him up. He stayed there till I went home, and then he broke his chain at one tug, and followed me home—precious scared my bearers were, too. He has never left me since. If I want to go anywhere without him, I have to chain him up myself. He won't let anybody else chain him. To hold him takes two chains, fastened to rings at opposite ends of his kennel wall. A single chain too strong for him to break is so heavy it drags down his collar, even when he is lying still, and chafes his neck sore."

"You don't mean to say he goes into the palace with you?" Proculus demanded.

"Oh," said Balbinus, "he'll stay by my litter if I tell him to. He knows that whenever I leave my litter I am sure to come back to it. He's obedient enough. I like that dog. I never liked a dog before. But he'd let me twist his ears off, if I felt like it. He's my dog."

"Thought you said Fonteia didn't give him to you," Proculus remarked.

"Neither did she," said Balbinus. "Next day she asked was I a dog-stealer. I said no, I hadn't stolen her dog; she could get him if she sent after him. She said that wouldn't do; I must bring back the dog and leave him, or pay for him. I asked how much she wanted. She said twenty thousand sesterces. I said that was too much for any dog. She said to bring him back then. Finally I paid her the money. What does she do but buy a turquoise brooch with it!"

"Queer how those red-headed women do run after blue."

"Red-headed!" exclaimed Balbinus. "Nonsense! Fonteia's hair isn't red. It's the finest imaginable gold-copper. There isn't a handsomer head of hair in Italy."

"Certainly," Proculus hastened to admit. "But what about that brooch?"

"She bought it of Orontides," Balbinus went on. "Said she had been wanting it for a year. Showed it to me the next day. I told her I would have given her a dozen of them if she had hinted that she wanted one. She said that was different. I said I couldn't see the difference. She said I was stupid, as usual. Anyhow, I have never seen her since without that brooch. She wears it no matter what color she is dressed in—red or yellow, green or violet, brown or gray."

"Don't you understand why?" asked Proculus.

"Not a bit," confessed Balbinus.

"Then you are stupid, as she says," Proculus declared.

"I suppose so," Balbinus admitted. "I'm generally stupid. I don't understand about Dacia, for instance. I know about the Rhine frontier; there's Gaul to sack on this side, and all those ravening kinglets, with their unhesitating hordes, on the other. You've something to defend and something to fight. But no Dacian would ever try to cross the Danube. Why not leave that as the boundary, and let the Dacians eat each other up? What is there in Dacia worth fighting for?"

"Dacia mostly," Proculus replied, the aggressive light of the enthusiast for a new country shining in his eyes. "Dacia is bound to be the very jewel of the empire. It is no teeming land of easy plenty like Egypt; no trimmed and clipped garden of glorious abundance like Syria or Asia; never can be such a country as Italy or Spain, or even Gaul; but it is enormous, and full of

possibilities. It has immense plains, flat as the sea; the finest horse-breeding territory in the empire. It has vast stretches of rolling country; nothing better in the world for grain. It has uncountable chains of mountains covered with the finest timber; full of mines of iron and lead, silver and gold. Oh, it's all worth fighting for; every foot of it."

"What's the use of all that without colonists?" Balbinus demanded.

"Without colonists! It's filling up fast; much of it has filled up. The bridge is jammed from sunrise to sunset; and as I came southward I passed colony after colony. The roads are thronged all along."

"Got roads there, too?"

"As fine roads as any in the empire," Proculus asserted; "with good spile bridges at every river, and some stone bridges. More than a thousand miles of perfect roads, ditched, curbed, paved, and full twelve feet wide."

"But how on earth," cried Balbinus, "can you get colonists to go there in the face of all that raiding?"

"You don't understand," said Proculus. "We keep pushing the frontier back all the time. Where I was fighting in an absolutely wild country the first year I was there is perfectly peaceable now; not only not a massacre, nor inroad, but no disturbances of any kind; not so much as a murder. The farms are thick-set all over the country, and the people live on them the year round, entirely fearless."

"What do they raise?" asked Balbinus.

"It varies with the part of the country. Cattle and horses and sheep on the plains, wheat and barley and rye on the farm-lands."

"No olives? No wine? No fruit?"

"They'll never raise olives there," Proculus conceded. "But they'll raise vines yet. They are trying everywhere. And they make a sort of wine out of barley. It's not bad when you are used to it. And for fruit they have cherries and apples finer than anything in Italy; and in season you'll find as great a variety of garden-fruits and fresh vegetables in the town markets as in any town market in Italy."

"You make it out a fine country if we can hold it," said Balbinus.

"Hold it!" Proculus cried. "We'll hold it forever. We'll push on beyond the Carpathians up to the Dniester."

"Where can the empire ever get men for such a conquest?" Balbinus wondered.

"From Dacia, of course," said Proculus. "Dacia makes men. It not only will soon furnish enough men to hold its own frontier without a single legion from outside, but will push on westward, swing round the Yazyges, and swallow them whole, and press on Germany from the rear till we crush it between Dacia and Gaul, and colonize it up to the Baltic."

"These are all wild dreams," Balbinus protested. "Come down to facts. How do you hold Dacia now? If what you say is true, it is already nearly as well worth looting as Gaul, and will soon be richer. How do you hold off all those desperate nomads on the north?"

"Dacia will take care of herself in a few years," Proculus argued. "And until then our outposts let no raiders through between them. The savages have learned better. We've plenty of local friendly cavalry; same kind of fellows as the raiders, confident in the backing of the legions, and aching to pay off old scores on their tribal enemies. And we modify the legions to meet the local conditions. Besides their regular equipment, every man has a bow and quiver. Out of a legion we get four thousand men fit for volley archery; two thousand of them make good archers, and one-half of those get to be experts while on horseback. Then a legion can fight afoot with their regular shields and formation; or we can use any advisable proportion of the men as archers, and shift from one arrangement to the other, as we please. Changing their heavy shields for bucklers, we can use as many as a third of a legion as mounted archers. And we can make any combination of mounted and foot-fighters we need.

We can fight a legion as a whole, or break it into cohorts or maniples, and scatter them about. We teach them, besides their own natural methods, the nomad tricks, and outdo the raiders at their own game."

"But how do you think of such innovations? I have often considered about that. Somebody must have thought of everything first, I know. But I simply can't imagine it. I can do anything when some one explains it to me. But I should never think of making any variations. How do you do it?"

"Don't know," said Proculus. "Seems simple enough to me. Don't you think it's time we were going?"

"We might go," said Balbinus, rising. "But I've time to spare yet."

Proculus rose and surveyed the building with a lingering, loving gaze. The sunlight now bathed the interior opposite him, though some of the lower tiers of seats were still in shadow, as was the arena; which was, however, lit up by the glaring reflection from the higher expanse of sunlit marble.

"What's that up yonder?" he inquired, pointing to the far end of the arena.

"Oh," said Balbinus, "they're turning one of the animals loose. That's another of Commodus' notions. He says the beasts get dull and stupid in cages, and he has the pick of them let out into the arena, one at a time, for air and exercise."

"But what kind of a beast is it?" Proculus queried.

"Panther."

"Nonsense!" Proculus objected. "That can't be a panther. A panther is spotted yellow and brown, or is solid black. That creature is black and white, like an Epirote bull or a Carthaginian watch-dog. There never was a panther like that."

"Never was, maybe," said Balbinus. "Maybe never will be again; but there is now. Why, you must have seen that brute before you left. She's been here for four or five years."

"Five years!" Proculus exclaimed. "Why, no animal lasts five years in the Colosseum; few ever fight twice."

"That panther will last ten years. She has a charmed life. She'll die of old age, like as not. She has fought at least two hundred times. And never varies when she is let out. Watch her." And Balbinus sat down.

Proculus, reseating himself, watched as he was bid.

"Watch her," Balbinus repeated. "She always makes for that same panel of rollers over there—the set that is so gouged and clawed—and tries to climb up. She never tries any other panel, and she always tries there at least three times."

The panther loped easily across the sands, crouched, sprang vertically, and caught the third of the wooden rollers set along the face of the wall to protect spectators from any possibility of an animal scaling the enclosure of the arena. Her claws sank into the wood, but the lurching turn of the two-foot roller threw her back upon the sand.

"That was not much of a leap," Balbinus commented. "I've seen her touch the sixth roller. Those claw-marks are nearly all hers. You can see from here some on the sixth roller. See, the sun has just reached it! She has never touched the seventh roller. There she goes again!"

As he spoke the panther shot into the air. She got a hold on the fifth roller and clawed wildly with her hind legs at those below, but as they yielded to her weight and revolved on their bearings she slipped down again.

"She's only playing," said Balbinus. "When she is really in earnest she does better than that. My seat is right above that panel, almost exactly in the middle of it, and sometimes I think she's going to get her claws over the coping. If I am looking over when she springs, it seems she is coming right in my face."

The panther sprang a third time, and fell back at once.

"She won't try again," Balbinus affirmed. "Sometimes she tries six or seven times."

She walked nosingly around the edge

of the arena, flicking the end of her tail. She lay down, rolled over, sprang up lightly, and continued her nosing progress.

Proculus eyed her as she went.

"Did you ever see a black dog that had been scalded," he asked—"with white hairs grown out on the scars?"

"I have," said Balbinus; "but the white hair would only be in little streaks. She is more than half-white."

"Her belly is black, and her tail is black."

"If she had been scalded over as much of her skin as shows white hairs she would have been killed," Balbinus argued. "I believe those are natural colors on her. The edges of the white are too irregular for scald-marks. Look at her face now while it is toward us. That black patch over her left eye and ear looks perfectly natural."

"Perhaps it is natural," said Proculus. "But I never heard of such a beast."

"You must have heard of her," insisted Balbinus. "That is the very panther that killed Fonteius Bucco."

"Killed Fonteius Bucco!" Proculus exclaimed.

"Oh, well!" said Balbinus. "He had no right to the name, of course, but he had passed under it."

"But which Fonteius Bucco?" queried Proculus. "And how did she come to kill him?"

"Do you mean to say you never heard of the murder and the trial, and all that frightful scandal?" demanded Balbinus.

"Lucius," said Proculus, "I have heard nothing for five years except the wind howling over the plains, the moaning of the forests at night, the roaring of great rivers at their fords, the yells of Scythian robbers, the blare of bugles, the whine of well-sweeps, and suchlike noises of campaign or camp. I have seen nothing but camps, or stockaded forts, or miserable, raw, timber towns, or the wild mountains and the weary plains of Dacia. I have had no time to read, no time to talk. It's been day-and-night riding and fighting, or desperately hasty ditching, or breathlessly driven sword, spear, shield, helmet, shoe, harness, tent, or tool making. Little news has reached me, and no gossip. Please assume that I know nothing. Tell me everything you know; and by all means tell me about Bucco and the panther."

"You remember Decimus Fonteius Bucco?" Balbinus asked.

"Fonteia's uncle?" Proculus asked in turn.

"No," said Balbinus, "not old Decimus, young Decimus."

"Fonteia's brother?"

"As you and I knew him."

"A vile whelp!" exclaimed Proculus. "The worst specimen of a noble family ever I saw! I detested him. How such an unsavory pup could be Fonteia's brother and Causidiena's son I never could make out."

"He really wasn't. But I'll get to that later. Causidiena died before you left, I believe."

"I was at the funeral," said Proculus; "and very sorry I was. She would have turned into a lovely old lady like Nemestronia."

"Well," said Balbinus, "even before she died, what with old Fonteius Bucco's blindness and the invalidism of Marcus, young Decimus was more and more unmanageable. Marcus Bucco never could control any of his children, not even Fonteia. Naturally, being the best man of the family, Caius Bucco had charge of all the estate, and when his father and Marcus died about the same time, a little after you left, it hardly increased his power over the property. Old Decimus stood out of the way, and never claimed any of his privileges as elder brother. Young Decimus kept getting into trouble, and, though Caius was kind to him, he quarreled with his uncles continually.

"Then Caius was found murdered—most atrocious butchery, too. Everybody thought it was one of his slaves. He was a very reckless man about slaves; bought all sorts, with no guarantee of good character, and gave them a loose rein. But when the investigation was no more than started suspicion

turned on young Decimus. Proofs accumulated, and it was soon clear he had murdered his uncle. He was convicted. Then one of Marcus' slaves confessed that Decimus was her son. She had substituted him for Causidiena's baby, and had never been suspected. The legitimate heir had died on her hands before he was a year old. Of course that mitigated Fonteia's shame, but still she had grown up with him as his sister, and felt the disgrace of the trial terribly.

"After he was proved a slave, the lawyers had a fine wrangle over the sentence. One lot said he must be sentenced as a slave. The other lot held out that as he had had the status of a free man when the crime was committed, and was constructively related as a son to his victim, he must be punished as for parricide by a citizen. Then Commodus cut in. He said he didn't mean to interfere with the dispensing of justice, but he suggested that, instead of wasting time deciding whether to crucify him as a slave or drown him, sewed up in a sack with snakes, dogs, and monkeys as a parricide, why not compromise on throwing him to the beasts in the Colosseum? That would be more of a lesson to others, as being visible to a greater crowd, and it would be more spectacular.

"Thrown to the beasts he was. It was four years ago; four years ago tomorrow. Fonteia was there. She had been sorely tried at first between her genuine dislike of him, her abomination of him as a murderer, and her love of her uncle on the one side and her mother's training in family duties and loyalty on the other. Once he was proved a slave and no kin of hers, she behaved as if he never had existed. But the spectacle here shook her nerves for all her self-control.

"I sat on this side, then, just where the Vestals sit now, about three panels nearer the dais. She sat with the Vestals where I sit now, above that panel the panther tried to climb. Several batches of criminals had been disposed of when they cleared the arena, sanded it afresh, and turned him into it alone. He had nothing on but a waistcloth, and carried a short club, to let him feel as if he had a chance, and make it interesting.

"They let out six panthers from six different inlets. Two began snarling at each other at once, and paid no attention to anything else. The one nearest the fellow went straight for him, and, do you know, that cowardly scoundrel showed just one flare of courage in his desperation! He ran at the beast, hit it on the nose, and drove it away. He scared off the next, too. The fifth was afraid of the crowd and the shouts, and all that, and tried to get back through the grating down the inlet.

"While Bucco had been setting the crowd wild with delight by scaring off the two panthers in succession, that she-demon down there had never moved. When he paused and glared round she began to crawl toward him. The moment he saw her coming he yelled, threw away his club, and ran. She never hurried, just crawled steadily.

"He scudded to that panel of rollers below the Vestals. There was Causidiena, the eldest Vestal; and Fonteia, who had known him as nephew and brother; and Gargilia, the youngest Vestal, whose cousin he had courted. It was harrowing to see him run and hear him yell. And the panther never hurried, just kept on crawling. Fonteia sat as if nothing was going on, but the Vestals leaned forward; Causidiena was very bitter over her brother-in-law's murder. Then—have you ever seen one of the log-walking contests?"

"I haven't seen one amphitheater show where you have seen a hundred," said Proculus.

"I mean," said Balbinus, "when the arena is flooded and they throw in a dozen or two logs, and then offer a prize for any one who can stand up on one. And first they let a batch of street urchins try, and they wade out to them, and scramble onto them, and try to stand up, and always get thrown off when the log turns."

"I've seen that."

"And then, you know," Balbinus went on, "slaves and rabble try, and

not one of them can stay on a log. Then an acrobat minces out on a slack rope, and takes a long jump for a log, and lands neatly on it, and stays there. And he dances and skips, and makes the log turn under him, and pirouettes and turns flipflops, and walks on it on his hands, and stays on."

"Yes," said Proculus, "I've seen that."

"You know what a peculiar trick of balancing he has, so the log never lurches and throws him off?"

"Yes."

"Did you ever see anybody climb arena-rollers with a similar trick of balancing?"

"No, I never did, and I don't believe it could be done," declared Proculus.

"Neither would I have believed it," Balbinus admitted, "until I saw it. That frantic murderer jumped for the lowermost roller, and somehow got his right arm and right leg over it, hugging belly-flat to it. He hung on when it turned. Then he clung to it with both legs and one arm, and got his right arm over the second roller. Then he got both arms round the second roller, and steadied himself. Then up went his right leg, and he was sticking to the second as he had stuck to the first. The whole audience was dead still; everybody that could see him watching breathlessly, and the rest silent because the others were.

"The panther never hurried, just crawled steadily, her eyes never leaving him. By the time she was below him he was on the fifth roller, and she crouched flatter and flatter while he worked up to the sixth roller. When he put up a hand to the seventh she sprang. Her paws clawed into him, one on his ribs and the other on his left thigh; and she gripped a mouthful of his right flank just above the hip; her teeth must have met in his liver. He gave one frightful screech as they fell together. She landed on her feet, and instantly gave him a cuff with her forepaw alongside the head. It tore the side of his face off, and must have broken his neck. Then she set her teeth into his throat and lay down flat, holding on.

"The audience had given one barking shout as they fell, and then hushed again. When she lay motionless, they yelled over and over. And through it all Fonteia sat bolt upright, fanning herself quietly and keeping her countenance, though she was dead pale. And she has never missed a spectacle since; too proud to give any one an opportunity to say she stays away because of her memories. She always comes with the Vestals, too. But they were so affected by the panther's regularly repeated efforts to climb those rollers, that Causidiena petitioned Commodus for a different place. He was just making his revision of the seating regulations at the time, and he changed them to this side.

"Quite by accident my new seats happened to be where theirs had been. I don't wonder they were upset; it makes my flesh crawl every time that brute tries to climb up; not that I am afraid she is coming over, but because she reminds me of Bucco, and all that. Fonteia hates the sight of the beast a hundred times worse than I do, I know.

"I used to hope each show would finish the creature. But she has killed any number of criminals. She has fought goats, antelopes, elks, bulls, buffaloes, and all sorts of horned animals. She has set-to with dogs, panthers, tigers, and lions, and come off alive. She has escaped numbers of gladiators, bested some, killed one or two, and been let off by the favor of the audience over and over.

"When I gave up hoping that she would be killed, I tried to bribe the keepers to poison her. But they wouldn't hear of it. I bid them up to two hundred thousand sesterces, but they said Commodus had taken a special fancy to the beast, and they dare not take any bribe to poison her. I would have paid four hundred thousand to get the creature out of the way.

"I know how Fonteia feels, though she holds her head high at the shows, and never mentions the panther at any time. She can't help being reminded of all that hideous humiliation, and she not only can't help remembering the

horror of Bucco's death, but she must recall her baby days with him before he developed his ugly traits. It must tear her heart to see that panther. I am sure nothing would please her as much as getting finally rid of the beast."

"By your own account," said Proculus, "you are no nearer winning Fonteia than you were five years ago."

"No nearer and not any more hopeful," said Balbinus; "but just as determined."

"Doesn't the turquoise brooch make you any more hopeful?" asked Proculus.

"I don't see what that has to do with it."

"That's just it. You don't see."

"One thing I do see," said Balbinus. "She doesn't seem to care for any one else. She has any number of suitors, but never treats any one any better than she treats me; or any worse, for that matter."

"I believe you are more hopeful, after all!"

"Not a bit," Balbinus denied. "Whenever I talk marriage to her she says Helvacius was a man who did something, and she'll stay a widow for life before she'll marry a do-nothing. She says if I'd only do something she'd think about it."

"Why don't you do something?" Proculus suggested.

"Can't get a chance to do any of the things I can think of," said Balbinus. "And can't think of any more."

"What did you think of?" his friend asked.

"I went to Commodus," said Balbinus, "and asked for a province. You know the way Commodus looks at you, like a stupid countryman who has not understood what you said?"

"Yes, I know." And Proculus laughed grimly.

"Well," said Balbinus, "he stared at me in his red-faced, goggle-eyed fashion, and burst out:

" 'Make you a prefect! You manage a province! You never managed anything in your life.'

" 'I manage my estate,' I said.

" 'Don't put on airs with me,' he growled. 'You talk as if you were your rich cousin. You aren't *the* Caelius Balbinus. Your estate is no wonder. There are a hundred men in Rome richer than you.'

" 'I'm not putting on airs,' I told him. 'I know where I stand, and what my estate is. Such as it is, I manage it.'

" 'You do not,' he snapped, like a dog. 'It manages itself. You've bailiffs and overseers and inspectors and bookkeepers and managers. Your father trained them; yes, and your grandfather, in the ways his grandfather's grandfather before him didn't so much as start, but only had to keep in motion. The estate runs itself as well as if you had been born deaf, dumb, and blind; runs itself no worse and no better. You manage nothing.'

" 'Men less capable than I have provinces,' I said.

"Then he did puff and glare.

" 'You think,' he bellowed, 'because I don't wear a long beard and keep a glum face, like my father, that I'm a fool! You think because I enjoy a good time and don't consort with dreary old shaggy-faced, shaggy-cloaked philosophers, that I care nothing for the empire. You think because I love horse-racing and archery and beast-fighting and gladiators, and all sorts of really entertaining things, I am no judge of men. I know men. I love best a man who can do things with his hands; a good swordsman or fighter. I love best a man who can distinguish himself in the amphitheater. That's the best kind of man. But I love any sort of capable man. You senators think I hate you all. I don't hate senators, I hate loafers. You are about as active as a row of hayricks in the sun. Get out and do something, any one of you, and I'll be the first one to give you credit for it. If it's worth while, I'll love you for it. I know men. You take me for a fool, but you are wrong, all of you. I'm no fool, and I care more for the empire than any man in it. I know whom to appoint and whom to reject. You run a province! You couldn't attend to a rabbit-hutch. You great bloated lard bag you! you sit like a toad on a mud

bank gaping for flies to blunder into his mouth. You never did anything in your life. Get out and do something.'

" 'What am I to do?' I asked. 'I want a province, and you refuse, and then tell me to do something. What am I to do?'

" 'Men who do things,' he said, 'don't need to be told what to do; they see things for themselves. If you only once did something I might think of you.'

" 'But what?' I insisted.

" 'What?' he roared, in rage. 'Anything! I'd like to see you spit once as if you really meant it. I could forgive you if you'd up and kick me under the chin, if you thought of it for yourself. Go home,' he said. 'Get out of my sight.'

"And I went. I don't care about the province, and I don't care whether I please him or not, but I do want to do something to please Fonteia. Only I suppose nothing I could do would please her."

Proculus made no answer at the moment, but presently he said, quietly and sincerely:

"I believe that Fonteia is much better pleased with you than you suspect, and I believe Commodus likes you, too."

"They have a queer way of showing it!" Balbinus gloomed.

"You could please them both at once," said Proculus.

"I wish you would tell me how!" And Balbinus shrugged his broad shoulders. "Hang him, I say! Yet I shouldn't mind catching his eye. For her I'd do anything, as you know."

"Do you really mean to say," demanded Proculus, "that you don't see for yourself what to do?"

"Not a bit I don't."

"Not with such an opportunity staring you in the face? When the gods have loaded the dice for you, and all you need is to make the throw?"

"If you see anything to do," said Balbinus, "you tell me, and I'll do it quick."

Proculus looked around. Several gangs of workmen were busy, but none near them. He stood up, walked to the rail of the stairway, and peered down it. Then he came back to his seat.

"Now listen to me," he said; "and don't interrupt me till I am done."

Balbinus listened, mouth and eyes open. When Proculus was done he objected.

"It won't work."

"Are you afraid?" asked his friend.

"Not a bit," said he. "It would be easy. But if they refused two hundred thousand sesterces before, how can I bribe them now?"

"Don't you see how different this is?" asked Proculus. "They have no dead panther to account for, only a natural failure to notice some rollers out of order, and you won't be dealing with the same set of men, anyhow; not trying to bribe men who have once shied. These will only have to invent a story to explain a perfectly usual occurrence. Did you never know of rollers jamming?"

"Often," said Balbinus.

"There you are!" cried Proculus; "and now let's go. It's getting hot here, and you'll be none too early at the palace by now."

"Your advice is good," said Balbinus; "I'll take it."

Therefore the moon that night, looking down into the Colosseum, saw a group of figures in the arena by the enclosing wall. One was a very big man with two attendants. The others were regular keepers of the amphitheater. They talked a long time, and there were many explanations and much assurance that there could be no mistake. A bag of coins changed hands.

Next morning, so early for holders of senatorial seats that they found the chairs all about their own still vacant, Balbinus and Proculus settled themselves into their places.

"One drawback about festival days," said Balbinus; "I always have to chain up my dog. I miss him, and he misses me. He hates to be chained up."

"I sympathize with him." And

Proculus half-shut his eyes against the dazzle of the sunlit sand, and snuffed joyously at the perfumed air. "I'd hate to be chained up to-day. But don't you think he'd interfere with our purpose?"

"We had best not think of our purpose," said Balbinus, "until the time comes to carry it out. I have never been nervous in my life, and I don't expect to be now, but I want to run no risks. Let's forget our little secret until the moment for action arrives. There's plenty else to think of."

"The greatest plenty," Proculus agreed. "And more for me than for you. What makes the sand sparkle so?"

"Notion of Commodus," snorted Balbinus. "His father saved so much money he's afraid he can't spend it fast enough. So he has gold-dust sprinkled over the sand. Fine bit of fool ostentation!"

"Wish he'd save the cost and spend it on Dacia," said Proculus earnestly.

"Can't you forget Dacia for one day?" Balbinus asked banteringly. "Isn't this enough to make you think there never was a Dacia?"

"Indeed it is," Proculus replied.

"Well, forget it then," his friend advised, "and enjoy yourself."

"I can't help that. It's almost as novel to me as if I had never seen it before."

"Then you ought to be able to answer a question I have heard debated. Does the Colosseum look bigger when full or when empty?"

Proculus ruminated, gazing about him. The arena had in it only a few sweepers, the imperial platform was untenanted save by the sentinels; most of the movable armchairs in the foremost rows were not yet occupied; but the second wider belt of stone seats devoted to the wealthy nobility of lower than senatorial dignity was already well filled; the third yet wider division of stone benches was crowded with gentry; the fourth steepest circle was overflowing with the populace; while behind them, on the uppermost level, was a packed jam of standing rabble.

"I don't know," he answered. "Yesterday it seemed enormous. To-day there is something choky about the crowd. Yet the unfailing variety of all that flickering, waving of fans and turning of faces and moving of hands and arms gives one a sensation of immensity, too."

"What strikes you most?" asked Balbinus.

"The flowers," said Proculus.

"Don't you have flowers in Dacia?"

"Dacia won't be forgotten," laughed Proculus. "Yes, we have flowers there, even some roses. But when we have games, the spectators just sit on the grass slopes or stand along the edge of the arena, like our ancestors of old. You don't see the wreaths as you do here; and there they are mostly made of strange wild flowers, not a bit homelike to see. These are uniformly roses; and such roses! there must be wagonloads of them. When the seats are all full, allowing a dozen roses to a wreath, there will be twelve thousand roses in this building."

"More," corrected Balbinus. "But hang the wreaths! I'm afraid mine will tilt over my eyes at the critical moment."

"Shall I pull it off your head as you rise?" asked Proculus.

"I'd thought of that," said Balbinus. "Better not. It might disconcert me. I'll risk its slipping."

"We agreed to keep off that subject," said Proculus.

"We did," Balbinus admitted. "But it will come back. Yet it's not worrying me any. I'm as cool as possible."

"You look it," said Proculus; "and that's more than most of the audience look. I think it will be a hot day."

"It's cool enough here, but the upper tiers look hot already."

"I should think they would be!" exclaimed Proculus, "piled against each other as they are. I never sat before where I could see the top rows opposite me. You senators get a fine effect here; able to see up under the awning, clear to the arcade and the awning-poles. You can't imagine what a difference it makes."

"I can," said Balbinus, "for I never

could see that much before. The sag of the awning at its inner edge on the farther side always cut off my view of everything above the top tier of seats."

"I thought it was all because of our location. What makes the difference?"

"It's the awning," Balbinus explained. "It's the lightest they ever put up, and it sags correspondingly less."

"What's it made of?" asked Proculus.

"Silk; pure silk. Commodus has started the fashion of full, complete silk clothing for men, and all the dandies are imitating him. Linen and wool for me, though, yet. But Commodus, not content with dressing in women's textures, must needs commit the extravagance of an entire silk awning."

"It's beautiful," Proculus cried enthusiastically. "But I should say it is too thin to do much good."

"It's hard to get a satisfactory awning," said Balbinus; "they have tried all sorts in my time. One thick enough to stop the sun-rays altogether is so heavy it sags till the inner edge cuts off the view of the upper tiers over the farther side of the arena; and besides it makes the place look gloomy. So does any awning all one color. Brown and gray are coolest, but very dingy. Blue and green make the people look ghastly and the women ugly; white and yellow make a glare no one can endure; and red makes the place look hot. This awning is about the best I ever saw. It's light and not too thin, the pattern is gay, and the red and yellow, blue and green make a pleasant variety of bright colors on the audience."

"Too much red, isn't there?"

"That's Commodus again. He likes red."

"Speaking of red," said Proculus, "what have you on under your toga?"

"Tunic, of course," said Balbinus promptly.

"But what color?" Proculus queried.

"Crimson."

"But why?" Proculus persisted.

"I might get scratched," said the strong man, "and I don't want to show it, if possible."

At this moment several senators, with their wives and guests, came to fill the chairs to right and left of them. Greetings, introductions of Proculus to the newcomers, and various chat occupied some little time. By and by Proculus came to a lull in his talk with his left-hand neighbor, and found Balbinus momentarily disengaged, and questioned him.

"Is Fonteia with the Vestals? I can't make her out."

Balbinus peered across the arena. The Vestals had just entered and were settling themselves in their chairs.

"That's Fonteia in lavender. She's between Causidiena, on her right with the gray hair, and Manlia; Gargilia is the one with the black hair on the left end."

"Fonteia is too young and too slender for lavender," said Proculus.

"That's what I tell her," said Balbinus. "I say lavender is for old, fat women. But she will wear it."

Just then the imperial cortège began to fill the dais, and the audience burst into the quick staccato three-bar song of greeting to the emperor, thundering it over and over until he was seated and held up his hand for silence.

At once the shows began. Proculus, watching with unsated eyes the succession of beast-fights, acrobatic feats, and killings of criminals by various beasts, was, even in his interested state, aware of the lack of enthusiasm in the audience. He was too far from the dais to make out the emperor's expression.

Commodus was hardly more than a great hulking, overgrown lad, with all a boy's impatience and petulance. Not much could be expected of him in the way of dignity. He sulked often, and at the smallest pretext. Yet Proculus perceived, or thought he perceived, a more than usually obvious posture of bored irritation, of disappointment with the progress of a very tame, usual, and uninteresting series of shows. He saw,

or imagined he saw, an emperor wearied with what he had seen over and over, and eager for some diversion, something new, something unusual.

Fonteia's face Proculus could not read where she sat. It was all one could do to identify a known figure in a known seat at that distance. Yet he reflected that she could not but see Balbinus, the biggest-bodied man in the senate, in the front row. As he looked on with a return of half-forgotten reminiscence, he realized that no one could see everything when so many things went on at once; that no one group in the arena, still less any one figure, caught the eyes of all the throng.

Yet when the splotched panther appeared from one of the beast inlets, it seemed to Proculus that all eyes followed her, as, ignoring everything in the arena, living and dead, she galloped in a straight line across the sand. His eyes he certainly kept on her till the coping cut off his view. Then he saw Balbinus slip the toga from his shoulders. Both of them sat well back, and strove to appear unaware of what their strained senses expected.

That the panther had sprung and had not fallen back they were apprised by a universal yell from all parts of the amphitheater from which she was visible by an alarmed shrinking back of the senators and their guests near them; by little screams from two ladies who had been looking over the coping, and who shrank back abruptly.

Proculus pressed himself against the back of his chair and over its left arm, to give Balbinus room. He heard in front of him a scratchy clawing; heard it even above the redoubling waves of excited yells that rang from all around the arena; heard it all the more when those yells subsided suddenly into a tense hush of expectation when the seventh roller failed to turn.

A paw clutched the coping; a splay paw with four translucent, horny claws, that slipped on the polished stone and caught on the interlaced leaves of the carven vine on it; a puffy paw, with dingy black hair between the claws.

Then beside it, and by no means close to it, another paw, white-haired and paler-clawed, hooked its talons into the carvings.

A head came up; a head with a black ear and a white ear, with irregular marblings of white and black, with two round-pupiled, yellow-gray eyes, one looking out of a black patch and one out of a white. It had a moist, black muzzle; and as it rose the lips curled, the mouth opened, and Proculus found himself trying to push back his chair as he recoiled from a jagged snarl. He was looking past incredibly white, unbelievably sharp teeth into an unforeseeable immensity of scarlet mouth and throat.

There was more all too audible scratching; and the head elevated itself on a black-and-white neck. Proculus did not see Balbinus move, but he did see a big, beefy, pink hand round that neck, the thumb on the gullet.

The spectators, who had first yelled in mere blind excitement, and then stilled in mere unconscious strained attention, saw the panther's head above the coping; saw the senators tumbling over each other to right and left; saw the two occupied chairs in front of her; saw the distracted arena-guards, some ineffectually rushing for the nearest exits, vainly trying to reach the podium before the animal cleared the coping; some vacillating on the sand below, eager to shoot the beast, and fearing to loose spear or arrow for fear of wounding one of the senators.

Then they saw a big, crimson-tuniced figure erect, its long arms stiff and straight out before it, the panther's throat vised inside its big hands, the beast's forelegs beating the air in front of her; her hind legs lashing wildly against the top roller and the bit of wall below the coping.

They followed breathlessly the gyrations and throes of the lithe body until it hung limp and motionless, straight down from the unaltering grip of those big hands. Then they stood up and howled, and stamped; yelling wave after wave of cheers till they were hoarse.

Balbinus stood motionless, the panther dangling against the coping, his tense arms streaked with the streams that gushed from a dozen gashes.

When the cheering died of itself, he straightened his arms again till the carcass hung clear of the wall, gave it a flirt to the right, and flung the flaccid, broken-necked carrion into the arena.

The wave of cheers that followed after he sat down made all that had gone before seem whisperings.

When the first lull came between the gusts of cheers, Commodus, standing up on the seat of his throne, his voice broken by excitement to a cracked falsetto, sent down the whole length of the arena, audible to every one, a shrill yell of

"Macte virtute esto Balbine."

The cheering rose again like a storm-wind. It was very pleasant to Balbinus. He sat bolt upright in his chair, his toga wrapped round him to the throat, his arms under it. He was staring across the Colosseum at a lavender-clad figure in the front row facing him.

THE IRON DUKE

TOURIST (at ancient rural hostelry, coming down to breakfast with a haggard, unrested appearance): "Last night, madam, you informed me that the great Duke of Wellington once stayed at this hotel. Is it a fact?"

Landlady: "It is, sir; a solemn fac'. He slept in the very room you occupied last night."

Tourist: "Was it just the same as it is now?"

Landlady: "Jest the werry same."

Tourist: "Same bed in it?"

Landlady: "The werry identical bed."

Tourist: "And the Duke of Wellington slept in it? He actually slept in it?"

Landlady: "Ain't that what I'm a-tellin' of yer? The Dook of Wellin'ton act'lly slep' in the werry bed what you 'ad last night."

Tourist: "Great Cæsar! No wonder they called him the Iron Duke!"

Willie

By Edward Marshall

Author of "The Man Who Did Not Commit Suicide," Etc.

The humorous debut, in a Western town, of a man who labored under the delusion that he was an arrant coward and was determined by hook or by crook to acquire what he felt he most lacked—a backbone

IT had been right busy day before, for two ranches had paid off an' turned their outfits loose in town. If you are any posted on the country, you know the sort of dim, religious stirabout that had characterized the evenin' hours an' them that follered until dawn. Things had kep' a-goin', to be frank, till they had plum run down with a loud whir.

We was a law-abidin' lot, of usual, but, somehow, th' day an' night before we had got kinked, an' quite a lot of statutes was lyin' round all fractured up an' busted. Th' town, for one reason or another—booze, bullets, jest exhaustion—was comatose, excep' for us, an' there was only six of us. We was th' six survivors, so, I s'pose, we was th' fittest. It's th' fittest that survives, they say, don't they?

Gen'ly th' games did not close down at all when paid-off men was nigh an' handy, but this noontime they was all closed. Th' gamblin' palaces—splendid rough board an' canvas structers—was shut up. You substitute an 'o' for th' first 'u' in that term, an' you'll know why most of 'em was so.

Us six had rose about th' time th' sun begun to pour down straight upon th' various spots that we had chose to get a wink of sleep in. Th' gents who had, when they retired, the forethought to retire beneath some roof or other, had not been so aroused. They was only us poor, mis'rable unfort'nates that was awake an' movin' some, as we felt capable.

Among th' six was half a dozen mornin'-after thirsts that worried us beyond belief. Unsatisfied they was, for that poor town was prone, supine, knocked out. 'Most all th' liquor had been drinked th' night before. Th' balance had been let to ooze away from kegs tapped carelesslike by rovin' bits of lead. What better evidence could be of drunkenness than that? Imagine a real man so intoxicated that he'd shoot a hole in a receptacle that held good liquor! Strange things th' human beast'll do when he gits fuddled.

Well, us six, prospectin' 'round about, came slap ag'inst that awful situation. There wa'n't a single drink available. My! It was fierce. Almost in tears we made our painful way a half a mile to where th' railroad had a platform, at which passengers, when there was any, lighted or got all aboard. We conjured up a strange belief that maybe we could work th' porter of some sleepin'-car or diner to dispense some booze—sech queer idees afflict a human bein's mind when he has passed through what we had went through. With this idee in our minds, we went down to th' station an' waited on th' long plank platform for th' one west-bound express.

But we didn't ask for railroad licker from no colored porter. Almost unconscious an' half-faintin' as we was, th' shock nigh killed us when a pink-an'-white tenderfoot climbed down off th' train an' left no energy among us

for to hold no conversations with no colored menials.

He was th' funniest little chap you ever see. It didn't take us thirty secon's to observe that he was a reg'lar comic-paper tenderfoot—a breed we hadn't none of us believed had ever re'lly grew.

They was a nigger loafer on th' platform—a chap whom citizens had tried to lynch down South, but failed to execute because he was too tough to kill. Th' worst men in th' foot-hills of th' Selkirk range had learned to cough three times before they spoke presumshus to that colored man an' brother, but th' pink-an'-white exudence from that sleepin'-car jest looked at him, mere casual, an' then snapped his fingers at him.

"Here, boy," says he, like that, as careless's if he hadn't stood a-peekin' through th' pearly portals while he did it, as we knew he did. "Here, boy," he says, all calm an' unconcerned, "you gather up that luggage, an' take it down to th' hotel."

Yes, that was what he called it—luggage. An' that was what he called that nigger—boy.

I struggled hard to hold my breath an' wisht I had a block and tackle for th' purpose, for it pulled, my breath did, for a second.

But did that nigger draw on him an' shoot him up all dead an' things? He *did* not! He ast him, humble like, to which hotel he was to take th' luggage.

"Why, you unpleasant, sassy feller," says th' trav'ler; "you know as well as I do that there ain't but one hotel. Th' train conductor told me so. You take it there, of co'se!"

That nigger was a real bad pusson. Once he was a member of th' U. S. A., but got fired out because he was too rough to mix with fightin' men. He was capable of expressin' his opinion of a feller critter—havin' traveled on th' Pullmans, served in Cuby, an' stoked upon a steamship goin' to th' world's remotest parts at divers times in his career—in English, Canuck French, hog-Latin, Spanish, Dutch, Choctaw, an' half a dozen dialec's of each. He had command of fourteen million cuss words, each more amazin' than th' one that went before or follered it. We looked to see him start to eat the pretty pink boy raw without waitin' for a finger-bowl or napkin, an' we wondered if we'd stand for it. You see, th' six of us might possibly have handled that there nigger, an' even if th' traveler was a little girly-girly rosy in his cheeks, th' fac' remained that he was white, if infantile. But did th' nig unlimmer his artil'ry an' begin to make assassinations? Not that any of us noticed, an' we all was watchin' clost. When that pink dude asserted that he was a "sassy feller," he wilted like a leaf o' lettuce in th' sun at Yuma, Arizona, which is known among th' wise as hell's stove-door, an' is th' hottest place on earth. He took one shiverin', deep breath, an' wilted like I say.

"Oh, yassah," he remarks, an' goes about his work of gatherin' up that truck into a neat an' pleasant heap, all speechlesslike, an' dazed. From time to time he murmurs: "Yassah, right away, suh."

Th' color-line ain't drawed along th' northern bound'ry. One man's as good's another, irrespective of his tint, until he proves he ain't. There wasn't, of a ordinary time, no humbleness at all about that nigger. He hadn't never bowed, not none, to th' superiority of whites since he had sojourned in our midst, so fur as we remembered; but now! Well, took him near a week to git his Ethyopyan breath back after that. Watchin' of th' attitudes he struck while workin' with that luggage, we half-expected for to hear th' softly Southern accents of that good ol' slave word, "massa," glide from his tremblin' lips. He was filled so full of meek subservience he swelled.

An' us? We stood an' looked, an' spit, an' gasped. Nothin' not at all like this had ever been projected on our screen before. We was jest afraid to say a word to it, for fear we'd find it too good to be true, an' see it fade away like cigareet smoke. It was because we was so numbed that th' newcomer was th' first to speak. He looked at me.

"I say," says he, all cheerful like an' unconcerned. "I like yer face, me man. Do you know anythin', by chance, about firearms?"

I did, a little, an' jest a minute previous had been considerin' th' proposition of inducin' him to dance while mine was goin' off. But my gun-arm now was paralyzed. It was *palsied.* I got some movement in my legs, though, by exercisin' will-power, 'n' steps away a pace or two to look at him. How my heart thumped! It was a new an' strange experience, an' made me feel all woozy. In a minute I had clutched my nerve an' dragged it, shrinkin', back, an' then I looked at him severe. I ain't a bragger, but it's true that that there look o' mine has made fresh gazaboos weak-kneed a lot o' times, for it's allus been a prophecy of trouble comin' right away by fast express. But did *his* knees wiggle any? Say, I looked him in th' eye, an' his calm glance begun to waver just th' way a two-inch plank would waver if 't was bolted solid to th' Rock of Gibraltar, an' then fastened, extry, with cement.

He wasn't sech a homely sight to look at, even if his hair *was* red an' curly. His skin was much like candy for good kids in colorin', as I have said, but he seemed to fill his coat up comf'table around th' shoulders, which means a lot more than complexion does.

"I like yer face, me man," he says ag'in.

I waked up from my trance a little after this remark, an' says with real deep feelin':

"Oh, thank Gawd fer that," I says. "I was near scaret to death for fear it wouldn't suit you."

Now, wouldn't you have thought that would 'a' stopped him? But it didn't. Didn't even make 'im pause.

"I do," he says, an' smiles, as if he knew that he was givin' pleasure to a child, an' liked to do it. "Re'lly, it is quite a honest-lookin' face. But you ain't tol' me if you are familiar with firearms."

That shows! I had intended, as I have explained, to draw on him an' make him furnish jest a little innocent amoosement for th' comp'ny, but I didn't. I didn't even motion toward my gun enough to call attention to th' place it hung, a bit behind my hip, which is th' most convenient place for me to park artillery. Some fellers like their batteries right on th' bony bulge. I don't. I carries mine a little 'round behind. Seems more convenient to me, somehow.

Th' boys had gathered 'round by this time, an' would have interrupted, likely, but they didn't have th' breath for two cuss words among 'em. He had extracted all their wind. They stood there, gaspin', same as I was. Bimeby I answers.

"No," says I, "I don't know not a thing about firearms. I ain't old enough to carry 'em. A feller's got to be sixteen or more before he totes a gun in these here parts. When I git a little older they'll let me have a nice toy-pistol an' some paper caps."

Now was th' time for Nick Ear—that's a feller there with us—to decide to enter in th' game—a thing he hadn't ought to done, by no means, for th' stranger an' myself was playin' jest two-handed. But Nick Ear is allus hurried. He speaks up, quite precipitous, an' asks th' stranger what he means. His language needed disinfection. It was full of germs, an' awful noxious ones at that. Havin' finished quite a preamble, he starts to say what re'lly was on his mind, an' got as far as:

"Stranger, I reckon that you think——"

"What I'm thinkin' of," replies th' stranger, interruptin', but polite, "is puncturin' your head an' puttin' of my lips to that there hole I make. I need a good long drink of water bad. That's what there is inside *your* skull—jest water. Brains there ain't, a tiny mite. But I won't take it from you, 'cause it's likely brackish. Now, be a real good child, an' do not interrupt your betters."

Nick Ear almost *fainted.* If he had drawed he knew we would have said good-by to him with forty-fives, because

it would have spoilt our sport to have that stranger ended premature. Th' stranger turns his blue eyes on me ag'in.

"Re'lly?" he remarks. "Ain't that too bad! I thought, maybe, you might know a pistol when you see one."

An' as he says it, that there little runt he looks at me with *pity* in his eyes. Why—darn him! An' then, thus havin' filled me up to overflowin' with hot shame an' things like that, so that I was re'lly scaret that I would bust out cryin' an' threaten to tell ma on him, he adds:

"I see now that you're nothin' but a babe," he says. "I hadn't made no plans to start up conversations with no members of th' infant class," he says, "but my left eye is weak, an' I mistook you for a real live man," he says. "How you did fool me! Quite tallish for your height, now, ain't you?"

Well, now! You've heerd folks tell of minutes when th' strain was sech it stretched 'em out like hours; of times when ev'rybody held their breaths till you could hear a pin drop? Now, I'm tellin' you that th' nex' minute was so quiet on that station platform that if any one had dropped a bit of thistledown it would have sounded, when it struck, like planets bustin' into pancake flour.

I didn't know jest *what* to do. I tried to move my hand around to my howitzer, but I tell you it wouldn't move. My wrist, jest like my intelleck, was on dead center. I stood an' gapped in painful wonder. If he'd come up an' slapped me on th' wrist, I'll bet I'd run a hunderd miles without a stop, an' then fell on my knees an' sobbed, an' begged him not to spank me *too* hard, 'cause I was saddle-sore. Ev'ry minute that I stood an' gapped at him, *he* stood, a-growin' easier, more calmer, an' lookin' colder at me, with just th' twitchin' of an unapprovin' frown—like what a well-bred king would wear when listenin' to fool explanations from a pris'ner, frowsy, up for stealin' from a child, an' weakened by th' mange.

"Maybe you could tell me," he says fin'ly, "where I could *find* a real, growed man."

That settled it. Th' cuss had roped me. He had me throwed. He had me hobbled. He had me branded on th' flank, with *"mine"* in great big letters, sore an' smokin'. I was broke to saddle an' to harness without no more endeavor on his part. I was ready—I was *hungry*—to eat out of his hand, an' drool because I loved my master so.

"Why," I says, with lots of plain humility that wasn't coniack a bit, "since you have spoke of it so frank, an' *since* you like my face, I'm goin' to be real bold an' tell you that *I'll* grow. I'll be a man myself, bimeby."

An' then that feller up an' smiled. Not a sarcaskit smile, but just a fine, free, masculinish grin. He held his han' out, an' I took it, anxious—like a man would take a han' that promised to assist him to climb upward where he wished to go.

"Glad you think so." Then he says to me, as calm as ever: "An' I'll bet that you're dead right. I thought as much or more than that when first I clapped my eyes on you. I thinks, thinks I, when I sees you: 'There is a chap—young *yet*—but goin' to mature right sudden when he gets himself within th' proper spear of inflooence. He'll be a hell of a fine feller when he *doos* git growed,' I tells myself," says he.

With that th' others got their breaths, an', Lord! Lord! Lord! they howled. They, too, with thoughts of joy ahead, had seen that pink-an'-white creation steppin' from th' train, but now they ceased to think of him as that from which th' joy would emanate, an' turned to me. My, how they all was pleased, amused, an' tickled when they turned to me!

It stopped, though, that loud laughter did, right sudden, for that saucer of pink peaches an' sweet cream turned to 'em, suddenlike, an' says, says he, right soft but penetratin', never losin' of his baby smile th' while:

"This gen'leman," he says, a-meanin' me, "is my close friend, an' we don't neither of us much admire to have th' vulgar rabble laughin' at th' other feller," he explains. "It would distress me much," he says, a-lookin' at th'

boards that made th' station platform, "to have to decorate them planks down there with paint from any veins an' arteries you chaps may have an' hold," he says, "but if I have to do it, why, it will be done; an' if you don't immejut cease to see th' joke on him, I'll have to do it."

It was about their turn to gap, an' they took full advantage of it. That dude was awful pale by now, but quiet men git pale, sometimes, when they are dang'rousest, an' they all reckoned that was just about his state o' mind just then. What smiles was left when he had ceased to look 'em over was of that kind that gits congealed upon th' faces of them men that wish to cease their merry gaiety but can't, because of sudden atmospheric changes. Nobody said no word, an', as I looked at that there kid an' noticed for th' first time th' outline of a cannon in his pocket, I says unto myself, says I:

"There's ice-cold death a-waitin' in that feller, for some reason, to be served out hot to any chap denyin' that I'm *it*. I don't know why it's there, but there it is."

There was one thing for me to do, an' only one, an' so I done it without lingerin' in thought. I steps right over to him, an' I joins him in th' game of starin' at them fellers. Queer it was! He hadn't been there on that platform ten short minutes, an' I had been th' one had shouted loudest for his discom*fit*ure, but here we was as brothers—almost twins!

"You understand," he says, a-lookin' at that crowd, "that I mean what I say, don't you?"

Wa'n't no one said they understood, but no one said they didn't, an' he let it go at that.

"An' now," he says, "I am a nice, sweet, juicy tenderfoot, an' you would like to eat me up a little, wouldn't you?" he says, an' turns again on Nick Ear so sharp that Nick darn' near fell backward off th' platform.

"I'd rather," answers Nick Ear, "if it's jest th' same to you, that some th' other boys would take th' first big bite of you," he says.

Th' baby boy smiles, softlike, an' stan's there, lookin' at him. Some of th' other boys was startin' in to laugh, when he whirls quick on one of 'em, an' says, almost a-whisperin':

"An' you?"

That feller's smile fell down his throat an' drownded. Almost choked him.

"Maybe you are tender," he replies, with effort, swallerin' twicet; "but I don't wish to be th' one to feel an' see."

"All right," says Baby Boy to him, an' looks around upon th' crowd. "If there is any one here present who *does* wish to investigate, I'd like to have him now step forward, or forever after hold his peace," he says, or words that meant like that.

There wasn't any takers. Maybe this was due to my new brother Willie's eyes, an' maybe it was due to me. I ain't a-makin' useless guesses. I would 'a' shot, all right, though, if any one had said much more than "Boo!" to him, for I was jest that captured up an' corralled by his gentlemanly ways.

"Well," he remarks, when he had waited quite some time for answers, an' heard nothin' but still silence, "le's go an' have a drink, then."

"Ain't none buyable in town," says Nick Ear, as much to see if he *could* speak as to convey th' information. "We had some little sport here, yester evenin', an' th' town has swooned."

"You mustn't conterdick me," says th' boy, not quite severe, but with a geenyality that had a pretty stiff backbone. "I never asks a man to have a drink where licker ain't to be obtained. Since I got off th' train there's quite a lot of drinkables in town, for I have freighted in some sev'ral ounces of th' real, real stuff." He pointed to that leather luggage that th' sleepin'-car officials an' our humbled Ethyopyan had had to work so hard to jettison an' stack. "I'd like to have you gen'lemen," he says, "come 'long o' me an'— an'——"

"Come with you an' your brother," I remarks, and steps beside him, grinnin' happily an' *proud!*

He laughs outright—th' kind of laugh that does you good.

"Come with me an' my brother," he goes on, "an' tell me what you think about its quality. Perhaps you won't conceive it's good enough to drink, an' then ag'in—why, some of ye may like it."

Well, there wa'n't a man there in that bunch that didn't want to carry some o' that there luggage. Th' nigger almost had to fight to git a load.

We went down to th' Waldorf, th' least worst of th' three hotels that stood, with low, peaked roofs, not hid, but unabashed behind square-cornered, high false fronts on Main Street, an' let 'im in ourselfs, by kickin' down th' door. Th' owner was all comatose with redeye, an' bandaged like a king of Egypt buried in a pyramid. We took our freight into th' billiard-room, an' set th' billiard-table up in front among th' faro-layouts. It give more elbow-room about th' bed we took from underneath th' owner, an' elbow-room we was determined that our friend should have.

An' then he opened up one of them leather trunks of hisn. Oh, let me draw a veil! There hadn't been such booze as that in that there town since first th' sunrise pinked th' towerin', snowy summits of th' distant Rockies; no, nor yet before that time an' circumstance. It was liquid peace, content, an' all home comforts goin' down your throat to soak into your soul, an' make you feel that life was full yard width, an'—*silk!*

After that first gug-gug-gug-gug-gurgle, why, th' boys was ready to lay down an' die for him, not more because he owned that booze, an' said that more was comin' by a later train, than just because they honored an' respected him. You *had* to feel like dyin' when th' need come for that feller. He ast each one of us our names, an' shook han's with us cordial, sayin' that a long an' lastin' friendship would be certain to result from that there pleasant greetin' we had met him with. When he shook with me, he looked into my eye so frank an' decent, open-souled, an' brotherlike that I was his—yea, even more than formerly, which was impossible. Bimeby some one asts his name.

"Oh, I forgot," he says, an' seemed to be embarrassed 'cause he hadn't been polite enough to tell us it before. "Me?" he says. "Why, I am little Willie."

Th' fellers laughed, uneasy, for that was what some of th' group had murmured, disrespectful, when he got off th' train, but he would not acknowledge any other. We knowed it was an alyass, because there wa'n't no W in th' initials on his traps, th' nearest to it bein' U, which come before S. A., down in a second line of highrollglyphicks painted bold an' black on every piece.

Well, after all th' rest had gone an' left us two there in th' Waldorf bridle-chamber—so called because horse-trappin's hung upon its walls an' things, th' same all smuggled goods from Canada—he says to me, says he:

"Now *have* you got a pistol?"

I put my hand on it, an' smiled.

"What shall I do with it?" I asks. "Its life an' work is yours, dear Willie—they is yours."

He smiled, it havin' become plain that he was not averse to playful langwidge.

"Can you shoot much of any with it?"

"Quite some," I answers, modest.

"How near," says he, "could you approach my ear with bullets without hittin' of it?" he inquires.

"Why don't you ask how fur off I can miss, still blowin' of your brains out?" I suggests.

He laughs.

"You ain't quite on," he says. "What I would like to have you do is shoot at me a while."

I felt like cryin' out that I was dreamin', an' desired to wake.

"Why," says I; "now, why——" but couldn't git no further with my conversation.

"I'll tell you all about it," he remarks, an' that is some relief. I takes another drink.

"You see," says he, "I am a coward."

"Yes," says I, "I've noticed that.

You stacked up at th' station against us crowd of yaps, just like a coward allus does. Th' trouble is that you are so bad scaret it dazes you, an' you don't know how you act. You get so rattled through your fear that you mistake, an' have appearance of a nervy little cuss."

"I am a dad-blimmed coward," he insists, thus usin' nearest to a cuss word that I ever heerd him use.

"You are entitled to another guess," I says.

"I ain't," says he. "I got it right first time." An' he speaks mournful-like. "How much you makin' by th' month?"

I told him.

"I'll give you ten more dollars," he asserts; "an' ten more piled on top o' that. Shake han's."

I does. Then he reaches into some recess there in his clo'es, an' passes out some dough.

"Now," he remarks, "you're hired, an' hired men do what they are told to do."

I nods, emphatic.

"Well, then," he says, resumin', "you come ou'doors to some secluded spot an' shoot at me."

"I won't!" says I.

"I'll fire you, then!" he says, real stern.

"All right, I will," says I, a-weakenin', for, somehow, I jest couldn't bear to part from him now we was hooked to travel double.

"Come on," says he. "You git some ponies an' come on."

I gits a couple hawses, an' we rides away, me in a daze that makes th' landscape look all crinkly as I gazed at it, an' tried to make my mind up whether he was crazy or just had somethin' up his sleeve, mysteryous. I looks at him, though, an' I says to me, I says:

"You betcher life that he ain't crazy; no, he's *awful* sane."

"Is this a satisfact'ry spot?" he asks, at last, when we had got into a coulée, where there wa'n't no one, nor no one ever had been or would be, because of primal desolation.

"We can't get any lonesomer than this," I says.

He gets down from his hawse an' hobbles it, an' stands, back to me.

"Begin, then!" he commands.

"Begin at what?" I asts.

"Begin a-shootin' at me," he responds. "An' if you miss an' hit, why, that's all right. I'd lots prefer to be all wownded up or dead than be all cowardly like what I am," he says. "Now shoot," he says; "an' don't you miss by more'n an inch."

"I won't," I says. "My hand is shaky from las' night, an', like enough, I'll kill ye if I try to not to."

"That makes it ever so much better," he declares; "for then th' strain on me will be quite real. You shoot!"

Well, what you goin' to do with such a man as that? I shot, but I was re'lly scaret I'd hit him, for sure, my han' *did* shake.

"Oh, closer!" he exclaims, when all six chambers had been emptied, an' I paused to load. "Three of them projectiles went so far away I couldn't even hear 'em whistle. Make 'em sing closet in my ear, an' if I wince perceptible, you make a note of it."

I begun to get a sore-eyed inklin' of what th' chap was up to, an' my hand begun to steady. I gives him another half a dozen, puttin' of 'em re'lly closet. One nicked his ear—th' last one—makin' blood fly.

He turned around, and come to me a-smilin'.

"That's right!" says he, real happy-like. "That's shootin' closet, th' way I want you should. Now, did I wince?"

"Not none," I says. "You stood there stiff, like a dead rabbit froze in zero weather."

Enthoosiasm lit his face.

"By George! Did I?" he asks, all pleased. "I'm glad." But then he lost his happiness at thought of somethin'. "But it is just as cowardly to stan' an' stiffen up like that with apperhension as't would be to run! I'll try to stan' at ease," says he, "with muscles soft an' comf'table. You try ag'in—an' don't mind if you hit me, not a mite."

Well, he done better that time, but I had got some confidence, so's 't I could

watch him closet, an' I still see some signs of stiffenin'.

"Maybe it will wear of," he says sadly, when I tells him of it.

Then he stops an' thinks for quite a spell, an' almost shivers as he contemplates. He braces up, right soon, an' bares his left forearm, though, an' I could see at once that somethin' bad had happened to it. It looked all whitey-blue like. He holds it out toward me.

"You make a half-a-dozen feints or so," he says, "so as to worry me, an' then, when I am not expectin' it, you hit it good an' hard," he says. "But don't you strike *too* hard," he says, "for that would break it once ag'in, an' spoil th' fun. It ain't entirely healed up yet, from bein' broke two months ago."

It made th' cold chills canter up an' down my back.

"I ain't no Spanish inkewsition," I remarks. "I ain't a-goin' to do it."

"All right," says he, "you're fired. I'll hire some feller that's got nerve."

Well, what you—I hit it.

Lord, how white he turned! But, say—he never flinched, nor jerked it back, nor nothin'.

"Hit it ag'in," he says, although his lips were pressed all tight together from th' pain, his face had all gone gray, an' he was swayin' on his pins. "I know, now, how it's goin' to hurt, an' maybe I will flinch this time. You hit it once ag'in, an' see."

I did, but, my! I didn't have th' nerve, myself, to hit it hard. I felt as if it would hurt *me*. 'Twas hard enough, though, for he turned, an' when he looked at me I hollered, right out loud. His face was white as chalk, his eyes was glazin' up, an' from his mouth there dripped a little stream of blood, where he had bit his lips. A minute after he was took all sick, an' I sot there an' held his head upon my knee, when that had passed, till he got stren'th to stand ag'in. He hadn't had control of tongue enough, since that there whack, to speak a word, but finally he did.

"Did I wince *much?*" he says, real wistfullike an' anxious.

"You didn't wince a mite!" I says, indignant at him for suggestin' that he had.

"That's—good," says he, an' shets his eyes.

I got some water in my hat an' brought him to.

"We'll do this ev'ry day," he says, as we rides back to town.

"Not much, we won't!" I says.

"Then I'll discharge you!" he remarks, real fretful.

Well, we did it. We kep' it up for two long weeks, th' whole town wonderin' what us two was goin' off for ev'ry day, sometimes to one place, then another—allus somewhere where I didn't think we would be follered.

Willie was generous with money, but not *silly* with it, like *I* allus had been when I had it, an' got mighty pop'lar. He never touched a card, nor never drunk too much. He didn't seem quite crazy—bein' saner'n hell on most things—an' I couldn't make him out. All I was certain of, as days passed, was that if he was loco, then I wished to spend my life in a asylum herdin' with a lot of just such lunatics. "Brother" he allus called me, an' I called him "brother," too. Th' town, faceeshus, spoke of us collective as th' twins.

He had me try all sorts of things—shoot close by his ear when he was fast asleep; pinch that sore arm when he was least expectin' it; jump, yellin', at him in th' dark, an' firing off my ord'nance; an' suchlike funny, funny things like that. At first it told plain on his health, but presently it got so that I couldn't make him wince, or dodge, or anythin'. He was as stoic as an Injun when he sticks deer sinews underneath the muscles of his back, an' swings from a high pole by 'em, just so's to show he ain't afraid of pain. I've seem 'em do it. Willie made me think of 'em.

He got so calm in case of unexpected things it was uncanny. 'Twa'n't just when we'd fixed a test to try him. A crazy steer come for him on th' rampage, with his horns full three feet long, an' sharp as spears, his eyes all bloodied up with mad, an' snortin' like a freight-

train on up-grade. I'd cut an' run myself for that, for I have seen more'n one good feller go that way. but Willie didn't. He heared th' rush of hoofs behind him, turned like lightnin', but not nervouslike; side-stepped with a quick move, an' *spit* at that there steer as he went by.

"Now, what's this all about?" I says to him one day, when I had been experimentin' with him. Twicet I had wownded him a little, through his everlastin' claimin' that I didn't shoot near enough.

"Well, brother," he remarks, "I'll tell you. You see, I uset to be a second loot'nant in th' army in th' Phil'pines. I made a pretty fair good record, till one night I got all panic-struck, an' run till I woke up. There wasn't nothin' done to me to punish me, 'cause *when* I knew what was a-happenin', I turned to face th' music, like I ought to have done first, an' found that nothin' re'lly was occurrin'. Just a little volley fired at us at night, you know, an' mostly into my own shelter tent. But I was plum disgusted, seein' that I was a coward, which I hadn't knowed before that minute. Back at home there was a girl that I had planned to marry, an' I thinks, thinks I, that she had better hear about that episode before she ties to me. It seems to me that it ain't fair to let her get all married up to me *without* a-knowin' of it. Thus she makes th' second person that I tells."

"Who was th' first?" I asks.

"Th' C. O.," says Willie. "*'Course,* I goes to *him* an' tells."

"What's C. O.?" I inquires.

"Commandin' off'cer," answers Willie. "I goes to him an' asks him for court-martial for my cowardice. *That* I *has* to do, for no one but myself has knowed about it, an' to keep it quiet wouldn't be just hon'able."

"What does he remark?" I asts, a-realizin' that I'd never understood what honor was before.

"He laughs," says Willie; "an' he says that he run, too, once on a time."

"Nice feller, that C. O.," says I, an' meant it.

"Yes; wasn't he?" says Willie.

"What does th' girl say?" I inquires.

Now Willie winces.

"She—she breaks it off," says Willie, slow an' painful.

"Good riddance, then, for you!" I says, indignant.

Lord! You ought to see him, then! He makes for me like wildcats. If it hadn't been for his sore arm he would 'a' licked me, for us chaps know mighty little about fist work when compared to guys like him, who've studied in them colleges where there is two courses—classical, with boxin', an' academic, which is different, because it also teaches ju-jutsu.

Finally he calmed, though.

"You didn't mean to be insultin' to her," he remarks. "It's just because you wasn't raised a gentleman."

Think of any one with a sore arm a-tellin' that to me! If any one but Willie had have said it, I'd 'a' had him skinned an' fried for dinner, or perished in th' preparation of th' meal; but by this time—why, Willie he can call me hawss-thiefs an' not break my friendship for him; no, nor even chip its fine, enameled surface.

"Now, what is your opinion?" he inquires. "Would you, at present, since I've practised up, consider me a dad-blimmed coward?"

"Not when I was sober," I replies. "I says strange things sometimes when I am fuddled up with booze."

"Thanks!" says he, an' shakes my hand, usin' his left on it, because his exercises in defendin' her has made his right wrist swell.

We pauses in our conversation for quite a little spell just then, because I'm thinkin' about Willie, an' he, I reckon, is considerin' th' girl, for he looks excessive saddened.

"What did you do all this for?" I inquires, at last.

"I wished to satisfy myself," says he. "I wished to see if, maybe, I couldn't cultivate th' brav'ry that I lacked."

"What have you made your mind up to about that subjick?" I inquires.

"My body is a coward," he replies, "but I ain't what you re'lly call a coward in my mind."

"No," I replies. "I shouldn't say you was—exac'ly."

More silence.

"What you goin' to do about th' girl?" I asts.

"Why, nothin'!" he exclaims, surprised that I should ast th' question.

"Humph!" I comments, eloquent.

Then there come a lot more silence.

"You see my body *is* a coward," he says, later.

"Not!" says I. "Your body is as right as any body I have ever saw."

"I'm glad you think so," he replies, "but you don't know just how it all goose-fleshes up when I stand with my back to you a-knowin' that you're goin' to shoot at me. I'm awful glad you hit me in th' ear that day! I didn't dodge *much,* did I?"

"*I* didn't notice any dodgin'," I replies. "Why don't you write to her an' say you *ain't* a coward?"

"'Cause I *am* a coward!" he responds.

"How'd you hurt your arm?" I asks, quite sudden, thinkin' of it. I had meant to ask for days.

"Oh——" says he, an' stops.

"Out with it!" I insists, for me an' Willie have got right familiar with each other, havin' got that kind of fondness that men gits.

"Well," he says at last, "I had to hit her brother."

"*Hit her brother!*" I exclaims.

"Yes. He knew about it all, an' said she was a fool. 'Course I wouldn't let no man say things like that of her. I had to hit him—certainly I had to hit him; an'—well, he's quite a little bigger'n I am."

"Must have hit him hard," I says, "to do that to your wrist."

"Of *course* I hit him hard," says Willie. "Hadn't he spoke ill of her?"

"My Gawd!" says I, "you've got me all woozed up;" an' went away to think it out alone, back in th' coulée.

Willie went, nex' day, bein' just on furlough, for his resignation from th' army wa'n't accepted. Didn't know that when he come, an' *cried* when he received his colonel's letter. Th' old man told him to come back as soon as possible, endeavorin' not to be a ass no more, an' git his first lieutenant's straps.

Now, don't you see how I am up agin' it? Never was so worried in my life before. I've got that girl's address. He started once to write a letter to her, an' addressed th' envelope, but then he tore th' letter up, an' didn't send it. I found that envelope there in th' Waldorf after he had gone. Of course I've got to write to her, for Willie loves her—sure!—and any girl that Willie loves must be all right. She's just too young an' foolish to be quite right in her head, that's all; but she'll get over that. I sure have got to write to her, but how'll I begin th' letter? Had I ought to say "Dear Madam," or "Dear Miss"?

THE SPINNERS

THE spider-web gown may soon be a reality, for the threads of thousands of spiders are being carefully gathered, unwound, and woven into shimmering silken fabrics.

On the island of Madagascar this odd industry is carried on under the direct management of the governor, who has been appointed by the French authorities manager of what is perhaps the strangest factory in the world.

Here spiders toil day and night, and die from overwork and from ignorance on the part of the attendants. Therein lies the chief difficulty. The spider seems perfectly willing to spin out in the mango groves of his native land, but it grows sulky when transplanted to the specially prepared cells in the silk-spinning factory of Madagascar.

Zollenstein

By W. B. M. Ferguson

Author of "Garrison's Finish," "Strange Cases of a Medical Free-lance," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Mortimer, a young Englishman, ex-soldier and adventurer, quarrels with Colonel Gratz in a West End club and strikes him so viciously that one of Mortimer's companions, Lieutenant Von Lindowe, bending over the fallen man, pronounces him dead and urges Mortimer to fly to the Continent, offering to assist him in procuring a captaincy in the Blues, the crack light-cavalry regiment in Zollenstein. Mortimer accepts the offer and goes to Zollenstein. He has first an encounter with Captain Kienert, then with the Princess Zenia. He is about to give the princess certain information which he has heard from her uncle Boris von Hohenstauffen, when he is struck unconscious. He awakes in a room in which Boris and Kienert are holding council. Kienert leaves and Prince Hugo enters—brother of the Princess Zenia, a witless young fellow who has just returned from England. Boris proceeds to make the youngster drunk, and this accomplished, Mortimer grapples with Boris, binds and gags him, and changes clothes with the stupefied prince. Mortimer escapes, and has a delightful encounter with the princess who takes him for her brother Hugo. Later the real Prince Hugo turns up and there is a quarrel, in which Mortimer receives a saber cut that renders him unconscious. He is taken to Heimruh, where Uncle Boris, addressing him as Viscount Greystone, makes him welcome as his guest.

CHAPTER XII.

AGAIN I MEET PRINCE HUGO.

I BREAKFASTED with Uncle Boris the following morning. It is wonderful what a niche in the peerage will do for one; what an effect it has on one's associates. Boris was charming, playing the host with a courtesy and ceremony I did not think he owned. My slightest wish was anticipated. To such an extent, in fact, that it came as a shock.

"For," said Boris as we sipped our coffee, "I have taken the liberty, Greystone, of impressing you into a week's stay at Heimruh. Now, don't offer objections, please. This might as well be your headquarters. I think it will offer as many inducements as the 'Toison d'Or.' Besides, your luggage is already here. I sent over for it early this morning."

It was a very touching consideration, and I tried to appear cognizant of the courtesy. If possible, I was getting into deeper waters. If I were not laid by the heels for false representations, the enraged Greystone would have me up for appropriating his baggage. But those were minor crimes compared to what I had accomplished. And truly this latest development had been no fault of mine.

The only thing left for me to do was to pretend to acquiesce and take French leave the first time opportunity afforded. And, as I had before determined, I would return to England and face the charge of manslaughter or murder, the dodging of which had been the initial cause of all my troubles. I would leave Zollenstein and her intrigue, bearing away with me but one thing I cared to treasure—the memory of the Princess Zenia. Here Boris interrupted my musings.

"Of course you will visit Schillingsberg, Greystone. And, by the way, young Hugo must still be under the impression that you are the paid hireling

This story began in the June issue. The back numbers can be obtained from any newsdealer. Price fifteen cents each.

of the chancellor. In certain particulars, he is a headstrong boy, and I hope when he discovers your true identity he will not be so foolish as to demand satisfaction."

"You mean for impersonating him?" I asked slowly.

Boris nodded. "Captain Kienert has told me about last night's unfortunate fracas."

"Well," I said resignedly, "if he chooses to regard my conduct as an affront to his august personage, and to his sister, her highness, it is but fair to make every reparation in my power."

"Every reparation compatible with honor," said Boris.

Here the uniformed attendant entered with the information that Prince Hugo, of Saxonia, was in the anteroom, and begged an immediate audience with his uncle.

Boris rose with a resigned sigh. "Just as I said, Greystone. Undoubtedly he wishes my help in running down the villain who has so irretrievably insulted his house."

"I am at his disposal," said I.

"He must be reasonable," returned Boris testily. "When he understands the circumstances—that impersonating him was your only means of escape."

"He might suggest that I could have declared my true identity," I ventured wickedly.

"True," said Boris, with a frown. "But when he learns that you intend suing for his sister's hand—but he *must* know your identity," he broke off, with a perplexed laugh. "Surely my niece recognized you."

"No," I said hastily, and with perfect truth. "She did not know I was Greystone. I was dressed as her brother, you see, and it was dark, and a year had passed since we last saw each other—those old Paris days."

"So," ejaculated mine host. "Then I will explain to the princeling. Damn! I'm not going to have two of my friends murdering each other."

And so he left on his errand of pacification. I could not but smile at his perturbation. Truly it was cruel of fate to set two of his most powerful allies against each other. I was satisfied that he would exert all his diplomacy to avert a conflict. And I did not care to fight with the Princess Zenia's brother.

But the peace conference must not have been very successful, for in an incredibly short time Boris returned, his face very red.

"The boy insists upon meeting you, Greystone. I was foolish to acquaint him with the fact of your being my guest. I thought he had some sense. He won't leave the castle until he meets you. Seeing that you are his equal, not an adventurer, as he thought, he demands the right to a meeting——"

He was cut short by the door being flung open. It was young Hugo himself. All trace of last night's debauch had vanished. His slim, boyish figure looked remarkably well in its natty hussar uniform. He bowed quietly to Boris, and then to me.

"Viscount Greystone, I believe?"

I rose without answering.

"I have heard of your record," continued the princeling, without any preamble, "and, from uncle, of the pretensions you presume to——"

"Hugo," said Boris sharply, "you forget the viscount is my guest——"

"I forget nothing," shrilled the boy, his youthful mask of self-control slipping from him. He clenched his hands, eyes snapping. "How dare you presume to pay court to my sister?"

"Since when has my nephew turned dictator, saint?" asked Boris, dangerously polite.

"I'm not a saint. I never claimed to be one," cried the boy hotly; and he ran on: "But, damn it, it's one thing to be bad yourself, and another to insult ladies with your presence. Whatever my crimes, they don't entitle rakes to pay court to my sister. I speak for my sister as well as for my entire family, Viscount Greystone, when I say I beg you to understand that your acquaintance is not desired. You will favor me by bearing that in mind."

I bowed again.

"By whose authority do you take upon yourself such a position, may I

ask?" said Boris, purring like a cat. It was plain that if he must lose one ally, Boris preferred that it should be the princeling rather than the powerful Viscount Greystone, who, it was possible, could engage the might of Great Britain with which to offset any aggrandization of Germany, should the latter empire interfere in the event of any internal dissension.

"By the right of a brother," replied young Hugo. "And do I understand that knowing the Viscount Greystone for what he is you support his suit——"

"Pouf! You talk like a yearling," sneered Boris. "We are men, let us hope, not young swaddling-clothes."

For a moment Hugo did not reply. I surmised that his sister had given him the same advice she had unwittingly given me. Certainly her influence, short as it must have been, was decidedly apparent in his bearing. I was glad that a difference had arisen between him and his pseudo uncle; that his animosity toward myself had not taken a more militant form.

But the prince's next words speedily undeceived me regarding this. He had by no means finished with me.

"And now, Viscount Greystone," he said formally, "you will give me satisfaction for your insults of last night. They admit of no apology. The meeting can be arranged here and now."

"I appreciate and decline the honor," said I, with a bow. Boris was eying us, chin in hand.

"I insist," said young Hugo, standing very erect. It was his first affair, no doubt, and he was punctiliously following the code.

"And," said I, "again I decline," and once more I bowed.

I saw the tempest of his passion sweep to the boy's face. It wiped out all trace of weakness.

"Am I to understand that you add the stigma of arrant cowardice to your other accomplishments?" said he, with a sneer. His whole attitude was more than I had taken from any man.

"You are at perfect liberty to understand anything you please," said I shortly, and I turned on my heel.

I heard quick footsteps behind me, and a subdued warning from Uncle Boris. I turned. Prince Hugo's hand caught me full across the face, and before I could hope to parry he had struck again.

"*Now* will you fight?" he panted, with quivering lips.

"With all the pleasure in the world," said I. "And God keep me from murder!" Here was I bearing another man's name—but I was not fighting for that name. I was backing my conduct of the previous night. God knows I did not wish to fight the Princess Zenia's brother, but I needs must.

It was speedily arranged that we meet on the handball court of Heimruh. Boris, true to his previous statement—"Every reparation compatible with honor"—offered his services as my second without comment. I declined. "I think it is more fit that you second your relative," said I, though well aware that no blood existed between them.

"As you wish," said he, with a bow. "I will have Sous-Lieutenant Meurdon of the Chasseurs act for you."

Though young Hugo had forced the fight, I, by right of being struck, had been the challenger, and therefore the choice of weapons lay with him. I was glad when he decided upon rapiers, for the affair was *"à l'outrance,"* and there was more opportunity of disabling my opponent without asking his life if swords were used.

Now, it is a fact well known to fencers, paradoxical as it may seem, that the veriest tyro makes the most dangerous opponent. For he owes no allegiance to any school. His very ignorance is his safeguard. He does not do the expected. As our blades crossed and I felt out my adversary, I realized that his knowledge of the weapon was practically nil. But he owned a flexible wrist and the utmost activity.

Moreover, the boy was in deadly earnest, and pressed me hard. What with parrying his unscientific thrusts, endeavoring to fathom his next eccentric attack, while keeping my own

weapon from reaching a vital spot, I had an exceedingly busy time of it. And my ankle had by no means recovered from the nasty twist it had suffered the previous night.

I think that at last Hugo understood that I was playing with him. He snapped his lips and came in with infinitely less caution than usual. I knew that disarming him would be of small use, for he would but insist upon continuing. So I let him disport himself at pleasure. The only thing was to tire him out; let him so thoroughly exhaust himself that he would have no stomach for further exertion.

My plan would have succeeded, for he was beginning to blow and pant, and I saw the sweat on his face, had fate not willed it otherwise. I had just parried a furious thrust in tierce, answering with a ripost outside the guard. It was merely meant for a warning, but, as I was extended for the lunge, my unfortunate ankle abruptly twisted.

I pitched forward, my blade was deflected, and there was Prince Hugo lying on the handball court, with an ever widening smear of blood sweeping through the white of his shirt.

I was the first to reach him. In a trice I had stanched the bleeding. We carried him, unconscious, into the castle. The attendant doctor declared the wound was dangerous, and would necessitate the utmost care. Accidental though it had been, forced to the issue as I was, it was a brutal piece of work; and, as I watched the ghastly face of the boy, strangely like that of the Princess Zenia, I hated myself to the full extent of the law.

Uncle Boris accepted the situation with philosophy. "He would fight," said he, shrugging his shoulders. "It's his own fault."

"You'll have all Saxonia here when the tale goes out," said I moodily, as a new phase of the situation occurred to me.

"And you and I bid fair to face an exceedingly pleasant time, eh?" added Boris thoughtfully. "I have considered that. The Princess Zenia owns a temper, I assure you. I can imagine her actions when she learns the truth. I am an accessory before the fact." He frowned, eying me musingly. "Taken all in all, Greystone," he finished, "how about keeping the affair from my niece until Prince Hugo has recovered? Believe me, it would be the wisest course. The boy cannot be moved in any event, and two or three weeks will see him as well as ever."

"And in the meantime?" I asked dryly. "He cannot very well disappear for that length of time."

"Why not?" asked Boris. "Why could he not be away on some royal escapade? I'll wager he's inclined that way. You may be sure he has said nothing about coming to Heimruh. In the first place, he did not expect to meet you on the field of honor. And, at all events, he would keep my niece's name out of the affair."

Now, of course, I was not particularly anxious for the princess to learn of my encounter with her brother. True, it would be set to the account of Greystone, but it was only a matter of time before she must learn the truth; and what garbled form it might take I did not know. There was a certain irony in thinking thus. As if it mattered a curse how I came to fight Prince Hugo! In the Princess Zenia's eyes I was a thing beyond redemption. But yet I owned that wish.

I was silent, pondering Boris' words. Certainly it would be the easiest way. Then, as I watched my suave little host, other thoughts came. I knew that Zenia was utterly averse to her brother staying at Heimruh.

From the chancellor she had received some inkling of the spuriousness of Boris' claims. She mistrusted his influence over her brother. If I fell in with his specious arguments I would be abetting him. During the long weeks of convalescence, would Boris not again regain his ascendency over the princeling? Would he not firmly rivet the shackles already forged? Failing this, in the event of the boy's refusing his allegiance, who knew what might happen in stern, dark Heimruh?

The more I thought the more I mistrusted Boris. God knows I had sufficient cause. This, together with the knowledge that I was fouling Greystone's already cloudy name, coupled with my desire to win clear of this hotbed of deceit, caused me to form a resolution. I would endeavor to dupe Uncle Boris; make some pretext of leaving Heimruh, go straight to Schillingsberg, and confess everything—everything—all my share in the Zollenstein mud-puddle; confess all to the Princess Zenia. I would take whatever punishment was due me. Then I would win away to England—England and the jail.

Even though the future was exceeding black, I felt almost light-hearted. No matter how unenviable my meeting with her royal highness, I would, at least, see her once again. And criminal though I was, I would not be standing in another man's shoes. I would face her as myself—John Mortimer; sometime soldier and fool errant.

"Well?" said Boris, somewhat impatient at my long silence. "Of course you agree with me?"

"Of course," said I. "I was thinking of other things. I thought we had already decided on that."

"It was necessary to have your collaboration," he laughed, at his ease. "Do you know, Greystone, I think we will be very good friends? Very good, indeed. You are fashioned after my own heart."

I was thinking how I might safely leave Heimruh, when his next words cried my effort needless.

"I am going to the castle to interview the chancellor regarding certain matters—for instance, my coronation. Would you care to accompany me?"

"Yes. As far as the 'Toison d'Or,'" said I, not greatly desirous of exchanging the frying-pan for the fire. "There are certain cables I expect."

"Very good." And he rose and yawned. "Pray, your business finished, repair to the castle. I will take over Zollenstein's political machinery very shortly. Command me in any occasion you may have."

I thanked him. Despite his bold assumption, I felt that he was not quite certain that his title to the throne was unimpaired. He had had a healthy respect for the wily iron chancellor. He feared while he hated. Naturally, if the powerful Viscount Greystone was arrayed on the Hohenstauffen side, might would make right, or go a long way toward it. Hence his courteous desire to see me at the castle. I was reluctant to leave Prince Hugo, but I needs must if I was to win him security from any possible treachery; and so Boris, Captain Kienert, half a dozen troopers, and I set out for Zollenstein. I had begun another day's strange adventure.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE DESERTED MILL.

I said adieu to Boris and his escort in the Rue Garde, and repaired at once to the "Toison d'Or," inwardly thankful that I had succeeded so well thus far. Now, once at the inn, I resolved to face Greystone, and acquaint him with my use of his name. Before night fell, I bravely determined all my crimes would stand confessed. Also, the inn could furnish me with my baggage, not of much value, it is true, except for the paltry silver ring I have mentioned before.

As I rode up to the door, the sight of the little hostelry brought up in vivid coloring the events of yesterday. Surely incident never before had so outcrowded time. It seemed months since I had first seen the mullioned windows and snowy door-step.

Mine host, Johann Lesser, he of the mysterious eyesight, ran out to greet me as I dismounted.

"Ach, mein Herr!" he erupted, in a perfect perspiration of fervor. "Welcome back again once more—*ja.*"

Then, the courtesy to my nationality over, he lapsed into his mother tongue, saying he had felt certain I had met with accident. He spoke of the attack on Lieutenant Von Lindowe, referring to Captain Kienert as "that red-headed

son of an evil mother," and "spawn of an unbreeched devil"—whatever that may be. And he added: "They were looking for your highness——"

"How many times am I to say I am not of royal blood?" I asked, half-irritably, for the man's persistence was abominable.

He bowed, rubbing his bloodshot hands in an agony of contrition and propitiation.

"*Mein Herr* must pardon an old and loyal subject, whose tongue only strives to agree with his eyes. Your humble pardon, your—*mein Herr.*"

"Tell me," said I abruptly, "were not certain inquiries from Heimruh made here regarding the identity of a Viscount Greystone?"

Johann Lesser nodded. "An Englisher registering under that name came just after you had gone. Supper finished, he went out, leaving no word. Then two retainers from Heimruh—saving your presence, God's curse on the black name!—came asking if the Englisher who had arrived was in. From me they learned he was Viscount Greystone, and after some talk between themselves they left. They returned early this morning demanding his baggage, and saying he was Boris' guest. I want no dealings with guests of Heimruh, and they were welcome to it."

I mentally blessed the soldiers' stupidity, even while wondering where Greystone had succeeded in losing himself. His absence meant that I would have to postpone acquainting him with the fact of my use of his name. What he would say when he learned that his baggage had been carried off to Heimruh I did not care to think. And I could not very well enter into explanations with the fat and gracious landlord regarding the happy mistake that had been made.

So, merely informing mine host that I was going away on business, I went up-stairs to my room and unpacked my portmanteau. I did not know what the outcome of my interview with the Princess Zenia might be, and I resolved to leave my baggage with my host. If it was never claimed I would have suffered no great loss. But I appropriated the only things I cared about.

The battered silver band, purely for sentimental reasons alone, I slipped on my right forearm. The second article was my old Frontier Model, Texas holster, and thimble belt. They had seen trouble in their time. I jammed the latter full to the limit with forty-fours, and then strapped it under my coat. Its presence was not obtrusively apparent; for I was wearing a loosely cut tweed riding-suit and puttee leggings considerately furnished by Uncle Boris. Luckily Greystone's baggage had not contained such a costume, and so I had been saved from wearing his clothes as well as his identity.

Giving my bag in charge of Lesser, and paying my score with almost the last silver that warmed my pocket, I set bravely off for Schillingsberg amid a perfect tempest of, "God bless your highness," and even "Your majesty," the fat landlord taking full advantage of my back in thus venting his peculiar humor.

I had said good-by to Zollenstein for good or ill, thought I. I had left behind what I had been; I was riding to what I would be; riding to her who had given my better self birth.

The road to Saxonia I knew well, for I had traversed the greater part of it the previous night, and long experience on many trails had given me the habit of acute and accurate observation. I could well have imagined myself off for a morning canter in Devonshire, everything was so peaceful and humdrum. It was close to the noon hour, and the yokels were returning from the fields. There lies no important town between Zollenstein and Saxonia; nothing but a succession of little hamlets, whose inhabitants gain their living from the none too fertile soil.

Despite my mission and the dreary waste of retrospect and prospect, something of the fresh, buoyant youth of the springtime entered into me. Again and again I put my horse to the full gallop, and with the sweeping wind I drank in renewed hope; renewed faith in the decent average, in the ultimate

goodness of all things. Nature, prodigal, forgiving, ever seeking to renew, replace, was stretching forth her mighty hand to me, and I was impregnated with something of her wonderful philosophy. I was in tune with the infinite.

At the time these thoughts were bravely welling up within me, I was riding down a narrow lane, its vista terminating in the four, spread-tattered arms of an old windmill painted a dull red. The lane was a short cut, the road twisting like the letter "S"; the lane in question running diagonally from the bottom of the letter to the top. The old mill in the distance was thus on the Zollenstein Road, as the thoroughfare connecting that town and Saxonia was called.

It was a charming scene—the narrow path, the absolute quiet, the budding trees meeting in an arch overhead; the occasional glimpse of dead-blue sky, the twitter of unseen birds, the warm sun sifting down like golden rain; and away down the narrowing vista, against the blue of the sky, thrown into sharp relief by the two converging lines of trees—fresh, sappy, green—there stood the dull red of the old windmill, its gray arms flung wide, as if arrested in giving some mysterious warning.

As my mount proceeded slowly, carefully, as if afraid of shattering the universal peace, the muffled thud of its hoofs sounding dully on the undergrowth, a peculiar feeling gradually took possession of me. I began to feel as if I were in the enchanted woods of the fairies.

I felt as if unseen eyes were peering at me from every tree and shrub. I experienced an insane but persistent desire to run, to shout. And that windmill, slowly, inexorably drawing nearer, annoyed me inexpressibly. Ridiculous as the admission may appear, in time it filled me with a strange dread. It was if I were a child again, playing at hide-and-seek in the twilight; approaching some closed closet, knowing it gave sanctuary to some hidden playmate, yet afraid to open the door—afraid of the unnamed dread of eyes suddenly looking into eyes. Something of this feeling was communicated to my horse. He became restive.

The silence at length became unbearable. It was so real that I felt as if I could take it in hand and examine it at leisure. The mystery of the woods was certainly affecting me strangely, and so, putting spurs to my horse, and breaking out into one of the rollicking barrack-room ballads, I flew down the remaining length of lane, determined to win, as shortly as possible, the breadth and freedom of the Zollenstein Road. I charged my childish imaginings to lack of sleep, and to the amazing series of adventures I met with.

And just then a great scream rang out, awakening the echoes of the forest, sending its inmates all a-twitter. I felt my heart spring to my lips; my horse whinnied shrilly, and drew back on his haunches. I had good reason to think there was nothing so fearsome as to be awakened by a scream in the dead of night. I had heard it many times. But now the silence, the suffocating proximity of the trees, the hot, intermittent splotches of sun, the dabs of blue sky; above all, that stark, staring windmill, with its blood-colored body and mysteriously warning arms, set me all a-tremble. As I sat sweating in the saddle, my horse quivering under me, again that dread cry rang out. It was a woman's voice. Then was a shot; another, and another. They came from the old red mill.

Drawing my gun, I rushed to meet the trouble, every vestige of unknown fear swept away by the lust of battle. The blood was singing through my veins like old wine. The smell of powder was in my nose, my mouth; obliterating everything but the memory of the service. I was no knight-errant rushing to the rescue of beauty in distress. I confess that freely. It was but primeval man awakening. It was the love of fight for fight's sake.

By now I was on the broad Zollenstein road. Confronting me was the old red mill. I saw now that it stood in a sweep of bare meadow-grass, with

a bog verging on its rear. The only other habitation in sight, perhaps in miles, was an old tumble-down cottage, long given over to decay; probably the home of the one-time miller. A more lonely-looking spot could not well be imagined. A fitting stage for a tragedy.

As I dismounted, the southern exposure of the building came into view, and I discerned a group of horses, perhaps half a dozen in all. I had but time for a cursory glance, but I noted that one of the animals bore a side-saddle. Another second and, gun in hand, I had cautiously entered the mill, not knowing what I might meet.

I was in a big, empty room that occupied the entire ground floor of the building. In a far corner a narrow stairway, devoid of railings, gave admittance to the room above. At the bottom of this stairway, their heads at curious angels, sprawled two troopers. I had seen death too often and in too many guises not to now recognize it instantly. Both had been shot through the head.

My heart gave a great bound as I recognized their uniform—the blue and silver of Saxonia. All this time I had been conscious of a subdued scuffling from the room overhead, and dust came sifting down in fine white clouds through the wide cracks in the ceiling. The rumble of men's voices came to me.

A mighty fear, a mighty suspicion was gripping at my heart as I slowly climbed the stairs. As my head emerged through a trap-door and my eyes came level with the floor, fear and suspicion were verified. Down the far length of the room stood the Princess Zenia, very erect, very quiet. Her face was white, and her teeth biting the quiver from her lips. She was in a black riding-costume, torn and stained, her hands tied behind her. Three slouchy-looking ruffians were grouped about her. A great livid welt bisected the face of him whom I picked out as the ringleader. I had ocular proof of the sting of the girl's riding-crop—if I had needed further proof.

"And now, missis," said the leader, "here we are, and here you are—a merry party, indeed. Cry as loud as you please. We will listen."

"And the meaning of this?" asked the girl, fighting for composure.

"You have murdered two of my soldiers; two of my faithful followers."

Here she had difficulty in keeping the tears up. "You have tricked, outraged me. What is it you wish? What is your price? Make it heavy; make it worth your while, for, as sure as I rule Saxonia, you will account for this day's work."

The ringleader, a ruffian of Falstaffian proportions, shrugged his shoulders. "Missis," he said, "that comes from another quarter. We would like to take your money, but we can't. Our orders are to hold you here until our master comes. You need have no fear, for we are gentlemen; gentlemen all." And he waved a dirty hand to his two bedraggled followers.

"Who is your employer?" asked Zenia sharply.

"He has a good tongue. He will answer for himself," said Falstaff deferentially.

"What does he wish of me?" asked the girl, fear in her eyes. "Is it ransom?"

"Who can say?" parried Falstaff ingenuously.

"You are a bloody villain." And she fell silent, biting her lips and tapping the floor with her riding-boot. "I will pay you far more than your employer," said she, at length. "And I will give you twenty-four hours' start before I hunt you down and hang you all."

"It is a fair proposition," said Falstaff, meditatively stroking his chin. "Fair—and quite absurd. All is fair in love and war."

"Love? War?" she caught up swiftly.

"Both, missis," said Falstaff. "For," he added, with much philosophy, "isn't love war?"

Zenia was silent again, and I improved the occasion to enter the conversation. Falstaff proved doughty in repartee, and I did not get him until

the fourth attempt; and in the meantime one of his sincere efforts had furrowed my cheek. When the smoke blew over there were two dead men, and my fat friend had jumped from the window, his arm hanging at all angles. I own it took some decent shooting to keep from hitting her highness, but it was no time for niceties.

I quite expected her to faint, the danger over, but she did nothing of the kind.

"Allow me, madam," said I, cutting the cords that bound her wrists. And "Thank you," said she simply. Then her eyes met mine, and she started. I saw the blood slowly crimson her cheek. Her eyes darkened. I think we inspected each other in profound silence for quite a time.

"Oh!" she said softly, at length. "The adventurer!"

"Granted, madam," said I.

Our eyes clinched, broke, and met again.

"Was this—this performance, this rescue, a—a—farce?" said she.

I pointed to the two dead men. "Would that be the price to pay, madam?" But I was hot that she should think so of me. I felt her eyes on my face.

"You are my enemy. I feel it. I know it," she broke out suddenly, fiercely, trembling like a child.

"I am your highness' most humble and obedient servant," I ventured.

"I do not—I cannot trust you," she returned, her eyes wide with fear. "I—I am in your power. I do not forget last night. You tricked me——" A wave of color engulfed her.

I knew that the memory of those kisses had come. I, too, felt my cheek burn. She turned her face away, biting her lips.

"Your highness," said I stumblingly, "allow me to explain——"

"It admits of no explanation, sir," she cut in hotly. Then the tempest of her passion went, leaving self-control in its wake. She faced me, white to the lips, but with brave eyes. "Again I thank you for your service, sir." And she bowed—a curious little bow, half-girlish, half-queenly. "And now—may—may I go?" There was something so entreating, so pitifully imperious in the demand, that I grew hot again with anger—wounded vanity, if you like.

"Good Heaven, madam!" said I harshly, "am I keeping you?"

She eyed me steadily, a spot of crimson in either cheek. "I will see that you are rewarded," she said quietly.

"Your highness is pleased to be insulting."

"Sir!" She caught me up, stamping her foot. "Oh, but your pardon. I thought a gallant gentleman had come to my rescue."

"Gentlemen and rewards are not mentioned together, madam."

"True," said she, tapping her lips. "But you are——"

"Say it, madam—an adventurer."

She looked long into my eyes. "Aren't you—you the—the *gentleman* I struck last night?"

"I had that honor, your highness."

"And," she added musingly, wickedly, "weren't you the—the *gentleman* who foisted himself upon an unsuspecting girl as her brother? The *gentleman* who must be in the service of Heimruh? I suppose you had a good laugh with Boris over the affair."

"You can suppose a great deal, madam. It is your privilege. I am guilty of many things, but not of that last. I was pitchforked into this arena. I was on my way to explain many things to your highness when—when I happened in here."

"Your name, sir?"

"John Mortimer, madam."

"You are English?"

"And—an adventurer, madam," said I bitterly.

She fell to musing. "It—it is difficult to trust any one," she murmured; "and I am only a girl. But"—looking at me—"your eyes do not lie."

"That duty has always devolved upon my tongue, madam," said I.

She laughed a little—a wonderfully enticing laugh had it but made up its mind to enjoy itself to the full. She fumbled in the bosom of her riding-habit. "Do you know anything of that,

sir?" said she, handing me a letter. Her eyes never left my face as I read it. It was to the effect that her brother had been dangerously wounded in a duel with Viscount Greystone, and while being transported to Schillingsberg had collapsed. He was lying at the little village of Anselmo. He wished the matter kept secret, but begged his sister's presence. It purported to be dictated by the princeling, but was signed with the name of Sous-Lieutenant Meurdon, who had seconded me in the affair.

"I know nothing of this, madam," said I gravely. "Faith of a—a *gentleman.*"

"It came this morning," said she wearily. "Of course I set out immediately. Anselmo, as you may know, lies but six miles from Schillingsberg. As we were passing the mill, those ruffians sprang from ambush; you know the rest."

"Evidently a trap, madam. Why, I cannot imagine. It is undoubtedly a forgery."

She sighed. "I am so sick; so sick of it all," she murmured bitterly, half to herself. "God send me one true friend."

It was quite in order that I should here go down on my knees and swear allegiance—but I did not do so. Firstly, because I had too many pressing engagements—especially that one in England. Secondly, I was thinking of a certain truth in the forged letter. I had almost killed her brother. And so I merely stood very stiff and silent, waiting for courage to help me confess.

She broke silence; now coldly, haughtily. "Again I thank you, sir, for the service you have rendered me. Will you kindly catch my horse for me? I must return to Schillingsberg. Thank God Hugo is not in danger!"

"And Prince Hugo?" I asked.

"Yes, but the letter was a forgery, a trap," she said quickly.

"Yes," agreed I, "but——" I stopped. I was looking directly into her eyes, and I *could* not tell her. "I will escort your highness to Schillingsberg," I finished hurriedly.

"I do not require your services, Mr. Mortimer."

"But I insist, your highness."

"And I say no," she cried, stamping her foot.

"And I say yes, madam. I have something to say which I cannot say here."

"*Will* not, you mean," said she coldly.

"Cannot," said I. We eyed each other like two quarreling school children.

"You are officious, impertinent——" she began. Then her eyes chanced to stray to the window. I saw her face go white. And well it might, for we were caught like the proverbial rat in a trap. I had forgotten about the gallant Falstaff; but he had not forgotten us. Here he was coming up the road at the head of half a dozen troopers. And by his side rode his master—no other than my very good friend, Captain Kienert.

Zenia gave me one terrible glance.

"Have I fallen into your trap?" she cried, in a smothered voice, tremulously illogical. "Have you equivocated to your complete satisfaction? Oh, how I despise and hate you!"

"Madam," said I harshly, wearied with her eternal suspicion, "it is time for deeds, not words. My life and your honor are in the balance."

For I knew my red-haired captain.

Zenia started as if I had struck her. Just then the debonair captain caught sight of us at the window. He showed his teeth, and gallantly uncovered his head.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FIGHT AT THE MILL.

Kienert waved back his companions and entered the meadow, stopping his mount directly under the window where we stood.

"Ah, my bantlings!" he said, with the utmost good humor, "what a charming billing and cooing eerie you have found!"

I dared not look at Zenia.

"Captain Kienert," I said, keeping all passion from my voice, "allow me to say you are a contemptible blackguard. If you will meet me down there on the meadow, and offer me some show of fair play, I will do my best to kill you. If not, I will give you three seconds to get out of range of this." And I fingered my Colt.

He smiled most delightfully up into the muzzle of the weapon.

"How dramatic, *mon ami!* Fie!" he added gently, bringing out a handkerchief. "First you would fight before a lady. Failing that, you propose to dishonor a flag of truce. Fie!"

I felt Zenia's hand on my arm.

"Don't—don't fight him down there," she ventured pleadingly. "He is capable of any treachery."

"You are at the bottom of this outrage," I said to Kienert. "And you will answer for it. What is it you wish?"

"For a viscount," he replied, sadly shaking his head, "you are surprisingly stupid. "For a—viscount." And he smiled impudently up into my eyes. "Behold, I come here on a heroic errand, and—pouf! a viscount offers me violence."

"Be more explicit, please," said I, smothering my rage. "This gun has a happy faculty of going off."

"So I should imagine," said he, with all the good humor in the world. "And, if I may venture to suggest, so have you. And that is why I am here—to stop you."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, viscount, news has just reached Heimruh that some villain has made so bold as to elope with the Princess Zenia. Naturally, her highness' uncle, Duke Boris, posted me hot-foot to the rescue, and—here I am very much at your service." And the villain had the effrontery to doff his hat and bow profoundly. "Fie, viscount, for such amours! I am afraid they have at last placed you in serious trouble. Murdering her highness' soldiers, and —entertaining her highness in a deserted mill. Fie, viscount! Will you come down, or must I go after you?"

"Come after me," said I, through my teeth; and I made a great vow that Captain Kienert should answer to me for his day's work, and his insults to her highness. At best, her fair name would be smirched.

"You see, viscount," added my tormentor, his eyes dancing, "I rather counted on your—er—entertaining abilities. I surmised they would keep you for some time."

"Now," said I, putting my head out of the window and lowering my voice, "damn you for a foul-mouthed villain! You have said your say. Now get back to your kennel." And he saw murder in my eye and hand.

"Your blood be upon your own head," he said piously, and, wheeling his mount, slowly rejoined his followers. The bright, searching sunlight illuminated his straight young back, and my fingers itched to send a bullet crashing home. And if I had, God knows it would have spared me much future trouble!

"I think," said I to Zenia, "we had best surrender while we have breath. It will be all the same in the end."

She eyed me steadily, the blood in her cheeks.

"Then leave me the gun and go down to them," she said quietly. "I know what to expect. I have seen it in his eyes. And—I will keep one bullet for myself."

"I wish," I regretted sincerely, "that I had killed him when I had the opportunity. But I trust it will never be too late to mend." And I peered cautiously forth from the window, only to withdraw immediately, and with little dignity, for a hail of bullets came straggling in with great ardor. Half the attacking party had taken up a position to the right of the mill. As I would be compelled to lean forth to get a shot at them, the odds of success were hardly fair. And I surmised with little difficulty where the rest of the brigands had gone. Very faint sounds ascended from beneath.

"They're going to rush the trap," announced Zenia quietly.

I crept over to the little exit. A soft argument was in progress in the lower

room. They had gone into a close caucus as to who would have the honor of leading the procession up-stairs. And no one seemed particularly willing to usurp it. A wrangle ensued. Then what I had feared was proposed. Some kind and ingenious friend suggested that we be smoked out by fire. But here the Falstaffian rascal most unexpectedly came to the rescue. The strict orders were that her royal highness was to be subjected to no peril.

"Fire knows neither man nor woman," he said, with great logic; "and a singed cat does not look pretty." At which some snickered.

Then I heard Kienert's voice from the doorway, calling them. After a silence he offered, laughingly: "You cowardly curs, I'll lead the way myself." And I prepared to give the devil his toll.

The moment passed to the music of shuffling feet. Then I felt Zenia's hand on my arm as I stood over the trap, ready for the first head.

"It is not right," she said steadily, "that you should sacrifice your life for me. Give me the revolver, and make the best terms for yourself. You own the blessing of being a man—they won't be hard to meet."

"Now," said I persuasively, "don't you think it is much better to die a man than to live a coward? And it is better to die with honor when one can no longer live with honor. And, faith, madam, death is life in some company." And I ventured on a bow.

"A charming paradox," she said, her eyes on mine. "One that I can indorse."

"You misunderstood me, your highness," said I; and I saw raillery in her eyes. "Not that death comes as a relief, but——"

"I think you need not finish it," she said dryly, plucking at her gown, and a faint flush in her face. "It is peculiar" —wide-eyed—"how the intensely serious lends itself to such easy banter. Now I do not feel unduly upset; rather exhilarated, in fact, though I am due to meet my Maker in some five minutes or so. But I always thought if one had to die, why not to the most glorious music? Some lives are given up in a wayside ditch, 'unknown, unhonored, unsung,' when the same price could win everlasting fame on battle-field or——"

"Or back-stairs," I added dryly. "Step back, please. Here they come." And their heads covered by an old door, somewhat as the ancient Romans used their shields, our friends came at the charge. Evidently they had miscalculated the size of the trap, for the end of the door stuck fast ingloriously with a great crash, and became firmly wedged.

Affairs here began to take on a burlesque atmosphere. Profuse swearing followed. Then came a concerted, mighty tug, and the door suddenly gave with great good-will, clattering down the stairs, with its supporters scattered about in great profusion.

'I think this is rather comical," I began, in an amiable aside, when the frustrated ruffians suddenly sent up a volley of shots through the trap, which dispersed themselves harmlessly in the ceiling.

"Surely they are not so stupid," said Zenia; and she could not but smile, as, looking down, she beheld the awkward maneuvers of the heavy oak. "Perhaps —perhaps this is but a movement to divert our attention from the real source of danger. They do that in war, don't they?" And she questioned me with her grave, childish eyes.

"Undoubtedly," said I, with much superiority. "But there is no other admittance to this floor save through that hole. And they certainly cannot take unto themselves wings and gain the roof—even if that would oblige them any. No, so long as we can hold this trap, and their consciences prohibit the use of fire, we are safe——"

And at that precise moment a great bang went off behind me, and I felt a curious cramp in my shoulder. Came another, and the Princess Zenia's stifled scream.

I swung about just in time to see Captain Kienert amiably regarding me from the window; and I was looking squarely into the eye of his gun.

"A message from Garcia," he quoted pleasantly. "Is it hands up, *mon ami?* Or does one good turn deserve another? So be it. Kindly throw your revolver on the floor. No, in front of you. That's it. Many thanks. Now, up with the pretty hands. Very charming, indeed. Most effective. If mother could only see you now. You have to thank me for not shooting at your head, but, faith"—showing every hound's tooth—"I thought your body the harder. Fact is," he ran on entertainingly, while his men, who had swarmed through the trap, securely bound my hands, "we had a little entertainment committee to attract your attention, while, with the aid of a horse and a man's shoulders, I gained fair Rosamond's bower. *O tempora! O mores!* And that's how they teach you strategy in stuffy little England." There was no shutting his bantering mouth. It was a mania with him.

Zenia was regarding him white-faced. He bowed to her with a great flourish.

"Your uncle, your royal highness, is in great stress of mind regarding your safety. May I have the honor to conduct you to him?"

"You lie," she said, steadily regarding him.

"That lowly posture is but natural before your highness," he returned humbly. From somewhere she cloaked herself in the mantle of royalty, and his eyes at last shifted under hers. She turned on her heel.

"I am ready," she said coldly. "Make the most of the present, for the future will pay you dearly. I will make but one request—release Mr. Mortimer. He is an honorable gentleman——"

"Oh, the viscount!" asked Kienert politely, meeting my eyes with a smile.

"Viscount?" she echoed, the stress of the moment submerged in the surprise.

"The Viscount Greystone," explained the captain, rocking gently on his heels.

"Greystone!" she said, her eyes on mine. "Oh——" and she scanned me narrowly anew. "Greystone! Then you cannot but release him." And her lip curled in fine sarcasm. "If the Princess of Saxonia lacks backing among her own people, England's might can, and will, protect her own children."

Kienert, hand at chin, admiringly watched the blood in her cheeks, called up by the force of her words.

"I regret," he said, with his eternal obeisance, "that your first command should be so untenable. The Viscount Greystone has business with me."

"Surely, surely——" began Zenia, turning clouded, bewildered eyes to me. When Kienert courteously interrupted.

"I might suggest, your highness, that deserted mills make poor boudoirs. Love makes time fly; time makes love fly. How true! See, the sun is westering, and time is ungenerous. We must be off. More of this again." And he pleasantly drove us down-stairs like a pair of amiable sheep. We were soon in the center of his troop. My legs were hog-tied under the horse.

"Where are we going?" asked Zenia steadily.

"To Zollenstein," said Kienert. And deliberately headed the troop in the opposite direction.

In what direction we were headed, where destined, I did not know. Time and time again we cut off from our initial route at right angles; circled, recircled, crossed unsavory swamps, with the ooze at our horses' fetlocks; skirted bleak, wooded tracts until my head was singing the song of the perpetual circle. Darkness swept down on us at about the fifth mile. It was as if I had been blindfolded, rotated with great velocity, and set free, for my eyes to play me false. And, as the sky's watch-dogs were kenneled, I might as well have been groping in a witch's pocket. Once or twice, even, Kienert was at fault, for we halted while he called Falstaff and some of the lesser luminaries into consultation.

I had been separated from Zenia; my shoulder was burning like vitriol; I was dog tired, hungry; and my arms and soul ached abominably. Add to this my befuddled state of mind, and perhaps without egoism, a stoic could have cried mercy.

How long we rode on, on, on, I do

not know. Our company, in the gloom, looked to me like those phantoms one sees in the acute stages of typhoid. Ever marching, counter-marching; wheeling—gaining nowhere. Perhaps the monotonous motion of the sway-back animal I bestrode, reenforced by my fatigued condition, generated a species of feverish, half-conscious dream. I lost coherent cognizance of everything but the heaving, bobbing shoulders of the troopers immediately adjacent to me.

At last we had halted. A huge, black smudge towered over us, showing but indistinctly against the brother darkness of the night. I heard a door open, but no light followed. Then came a whispered voice. Without a hint or warning of any kind, I was suddenly given a heave by my nearest neighbor, and down I went on the ground in a tangled mess. Of course I struck on my weak ankle, and I swore aloud with the pain. With but little ceremony I was rudely jerked to my feet and given a shove forward. My guides piloted me up three steps. I endeavored to focus in my mind the general direction of our route, for all was Stygian darkness. Through a long corridor we went, then a turn to the right, and an ascent of twenty steps; another turn to the right, sixteen steps; once again a corridor and a turn; this time to the left. There we halted. A door opened, and I was propelled abruptly forward. I crashed some two feet into abysmal gloom. Where the Princess Zenia was I did not know.

I have no very clear recollection of subsequent time, place, or incident. I remember when at last I regained coherent cognizance I was stupidly watching a patch of dull gray light which soaked through a muffled glass protected by bars, and sluggishly diffused itself in the surrounding gloom. I was lying on my back on a cot, and this small two feet of window, evidently a skylight, was the only aperture the room afforded. One consolation, I was not in any deeply moated dungeon, but at the top of the house.

As I had no windows, I had small means of ascertaining the situation of my prison. The room was ten by fifteen feet. I paced it off carefully; why, I do not exactly know. But I had read of prisoners doing that, and evidently it was the correct thing. The walls, ceiling, and floor were of heavy, seasoned oak. A few necessary toilet appurtenances and bedroom equipment were present. A fugitive ray of sunshine crept shyly through the skylight, and I promptly marked its kiss on the floor. Its movement would be my only chronometer. There was nothing to do; nothing but to lie like so much inert clay. As the hours passed I began to wonder uncomfortably whether a kind providence had destined me to die from slow starvation. After thinking over every possible contingency and wrestling with abominable retrospection, my mind evidently became numb, for I slid off into a fitful, feverish slumber.

When I awoke, my sunbeam had traveled a foot from its initial point. I was miserably hungry. Then in a corner of the room my eye fastened upon a covered tray; and I was off the cot and seizing upon it with avidity, like any untutored savage. There was a flagon of ale, a cold capon, truffles, Brussels sprouts, potatoes au gratin, Camembert cheese, and, to crown all, a box of Sirdars. I will always remember that menu. I forgot everything but the gourmandizing moment, and blessed my captors incontinently, with full heart and mouth. Captain Kienert's score held one less tally. Thus stomachs doth make cowards of us all. Good food and digestion are the essence of courage, and many plans for escape went up in the smoke of my cigarette. I felt decidedly more like grappling with an adverse fate; and evidently I had fallen into the hands of an admirable chef. I determined to watch faithfully until the next collation was served. The secret door disclosed, I would plan my break for freedom.

True to my resolve, for it was my only hope, I waited religiously. First with every faculty keyed to the highest tension. Then the hours commenced to drag, and, despite myself, my inter-

est to follow suit. My sunbeam disappeared. Night came, and hunger reawoke. The universal silence became unbearable. Again I made predatory search for the hidden door, but nothing rang hollowly to my eager and impotent knuckles. At length I succumbed to nature.

When I awoke a fitting breakfast was awaiting me. That day was a rehearsal of the previous one. Then it was slowly borne in upon me that wakefulness meant hunger. It seemed almost as if I were watched. Elijah's ravens deigned to appear only when he slept. I tried every subterfuge to catch them napping, but fruitlessly. *I* was ever caught napping; and I needs must, or go hungry.

And so three days dragged their weary way across the floor. Then I determined on the hazardous process of bribery. It would be a stab in the dark.

Though I had nothing to give, if I could arouse my waiter's cupidity, I might, perhaps, enter into conversation with him, and thus learn the location of the hidden door. At all events, I could be no worse off, so, with the aid of a burned match and the fly-leaf of Plutarch's "Lives," which, together with several other classics, had been considerately left with one of my dinners, I indited a message to my unknown Jeams, promising a generous sum for one moment's conversation with the recipient. This I laid carefully, in plain sight, on the tray.

The succeeding developments were meager, but to the point. The following morning an answer awaited me on the tray:

VISCOUNT, MY DEAR FELLOW: It is beastly bad form to tamper with your host's servants. This is the first law of etiquette: Silence is golden; don't try to break it with silver. CAPTAIN KIENERT.

Another day passed in futile endeavor. Then, one night, chance took a hand in the game, and succeeded where all my ingenuity had failed. I retired at my usual hour, but, contrary to my usual custom, did not sleep unbrokenly. Why I should suddenly awaken this night, of all others, at the prescribed psychological moment I cannot presume to say. But awake I did, and I was staring, every faculty on the alert, at a faint patch of light high up on the wall, and directly facing my cot. In it was framed the Falstaffian rascal with my tray. Then the secret door closed.

I waited feverishly for daylight. When it came, I made frantic efforts to locate or move the hidden panel, but all to no purpose. I was no better off than I had been. Worse, in fact, for I got no breakfast; my captors evidently being aware that I had watched the night through wide-eyed. I became convinced by this, if additional proof were required, that my every movement was constantly watched by unseen eyes. For my intermittent slumbers were timed to a nicety.

That night I put into practise a plan that desperation had matured in my brain. I retired at my usual time, and simulated a vigorous snore for the better part of an hour. So genuine a thing was it that I forgot I was but acting, and almost succumbed to sleep. Then inch by inch, and noiselessly, I slid to the floor, between the cot and the wall. I inserted a pillow in my pajamas, and arranged it tastefully and artistically in the bed. Then I crawled across the floor, still bearing in mind that some one might be looking into the darkened room, and laboriously dressed; after which I took up my position to the right of the concealed door, as near as instinct could locate it. I waited until I was cramped; until my patience was worn threadbare. Dawn was just beginning to show when I detected the very faintest of sounds at the other side of the wall. Some one was at the panel.

CHAPTER XV.

I AM GIVEN A PROOF OF FAITH.

Nerving myself, I waited. I had no plan. I staked all upon fortune. Once clear of the room, if I ever would be, the gods would have me for their play-

thing. But I determined I should not leave the place without the Princess Zenia, if she were still here.

Just then the sliding panel moved noiselessly back, and a bloodshot hand lowered three short, red velvet-covered steps into the room. Then Falstaff's head appeared. He had evidently deposited the tray in the corridor preparatory to entering. He descended softly backward, never even glancing to where I crouched in the shadows, but two or three feet away.

As he leaned over to get the tray, I suddenly jerked his feet from under him, and when he thudded on the steps I slipped an arm about his throat, threw him backward to the floor, and choked him senseless. A couple of towels and a handkerchief bound and gagged him securely. I hoisted him into bed—no child's task, for he weighed like a cow—and covered him with the clothes. A search of his person revealed a loaded revolver, a dirk, and a bunch of keys. These I very gladly appropriated. Then I gobbled the breakfast, for I was unduly hungry, and conservation of strength is the first principle in warfare.

A hasty glance into the corridor assured me that the coast was clear. Once free of the room I located the button, cunningly hidden, that manipulated the sliding door; and I pressed it home. Evidently it could only be operated from the corridor; and so Falstaff was a prisoner until some fellow worthy discovered and released him.

Dawn, as I have mentioned, was but struggling to arrive, and a swinging lamp hung in the corridor, where it took a sharp passage to the right, its dull yellow flare but accentuating the shadows. Cautiously I slipped toward it. I owned a vague idea of endeavoring to locate Zenia's room, providing she were still a prisoner.

I had almost reached the lamp, where the corridor branched off at right angles, when I heard quick footsteps approaching. Another moment and they would have turned the corner. I was checkmated. I could not run. There was no possible hiding-place. I drew my gun, and threw out a hand to steady myself against the wall, prepared for the encounter. My hand fell upon a door-knob. It turned. Without a thought I flung the hitherto unnoticed door wide, closed it, and stood breathing heavily in the room of heavy shadows. I had no time to look about me. Already the steps had halted. I crouched against the wall. The door swung open, and blotted me from view.

The door was not closed, and I stood there, hardly daring to breathe, closely hugging the wall. Two men had entered. I heard the clink of china and a laugh, though I could not catch the words. Then came the sound of a key turning in a lock.

"Where's that sluggard, Grotz?" asked one. And the other replied: "Probably sneaked off to flirt with Michu." Then the one stood humming in the room, while his companion unlocked a door. I could hear it creak gently on its hinges. I could not slip from my hiding-place. I must be discovered when the men returned.

My heart gave a great leap. I had heard the Princess Zenia's voice. She was the inhabitant of the inner room. I had determined to stake all upon an encounter with my two enemies, when the one in the other room called: "Here, Jacques, give me a hand with this dresser." My humming friend obeyed.

Scarcely had I ascertained from his voice that he had joined his fellow, than I slipped from my hiding-place.

I hurriedly looked about me. The room was furnished as a boudoir; probably an anteroom to the princess' bedchamber, though, as I had seen, the connecting door was locked. A large oak closet faced with mirrors at once pointed my city of refuge. I crept warily across, and concealed myself in its capacious interior. After a long minute the men returned, and I did not hear them bar the connecting door. But the key grated in the lock of the one leading on the corridor. I was a prisoner with the prisoner of my heart.

I emerged from the closet and knocked softly on the connecting door.

"Come in. Is that you, Michu?" asked the Princess Zenia, weariness in her voice.

I flung the door wide, and confronted her on the threshold. She was seated in a low rocking-chair by a barred window, her elbow resting on the broad sill. The pallor of confinement was on her cheeks, and her eyes were bright and feverish. She rose slowly, hand at throat, as her eyes met mine.

"I—I did not recognize you," she said slowly at length, a catch in her voice. Her mouth drew across in a straight line, and her hands clenched. "Is this an honor or an insult?" she asked steadily.

"Your highness," said I, "I have but escaped myself." And I very shortly rehearsed my previous adventures.

"Oh," she said softly, "your pardon. I—I think I will sit down." And she groped for the chair, and fell to pleating her silk-clad knees. Then she laughed a little. "I—I am rather nervous, as you see," she apologized diffidently. "The strain of the past few days has been unbearable—waiting, ever waiting, for the worst. Forgive my swift injustice. I thought you one of them. Won't—won't you be seated?"

I accepted an armchair for our decidedly unconventional tête-à-tête.

"What will happen," said I, "if our jailers return?"

She wrinkled her pretty brows.

"This is our only chance; we must not be hasty," she whispered anxiously, cradling her knees. "Why not the closet?" And she eyed me boldly. "It will not be long before Grotz is discovered. Let them imagine you have safely escaped. Under such a supposition, if they imagine me without a protector, and you at liberty to work them harm, our chances of escape will be tenfold. Surely you can see that. This room will be mine—the boudoir yours. When you hear them approaching, hide in the closet, and lock the door from the inside. They will never suspect. We can formulate a plan of escape at leisure. I will share my food with you."

"But this connecting door was locked to-day," I reminded her.

"Because they were rearranging the boudoir," she explained. "That is why the door leading on the corridor was not locked. My guards are Jacques and Michu, the chambermaid. I have not seen Captain Kienert."

"Madam," said I, regarding her steadily, "your plan appeals to my reason. Undoubtedly it is the best. Our chances of escape, as you say, would be small, indeed, were they undertaken during the uproar occasioned by my supposed break for freedom. And yet, your highness, it is impossible. You forget one thing—I cannot compromise you."

The blood was instantly in her face, and her eyes met mine.

"I do not forget," she said gravely. "But I choose to overlook. Honor, life has been at your command before, and you did not betray your trust. I am not afraid. For the opinion of the world I do not care. It is no time for prudish convention. Surely, surely"—with a sudden resumption to her appealing, childish attitude—"you will not leave me alone in that villain's power for an overmagnified scruple of nicety. And—and believe me"—her mouth twitching—"you have all my great gratitude for—for——"

"Madame," said I gravely, "that is payment enough for any hireling. Consider me your most respectful and obedient servant to the death."

"Nay," she whispered tremulously; "but a brave, true knight—to the life. Kneel."

And, obedient to her whim, I knelt at her feet.

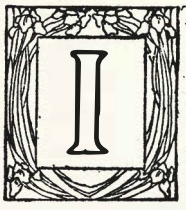
"Rise, Sir Mortimer," she said softly; and I felt a touch upon my head. And I stood up, facing her, the blood in her cheek and a little silver fruit-knife in her hand. Then our eyes met, and we laughed suddenly, like two children at play.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The Fleur-de-lis Jockey

By Charles Steinfort Pearson
Author of "Romances of the Race-course," Etc.

The mystery connected with a plucky young jockey whose enthusiasm at the race-track was strongly contrasted with the curious reticence which provoked considerable adverse comment at the Fleur-de-lis Stables



T was on a day when the dogwood was beginning to bloom, and the hoofs of the Yelverton thoroughbreds were beating tattoo signals of distress at their confinement against the sides of their box stalls, that Dick Yelverton had his first introduction to his new jockey.

Yelverton Hall, the fine old estate down in Virginia, was now in possession of young Yelverton. It had lately come to him through the death of a bachelor uncle, Eric Yelverton, a transplanted Englishman.

Yelverton was four or five years out of Oxford; a tall, good-looking, athletic young Britisher, who had paid many visits to his uncle in vacation times, and was half-Americanized already, with the intention of becoming a full-fledged American citizen later on.

Standing outside the training-stable in the balmy, early spring atmosphere, he glanced comprehensively but kindly at the little figure which stood before him with the old trainer, Tasker. The boy looked back at him with bright, fearless blue eyes.

"Think you'll make a jockey, eh?" asked young Yelverton good-naturedly, gripping a brierwood pipe in his teeth.

"I hope so, sir," was the quiet reply. "Tasker tells me I may do well—in time."

There was a little, deprecatory cough, which the trainer drowned with the hurried explanation:

"I've told Mr. Yelverton all about you. I have been around horses all my life, Mr. Dick, as your uncle knew, and I never saw any one who could get more out of a thoroughbred.'"

"Well, that recommendation goes a long way with me—er—I have forgotten what Tasker told me your name was?" Yelverton said inquiringly.

"Willoughby, sir."

"Oh! Of course I know your last name. Anybody who has visited in this part of Virginia has heard of the Willoughbys. I mean your first name."

"Will, sir."

"All right, Will. How old are you?"

"Eighteen, sir."

"Folks willing for you to ride, I suppose?" the owner asked.

"They are perfectly willing for me to become a good jockey, Mr. Yelverton. I thought you knew——" The boy hesitated a little. Yelverton saw fit to interrupt quickly.

"Why, certainly, I understand. I am a thoughtless brute," he declared. "You see, Will, I've been away from the country so long—on the other side, you know, until the news came. I knew little about the folks at home. I haven't forgotten that the Willoughbys used to be the biggest landowners and breeders in the country. You and I ought to get along pretty well together, I fancy, as your family has lost everything, and I find myself the heir to several fair-class race-horses and a long list of

debts, contracted, I fear, to help me to keep up appearances. And I never knew it! Poor uncle! I suppose, of course, you have heard all about me, too, so we are quits there."

Young Willoughby did not reply, but merely nodded gravely. His face wore an expression of sympathy.

"Because I've been in England with relatives so long is no reason why I can't come back and clear up some of this tangle," Yelverton continued cheerfully. "I count on Tasker here and you to help me get all I can out of my racehorses at least. Like to have a look in at Tristram, Will?" asked the young owner.

The boy's face glowed with pleasure; Tasker's countenance also was beaming as he led the way to the stall, over the half-door of which the big black was sticking his head, putting back his ears with real or pretended anger at the intrusion.

"Ugly-looking brute, but possessed of great speed, Tasker tells me, Will," said Yelverton, watching the young fellow move straight to the stall, and, unmindful of possible danger, stick out a hand in fearless fashion directly under the racer's nose.

Yelverton's warning cry was checked on his lips as he saw the thoroughbred sniff at the hand, the flattened ears go forward, while the beast nipped playfully at the boy's sleeve, receiving pats on the nose with evident appreciation.

"Wouldn't stand that from me first meeting—or now," declared Yelverton surprisedly. "Perhaps you and Tristram are old friends?"

"I never saw him before, Mr. Yelverton," was the boy's earnest response. "I just came from Blantyre last night. Tasker has seen me ride, and liked my style. That's how I have come. He used to train for my father, years ago," the boy supplied reminiscently.

Yelverton knew all that. Tasker also had explained to him that all of the high-class jockeys were under contract; that the only thing to do would be to develop a "find." Tasker had confidence in Willoughby. Also Yelverton was aware that the sum he could pay the Willoughby chap—a pittance compared with the salary of a high-class jockey—would go far to supporting the impoverished, fatherless Willoughby family.

"You'll do, youngster, unless I'm greatly mistaken," declared Yelverton briskly. "If you can make friends so easily with as sulky an old brute as Tristram is said to be, you should be able to hypnotize an ordinary racer into being 'placed' in the Derby. Tasker tells me you've got good hands as well as a firm seat and level head; but, above all, your judge of pace is remarkable. Suppose we give Tristram a trial. He ought to be able to do three-quarters in 1:16, with some weight up, even this early. Get the boy togged up, Tasker, and we'll see about his judge of pace. Try as near to 1:16 as you can, youngster," he commanded.

Presently the horse was led out of his stall by a stable-boy, the racer champing the bit fiercely, fire in his eye. Tristram had been given slow gallops for some time previously—just enough work to make the high-strung thoroughbred long for more. As he danced around the trainer, who had taken hold of him, Yelverton found time to make a closer survey of the midget Willoughby.

"You said you were eighteen, did you not?" he asked, studying the bright face, running his eyes over the tiny figure.

The boy nodded.

"Humph! You don't look it," was the owner's comment. "Slim-waisted, straight legs, small hands and feet—there's where the blue blood in you comes in, Kiddy," he declared.

He laughed as he saw the crimson mount to the rider's face.

"Evidently hasn't been away from home much," was the young Englishman's unspoken thought. "He'll get all that knocked out of him when he mixes in with other jockeys, if I know anything about him or them. Don't do to have them overconfident at first."

As they stood together, the owner overtopped the other by a foot certainly, for Yelverton was all of six feet.

Underneath the golf-cap which the boy wore his hair was golden, and curled up all around the edges. The features of the oval face were regular, the nose typical of aristocratic birth; the mouth, small but sufficiently firm, was inclined to droop at the edges; chin firm, with a cleft in it.

"Handsome as a cherub," Yelverton said to himself, and voiced it differently.

"If you ride half-decently, you'll have all the swagger women of the horsy set running after you," he said admiringly.

"Have a leg up?" he asked, as Willoughby was prepared to mount.

As if he had not heard the question, the little rider had taken the bridle-reins from the trainer's hands; and how it was done Yelverton did not know, but in a second the boy was in the saddle. Tristram was in no mood for delaying, and the next minute Yelverton was treated to a display of horsemanship which did his soul good. Bucking like any Western bronco, striving to break away at full speed, rearing, stamping, and kicking up behind, the ugly beast seemed bent on unseating his rider and having a romp alone.

Through it all the boy sat as if he and the horse were of one mind and body.

Frightened? Not he! As Yelverton watched, open-mouthed, really alarmed to see what the outcome would be, the boy drew his whip; it fell with a swish full on the beast's flank.

Tristram plunged, snorted; changing his tactics, danced in a circle. As they turned, Yelverton caught a glimpse of a smiling face, heard the words:

"I didn't like to do it, but he must learn his master."

More surprises were in store. Standing at the three-quarter pole of the old six-furlong training-track connected with the Yelverton racing establishment, which was the start and finish in one, watch in hand, Yelverton gave the word to the eager boy. A little distance up the track Tristram wheeled, dashing like a whirlwind past the owner and trainer.

Coming around the home turn of the short, circular track, the lad leaned forward in the saddle, seemed to be assisting his mount, giving him verbal encouragement, and the black was slipping along easily, faster than was suspected from his frictionless stride, passing the finish, the owner, and trainer like a streak of darkness.

Then as Yelverton had looked at his watch, caught the time, the horse's speed was checked, he had wheeled, and was cantering back at a hand gallop.

"Did I come anywhere near the mark?" the lad asked eagerly, reaching them, his blue eyes dancing.

"You're a wizard, my boy. One-sixteen flat," was the owner's smiling reply, concluding with:

"Bravo, bravo, my lad! Reiff couldn't have done better. Where did he get it from, Tasker?"—turning to the trainer.

From sunshine the trainer's face turned to shade. He was silent a little.

"It's in the family, I think, Mr. Yelverton. The father in his younger days was a famous gentleman steeplechaser, and won many a race by timing his run. Such things are heritages, sir."

The owner was young enough to be enthusiastic. Perhaps it was that he was democratic. But he knew all about the Willoughbys.

"Come over to the Hall with me, and we'll have a glass of sherry or port to our mutual success, Kiddy," he said. "You and I shall be of one blood."

Young Willoughby did not accept with alacrity or in quite the spirit which the owner would have liked. In fact, he did not accept at all. The lad was looking appealingly at Tasker.

"He's very young, you know, Mr. Dick," the old fellow hastened to explain in a whisper. "I'd let him off if I were you—this time."

"Rather not?" asked Yelverton carelessly. "Oh, very well, suit yourself, but remember that the house is always open to you. Don't let the fact that you are in my employ make you imagine there are to be any barriers between us," he said heartily.

Whether it was pride or diffidence, or something which Yelverton could not fathom, that something kept the boy from making the Hall his home instead of the trainer's modest household.

Yelverton knew a prig when he saw one, and he did not set down the boy's refusal to accept his hospitality as due to priggishness, but to pride.

"He might meet me half-way, though," was the young owner's honest opinion. The truth was he was lonely at the old Hall, and longed for the companionship of the bright-eyed youth who persisted in sticking to Tasker and his wife, and, of course, the horses.

"How do you like the stable colors, youngster?" Yelverton asked, just before the first meeting at which the stable was to be represented.

Fresh from the hands of the makers the new sets of colors were being inspected by the owner, the trainer, and the jockey.

"I think they are fit to have been chosen for a king, sir. I only wish they may flash to victory often. I shall do my best to help them to do so, sir," was the boy's quick response, and then he checked himself, seeming ashamed of his enthusiasm.

"So, ho! You're of an imaginative romantic bent, eh, Sir Knight?" said Yelverton teasingly, and then, noting the lad's heightened color: "I suppose you have some 'lady faire' in mind for whom you will ride, 'an it were a kingly joust.' In love, and so young! Well, well, you're beginning early, lad. I'm much older, and have not yet got so far along."

Willoughby seemed to resent the teasing, and was busily engaged in fingering the soft silks of which the jackets and caps were composed.

In reality the colors savored of royalty, for the jacket part was of a royal purple, with many gold fleurs-de-lis in the pattern, old-gold sleeves and cap—giving the Yelverton outfit the distinctive appellation of "The Fleur-de-lis Stable."

It was at the first meeting also that the colors were made to distinguish themselves. The start of the racing season was at the capital. The principal opening event, about which a certain glamour was attached, was the Capital Cup, in which Yelverton had entered Abdul, a three-year-old of fair speed, but against which supposedly better horses were pitted. Among these was a four-year-old owned by Garrick, whose jockey, Hodder, was head and shoulders above the rest in experience and celebrity. Garrick's entry was conceded to have the race at his mercy. Yelverton did not share his trainer's optimism; had merely shrugged his shoulders when Tasker had told him:

"Abdul can't lose, Mr. Yelverton, with our jockey."

It had amused him to see the before-the-race assurance of Willoughby when he had talked with the little chap up in the paddock.

"Feel nervous at the prospect of your first appearance before the racing public, Will?" he had asked the tiny chap, attired in the long coat, reaching to the ground, in which Willoughby appeared then, and on all subsequent occasions when he was to ride.

"The only thing that worries me is that I may not get off well, sir," responded the boy. "You see, I'm not used to the barrier like the rest of them."

"Well, don't worry, Kiddy," was Yelverton's reassuring reply. "Not one in a thousand wins the first time he sports silk."

What Yelverton saw through his glasses when the barrier was sprung caused him astonishment.

"Well, of all the luck!" he was heard to declare by Trainer Tasker, standing with him. The trainer knew it was not luck.

When to the accompanying roar "They're off!" the racers sprang into their stride, at the very start one assumed command.

That one carried the royal purple and the fleurs-de-lis. Furthermore, the purple and gold remained in front throughout the whole distance.

Coming down the stretch a quarter from the finish one horse alone drew

out from the bunch, under the spur and whip-stroke of his rider, to challenge the leader. From there on it was a contest not between two horses of equal speed and stamina, but a duel between a veteran jockey and a tyro. But Abdul was winner by half a length. The name of Willoughby on the result-board was greeted by the applause of the racegoers then for the first time. Thereafter the jockey bearing the fleurs-de-lis was the idol of the racing public—at a distance.

Though the papers contained much about the marvelous success of the Yelverton stable, the jockey was merged in mystery. It was hinted that the little chap was the scion of an old Southern family, riding under a *nom de course;* that he was a truant from home. Yelverton himself did not care what was said.

"You go on winning races, Kiddy, and you and I will be millionaires some day," he told his rider in private.

It was a fact that his jockey was almost as unapproachable to the young owner as to outsiders. Away from the horses Willoughby was afflicted with a strange diffidence; an air of constraint, begirt by a wall of reserve which Yelverton himself could not pierce. Tasker and his wife, who lived in a cottage near the tracks at each of which Yelverton had representatives, were the only ones who were his intimates.

In spite of his reserve and strange exclusiveness, that the boy had spirit was brought home forcibly to Yelverton on one occasion.

It was after Yelverton had won the famous Maturity Race on Giaour, a colt entirely overlooked by the turf-sharps. As in the first race, the contest had narrowed down to a duel between Hodder and Willoughby. Hodder plainly had been outridden at the finish, and the fact was so obvious to the public and himself that it cut him to the core. Compared with Willoughby in size, the Garrick jockey was as a seasoned four-year-old thoroughbred to a two-year-old.

After "weighing in," seeing his rival seated in the floral horseshoe, which he thought reserved especially for himself, the wrath of Hodder knew no bounds.

In the paddock, where they had returned, Hodder saw fit to twit Willoughby. First he had changed the little jockey's name, Willoughby, into that of "Willie boy." Emboldened at the manner in which the slur was received, and the laughter of other jockeys, Hodder advanced upon Willoughby with the intention of slapping his face. His hand was no further than upraised.

Willoughby could protect himself. No sooner had he become conscious of the intended reprisal than he drew back. Not a word escaped his lips. With a movement so quick it scarce could be followed, his right hand had grasped the handle of the rawhide whip.

Two strokes the whip fell with unerring aim on the would-be assailant's cheek. Hodder put up hands to ward off further blows, staggered back blindly, howling from the two lashes, one big white welt across the right cheek, another belting the temple.

Valets of the jockeys rushed between. For a moment Willoughby stood defiant. From red to pale his face changed. He threw the whip from him.

"You did perfectly right, youngster," Yelverton told him, when he had been attracted to the scene and realized what had happened.

"You, Garrick, if anything, you're a more contemptible, sneaking hound than your jockey," he hurled at the owner. "I've a good mind to use this on you." And he made a move as if to pick up the whip. "You would chastise my jockey, would you, when your tool failed?" he spat out, having come just in the nick of time to prevent Garrick from taking hold of Willoughby. "Thought you'd thrash Kiddy, here, because he won a race," he declared savagely. "Oh, I'll——"

"Please don't do anything, Mr. Yelverton. He never touched me," said Willoughby. "I struck Hodder first."

"If I ever hear of you or your jockey even so much as crooking your finger at Willoughby again, I'll thrash you so you'll regret it, Garrick," blazed out Yelverton. And Garrick contented

himself with merely walking away and muttering, for he knew Yelverton, as all the racing-people knew him, to be a man of his word.

Only on one occasion did owner and jockey have anything in the nature of a quarrel, and it came about innocently enough. Yelverton had brought the famous beauty of two continents, Miss Sylvia Westover, with whom his name was coupled constantly, up in the paddock to the stall where Willoughby was standing, attired in the famous long top-coat, ready to mount for the next race.

"This is Miss Westover, Kiddy," said Yelverton, with boyish exuberance.

The gold cap was doffed, showing the curly, gold locks underneath, but the boy did not seem pleased.

"I wish to make a wager, and I'm certain you can tell me if your horse will win to-day, Mr. Willoughby," said the dashing beauty sweetly. "Has your mount got a chance?"

"Mr. Yelverton wouldn't let him start if he didn't think he had one."

The beauty was a trifle piqued. She bit her lip, and patted the ground impatiently with the toe of her little foot.

"Oh, come, now, can't you tell me if you will win or not?" she said coaxingly.

A laconic "No" was the answer.

"I'm afraid you're no more friendly to women than you are said to be to men," said Miss Westover somewhat tartly.

"It depends altogether upon the woman, I suppose, Miss Westover," was the answer.

"Plainly you don't like this one," laughed the belle, but she was evidently provoked.

Yelverton later saw fit to censure the lad.

"'Pon my word, Will, you were positively brutal to-day to Miss Westover, and after I had cracked you up to the skies," he said. "Hodder himself couldn't have been less of a gentleman. She's the best friend in the girl line I have in the States, too. What got in you?"

Willoughby had no answer. He did not seem to be sulking over the mild rebuke for several days, only he appeared possibly more silent. That was all.

Yelverton found his jockey more and more incomprehensible. His brave show of resistance to Hodder proved that he had courage. There was another side to his nature, as shown when Yelverton discovered him weeping silently alone over a race he had lost.

So it was throughout the entire season. Was it a discussion or solving of a problem in stable-affairs, Willoughby was the most conspicuous figure. All of the social affairs in which the owner delighted, and in which he would gladly have had the well-born jockey participate, Willoughby eschewed scrupulously.

His success in the saddle was phenomenal. For a small establishment, the "Fleur-de-lis Stable" was the largest winner in the mere matter of stakes and purses.

As the Eastern racing-season began at the capital, so it closed. Tristram had won the first big stake event, with Willoughby up, and the racer was entered for the important event on the last day of the season. Yelverton was enthusiastic.

"Good news for you, Kiddy," he told Willoughby the day before the race. "Behold in me a man of great magnanimity. You have heard of Mountstephen? Yes? Great sportsman on the other side, where I knew him. He's here now. Wants an American jockey to ride his horses. I'll release you from your three-year contract with me, and he'll give you——" the sum he mentioned was away up in the thousands.

"He wants to see you ride, Kiddy. You'll have the chance of your life to-morrow. Show him what you can do on Tristram. The old horse is somewhat stale, but he can win—with you. There you are, my lad."

Willoughby did not seem greatly elated over the prospect, Yelverton thought, but the owner set it down to weariness after the busy season.

Next day, too, when Yelverton was giving the boy his final instructions how to ride Tristram, telling him that

Mountstephen would watch him in the race, it struck him that the rider was listless; that he even wore an air of despondency.

The owner knew, as well as the jockey, that it would be a hard race. Willoughby had won their first big race; the jockeys would be allied against his winning the last.

Yelverton was confident, however. With a great show of spirits, he sauntered off into the infield, glasses dangling, to watch the start. Across from him a little distance down the track he could see the packed grand stand, the lawn black with figures of enthusiastic racegoers.

Eleven horses faced the starter for the mile and a quarter race. As the faint November sun filtered on the shimmering satins of the jockeys, Yelverton's eyes singled out the purple and gold.

In and out the starter's assistants wove their way among the row of restless racers.

At last they were in perfect alinement. One brief space of suspense. Simultaneous with the flash upward of the barrier came the cry of the starter. They were off!

An exclamation of dismay came from the innermost soul of Yelverton as he watched.

"How could you let it happen, Kiddy?" he groaned. "This day of all!"

Tristram practically had been left at the post. His jockey napping, the black racer had caught his stride the last of any. As the field thundered past the grand stand for the first time Tristram was absolutely last.

At the first turn the game old horse almost had caught up with the flying leaders, at the half was in the middle of the second division of racers.

Hope was kindled anew in Yelverton's breast. Going down the backstretch the purple jockey seemed to have taken on a new lease of life. Coming around the far turn, under the magnificent guidance of the rider, Tristram was gaining. Coming down the last turn for home the Yelverton thoroughbred's splendid speed and stamina were telling. But four horses were leading Tristram: Grand Mogul, on the rail; his stablemate, Gaekwar, almost lapping him, second from the rail, a little daylight showing between; next to Gaekwar the fleet chestnut mare The Jade; on the outside, almost touching the mare, was Red Ranger.

It was a wall of horse-flesh through which the racers in the rear could have no chance to pass.

And then Yelverton gave a gasp of horror, he took a fierce grip on his glasses—surely Willoughby had been bereft of his senses—a cat could not get through the narrow space between Grand Mogul and Gaekwar.

Before he realized it, Willoughby's whip was out, had flashed downward, Tristram's head was in the gap between the flanks of the two leaders.

From his infield position Yelverton could see the move plainly, and his heart was in his throat. His one purpose was, if possible, to check the boy's design. He knew the inevitable result.

At the instant, he ran wildly to the inner rail, shouting out his warning.

"Don't do it, Kiddy, don't try to get through, don't do it, you can't do it!" he screamed wildly. "For God's sake, don't! Pull up, pull up!" he shrieked in an agony of fear over the danger of the fearless little figure in the purple and gold, caught in the furious jam of horse-flesh as a man swirling in an irresistible current above a cataract.

It is doubtful if Yelverton's cries came to the ears of even the jockeys in the tail end of that mad procession.

Tristram drew up, up, and still up in that vortex of straining muscle and hammering hoof, obedient to the urging of the rider. One second more they swept along almost in a compact mass, the finish was in sight, the jockeys were feeling the flush of expected victory, fighting against defeat. Tristram appeared to hesitate in his stride.

And then it happened!

When the dust cleared away Yelverton saw that there was a gap, the sheen of the purple was missing from the kaleidoscope of color, the racers in the van swerving to one side as they passed.

Yelverton, running wildly along the rail, saw a horse rise from the track and gallop lamely after the field.

Scant notice did he give to this, for his eyes had alighted on the still form on which the gold fleurs-de-lis were shining.

Then he was over the rail, the first to aid, with the head of the unconscious jockey on his knee; he was unbuttoning the collar of the purple jacket to give more air to the victim.

As he undid the top button his fingers encountered something inside the jacket—a white ivory tablet in a thin frame, dangling from the neck by a little gold chain. He paused a moment to read what was thereon written:

"In case of accident, this is to notify that the wearer is——"

Scarcely could he read the two words remaining through the sudden mist which had risen to his eyes. Quickly the card was replaced, the jacket closed. His fingers were trembling. Now he had come into full understanding!

Lifting the little figure as tenderly in his arms as if it had been that of a baby, Yelverton started down the track.

Tasker, his face white and haggard, appeared to him from somewhere.

"For God's sake, Mr. Dick, don't tell me it's fatal!" he groaned. "For God's sake, don't!" Then coming closer, he said, with a sob:

"Mr. Dick, don't blame me, sir, for not telling you the truth before, but if——"

Yelverton cut him off short.

"I know," he said sharply. "Not a word more—about anything. Run ahead and tell Mrs. Tasker to have everything in readiness. I'm going to carry"—he hesitated a moment—"my jockey to your house myself; understand?"

Tasker did not delay. As he hurried along, the track ambulance ran swiftly to meet the owner and his unconscious burden. Track officials, turfmen, and spectators followed closely.

Yelverton motioned them all away.

"Come over to the Tasker cottage," he called to the surgeon standing on the step of the ambulance. "This is my jockey, and I need no help."

So he walked along the course, and out the front gate, paying not the slightest attention to any one of the curious, wondering throng.

It was before he had reached the end of his journey that a gasp came from the white lips of the jockey, the blue eyes opened wide. Yelverton felt them resting on his own, knew that consciousness had returned.

"Forgive me, Mr. Dick, oh, forgive me—I, oh, how can I explain! I must, but I cannot——" the sentence was finished in a fit of sobbing.

"There is nothing you need tell me, Kiddy," said Yelverton gently. "There, there, don't worry."

It was as if he was speaking to a child.

"But I must have your forgiveness," the small voice went on weakly, pleadingly, hurrying as if fearful that speech would be denied.

"I threw the race away, Mr. Dick. I got left at the post on purpose"—the words came with effort—"because, because I did not wish to leave your employ. I threw it away—then I hated myself, and tried to win, in spite of it."

"Nonsense, youngster, you don't know what you're saying," Yelverton managed to answer bravely enough. "That spill jolted you up a little, but you'll be all right soon."

No response. Only a fresh fit of weeping. They had reached home, and Yelverton laid the jockey on the waiting couch, resigned his charge to the care of motherly Mrs. Tasker, and left the place.

"Let me know instantly if it's at all serious or otherwise," he instructed Tasker briefly. "I'm bound for the stable." And he hurried off, his eyes brimming with tears which he tried vainly to repress.

Tasker's face was sufficient evidence that the accident was not serious when an hour or so later, which seemed terribly long to Yelverton, the trainer summoned him.

"Only a shaking up, no bones broken, the surgeon states, Mr. Dick," said the old trainer, his face shining. "I think, sir"—he stammered a little, but smiled,

also—"I think *she* would like to see you, sir."

Yelverton felt as he never had quite felt before, as he was admitted to the darkened room, and found his way to the big chair, where he made out a little form propped against the pillows.

"I wish to ask your forgiveness for purposely throwing the race away today, Mr. Dick," a voice said weakly, almost sobbingly.

"My dear"—Yelverton had started to say "boy," but changed it to "child," with a little gulp—"I'm the one who is to be forgiven. I've been a blind, stupid ass all along. I pray you forgive me for not fathoming your secret long ago, and not—not making it easier for you without your guessing that I knew. I humbly beg your pardon," he pleaded. "About that contract, Will——" the name seemed inappropriate now. Yelverton was floundering in the mire of embarrassment.

"Wilful?" the girl supplied, with a suspicion of laughter. "My name is Wilhelmina, but Will it is, also—to you, Mr. Dick."

"Oh! Yes, Wilhelmina"—catching at it eagerly. "You will understand about this matter of contract. I didn't want to get rid of you. It was because I thought you'd become famous in England. 'Pon my soul, it made my heart heavy to think of losing you—but I sha'n't lose you now," he said desperately, coming over, finding a little hand and holding it tightly.

"I want to keep you forever. I can't do without you, Will—Wilhelmina. I wish to make a lifelong contract with you, little girl, as my wife."

She was as wilful as ever; she would not submit tamely even now.

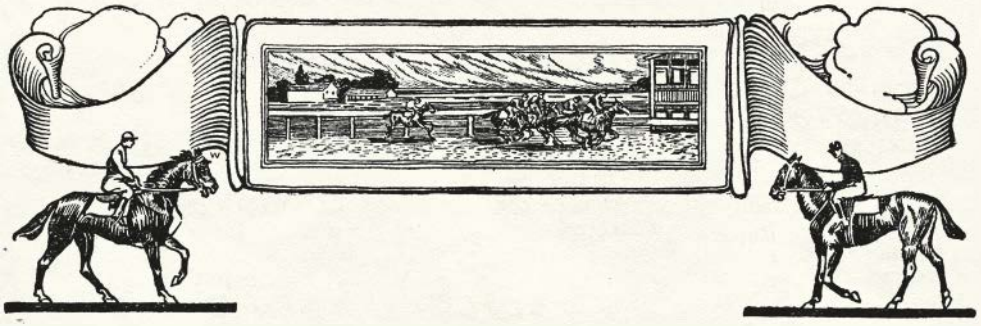
"Have you forgotten Miss Westover so soon, Mr. Dick?" she demanded, and there was a subtle ring in her voice that made him want to take her in his arms.

Her blue eyes were dancing, her voice was rippling with laughter.

A light broke over the misty mind of Yelverton.

"By Jove! Kiddy," he said delightedly, returning unconsciously to the old appellation, "you were jealous! Oh, yes, you were. Had I been acquainted with feminine nature I should have—should have—that is to say, I might have understood the circumstances—— Hang it all, Wilhelmina! you do love me, don't you?"

Mrs. Tasker having opened the door softly at this point, found it fitting to close it again without her intrusion being discovered.



Tales of the Lost Legion

By Francis Whitlock

IV.—THE SIMPLICITY OF "SYLLABLE" SIMPKINS

(A Novelette)

AN atmosphere of gloom pervaded the ordinarily cheerful and cozy little restaurant situated on a quiet side street of lower New York over which the motherly Madame Hortense presided. The unostentatious and homelike eating-place was the recognized rendezvous of the adventurous sons of the wandering foot known as the "Lost Legion."

Mr. Jabez Cooper, who had employed the Legioners to further his schemes of enrichment, was for the moment devoting his energies to safe and lucrative wool-shearing close at hand which did not demand the services of the Lost Legion, and consequently the credit which Madame Hortense always willingly extended was fast reaching its limit.

Mr. Richard Redgreave, who was pessimistic by nature, fairly reveled in the pervailing depression, for it afforded unlimited opportunity to recall the omens of impending misfortune at which his companions had jeered in their time of prosperity; and even Mr. Albert Jenkins, whose confirmed optimism always enabled him to detect a silver lining in the darkest cloud, was at his wits' end to discover anything hopeful in the outlook. Halliday, whose handiness with a forty-five had gained him the sobriquet of "Hair-trigger" during his service with the Texas Rangers, was disconsolately searching the "Help Wanted" columns of an evening paper in the hope that he might find a suggestion to relieve the financial stringency from which he and his companions suffered; while Madame Hortense, perched on her high stool behind the desk which formed her post of observation, had laid aside the inevitable knitting to consult an ominously thick volume which bore the word "Ledger" in large gilt lettering.

The three adventurers gathered about the table glanced furtively toward the customarily placid face of madame, on which just the slightest trace of distrust and apprehension was striving for place. Suddenly, as April clouds vanish before the sun, the tension was relieved by the entrance of another member of the Legion, whose good-natured face radiated the cheerfulness which could only come from the prospect of congenial and lucrative employment.

"It came my way," he said, giving a cheerful nod to the trio at the table, and handing a check bearing the familiar signature of Jabez Cooper to madame, whose face became wreathed in smiles as she noted its proportions. "Cash that and wipe out all the chalk marks against the bunch. Boys, I'm it."

"What's up, Syllable?" asked Jenkins hopefully, but Redgreave—commonly known as "Doleful Dick"—shook his head ominously as he noticed that the newcomer omitted the obvious precaution of rapping on wood when he announced that fortune favored him.

Halliday, with a sigh of relief, discarded the paper and made room for the lucky one beside him; and Mr. Samuel Simpkins—nicknamed "Syllable,"

from his invariable habit of employing the shortest words in the English language to convey his ideas—drew up a chair and made a sign which Seraphim, the angel-faced waiter, had watched for in vain for many days.

"The old game in a new scene," Simpkins remarked, as Seraphim smilingly placed the glasses before them. "Heard of Morocco, haven't you?" This question addressed to men who made it their business to absorb all possible information about prospective storm-centers against possible future need seemed superfluous, but they all nodded assent, and Jenkins quoted the late secretary of state's historic and epigrammatic demand which had brought a threatening incident to a quick and happy termination.

"That's right—the same place!" continued Simpkins. "Well, I leave for Morocco by the first boat. Cash on the nail now; more when I get back if I bring off the game. Cooper backs the game and I take the chance. It's like a find."

"Give us the yarn, Syl," demanded Halliday eagerly, for in want of personal occupation they were all interested in the employment of a comrade.

Simpkins prepared for narration by adequately moistening his throat.

"It's this way," he said, as Seraphim deftly refilled his glass. "The sultan is up a tree. Cash-box empty—harem full—credit busted. Tells Jabez Cooper a pipe-dream—much gold in ground, but no good to him while a man that wants his job sits on the lid. Sultan has the map—other chap has the town. Sultan afraid to deal with other chap—name too long for me, but call him Ben for short—so calls on Jabez Cooper for help. Knows him of old; when he was after the job he holds now, Cooper put up his grub-stake, and his nibs made good. Cooper gives him glad hand and sends for me.

" 'Simpkins,' says he, 'here's a chance to pay your board-bill to Madame Hortense.'

" 'I'm on,' says I. 'Where is it?'

" 'In the ground, right here,' says he, and he shows me a map. 'Get there, dig it up, bring it back, and we win; you work and I pay. Good-by,' says he, and —here I am!"

He spread out a parchment map, yellow with age and covered with strange hieroglyphics; and the three heads were close together as the adventurers leaned over the table and eagerly studied it. The coast-line identified it immediately as Morocco to these expert cartographers, the bordering Mediterranean indicated by conventional wave-lines and crude representations of the piratical galleys which had made the Straits of Gibraltar a terror to peaceful mariners. Cities were shown by graphic representations of fortified gates, towers, and minarets; while groups of palm-trees indicated oases in the desert of the vague southern boundary. One of the cities, situated fairly in the heart of the country, and from the number of towers and minarets allotted to it evidently of considerable size and importance, was surrounded by a recently added circle in red ink; a cross—the abomination of the whole Moslem world—in the same vivid color, indicating a pretentious mosque.

Taking a pencil from his pocket, Simpkins drew a straight line from the location of Tangier to the red cross, ignoring the fact that it ran through apparently trackless deserts, over formidable mountain ranges and across crooked rivers, which were undoubtedly without bridges, and probably unfordable.

"There's the trail I take," he said confidently. "Leave Tangier and go due south, spot the cross, dig up the gold, get back with it—and blow it in!"

Halliday and Jenkins, who were accustomed to laying out their routes with similar directness and disregard of obstacles, which never worried them until they actually encountered them, agreed with him; but Redgreave, who never saw anything promising in the most roseate prospect, shook his head dubiously.

"There's plenty of trouble along that line," he remarked. "I happen to know it for about fifty miles from the coast, and if any other white man ever went

farther he's there yet; for no one ever came out."

But Simpkins was not to be deterred by this gloomy outlook, and ten days later he stepped jauntily from the tender to the landing-stage at Gibraltar. His simple blue traveling suit was without a wrinkle, his linen, tie, and boots immaculate, and he looked as if he had just emerged from the traditional bandbox, although his entire wardrobe was contained in the small canvas roll which he carried—a piece of luggage suited to any method of transportation, including its owner's broad shoulders, if no other offered. Like all experienced travelers, Mr. Simpkins believed in conserving energy, and he selected from the crowd of jabbering porters a typical "Rock Scorpion," as the native inhabitants of the Gib are called, to care for his limited impedimenta.

"Now, my boy, if you want to keep your job, you stick close to me with that roll," he said. "What might your name be?"

"Ricardo Mahomet Patrick Achilles Alphonse MacDuff," answered the Scorpion proudly, for the conglomeration of names bore evidence of the cosmopolitan nature of his ancestry; but Simpkins looked at him pityingly.

"I guess you didn't have much more choice than I did," he said sympathetically. "I'm not just stuck on my name, but what they did to you makes me think I was in luck. From now on I'll help as much as I can, though, and you'll be just plain 'Mack' to me. Now, then, lead on!"

It was no part of Mr. Simpkins' plan to waste time in sightseeing, for the members of the Lost Legion when employed by Mr. Jabez Cooper traveled for neither health nor amusement; but he was destined to remain a day in that small piece of rocky territory which England justly regards as one of the most important outposts of the empire.

It was in a café frequented by men swarthy of skin, black of eye, proud and erect of carriage and dignified of manner that Simpkins elected to spend his day. He resolutely declined to follow the suggestions of his porter, who, when the luggage had been deposited at the hotel, with ready adaptability volunteered to act as *valet-de-place,* to inspect the curious old fortifications which honeycomb the rock; but "Mack" refused to be dispensed with when prospective profit seemed possible, and accompanied him to act as interpreter.

He spoke all languages with equal fluency and incorrectness; his ordinary English reeking with cockneyisms absorbed from association wtih the Tommies of the English line regiments in the garrison; but under excitement tinged with the broad Scotch inherited from his grandfather, one time color-sergeant of the Gordon Highlanders; or the soft brogue of his maternal grandmother, who was "carried on the strength" of the Dublin Fusiliers when that famous fighting regiment was stationed at the Gib.

"Sure, ut's meself that can 'elp you be keepin' hoff these bloomin' rotters; an' you'll nae be missin' th' wee bit siller," he protested volubly, when Simpkins tried to dismiss him.

The Legioner, overcome with admiration for a man who could combine the accents of the United Kingdom in a single sentence, good-naturedly accepted his services—a piece of indulgence for which he had good cause to be thankful in days to come.

The steamer which was to ferry him across the Straits would not sail until the following morning; but there were Moors at hand to be studied, and Simpkins was not in the habit of throwing away chances.

To the accompaniment of the soft bubbling of narghiles, he absorbed numberless small cups of Arabian coffee in the semi-Oriental divan which the English shunned, but where their innermost secrets were openly discussed; while his ears took in the whispered translation in which Mack epitomized the gossip of the soft-voiced Moors who were its regular patrons.

The report of the sultan's increasing impecuniosity, and the consequent desertion of many of his most trusted followers to the pretender, Ben Yussuf,

Simpkins listened to most eagerly; for the reward of his own services would be commensurate with the extremity of the sultan's need. But through the long day, as different groups successively occupied the low divans and pulled at the amber mouthpieces of the snakelike narghile tubes, he needed no interpreter to tell him that more important than sultan or pretender, in the estimation of these men whose talk was of intrigue and plunder, was the one whose name was constantly on their lips—Raisuli.

Raisuli, one of the most picturesque figures of this twentieth century, the chief of an almost unknown tribe in an unimportant country, but whose ambitions had nearly set the Great Powers at each others' throats, was evidently the man to be reckoned with when the gates of Tangier had closed behind the traveler; and, if their hints and innuendos were to be credited, his influence was paramount within the palace whose owner publicly repudiated his acts and set a price upon his head.

At last Simpkins wearied of the sights and sounds and returned to the hotel.

"Here's where I feed my face," he said to the Scorpion; and MacDuff listened attentively, anxious to add American colloquialisms to his already varied linguistic accomplishments. "Then I have a date; but you can show up in the cold gray dawn and pack my grip to the boat. If you are loose, maybe you would like to tie to me for a trip to Tangier?"

In scraps of most of the languages he knew, MacDuff protested that it would realize his fondest hopes to serve the illustrious señor, who would find him a hexcellent servant, nane sae slow on th' uptake about larnin' his new juties, be jabbers!

"You're on, Mack; be right on this spot at six sharp," curtly interrupted Simpkins, as he turned to enter the hotel, and Ricardo Mahomet Patrick Achilles Alphonse MacDuff departed to announce to his family of every shade of complexion and color of hair that his fortunes were made; for he had entered the service of an American who was niggardly only in the use of polysyllables, with which he was already abundantly supplied.

II.

It was not until the long roll of the drums proclaimed that the keys of the town had been carried under military escort to the governor, making the inhabitants prisoners within the city and forcing belated travelers to spend the night without the gates, that Simpkins again went out into the narrow streets. It was his first visit to Gibraltar, and he had asked no questions which might betray his errand; but with unerring steps he went straight to his destination —a humble shop situated in a narrow lane redolent with the odors of the East.

A peculiar knock on the closed door and it was quickly opened, to be as softly closed behind him when he had stepped into a dimly lighted room, where he stood quietly, while many well-oiled bolts were shot noiselessly into place.

"And what may the stranger require that he honors my poor abode with a visit at so late an hour?" asked the tall, intellectual-looking Moor, who seemed strangely out of place as proprietor of the small shop at which Cook's tourists were wont to pause in their breathless sightseeing to buy souvenirs of the Orient which were made in Germany.

Simpkins looked at him sharply, noting the fearless eye, which did not indicate the trader; the thin, straight lips, which seemed more fitted to frame commands than to haggle over the price of curios, and the bearing which spoke of the freedom of the desert.

"You are Ali Ben Sadi?" he said interrogatively; and the Moor bowed assent. "That is, in the Gib you are; but in Tangier not a bit like it," continued Simpkins, smiling good-naturedly. "I guess you know who I am, or that door wouldn't have swung. Anyway, I'm Simpkins."

"From the Sheik Cooper in far-away New York?" asked Ali.

The Legioner nodded. "From the

same, but we call him Jabez," he answered, grinning. "Here's a note he told me to give to you."

The Moor took the communication, which consisted of a roll of parchment addressed in strange characters, and pressed it to his forehead before breaking the seal. After reading it carefully he placed it in his bosom, and motioned to his visitor to precede him through a narrow doorway at the back of the shop. Across a courtyard they passed to an unpretentious building at the back; but when another thick door had closed behind them Simpkins found that they were in an apartment furnished with all the luxury of the Orient.

Around the room were low divans covered with priceless rugs; and the antique Persian carpets scattered over the floor of tesselated marble made the rough tread of his thick boots seem a profanation. It was dimly illuminated by hanging lamps of curiously worked silver, the light from the wicks which floated in perfumed oil softened by passage through multicolored glasses. Low tables of quaint design, fashioned from priceless woods and elaborately inlaid with ivory and mother-of-pearl, supported hubblebubble pipes and silver canisters containing the choicest of Turkish tobacco, and a crystal casket half-filled with a translucent paste of greenish hue—the purest of hashish, which is almost beyond price.

Sunk in the middle of the marble floor was a large basin, into which a small stream of water plashed with a musical tinkle; and in its depths goldfish of a dozen hues swam lazily about.

It was a curious room to find in this town clinging to a rocky and barren hillside, where grim war seemed always to threaten; and a gauzy scarf, heavily worked in gold thread, and a long-necked Moorish guitar lying on one of the divans, indicated that feminine occupancy was not strange to it. The Legioner's sharp senses detected indications that such occupancy had been very recent, for the air bore trace of a perfume, which was more delicate and feminine than that from the lamps; while a slipper of yellow satin, thickly embroidered with seed-pearls, and of such tiny proportions that Cinderella might well have envied it, lay in front of a thick rug, which apparently concealed a door.

The Moor motioned to him to seat himself, and clapped his hands, a summons which was quickly answered by the entrance of a gigantic negro bearing a tray with the tiny cups of coffee which in the East are the invariable accompaniments of trade or negotiation.

Simpkins, profiting by his observations of the afternoon, lifted his cup with his right hand, sipping it as audibly as the veriest Arab; and Ali looked at him observantly as the negro filled the bowl of a narghile, and, with profound salaams, presented a tube to each of them.

"The Sheik Simpkins has been in Araby before?" he said interrogatively, when he noticed that his visitor gave a half-dozen rapid puffs at the amber mouthpiece, and then deeply inhaled the smoke of the seventh, holding it in his capacious lungs until only the slightest trace of smoke was visible when he exhaled it from his nostrils.

"Not yet, but I hope to know it well; for I find that its men please me, and its ways are good," answered the Legioner.

The Moor bowed his acknowledgment. "You are of those who have the gift to make all lands their own. The Frank ordinarily despises the followers of Islam, and sees nothing but that which is to be condemned."

"Yes, all lands look the same to me, if they offer that by which I may live," answered Simpkins.

Ali looked at him curiously. "In the land to which you would go life is very uncertain. The Nazarenes who pass to parts where war-ships offer no protection have no hope but in their own prowess."

"I have yet to ask a gunboat to help me out." And Simpkins smiled confidently. "Now, Ali Ben Sadi, the night is short. I was told that from you I might learn much that would help me in what I go to do. Now, what's the news?"

"The command of my master, the Sultan Abd-el-Azziz, is this," said the Moor impressively. "You will proceed at once to Bab-el-Ghizel. Arrived there, you will make your way to the great mosque, and under the stone which is set in the eastern wall to show the believers in the true faith the direction of the tomb of the only true prophet, Mahomet"—he bowed his head reverently—"you will find a great treasure. That you will remove with all secrecy and despatch, and fetch to Tangier, where my royal master, the direct descendant of the true prophet, awaits your coming."

"So far your words are as clear as day, and in most points the same as those Jabez Cooper gave to me." And Simpkins grinned as he remembered the essential difference; for his employer had enjoined upon him to avoid Tangier as he would the plague on the return journey—"If there is one," he had playfully remarked—and to divide the loot on the European side of the Straits, where the red ensign of England guaranteed a white man security. "Now, will you give me a hint as to how I shall get there with a whole skin and get back with the gold, which will weigh half a ton?"

"You ask, I fear, more than I can answer," replied the Moor gravely. "Tomorrow you arrive at Tangier. At nightfall, if you go to the postern of the Bab-el-Faz, the guard will allow you to pass without the walls. Two horses of the purest desert breed and a guide will await you there, and before the dawn you should be fifty miles on your way. Beyond that, Allah be with you, for the help of man will not avail." He drew from the folds of his burnoose a small amulet hung from a steel chain, and handed it to Simpkins, who examined it closely. "That will be your passport," he continued. "A safeguard from those who serve my master; your warrant of death by those who war against him."

"So that when I flash it I'll know which side they are on from what they do to me," answered Simpkins dryly. "I don't know that I care to pack a thing that is just as apt to blow me up as to pass me on."

"As it is written, so it will befall," said Ali, with the stoicism of the fatalist when another's fate is in question. "If it is ordained that you are to succeed in your mission, the arts of your enemies shall not prevail against you; and if failure is to be your portion, your bones will be picked clean by the vultures and bleach in the desert, while your salted head will sun-dry over the gates of Bab-el-Ghizel. From the one the amulet may not save you; but if you succeed it may serve to make your path easier."

"I think I'll just leave it with you, then, for I don't see its use to me," said the Legioner, offering to return it.

Ali shook his head. "It has a hidden virtue that you know not of," he said calmly. "Should misfortune overtake you and torture be your lot, place it beneath your tongue, and you will pass without pain to the reward of all brave men. It would be grateful should you be spiked hand and foot to the emblem of your faith, to linger miserably for days in the desert sun."

"Then maybe I should be wise to keep it," answered Simpkins grimly. "I make it a rule to try to keep the last shot for my own head, but you can't be too sure. Anyway, it quite perks a man up to talk with you and hear what may be on the cards, and I'm glad I came. You might send on word, if you have the chance, that I have a date at Bab-el-Ghizel, and any one who gets in my way may get hurt, for I'm apt to shoot first and talk last, and I don't miss. Now I'll hit the trail for bed, so ta-ta."

The wall against which the Legioner had rested his back was in reality a screen of mushabeah work—that intricate wood tracery with which the Mohammedan screens his women folk from sight of profane eyes, while permitting them to see and hear—and as he straightened up he was conscious that a little sigh of regret was breathed so close to his ear that he felt the warm breath against his cheek. Not a sound had come from the other side of the

screen during their conference; but Simpkins knew that in the East the walls have ears, and the delicate perfume which floated through the mushabeah from softly rustling silken draperies convinced him that something daintily feminine was behind the screen.

Another fact of which he had been unconscious was that as he sat cross-legged on the great divan the soft light had revealed his perfect profile, clear skin, and laughing eyes, and that with the easy grace of his movements as he sipped his coffee and used his well-shaped and perfectly cared for hands, which expressed as much as his short words, the total had made a picture to appeal to the eye of any woman. A pair of them which any man would have been glad to look into had watched him, noting the broad shoulders, the well-poised head, the air of confidence, and the unflinching resolve to push on in spite of the dangers at which Ali had hinted; and, recognizing a man, had found him good in their sight.

Simpkins knew that it was unpardonable rudeness for a man to make the slightest reference to the feminine portion of a Mohammedan's domestic establishment, but he glanced at the tiny slipper when he rose from the divan; and Ali Ben Sadi, whose sharp eyes missed nothing, smiled knowingly.

"Much depends upon the success of your mission, which I wish that I might insure," he said significantly. "Perhaps the continuance of an old dynasty or the foundation of a new one; surely the lives of thousands of men now living, the future of thousands as yet unborn. But when you have passed beyond the walls of Tangier, it is as Allah wills, for the protection of the most powerful would not help you, and the hand of every man will be against you."

"If I get a square deal, I'll take the luck as it comes," said the Legioner, holding out his hand, his eyes furtively watching the spot on the screen against which his head had rested. "If no one gives them the tip, I'll try to elude the boys who would nail me to the cross; but I want no guide I do not know. I choose my own friends, and I take one with me from here."

"As you will," answered the Moor, looking at him curiously. "You fear my lack of good faith, for you have heard ill of my people—wait!" He clapped his hands, and the negro brought in a tray containing bread and salt, and Ali took a piece of the former, dipped it in the salt, and motioned for his visitor to do the same. They each swallowed a portion of the not altogether appetizing refreshment; and the Moor drew himself up proudly and looked him straight in the eyes.

"Under my roof we have broken bread together, and you have eaten of my salt," he said gravely. "After such a ceremony you could trust the lowest Arab who breathes—even the renegade Raisuli!"

"And that's a gent I'd sure like to meet—if I had time," answered Simpkins, smiling; but as he walked through the narrow streets to his hotel he had no fear of treachery from Ali Ben Sadi, and his thoughts were more of the mysterious woman behind the screen than the dangers which lay before him.

III.

Ricardo Mahomet Patrick Achilles Alphonse MacDuff, arrayed in garments which owed their origin to as many nationalities as his name, was on hand promptly at the appointed time; and Simpkins nodded curtly to him as he handed him his scanty baggage. At the extremities he was Moorish; for a red tarboosh, its long silken tassel blowing out in the morning breeze, adorned his head, while his feet were protected by the inevitable yellow slippers without heels; but between the two his costume was a curious mixture.

Puttee leggings purchased at the auction of a deceased officer's effects, a pair of trousers of the Gordon plaid which had once formed part of the color-sergeant's kit, a sleeveless Greek jacket, and a discarded toreador's cape, gave him the appearance of an animated dummy for a cosmopolitan old clothes shop.

"Th' top av th' mornin' to yer honor," he said, the Celtic strain being predominant, as was its wont when he was particularly hopeful. "Ut's a foine day entoirely we'll be afther havin' fer our small excursion."

"And maybe a long one," replied the Legioner, as he mentally estimated what Mack would look like at the end of the steamer passage and fifty miles of rough riding. "I hope that you are not short of sleep at the start, for it'll be many a long day before you find time to catch up."

The Scorpion did not seem discouraged at the prospect of prolonged wakefulness; and when Simpkins saw the family group assembled to bid him good-by at the landing-stage he understood the joy of his courier in escaping to the comparative peace of an expedition to southern Morocco. The MacDuffs were undeniably prolific and apparently long-lived, and generations had assembled; from decrepit grandmothers to the last pledges of affection which Mrs. Ricardo—a buxom Tunisian Jewess—had presented to her husband in the form of a pair of lusty-voiced twins.

Leaving Mack in the embraces of his feminine relatives, who literally clung to his neck, Simpkins, after a brief survey of his fellow voyagers—a motley gathering containing specimens of every race inhabiting the Mediterranean littoral—proceeded to make himself comfortable for the voyage.

Tangier, as seen from the water, is a windowless town. Flat-roofed houses, their high white walls, with but a single opening into the street, rise tier above tier on the hillside; the inevitable Kasbah of the Arabian town, half-palace, half-fortress, commanding all. In the center of the town a solitary palm shaded the well beside the tomb of a marabout who had acquired holiness by refusing to shave or bathe for fifty years, and committing the entire Koran to memory, while the flags of many nations floating above consulates and legations testified that in this small corner of a barbaric nation the foreigner might claim a measure of protection.

Simpkins gained the shore on the back of a lusty porter, the exposed harbor offering no landing-place even for small boats; and, thanks to his foresight in stowing most of his contraband arms and ammunition about his person, and a judicious distribution of bribes by Mack, he passed quickly through the customs formalities.

The narrow, ill-paved streets through which he passed on donkey-back to reach the Royal Victoria Hotel he studied carefully, realizing the hopelessness of any attempt at intimacy with a people who hid their entire private lives in the seclusion afforded by thick, windowless walls, and appreciating the helplessness of a stranger in a city where every narrow alley afforded hiding-place for possible lurking enemies.

But had he been an idler, the thought of risk would not have deterred him from entering upon an adventure to which he was introduced by a note presented to him by a slave boy, who apparently came from nowhere soon after his arrival at the hotel—a note whose dainty handwriting proclaimed feminine origin. It read:

> If the emissary of the Sheik Cooper, who tempts better men than himself to risk their lives for gold, would be guided by a friend's advice, he would not leave Tangier. But one life is given to a man, and it may hold much that is sweet. The writer can, perhaps, offer compensation for giving up the journey. The bearer is discreet, and a written word entrusted to him will be safely delivered. Say that you will give up your reckless venture, and at midnight he will wait at your hotel gate to conduct you where no jealous mushabeah screens from you one who loves a brave man and would not see him sacrificed.

Simpkins read the message a second time, and then looked sharply at the slave boy, who stood with bowed head and hands crossed on his chest awaiting his answer.

"Who sent you to me with this?" he asked, but the negro only shook his head.

Simpkins took pencil and paper from his pocket. He had no intention of jeopardizing his employer's interest by involving himself in a harem intrigue;

but it was not without regret that he composed his refusal.

My date-book is full for the next few days; but shall be glad to meet you on this side of the bird-cage when I get back.
With best love, yours for health,
SAM.

"That'll be all, I guess," he said ruefully, as he handed the paper and with it a large silver coin to the slave. "Just trot home with that, and keep an eye out for me when I get back; for I've got a hunch that I shall pass this way in, say, three weeks from now."

The slave, who understood that he was dismissed, although the words were unintelligible to him, pocketed the coin, pressed the note respectfully to his forehead, and disappeared as silently as he had come; while Simpkins, looking upon that affair as a closed incident for the time being, devoted himself to acquiring information about the country.

The fact that Tangier is close to Europe, and that Morocco is not hampered by extradition treaties, makes it a favorite resort for many people besides those who seek it for its winter sunshine; and a voluble Frenchman who had absent-mindedly signed another man's name to a check, and was living on the proceeds, offered much enlightenment.

According to his story, the sultan exercised a nominal authority over the country as far south as the Atlas Mountains; but it was supreme only in Tangier itself. Raisuli had gained influence over the restless and lawless spirits of the neighboring provinces, and was in reality the ruler, although he was shrewd enough to leave the sultan as a man of straw to answer to the Powers for his brigandage. The provinces were ruled by governors, who squeezed the natives unmercifully, only to be squeezed in turn by the sultan, who had the subterranean dungeons under the Kasbah filled with ex-governors whom he suspected of having cheated him. South of the Atlas the Sussi tribe openly supported the pretender and defied the sultan, which had led some six months earlier to the despatch of a large army, with instructions to "eat up the country," which in Morocco means depopulation. Only a remnant of this army had returned, with a dismal story of failure.

When Simpkins announced that they were going to the Sus country Mack looked very serious, and remarked with true Scottish caution that its people were an "unco' bad lot"; but when Simpkins offered to release him from his bargain, his English doggedness was appealed to, and he announced that "no bloomin' fuzzy-wuzzy was 'arf man enough to scare a true-'arted Britisher," and he was ready to follow the American wherever he led.

The exhibition of the amulet gained them passage through the small postern, the Moorish guard only indulging in a few remarks about the ancestry and eventual fate of all unbelievers—aspersions and prophecies which Mack's knowledge of the language enabled him to answer in kind.

Simpkins grinned when the Scorpion translated the conversation, but having no mind to incur unnecessary enmity, curtly directed him to "cut all that sort of thing out from now on," and led the way to where a horse's nickering and the impatient stamping of shod hoofs indicated the presence of their waiting mounts.

He found two beautiful Arabs, his own equipped with a good English saddle, over which was thrown a jellaba—the short riding-cloak of the Moors—made of fine cloth; a youthful groom holding the stirrup for him to mount.

Mack clambered awkwardly into the high-peaked Moorish saddle on the other horse; but when Simpkins leaned over to ask the direction of the road, the groom had disappeared in the darkness. A moment later there was a sharp clatter of hoofs, and he dashed past them mounted on a white barb. Instinctively their own horses galloped after it. The Legioner was provoked, for he wished no companion who might know the true object of his mission; but his shouted commands to stop only caused an increase of speed; and, making the best of a bad bargain, he set-

tled himself in the saddle and galloped through the night in pursuit of the ghostlike animal which led the way.

At the end of about four hours' steady galloping, when Simpkins judged that they must have traversed half of the allotted distance, the horses slowed down in response to a whistle from the groom; and when they came to a halt he thought it a good opportunity to have speech of his unwelcome attendant; but the white horse effectually prevented near approach by viciously lashing out with well-shod hoofs, while its master remained persistently out of reach on its off-side.

He finally abandoned his useless efforts and turned to Mack, whose unwonted equestrian exercise had removed most of the skin from the portions of his body which came in contact with the saddle, and who was exhausting the curses of several languages in stating his opinion of the man who tamed the first horse.

"Don't you care; it'll grow on in a few days," Simpkins said encouragingly. "I'll see to your horse, and you try to round up that will-o'-the-wisp that led us this dance. I have a few things I wish to say to him."

With limping steps and conciliatory words, Mack approached the spot where the groom was standing solicitously loosening girths and tending to the comfort of his horse; but the animal quickly assumed the offensive; and from the darkness came a volley of abuse in the vernacular of the stable-yard which caused him to stand still in open-mouthed admiration at the other's command of bad language. Finally, the invective being exhausted, he was curtly ordered to inform the sheik that he would be faithfully served by the slave of him whose salt he had eaten, but that he must ask no further questions until daylight should mark the end of their ride.

"An' ut's meself that'll be glad whin that same time comes," concluded Mack, when he had translated the message. "I dinna like the beastie, an' th' 'ide's fair wore hoff me."

He groaned audibly when a signal from the darkness warned them to remount; and Simpkins almost regretted bringing him, as every stride in the darkness brought an ejaculation of pain in one language or another, but the Scorpion stuck fast to him, and when the first streak of dawn came he was well up in the first flight. The groom had galloped on through the night in advance without speaking, but now he turned in his saddle and pointed to a town of low white houses which they were approaching, an imposing Kasbah of large size denoting its importance. Jumping from his horse, he motioned for Mack to approach, and, after listening to his earnest words, the courier limped to Simpkins and translated.

"In th' flowery words av th' Moor, he begs that you be not angry with Zamluk, the 'umblest av your slaves," he said, grinning. "There's a woman in th' case, your honor, an' ut's from that same that he's carryin' a billy-doo that he's wishful to presint."

Simpkins motioned for the groom to approach, which he did with hanging head. After presenting a letter which he drew from the voluminous turban wrapped about his tarboosh, he stood with downcast eyes and hands crossed submissively while the Legioner opened the missive, about which he recognized the subtle perfume which had permeated Ali Ben Sadi's harem.

The letter was in the same dainty writing of the former note. He read:

> Be not angry, O man of iron in whom duty is stronger than love.
>
> You go to that which it is not meet that a woman should share, but I can at least send my slave, Zamluk, to watch over you. He is devoted to me; and to him, because he is a slave, my word is law. Use him as you see fit, spare him not, and remember that if one must die, a slave can be replaced. You will find him faithful, resourceful, and worthy of trust; and in emergency—although his years are few—his counsel will be of help. Trust him and her at whose command he goes to die, if need be, in your stead.

Simpkins shook his head when he had finished, and carefully placed the note in his pocket before turning to Mack to interpret.

"Ask him what this means, and the lady's name and age," he said.

Mack requested the information in Arabic, and the groom salaamed deeply and spread out his hands.

"That is not for me to tell," he answered. "To the service of the sheik I am devoted, and my life is at his disposal; but of my mistress I will not speak."

"Then it's back to the coast for him, quick march!" answered Simpkins, when Mack had translated. "I don't take a man who does not trust me. Tell him that he can take these horses back and we will walk on to the town, which I take it is El Kantar, from which we go on camels."

The groom listened submissively, but before the Legioner could stop him he had jumped on his horse and galloped rapidly back over the trail they had come. The other horses, which were grazing quietly, followed after; but Zamluk stopped and, knotting up their reins, sent them back to where the men were standing, and with a wave of his hand disappeared over the crest of the hill.

Simpkins had no desire to accept vicarious sacrifice, and he argued with himself that the disappearance of Zamluk was precisely what he had desired, but as he again swung himself into the saddle and turned his horse's head toward El Kantar he acknowledged that it was not without regret that he had lost the opportunity to learn about the woman who seemed so strangely interested in him and his mission.

"I guess it's to that bird-cage on the hill that we must go to find his nibs who runs this part of the show," he said, pointing to the Kasbah.

Mack agreed, but stated that there were usually difficulties to be encountered before gaining an audience with the local bashaws

"I don't lose sleep and ride all night to let any one stand me off," continued the Legioner confidently; and his confidence was justified, for within a quarter of an hour they stood in that ruler's presence.

It is true that their entrance was not dignified, for on arrival at the city gate they had been unceremoniously dragged from their horses and hustled, close prisoners, through filthy lanes by fierce-looking Moorish soldiers, and were forced to make involuntary kotows by the simple process of tripping up and punching in the back; but when Simpkins had recovered the breath which had been knocked out of him by his captors, he sat up and looked about him curiously.

They had evidently arrived at the justice hour, and the bashaw was acting as magistrate. Seated on a raised dais under an awning in a large courtyard, and surrounded by an imposing-looking guard, he might have passed for Solomon himself; the long white beard and the large spectacles over which he glanced at them giving him a benevolent and judicial expression.

At one side stood a smith, his hammer resting on a low anvil, and a pile of chains and fetters before him; on the other a negro carrying a large sword. Before him was arraigned a trembling peasant, whom he questioned from time to time after consulting an impressive-looking volume on a cushion in front of him. The examination was apparently finished, for he made a sign, and two soldiers seized the prisoner, deftly stretched him on the ground, while another proceeded to bastinado his bare feet with a stout stick.

The howls of the victim were not allowed to interfere with court routine nor to delay justice; for another prisoner was quickly arraigned and questioned. It was not until his case had been disposed of, and the smith had riveted a heavy bar of iron to his ankles, that the bashaw motioned to Simpkins and Mack to approach, first bidding the soldier who was applying the bastinado to desist.

"The Nazarenes have ventured far from the waters on which the war-ships float," he said benevolently. "Truly you are of a restless people, and it is given to the true believers to put a check upon your movements."

"Tell him that I am sent here by the sultan whom he serves," said the Le-

gioner, fumbling for his amulet, which he produced when Mack had translated.

The bashaw took it, and smiled as he placed it to his forehead.

"Truly, in Tangier this might save a man's head," he remarked. "In El Kantar, where I am banished to govern an obstinate people, who dishonestly hide the property which they acquire under my protection, I am unable to recognize such trifles. It is a matter which I shall be pleased to go into later, but this is unfortunately my busiest day. I shall, however, see that you are kept from harm in the meantime."

He made a sign to his guard, and the negro with the sword, who had been eying them expectantly, gave an exclamation of disappointment as they were hustled toward his rival the smith. A few minutes later they were each fitted with a neat collar of two-inch band-iron, a heavy chain fastening them together like coupled hounds.

Realizing the futility of resistance they obediently turned to follow the jailer, who had taken charge of them, and would have tasted of Moorish captivity, the harshest in the world, but for a timely interruption.

Through the archway which they had entered so unceremoniously came Zamluk the groom, escorted in all honor by a guard of soldiers. In the proud stripling arrayed in the handsomest of Oriental costumes, with crimson riding-boots coming well up his thighs, and a silken turban of mammoth proportions fastened by a jeweled clasp, they had difficulty in recognizing the mud-bespattered menial who had left them an hour before.

He made an imperative gesture for silence, then drew a large paper, sealed in many places, from his breast, and, after pressing it to his forehead, held it up for all to see.

"From Abd-el-Azziz, descendant of the Prophet, Cherif of Wazan, Sultan of Fez and Morocco, Commander of the Faithful, before whose frown all the potentates of the earth tremble; to his slave, Ben Hassar, Bashaw of El Kantar," he said; and the bashaw made low salaam. "A white horse, fitly caparisoned, awaits you at the gate of the Kasbah. By the command of the sultan, you will mount it and proceed to his court at Tangier, to render an account of your stewardship."

The face of the bashaw turned a sickly green, for the arrival of the white horse from the sultan is the inevitable precursor of imprisonment, torture, and starvation, until his gracious majesty is convinced that he has extracted the last possible farthing of blood-money from his victim. But he knew that resistance would be useless.

He had not expected the summons for another six months, and would have been safely across the Algerian frontier before then; but now that it had caught him unawares, he shrewdly calculated that he might gain immunity by giving up half of his concealed horde.

Casting an eye over the waiting prisoners, he tried to estimate what they would be worth to him when he returned. He was interrupted in his consoling mental arithmetic by a cry of rage from Zamluk, and, looking up, saw that the sultan's emissary was pointing at his white captives.

"Son of a dog!—what is the meaning of this?" demanded the transformed groom fiercely; and when the bashaw smilingly remarked that they were only a couple of Franks whom he was locking up until he could decide whether to boil them in oil or crucify them, he received a blow in the face from the back of his questioner's hand which sent his spectacles flying across the courtyard. The red boots were stamped viciously on the tile floor, and, while the bashaw sat blinking in astonishment, Zamluk sharply commanded the smith to remove the iron collars.

"These men, Franks and unbelievers though they be, have the safe conduct of the sultan whose slave you are," he cried fiercely. "Know you not that they are also under the protection of Raisuli, and that, after your master has finished with you, you will have to answer to him for their ill-treatment?"

The bashaw's face, which had been green when the sultan's summons was

delivered, now became livid, and he groveled at Zamluk's feet, and protested that they had said nothing of the great outlaw's friendship, or he should never have harmed a hair of their heads.

"A fat chance we had to tell him of it!" exclaimed Simpkins indignantly, quickly taking the cue when Mack translated. "He didn't do a thing but have those little trinkets put on our necks before we could get in a word. That cuss took a chip out of my ear, too," he continued, looking at the smith who had handled his hammer with malicious freedom when doing the riveting, a piece of carelessness he speedily regretted, for the Legioner took advantage of his regained liberty to knock him flat. The black executioner, critically testing the edge of his blade with his thumb, advanced hopefully, thinking that his services might be required on his late competitor; but Zamluk waved him back, and, selecting a particularly heavy set of irons, ordered them put on the bashaw.

"The white horse is not for those who abuse the friends of Raisuli," he said sternly, as the bashaw howled when the smith made a miscue and hit him on the shin with his hammer. "In these irons shall you sleep in your deepest dungeon until my return, and then you shall go to Tangier tied to the tail of an ass. Now, Kaid, your best camels, and an escort of a hundred men! Within the hour we must be on the road for Sus, to drive those dogs of rebels who hold the pass back to their kennels."

The officer in command of the soldiers salaamed and went out to order the caravan, and Zamluk motioned for the white men to follow him into the Kasbah; but no sooner had the curtained door afforded privacy than he was once more the submissive servant, and all assumption of command left his manner.

"If your slave has found favor in your sight, O sheik, read this," he said humbly, as he handed Simpkins another note, and in the now familiar writing he read:

Fearing that your pride may cause you to refuse the first offer of service by my slave, I give him this to hand to you when his help may have availed you. If he has been of use to you, keep him; if his interference annoys you, kill him; for he will have deserved death.

"Young man, you sure made good, and it's up to me to say so," said the Legioner gratefully, when he had finished the note. "I don't know who taught you to act, but you put up a good bluff, and if you're stuck on this job, the least I can do is to put your name on the pay-roll as from this date. Can you tell me how much of a start we can count on? When his nibs wakes up from that pipe-dream you gave him he'll be hot on our trail."

"News travels slowly in Morocco, O sheik," answered Zamluk. "We should be well on our return journey before the news reaches Tangier; and then they will talk for many days before they act. Perhaps in a month they may send to make inquiries, and in another month a new governor will come, for Ben Hassar will have been gathered to his fathers—may their tombs be defiled! Before then we shall have fought much, and, if we still live, should be again in Tangier. Have you further commands for your slave?"

"Just cut out that word; I don't like it," answered the Legioner curtly. "If you have pull enough to raise some grub that a white man can eat, I'll show what I can do to it; but we can't start too soon to please me. Sit down and cheer up, Mack; the worst is yet to come; for the camels will take off what skin the horse left."

The Scorpion, for reasons best known to himself, preferred to eat the generous breakfast standing up; and he looked ruefully at the courier camel which had been allotted to him when they went to the great court where their escort was assembled.

"Blimey! th' bloomin' 'umpback carn't be wuss than th' rotten 'orse!" he exclaimed hopefully, as he carefully placed his leg over the back of the kneeling brute; and when it nearly pitched him over its head as it straightened out its hind legs, and threw him

back on its tail when it rose in front, he clung desperately to the hump and tried to look pleasant.

He had long since discovered that working for Simpkins was no sinecure, but fortunately he had inherited, with the hopefulness of the Irish and the canniness of the Scot, a good share of English doggedness, and had no thought of backing out. When the caravan moved out to cross an unknown, trackless desert, where danger lurked behind every bush, he gave evidence of it, and whistled "The Girl I Left Behind Me," to which his ancestors had marched to battle, through lips puckered with pain.

IV.

With ready adaptability, Simpkins took full advantage of the improved conditions arising from Zamluk's successful effrontery. So far as he had been able to make plans at all, he had counted upon procuring fast camels for himself and Mack at El Kantar, and winning through the desert to the Atlas Mountains by speed and stratagem; but, finding himself in virtual command of a well-equipped expedition which could bid defiance to nomadic brigands, and possibly strong enough to force the pass through the mountains to Bab-el-Ghizel, he sacrificed speed to safety. He knew that the fanatical Moslem soldiers of his escort would only too willingly acquire merit by killing an unbeliever; but, depending upon the effect of the friendship of Raisuli which Zamluk had claimed for him, he ruled them with a rod of iron, and gave them a taste of unaccustomed discipline.

Every mile of their progress was harassed and disputed after they left El Kantar, for between the sultan's troops and the desert nomads there was undying feud. In the fighting Simpkins and his comrades played their parts, the Legioner grimly using his Colt automatics with precision and effect; the Scorpion entering into the charges with the élan of an Irishman at Donnybrook Fair, standing to repel a rush with the obstinacy of an Englishman with his back against a wall, and following up retreat with the dogged determination of a Scotch Covenanter. Zamluk was everywhere where the fighting was hardest, and consequently never far from the side of the man to whose service he had been devoted by his mistress' commands.

In only one part of the work they refused to take part—the collection of heads to decorate the walls of El Kantar which followed every skirmish. In any case, Simpkins was too wise to interfere with immemorial custom; and, after stumbling over several evidences of desert cruelty and oppression, he had little inclination to interfere with the stern reprisals.

Before they reached the Atlas the original hundred was reduced to fifty men, and Simpkins realized the utter uselessness of trying to march through the pass and on to Bab-el-Ghizel with such a handful, and quickly changed his plan.

"Now, Zam, here's where we part," he said at his final council of war. "I want you to stay with the boys and make a bluff at the pass. Mack and I will try to make a sneak by their flank, and then a quick dash for Bab-el-Ghizel. We'll rig up the loot and hike back as quick as we can, and if you keep the big show on here, they'll not get wise to the fact that we are not with the bunch, and we'll have a cinch."

The boy made vehement protest. His orders were to attend the person of the sheik, not to manage a side-show to distract attention; and he knew his mistress too well to dare disobey.

"Keep cool, son," answered Simpkins soothingly. "Up to date you've done your best, and I won't stand by and see you get the worst of it when we go back. Mack is a tough old cock, and I don't think that loss of sleep will spoil his looks; but this will be no child's play from now on. You can do a heap more with the Moors than he can, and some one I can count on must boss this part of the job. We'll be back, right side up with care, just as soon as we can get the goods. Now I'll make Mack shed what's left of those plaid

pants; and if you see two full-blown Moors hit the high spots to the left when you start the ball, don't say a word, for that'll be us."

Zamluk wanted to debate the point, but Simpkins turned him to the right-about, and he hurried away to give the necessary orders for the advance, while the Legioner took Mack to his tent, where, in spite of lamentations, he made him discard the remnants of his variegated costume and assume the turban and burnoose of a Moor. Then he led the way out of the tent, and made for a goat-track to the left of the pass, where the fighting had already commenced.

Simpkins' stratagem was justified by complete success. The attention of the pretender's men whose duty it was to watch the pass was so fully occupied by the feint of the sultan's soldiers that he and Mack in their native costumes had no difficulty in creeping along their flank; and when they sallied out to follow up a feigned retreat, the two adventurers slipped to the rear, and, appropriating a couple of mules from their camp, were soon well away from the scene of hostilities.

For two days their passage through a country swarming with those who would have savagely murdered them had they discovered their identity was ridiculously easy; and when they were within a day's march of their goal, the Legioner's quickness turned the only threatening incident distinctly to their advantage.

A courier from the commander at the pass to the pretender, magnificently mounted on an Arab horse, overtook them, and was unwise enough to delay the important business on which he was traveling to make inquiry about the mule which Simpkins was riding, and which he recognized as his personal property.

The Legioner was apparently deaf to his questioning, but all of his senses were keenly alert, and when Mack made the prearranged signal that the threatening danger was a grave one, he was quick to act.

The courier had foolishly asserted his right to the animal in a secluded part of the road; and, losing patience with Simpkins' assumed infirmity, had tried to substitute force for persuasion.

Unfortunately for him he followed the universal custom of the country, and carried his long-barreled gun carefully protected in a case of red flannel. Before it was half-withdrawn Simpkins fired through his burnoose, and the courier fell from his saddle with a bullet from an automatic pistol in his brain.

Mack caught the bridle of the horse, which attempted to bolt, and the Legioner quickly went through the dead man's garments, and took his despatches.

"Now, Mack, my boy, see what you can make of these fly-tracks," he said, as he spread out a parchment roll.

Mack gave an exclamation of astonishment. "Sure, ut's Zamluk that's th' broth av a boy!" he cried admiringly. "Th' fifty Tommies 'e' 'ad 'as growed to a bloomin' regiment, an' th' fuzzy-wuzzy in the pass is in a blue funk. 'E's a beggin' 'ard for reenforcement, an' this 'ere Johnny as stopped to hargue is——"

"Done for—I know that!" interrupted Simpkins. "Now, Mack, it's up to us to get a swift move on; for if that kid has put up such a strong bluff, there will be more than one man sent for help, and I don't care for this part of the job in cold blood. From here to Bab-el-Ghizel I ride the horse, wear the clothes, and play the part of his nibs there, and you will clear the way. I'll put on too much side to talk, but you can shout till you're blue in the face."

Mack was quick to take the cue, and on the crowded road to the capital which they soon entered he rode ahead, shouting like any sais, and enforcing his commands of *"Balaak! Balaak!"* ("Way! Make way!") by a vigorous use of his whip. Donkey-men and camel-drivers gave place to the messenger of the man whose nod meant life or death south of the Atlas; and Simpkins, sitting the high-peaked Moorish saddle like a native, rode through and over them with the insolence of a man clothed in a little brief authority.

It was not until the white domes and minarets of Bab-el-Ghizel were in plain view that they slackened their pace and proceeded as ordinary travelers, for Simpkins wished to arrive after the gates were closed, that he might camp without the walls and reconnoiter.

The result of that reconnaissance was not cheering, for the barbarity which out of deference to the Powers is more or less hidden behind walls in the coast cities was in this isolated place openly flaunted. Every gate was surmounted by its row of heads, while on the highest walls of the Kasbah a row of gibbets and a half-dozen crosses testified to the cruelty of Ben Yussuf, the actual ruler of Sus, and pretender to the throne of Morocco.

Armless and sightless beggars, mutilated for petty thefts, howled for bakshish at the gates; and a long caravan of camels, each laden with two prisoners heavily ironed, carried its unfortunate cargo of debtors to the Kasbah, where they would disappear forever in the subterranean dungeons, or come out of them only to be sold into perpetual slavery.

The breeze which came from the city carried unmistakable evidence of the filth and unsanitary conditions which are the invariable accompaniment of barbarism; and Simpkins scratched his head thoughtfully when he realized that the dangers he had passed through were but a bagatelle compared to those before him.

Mack apparently came to the same conclusion, for he disconsolately pointed to a couple of empty gibbets on the Kasbah wall, and made a significant gesture.

The Legioner grinned reassuringly. "Cheer up—we're not at the end of those ropes or our own yet," he said hopefully. "All we've got to do now is to slip in with the push at sunrise, and then we're at the end of the trail, and as soon as we pinch the stuff we can hit the back track. It doesn't look too good on the face of it; but I've been in a worse fix and got out. From the scent that blows from it, I don't think we'll want to stay there for our health."

"Aye, mon, it's a braw uncanny spot," answered Mack dolefully. "I hae me doots that we'll see the bonny Gib again, an' it's unco' thankfu' I'll be to sit by my ain fireside with th' bairns about me."

"You'll walk the floor nights with new ones for years to come, never fear," answered Simpkins encouragingly. "Now if you'll hold the light, I'll brush up my facts."

From a belt next his skin he drew a paper of instructions which he had received in New York, containing exact information as to the location of the treasure, and directions as to how to uncover it. According to the history, it had been buried in the mosque by the Moors when they founded the city after their expulsion from Spain, when their rulers dreamed that their new country might become a center of culture and learning.

Through the darkness of the Middle Ages they had made the peninsula the center of the arts and sciences, and the ruins of the great universities which they founded in Morocco testify to their ambition. But Africa, overpowering in its barbarism, overwhelmed them; the mixture of Ethiopian blood from intermarriage with slaves brought the inevitable degeneracy, and the enlightened government became a savage despotism, the only functions of its rulers oppression and taxation, the inhabitants hopeless in their degradation and misery.

Ali Mahomet, grand vizier, a man noted for his deep learning in chemistry, and reputed to have discovered the secret of the transmutation of metals, had buried the treasure which some three hundred years later Simpkins was sent to unearth; and it was supposed to represent the product of years of toil in his laboratory.

The original manuscript of which this was a translation had only recently been discovered, and the information which it contained was valueless to the sultan, whose authority was not recognized in Sus. He dared trust none of his own subjects, and so applied to the American capitalist who had financed some of his previous ventures.

The Legioner skimmed hastily through the long introduction, which consisted of pious and fervent exhortation to the finder of the treasure to employ it reverently and wisely; and a grim smile came to his lips as he thought of the manner in which Abd-el-Azziz, a depraved and debauched sensualist, would use his portion; but the conclusion he read attentively.

And this, the result of ceaseless labor, of sleepless nights and weary days by him who writes, will make this fair land the Mecca of the seekers after wisdom. If it be wisely employed it will prove a boon to all mankind, and all men shall honor and bless the name of the Hadj and Hakim Ali Mahomet, grand vizier to his Shereefian majesty, Muley Abdullah. A treasure greater than any of this earth have I buried under the floor beneath the praying-stone of the Mosque of Omar. Let him who would profit by it raise the edge of the third marble square from the wall and grasp the ring of iron which lies beneath.

Simpkins committed the directions to memory, and replaced the paper in his belt.

"If this is a straight tip, it'll be a cinch to find it, but no small job to tote it back," he reflected. "Cooper won't stand for less than the lot, and it looks like a pack-train load to me. Why didn't the blame' fool make diamonds, and save the bulk while he was at it?"

Realizing that his mind was wandering into realms of unprofitable speculation, and that the morrow would bring real problems to be faced, Mr. Simpkins availed himself of the few remaining hours of darkness to obtain much needed sleep.

V.

Entering the town with the throng of peasants carrying vegetables and meat for the market was a simple matter, thanks to the judicious bestowal of bakshish by Mack; but the fact that none of the white men who had entered before them had ever been known to come out again did not make them anxious to court discovery. Simpkins headed straight for the Mosque of Omar. The muezzin was calling the faithful to prayer from its highest minaret as they entered. Joining the throng which answered the summons, they passed through many narrow lanes with blank walls on either side, gingerly stepping over pools of green, slimy water in the wretched pavements, and concealing their faces as much as possible with the hoods of their burnooses.

Presently they entered the great court of the mosque, where hundreds of Moors were waiting their turns to perform the requisite ablutions at the marble fountain before going into the building. Under the great colonnade which surrounded the court many Arabs were rolling up their scanty bedding or preparing a scantier breakfast—for the mosque served as lodging-place for travelers.

"I'll camp here for a bit, too," muttered Simpkins, as he realized the advantage this would give him in his quest. "There may be sights to look at in the city, but I'll have to leave them for the next trip. Now, Mack, when you see me start to pray with the bunch, you get back to the camp and keep your eye on the horse and mule. I won't have to talk, and one is as good as two at this part of the work. If I find there is more stuff than I can pack at one trip, we'll have to cache what I do bring, and come back for the rest."

The Scorpion's loyalty would have made him hesitate to desert his employer, but he appreciated the importance of keeping a line of retreat open, and the fact that ambulatory property could be rapidly lost in Sus unless carefully guarded. Accordingly, when Simpkins had gone through the ceremonial of foot and mouth washing as scrupulously as any born Moslem and entered the mosque, where he prostrated himself with the worshipers, Mack turned and stole quietly back to the city gate.

Simpkins had brought with him a scanty supply of sustenance, but he was not without food for thought during that long day. Countless worshipers came to the mosque, and with relay after relay he went through his genuflexions and prostrations so faithfully that no suspicion was aroused.

Inch by inch he crossed the great

building on his knees toward the black stone set in the white wall; but so slow was his progress that it was almost dark before he reached the third square of marble from the wall.

"Well, there it is, and here I am at last; but it's a blame' poor show I'll have to raise the stone and have a look while this gang has its eyes on me," he reflected. "If this is an all-night game, I may as well make up my mind to sleep on it; for now that I'm here, I'll stay till I've made good. These chaps must sleep some time, and I guess I can stick it out."

Had Mr. Simpkins known that since the erection of the mosque there had never been an hour, day or night, when it was not occupied by worshipers he would have been less sanguine about his staying powers; but ignorant of that fact, he philosophically settled himself as comfortably as possible to await his chance.

Hour after hour the stream of newcomers showed no diminution, for the musical call of the muezzin seemed incessant, and he was beginning to debate the advisability of tunneling from the outside when there was a sudden interruption of the devotions.

A hoarse murmuring, quickly swelling to the uproar of thousands of angry voices, came through the arched windows; and as if by common consent the worshipers silenced their supplications to listen.

Suddenly a white-robed dervish rushed in, and began an impassioned harangue, which was, of course, unintelligible to him; but the scattering reports of firearms from outside and the constant repetition of the name "Raisuli" by the dervish came as a relief, for he had feared that Mack's identity had been discovered, and that he was being hunted like a mad dog through the narrow lanes.

The exhortation had immediate effect, and with the terrible Moslem warcry of *"Deen! Deen!"* ("Kill! Kill!") the Moors rushed out of the mosque, discarding cloaks and prayer-rugs, and loosening simitars in their scabbards; and for perhaps the first time in three hundred years the great building was left without priest or worshiper.

"And here's where J. Cooper wins out!" shouted the Legioner victoriously, as he slipped the edge of a powerful short jimmy under the square. "A long pull, a strong pull, and—up she comes!"

The stone, which at first resisted his efforts, suddenly yielded and half-revolved, showing that it was balanced on steel pivots in the center.

A musty odor came from the dark hole which yawned before him, but his olfactory sense had been so outraged since entering the city that a little thing like that did not deter him; and, after wedging the stone with his prayer-rug, he leaned far into the opening, and explored it carefully by the light of a candle. It stood revealed as a cavity about eight feet square and as many deep, walled by masonry and without other opening; but, instead of the glittering mass or fat bags of gold his imagination had pictured, there was but a small chest of bronze, fastened with a half-dozen padlocks.

"It sure must be diamonds!" exclaimed the Legioner hopefully; and, after a hasty glance about the mosque to satisfy himself that he was still unobserved, he dropped into the chamber. The chest resisted all effort to move it from the small altar on which it rested, and he discovered that it was firmly secured to the stone by straps of iron. He knew that minutes were precious, and, concluding after a hurried examination that it would be easier to break the straps than to force the lid, he set to work at them with the tools he had brought for just such an emergency.

Filing, prying, and hack-sawing by turns, he worked until the perspiration was rolling from his face and the blood dripping from his lacerated hands.

One of the iron straps was conquered after a quarter of an hour of hard work; and he was getting well on with the second when something landed on his shoulders with the lightness of a cat, the candle was overturned and extinguished, and he found himself in utter darkness, for the stone had turned and closed the opening above his head.

Knife in hand, he crouched in the corner, trying to locate by the panting breath the exact position of the new arrival that his thrust might be a sure one, when the familiar voice of Zamluk gasped out his name.

With an exclamation of relief he sheathed his knife and struck a match. The light of the candle showed a dusty and travel-stained slave lying exhausted on the floor, his tongue hanging out between parched lips, his dark face ashen with fatigue.

Simpkins tenderly raised his head, and, unslinging his canteen, held it to his lips.

"This wasn't in the bond, son; for you were to run the show at the pass till I came back," he said half-seriously, as Zamluk eagerly drank the water. "I'll wait for you to tell me what's up, though; for from the looks of you I don't think you threw up the job from your own choice."

The slave, who had gradually recovered his breath and revived under the influence of the water, looked at him appealingly, and drew from his turban a missive of familiar appearance. The Legioner smiled grimly as he took it and broke the seal.

"Zam, you make me think of the time I was a kid at school and had to flash a note from the old man when I was kept home to do chores," he said; and, as the memory of the number of those notes he had composed himself when the chores consisted of a lazy morning with a fishing-rod of which his father knew nothing came back to him, he looked at the boy suspiciously, and the confirmatory evidence of his suspicion brought a flush to his cheek; but he read the note before voicing it.

This by the hand of my slave Zamluk, in all haste, O sheik! A new and very grave danger threatens you, for Raisuli has learned of your mission, and with a great army follows in pursuit. At his hands you can expect no mercy, and you must abandon your quest and fly. If the slave Zamluk has found favor in your eyes, let him accompany you; if not, leave him to a fate which is worse than death; but you can trust him, and he will cheerfully share what of good or ill may befall you. Be not reckless, O bravest of the brave, but listen to the warning of one who places life and honor in jeopardy to send you this.

Simpkins refolded the note carefully and placed it with the others in his belt, watching meanwhile the slave, who sat, with his hands crossed on his breast, and with downcast eyes.

"I've been a blame' fool more than once in my life, but this takes the cake!" he exclaimed, as he noted the delicate shape of the boy's hands and feet, and the soft curves of the figure which the absence of burnoose revealed. "Now, Miss Ali Ben Sadi—for I guess that's who you are—you may as well make a clean breast of it, and tell me what you mean by all this, and what I'm to do with you now that I've got you on my hands, so to speak."

The situation was suddenly complicated by his discovery. It was bad enough to be in the heart of a barbaric and hostile country charged with the transportation of a great treasure through trackless deserts with enemies on every side, and the most noted outlaw of modern times at his heels with an army; but that counted as little against the greater care of a young woman who had risked everything to save him.

So far as he knew, the closing of the stone had made them prisoners together, with little chance of escape, and the outlook, or lack of it, was sufficiently hopeless; but it apparently troubled the disguised girl not one whit. There was only a shade of embarrassment in her laugh as she modestly drew the prayer-rug which her entrance had displaced about her booted knees, and looked at him with eyes which sparkled with mischief.

"Cannot the sheik, who is in all things resourceful, answer that question?" she asked half-mockingly in English, with only the slightest suspicion of accent. "What does a brave man do in your country when such opportunity offers?"

"He does the best he can, I guess, when he gets in this kind of a scrape; but it's a new one on me," answered Simpkins, scratching his head thoughtfully and totally unconscious of the

soft eyes which glanced furtively at him. "But right here I wish to state that I came here to get what's in that box, and it's due to my boss that first of all I should get it loose. You can spin your yarn while I work, and then we'll make up our minds what we'll do next—if there's anything left to be done."

Suiting the action to the word, he resumed his filing and prying; and while he toiled the girl related her history.

"You called me Miss Ali Ben Sadi, but my name is Zuleika," she commenced. "My father is he whom you visited in Gibraltar, and it is there that I have spent much of my life, immured in the harem as if I were in Tangier, but educated by English and French governesses. Perhaps half of the time I have been in Morocco, living in the tents of my father, who is the head of a great tribe, and—as you must have guessed—a man of great power in this distracted country. Can you wonder that when I heard you planning your expedition the longing for the freedom of the desert came to me—a miserable captive doomed to seclusion in my father's harem until I should change it for that of a Moslem husband? I craved the excitement of real life—not the living death behind the mushabeah."

"And you sure got it," commented Simpkins, without interrupting his work. "Go on—tell me how you got out and how you got here."

"I crossed on the boat with you; I was one of a party of swaddled, helpless, pitiful creatures herded by eunuchs whom you must have seen on the deck," she continued contemptuously. "They had no thought above the petty intrigue, the idle, lazy, sensuous life of the harem; but I, carrying the commands of my father to his slaves, who were to provide you with horses, was seized with an irresistible desire to accompany you, to share your danger, and to live a real life in the excitement."

"And share a real death in this black hole if we can't lift that stone," said Simpkins grimly.

"What does it matter?—we have lived, and we are together," she answered; and her tone as much as her words convinced the Legioner that there were possibilities of the situation becoming even more embarrassing unless he attended strictly to business.

"The execution of the plan was easy," the girl went on. "In my father's absence I held the power of life and death over his slaves, and they dared not disobey me. I took the place of Zamluk, who was to have been your guide; and my knowledge of the customs of the country and my woman's wit enabled me to serve you. Perhaps you despise me for playing the part of a man too well; but it was because a woman's heart was in my breast, and that heart beat only for——"

"We'll cut that out, please," interrupted Simpkins hurriedly. "Just put me wise to that last act, and tell me what made you drop in on me, then you can rest."

"To save you, if possible; to die with you if I could not; for death is better than the fate in store for me if I am captured," she said bitterly. "Each year the maiden who is reputed to be the most beautiful among my father's people is sent as tribute to the harem of Abd-el-Azziz. In two months I, educated in Gibraltar, where I learned what a woman's life might be, would have been sent to be the plaything of that savage, to end my days in company with Circassian concubines, and under the tyranny of the favorite of the hour. Perhaps I should have made the sacrifice for my father's sake had I not looked through the mushabeah and listened to a voice which taught my heart to——"

"Will you stick to the point?" exclaimed Simpkins, prying viciously at the iron strap. "What I want to know is why you left the pass and came on here?"

"Because my father had raised the hue and cry when my absence was discovered, O man with eyes of a bat and heart of stone!" she answered irritably. "His power is great, and even Raisuli listened to his words. Where the sul-

tan himself dare not come he followed with an army. His advance-guard was upon us, and my men, knowing that they could expect no mercy at his hands, followed me in a desperate attack on the pass. We cut our way through, with Raisuli close after us, and, mingling with the fugitives from the pass, rode to Bab-el-Ghizel without pause. Raisuli has sent word that he will not leave one stone on another, nor spare man, woman, or child; and his army was at the gate as it closed behind us. I saw Mack, and he told me where you were. I gave him my horse, and ordered him to wait for us at the wells, a league to the south. If we can make our way to him, he may still escape by Mogador or the Spanish Protectorate."

"There's a big 'if' in that," said Simpkins thoughtfully, as the last band gave way and the box was freed. He lifted it, and, finding that it was not too heavy to carry, gave a sigh of relief. "It looks to me as if we were in a trap," he continued dubiously. "If I do get that stone up, we can't tell what we'll find on the far side of it, and we may wish it down again. Now, my girl, I know you meant well, and I'm not the man to scold you; but you know what I came for and who sent me. He's square and all right; but he's for J. Cooper first, last, and all the time. He might give me the glad hand if I told him that I got this box but left it to save a girl; but the one best bet is that he wouldn't. He's got a wife already, and that wasn't what he sent me out here for. Just the same, you stick close, and if it's put up to me to choose which to drop, it won't be you."

He was carefully adjusting his arsenal as he spoke; for the only chance for escape seemed to be in quick action, and he had tipped the box on end to stand on while he pried at the stone, when Zuleika touched him softly on the arm.

"Listen, hard-hearted one, who would deliver me to the harem of another," she said reproachfully, and drew a paper from her bosom.

Simpkins looked at her suspiciously and shook his head.

"There's no call to flash a fake note, now that our cards are all face up, and I haven't time to read one," he said, grinning; and the girl laughed.

"And I have no time to write one," she answered, as she opened an impressive-looking paper yellow with age. "This is the original, of which you have the translation; but yours is not complete. If you should raise that stone it would be to invite certain death; but this plan tells of another opening."

She translated, and Simpkins, following her directions, quickly located the movable stone in the wall. So perfectly had the mechanism been devised that centuries of disuse had not impaired it, and it yielded readily to his pressure, showing a dark, narrow passage tunneled in the solid rock. The plan indicated that it led under the town and emerged in a ravine beneath the city wall; and Simpkins, whose memory retained every detail of the circuit he had made the night before, gave a shudder of disgust as he remembered that the exit was under the particular spot where such portion of the city refuse as the inhabitants had energy to remove was thrown out.

He felt half-inclined to risk the dangers which might confront him in the mosque; but an ominous scratching at the stone above him quickly dispelled all doubts; and, placing the box on his shoulder, he seized the girl's hand and plunged into the darkness.

The passage seemed interminable, for they were without light; but the smooth walls on either side precluded all chance of their losing the way, and at the end of ten minutes they came to the end, which was closed with dirt. Simpkins lost no time in explanation; but, setting down the box, and with some difficulty releasing his other hand, he started burrowing like a badger.

The girl attempted to help him, but he curtly ordered her to stand aside; and never had air seemed sweeter to his nostrils than that which the tainted breeze brought to him from the dry moat when, with fingers stripped to the bone, he tore away the last bit of sod.

Muffled shouts from behind them

warned him that the second opening had been discovered, and he grasped the girl and shoved her unceremoniously through the opening.

One glance showed him that the place was deserted, and, after he had placed the precious box outside, he motioned to her to wait as he fumbled under his burnoose.

"There's one good point in these cloaks—a man can stow a lot of stuff under 'em," he said grimly, as he drew a pound stick of dynamite, capped and with fuse attached, from under it. "I thought I might have to crack a safe, so I brought a full kit."

The fuse spluttered angrily as he touched a match to it and placed the dynamite in the opening; and, catching up the box and taking the girl's hand, he sped into the darkness away from the unsavory surroundings. They had gone perhaps a hundred yards when there was a tremendous crash behind them. A portion of the wall surmounted by a watch-tower seemed to rise in the air, and then settle down into the ditch a ruined mass, while Raisuli's men, who were attacking a gate a hundred yards away, started for the providentially made breach, and with savage war-cries poured into the city.

Mr. Samuel Simpkins was always very sparing, even of his monosyllables, in describing the remainder of his adventure. It seems to have consisted of a hurried march through the night, with the precious box on the saddle in front of him, and Zuleika at his side; while Mack sang a pæan of victory in the various accents of the United Kingdom.

At daybreak the Legioner commandeered feminine apparel from a small village, and installed the Scorpion as chaperon-in-chief. Some two weeks later the trio arrived at the Canaries, having made the Spanish Protectorate in safety, and took ship for the Gib. The shop of Ali Ben Sadi was closed, the building behind it deserted and dismantled, but at the hotel Simpkins found a letter addressed to him.

Dog of an unbeliever, you have eaten my salt and yet betrayed me. For the treasure you have taken I care nothing; but the curse of Raisuli will follow the man who has stolen the heart of his daughter, if he makes not honorable amend.

Simpkins looked at the girl, who had followed him like a spaniel since they landed.

"So it was the old boy himself, was it?" he asked.

She blushed. "Yes, I am Zuleika Raisuli," she answered.

Mr. Jabez Cooper exacted only fidelity, and accepted the fortunes of war as they came—which was fortunate for his employees. Three weeks later the lid of the box was forced in his private office, but instead of gold or precious stones the contents were found to be a handsomely bound volume containing in clear Arabic characters the wisdom of the Moors who had kept the lamp of learning alight through the Dark Ages—to Ali Mahomet, its author, a thing more valuable than all earthly riches. The capitalist had heard the bare outlines of the story, and he shrugged his shoulders as he turned over the pages.

"Young woman, you seem to be out of a situation; so I'll appoint you my secretary to translate this," he said, looking admiringly at the dark-eyed, olive-skinned, and remarkably beautiful girl who had accompanied the Legioner to the office.

She looked at Simpkins inquiringly, as if asking his permission to accept.

"You've got one more guess, Mr. Cooper," he said, stepping between them. "This girl has a date with me, and I'll see that you get a card with time and place on it just as soon as she lets me know that she can bear with 'Simpkins' for a second name. Zuleika, dear, good old pal through thick and thin, good and bad, joy of my life and pride of my heart, I love you!"

"Oh, Sam, dear! I never knew that such short words could convey so much; but why didn't you teach me before?" she exclaimed, as she threw her arms about him; and Mr. Jabez Cooper busied himself with writing a substantial check while Simpkins explained.

Easy Money

By A. M. Chisholm

Author of "Quite Contrairy," "Where Friendship Ceases," Etc.

Mr. Chisholm's humorous stories are always full of "point," and in this one there is a moral you can't miss. He tells how a gilt-edged proposition aroused the cupidity of a seaman who, though retired, was yet not immune from the get-rich-quick fever

CAPTAIN TREGASKIS sat at a table in the refreshment-room of the Dog and Duck Hotel in Southport. The table was a point of vantage, commanding a view of Southport's main street. At the moment, save for an unobtrusive individual in a far corner, Captain Tregaskis was the sole occupant of the room. A glass of whisky and water stood before him, and he pulled contentedly at a brier pipe of heroic proportions.

His afternoon glass of grog and a pipe was a habit of long standing, and his seat at that particular table a part of it. He derived a certain calm satisfaction from watching, unobserved, the doings of his fellow townsmen. Later some old cronies would perhaps drop in, and there would be a four-handed game, after which supper and a quiet evening. The captain's life was methodical and well ordered.

Smoking contemplatively, he did not observe the approach of the other occupant of the room until the unobtrusive individual addressed him.

"Excuse me," said the quiet gentleman, "but do you object to my taking a seat at your table and enjoying the view from the window?"

"Not at all; certainly not," said Captain Tregaskis, rather inclined, nevertheless, to resent the intrusion of a stranger. "I don't own this table, you know."

"Maybe not," said the other diffidently, "but I never like to intrude on a gentleman when he appears to be thinking over important matters. Still, if you say you don't object, I may admit that I prefer a seat here, where I can see people, to the one I just left, where nothing can be seen; and, having broken in on your privacy in this way, may I ask you to have something with me to show I appreciate your kindness?"

"Why, you are very polite," said Captain Tregaskis, "and I don't mind if I do. Not that you disturbed me any—not at all. I was just thinking things over, but they will keep."

"Nice town you have here," said the stranger, after the refreshments had been brought; "a very nice town, indeed. Plenty of business, I should judge."

"Considerable," said the captain. "Living is tolerable cheap, and the place is healthy. Stranger here, I presume?"

"Yes, I got in this morning," said the other.

"Thinking of staying here?" asked the captain.

"Well, that depends—I imagine I may not," was the reply.

"Traveling man?" asked the captain.

"Well, I travel a good deal—most of the time, in fact."

"What line?"

"Business, financial and confidential business," replied the stranger.

"Ah," said the captain, "I see." As a matter of fact he did not see at all, but he nodded his head wisely.

"I would take it," said the stranger, "that you are pretty well acquainted here—know all the people who are worth knowing."

"I've lived here ever since I retired, a matter of five years," replied the captain, "and I think I know most of the folks."

"Not much goes on that escapes you. You're an observer; I can see that."

"Well," responded the gratified captain, "I guess I know most of what takes place, though I don't see how you know I'm an observer."

"Your seat at this table for one thing," said the other; "and your alert manner and your eye. They all stamp you unmistakably as a keen, practical observer. I knew it the minute I saw you sitting here."

"You must be something of an observer yourself," said Captain Tregaskis. "Yes, I try to take notice of things. It comes natural to me to do it."

"Certainly it does," said the stranger; "and you improve the faculty by practise. You are the possessor of a very valuable quality, that of rapid, highly trained, accurate observation. Also, if you will excuse me for mentioning it, you carry with you the air of one accustomed to command men."

"Hem—ha—yes, perhaps," said Captain Tregaskis, much pleased. "I guess I know how to turn a crew to as well as any man. And for observation—well, a man doesn't sail for forty years without learning to put two and two together."

"Oh, a sea-captain!" said the stranger. "In the navy, I presume?"

"No, sir!" snorted the captain. "No such thing! None of your gilt-braided, thick-skulled, swivel-eyed quarter-deckers about me! Just plain, ordinary retired master of a clipper, that, give her a wind three points aft, could show her heels to anything that ever carried white paint and a contractor's curse."

"Ah," said the other, "I might have known it, Captain—Captain—er——"

"Tregaskis," said the captain.

"Glad to know you, Captain Tregaskis. My name is West—George West, at your service. Sorry I have to leave you now. Perhaps I may see you again before I leave town."

"Hold on; have one with me before you go," said Captain Tregaskis, his notions of propriety outraged by a proposed withdrawal before he had returned a stranger's hospitality.

"I really can't," said the stranger. "I have been so interested in your conversation that I am now late for an important appointment, but if you will be at home I can make it a point to drop in on you to-night. Perhaps I may be in a position to make you a business proposition."

"Do," said Captain Tregaskis. "Go up Elm Street till you see a little house with port and starboard lights at the door. That's mine."

"I will," said Mr. West. "And now I'll leave you. I see a gentleman heading this way who seems to be a seafaring man also. Perhaps a friend of yours."

Captain Tregaskis glanced out of the window at the approaching individual, and scowled ferociously.

"Him! He's no friend of mine. Old Bill Smithers. Had a rat-haunted, worm-eaten, man-killing dough-dish, and piled her up for the insurance. Knows as much about navigation as the devil knows about shower-baths. He's——"

But Mr. West had departed; and Captain Tregaskis, after a vain attempt to appear unconscious and at his ease when Captain Smithers entered the room and took a seat, followed West's example, the two mariners exchanging surly growls and belligerent glances by way of deference to the conventionalities which would not allow either to entirely ignore the other.

At eight o'clock that evening Captain Tregaskis sat awaiting the arrival of Mr. West. He had filled two decanters, one with rum and the other with whisky; lemons, sugar, nutmeg, and hot water were in close proximity, flanked by a box of cigars that bore no revenue-stamp. The offering to the gods of Hospitality appeared to be complete.

To while away the time, and to test the efficiency of his preparations, Captain Tregaskis mixed himself a glass of hot toddy and lit a cigar, testing both with the critical taste of an expert. Finding them to his liking, he stretched himself out in his chair and meditated in great comfort.

His thoughts ran on his interview with Mr. West and the probable nature of the business proposition he had mentioned. Though comfortably off, the captain had no objections to adding to his income; and the flattering words of Mr. West seemed to hold a promise of some method of earning money by the exercise of the special qualities he had mentioned as being possessed by the captain. Therefore he waited the coming of his guest with some impatience.

At 8:30 the captain's bell jingled. As he opened the door, Mr. West stepped quickly in and closed it after him, with what sounded very like a sigh of relief. Holding up his hand for silence, he applied his ear to the crack of the door, and listened intently for several moments, Captain Tregaskis regarding this peculiar conduct in blank amazement. At last Mr. West seemed to be satisfied.

"You must excuse this peculiar behavior on my part," he said, "but I could have sworn that I was followed."

"Followed! What for? Who by?" demanded Captain Tregaskis.

"By the people who are dogging my steps," replied Mr. West mysteriously.

"What should they dog your steps for?" asked the captain, in astonishment.

Mr. West shook his head with the air of one who conceals much, and followed his host into the sitting-room, where he took a seat well away from the window.

Captain Tregaskis mixed a fresh toddy, and shoved the cigar-box across the table, sensible, as he did so, of the marked change in Mr. West's manner. At the hotel he had been diffident, hesitating; here he was keen, alert, his every movement suggesting energy.

Silently he smoked his cigar, his eyes boring into those of the captain, who grew ill at ease under his gaze.

"Captain Tregaskis," said he at length, "I have been studying you, and you in turn have been studying me. Do not deny it. I assure you I am not offended. I recognize that it is a part of your habit of keenly observing men and things, and it is because I have faith in your ability to do so that I am here tonight."

"Can't say I understand your drift at all," said Captain Tregaskis. "Suppose I can size up a man pretty well, what then?"

"Why, then," said Mr. West, leaning forward eagerly, "you are just the man I have been looking for—just the man. Let me ask if you have ever turned these powers of yours to practical account—have you ever, to put it plainly, made money out of them?"

"Not very much," replied Captain Tregaskis diplomatically.

"And if you had the opportunity, would you take it?" asked the other.

"Course I would," replied the captain. "Why wouldn't I?"

"Well, then," said Mr. West, "I can give you the opportunity. See here!" Throwing back the lapel of his coat he exposed a nickel shield, and pointed to it with one finger, his eyes fixed on his host. "This," he said impressively, "is what I mean. Read it!"

He detached the badge and handed it to the captain, who read:

Superintendent, Detective Agencies, U. S.

Captain Tregaskis' mind flashed back to certain incidents in his career which he had long considered as closed, and for a moment he regarded Mr. West apprehensively. Partially reassured by the expression of his face, he cleared his throat nervously, and remarked:

"You're a government detective, then."

"Partly that," said Mr. West; "but the agency is not confined to government work, though authorized by the government, and often employed by it. That is to say, when they have a piece of work so complex or important that they cannot trust it to their regular de-

tectives they call us in. Of course they have to pay high for our skilled services, but we give them results."

"And where," asked the captain, after a few moments of bewildered reflection, "do I come in on this play? You ain't after me, I suppose."

"Yes, I am," said Mr. West. "Not," he went on, noting the consternation visible in the captain's face, "in the ordinary sense, of course, but in the interests of our firm and of the public. Now let me explain. We are continually looking for agents who are shrewd, keen observers of men and happenings. Spread over the entire country as our business is, we need such agents in almost every town and district, and we are prepared to pay liberally for their services. To such agents we make an offer of what we consider liberal terms, to represent us and gather the information we need. Now I find you are peculiarly qualified, and if you are open to join us I can go into the details."

"Do you mean you want me to be a detective?" asked Captain Tregaskis, in pleased astonishment.

"Ah, there is where your penetrating mind acts at once," said Mr. West. "That is exactly what I do want. Will you?"

"If there is any money in it—rewards and so on," said Captain Tregaskis cautiously, "you can count me in. I always had a taste for finding out things, and a way of getting at anything I wanted to know. Aboard the old *Flying Cloud* I remember some one heaved a marlinespike at me from aloft one night, and the whole crew went on quarter rations and no grog till I found out who it was. And what I did to that measly, black-avised, skulking, misbegotten son of a South Sea pirate fair put the fear of God into the hearts of the crew of scum I had that passage, so that they run, every man Jack of them, at Singapore, without their pay; and I shipped a new lot of hands."

"You are just the man we want!" cried Mr. West enthusiastically. "A man who can't be bluffed when he sets out to discover anything. Now, here are the terms we have to offer. From every special agent we appoint we obtain a deposit of from one hundred to one thousand dollars, according to the locality he is in and the importance of the work we intend to place in his hands. In return for this he receives a deposit receipt from our agency for a like amount, guaranteeing interest at six per cent. He also receives a special contract giving him a percentage of the profits arising from work done in his district, the percentage depending on the amount of his deposit. Now, you naturally ask why we require a deposit. That is the first question that occurs to you. Well, we require it as a guarantee of good faith. Our agents become possessed of a fund of the most important information, often involving the character of those occupying positions of trust; and in case of the recovery of valuables they are often custodians of small fortunes in money, jewels, papers, and so on. Then, too, they are sometimes approached by those who wish to buy their silence; and you know how loudly money talks. Now, in the face of this, is it not reasonable that we should require a substantial guarantee from any one we have to trust so fully?"

"I s'pose so," said Captain Tregaskis doubtfully, "but——"

"I know what you are going to say. You would ask why we don't get a fidelity bond from a guarantee company instead. For one reason, a guarantee company will only guarantee against pecuniary loss, and that is the smallest part of the loss we may suffer through the infidelity of an agent. Information given by an agent to a suspected person would injure us more than any valuables he might possibly get away with, and no company would guarantee against that risk. Then, too, if it did, the loss would be the company's and not the individual's, whereas when he puts up a substantial cash forfeit he has a direct interest in keeping his mouth shut. You see that, don't you? It is the only method we have found at all satisfactory after years of experience, and I hope you will see it in that light."

Captain Tregaskis scratched his head

hesitatingly. He was willing enough to be a detective and share in the profits of problematical captures and rewards, but the idea of paying out one thousand dollars, or even one hundred dollars, cash for the privilege was repugnant to his instincts of caution.

"Before I go into this," he said, "I'll have to know more about it. Suppose I did put up a thousand—and I ain't saying I've got that much money to put up—I'll have to know what I'm liable to make in, say, a year at the business. S'pose I put up one hundred dollars now—how much do I stand to get out of it?"

"Well, of course that would depend altogether on circumstances," said Mr. West. "You would get five per cent. of what we made in your district. It might be nothing. You can never tell where a crime may be committed, a criminal caught, or our services required. Our terms run this way: Five per cent. of rewards for every hundred deposited up to fifty per cent., where we are forced to stop. We cannot afford to take less than fifty per cent. ourselves. If you deposited one thousand dollars, you would get fifty per cent. of the profits. If nine hundred, you get forty-five per cent., and so on down to a deposit of one hundred dollars, when, as I have said, you get five per cent. It is absolutely impossible to give you a line on your profits further than to say that we are now working in this district, and appearances indicate that we will have considerable business here during the next year. On a five per cent. basis you would be nearly certain to make a couple of hundred dollars. On the fifty per cent. basis you would, of course, make ten times as much, and likely more, for, as I think I said before, we cannot afford to give our most important and remunerative work to the smaller depositors. They get the remnants, as it were. And of course you must remember that we pay six per cent. on the amount of your deposit with us, which is as much as you can get on the ordinary investment; and it is withdrawable at any time."

Captain Tregaskis hesitated. It was all very well to be asked to be a detective, to share in exciting man-hunts, and in a division of rewards, but—a thousand dollars! His native caution was in the ascendent.

"I don't reckon I can pay a thousand dollars," he said at length; "it's more than I want to put into a new thing. I might go up to a hundred to start with, though."

"Just as you say," replied Mr. West, somewhat disappointed. "Don't let me appear to urge you to take any shares at all. None the less, I think it would pay you to take more. Well, take this hundred dollars to start with. We'll let it go at that. Meanwhile I need your help to-night. I am on the track of one of the boldest and most successful robberies of the government ever perpetrated. The criminals know that I am pressing them closely, and I am shadowed day and night." He paused, casting an apprehensive glance at the window, and resumed:

"Some little time ago over a quarter of a million dollars in securities and cash was stolen from the treasury department. So skilfully was it done that no clue whatever to the thieves could be found. All that is known is that the securities were locked up at night, and in the morning they were not to be found. The government kept the robbery a secret, of course, and called us in. For months I have been working on the case, and I believe I am now in a fair way to recover the plunder, if not to arrest the thieves; but, as I say, I am shadowed. My identity is known. I cannot move without feeling that I am watched; and since I came here I feel it more than ever. Then why this redoubling of vigilance? Why this constant espionage? Why, having the booty in their possession, do not the thieves divide it and scatter? Now, your logical mind will at once see the solution. They have lost the stolen articles, and they fear that I will find them. Why do I reason in that way? I will tell you.

"A week ago a man was brought into the hospital in a dying condition. He had been assaulted and apparently robbed. His pockets were turned inside

out; and the lining of his clothes was ripped away. Even the soles of his boots had been ripped open. This man was a noted crook, and it was evident to my mind that he had been assaulted and then searched for something he was thought to possess. What was it?

"I had a watch set by his bed, and from the words he spoke while delirious I gathered that he was one of those concerned in this robbery; that in some manner he had given his confederates the double-cross, secured all the plunder himself, and concealed it somewhere. The whereabouts we could not exactly make out, except that it was near here, and the exact spot might be known by a line drawn due south for thirty paces from a stone with a hole in the top. Not a very definite clue, is it? There are many stones with little holes on the surface, and I have paced south from several dozen to-day, and found no sign of anything.

"To add to the difficulty I am followed, and have to proceed with the utmost caution. I can't afford to let any one see me pacing thirty steps due south twice. These are no common criminals we have to do with, captain. They already know almost as much as I do of the location of the treasure, and if we do not find it first we won't find it later. Therefore you see that I must have help. Now you, living here, can walk about without exciting suspicion while I cannot. That is, I hope you can. If not, you may be in some danger."

"I ain't afraid," said Captain Tregaskis sturdily. "Just let me get a fair swipe at one of them crooks, and he'll think he was one of my hands aboard the old *Goodwill*. I ain't," pursued the captain regretfully, "hit a man what you might call hard in five years, and my knuckles is getting that tender and soft they might belong to a lady." He sighed, and regarded a calloused, knotty fist disparagingly.

"Well," said Mr. West, "don't hit them too——" He broke off as the door-bell sounded. "Who is that? It won't do for any one to find me here unless it is one of our men. Go to the door, captain, but be careful how you open it. I've known some desperate attempts to be made by this crowd. If there is trouble, I'll be right at your back." The gleam of a wicked-looking revolver emphasized the assurance.

Captain Tregaskis went to the door, opened it slightly, and placed one ponderous foot against it as a stop.

"Who's there?" he asked.

"Is Mr. West here?" was the question.

"It's all right, captain," said Mr. West. "Let him in. He's one of our friends."

The captain withdrew his foot, and the newcomer, a bronzed, keen-eyed man, entered.

"Here, West, I want to see you at once and alone, if this gentleman will excuse us."

"It's all right, Mr. Griffin," said Mr. West. "This is Captain Tregaskis, our agent at this point. You can speak quite freely before him. Captain, this is Mr. Griffin, of the treasury department."

"Glad to know you, sir," said Mr. Griffin. "Now, Mr. West, I have information that leads me to believe we are working in the wrong locality. The money isn't secreted here at all, but farther down the coast, near Williamsburg. I traced you here, and I think we had better pull out at once."

"But how do you know?" said Mr. West. "Everything points to this place —everything. What have you discovered?"

"Not a great deal, but enough to give a clue. They have found a railway-ticket to Williamsburg in Edwards' clothes. That seems to point to that locality."

"It may," said Mr. West, "but I don't believe it. If Williamsburg, why should I be followed here? Edwards mentioned this place in his delirium. I know that a man corresponding to his description has been seen here. His confederates, if we only knew them, are here. I tell you this is the place, and I won't leave it without a further trial."

"You'll please yourself about that, of course," said Mr. Griffin tartly, "but

I am going to Williamsburg. We have covered this ground with no result. If you want to handle that ten thousand dollars reward, West, you had better come with me."

"I'll take my chance of earning the reward here," said Mr. West. "That railway-ticket doesn't convince me. He might just as easily have had one to Chicago. It may not bear on the case at all."

"Now I ask you, Captain Tregaskis, what you think," said Mr. Griffin. "Here is a week spent in looking over this territory and nothing found. Now we come on a new clue. Should we not follow it up at once?"

"Well," said the captain judicially, feeling that at last he had a place in the councils of the mighty, "there's a lot to be said on both sides. If we find the valuables here we won't find them at Williamsburg; and, again, if they are there we won't find them here. You'll admit that's so."

"True," said Mr. West, nodding his head.

"And so," concluded Captain Tregaskis sagely, "my advice is to search where we're most apt to find them."

"And that's Williamsburg," said Mr. Griffin.

"It's here," said Mr. West.

"Time will show which of us is right," said Mr. Griffin. "I'm off for Williamsburg at once. Sure you won't come, West? Well, then, good-by, and I'm sorry you won't touch that ten thousand dollars reward."

He moved to the door and vanished into the night.

"Good riddance," said Mr. West. "Griffin is in the confidence of the treasury, and thinks he knows it all, which he doesn't. I'll find the stuff here while he hunts for stones in Williamsburg."

"Is there," asked Captain Tregaskis, "a reward of ten thousand dollars for the recovery of the money?"

"Ten thousand for the money and five thousand more for the arrest of the robbers," said Mr. West. "Uncle Sam is mighty generous when some one gets to his pocket. And now I'm going back to my hotel to get some sleep. To-morrow at seven o'clock I'll be here, and we'll begin a systematic search for the stolen goods. Good night, captain. No, I don't want your check for that hundred dollars to-night. Any time before I leave here will do." And buttoning up his coat and shaking hands he took his departure.

Captain Tregaskis sat long by the fire that night figuring with a stubby pencil on the back of an envelope. Five per cent. of ten thousand dollars was five hundred dollars, and five per cent. of five thousand dollars was two hundred and fifty dollars, making a total of seven hundred and fifty dollars he stood to make in case the money was found and the criminals arrested. That was on the five per cent. basis.

But suppose he paid one thousand dollars, his share would be on a fifty per cent. footing, and would be—he gasped at the thought—seven thousand five hundred dollars!

And seven thousand five hundred dollars would buy a great deal. The captain's mind already formed plans for spending it. His tastes were very catholic, and included a week in the city on the "wide-open plan," a stock of liquors, cigars, and tobacco, all of the best, sufficient to last for a year; a new shotgun, a motor-boat, and a selection of literature of the "Sappho" variety.

And, after all, this one reward was only a beginning. People were constantly being robbed, murdered, and abducted. His services would be in demand. They would come to him to clear up the greatest mysteries and offer proportionate fees. He would write a book. And, finally, with the lowering of the liquid line in the decanter, the great play, "Tregaskis the Trailer," with the original in the title rôle, turned away crowds nightly. At this point, feeling that ambition could aim at nothing higher, the captain arose, knocked out his pipe, and went to bed.

Promptly at seven o'clock the next morning Mr. West was on hand.

"Now, captain," said he, "we will try a section of ground I haven't covered yet, and see what luck will bring us.

Do you know that I was followed to my hotel last night?"

"Who by?" demanded Captain Tregaskis, filling his pipe with care, so that it should last in the wind.

"By two men. One was short, dark, and slight, and looked like a foreigner —Mexican or Spaniard, I should say— and the other was a man of about your own height and build; a seafaring man, I should judge by his general appearance; not unlike the man Smithers you pointed out to me at the hotel."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Captain Tregaskis. "Bill Smithers! I always said he was a scoundrel, and would wind up behind the bars. Bill Smithers, eh? Can't we arrest him at once?"

"What could we prove against him? We have no evidence."

"How about putting him through what you call the third degree?" said Captain Tregaskis vaguely. "Or maybe we could sort of coax the truth out of him with a horsewhip or a hot iron. Not but he is a natural-born liar."

"Not to be thought of," said Mr. West. "But if I was followed then I may be followed now. Therefore I am going to disguise myself, and I have brought along a make-up for you, too. Now, my plan is to leave the house openly, without any disguise whatever. We will then go out along the coast for a mile, in which distance we can make sure if we are followed. It not, well and good. If we are, we will assume our disguises and throw the pursuers off the track. Do you catch my meaning?"

"Certainly, and it's a first-rate plan," said Captain Tregaskis, reaching for a slouch-hat that might have shadowed the brow of a typical conspirator. "My own scheme would be to arrest any one following us without waiting, but you know best."

For a mile or more the two strolled along the shore, Captain Tregaskis continually glancing back over his shoulder. As they approached a small patch of woods he caught sight of a figure in their rear dodging along, bent low, apparently endeavoring to escape observation. In a mysterious whisper he called Mr. West's attention. Mr. West did not look back until they were hidden from view by a screen of bushes. Then he produced a pair of binoculars, and scanned the distant figure intently.

"That is one of the men who followed me. Now to give him the slip."

Sitting on a log, he drew out two wigs and beards.

"Lucky we're both clean-shaven, captain. Put these on, and we'll see if our prying friend will recognize us."

With difficulty and some aid from Mr. West, Captain Tregaskis adjusted the disguise, feeling that he was being initiated into the inner mysteries of his new calling. As the stranger approached they both stepped out into the open.

The stranger, a slight, dark man, gave a quick start and stopped, but after regarding them a minute advanced.

"How you do?" he said. "You see two men go dis-away? One thin man like a mouse quiet, and big man like sailor. Friends of mine. You see men?"

"Yes, about five minutes ago," said Mr. West, in a voice Captain Tregaskis would not have recognized. "They went that way"—pointing directly inland following the trend of the woods.

"Much oblige," said the stranger, setting off at a brisk walk in the direction indicated.

Captain Tregaskis breathed hard. His disguise was evidently impenetrable. Mr. West was now all impatience, and seemed to take the success of his expedient as a matter of course. Rapidly he led the way, and the captain followed.

The ground they approached now changed its character, becoming a flat covered with scrubby bushes. Here and there the gray backs of large boulders appeared. Mounting one of these, Mr. West took a comprehensive survey. Nobody was in sight. Descending from his elevation, Mr. West rubbed his hands and chuckled.

"We've given that fellow the slip, all right. The next time we'll be looking for him, or I miss a guess. Couldn't

arrest him now for lack of evidence. This is the place I had in mind, captain. Looks lonely enough to tempt any crook to believe that nothing he concealed would be disturbed. Now to work. I'll go to the right and you to the left. Keep a lookout for a rock with a hole on top, and if you see one, shout."

He moved off as he spoke, and Captain Tregaskis followed suit, peering about him intently. In this search some time passed. Many rocks with slight depressions presented themselves to the captain's anxious eyes, but nothing could be called a hole. At last, however, he found one, and on the top a hole newly drilled. Not only that, but in the bottom lay the blackened stump of a match, and beside it several twigs were broken short off. The captain, much excited, shouted and waved his hat to Mr. West, who was slowly approaching, quartering the ground carefully.

"This certainly looks promising," said the latter. "A new-drilled hole. Let's try thirty paces south, captain. Here's a compass. So. Now I'll pace it. One, two, three——"

He led off, pacing carefully.

"Thirty." He paused. Before him lay a small clump of low bushes. Peering into them, the captain saw that the surface of the earth had been recently disturbed. With a roar of triumph the seaman leaped through the bushes, followed by Mr. West. The latter produced a broad-bladed knife, and the earth fairly flew as he burrowed down like a gigantic mole.

Finally the knife-blade struck something hard.

Inserting his fingers in the loose earth, Mr. West heaved out a japanned box, much like those used in safety-deposit vaults. A padlock secured it. With a quick wrench Mr. West ripped away the soldered staple and shook out the contents. There were the government bonds and several packages of bills of large denominations.

Captain Tregaskis gazed with widening eyes. Mr. West methodically counted the notes and verified the securities from a note-book, replaced the whole in the box, and turned to Captain Tregaskis.

"There we are, captain, the whole thing. Now I wonder what Griffin will find at Williamsburg. Good joke on him. And you found it, too! You who are practically new at the business! All the better joke. Now let's go back. Our work is only half-done. We have yet to catch our men. Come on!"

He started swiftly the way they had come, the captain striding beside him, immensely pleased with himself. As they walked, however, his self-congratulatory mood vanished. Here was a ten-thousand-dollar reward earned, but what part of it was his? Only five per cent.! A measly five hundred dollars —when, if he had taken fifty shares in the detective agency, he would have been four thousand dollars in pocket clear. It was too bad. The more he thought of it the more galling the thought became. Finally he could stand it no longer.

"About this reward, now," he ventured. "I took five shares, you remember, and was thinking of taking more. How would it be if I took fifty?"

"On this reward, you mean?" replied Mr. West. "Well, of course you took five shares, and you get five hundred dollars. That was the agreement, you know."

"But I was thinking of taking more," said Captain Tregaskis. "We left it open, you remember. I hadn't quite made up my mind."

"Now look here, captain, that wouldn't be fair. You paid, or were to pay, one hundred dollars, and get a five per cent. division. How can I change that, now that we have earned the reward? It wouldn't be fair to my associates. Besides, I think I mentioned our arrangement to Griffin."

"You didn't say a word about it," said Captain Tregaskis eagerly. "I thought it all over last night, and had my mind made up to pay one thousand dollars and get a fifty per cent. share. I intended to tell you that before, but it slipped my mind. Can't we arrange it now?"

"Don't see how," said Mr. West. "Why, man alive, it's like making you a present of five thousand dollars, and a lot of that would come out of my pocket."

"How much?" asked Captain Tregaskis.

"Five hundred dollars, at least. Apart from that, it wouldn't be fair to others."

"I'll give you," said Captain Tregaskis, stopping short, "six hundred dollars for yourself to let me in on a fifty per cent. basis."

"Can't do it," said Mr. West.

"Seven hundred, then."

"Seven hundred is quite a bunch of money," said Mr. West hesitatingly.

"It is," said Captain Tregaskis. "Come, now, will you or won't you?"

"After all, you made the find," said Mr. West. "You ought to have more than five per cent., and because of that, and because I like you personally, I'll let you in. I'll just consider that seven hundred of yours a contribution to charity, and let the charity begin at home."

Arrived at his home, Captain Tregaskis lost no time in clinching the bargain. He produced his check-book. "Now I'll just write you a check for that thousand dollars."

"Date it yesterday, for appearance sake," said Mr. West. "Here, I'll give you my check on our bank for your share of the reward, but I'll have to date it a week ahead, for it will be that time before the reward is paid. There you are, five thousand dollars. Not every day a man makes as much in a morning. Oh, yes, and that check for seven hundred dollars—you might as well make that out, too. You can date it to-day. Thanks. Hello! what's this?"

Knocking at the door, but without waiting for it to be opened, Mr. Griffin plunged into the room. His eyes fell on the japanned box on the table, and widened in surprise.

"You got it, then!" he exclaimed. "I just learned there was nothing in that Williamsburg story. Is it all there? Yes? Well, the devil's to pay! It's the Horner gang that did it. They've got wind somewhere that we know, and pulled out of here this morning. They were all here. They're heading for Chicago. And the deuce of it is," he went on ruefully, "that some one went through me an hour ago and took every blessed cent I had. Slickest piece of work I ever saw. And on *me*, too. Left me stranded with not a cent and no one in town to cash a check for me."

"That doesn't matter," said Mr. West. "I've plenty of money. We must be after them and not lose a minute. I must get those checks of yours cashed at once, captain. When does the next train start?"

"In half an hour. You've got just time to make the bank. Oh, what in thunder are we going to do with these bonds and cash? We can't go lugging them around the country."

"Leave them with Captain Tregaskis. He's one of our men. Here, captain, roll a newspaper around that box and take it with you. Mustn't leave it about in the house. You'll have to identify me at the bank, or there'll be a delay in getting the money, and then we'll miss the train. Come on!"

Three men sat in a stateroom of the west-bound train oblivious to the passing landscape.

"You cashed two of the old sucker's checks," said Mr. Griffin, "and you got a holy wad for each. Throw it out on the table and let's see what real money looks like."

Mr. West laughed, and threw down two rolls of bills.

"This is a thousand to pay the usual initiation fee of our noble association, and this is seven hundred I got as a bonus for letting him in on a fifty per cent. basis after he had found the plant under an agreement for five per cent. I ought to get that by rights. As for Dago Frank here, he wasn't needed, and shouldn't get anything."

The third person blew a thin stream of smoke from his lungs.

"I getta my rake-off alla right," he said; "else for why I mak-a de goods in de box and punch-a de hole in de rock?"

The Fortunes of Geoff

By K. and Hesketh Prichard
Authors of "Don Q.," "Roving Hearts," Etc.

XII.—THE LAST ROUND

(A Complete Story)

GEOFF was asleep, his dark head pillowed on his arms, which were flung upon the wine-stained table of one of the partitioned spaces of the hotel eating-room. It still wanted an hour to dawn, and upon the previous night he had ridden both fast and far, until, indeed, he had seen the lights of Lord Galtron's yacht, the *Vashti*, shining through a light smother of fog from her anchorage in the Gallegos estuary.

For two weeks Geoffrey Heronhaye had been in chase of this ship; from Montevideo he had followed her to Buenos Ayres; from Buenos Ayres to Bahia Blanca; from Bahia Blanca to Puerto Madryn; from Puerto Madryn to Santa Cruz. There the little coasting-steamer he traveled in ended her voyage; and there, forced to take to the land, he had bought a couple of horses and had made the hundred miles to Gallegos in twenty hours.

The reason for this rush down half a continent was contained in the letter, gripped in his hand, which he had read for the twentieth time ere he fell asleep by the light of the acrid paraffin flame which still burned fitfully above him.

At length Geoff stirred and sat up. The white light of sunrise was beginning to turn the darkness into the color of skim milk. A waiter, clad in his morning costume of blue jersey and rope-soled shoes, was wiping the central table with a sloppy cloth. From him Geoff ordered coffee, and, as the man turned to fetch it, he again inquired the name of the yacht in the estuary.

The waiter rubbed his unshaven chin and grinned sourly. "I know not the name, but she belongs to an English Lord Galtron. You are also English. No doubt they will invite you on board!"

The sarcasm was lost on Geoff, who was already deep in a reperusal of the letter which was dated from New York. Yes, for three weeks he had chased this ship, not only because it carried Gabrielle Van Rooven, but because it also carried a certain Charles Grandison, whose name had brooded in the shadows of his mind for the last five years; the man who had been the partner of his cousin's wife, Sophy Heronhaye, in a memorable game of bridge which had made him, Geoffrey Heronhaye, of Yattalis, an exile. Sophy had been accused of cheating, and to save her Geoff had accepted the blame. A violent quarrel with his uncle followed, and he left Yattalis dishonored. Sophy had never realized the extent of the sacrifice Geoff had made for her; and, although five years had passed since then, she was still disposed to treat the matter lightly.

Dear Geoff (the letter ran) Gabrielle Van Rooven says this will find you. I hope it may, for I am very miserable, even more miserable than I was that last evening at Yattilis, when you helped me. Geoff, I am heart-broken now; I shall never believe in human nature again. You have heard of Billy's death, I suppose? It was most providential—

apoplexy, and he had no time to change his will. I wore absolutely the most adorable mourning for him; I took a lot of trouble about it, and, Geoff, I am glad of it now, for I have found out that there are worse men than poor Billy was, though I may have said things about him long ago. Who do you suppose has gone south in Lord Galtron's yacht? Charlie Grandison! And it will interest you to know why—to make love to Gabrielle, if you please, because that silly Mrs. Storey hinted to every one that she might leave her money to Gabrielle, if she continued to be sensible and to give up painting pictures.

I spoke to Charlie about it—I can see you smile! Oh, yes, we had a scene. I told him that people like Mrs. Storey were most unreliable, but he laughed and said he would take care that Gabrielle did not give her a chance of being anything but reliable. Then I was driven to remind him of all that I had done for him, how I had sacrificed myself for him, and gone to you that night and pretended that I had cheated, when, *of course,* it was really Charlie who had done it! You were the only one who was kind to me at that time, and I am sure I deserved kindness, doing all I did for him in that wretched business and getting into such dreadful hot water about it with Billy. I don't know what I should have done if you had not helped me and taken the blame of it on yourself. I quite appreciated it, Geoff, though I know that sort of thing is never so hard for a man as for a woman, yet it really was good of you, and I have often wondered where you went away to, and whether you were dead among savages. People seemed to love to spread that report.

Charlie owed so much to me, and now, just see how he treats me! Geoff, cannot you help me? I wonder what uncle would have done, had he been alive? But you are now Lord Yattalis, and I am sure you can bring Charlie to realize that he will never be so happy with any one as with me. I have proved my love. I sacrificed myself for him that evening when I pretended to you that I had cheated. If you are alive still, I don't believe you can have grown so horribly selfish as not to take some trouble for my sake. Affectionately yours.

SOPHY HERONHAYE.

P. S.—I honestly think Charlie would very soon tire of Gabrielle, don't you? In any case you can see that it is your duty to help me, as Billy was your cousin. S. H.

It was with a very grim face that Geoff folded up the letter and put it away into his breast pocket with that minute care which betokens concentrated thought. Yet it is to be doubted if he wasted a second of it on Sophy's vicarious self-sacrifice or her artificial sorrows. The one galling thought in his mind was the knowledge that it was not in Sophy's but in Grandison's stead that he had for five long years carried a burden of obloquy and disgrace. To shield Sophy was one thing, but to be the victim of Grandison's trickery was quite another. And worst of all, Gabrielle had gone south in the *Vashti* in Grandison's company—gone with an embittered mind; and how can any man forecast what a girl will do when her emotions are stirred and her pride wounded?

Geoff was well aware that in turning his back upon Bovador he was renouncing the fortune for which he had striven throughout the whole period of his exile; but here was a matter that, for Gabrielle's sake, brooked no delay.

The waiter returned just as the lamp, with a final leap, fell dead, contributing a last evil pungency to the vitiated atmosphere. But Geoff drank his coffee for once unconscious of the all-pervading odor. He had changed his seat to a window, and was looking out on the estuary that ran raw and choppy under a blustering wind.

"I see no one stirring on the yacht," he observed, in order to make the man speak.

Ramon, who had become partially humanized by the warmth of the cookhouse, chuckled sardonically. "They travel not for pleasure, this nation of yours, señor; they go but where their devil drives them," he began. "The ship is superb as the Royal Palace of Madrid—but, *caramba!* they leave it to make a promenade of boats up the river, which Benito says gallops like a horse this morning under the storm from the west. They are possessed, yes?"

Geoff smiled.

Ramon continued: "They have yesterday sent forward a tropilla of horses that, when the mariners make camp, they may ride upon the pampas—for pleasure!" he laughed hoarsely. "An English excellenza, one who named himself Grandison, came here to choose the horses; and he swore with many oaths that not one of the whole fiddle-

headed crowd (I speak the English, me!) was fitting for the beautiful señorita to ride upon. But then Ricardo Lopez brought the little alazan mare of his wife——"

Geoff pushed away his cup with a clatter. "What? Have they already started from the yacht?"

"By sunrise—in a launch, because of the swiftness of the current."

It did not delay Geoff long to verify this news; and then taking his two horses he set out along the bank of the Gallegos, following the tracks of the tropilla sent ahead by Grandison. The day was nearing noon when he saw ahead of him, pitched in the river valley, the tents of Lord Galtron's camp. In spite of the wind the sun was shining, and he could see a few people sitting at lunch in the large dining-tent.

Geoff wondered grimly how Lord Galtron would receive him. He remembered the man well, for he had known him slightly in his Oxford days and later. How much importance would he attach to the old story of the bridge-party at Yattalis? Well, the question could very quickly be settled. Geoff called one of the servants from about the fires and asked for Lord Galtron.

He came out, a tall man stooping under the flap of the tent, a tall man with listless black brows contradicted by lips that closed firmly.

"Sorry to disturb you," said Geoff.

At the sound of his voice Galtron put up his single eye-glass. "What can I do for you?" he asked coldly.

Tone and face were equally expressionless.

"I am Geoffrey Heronhaye."

"Indeed?" No change came to the imperturbable stare of the eye-glass, yet Geoff knew that Galtron recollected everything.

"I am come to see Grandison. Perhaps you will send a man to let him know it."

"He is not yet returned from riding."

"That is unfortunate. I shall make my camp over the bluff yonder, and may I beg you to ask him to spare me half an hour?" Geoff turned on his heel.

Galtron watched him as he strode away over the tussocks. Yes, it was Geoffrey Heronhaye, right enough! He wondered how that old business could possibly have come about! Well, it was nothing to him; he shrugged his shoulders and passed back into the tent, but he took care to avoid mention of his visitor.

Geoff rode out of sight before he made camp. He gathered wood for his fire, and while the water boiled in his kettle he realized for the first time to its full extent, in the light of his late reception by Lord Galtron, the injury which Grandison had done him.

As he prepared his simple evening meal his thoughts fled back to those days nearly five years earlier, which he had spent in this same country of Patagonia. At that time he was in the first stages of his struggle against the forces of nature for the mere boon of life. Since then he had become a man of his hands; now let fate cast him where it would, he knew himself to be adequate; more, he could live and thrive where a man of lesser experience and lesser thews must die. But of what good was it all, since he had quarreled with Gabrielle, or, rather, she had found vital cause of offense against him in the matter of those paintings of hers which he had surreptitiously bought? She could never forgive him, and so it came about for a second time that the wind-tormented Patagonian landscape framed another of his dark hours.

To turn to his own situation, there was little light there as yet. He was become Lord Yattalis in his uncle's place, and he pictured the cynical old man dying with bitter dislike of the nephew who must be his heir, and to whom he would most surely leave as lean an inheritance as the law allowed. Well, it mattered the less now, Geoff reflected, as the one gift for which he would have thanked the gods was to be irrevocably withheld.

On this he remembered that during their last interview Gabrielle had cast the story of his disgrace in his teeth. For that, at least, she would yet be sorry, for he had long ago discerned

the strain of justice which ran through her wayward disposition. So his thoughts turned back to Grandison. With the easy wisdom which comes after the event, he wished he had made sure of the true happenings of that desperate evening before he pledged himself blindly to shield Sophy.

He formed no plans for dealing with Grandison. Perhaps he trusted that the moment itself would inspire the words which he should speak, the acts which he must do. Years ago Geoff had been an ill man to quarrel with; since then hardship and trouble had not softened him. His one desire was to meet Grandison man to man and force him to acknowledge his guilt. But as he sat now in the failing sunlight beside his camp-fire, he recognized all that it meant to wash out this stain upon his honor.

He had Sophy's letter, to be sure, but what use could he make of it? Grandison, of course, would deny the whole affair, and, although it was certain that Sophy had now told the truth, yet the story of what she had done in penalizing himself to shelter Grandison could never be made public. Were it told abroad, what ugly questions, what surmises, would arise! Why had she done so much for Grandison? Geoff sighed; it was going to be a tough net to escape from.

He woke from his reverie with a start. Clouds were darkening and piling in the west. He wondered if Grandison had returned. He climbed the cliff and looked across the wide valley, where the fires made by the sailors of the *Vashti* now began to glow and burn, in the dusk.

Surely Grandison, with the riding-party, must have returned by now! Probably he was waiting for his dinner, his coffee, his cigarette, before he took the trouble to walk across to see Heronhaye—"the fellah, my dear Galtron, who disgraced himself and incidentally swindled me out of a pocketful of money five years ago."

Geoff could almost hear the insolent voice. His hands tightened as he dwelt on Grandison's craft in using poor, silly Sophy Heronhaye as an instrument to work upon his chivalry. He knew his man, a cur and a villain it might be, but with all the machinery of unscrupulousness and savoir faire behind him, popular in his own circle, strong in that social recognition which Geoff himself had lost, one able to take the lead in most companies, a good shot and of acknowledged courage—taken altogether, a dangerous man.

Another hour passed. The one thing that Geoff had not expected had happened. Grandison evidently did not mean to come; he had shirked the interview, or it may be he posed as too contemptuous of a broken man's request to trouble about it. Either way Geoff determined to bring the matter to an issue.

He walked over to the other camp, and found most of the men round a huge bonfire. He strode straight up to Lord Galtron.

"May I ask if you have given Grandison my message?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Haven't seen him." Lord Galtron turned his shoulder pointedly, and joined the other men, who were grouped together so deep in talk with a couple of gauchos that they had failed to notice Geoff's approach.

"I say, Galtron, the fellows tell me they can't do anything until morning!" exclaimed a stout, middle-aged man, turning to meet his host.

"Brutes! Of course they *must* go and search for them! I am glad Mrs. Storey did not come up with us. The idea of Miss Van Rooven out on the pampas on such a stormy night as this! Here, you fellows!"

The two gauchos slouched forward; one of them, a man with a close, black beard, answered the questions put to him by Lord Galtron, in camp Spanish, mingled with a few words of English. Geoff stood with his back to the fire, listening.

"Can any of you fellows understand what he says?" Lord Galtron inquired, in despair, after a few minutes of this colloquy.

"I can." Geoff stepped up to his side.

Galtron frowned, but there was no help for it, he must accept the proffered aid.

"The fact is," he said, "Grandison and Miss Van Rooven, somehow, lost touch with the riding-party, and disappeared before these gauchos noticed it. Now they can't find them."

"It is very easy to lose oneself on the pampas," replied Geoff, as indifferently as he could, when face to face with the thought of Gabrielle out alone on the pampas with a man quite ruthless where the attainment of any wish was concerned. "Within twenty yards one could be lost sight of in the undulations of the country, and to find his way again would be, for a stranger, next to impossible, as there are no landmarks for guidance. I'll hear what the gauchos say about it."

More than one man present had known Geoff in other days, but his face was completely in shadow under the wide brim of his sombrero. Rapid questions, each with its answer in voluble rolling Spanish, followed one another. The bearded gaucho appeared to have a good deal to say, and he said it. Then Geoff addressed Galtron.

"They are certain that Grandison and Miss Van Rooven were with the party almost to the banks of a small stream called the Chico, about which the ground is, I know, very stony, where taking up a trail would be difficult. Blas says it is impossible before daylight."

"What? Do you know the country?" put in the stout man bruskly.

"More or less," said Geoff.

"Then why the dickens, Galtron, can't he go to look for them?" exclaimed the other.

Galtron met Geoff's eyes; they had a gleam in the firelight which held him silent for an instant. He felt much as if he were unchaining a bloodhound on Grandison.

"I am going," said Geoff, before he could speak. "Perhaps you will lend me a fresh horse, and I'll take Blas with me, by your kind permission."

Galtron nodded, and before he turned in that night he smoked a long, meditative cigar. Then he rose and stretched himself. "Looks ugly for Grandison, but I don't see why I need bother about that old story. He is better able to take care of himself than most men."

Geoff and the bearded gaucho left the camp by the river at a hard canter. The moon was beginning to show, where the wind had blown clear a broad space of sky. Geoffrey Heronhaye knew something of the country behind Gallegos. A few farms clung to the coast, dotting the immensity of the landscape; behind these the country rolled away in great folds rising gradually toward the cordillera, but rifted here and there with yawning chasms into which one dipped unconsciously. There, if a man with untrained eyes stopped to look round him, north, south, east, and west, he saw the same inexorable sameness of aspect, no stone, no tree to mark direction; there he came to know he had made a mistake which could not be rectified—he had stepped from the old, warm household world into space.

Yet this was not the view of Grandison's case which presented itself to Geoff. As he rode hard and fast behind the gaucho, urging him to greater speed, the whole affair opened itself like a book before him. He seemed to read the plot as clearly as ever he had read printed characters in his life.

Sophy's warning that Grandison had declared his intention of marrying Gabrielle supplied the key. The man was probably on the last legs of his credit; he would stick at nothing to refill his pockets and to secure his future. Could he succeed in spending even a day or two alone with Gabrielle on the pampas, she would find herself in a position from which only he, as her companion, could extricate her.

Geoff shuddered to think of that position, for in the eyes of a certain portion of her world she would be compromised. Grandison would offer marriage in such terms as would induce Gabrielle to accept him—for he knew with accuracy how to play upon a woman's feelings.

That was one side of the question. On the other, how would it be if Gabrielle had really learned to care for Grandison? In that case what would he himself do, or, it might be better said, not do, in the matter?

Meantime Blas rode ahead with stubbornness in the set of his bowed shoulders. Geoff was persuaded he was in the plot—how else could Grandison hope to escape from the grip of the pampas? No, he had carried Gabrielle to some appointed spot, there to remain until she accepted her fate, when, no doubt, Blas would reappear and rescue the pair with appropriate exclamations.

By this time they were crossing an upland covered with espinilla, seemingly untenanted by any living thing save a spur-winged plover, which sprang up screaming almost from under the horses' hoofs. Then they descended the cañadon into a wide valley through the middle of which a stream flowed. On all sides lay expanses of harsh thorn and gravel. Blas reined up abruptly on the bank of the little river.

"It is here the trail ends," he said; "one cannot follow over such camp as this, stones, rocky bottom, gravel."

"That is so, nevertheless one can search," Geoff answered, as he dismounted, ordering Blas to do likewise.

Blas threw his leg over the saddle, grumbling, and, like Geoff, fastened his horse to a stone.

"It would simplify matters very much," went on Geoff quietly, "if we knew in which direction they went, the señor and the lady."

Blas grunted, by way of reply, and there was more than a suspicion of insolence in the sound. Geoff stood looking at the man beside him until the moon cleared a cloud and shone down upon them with her full light.

"If we knew in which direction they went," he repeated.

"In which direction they went, señor?" Blas shrugged his shoulders. "Quien sabe?"

"*You* sabe!" said Geoff suddenly. There was an instant's scuffle, the gaucho's knife flashed in the moon and fell tinkling twenty feet away, then he stiffened with Geoff's grasp upon his collar.

"That story was all very well at the camp, but it won't do here and with me. Take off your belt."

Blas hesitated, but the grip on his neck was terrific.

Geoff took the belt in his left hand, opened one of the heavy buckled pockets, and shook from it a roll of notes.

"Now we shall have no more delay," said he. "Stand there. He flung the heavy Argentine violently back and let go of him. He had had occasion to observe before now that most men on a foretaste of his strength were apt to think twice about their next move. "Two hundred dollars. Good!" And he clasped the belt about his own body.

"My money!" yelled the gaucho, leaping forward.

"Steady! You have not earned it. It was Señor Grandison's a few hours ago. Hear me! If we reach Señor Grandison and the lady to-night, you shall have the money back to-morrow. If we do not find them to-night, I shall shoot you. You understand?"

Blas growled: "Bah! You would not dare!"

Geoff took off his hat and the moon lit up his grim face. "You have seen me before now, Blas," he said.

The gaucho sprang back, with a cry: "The man who killed Delirez!"

Geoff realized that any reputation, provided it be big enough, is sometimes valuable. Delirez had been a horse-thief and a murderer whom Geoff had killed in self-defense, thereby gaining for himself in Patagonia a name which will endure past the making of railways.

"Now, where are Señor Grandison and the lady?"

"If I tell you, will you give me the rifle which you hold in your hand?"

"No," returned Geoff, "but I have warned you what will happen if we fail to reach them to-night. Again, how far?"

"Two hours," said the gaucho.

In a brief gleam of morning sunshine Gabrielle and Grandison, in com-

pany with half a dozen others and escorted by the two gauchos, had ridden away from camp over the brown backs of the ridges. Every one appeared to be in high spirits, Gabrielle among them; her laugh was perhaps all the readier because she laughed in her own despite. She would not own even in secret that she was heart-sick and unhappy, yet thoughts of Geoff, persistent as the man himself, rankled in her mind and would not be forbidden.

Chance talk had thrown a new light upon him and his conduct in the past, and she began to be less sure of her own justice on a certain afternoon at Montevideo when she had driven him away with reproaches.

There was also another influence at work. She was too much a woman not to feel the flattery of Grandison's advances, a man whose discourtesy to the world in general threw into relief his manner with herself. If he had not the tact, he had, at any rate, the experience to understand that the rough lover was not the man to gain her.

So they rode, Gabrielle flying before her own thoughts, while Grandison never quitted her side, sedulous, almost humble, relentlessly waiting, waiting, for what? Twice or three times he had made it fairly clear, but Gabrielle had fenced him off, all the more resolutely because a fear of him lurked somewhere in her heart.

But Grandison knew how to be patient. He had come to the conclusion that it was time for him to settle down, and for many reasons Gabrielle seemed to be the wife he desired. First and last and wholly important was the fact that she would inherit great wealth, but also luckily she was a beautiful woman and high-minded, for whatever his own history, Grandison was resolved that his wife should be above suspicion. It was true that he had made just such a plot against her as Geoff guessed at, but he had no intention of carrying matters to extremes and thereby condemning himself to two or three days of discomfort in some pampas hut, if it could by any possibility be avoided. But Gabrielle's determined shrinking from the significance of his hints drove him to play his trump-card.

He dropped behind and made a sign to Blas, who answered by another. Grandison rejoined Gabrielle, and, seeing that she was deep in her own thoughts, he rode silently at her side, slowly edging her horse away from the party and down a slight incline. He knew that he would have some trouble with her presently, but, as has been said, he was experienced in these matters, and had passed undistressed more than once through these scenes that are of all the most pitiful, when a woman abases herself and pleads for the continuance of a dead love.

"I am tired; let us go back. But"—Gabrielle reined up and looked round in dismay—"where are all the others?"

It was in vain that they rode hither and thither, up and down, always guided carefully southward by Grandison's quiet efforts, and thus farther and farther away from the camp on the Gallegos. Grandison was as much distressed as she, herself, so it appeared to Gabrielle, and she galloped on beside him with entire faith, mile after mile, while he assured her they were now moving in the right direction, whereas he was making as straight a bee-line as was possible to him for a hut ten leagues to the south, where he hoped to find shelter for the night.

The sun was dropping to the horizon when they saw below them a small shed in the middle of a broad vega. Grandison proposed that she should rest there, while he resumed his search for the right track. Night had closed in before he stood again at the broken door looking dispirited and dog-tired, although, as a matter of fact, he had been resting comfortably enough behind a hummock not two hundred yards away.

He shook his head as he entered. "Let us hope that they may track us in the morning," he said. "In the meantime perhaps we can find something to eat."

Gabrielle sank back upon the saddle-rugs, where she sat in miserable disap-

pointment while Grandison produced some tins from a shelf and induced her to eat and drink. But it was a most unsatisfactory meal for a man of his habits; besides, his attempt to make a fire ended in failure. Unromantically cross and cold, he rushed his plot to its climax.

But although he brought to bear upon Gabrielle all his tact, all the spell of his personality, all the ruses of his experience, the net result was a blank refusal. He stood, at length, leaning against the wall of the hut, scowling and gnawing the end of his mustache, but not in the least shaken from his purpose.

"You must know very well, Gabrielle, that I have loved you for a long time," he said at last reproachfully. "Why will you refuse me happiness?"

"I have told you—because I don't love you." The girl's voice shook a little and she did not raise her eyes.

"But, my dear child, listen to me."

"Please say no more, because I—I don't even—*like* you!"

A curious look flashed over Grandison's face. Was there any one else? On the whole, he rather thought not, though long ago, at Yattalis, he had imagined that Geoffrey Heronhaye—the name gave pause to his thoughts. Where was Geoffrey Heronhaye? Gone, vanished, no one knew where, and he dismissed the idea. But the chill night air, the dirty hut, all the outlook of continued discomfort for two or three days if this girl could not be quickly brought to give him her promise to be his wife, was chafing his temper dangerously.

"Have you set up an ideal to adore?" he asked. "That may be all very well to begin with, but I can assure you, Gabrielle, that a lover of flesh and blood who worships you is, as you will find, a much more satisfactory personage."

To this the girl made no reply. Her silence worked on his irritable mood. He looked at her with something between sour approval and a sort of fury. Even then he foresaw, he who was trained to foresee, what their married life would be. She was full of enthusiasms; Grandison hated enthusiasms. She had a heart; Grandison was rather wearied of hearts. He wanted rest, rest, and money, in order that he might pursue the calculated selfishness of his life. This last was worth gaining, anyhow.

"Gabrielle," he began again, "I do not pretend that you are the only woman I have ever admired——"

"Oh, no, of course not!"

Grandison winced. He was callous enough on most points, but the indifference of this ready assent stung him. The girl was not even jealous! Well, he had a weapon left which she could not parry.

"But, as it happens, you are the one woman I care for now. You will at least believe that?" He paused for her answer.

It came at last, falteringly: "I can't quite believe it."

"I am sorry that I have failed to convince you," he replied, "but, at any rate, I *am* in deadly earnest. I want you for my wife, all the more now that——"

"Please don't let us talk about it," she said wearily.

"I am afraid, my dear girl, it must be settled here and now."

The change to familiarity in his manner alarmed her, but her voice was steady. "Very well, I can only give you the same answer."

"Is there another man in the case?" Grandison asked.

Her spirit rose. "Yes," she said, "there is another man."

Grandison shrugged his shoulders. "Lucky fellow! And unlucky me! Yet, I fear that fact cannot alter the issue. Gabrielle, you may believe that I love you very truly."

Geoff and the gaucho halted on the summit of the nearest rise and saw the glimmer of light which marked the position of the lonely hut.

"I go no farther," announced Blas. "There you will find him. For me, I vanish, yet I will return, in time to see which of you two lies dead for the coranchos to bury. *Hé aquil!* he also is a man to be feared."

Geoff hobbled his horse and strode

down on foot to the great crisis of his life.

"I will devote my whole future to making you happy." Grandison was throwing some shadow of passion into the old formula. "Don't refuse to hear me, darling! You must hear me; you must, for your own sake, face the position!"

"What do you mean?" Gabrielle exclaimed.

"I must speak plainly. Don't you understand that although this tête-à-tête in a deserted hut alone on the pampas is for me a charming piece of good fortune, for you it is—a predicament?"

Gabrielle's lips grew white. "You—you——"

He laughed oddly. "Yes, I am so much in love that I will not stick at trifles to win you. All is fair in love and war. It is quite possible that we may not be found for another day or two, perhaps not for a week. And then—— Come, dear, this comedy of love is finished, is it not?"

The crazy door leaped from its hinges, Gabrielle could not stifle a cry, and Geoff stood between them.

"Not quite finished," he said.

Grandison eyed him sneeringly. "So you are still alive?"

But Geoff's look sent his hand creeping toward his coat pocket.

"You are not lost on the pampas, Miss Van Rooven," Geoff declared. "Mr. Grandison has known all along exactly where you were. He *led* you here."

"This gentleman," interrupted Grandison suavely, "has already established a reputation for himself. His word, the word of a self-acknowledged cheat, will scarcely be convincing."

Geoff smiled scornfully. "This is a deserted hut, but you cannot credit that a shepherd or settler ever owned, much less left behind him, this stock of fresh tins of fruit and meat, which I see here on the shelf. Further, for what reason should Grandison give Blas this roll of notes, except as a bribe?" Geoff drew the dirty bundle from his belt.

"I know nothing of them."

"That statement can be put to the test at the bank, where you drew them. It is useless to deny the thing, for I had the whole story from Blas himself not an hour ago. You bribed him to prepare this hut, to direct you how to get here, and you were to signal to him to return when you thought proper to be discovered."

"May I ask you to suggest why I should do all this?" inquired Grandison. His hand was in his pocket now, and Geoff had moved nearer to him.

"I overheard a sentence or two as I ran up. I think you were putting the reason plainly in your own infernal way."

"No, but you put your own interpretation to my words; just as long ago, at Yattalis, you misinterpreted the laws of honor. You overheard me asking Miss Van Rooven to be my wife, as I take pride in asking her the same question again in your presence."

"To force her consent to that question was the whole point of your plot. You intended to create a lot of gossip——" Geoff stopped, for at the moment he met Gabrielle's eyes. She turned away abruptly, and covered her face with her hands.

Grandison was quick to seize his advantage. "Gabrielle, you hear what even he says about the situation, yet it need not be a painful one, if only you promise to be my wife. There is no other way."

"Never!"

This one word from Gabrielle was all that Geoff wanted, all that he had waited for.

"You have offered your solution of the difficulty," he said; "I have another to suggest."

Grandison's lip curled. "I think I can conjecture it."

"No, you cannot; but you shall carry out your part in it."

Grandison turned on him with a sudden snarl. "If Miss Van Rooven were not present I should kick you through that door! Take care what you say."

"Just a moment." Geoff spoke slowly. "It will never be known that you

were here with Miss Van Rooven. This is the story that must travel back to Galtron's camp, a story infinitely more to your credit than you deserve, Grandison, but I can't help that. As soon as you discovered that you and Miss Van Rooven were lost, you left her to search for the trail back to camp, and from that time—you disappeared."

He stopped on the word, and, forestalling Grandison's movement, quick as lightning flung the roll of notes in his eyes. A shot rang out, and it was with a powder-blackened face that Geoff closed with his antagonist. Both were strong men, but even had Grandison been the stronger, it is doubtful how far strength would have served him in the face of Heronhaye's rage. But Grandison was desperate, also; he was fighting for his life and for what was more to him—conquest over the man he had injured and whom he hated more than any human being upon earth. Two minutes of struggle, then the turning-point came, when Geoff flung his opponent's revolver through the doorway.

Gabrielle cowered in a corner, sobbing miserably; she hardly heard the noise of blows which followed. Geoff had caught up his heavy cowhide whip by the lash.

A few moments later, perhaps, Grandison's greatest enemy might have pitied him as he lay gasping on the floor of the hut. Geoff, breathing hard, stood across him. Up to this moment he had quite forgotten his own business with the man.

A sob from Gabrielle startled him. With bitter compunction for the scene he had, in his anger, thrust upon her, he turned, with some stammered excuse, but she only shook her head and buried her face still more deeply in her hands.

The ten minutes which followed haunted Geoff's imagination for many a day, even after—— He flung his flask before Grandison, who emptied it down his throat, and then sat up, livid and venomous.

"I ask Miss Van Rooven's indulgence for a few moments longer," began Geoff, "but there is another matter to be cleared up between us before we part to-day, Grandison."

Grandison set his teeth. "If you mean the matter of my disappearing to shield Miss Van Rooven and *you*," he said bitterly, "yes, Miss Van Rooven, it is obvious to me that here is the 'other man.' Unless I am dead, I will go back to Lord Galtron and show him the story from my point of view! I am inclined to think that my opinion will have weight as against that of a man cast out by his own class because he cheated at cards."

"So it was said five years ago, at Yattalis," interrupted Geoff, "and I let the accusation go by default, because I was deceived, you know how. For five years I have carried the weight of your guilt, but at last I can act, at last I can clear myself and show what you are."

Grandison moved painfully, but satisfaction stole back to his face. "I fancy you will find it rather a hard matter to prove such a wild statement against me."

"I have the proof in my pocket."

"Let me see it."

Geoff was face to face with the crucial moment now, and, alas! at fault what next to say, or how to enforce the fact of his innocence. Well he knew that there was the weak point in his armor; Sophy's letter, though it carried conviction, could never be made public. Then fate, so long his foe, intervened and thrust into his doubting mind the charmed word. "My uncle, Lord Yattalis, is dead, and——"

To his amazement Grandison brought his fist down on his knee with a curse. "So that is it?" he said. "All right, that ends it. After all, you Heronhayes stand together, though he hated you. He never rested until he got to the bottom of that bridge business, but he would never have allowed you to see that paper as long as he lived. When he came to die, I suppose for the sake of the old name, he——"

He rose stiffly from the ground. "Well, you have my signature to it, and you will, of course, hand it round. It's my turn to disappear, but you may

take it from me, Lord Yattalis, that if a curse can carry or an ill turn harm you, you may count on me for both."

But Geoff stopped him as he made for the door. "You will stay here and nurse yourself for a day or two until the *Vashti* leaves Gallegos," he said grimly. "In the meantime Miss Van Rooven and I must set out at once for Galtron's camp."

Before he could address her, Gabrielle turned to the door without a word, and Geoff, taking up her saddle, followed her from the hut.

Morning found them riding silently over the pampas. The wind had fallen, and the sun, as it rose higher, warmed Gabrielle's chilled limbs, and revived her.

"Are we near the camp now?" she asked.

"It is over the next slope. You will not be troubled by me longer than is absolutely necessary." Geoff meant to be far away to-morrow, yet he found it hard to keep his eyes away from her. He had never loved her as he loved her now when he was once more free to ask her to be his wife, but, alas! now there stood between them that obstacle of his own making, the secret purchase of her paintings. "But I want to say one thing while I have the chance. I bought those pictures because I wanted them, because I own nothing on earth I value so much. It never once entered my head that you could misunderstand my confounded stupidity."

He was not looking at her now, and did not see the little smile at the corners of her mouth. "You have done a good many things I don't like," she said demurely. "Mr. Grandison told me that you had become a professional pugilist when you were in New York. Some one saw you fighting, and recognized you, so he said. Is that true?"

"Yes, it's true, though I was never good enough for a professional."

"But you fought for money?" persisted Gabrielle.

"Yes"—in spite of himself he felt the blood slowly rising in his face—"paid in advance, too, which was lucky, for the police raided the place!" He was reckless; it did not matter much now, for he could never make her understand.

"It was on the very evening you saw me?" she asked, in a low, reproachful voice. "Why did you do it?"

"I don't know. Because I rather enjoyed it, I suppose."

"How could you?" she cried. "Don't you think I know why you fought—for money?"

Geoff's heart leaped into his throat. He put out his hand and caught at her bridle. "Gabrielle!"

"I found out the date of that fight," she went on, half-sobbing, half-laughing, "and immediately after my first picture was bought by somebody who thought I was poor, and—and—it was very kind of you, dear Geoff."

Geoff's arm was round her in spite of a very strenuous opposition offered by the alazan, and so they must pass away over the ridges forgetting time and place while the sun swings up into heaven and warms the morning world.

The Man Who Was Dead

By Arthur W. Marchmont

Author of "In the Cause of Freedom," "When I Was Czar," Etc.

CHAPTER XVIII—(*Continued.*)

NTENSELY excited as I was by the events of the night, particularly my discovery about Alexandrov, I shut out all thoughts except about the meeting in the morning. If I was to be killed nothing would matter, and my chief consideration was to get some sleep so that my nerves might be steady; and to sleep I went.

I was ready before the prince arrived. If anything, I was, I think, the cooler of the two. He was almost excited in his eagerness that I should kill Von Epstein.

"I understand you can do almost anything with a pistol?" he said once.

"Did you get that from Arnheim? I once offered, in a swaggering jest, to trim his mustaches with a revolver."

"But you *are* a good shot?" he asked very earnestly.

"I think I could hit a man."

"He will kill you if he can. He is mad against you. His conduct to you last night was the vilest I have ever witnessed. Even a coward would have had his blood set boiling. And you are no coward, monsieur."

"You needn't try to work me up, prince."

"Ah, you English, you are so cool—so cold-blooded. Why do you pass yourself off as a Frenchman, monsieur?"

"If you ask me after this affair is over I may be disposed to tell you. But at present, if you don't mind, I'd rather just be quiet." And I said no more until the carriage drew up at the place of the meeting.

To my concern I saw Arnheim on the ground, smoking a cigarette and chatting with a stranger.

"What are you doing here?" I asked him.

"I'm the doctor," he replied, with a smile.

I turned to the prince.

"You must get another doctor. I won't have Arnheim."

"Why not?"

"I'll keep my reasons to myself, if you please, except one. I don't believe in his skill. He has a knack of letting his patients die under anesthetics."

Arnheim laughed.

"You've no cause to grumble on that score, Provost," he added significantly.

"I really think you should give your reasons, monsieur," declared Lepova. "It is a most extraordinary course."

"If you want them you can have them. This is a duel, not a murder, prince. I won't have Arnheim touch me if I'm hurt, and much more certainly will I not let him touch Von Epstein."

I was certain from the prince's manner that my guess was right, and that if I only wounded my opponent Arnheim's treatment was to do the rest. A very hot wrangle followed, and we were in the thick of it when Von Epstein arrived. As he had fortunately brought a doctor with him, Arnheim's capacity to do mischief was checkmated. So I got my way, and he left.

But relations between Lepova and myself were seriously strained by the

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This story began in the April issue. The back numbers can be obtained from any newsdealer. Price fifteen cents each.

incident, and had there been time we should have quarreled. As it was, however, he contented himself with a strong sentence about my interference, and turned away to arrange the preliminaries of the duel.

Judging by my adversary's expression, his temper was quite as furious as on the preceding night, and he had come fully resolved to kill me, if he could.

He had dressed himself in regulation duel attire—all in black, that is—and his long frock coat was carefully buttoned right up to the throat, so that not a spot of white should afford a mark for my bullet.

He was of the demonstrative and rather stagey type of men. I have no doubt he was brave enough—indeed, he showed that clearly afterward—but he appeared to think he could best show his courage by posing and expressing his contempt of me in look and attitude. And while the seconds were choosing and measuring the ground and completing the other arrangements, he stood with arms folded and head thrown back, glaring now and then at me with looks of defiance.

Except for a side glance or two I took no notice of him, but walked up and down considering very anxiously what course to adopt. I was absolutely confident of my ability to shoot him just where I wished. My hand and pulse were both steady, but, although his conduct to me had been both vile and violent, the circumstances made it impossible that I should do more than wound him.

I had come to the ground resolved not to hit him at all, but if he was bent on killing me it would do no good to miss him. If his first shot failed, the thing would go on until he succeeded in his object.

That was far too quixotic a course for me, and I decided to try and break his firing-arm, and so make it impossible for him to continue the fight.

When the arrangements were completed Lepova made a last attempt to spur my anger.

"He means to kill you, monsieur," he said, as he was placing me. "That has been his cry to his seconds all the way to the ground. He is mad that you struck him. If you take my counsel, you will turn very rapidly and get your shot first."

I let this go without reply, as I knew his object.

We were placed back to back at a distance of twelve yards, and our weapons were to be held down at arm's length while Lepova counted three. We were then to turn and fire.

Just before we turned our backs on one another Von Epstein gave me a last furious, malignant, and rather swaggering look, and I was not sorry to see it. I knew that if he was in anything like the passion he appeared to be in he would be far less likely to hit me than if he had been cool.

In the few seconds before the signal was given I concentrated my thoughts upon my aim. If he fired, as many Austrians did, with his arm straight, I would send my bullet into his shoulder, but if with the arm bent I would aim at his elbow.

Then the prince asked if we were ready, and counted three, very slowly.

At the word "Three!" I turned, not too hurriedly, and found that my opponent already had me covered and was taking a very deliberate aim at my head. His arm was bent, and I let fly at his elbow.

It was a very narrow thing for me. His bullet sang past my head, skinning the tip of my left ear and making a little furrow in my hair. But my aim was better than his, for the bullet smashed his arm just at the elbow.

That his manner had not been mere bluster he soon proved by demanding that the fight should go on. He could use his left hand as well as his right, he said, and fight on he would.

But I refused peremptorily, and my refusal led to a little scene. He was very violent—called me a coward and a good many other things, and swore generally at the English, to induce me to fight on. But I declared firmly that I would not fight a wounded man, and to that I held. When one of his seconds

intervened with a remark somewhat on the same lines, however, I resolved on a little theatrical display.

I walked right up to him and stared him fixedly in his eyes, and said, very quietly: "I don't know who you are, and don't wish to. When Baron Von Epstein has recovered from this hurt I will meet him again, if he wishes it. But next time I shall put my bullet into his head instead of into his arm. I could have done it just as easily this time. I'll prove that to you."

I took up a pistol, and, pointing to a small knot in a tree at some twenty paces distance, I turned my back as in the duel, and, swinging round quickly, sent a bullet straight into the center of it.

"Now, monsieur, if you, or any one else here, wishes to insult me or my country, I am willing to take it up on the spot. But I warn you I shall shoot to kill."

There was no response. A little swagger is a most useful argument at times, and this one had quite a soothing effect. Even Von Epstein himself subsided.

The prince was, however, disposed to take a very different view. He wanted to lecture me both for not having killed Von Epstein outright and for having declined the second shot, and demanded angrily to know the reason.

"Because I am an Englishman, prince," was my reply.

"You don't seem to understand, monsieur——" he began, when I cut him short.

"That will do, thank you, prince. You have said a good many nasty things to me this morning, and I am at the end of my forbearance. Anything else you may say I shall resent very strongly." And my look said the rest.

"I cannot understand you, monsieur," he exclaimed, with a shrug of perplexity. "But in letting this man leave the place alive you have done us all a very bad turn."

"I know what is in your thoughts, of course," I said, as we crossed to his carriage; "and I think the time has come when you should understand me. As we drove here you asked me why I posed as a Frenchman. Let us go to my rooms and I will tell you. I can promise you that you will be interested."

"Certainly I will come, monsieur," he agreed readily, and, giving the coachman the order to drive to my rooms, he entered the carriage.

Matters were all going as I would have had them, and I was in the highest spirits.

The means of reinstating myself were in my hands, and at the same time I held the reins of control in regard to all the other affairs.

CHAPTER XIX.

A FRANK TALK TO LEPOVA.

During the drive Prince Lepova and I spoke very little. I had decided that the time had come when I could safely speak quite frankly to him. I had no longer anything to fear from the truth, thank Heaven.

I knew that Alexandrov was the murderer of Provost, and I had luckily been able to get the knowledge without rousing his suspicions that I had it. I should have him safe under lock and key within a few hours, and the whole history of my supposed death would be carefully investigated. My influence with my father's old friend would secure that being done thoroughly and secretly.

I had been careful to learn the names and whereabouts of all those who had been concerned in that sham operation, and before the day was out every one of them should be lodged in jail. The Austrian police could be trusted to do the rest, when inspired by such influence as I could command.

I need not give away the secrets of the conspiracy, nor betray either Stephanie or Lepova. I would hold my tongue about everything, indeed, provided that Normia was left free to decide for herself what course she would take. But I would stand no nonsense. They had forced me into the thing. I had been branded as a murderer, and I had been tricked into this quarrel with

Von Epstein in order that I might commit another murder, or, as it seemed, lose my own life as the alternative.

The whip was in my hands now, however. While others had had it, it had been used to scourge my back so roughly that I need have no scruples about using it on them if they forced me. It should rest with Stephanie and Lepova themselves whether I betrayed the whole plot.

The prince was very anxious to hear what I had to say, and as soon as we reached my rooms he asked impatiently, and with a distinctly peremptory note: "Now, Monsieur Provost, what is the meaning of all this?"

"When you were last in this room, prince, it was to give me a commission to—we may as well use plain terms—to murder Baron Von Epstein. Presumably you came because you believed that I had already murdered in cold blood, for the good of your cause, Guy Pershore, the Englishman, who had been sent to Vienna by the Servian Government to find out what you were doing. Is that so?"

"Go on, monsieur."

"You are, no doubt, aware that I told the Baroness Dolgoroff that I would have no hand in anything of the sort, and then together you concocted that little plan by which the quarrel was forced and the duel made necessary."

"I protest, monsieur——"

"You needn't," I broke in quietly. "We are going to indulge in some very plain talk, and I shall not say anything that is not true. Don't trouble to contradict me, therefore, or to protest."

He was very indignant, and rose, saying very angrily: "I am at a loss to understand you. Do you mean to insinuate that I speak other than the truth?"

I paused, and lighted a cigar with much deliberation.

"Do you think I'm the man to be frightened by a show of temper, prince? If so, you'd better go. But, if you *do* go, you will miss a plain statement that concerns you very closely. That is your concern, however. But if you decide to stay and listen, put away all idea of scaring me."

He stood a few seconds in hesitation, then sat down again, and laughed with an assumption of indifference.

"Go on, monsieur."

"Having concocted that scheme of indirect assassination, your next step was to be angry with me about Arnheim. I would not allow him to have the chance of finishing professionally what I might commence. After that you were again angry because, having shown you that I knew how to handle a pistol, I had not deliberately used my skill to shoot your victim."

"This is only your own interpretation, monsieur," he said, as I paused, and he waved his hand, as if indulging my caprice.

"I'm not blaming you, exactly. The mistake was not an unnatural one, seeing the number of men you have about you accustomed to do your bidding in such affairs for the good of the cause. You took me for one of them."

"You are a little tedious, Monsieur Provost."

"I don't think you'll find the time exactly wasted," I returned dryly. "However, I'll take a subject next that will interest you—the Princess Normia. Ah, I thought that would rouse you." He was on his feet again, looking very black and ugly.

"I don't allow you to discuss her, monsieur."

"Then you'll have to go, prince, for I have a lot to say about her. If you don't mean to listen—well, the door is not locked." And I rose and opened it.

But he did not go. He had obviously come to the conclusion that there was something really serious in the interview.

"I will hear you," he said curtly, resuming his seat.

"I wish you to believe that I have no sort of hostile feeling against you personally—except in regard to this forced quarrel. You smile at such a statement from Gerard Provost; but you won't smile presently. What I have to say in regard to the princess is this.

She has been forced into this conspiracy against her will because she believes that the Baroness Dolgoroff can endanger the lives of those who are very dear to her—her mother and sister. Now, she must be allowed at once to communicate openly with her friends, and to make her decision, in the light of information I can give her, whether she will go forward with your scheme or draw back from it. And in that I include the marriage with you."

He was interested enough now, and his brows almost met in the heavy frown with which he heard me.

"Your reasons?" he said sharply, as I paused.

"I know—and I shall tell her—that if she makes it known to the Servian Government that she has been forced into this thing and renounces everything the moment the true position is made clear to her, neither she nor those she loves will be in any danger. She and they are only in danger so long as she persists in her present apparent rebellion against the government."

"How do you pretend to know this?"

"I don't pretend—I know. I have it from one of the really powerful ministers in Servia."

"What you mean is," he cried, with an angry laugh, "that we are to abandon everything at your orders!"

"I give no orders, prince. But I do mean that the princess must be told the truth and left to judge for herself."

"And your personal motive?" he rapped out.

"Yes, I think I'll tell you even that," I said, after a pause. "Before her marriage with you was suggested I had the honor to ask her to marry me. She declined, it is true. But at that time I believed she cared for me, and that the answer she gave would have been different had she not been under the thumb of the Baroness Dolgoroff. Together you have terrorized the princess, but I need not call her that, because I know, as all the world knows, that she has no claim to such a title. That claim has been made simply by you, and merely for the purposes of your conspiracy. But the fact remains that together you have terrorized her into consenting to all this—the marriage included—and the time has come when she must be freed from it."

He sat thinking closely for some time, his head leaning on his hand. He appreciated the seriousness of the position, and was alive to all it meant to him and his schemes. Presently he fixed his black, piercing eyes on me intently.

"There is, of course, something further to be explained. Who are you, monsieur?"

I paused.

"Do you not know?" I asked tensely.

"Who are you, monsieur?" he repeated.

I met his look, and answered slowly, letting fall each syllable deliberately:

"I am the man who was dead—Guy Pershore, the secretary of his excellency the minister, to whom I referred just now."

"And now his spy," he returned viciously.

"No, I am no spy. Like Normia herself, I have been forced into this position by circumstances into which I need not go. But you may take my word. Further than that, you may rest completely assured that what I have learned in the last few days will not pass my lips, unless I am forced to speak in the interests of Normia or in self-defense. I must, of course, clear myself."

Again he sat plunged in earnest thought.

"There are, of course, many things I do not at present understand, and many questions I must ask, not only of you, but of Baroness Dolgoroff and others. Will you come with me to her?"

"No, thank you. I am safer where I am, prince."

"Mr. Pershore, if that is really your name and what you have told me is true, I pledge you my sacred word of honor that I will answer for your absolute safety."

"And about the princess?"

He shook his head.

"No. About that I say nothing. I must have time to think."

"I will take your word, prince, and will come," I answered. I had put the

question about Normia as a sort of test, and if he had at once agreed to do all I required I should not have trusted him.

"Shall we go now?" he asked, rising.

"No—this afternoon, preferably. For one thing, I have not yet breakfasted, and for another, this is the first duel I have fought, and I am not ashamed to say that I feel a good deal shaken up."

"This afternoon, then. I offer you my hand, monsieur, because I respect you as one whom I believe to be absolutely sincere, although opposed to me in many ways. Moreover, your story shows that you have been grievously wronged. I will endeavor to arrange that you shall have an opportunity of speaking frankly to the princess, but, of course, in my presence."

As we shook hands I asked him: "Are you still confident of success, prince?"

"Why do you ask that? I am getting to feel that you generally have strong reasons behind your words, monsieur. Have you now?"

"I think you have been misled as to the chances of success."

"By whom?" came the question, with a flash of the black eyes.

"I name no names, but I have grounds for believing that the whole movement is on the verge of collapse."

"Do you get that from Belgrade?"

"I have held no communication with Belgrade since—since I have been embroiled in this."

He frowned and pursed his lips. The frown changed to a very sad smile, as he sighed and answered: "It may be so. But you have a tradition in your country, Mr. Pershore, that if a ship sinks the captain should remain at his post and sink with it."

He went away then, and I sat down to breakfast.

It is often the commonplace act that emphasizes a great crisis in a man's life, and the hearty appetite with which I ate my breakfast that morning—the first meal for which I had had a really healthy zest—may be said to have signalized my recovery of a vigorous appreciation of life.

I had brought much of my trouble on myself by grievous blundering, and I had been horribly punished. I had not realized until that morning how acute the torture had been. I had been saved more by good luck than by my own efforts, and I had got out of as hopeless a mess as ever threatened a man with ruin and death.

I flattered myself that I had learned my lesson, however, and I would act much more warily for the future. Fortune had relented, and had put far better cards into my hands than I had deserved, and I could scarcely lose now, however badly I might play them.

A very confident smile was on my face as I looked at myself in the glass when dressing to go out. I could afford to smile, indeed, for I was looking, not at Gerard Provost, the despicable spy, but once more at Guy Pershore, the young diplomat with a career, a good name, a reputation, and an opinion of himself which was certainly as high as that which any one else could entertain.

My course was quite clear. I would first see my father's old friend, and then Catarina, to show her how Alexandrov had fooled her, and secure his arrest.

It would be difficult for any man to be more surprised than the minister when I walked into his room, and, without much preamble, told him so much of my story as was necessary to secure his help. As a first step, I asked that all those who had been concerned in the bogus operation — Arnheim, Hammerstein, Yuldoff, the nurses, and others: I gave him a full list—should be arrested at once. I wanted to get them safely under lock and key before any suspicion of my movements was aroused.

Alexandrov's name I did not give him. I felt that my pledge to Catarina bound me not to mention him until I had seen her. The pledge had not been intended to cover immunity for him as Provost's murderer, of course, and I had no doubt that the moment she knew the facts she would be as anxious for his punishment as I was, and would help me to find him. But it was fairer to wait.

I went straight from the minister's

office to her. How I enjoyed that walk! My step was firm, my head erect once more, and my heart light. I could look my fellows in the face without shrinking. I was full of the vigor of life. I was a free man once again—free alike from the haunting consciousness of disgrace and the grim shadow of impending death.

In other words, I was just in the mood when bad news was calculated to strike the hardest blow. And bad news there was for me at Catarina's.

The instant we met she made it apparent that her attitude toward me had entirely changed. Her manner was as chill as an iceberg.

"I am surprised you come to me, monsieur," was her greeting.

"Why?"

"You have broken faith with me. I accepted your pledge that no harm should come to Alexandrov. You have not kept it. He was to have brought me news this morning, and set me face to face with the man I seek. But, instead of that, you have driven him away. His life has been threatened, and he has fled, Heaven knows where. I am balked of my vengeance, and it is your doing."

"Fled from the city!" I repeated, aghast at the news.

I realized my blunder, with a shiver of dismay. I had had him in my hands, and had let him slip through them, and in a moment all the fine castles I had built upon my discovery were in ruins.

The news could not have been more disastrous.

CHAPTER XX.

DETECTIVE WORK.

Catarina in a bad temper was a very difficult person to deal with, and she was now in a furious passion. Worse even than that, she had convinced herself that I had broken faith with her; and it was clear that I must try to shake this conviction before I told her what had passed on the previous night at the Black House.

"I have not broken my pledge, Catarina. Alexandrov's name has not passed my lips to any one," I assured her, speaking very calmly.

"Why has he fled, then? He was to take me to face Dromach. He has not come, and no one but you had the knowledge which would place him in danger."

"Let us find him, and get the reason from him."

"The only reason why he should be threatened would be on account of the princess. You alone knew of that. What else can I think except that you have betrayed him?"

"The attempt did fail last night, it is true. Let me tell you just what occurred, and you will see——"

"I do not want to hear," she burst in fiercely. "The attempt having failed, he has been threatened by those who were in it. What right had you to cheat me of my vengeance? What is the princess to me compared with that? Leave me, monsieur. I do not believe your word. You are hiding things from me. It is easy to see that. Do not come to me again. I trust you no longer. I was but a fool to trust you at all." And, having worked herself up into a fine frenzy, she flung the door open. "Go, monsieur," she cried, her great eyes blazing with passion.

She looked magnificent in her wrath, and I could quite understand that Vosbach had spoken no more than the truth when he had said that Provost had been desperately afraid of her.

It is difficult to know just what line to take with an angry woman of any nationality; but an angry Greek is, perhaps, the most difficult of all. I tried calmness first. I met her fiery gaze for a second or so, and then, with great deliberation, sat down.

But it was clearly not a case for masterly inactivity. My coolness aggravated her. She stamped her foot and clenched her hands in passion, and literally hissed out a command to me to leave the house.

I changed my tactics, therefore. Springing to my feet, I let out an oath, slammed the door viciously, set my back

against it, and, meeting her look with one quite as fierce, I thundered out:

"Who are you that you dare to make this vile charge against me? It is false—as false as hell itself, and neither you nor I leave this room until you have unsaid it. I am no Greek to pass my word and then break it; and no child or fool to be hectored by an angry woman."

This answered much better than my coolness. In surprise at my sudden outbreak, she fell back a step or two, as if in fear that some violent act would follow the angry words—Greeks do strike their women at times. But she rallied her courage, and a very fierce quarrel raged, until I saw that her fury was beginning to work itself out.

Then I threw myself into my chair again, and allowed her to indulge in a monologue, during which the flame of her wrath flickered up and down, and finally went out. A silence followed lasting quite two or three minutes.

"Now let us talk sensibly," I said. "We have both been raging quite long enough, but with the difference that you meant what you said, and I didn't. We'll see now if we can't climb a few more feet of that pass of which you spoke the other day."

But this admission that I had not really lost my temper was another mistake. It added to her distrust, and she turned sullen and suspicious.

"You act well, monsieur. You have had much practise in misleading people," she answered.

"I have never deceived you. The first time I saw you I put my life in your hands. I told you my secret unreservedly."

"I had to come to you. You did not come to me, monsieur."

"I did not go to any one if I could help it. But the thing is this—I told you the plain truth, and you believed me. Now I am going to tell you exactly what occurred last night, and leave you to draw your own conclusions." And I went on to describe in detail the scene with Alexandrov.

But she shook her head. She was too full of her distrust to believe me.

"You do not know Alexandrov, or you would not think as you do. He is not a child to be scared as you think. I know he was near the scene of the murder—how else could he have seen Dromach? It is not for that he has fled. You have not told me all."

I tried to shake this conviction, but I might as well have tried to bring down the cross of St. Paul's Cathedral by shaking one of the buttresses. And I had to give it up.

"Come with me to Dromach's lodgings, and see if he has returned, and whether Alexandrov has told us the truth about him."

She shook her head again.

"I will do my work alone, monsieur," was her answer.

"As you will," I said, rising. "But you must not tell Alexandrov what I have told you; and, as this deed was not in our thoughts when I pledged myself not to harm him, I shall, of course, bring it home to him if I can."

"You are wrong, monsieur. The man we seek is Dromach," she said, in a tone of unalterable conviction; "and, by driving Alexandrov from the country, you have destroyed the only means of bringing the charge home to him."

Greatly disheartened by the result of this interview, I resolved to ferret out the old Jew shoemaker, Steinberg, with whom Dromach was said to lodge, and make some inquiries on my own account. If these proved useless, I should have to give Alexandrov's name to the police, and let them track him.

I succeeded, after some difficulty, in finding the old shoemaker; and a very singular character he proved to be. He lived in a low Jewish quarter of the city; his shop was dirty and ill-smelling, and he himself was grimly in keeping with the surroundings.

He was at first surly, suspicious, and uncommunicative. A visit from any one respectably dressed was enough to start distrust and put him on the defensive; and he was intensely curious to learn who I was, and how I had heard of him.

Matters improved somewhat when he found I had money and was willing

to let him cheat me. I bought a couple of pairs of boots; and paid his price without question. Then I let him measure me for a third pair, which he was to make; and I gave him a cigar, and sent him out for some wine, preparatory to telling him the little fairy-tale I had prepared.

"I do not come merely about boots," I said, after he had had a couple of glasses of the wine.

"I guessed that much, excellency," he said, with a knowing wink—the wine having had a little effect on him. "Gentlefolks don't come to old Steinberg for nothing."

"The fact is, that I think you can be of some service to me—service to be paid for, of course—under the following circumstances." And I went on with a tale to the effect that a servant of mine—an Englishman—had left me a little time since somewhat mysteriously, and was supposed to be in the Jewish quarter of the city. Could he help me to find him?

"He stole something, I suppose?" he leered.

"Oh, no, nothing that I should wish to punish him for," I replied quickly. "But after he had gone I missed something of no great value in itself, but very valuable to me for private reasons, and I think he could help me to recover it. It was a dagger." And I manufactured a yarn about how it had come into my possession, and gave a detailed description of the knife with which Alexandrov had killed Provost.

That his interest was aroused was shown by the avaricious gleam of his beady, shaggy-browed little eyes. "I believe I have seen such a knife, excellency. How much would it be worth to recover it?"

I named a sum large enough to appeal to his cupidity.

"Your servant was English, you say, not Greek?"

"English. But why do you ask?"

"If he had been Greek, I have a lodger who would find him. He knows all the Greeks in Vienna, excellency."

"That won't help us much, I'm afraid," I said casually. "It's a Greek knife, as I told you, but—what's your lodger's name, by the way? Could I have a word with him?"

"He is away from the city, but returns to-night. His name is Dromach. He had just such a knife as you describe; but he is an honest fellow, and would have come by it honestly. I think he sold it, too. If together we get it back for you, you will give me my share of the money, excellency?"

"Oh, yes. Here's an earnest of it." And I laid down a couple of gold coins. "Comes back to-night, eh? How long has he been away? Since my servant left me?"

"About three weeks—no, four weeks, excellency."

"Well, I'll call and have a word with him to-morrow. Don't say anything to any one else until I have seen him," I said, as I rose. "I suppose you are quite sure that he has been away all the time you say?"

"My daughter will know." And he shuffled away into the house. "It is five weeks, excellency," he announced on his return. "He has been in Athens all the time. My daughter knows. She keeps house, and he sends his rent to her."

I had the news I needed. Dromach had left Vienna long before the day of the crime, and Alexandrov's story to Catarina, implicating him, was a fabrication to turn her suspicion from himself. I could see his plan clearly. The instant she had shown him the dagger he had realized his own danger. Remembering that he had got it from Dromach, who had himself threatened Provost, through jealousy, Alexandrov had taken advantage of Dromach's absence from the city to put the crime on him.

The prospect of the money to be paid for the abduction of Normia had kept him in the city for the time, but he had obviously planned to leave the instant that was carried out, and had intended to induce Catarina to go with him, on the pretense of finding Dromach. The failure of the abduction had then checkmated him, and hence his last message to her that he was in danger of his life.

On the following day I would get Dromach's identification of the dagger, and then put him and the police to find Alexandrov.

The news obtained from the old shoemaker counterbalanced, in some measure, the check I had received from Catarina. I could probably do without her help now, and I was in better spirits as I returned to my rooms.

To my surprise I found Grundelhof there.

"Why are you here?" I asked curtly.

"I wish to speak to you, monsieur."

"I have neither time nor inclination to listen to you."

"It is about last night's affair. Your part in preventing the success of our scheme in regard to the princess."

"And what was my part, pray?"

It was, perhaps, best to listen to him, I thought.

"It was you who surprised Alexandrov and drove him away."

"Did he tell you I had done that?"

"No. But I know it was you. No one else was there."

"Confront Alexandrov with me, and I will show you that he has lied."

"He has fled from the city. When I ascertained it was your work, I went to find him. He has vanished."

"The best thing you can do is to go after him. Is that all?"

"No. I mean to know the reason for your conduct."

A hot answer rose to my lips, but I checked it, seeing a possible advantage. I laughed.

"You thought you could do better with the baroness' aid than with mine? Now, perhaps, you see that you could not, eh?"

"Alexandrov betrayed us to you, then?" he exclaimed warmly.

"Did he? Find him, and you'll soon know the truth. But one minute you accuse me of having frightened him away, and the next that we were acting in collusion. You forget yourself. One of the two must be false."

"There is a good deal about you that is false," he retorted.

"And yourself? When do you return to your regiment, Captain Nescher?"

"You hinted at this the other night. How do you know me?"

"Have I not been to Belgrade?"

He looked at me keenly, and then answered, in a slow, significant tone: "Yes. You went as one of us, and returned against us. You are not the coward I once thrashed. You do not know things he knew, and you do know much that he did not. You are not Gerard Provost. That's why I have come to you."

"You are a very entertaining person, captain," I laughed.

"I can be other than entertaining," was the blunt reply.

"I have no time at present for another duel."

"If you are not Gerard Provost, there is only one other man you can be —Mr. Guy Pershore, the Englishman, in the service of a minister of the Servian Government. There are curious rumors about what happened at the time of his supposed death."

"If I were to give your real name to Prince Lepova, captain, there would be something more substantial than rumors about you."

"And that is just what you would have done had you been the real Gerard Provost," he retorted very shrewdly. "It confirms my opinion."

"Your opinion is nothing to me."

"On the contrary, sir, it must be, for it will be reported to Belgrade. If you are the minister's secretary, how came you to thwart a coup which you know would have destroyed this conspiracy instantly—you who were sent here for the very purpose of destroying it?"

"I find no use in following out your ingenious speculations," I answered lightly, to hide my genuine embarrassment at his questions.

"It was an act of treachery for which you will have to answer, sir. I shall go at once to Belgrade to report this."

"I should think it is alike your duty and the best thing you can do. Don't let me detain you."

"You will find your treachery too se-

rious a matter to be disposed of with a sneer," he said angrily.

"Indeed!"

"Unless you are prepared to change your attitude and give us the assistance we have a right to demand."

"Are we coming at last to the real purpose of this visit?" I asked, with a sharp glance. "Having first tried to kill me, and then having bungled your own plan, you come to me to concoct another to cover your failure! Go to Belgrade—report your failure—put the blame where you will, and air any theories you please. But don't think to frighten me."

"I have the baroness' word that you were present last night," he said doggedly.

I laughed contemptuously.

"You have been fooled by this Greek, Captain Nescher. I repeat: find that scoundrel and confront him with me, and I pledge you my word you shall know at once all that passed."

"What did occur?"

"Do your own work, sir, and repair your own bungling," I cried sternly.

"Are you Mr. Guy Pershore?"

"To you I am Gerard Provost, the man you tried to kill. And now go, please."

"I shall go to Belgrade," he exclaimed furiously.

"You can go to the devil for aught I care, and choose your own route." And, with a last laugh, I slammed the door after him.

But it was both an unexpected and unwelcome complication. It was true enough that Belgrade would take it badly that I had thwarted the captain's scheme, and I should have an ugly corner to turn unless I won my way that afternoon at the Black House.

My old chief knew all about my feelings for Normia. He would see my motives at a glance, and I must be able to show him that I had smashed up the conspiracy at least as effectively as by the other way, or I should have to face a charge of betraying the interests confided to me.

It began to look as if the troubles which awaited me in my own name were going to be almost as serious as those which had beset me as Gerard Provost.

Certainly the interview had added greatly to the importance of the proceedings that afternoon with the prince. I started for the meeting with a very full appreciation of the difficulties in front of me, and my reception at the Black House was anything but reassuring.

The moment I was inside the doors they were closed behind me. I had never known such a thing occur before.

"Why is that?" I asked the man in charge.

"The prince has ordered me to report all arrivals to him at once, monsieur, and to allow no one to leave until that has been done."

Had I been fool enough to walk into a trap? It looked like it, despite the prince's pledge. But if that were the case, the way out of it was clearly not by that door, for two or three men immediately placed themselves between it and me.

So I turned away with a shrug of indifference, and told them to announce me to the prince at once.

But I did not like the look of matters at all. And the more so as, like a blockhead, I had come unarmed.

CHAPTER XXI.

"I CAN DIE HAPPY NOW."

I resolved to put a bold front on matters, and, without waiting for the servant to bring any message from Lepova, I went up to Stephanie's rooms. The man there appeared to have had no instructions concerning me, and let me pass as usual.

This might mean that, if the prince intended mischief, he considered it enough for the present to make sure that I did not leave the house. On the other hand, the orders below-stairs might be no more than a general measure of precaution.

Stephanie's reception showed that, so far, nothing had been said to her. She was greatly excited, but her excitement

was due to the fact that I had prevented the scheme against Normia overnight, and had not killed Von Epstein in the duel. She broke out into vehement reproaches that I had done no more than wound him.

"Why are you so bitter against him?" I asked, when I could get in a word.

"He will ruin us. He knows everything. His death was necessary. He will betray us all to the Austrian Government. Oh, you were mad to let him escape!"

"What you really mean is that for some personal reason you hated the man, and forced me into the quarrel, that I might shoot him," I retorted; and added: "Well, the scheme miscarried."

"You took his insults tamely enough," she countered quickly.

I laughed. "Because he did not understand the position, and I did. Anyway, I don't hold myself ready to kill every man who offends you. As for the cause, you had already arranged for its failure and secured your way out, so that part of the matter cannot be your reason."

She sprang up as if overcome with indignation, but her eyes signaled alarm.

"Guy! How dare you?" she cried.

"Drop theatricals! I know things," I replied very curtly.

"What do you mean?"

"That I had it from your friends. Captain Nescher told me of your hand in last night's affair against Normia, and the other I gathered from—Count Von Kassler."

"My friends? Why, I have never even heard of such men," she protested.

"You may as well sit down again and take it quietly, Stephanie. The man who calls himself Grundelhof has guessed my secret, and came to charge me with treachery for having checkmated his attempt. Taking me for a Servian spy, like himself, he gave away the whole thing. As for the man who comes here as Lieutenant Unterling," I added, with a significant smile, "well, he thought, of course, that, as the friend of the big man of the government here, I knew everything. There was thus no reason why he should not speak frankly, too."

This beat her. Chiefly, I think, the suggestion that Count Kassler had told me of her double betrayal, and she was too agitated to attempt a denial, or to reply at all, indeed. She sat fingering some papers, and trembling violently; and the color gradually ebbed from her face, leaving it dead white.

"After the duel this morning I had a frank talk with Prince Lepova——"

"*Mon Dieu!* What did you tell him?" she broke in excitedly.

"I didn't give you away," I assured her. "But I made it plain that his marriage with Normia will not take place, and that she must be told the facts, and allowed to decide for herself whether she will go any further with you two. I am here to see her this afternoon and have a chance to speak frankly what I know."

"You won't betray me to him, Guy?"

"No, but as he pledged his word for my safety here, and I am not at all sure that he means to keep it, things may take an ugly turn."

"If you tell him he will kill me," she cried desperately. "Does he know who you are?"

There was no time for me to reply, as Normia and the prince entered. She was very pale and agitated as he led her to a seat.

"You see I have kept my word, monsieur," he said to me. Then to Stephanie: "This gentleman made some very vital communications to me this morning, and we agreed the matters should be discussed in your presence. He wishes to speak to the princess. Now, monsieur."

Stephanie had made a great effort to regain her self-possession.

"You did not tell me of this, prince."

"I have told you now," was the reply, in a tone of unmistakable hostility.

"You also pledged your honor for my personal safety, Prince Lepova."

"I am not accustomed to break my word, monsieur," he answered coldly.

I turned to Normia.

"The case is this: I am not Gerard

Provost, and never have been. I am Guy Pershore—the man you knew and trusted in Belgrade. I told Prince Lepova so this morning. Baroness Dolgoroff has known it all through."

Stephanie interrupted with a gesture of repudiation.

"I told the prince that I had once ventured to ask you to honor me with your hand, but that you had what you believed conclusive reasons why we should not meet again. I now know those reasons, and know they have no foundation."

Normia shot a swift glance at me, but lowered her eyes again without replying.

"When I found you here I concluded that you had been forced into this thing by the same constraint, and I told Prince Lepova that I must have an opportunity of telling you the truth, so that you could decide, in the light of it, whether to persist in this present course or to withdraw from it at once."

She looked first at Stephanie, whose face wore a somewhat scornful smile, and from her to Lepova.

"Monsieur, I——"

She stopped abruptly as Lepova fixed his keen eyes on her.

"I am in a position to assure you—I had this from his own lips—that my chief in Belgrade knows that your mother and sister are alive, where they are, and under what name they are living. And, further, that the government will take no steps whatever against them, provided that they—and you—take no side in any troubles against the government. By this present action of yours you are doing the very thing you believed you were avoiding—you are exposing them to danger. What, then, will you decide to do?"

"I do not hesitate a moment," cried Normia instantly. "If I had only known this—oh, it was cruel! it was infamous! How could you deceive me, baroness? I only consented that I might save them. I——" And then she broke down and burst into tears.

TO BE CONTINUED.

NEARING UTOPIA

THE nearest approach to Utopia is to be found in the country of the Eskimo. There are no chieftains in the Eskimo community. They all regard themselves as free men, with an equal right to hunt, fish, sleep, and eat. Everybody shifts for himself. He is absolutely and unconditionally independent. His only ambition is to be a good hunter, and to rear sons who will inherit his skill with lance and harpoon. He has helped himself against the elements for centuries, and the white man descending on his shores, ostensibly to confer the blessings of civilization, has never been able to improve his condition, but only to detract from the old-time happiness and advantages of the aboriginal Eskimo community.

Doctor Fridtjof Nansen, Captain Holm, Doctor Salager, and several other explorers, have pointed out that an approach of civilization means to the Eskimo a slow but certain process of deterioration.

The natural helpfulness of the Eskimo is the basis of the socialistic state in which he lives. He will risk his life to save that of another, even his enemy. He will share the spoils of the hunt with his neighbors. If his neighbor dies and his wife is left alone with children, he will provide for her until she marries again. He does not slander or tell tales; he does not abuse any one, and he does not fight. He is a man of peace. He loves peace for its own sake, and his life is one long, laborious attempt at happiness for himself and his people.

The Flaw in the Armor

By B. M. Bower

The sad case of a cowboy whose fierceness was masked by dimples and good looks—both the subject of much merriment on the part of the Happy Family. B. M. Bower tells how he had to go outside his own friends for appreciation

THE Happy Family was rolling after-breakfast cigarettes in the mess-house. When they had smoked, they would troop down to the corrals to saddle for their several duties of the day. With round-up over and the cattle thrown back on their winter-range; with a tang of coming snows in the air of a morning; with horses that felt the nearness of winter and humped their backs ominously to the feel of cold saddle-leather and laid their ears flatter than usual when chilly bridle-bits were thrust between their protesting teeth, the Happy Family had relaxed perceptibly from the hurry of summer stress and smoked comfortably inside before riding out where duty and the Old Man impressed.

"Girls," said Pink authoritatively, licking his cigarette into shape and motioning to Weary for a match, "are all right in their place. I'd hate to go to a dance where there wasn't any, but if yuh ask me, I'd just as soon swing some other fellow's girl as my own—supposing I had one, which I thank the Lord I ain't got—and maybe I'd a little rather. It's fun to watch the other fellow give yuh the bad-eye during the swinging-process."

"Nobody with a lick uh sense would turn a hair if yuh swung his girl all night," fleered Jack Bates, with the safety of many miles between his girl and the dimples of Pink. "There ain't a female girl living that would take yuh serious. She might like yuh to play with, same as kid girls like to dress up puppies and cats and make 'em set up pretty in the high-chair to a table. She might want to curl your hair for yuh and tie that rosy handkerchief of yours in a pretty bow under your dimpled little chin; but when it come to a show-down, and real love-making, she'd look around for a *man.*"

Pink lost his dimples at this blunt statement of an unpleasant truth, and for a minute trouble hovered over the Family. Then——

"If your girl wasn't back East yuh wouldn't crow quite so loud, or flop your wings so free," he retorted calmly. "I sure do love to see a man climb a tree and then make a big war-talk. You haven't got any girl in swinging-distance—and so there's no use listening to yuh."

"You can swing my girl," offered Irish generously, because he hadn't one to call his own. He, like Pink, gloried in his freedom of feminine thrall.

"The facts uh the case is," said Pink, getting up and hunting for his hat, "I never saw the girl yet that wasn't dead willing for me to swing her; and I never saw the human girl yet that I'd go a rod out of my way to swing. They all look alike to me, and that's straight—and they don't look good enough to bother with. If I thought I was fool enough to let a girl break up my night's sleep, or make me do things I didn't want to do, I'd go bat my head against a rock and pray for a new set uh brains. So help me Josephine, I'd know I sure needed them!"

"Cadwolloper thinks he don't like

girls, but yuh notice he swears by one continual," drawled Weary. "He's always calling on Josephine——"

"Oh, git!" snapped Pink, and went out and shut the door so that the whole cabin rattled.

All this because Weary's schoolma'am had been trying to coax the Happy Family into another entertainment, and because Pink would have none of it.

Pink, whose solitary duty it was to line-ride a certain part of the range which stretched brownly and unevenly away to the northeast, promptly forgot his irritation at the stupidity of the Happy Family, and whistled blithely to himself, a-tingle with the pure pleasure of galloping over the springy sod to the tune of jangling spur-chains and the creak of saddle-leather; to say nothing of the metallic burr of Skeeker—Pink himself is responsible for the outlandish name — rolling industriously the "cricket" in his bit. All that is music to a true son of the range-land, and it was music to Pink, and put him in a very good humor with the world.

Still, the words of Jack Bates rankled now and then when memory was unkind enough to bring them back. Girls did look upon Pink with amused admiration; and Pink resented, secretly and bitterly, the attitude. Surely, it was not his fault that he stood only a meager five-feet-five, stretch as he might; nor was it his fault that he was slim and girlish as to form, and a tanned cherub as to features. How could the average girl understand that a very giant of daredevil courage and manliness hid in that "cunning" personality?

That was it: they thought him "cunning." He had overheard a girl call him that once, and Pink always gritted his teeth impotently when he thought of it. "She might like yuh to play with, same as kids like to dress up puppies and set 'em in a high-chair." It did not go well with all the little satisfying accompaniment of spur-clank and saddle-creak, and of Skeeker rolling his cricket. Pink swore a little at Jack Bates and at the tribe feminine without exception, and put it all out of his mind in the way that he usually discarded his troubles. There was one vow, however, that he made in all seriousness within himself: He would never fall in love with a girl, and so give her a chance to hurt him lastingly. Pink, with all his irresponsibility, was shrewd enough to know that the power of woman is leashed and harmless unless man is so foolish as to love her. Therefore, he would be wise; he would never love.

In that way he got back the mood to whistle.

Over a ridge, where a long slope drifted idly away to the abrupt barrier of another ridge, Pink came within sight—and smell—of a band of sheep scattered wide and blatting gratingly as they fussed here and there, feeding. Pink hated sheep. He hated them with all the inherent hatred of a cowman—the hatred that comes naturally as does the breath to one's lungs—and with the personal hatred which was but an inborn aversion to their stupid, yellow-eyed faces, and the rank, musty odor of them. Whenever he got upon the wrong side of a band of sheep, or even crossed the unmistakable trail of them, it was Pink's custom to hold his nose tightly and put spurs to his horse.

He did both at this time, and only varied his habit by looking about angrily for the herder. In this case the sheep were not where Pink thought they should be. I refrain from stating the exact spot which Pink named as the proper abiding-place of sheep and sheepmen, but at all events it was not where they were at that time.

Over on the windward side he discovered the herder sitting on a rock, while a horse nibbled at the ripened grass near-by. The inevitable pair of sheep-dogs were apparently very busy over a gopher-hole. Pink, with wrath in his heart and his gloved hand to his nostrils, galloped over to the group. There were several paragraphs seething just back of his tongue, and he was in a hurry to put them into scathing speech.

When he was quite close enough to begin, however, he promptly forgot the

opening sentences, and so rode up in silence. The herder, hearing hoofs, turned an inquiring face toward him. The herder was a girl, and she was sitting facing the sheep, with her hands clasped dejectedly in her lap and her shoulders drooped a bit, as if to emphasize the dejection. When she turned, Pink saw plainly that she had been—was even then, to be exact—crying.

Pink felt no premonitory fluttering of his heart; instead, that organ thumped regularly away at its work of sending the healthy young blood ("red blood of youth" is growing trite) through his body, unmoved by so much as an extra throb. He was not susceptible; neither was he bashful. He had a certain unceremonious frankness with women which made him piquantly interesting without being quite rude.

"What's gone wrong?" he asked, in just the same tone he would have used to a man he found in trouble.

The girl looked at him again, and blinked the moisture from her lashes. "Everything, I guess," she answered dolefully. I should like to describe her as a very pretty girl; only she wasn't—quite. She was little and slim, and she had tan and freckles in the generous abundance which Montana gives to her daughters gratis. Also, her eyes were red-rimmed and the color was not quite clear. Pink's heart kept methodically at work.

"Trying to herd sheep?" he inquired, with a polite attempt at keeping his disgust off the last word.

"*Trying*—yes. I—I just hate the sight of sheep!" The last sentence came out with a vindictiveness that warmed the interest of Pink. She went on, with the freedom of speech which comes of living in a wide land of few inhabitants: "They won't go the right way, and they blat enough to send one raving distracted; and those miserable dogs won't mind a thing I say!"

Pink eased himself in the saddle and looked down at her reflectively. "If it was me," he said judicially, "I'd quit the job cold and let the sheep go to—thunder, and the dogs, too."

She was blinking again, and kept her face turned away from him. When she spoke, her voice had little unsteady places in it.

"You wouldn't, if they were your father's sheep, and he was away, and—and expected you to look after things. You—you'd do the be-best you could."

Pink began to feel a little sorry, along with his very natural curiosity. A lady sheep-herder was something out of the usual run of things, to say the least. He was beginning, also, to feel that a lady sheep-herder may deserve pity.

"Did your dad have the nerve to go off and leave you to herd——"

"Don't you say a word against my father!" She flashed wide, indignant eyes at him. Pink felt more discomposed than if he had been facing a gun. "Papa had to go away; his brother died, away back in Vermont. And I could look after things, all right, only one of our men went right off to town and get on a big drunk; and Ole—he's the herder—tried to tend the stock, and a horse kicked him. He's laid up and can't walk. And mama has him to wait on; and he's been talking Swede to the dogs till they don't—— Can—can you talk Swede?"

"Thank God, no!" Pink told her solemnly.

The hope in her eyes went back to discouragement, so that Pink came near wishing that he *could* talk Swede, if it would help her out any.

"I thought—if you could, you might tell them what I want them to do. They've been digging at that hole for two solid hours——"

"What do yuh want them to do?" Pink looked at the half-buried dogs as if he contemplated thrashing them both for bothering a lady.

"I want them to tend to the sheep, of course; that's what they're here for. But Dooley is a natural-born shirk, and won't do a thing he can get out of; he *knows* enough—it's just pure cussedness."

The last word, brought out with a certain winsome recklessness, struck a spark of—something he did not name—from Pink's hardened susceptibilities.

"Olafson is just a pup; he depends

on Dooley to take the lead. And Dooley *knows* I'm green at herding; he just takes advantage."

"Which one is Dooley?" There was an ominous ring in the voice of Pink.

The girl looked up at him quickly. Evidently she understood. "I sha'n't tell you," she returned firmly. "It wouldn't do any good to—to whip him; he'd just go under the barn and sulk for days. If only you could—could swear — just a little, teeny bit — in Swede——" She regarded him wistfully.

"Er—wouldn't a mixture of English and Mexican and Blackfoot do?" Pink asked, showing briefly his dimples. "It sure makes a fierce combination. If it will, and you'll go off a ways——"

She shook her head, and Pink observed that she, also, had dimples. The knowledge somehow made him feel that there was a bond between them. He wondered involuntarily if any one had ever called *her* cunning; he could easily believe it.

"Ole has herded with them for more than a year," she sighed. "They always mind him, and he *always* talks Swede to them."

There was a minute or two when neither found anything to say. Pink looked at the scattered sheep, at the mutinous dogs, and at the girl; it is only the plain truth to say that he looked at the girl longest, and that he made another discovery: Her hair had little waves in it that caught the sunlight, and it curled in distracting little tendrils around her face. He rolled a cigarette and puffed thoughtfully.

"I should think," he ventured at last, "that a fellow could drive a bunch uh sheep like yuh do cattle. If yuh like, I'll try it a whirl."

She glanced up eagerly. "Oh, *could* you? But—I oughtn't to bother you. You—you must have work of your own to do."

"No bother at all," lied Pink. "If minutes were dollars, I'd be—— Where do yuh want to drive 'em to?"

"Well, Ole said that at ten or half-past I should start them down to that creek away over there. It's nearly eleven now. I did try to drive them myself, but they just ran all around me and—and *blatted!*" That last seemed the crowning offense. "You see," she confessed, "I haven't been at home very much since we came on to the ranch. I never drove cattle, either."

Pink carefully pinched out his cigarette stub and straightened in the saddle. "Well, I guess the two of us can make it, all right. Shall I help you on your horse?"

But she shook her head, got up, and caught the dragging bridle-reins of her gray, turned the stirrup ready for her foot, grasped the horn, and swung up. Pink told himself that she "went up like a cow-puncher"—which was the highest praise he knew. She looked even better upon a horse, he thought, with her divided skirt hanging in straight, graceful folds, than she had looked sitting on the rock. Also her eyes were not quite so red-rimmed, and he could tell better their color. They were that sort of gray which just falls short of brown. He believed, from the way she sat her horse, that she knew how to ride; he liked her better for that belief.

"You take this side," he commanded, "and don't try to hurry them. Just keep up the drag, and point 'em down the hill. I'll go and round up the main bunch, and get 'em going. And don't yuh worry any more about it, we'll sure get them to water, all right."

She smiled gratefully; and with eyes and dimples helping out the smile, her face became very attractive to Pink. He rode away feeling the glow which comes of a service performed without hope of other reward than a complacent conscience. At least, that is what he thought it was.

With a self-sacrificing chivalry which it is a pity the girl could not understand, he had given to her the windward side of the band, and rode heroically, with every fiber of his being protesting against the outrage around where the odor was overpowering. When the first whiff assailed his shrinking nostrils, he swore viciously the while he took down an end of his

rope, and began to "haze" the vile-smelling brutes into a more compact band.

"*Darn* sheep!" he gritted, when their yellow-eyed stupidity and the harsh tremolo of their blatting got upon his nerves. But he went at the work with all his accustomed thoroughness and energy, and—what is more to the point—he succeeded better than he had hoped.

If any one had told Pink, even as late as that morning, that he would some time be guilty of herding sheep—and herding sheep for sake of a girl, of all things—there would undoubtedly have been immediate and serious trouble for the daring prophet. Yet here he was, swinging his loop across shying gray backs, and shouting the "whoo-*ee*" which the range cattle know well, but which must have sounded strange to the sheep.

It was warm work, and at times irritating almost beyond endurance. Sometimes the sheep bolted, a panic-stricken blanket of gray wool, which it took all Pink's skill to turn back with the others. Sheep are so distressingly prone to do things *en masse*. Yet such was the indomitable will of him, that the whole band moved steadily down to the far creek-bottom. Across the dingy gray square of uneasy movement Pink could see the girl driving up the stragglers. He could not help seeing that she observed and copied his tactics closely—a fact which gave him a certain vague pleasure.

In the shallow creek-bottom he rode around and met her. Dooley and Olafson—names which betrayed the nativity of former herders—had at last felt the prick of duty, and were following shamefacedly at the heels of her horse. She greeted Pink with another illuminating smile. Her eyes were not even pink-rimmed now; and they were rather pretty eyes, he thought. Also the way she sat her horse did certainly please him; without doubt, she could ride.

"Well, we made it, all right," he gloated mildly, when he came close to her. "I'll have to ride on, I guess—but I'll be back this way in a couple of hours. It will be all right to leave the sheep here till then, I reckon. Herders most always hold them on water an unmerciful long time." Past experience with certain refractory herders had taught Pink that.

"It's wonderful—the things a man can do! I'd have been sitting back there on that rock yet, crying like a silly goose—only for you." There was sincere tribute to his masculinity in her voice, even more than in the words.

Pink blushed a little; it was new to him to have a girl take him so seriously. Still, he liked it more than he would own even to himself.

"Oh, that's nothing," he disclaimed. "Sheep-herding isn't the kind of work a girl ought to know, anyhow. Are you sure you'll be all right for a couple of hours? Maybe," he promised rashly, "I can get back a little sooner, if you want me to. Sure you ain't afraid?" (If the Happy Family could have heard that from the lips of Pink!)

"I don't want to bother you at all," protested the girl. "It's—it's awfully silly of me—but a man *is* a—a comfort—— You can't go, anyway, till you've had some lunch. Oh"—reading the refusal in his eyes—"there's plenty for both of us. I brought extra sandwiches, and extra doughnuts for the dogs. But they don't deserve any lunch, and I sha'n't give them a bite. You can have their share."

Presently Pink, who had vaingloriously boasted that he never would permit a girl to exercise the slightest influence over him, was sitting on a grassy hillock meekly eating the dogs' share of sandwiches and doughnuts, to the accompaniment of much blatting of sheep, and with the detested tang of unwashed wool in his nostrils. More, he appeared to be enjoying himself.

When all the lunch was gone, and they had drunk from a water-flask which the girl carried, he went reluctantly over to Skeeker and mounted. "I've got a little line-riding to do over north here," he explained; "but it won't take long. I'll be back in time to help yuh throw 'em back on the hills. Sure yuh ain't afraid out here all alone?" It

was the second time he had asked that question, and the girl smiled up at him while she shook her head in denial.

"I think you're awfully kind to me," she said. "It must be great to be a man and do things without help."

"Still," Pink flung back laughingly, "we like to have girls around to do things for; it would be a funny old world without 'em."

He rode away at the pace which ever marked Pink among his fellows, and which bade fair to keep his promise to be back soon. Loyalty to the Flying U made him cover every rod of the distance he was expected to ride, and to drive back a bunch of wanderers which he descried upon a hilltop far to the east. The wanderers, like the sheep, did not take kindly to interference with their liberty, so that Skeeker was in a lather and Pink in a villainous temper long before he could conscientiously take the homeward trail. By the sun he knew that he was a full hour later than he had told the girl he would be; and he fretted over what she would think of him. It seemed to matter much to Pink what she would think. Besides, he had an uncomfortable feeling that she would be afraid; that particular creek-bottom was a lonely place, and he hated to think of her waiting there, and watching futilely over a lot of fool sheep. It was no kind of work for a girl he told himself in extenuation of his feelings on the subject.

When he reached the place where he had left her sitting on the hillock she was gone, and the sheep with her. Pink pulled up and looked around him with a peculiar sinking of spirits. Back whence she had come he could see far; and there was no sign of her. She was not up the creek, for he had come that way; there was but one thing to do, and that was to follow down-stream till he caught some trace of her. Sober-eyed and with a deep uneasiness at his heart Pink hurried Skeeker over the rough ground.

The creek had many windings, and at one place flowed through a deep, lonely gulch. It was there that he came upon them at last; and as the familiar stench assailed his nostrils he gave a deep sigh of thankfulness.

The girl was on her horse, and she rode hurriedly to meet him. In her eyes was a grateful welcome that made Pink feel inches taller; no girl had ever looked at him just like that before.

"Oh, I thought you'd *never* come," she cried, between a laugh and a sob. "I've had the *horridest* time! A little while after you'd gone, a lot of cattle came crashing down the creek and scared the sheep, and they just ran and ran, and I couldn't stop them. And Dooley wouldn't help me at all—the mean thing. He'd just stand and wag his tail and look at me. So then I got angry, and got off my horse and threw rocks at him. And Dooley," she finished naively, "hit the trail for home, with Olafson at his heels. I'm so *glad* you're here!"

If one might judge from the look of him, Pink was also glad to be there. Without a thought for the distastefulness of the work, he rode and yelled, and at last got the sheep out of the gully and up on the grassy level, where they went to feeding as quietly as sheep know how to do. After that he felt at liberty to sit beside the girl and say trifling things just for the pleasure of hearing her laugh and reply in a manner quite as trifling. It never once occurred to him that he was doing anything out of the common.

The thing which most appealed to him, and most disarmed his natural caution, was the way the girl seemed to depend on him. *She* did not think him "cunning," and refer openly and amusedly to his dimples or his curls and long lashes; she looked up to his superior wisdom and strength and general protectiveness in a way that took him all unawares. When he told her his name—with certain abbreviations—she called him "Mr. Perkins" quite respectfully. Other girls usually called him Pink; one bit of impertinence had even addressed him as "Perky," and as a crowning insult "Pinky." It was good to be called as other men are called. And Pink was a man, however much he might look a mere boy.

Her name, she said, was Mary Wilson; but Pink called her, in his usual daring fashion, "Little Bo-peep"; and persisted in it, even after she had assured him that she had not lost any sheep. He also offered to ride into town that evening and fetch out the man who was on the drunk, but she pointed out the fact that the ranch was much better off without him, and that he could not herd sheep, anyway. Until Ole got able to be around, she declared, she would herd the sheep herself. She said that with a little practise she could do better; and she would have Ole teach her enough Swede that night to make Dooley understand that she was not to be trifled with.

Pink openly doubted her ability to learn enough Swede swear-words in one evening to manage a dog of Dooley's evident perspicacity, and asserted that he should ride around that way in the morning to see how she made out with him.

The girl did not offer any objections to this, so that Pink considered the matter settled. What more they said would sound rather flat without the atmosphere of the wide prairie-land, and the feelings of Pink and the girl, and the novelty of their sudden acquaintance to give color to the words.

When the sun dropped low they remounted and drove the sheep ranchward. There was no trouble, though a couple of dogs, properly obedient, would undoubtedly have been a help.

Still, it was sundown before Pink left her and the sheep at the brow of the hill beneath which lay the sheds and corrals and the rambling ranch-house she called home. And because he waited there till he was sure she would have no trouble corraling them, it was after dark when Pink got home, and the Happy Family was at supper, wondering much at his unaccountable absence; for Pink had never before been later than two o'clock.

"Been to town?" asked Happy Jack bluntly.

Pink came near saying that he had, until he remembered that some one would immediately ask for the mail. So he told them no, and sat down in his place with the first guilty feeling he had ever known.

"We thought you was lost, Cadwolloper," said Weary. "We were just organizing a rescue-party to go out with lanterns after yuh. Where was yuh, anyway?"

Pink, usually serenely indifferent to what any one thought of his movements, blushed; also he hesitated over what to reply. The Happy Family was looking at him curiously. It seemed to him that he had never before seen such an exhibition of inquisitiveness on the part of the Happy Family.

"None of your business," he retorted, with belated defiance.

"Sure not," Weary told him politely. "I only asked because yuh look kinda funny."

"He smells like sheep," sniffingly announced Irish, who sat next Pink.

Pink remembered going to the rescue of a half-grown lamb that had fallen off a caving cut bank; the girl had been afraid the lamb's leg was broken, and Pink had carried it several rods in his arms. Now he swore inwardly.

"Been having a scrap with some sheep-herder?" asked Cal. "Yuh might tell us about it, anyhow."

Pink retorted profanely.

"I betche the herder licked him; that's what ails him," guessed Happy Jack suddenly.

Pink, in sheer desperation, encouraged them, by his silence, to think so. To be sure, they would make life miserable to Pink for the rest of the evening; but he did not so much mind that. They had not guessed the truth; the humiliating truth that he had spent most of the day actually *herding* a band of sheep—and at the behest of a girl. Pink shivered whenever he thought of what would happen if they knew.

So great was his disgust with himself that he started out next morning with the determination of not going near the girl, or the sheep. If she wanted to make a fool of herself and try to do things she couldn't do, and had no business to do if she could, why, it was nothing to him. There was no reason

why he should leave his own work to help her out. He told himself self-righteously that the Flying U wasn't paying him to herd sheep for any Mary Wilson, and eat the dogs' share of lunch for his trouble. It seemed to him that she had kind of put him down on a level with the dogs, the way she spoke about the sandwiches and doughnuts. He hadn't thought of it at the time, but he thought of it now, all right; and he didn't like it a bit.

"Darn girls, anyway!" he said aloud, when his meditations had reached that uncomfortable point.

But even while he said it, the long-lashed eyes of Pink were searching unconsciously the prairie off to the north for a slow-moving, gray square against the brown. And when for some time he could not discover it, he changed the direction he was traveling and rode up on a high knoll that he might see farther. Truly, he was not a consistent young man that morning.

It was nearly an hour after that that he rode up to where she was again sitting on a rock. It seemed to him that she had purposely tried to keep him from finding her; for she was hidden from sight till he got almost up to her; and the sheep were browsing down in a hollow where the sage was thick. He felt a little tinge of resentment at the trouble she had made him—until he got close enough to see her face clearly.

"Well, how's sheep-herding?" he greeted, riding close and looking down at her. She could find no hint in his manner of the long search he had been obliged to make, or of any resentment he had felt.

"Not so worse," she returned, as airily as he. "I brought a book along today, and the sheep can do as they please till it's time to drive them home. I'm not going to shed any more tears over them, anyway."

Pink's spirits fell a little; she was so self-composed and so little in need of help apparently. He began to fear that, after all, she regarded him as merely "cute."

"All right," he said resignedly. "I guess I might as well ride on, then." Still he did not go, but sat with one foot swinging free of the stirrup, sifting tobacco into a tiny trough of paper. He looked up while he was drawing the sack shut with the string in his teeth, and found her watching him wistfully.

"I—I *hope* the sheep will behave," she remarked tentatively.

"How's the Swede lessons?" he wanted to know. "Learned enough to do any good with the dogs?"

"No-o; Ole only laughed when I asked him. He said: 'Ay tank dem dog she need more as Svenske talk; she not like for be boss around by a vomans. Yo bet yo Dooley she knows de deef'rance, all right.' "

"Yuh hear a lot about the sheep-herder's faithful dog," Pink observed, still making no move to go. "To hear some folks talk, you'd think the dogs are the whole show, with the calliope hitched on behind. They're supposed to know enough to herd sheep all winter by their lonesome."

"They do—only Dooley won't unless he feels in the mood. I don't even know where they are now. They took after a jack-rabbit on the way over here, and that's the last of them. If a coyote should come—or a wolf——" She glanced apprehensively behind her.

That settled Pink. He got down and stretched his slim length in the grass, resting on an elbow while he smoked. "I see right now that you've got to be looked after," he said; and there was a new light in the blue eyes of him—a light no other girl had ever seen. "Coyotes are pretty thick this fall; and they sure love fresh mutton."

"Well, I don't suppose they'd eat *me,*" she retorted. "Still——"

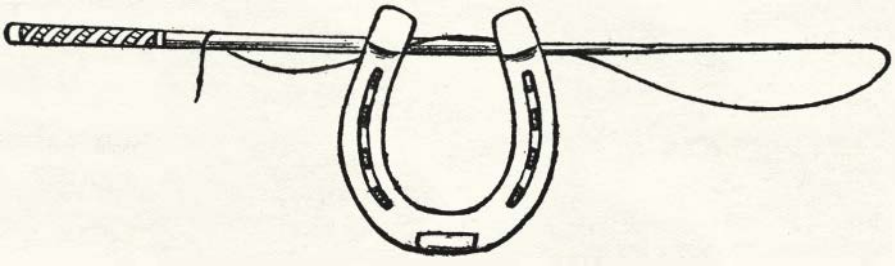
So Pink stayed, and watched her face in a way that would have been a revelation to the Happy Family if they had seen him. And it certainly seemed that Mary Wilson liked to have him there. Near noon they ate sandwiches together beside a creek where the sheep were drinking and blatting; and after that Pink galloped furiously away upon his round—and got back before the band had any thought of moving on.

By sundown the girl had promised to

go with Pink to the next dance—Pink sighed to think how far off the next dance was in the future—and she had also agreed that cattle were much nicer to own than sheep, and came near admitting that she wouldn't mind living on a little ranch somewhere, with cattle and—Pink. She came near admitting all that, but not quite; near enough, however, for Pink to get a new outlook on life, and to feel that truly there was something better than being a self-sufficient young man with no one depending on him but himself.

When they were almost to the brow of the hill back of her home, Weary and Irish rode past within a hundred yards of them. They did not stop, or call out, or do a single impolite thing, though Pink was at that minute trying desperately to turn an obstinate half-dozen of his charges. The two rode at a walk and watched him; and, though he only saw them from the corner of his eye, he felt that they were grinning at each other, with a thorough understanding of the whole situation.

But Pink did not care. He said good-by to Bo-peep, and rode homeward a half-mile behind Irish and Weary, whistling softly to himself, and dreaming dreams all about the girl and a little ranch of their own. And tucked away in the inner, left-hand pocket of his coat was a yard of crumpled red ribbon that had that morning been tied around the soft, pink throat of Mary Wilson.



AT THE MANAGER'S TABLE

THE waiter was very busy dusting away imaginary crumbs with his napkin, and seemed disinclined to go away from the table where the manager of a theatrical touring company was waiting for dinner.

"Well, what is it? I've given my order—what do you want?" asked the manager impatiently, wondering why the man hovered round instead of going off promptly.

"Beg pardon, sir," began the waiter, with a deferential cough, "but don't you remember me?"

"I can't say that I do."

"I used to sing in one of your companies, sir."

"Oh, yes, of course; now I recollect. You had a part in the successful musical play, 'The Dumb-bell Girls.'"

"Yes, sir; quite right. I suppose, sir, you must be surprised to see me now as a waiter?"

"Not in the least—not in the least, my dear fellow," said the manager acidly.

Vantanner's Right Whale

By T. Jenkins Hains

Author of the "Bahama Bill" stories

The exciting experiences of a blasé man of the world who, tired of the ordinary pleasures, and thirsting for some new kind of "sport," sought relaxation among the ice floes of the arctic

VANTANNER wanted something to amuse him. He had tried about every sport that was common to the rich and idle, but he craved something new. His life was a search for pleasure, for he had a great deal of money his family had left him, and he had very little ambition to accomplish anything in the way of work. Unhappiest of loafers he wandered down to the water side one day, and by some mischance fell in with my old friend and shipmate, Mr. Gus Torsberg.

Mr. Torsberg was at that time mate of the whaling bark *Albatross,* and he dearly loved company. Vantanner was inquisitive, and asked questions concerning the life aboard the now cleaned up and properly painted ship that lay at the dock-end, and Gus soon had him in his toils. No one could listen to one of Torsberg's whaling yarns without wanting to get fast to a right whale; and the matter ended by Vantanner buying his way into the bark at an absurd figure, and starting off on a two-year cruise to the arctic.

What Vantanner did not know about whales when he started off would have filled many volumes. What he learned during that short but eventful voyage will keep him and those who are not his intimates enthralled at café and club tables for many years to come.

Rhody Smith was in command of the whaler; and Rhody was not a gentleman. He scorned the idea of becoming one.

"I am a son of a sea-cook," he said to Vantanner the morning they cleared. "Both literally and figuratively a son of a sea-cook, and my mother was stewardess of the *St. Paul.* I don't come from aristocrats, not in any sense, and I don't believe any whaling skipper does, and I may as well say right here that if you are offended at my presence, you did a mighty fool thing to come into this ship. I am a blunt and honest sailor——"

"Blunt you are, all right," assented Van.

"But not dull," corrected Rhody; "don't get a mixture of definition. I'm not dull, if I am blunt. I know every star from Polaris to Aldebaran, and can work a position from any one of them, which is more than you could ever do if you went to sea forty years. And now as you are thoroughly acquainted with me and my personalities we will shake hands, for we have a mutual home here—and I'm the boss."

"You are the captain," corrected Van.

"Excuse me, but I'm the *boss.* There are such things as kings, emperors, potentates; but I am the *boss.* It's the biggest title I know of, or I would be that which is bigger—see? This is our happy home for two years, and I am the *boss.*"

Having formed an acquaintance, they sailed away for the arctic, and Gus kept the edge of the sport up by his thrilling yarns.

Rhody was known to the little steam finners of Newfoundland, but he held the skippers of such craft in scorn.

"Finners is only good for carrion. They are fertilizer, not whales. We are after right whales—which distinguishes them from wrong whales, such as those poor little steamers fire cannons into. Wait till we strike the ice."

They raised the high cliffs of Baffin Land one afternoon, and then started into the ice for the great right whales. Vantanner, who had spent most of his time on deck during the warmer weather, now found that it was necessary to remain below nearly half the time.

The stinks of the oil which he had heretofore not noticed now became apparent. His bunk, which was in Torsberg's room, opening into the main cabin, where a stove glowed night and day, was not so comfortable as it had at first appeared. It was soft enough, being built of feather mattress and furs, but deep in the interior of these there had been the starved remnant of a ravenous band which now multiplied most prolifically, and defied all attempts at race suicide. It was hard to keep the sleeping-bag over him on account of the continual scratching necessary to allay the constant irritation of the fornic acid.

"Something in your bunk?" exclaimed Gus, in surprise, after a night's entertainment. "I want to congratulate you, sir. It's a good sign. There's whales to be sighted sure."

"But what has that to do with whales?" cried Van testily.

"Don't get angry, sir. There's no use of getting testy at this season. Did you ever know a sick man to get whales? No, you never did. Well, then, your bunk is a sign that you are healthy. Them things don't stay with sick men. They get out—and into some other fellow's bunk. So by the same token we will soon sight whales—and ketch them."

"You are a fool, Gus," said Van, in a temper.

"Well," said the mate slowly, with his eyes growing smaller and the wrinkles stretching around them, "a man is sometimes known by the company he keeps—I never went whaling for sport—yet."

The days grew into weeks, but there was no sign of whales. Van, who had provided himself with everything in the way of reading matter he could well carry, found that he was even studying the advertisements of the various magazines and newspapers aboard.

The quarters were stuffy and stunk of foul clothes, for the weather was now below zero all the time, and everything had to be brought in to the general cabin for drying, as clothes once damp or wet would remain frozen indefinitely outside.

There were cards in abundance, but Rhody Smith had certain methods of playing poker not known to gentlemen, so by the end of a month Van was loser to the extent of twice his passage money.

He tried to find other means of passing the time. The second mate was quarrelsome, and the three engineers—chief, second, and donkeyman—formed a clique which no amount of good nature could penetrate. These, with two ice-pilots, the "boss," Gus, and the second mate, formed the after-guard, and held their own council in the general cabin into which all the officers' rooms opened for convenience and warmth. The cook was an Icelander and the steward a negro; but even these two worthies were allowed to sit and dry clothes at the red-hot stove.

Forward, the men had a similar room for a forecastle; and the harpooners and boat-steerers seemed to have access to both fore and after rendezvous, which gave them a social prestige not to be sneezed at. When there was fire under the boilers the engine-room was not a bad place for loafing, but the four firemen did not offer any particular inducements for social intercourse after Van had exhausted his cigars.

Vantanner stayed on deck with Rhody Smith every minute he could stand it, and at the end of a month he would have appreciated almost anything else. But he was a "sport," as he styled himself, and he would catch whales or "bust."

Tobacco there was in abundance aboard; and Rhody dealt it out freely for a shilling a pound. In the evenings

the air of the cabin was usually so foul with the reek of pipes that it was next to impossible to distinguish a man sitting on the opposite side.

At the end of five weeks they reached whaling-ground and raised a blow. Under no circumstances would the "boss" allow Van to go in the boats.

"I'm up here for money, not sport," said he; "and I won't take any risks with a greenhorn. You might gallie a grampus for all I know to the contrary. Wait until we get started all right."

Gus made fast to the first whale, firing his harpoon-gun into him at about twenty yards. There was no excitement of any kind, for the animal sounded, and came up so exhausted that a lance-thrust finished him at once. He was towed alongside, and the gruesome labor of stripping off the blubber and flipper began.

What a mess it made on the deck! There was not a place left unsaturated with the oil. It grew rancid in spite of the cold; and the odor below was not to be forgotten. Then the whalebone was cut out, cleaned, and stowed; and after that there was some attempt at clearing up the mess.

Six weeks from the day he sailed Van was allowed to go with Gus in a boat sent along the shore on the lookout for whales. It was bitter cold, but Van was glad of the chance for "sport" in any weather. They went through the broken ice near the rocky beach and joined two other boats waiting there. Then they made their way northward, keeping a watch seaward for signs of a blow.

Gus sighted a whale by four in the afternoon; and, without giving the other craft warning, he made his way rapidly and cautiously after the leviathan, hoping by this means to get in first shot, and have the game well in hand before they could catch up.

"You can let me do the shooting," said Vantanner. "That's what I've come a few thousand miles for, and I want to do it."

Torsberg was not of that opinion, but finally consented after Vantanner had given him promise to forfeit fifty pounds sterling if he missed. Van took his station in the bow of the whaleboat, exchanging places with an old Icelander, who could hit a whale every time as far as the gun would carry.

As the boat approached, the excitement grew intense for the novice. The huge dark bulk of the creature appalled him. He was lying like a half-tide rock, with the gentle surge washing over his back, making a noise like the wash on the shore.

The boat was approaching rapidly. The men in her were experienced whalemen, and lost no time gazing. They sent her swiftly and silently toward the quarry; and the landsman felt the tension which comes from a rapidity of incident and danger. Before he knew what was taking place, or realized it, the boat was within firing-distance, and a querulous whisper from Gus as to what he was doing awakened him from the "game-fever trance." The monster moved a little uneasily, but as the boat was out of range of his vision he merely felt that instinctive danger all whales feel at an uncommon disturbance of the sea.

"Take the gun, Olaf, and fire at him before he goes under," came the whispered order from the mate; but at the first movement of the harpooner Van quickly straightened out the gear and let drive at the piece of back he saw awash. So quickly did he fire that, although it was next to impossible to miss the huge mark, he let the rocking of the boat swing the gun upon the pivot in the bow until the head of the iron pointed for the animal's flipper, into which it flung with all the power of a double charge of powder.

The toggle came clear through and upset underneath, making the boat securely fast to the monster. The next instant with a whistle like the wind, a hundred fathoms of whale-line tore past Van and went whirling after that whale, who was leaping along at nearly twenty knots an hour toward the north.

Ollie tried to catch a turn, but to no purpose. They tried a hemp stopper on the bight, but it snapped like a thread. The tubs were emptying as though the

line was being sucked up into the air, for it was going too fast for the eye to follow it.

But the men were used to whales; and by dint of persistent effort and desperate endeavor they finally caught a turn on the loggerhead, and started the boat in the wake of the whale, letting the line smoke over the polished oak nubble until it sawed its way a full quarter of an inch into the wood.

Then they stopped it before the last fathom ran out, and the whale-boat sat upon her stern and skimmed over the smooth water of Baffin Bay like a feather blown before the wind. Between Gus' hurried orders Van could distinguish the smothered oaths of the mate regarding his aim; but the sport was so exhilarating that he answered not, but bent his eyes upon the foaming spot that marked the passage of a wild and frightened whale.

In about half an hour the topgallant yards of the *Albatross* sank below the horizon; and five miles away to the northward the white lumps showed the beginning of the solid ice-floes. But the whale still held on.

"Six hundred fathoms of whale-line —three hundred pounds, at ten cents a pound," muttered the mate at intervals. No one else spoke.

"Oh, let up on your whale-line whine," snarled Vantanner, as they neared the ice. "I'll buy you fifty whale-lines if we land that whale."

Without slacking speed, the whale dived under the solid ice. The edge of the floe came upon them as though it were driven by some mighty engine from the north. Olaf seized his ax and stood by to cut, when a piece of floating ice detached from the mass rose just ahead.

A quick stroke of the blade upon the line severed connection with the whale, but the momentum of the whale-boat was so great that she crashed into the ice, staving her bows open as far aft as her fifth timbers. Then she settled into the cool waters of the arctic, leaving a struggling crew to flounder frantically to the edge of the solid floe.

In the dim light of the northern day following, the *Albatross* picked up several badly frozen and thoroughly exhausted men from the ice. Fifteen hours upon that floe with a set to the polar regions had nearly caused the loss of the entire boat's crew. It had cooled the ardor for sport in one of them, and Vantanner said nothing about whales while lying a week in his bunk, though Gus explained that their mishap had been quite a common one. When he could get about again, Van took the "boss" aside and whispered something about "dollars," and a place the skipper called "The Sailor's National Bank"; and afterward there was harmony aboard again.

Rhody Smith's opinion of Van's prowess was not raised to any exalted extent by the escapade, but forward among the men he was looked upon with consideration. Ollie, who had been with him in the boat, and who hated Olaf as only a Swede hates an Icelander, sang his praises without stint. Of course he said nothing about the handsome knife Van had presented to him on the return to the ship, nor of the five-dollar bill he had slipped into his hand. It was not necessary to tell too much, especially to the too appreciative audience of the forecastle. Still, Van had acquitted himself manfully, and certainly was not the worthless "dude" big Jim Douglas had called him in scorn.

"Ay seen it weren't his fault wan he took de aim," said Bill, a sturdy Norwegian with blond curls. "Ay tank he shoot well enough, den. Ay tank he hit de fish; but Ollie, he yumped to one side an' rocked de boat. Ay tank Olaf don't hit him, den, when de boat rock. He's all right, den."

"Ah, what do you know about it?" growled Douglas. "I ain't got nothin' agin' the fellow, even if he is fool enough to come up here fishing for sport."

"Youse never says a good word for no one, you bull-head," said Mikey Swan. "I live in New York, where he comes from, an' he's worth ten such fellers like you—an' if youse don't believe it, I kin prove it by me own fair

hands. Youse is all right, Ollie, that feller is the right kind. They wouldn't have a feller like Rhody Smith as butler in his home."

"Ay tank he pays his way fair an' right," said a Swede, knocking the ashes from his pipe and rising to join the conversation.

Rhody Smith had come for whales and not for sport. He was now well into the whaling-ground, and each animal meant a thousand dollars or more. He would not trust Van in a boat without strict orders for the officer in charge to keep him out of the way of business.

Olaf, the harpooner of Torsberg's boat, remained silent always upon the subject of harpooning when it came to a discussion of Van's turn. Just what had transpired between him and Van was never found out, but Olaf was honest. In fact, Olaf was so honest and quiet that even that rough crew respected him. They even listened to what he said when he did speak, although they often pretended they did not.

A bright, cold day came, and the lookout sighted a school. They were led by a large bull, who showed little fear of the approaching ship. All the boats were lowered, and it looked as though they would land half the season's catch within daylight, or, rather, the hours of ordinary daytime. It was light fully twenty hours now, and they could work until tired out.

Torsberg's boat held Olaf, Ollie, Bill, and Jim, with Van pulling forward. Gus sat, or rather stood, in the stern and swung the steering-oar.

Jameson, the second officer, had a boat with an Iceland crew; and Jackson, the third, had one which he claimed was the best in the ice. Williams fell in the wake of the rest; and all four started for the school with the sun behind them.

In the still, cool air objects stood out in bold relief. The bark loomed behind them, her spars showing black against a heavy wall of a berg, the smoke from her funnel rising slowly. The "boss" stood near her poop-rail and watched the advancing boats, which strove to outrun each other, and at the same time not make any extra noise. It was a good prize for the first iron, and Olaf looked significantly at Van rowing with strong strokes.

Looking over his shoulder, Van could see the broad back of the bull leader. He was a large and powerful whale.

"He may be a right whale, but he looks big enough to be the wrong one," he whispered to Ollie.

They were a little in advance, and Olaf steadied himself for the shot. It would be a quick one, for Jackson's boat was close aboard. The old Icelander placed three irons close at hand, and, as the boat drew near, laid the gun fair for the monster's back.

"Way enough," came Gus' order, and the oars trailed. Olaf was bending over his gun, and the next instant the dull crack sounded, blending almost with that from Jackson's boat. Both irons were fast, and as quick as lightning Olaf hurled two more into the back close ahead, throwing them by hand and bending on the whips to the line before the bull realized what had happened.

Instead of sounding or plunging away full speed, the bull lay motionless for an instant. The boats backing with all oars barely kept from running upon him; and Jackson swore loudly at his bad luck in hitting second. Then the bull shook his flukes, raised his mighty head for an instant, and with a low, hoarse bellow flung himself at the mate's craft.

He struck the boat with his head and rolled it over, dumping all hands into the cold sea. The yells of delight from Jackson's boat were quickly hushed in the roar of the surge, for the whale instantly breached in a smother of foam, going down as straight as a plummet, leaving that officer's craft motionless, with the line whizzing over his loggerhead. The other two boats, seeing that Torsberg's crew were close to succor, kept on their course, and made fast to a whale apiece.

The shivering six clambered into Jackson's craft, Torsberg swearing and spluttering at his luck. Van noticed

that their boat still floated, and that the line seemed to be running out from the tub which was still in her. Calling to Ollie, he plunged overboard, and, in spite of orders to return, managed, with the seaman's help, to right the swamped craft. Then with an empty line-tub they bailed for dear life, while the wounded whale sulked a hundred fathom below. In a short time they had the boat clear enough to handle, and Van went to the line.

It was still running out of the second tub; but even as he let it run through his fingers it slacked, and he took a turn. Then he clambered aft, and the two sat in the stern-sheets, lifting the bow with their weight and bailing as fast as they could.

The water was freezing cold, and their hands grew numb, but they kept at work, nor heeded the orders to cut loose which came from the other boat. Suddenly something happened below. The wounded whale started ahead and for the surface. Jackson's boat was jerked in line with their own, falling a few fathoms astern of them, the line lying close along their gunwale. Without hesitation Van drew his knife across it amid a storm of yells and curses. Then, with the speed of an express-train, they shot ahead, leaving the furious men astern.

"It's a right whale, I believe," said Van through chattering teeth; "but it came near being a wrong one. Keep her straight while I bail."

Right ahead but far away rose the hull of the *Albatross*. The wounded bull laid a straight course for her, and away he went. The boat rid of her crew rode the water like a feather, and she was soon cleared of what was in her.

Ten minutes later Rhody Smith stood upon his poop and had the pleasure of seeing his passenger and able seaman sitting calmly in the stern-sheets, tearing along almost under his vessel's counter, while they waved their hands to him in joy. Rhody raved and cursed, and threatened to shoot them, but they kept on regardless, and apparently oblivious, of everything save the necessity of keeping their towing power dead ahead.

For an hour they went along without any signs of the whale failing. It was bitter cold, and they changed hands at the steering, for their fingers grew so stiff they could hardly bend them. Their clothes froze and cracked upon their bodies, resembling badly tempered sheet-armor.

"Better cut him loose, Ay tank, sur," said Ollie, after the spars of the bark sank to the royal yards.

"We'll stick to him if he runs us clear to hell," said Van, with emphasis.

"Ay tank it will be to a cooler place, sur," said Ollie morosely.

Suddenly, and without any change in his gait, the wounded bull began to slowly circle. In a giant curve he shaped his course; and almost before the freezing pair realized it they were heading almost straight back toward the bark again.

"Let him go, we're going home," said Van.

"Do you tank you c'u'd lance him, den, sur?" asked Ollie.

"Watch me and see," said Van.

In a short time the bark was showing her hull plainly; and as she rose nearer and nearer the spirits of the freezing two went up accordingly. They thrashed their fingers until they bled, and, in spite of the cold and speed, "hauled line."

Owing to the craft's lightness they managed to gain rapidly; and by the time the *Albatross* was within hailing-distance they were up to within a dozen fathoms of the foaming flukes.

By standing well in the middle of the craft they managed to gain on the line slowly without great danger. Soon they were close to the monster. Ollie went to the steering-oar. Vantanner bent his whole weight on the line, and gained a foot or two. Slowly but surely he hauled the boat to within striking-distance; almost alongside. Then he made the line fast and picked up the lance, which was fast in its place along the gunwale.

"Strike down an' forrads, sur, an' Ay tank you git him," called Ollie.

Vantanner drove the razorlike blade fully six feet deep into the bulk alongside. Then he pumped it up and down, making a frightful wound.

The whale feeling the deadly wound made a vicious plunge. Vantanner had just time to cast off the line when he sounded, leaving a purple sea in his wake.

Rhody Smith was watching them through his glasses, and saw the boat's headway slacken, and the two men in her sit down.

"Lost him, just as I knew," he growled. "Two blamed fools—an' a five-thousand-dollar whale! By gorry, I'll skin them!" he almost roared as he put down the glass.

He lowered a boat and sprang into it himself, and with two men, the engineer and steward, started for them. As he drew nearer he noticed them hauling line again. Soon a vast black bulk rose half a mile distant, and Vantanner, hauling his boat close to it, drove a harpoon with a piece of white rag—his shirt—attached to the shank, so that it fluttered a little in the keen air. It was the signal of a "kill"; and as he looked Rhody Smith gasped.

"Back starboard—give way port," he said, and turned his boat toward the bark.

Twenty minutes later the *Albatross* came slowly up under steam, and Rhody greeted the frozen pair from the poop.

"What luck?" he bawled, in his most winning tone.

Vantanner stood up. He was frozen stiff, and could hardly move or speak.

"Nothing like a right sort of whale," he drawled unconcernedly. "Throw us a line and let us get aboard—it's cold out here; rather chilly sitting doing nothing."

POISONS IN THE MAKING

SLIP on this glass mask," said the manager of a big chemical factory. "You will need it." The visitor donned the uncanny mask of glass, and the foreman led the way to the cyanide of potassium department.

"We make 1,000 tons of cyanide a year," he said. "A dose of five grains is a fatal one. Thus our annual product is enough to kill 2,500,000 people."

He opened a door, and a room filled with writhing flames, dense shadows, sparks, smoke, and weird figures in glass masks was revealed. In the center of the room, in a great caldron, 100 pounds of molten cyanide of potassium bubbled and seethed. The flames glinted strangely on the glass masks.

The manager coughed. "These fumes," he said, "are wholesome. The men, you see, are all robust. I have known weakly chaps, working here among these strange fumes, to pick up health and strength."

In another clean, cool room the finished cyanide was stored. It looked like crystallized white sugar, good enough to eat.

"Good enough to eat?" said the foreman gravely. "Well, we have had men eat it. Four men committed suicide that way. The fumes seem to create in our men a desire to taste the drug. They fight this desire, most of them, successfully; but they feel it, the same as workers in coffee-plants want to chew the coffee-beans, and some feel it so strongly as to succumb."

How Ballington Was Held Up

By E. N. McKeen

No one but an engineer can fully appreciate the tension of the moment when a red gleam flames out of the darkness in front of a fast moving train. This story tells why the danger-signal held up Engineer Ballington when he was covering the track at a sixty-mile gait

THE 888 stood waiting, motionless, with the soft pish-pish of her exhaust sounding regularly in the inky blackness, while out from the west came the bellow and blast of a tumultuous prairie wind; one of those forty-mile-an-hour blows that divert themselves occasionally by developing into a sixty-mile affair. This was not the first one of the kind the 888 had pushed her nose into, and she looked powerful enough, as she stood there, to defy the wildest wind that ever blew.

She was Ballington's engine, and Ballington was big and brawny and fearless. No prairie wind had ever got the best of him; he had bucked against many a one in his day. He was a silent chap mostly—when he spoke, his words were terse and to the point, but he had contracted a habit of whistling—a garrulous habit, after all, since with him it was equally as expressive as language. Probably he had contracted the trick from the 888. Sometimes it was a good rollicking tune, like the blast the 888 gave when everything was going her way. Again it was low and momentous; then Allen, his fireman, knew he was to keep the gage at a hundred and eighty, and never let her waver.

They were booked to haul the Overland Mail to Cheyenne to-night, and the Mail was late, wherefore Ballington's whistle was dropping in temperature. He had climbed in and out of the cab half a dozen times in as many minutes since the hostler had spotted her from the roundhouse ready for service. He had poked his torch into every crack and crevice more then once to conceal his impatience, and all his inspections had been interlarded with piercing glances down the east track for a glimpse of the much-desired headlight.

Allen was perched on the gangway steps, pulling away at his pipe and keeping his eye on the steam-gage; incidentally watching Ballington's maneuvers. Presently Ballington paused a moment, and, when he resumed, the whistle had shifted suddenly from minor to major. Allen knocked his pipe empty against the tender, and put it in his pocket; that shift signified that the Mail was sighted. He never glanced eastward to verify his conclusions.

Ballington and Allen were the crack crew of the third and fourth divisions, and they were irrevocably mixed up with the 888. No other crew had ever manned her since she had made her advent on the U. P.; and, from the superintendent down, Ballington, Allen, and the 888 were always spoken of as three old cronies. If the 888 went in for repairs, Ballington and Allen generally managed to "lay off" until she came out. If things were pretty tight and a crew couldn't be spared, they took another engine, of course; but no records were ever broken when they did!

She was in great trim to-night, and she backed down and coupled on to the Mail in a way that meant business. Their orders were brief, and luck was with them, for they had a clear track to Barrows Crossing. She was just fif-

teen minutes late with the first revolution of her drivers; a moment later and she was leaving behind her, like stars on a misty night, the feebling lights of Platte.

Ballington was peering ahead into the almost impenetrable blackness, for an oil headlight makes but a poor showing against sand and wind such as they were getting to-night.

The fire-box door swung ceaselessly to and fro, throwing Allen's bent form into lurid distinctness against the black background, all the while the gage was steady at 180, and Allen's eyes lifted to it with every shovelful.

There was a ceaseless, maddening, deafening roar as that huge monster, with her long tail of coaches swaying and rocking behind her, increased her speed with every moment. Way stations and small hamlets fled away from her like specters as she clattered and clanged upon her way. One keen flash of light, and she had fled by like a rocket against a glowering sky, piling the miles up swiftly behind her.

In an incredibly short time Barrows Crossing lifted its roofs ahead of them. Ballington waited until the last instant before he threw on the air. As she responded and slowed down to a pause in front of the operator's window, he pocketed his watch with the assurance that one minute lay to their credit. The whistle was looking up.

They made but a momentary pause for orders; he read them quickly. They were to pass No. 6 on a time-order at Granger at ten-fifty. It was ten now, and a good forty miles had to be covered, and that forty well sprinkled with curves and grades.

Kern was on No. 6. Not a man on the road but knew Kern's recklessness. If the 888 made Granger by ten-fifty, good enough; if she did not, Kern would pull out on the minute, and come plowing down for Seven Oaks siding—which meant that the 888 had to do her mightiest, or lay out at Seven Oaks for Kern and lose time. It was practically a mile a minute, with the wind in their face; but the whistle never wavered.

A piercing shriek and she was off again, puffing and belching forth cinders and red sparks, lurching from side to side of her own force, then, on a sudden, settling down to her steady gait like a racer on the home-stretch, straining every muscle, full of grit and determination. Allen was piling the coal into her ton after ton with dogged persistence, and the 888 swung past Seven Oaks siding like a streak of lightning.

The line from Seven Oaks to Granger lay through an undulating portion of the prairie. The ground rose in places almost to the dignity of hills, and scattered here and there were vigorous groves. To the west of Seven Oaks lay a steep down-grade, abutting at the lower end on a tremendous curve about the base of one of the larger hillocks. Once around that, the track lay practically clear to Granger; but that curve had been responsible for more than one smash on the third division.

The 888 was in a fair way to take it to-night at a good seventy-mile pace with the momentum from the grade, for she was doing her mile a minute and better as she shot past Seven Oaks, Ballington peering ahead confidently.

Suddenly he braced himself; his eyes contracted piercingly; the whistle dropped to a faint effort; and, with a vigor born of danger, he reversed her and threw on the air. Through the blinding blackness ahead came a light—red.

Seven Oaks lay but a few rods behind them, silent and dark. His mind was in a whirl of mental questions. Perhaps Kern had had a lap order, and in his haste to get to Seven Oaks before the Mail, had landed in a heap at the foot of the grade.

It was a sickening moment; the air-brake was stiffening every wheel and coach into inaction, but the momentum was tremendous, and for an instant she bore on with no perceptible slackening of speed.

Allen sprang into the cab and peered ahead into space, trusting in God that death and oblivion were not before them, neither thinking of themselves, but of all that depended upon their nerve and fortitude.

The great wheels crunched and ground and battled with the strength behind them, then in almost twice her length she had come to a full stop. Ballington sprang into the gangway, when, out of the sudden stillness and blackness at the side, a dark lantern flashed its brilliant glare upon him, and he was looking into the hollow end of a six-shooter.

"Hands up!"

His first impulse was to go at the rascal with all his might, but he had nothing to battle with but his brawny arms; the other had all the advantage. Resistance only meant death, sudden as a bullet flies. After all, there was nothing for it but to obey, but he felt himself grow white with rage because of his powerlessness.

He stood there in a white glare with the darkness circling about him; looking from that light it was impossible to distinguish how many stood behind it; there might be one or ten. Ten or one, it meant the same; he was in their power, and he did as he was told, descending from the engine and leading the way to the express-car; somehow Allen was telling paces with him.

After the first flash of rage had passed, he bothered little about what transpired around him; his mind reverted to Kern and his time-order for ten-fifty. A few minutes would bring him tearing around that curve, and bang into the 888, and she would be a thing of the past. The 888 to go out like that, ignominiously, with never a struggle! It was bitter.

They had come to a pause in front of the express, and Ballington heard the order to uncouple her. Time was too valuable to waste in bickering, though he knew there was no chance for uncoupling unless the slack could be taken up; however, he threw all the strength and muscle of his vigorous arms to the task, as he had foreseen, in vain; then he stepped back with a deprecating gesture.

"No man could uncouple her without the slack; try her yourself."

For an instant the gun opposite him wavered, then the lantern flashed on the end of the car; it was full upon him again in a trice, but the momentary reflection from the solid background had shown Ballington the number of his opponents—one big fellow, who was taking the lead, and a smaller one, who had Allen in tow. It was possible there might be more of them back there in the grove to the left; there were only two of them here. He longed to fall upon them and annihilate them.

They did not linger over the coupler, but moved on to the door of the express. Haggerty, the conductor, was leaning far out as he clung to the railing of the empty day coach, endeavoring to ascertain what the commotion was without the trouble of coming to see.

Ballington saw him by the reflection of the lamps in the coach, and the humor of the situation flashed over him. Haggerty might not be a coward, though he had been accused of a weakness in that direction, but, at all events, he was unusually cautious, and Ballington wondered what he would do when he discovered what he was up against.

The complication did not last; the big chap saw Haggerty in his half-recumbent position, and popped his Colt's at him with a pointed order to get inside.

Haggerty did not stand upon the manner of his going, but fled incontinently; nor did he return with reenforcements, as Ballington had hoped he might. He evidently saw no urgent reason why, when conducting a train, he should undertake to conduct a shooting contest at the same time. Allen laughed; it was all too absurd.

"Roust out your messenger," said the big fellow to Ballington, and Ballington called and knocked upon the door, all the while with a sickening sense of time slipping by and no help ahead to avert disaster.

The effort brought no response, and, as he went at the door again with more vim, he began to wonder if Phelps would refuse to open it. The man beside him neither wondered nor idled away his time; he opened fire upon the inoffensive door, and shot it full of holes, then through the apertures gave

Phelps to understand that the next exhibition would come from below in the shape of dynamite.

Phelps, reasoning that it was useless to resist, drew the bolts, and showed himself in the doorway. He was perfectly calm, and grasped the situation in an instant. The lamp from the interior, wind-tossed as it was, shed a flickering light upon the four grouped there beneath him.

Ballington saw by his expression as he looked down upon them that he thought the three of them pretty poor stuff to be held up by two such men, and Ballington thought so, too; but, as the robbers were bristling with loaded revolvers, while the rest of them had none, it made the situation rather uneven, with a heavy balance in favor of the minority.

Both the men wore masks, but the accent and general appearance of the larger one led Ballington to believe him a Mexican half-breed; the smaller one did not seem to be much of anything but a trailer. The Mexican did all of the aggressive work. He meant business, too, and was active as a jack-rabbit. He sprang into the express-car and turned to the safe.

"Open up," he said to Phelps briefly.

"That's a time-lock, with the combination in Cheyenne. I don't know anything more about it than you do."

The Mexican gave Phelps a searching glance, then handled the safe a moment to assure himself that Phelps was not trying to hoodwink him. He stepped to the door and extended his hand for a sack which the smaller man handed him very gingerly. He laid it roughly on the safe and pulled out a stick of dynamite; then, seemingly as an afterthought, he told his smaller companion to pull the expressman off, and to lie down that the shock of the explosion might not kill them.

They drew off forty feet or more, and sprawled face down upon the ground. The wind was bellowing about them like prairie-wolves, and the night was so pitchy black no man could see two feet beyond him. The light in the express-car was too wind-tossed to carry far, and Ballington thought the little chap there on his right must have been on his first run, having neglected to provide a light to keep watch over his charge. If the whistle had dared vent itself, it would have fallen into a thrilling andante.

Ballington knew he was too heavy and stiff for much of a sprint, but he had evolved a plan amid the confusion, and Allen was young and spry enough to carry it out. Help they must have, at any cost, and if the 888 could run to Granger, she could forestall Kern, and the operator could wire to half a dozen different points within a six-mile radius for help in pursuing the bandits. It seemed strange that any one should have chosen this point for a hold-up, when help could be so readily obtained. If they were at all familiar with their location, they probably would not tarry if the 888 pulled out. He hoped for the best, at any rate.

On Ballington's right lay the small man, armed to the teeth. The thing to ascertain was whether Allen or Phelps lay to his left. If it was Allen, his sleeves would be rolled to the elbow; he always wore them so when he fired extra hard. The engineer extended his hand cautiously and came in contact with a body. It was just body; his fingers drew this way and that, and could make nothing of it; then suddenly his heart gave a wild leap—he had found an arm, and in an instant a twisted sleeve!

His great rough hand closed upon the arm with telling pressure, and he felt Allen bend in his direction. He leaned over in the darkness, moving lightly, slowly, that he might not be discovered, and whispered:

"Sneak, and cut for Granger."

There was no child's play in it; if they discovered him it was death he had to deal with. The 888 lay fully a hundred feet from them, not far, after all, for a bullet to carry; but Allen proved himself game. He managed to extricate himself from the others, unseen in the darkness, and cover the hundred feet between him and the 888 in a twinkling, expecting every moment to

be knocked down by the explosion from the express-car.

But the game in there was not working right. Ballington could see the Mexican placing his fuse again; the first one had gone out. He seemed in a flurry of haste and excitement.

The chances Allen had to take were great, but there were the 888 and Kern to be thought of. It seemed an incredibly short time until Ballington's quick ear detected Allen at his work; and he heard him cut her loose from the baggage-car. It was not much of a noise above the roar of the wind, but the man beside him moved uneasily.

"What's that?" he asked.

"What?"

"Over there by the engine?"

"She only had water for three minutes; she is probably going to blow up, and your friend in there won't need his dynamite." Ballington said anything to gain a moment's time for Allen. No man had ever pulled a pin and cut loose the air as quickly as Allen did.

When Ballington heard the first sound the 888 gave after Allen had crept into her cab and thrown open the throttle his head swam, and his heart beat like a trip-hammer. He wondered what he and Phelps had to expect now that Allen had cut and run. Cowards are generally cruel; he thought perhaps the little fellow might let fly a few balls into him by way of revenge.

He had miscalculated. The little man was too busy thinking of himself to take revenge. With the first flash of knowledge that the 888 was pulling out he jumped and ran for the grove like a killdee. They must know the locality, then, and how speedily relief could come, Ballington thought.

The Mexican was more courageous; he fairly fell from the express-car in his haste to stop Allen, and for one wild moment it looked to Ballington as if he might.

Allen in his haste had thrown the throttle wide open, and the 888, instead of moving, stood there slipping her drivers. Ballington could see that the knowledge of what he had done came to him quickly. He heard him shut her off, then open more gradually, and she started up at a good gait.

But what if the Mexican had reached the tender and was even now climbing over the coal? If he was, Allen stood no show; he would be riddled with bullets, and the 888 would go tearing down the grade with a dead man to pilot her.

The suspense lasted hours to Ballington—in reality far less than a minute. Shot after shot now rang out, shrill and piercing above the howl of the wind. Allen was gaining speed every minute. The robber must be firing on the run, it seemed to Ballington, who was straining every nerve to penetrate the darkness.

A moment more and the fire-box door swung open. Ballington could have wept for joy, for Allen would not have dared risk himself in that light unless he knew he was practically out of danger. The shooting had stopped, but the Mexican must have run a good ways, for the last shot had sounded some distance from them. Probably it had dawned upon him that he was fighting his fight alone. The 888 was tearing down the grade now at a tremendous speed, and the little man had fled into the darkness somewhere.

Ballington and Phelps did not linger; there was no glory to be gained in the path of that Mexican if he returned. But the game was up for him, and he knew it, and he had gone out like the flame of a candle.

Now that the strain of the situation was lessening, the two men bethought themselves of Haggerty, and went in search of him. They found him securely locked in the empty day coach half-overcome with fright, while Allen was breaking every record on the third division to reach Granger by ten-fifty. He landed two minutes late, to find No. 6 still on the siding. Kern had laid off for a trip, and old Muldoon (the only man on the road who never took a venture) was complacently smoking his pipe in the cab and waiting until the rear light of the Mail should have pulled by him fifty feet.

Ballington had dropped into ragtime.

The Adventures of Felix Boyd

By Scott Campbell

Author of "Below the Dead Line," Etc.

XX.—THE MAN AND THE MOTIVE

(*A Complete Story*)

OBVIOUSLY it was something portentous. No ordinary communication would have brought that expression to the face of Mr. Felix Boyd. Startled by it, the Central Office man halted on the threshold and was about to quietly depart, when Boyd observed him, signed for him to enter, and presently hung up the telephone receiver.

"From Washington, Jimmie," he said tersely. "A message from the secretary of war."

"Is that so?" Coleman stared, dropping into a chair. "What's wrong?"

"He wants me to locate Amory Seward as quickly as possible. He's been trying to get in touch with him for several days. Seward is wanted in Washington on very important business in the ordnance department, and neither letters nor telegrams to him have brought any response."

"That's strange."

"Not at all like Amory Seward, who is punctilious in all business matters. There must be some serious occasion for his silence, unless he is ill, out of town, or—I guess I'll call up his office in Wall Street, and see what I can learn about him."

Before Boyd could look up the telephone number of this well-known capitalist, for years a conspicuous figure in Wall Street and a power in national politics, the ringing of his own instrument again broke the silence. He seized the receiver and responded to the call, while the Central Office man grimly waited, with a vague impression that this was the introduction to a mysterious case.

"Well, this is strange, following upon the heels of the other," Boyd presently declared. "The call is from Seward's office. I am wanted there as quickly as possible."

"By Seward himself?"

"Hardly, since the voice was that of a woman." Boyd started up and closed his desk. "I'd rather go down there at once than defer for questions by telephone," he said. "Wall Street, eh? That, Jimmie, is like setting foot on one's native heath!"

And Jimmie grinned understandingly.

"It's many a day since you were transferred from the banking district; many a day since I meandered about Wall and Broad Streets on special duty for nearly a hundred secret clients, the biggest toads in the great financial puddle. Amory Seward was one of them, Jimmie, and I shall be glad if I now can do him any service."

"Have you any idea of the trouble?"

"Not the slightest. We left that section of the city well cleared of crooks after downing the notorious Big Finger and his gang. Possibly some worthy successor of that accomplished knave has finally turned up, since things in that locality have gone to the bad of late. Two bank burglaries, a mysterious theft from the sub-treasury, a Maiden Lane jeweler murdered and robbed, a broker-

age firm cleverly swindled out of a hundred thousand in government bonds —that was the record, Jimmie, merely during the three months we were abroad."

"Black enough it was, too."

"It reminds one of our days below the dead-line, when we carried our lives in our hands and—come along with me, Jimmie. We'll see what's amiss with Seward. Possibly we shall run upon an old-time problem, one that will test our nerve as well as our acumen. All ready, eh?"

Felix Boyd had made ready while speaking. These reminders of bygone days, of sensational episodes in which these two had figured, were not without effect upon him. His voice had an eager ring. His eyes were alert with awakened interest. Followed by Coleman, who eagerly accepted his invitation, he led the way from his Union Square office, into which Coleman had drifted that afternoon early in December, some weeks after their return from abroad.

The season was a laggard one, and the weather wretched. The first fall of snow was long overdue. There had been no clear sky, no crisp, wintry air for ten days—only a warm, enervating atmosphere, as humid as in the dog-days, laden most of the time with dull gray fog and drizzling mist, that turned afternoon into evening at the end of one's lunch hour. Though not yet five o'clock, the street-lamps and shop-windows were lighted, shedding a sallow glow on the muddy pavements.

"This weather is devilish!" Coleman growled, wriggling into his overcoat. Then his thoughts went back to Amory Seward. "I thought Seward was living in Washington this winter, identified in some official capacity with the war department."

"Seward never held a government position; never would accept one," Boyd rejoined, as they hastened toward Third Avenue. "He has too many millions to look after, too many financial irons in the fire, to give any time to the government. He could have had the naval portfolio in the last administration, but he refused even to consider the offer quietly made him."

"Yet he has been in Washington for some time."

"Quite true, Jimmie, but only on personal business. He owns, I am told, a controlling interest in several valuable inventions useful both for land and naval warfare, and his mission in Washington was only to negotiate for their purchase by the government. The submitting of plans and models, together with tests in various departments, and the many red-tape details pertaining to such business, have required several weeks. He returned to his home in Fifth Avenue a month ago, I believe, and if any ill has befallen him it must be—step lively, Jimmie, and we can hit that train."

Twenty minutes brought them to the Wall Street building in which Seward's office was located. At the street door there was a handsome closed carriage, with a stiff-backed coachman in livery. From the man on the box to the tires on the wheels the rig bore the stamp of opulence, culture, and dignified aristocracy.

"That's the old man's turnout," Coleman commented, as they entered.

"So I see," nodded Boyd. "We may find him here, after all."

They found, instead, the wife and youngest daughter of Mr. Seward; the one a dignified matron of nearly seventy, the other a tall, attractive girl just turned twenty. They were seated in a private room adjoining the main office, both rooms being at the end of a long corridor on the street floor. Several clerks in a railed enclosure glanced up when the two men entered; and Seward's private secretary, Mr. Radford, hastened from the adjoining room to meet them.

"I'm glad you could come at once, Mr. Boyd," he said, with a nod to Coleman. "Come this way, both of you. Mrs. Seward insisted upon my sending for you, as we are very anxious over the strange disappearance of—this is Mr. Felix Boyd, ladies, and Detective Coleman, of the Central Office."

Both of the fashionably dressed

women arose to acknowledge the introduction, and the elder hastened to explain the occasion of their anxiety, which was plainly reflected in their pale faces and nervous manner.

"I have had Mr. Radford send for you, Mr. Boyd, because Mr. Seward has mentioned you as one on whom he would call for aid in certain serious emergencies. We are in painful suspense over his mysterious absence just now——"

"Ever since last Wednesday, mama," the younger woman interrupted.

"Allow me to explain, Ethel, darling. Two tongues telling a story make only a mess of it."

"Very well." And Miss Ethel subsided.

These remarks passed without the slightest irritation, and Boyd, suppressing a smile, sat down.

"Mr. Seward has been absent since last Wednesday?" he said inquiringly.

"Yes, Mr. Boyd, six days, including a Sunday," Mrs. Seward quickly exclaimed. "That is something he never has done in all our married life without explaining his absence."

"Can you state any circumstances bearing upon the case?"

"We know that he left this office about five o'clock on the day mentioned. Half an hour later he telephoned home, stating that important business would detain him down-town during most of the evening, and that he would not come home to dinner. He did not return that night nor the following day, Mr. Boyd, and we then began to feel anxious.

"On Friday morning I received a letter from him, or presumably from him, stating that he had gone to Philadelphia and might be absent several days. He did not so much as hint at the business calling him away, however, but added that we must not worry about him. Since then we have heard nothing from him, and I can only——"

"Pardon my interrupting," Boyd interposed. "Are you in the habit of worrying about your husband when he is away?"

"No, no, never," Mrs. Seward quickly replied. "I'm glad you bring up that point, for it also occurred to me. Though he now is over seventy, Mr. Seward enjoys excellent health, and retains all of his mental vigor. In no sense is he infirm, or incapable of taking proper care of himself. His business frequently takes him away from home for a considerable period, but never before has he cautioned me not to worry about him. The very fact that he did so in the letter mentioned, Mr. Boyd, serves only to increase my fears and misgivings."

"Yes, I see the point," Boyd thoughtfully remarked.

"Unless some serious occasion existed, he would not have remained away over Sunday without sending me word," Mrs. Seward positively declared. "I know, moreover, that he has very important engagements in Washington at this time which he would not voluntarily neglect. Since yesterday morning several telegrams have been received here from the secretary of war asking Mr. Seward to communicate with him, which plainly shows that my husband has not gone to Washington."

"Quite true, madame," Boyd admitted, yet he said nothing about the message he also had received.

"Something must be done at once, Mr. Boyd. I cannot longer endure this anxiety and suspense. I came here this afternoon to consult Mr. Radford and to have him send for you, that immediate steps may be taken to clear up this mystery. I am convinced that there is some serious reason for Mr. Seward's strange absence, and the fact that he has not again sent some word in explanation of it."

"You may be right, Mrs. Seward," Boyd gravely rejoined. "I will look into the matter. I would like to ask a few questions."

"Certainly."

"Who talked with Mr. Seward when he telephoned home after leaving his office last Wednesday?"

"Jacobs, our butler."

"Did he state why he was detained down-town?"

"He did not. I should have learned

had I been talking with him, but Jacobs did not venture to inquire."

"Do you know of any business, Mr. Radford, that he expected to transact that evening?" Boyd turned to the private secretary, who stood in respectful silence near the door.

"I do not," said Radford. "He mentioned none to me."

"You thought he was going home when he left here?"

"Yes; certainly. In fact, Mr. Boyd, he said so."

"The business, then, must have come up unexpectedly after he left here?"

"I infer so."

"Has he recently received any letters, or dictated any, that might possibly suggest the nature of it?"

"I do not think so. I recall none."

"You see most of his correspondence?"

"I do."

"Have any strangers recently called here to see him?"

"I have seen none."

"Or at his residence, madam?" Boyd put the query to Mrs. Seward.

"None, sir," said Mrs. Seward positively. "Not one."

Boyd turned again to the secretary.

"Is he engaged in any stock-market operations at the present time, Mr. Radford, that so seriously affect the interest of others that his abduction might be to their advantage in the market?"

"Far from it, Mr. Boyd," Radford quickly shook his head. "He now has hardly any interest in the stock-market."

"Do you know whether he carried much money when he left here?"

"No more than usual, I'm very sure."

"Not a large amount?"

"No, sir."

Boyd was silent for a moment, then abruptly he asked Mrs. Seward:

"Have you, until now, taken any steps to trace his movements, madam?"

"No. I did not wish to act hastily in the matter, so have waited in the hope of hearing from him," she explained.

The expression that gradually had settled on the face of Felix Boyd was not encouraging. He knew Amory Seward to be a man of sterling integrity, of strict business habits and exemplary conduct. In the light of these characteristics the circumstances plainly pointed to something wrong, yet to fathom the nature of it and the motive for it was by no means easy.

For several moments Boyd appeared wrapped in thought. From the Persian rug at his feet his gaze drifted to a large oil-portrait of Seward on one of the frescoed walls; a strong, attractive face, with silvery-gray beard and wavy hair. Then he stared vacantly up at the arched ceiling, noting in a vague way that it was made of ornamental steel and studded with innumerable translucent lenses, through which the room was lighted during the day.

Presently he came out of his abstraction, turning to Mrs. Seward and saying, with a curtness habitual to him when perplexed:

"The letter you received from Philadelphia—is it here?"

"I neglected to bring it with me," she nervously answered.

"Humph! That's too bad."

"Do you consider it important?"

"Is it written with a pen?"

"Yes."

"Certainly, then, it's important. It may be a clever forgery. I wish to compare it with writing known to be Mr. Seward's."

"I can send home for it, Mr. Boyd."

"That will take time."

"My carriage is at the door——"

"Much better." And Boyd started up from his chair. "We'll go up there at once. Meantime, Jimmie, try to trace Seward's movements last Wednesday evening, will you? Give no publicity to the case, however. I first wish to look into it a little deeper. See me in the morning, and let me know what you learn."

"I'll do so, surely," Coleman readily assented.

"Get at it lively, too, Jimmie—I don't like the looks of this affair," Boyd whispered as he passed Coleman, then hurried the two women through the main office and out to the carriage.

It was after six o'clock when they reached the Seward home, an enclosed estate on a fashionable Fifth Avenue corner, with a driveway entrance from the side street. The avenue was veiled with falling mist and swirling fog. The nearer buildings were magnified by it. The vista of lights in either direction had a wan and sickly appearance, and the perspective was reduced to a few hundred yards.

Boyd's inquiries during the ride had brought out no additional facts, and he had sunk back in a corner of the carriage, vainly racking his brain for some theory to fit the case. Seen in the dim light, his thin, clean-cut face looked white and austere, with his brows knit and his lips grimly drawn—not a face from which his companions derived any encouragement. They had found, moreover, that he was not in a mood to answer questions.

Suddenly, however, the carriage swerved toward the driveway entrance, and Boyd started up as if electrified. At the risk of being run over, a man had stepped nearly between the wheels of the moving vehicle, and glanced sharply into it, then hastened away.

Boyd had only a momentary look at the fellow's face. Seen through the mist and drizzle it was not inviting. It was a thin, haggard face; that of a man of fifty, with abnormally brilliant eyes and an expression of mingled eagerness and desperation. His chin was hidden by a scraggly brown beard, sadly in need of trimming.

"Good heavens!" Mrs. Seward nervously exclaimed. "What is the matter, Mr. Boyd?"

Boyd saw that neither woman had observed the man, who had appeared and vanished in an instant.

"I'll inform you later," he said quickly. "Do nothing more until you hear from me. I'll call or telephone this evening."

He did not wait for an answer. He had opened the door while speaking, and now sprang from the moving carriage and darted after the stranger, leaving both women dumb with amazement.

II.

It had taken Boyd only an instant to decide that he had less interest in Seward's letter for a time, than in the identity and motive of a man who would hazard the breaking of a leg in order to glance into a moving carriage. That the fellow had some strong incentive, that he might be a spy employed to watch Seward's residence or its inmates, that he possibly was informed of the latter's whereabouts, if not in some way responsible for his mysterious absence—these conjectures occurred to Boyd, and started him after the fellow.

Upon reaching the corner he discovered him on the opposite side of Fifth Avenue—a gaunt, raw-boned six-footer, with rounded shoulders, long arms and legs, clad in a suit of rusty brown, baggy at the knees, and obviously much the worse for wear. Such a figure could not but be somewhat conspicuous amid other pedestrians, and Boyd readily located him.

From under a black alpine hat the man was gazing over at the lighted windows of the Seward home, at the same time moving quickly down the avenue with long strides and a curious, ambling gait that accentuated his almost grotesque appearance.

Boyd followed him without crossing the street, taking care that his espionage should not be suspected. Before fifty yards had been covered, however, he discovered that the man was exceedingly cautious. He was seeking the darker portions of the sidewalk and avoiding the glare of every street-lamp. His restless eyes were constantly alert, casting swift glances in every direction. He began to hurry, moreover, after leaving Seward's residence behind, and now appeared bent upon safely reaching some point for which he was heading.

With some little difficulty, for the man's vigilance did not relax for a moment, Boyd followed him undetected to a cheap East Side lodging-house, in front of which the fellow briefly paused, glancing sharply in each direction, then bounded up the stone steps and entered. From an opposite doorway Boyd saw

that he did not use a key. A few moments later a light appeared in a front room on the third floor.

"Gone to his room. I reckon it's up to me to pay the rascal a visit."

Boyd demurred only for a moment, then crossed the street and quietly entered the house. A sputtering gas-jet lighted the narrow, deserted entry. The air was impregnated with the scent of cooking cabbage. Quietly climbing the bare stairs, Boyd reached the third floor and peered into a front room, the door of which was ajar. A man's hat was lying on a bed, but the owner of it was not to be seen.

Boyd stepped into the room, leaving the door as he had found it, and glanced sharply around. It was a cheaply furnished room of moderate size, with no door except that through which he had entered. The only object worthy of his attention was a strong, iron-bound trunk, which he hastened to examine, finding it locked and in no way marked with its owner's name. While he was thus engaged, however, a few hurried steps fell on the bare floor of the entry, and the gaunt six-footer rushed into the room.

Boyd started up from the trunk and turned to meet him. Then he saw that a wonderful change had come over the man. His gaunt face turned fierce and desperate. The spirit of one ready for bloodshed leaped up in his startled eyes. Quick as a flash, despite his awkward build and bearing, he closed the door and leaned his narrow shoulders against it. In the tenth part of a second Boyd found himself gazing into the mouth of a leveled revolver, which the man had snatched from his coat pocket.

"Don't move!" he cried, with his jaw fiercely twitching. "I've got the drop on you this time! If you stir a finger I'll shoot you like a dog!"

Boyd felt no great alarm when the shot was withheld. He saw that the man was intensely excited; that he was trembling violently; that he was listening even while he threatened, as if in fear that confederates of the intruder were in the adjoining entry. A more eccentric-looking fellow, even in his threatening ferocity, Boyd had never seen.

"Put down that gun," he coolly commanded, while he discreetly refrained from moving. "You have no occasion to do any shooting."

"Haven't, eh? What are you doing here?"

"I came in only to ask you a question. It's no fault of mine that you were absent."

"That's a likely story. You were at my trunk——"

"Only to see if your name was on it," Boyd curtly interrupted. "I've a fancy to know who you are."

"You're a thief——"

"You're wrong again, sir. I'm a detective."

Though the glare of desperation and suspicion lingered in the man's frowning eyes, his countenance lighted perceptibly and his weapon began to droop.

"A detective—how am I to know that?" he demanded.

"Call in a policeman and have him vouch for me," Boyd dryly suggested. "If you are not the rascal I've been led to suspect, you have no occasion to fear me."

"I'm not so sure of it. If you'd been up against what I have for six months you'd trust no man."

"Do you mean that you've been in danger?"

"Never out of danger. I've been dogged by spies half-around the world. I've been knocked out twice and left for dead. Yet I'm still alive and kicking, and ready to blow your head off if you're in with the infernal rascals."

"Well, well, this sheds a new light on your recent actions," Boyd replied, with a laugh. "I begin to think that I, too, am in error. At least, my man, I'm not in with any gang bent upon harming you, take my word for that."

"I'm done taking the word of any stranger," declared the other, with an emphatic wag of his unsteady head. "What do you mean by speaking of my actions? Why did you think me a rascal?"

"Only because your conduct this evening invited suspicion."

"How was that?"

"You've been watching a house in Fifth Avenue whose owner is mysteriously missing. I saw you take some little risk in order to glance into his carriage, in which I was seated at the time, and I sprang out and followed you here. I have been employed to locate the missing man, if possible, and your actions led me to suspect you of——"

"Oh, that's the way the wind sets, is it? You mean the house of Mr. Amory Seward?"

"I do."

"And his carriage?"

"Yes."

"Don't you know where he is?"

"I do not. Do you?"

"No. I'd give a good deal if I did. I've been looking only for him—and dodging rascals who are looking for me."

"Persons you stand in fear of, eh?"

"I've mighty good reason to fear them."

"Well, well, it appears obvious that we've mistaken one another's motives this evening," Boyd now declared, with genial frankness. "Put up that gun, my friend, and let's come to an understanding. I have been employed both by Mrs. Seward and the secretary of war, in Washington, to locate Mr. Seward, who has been missing since last Wednesday. Here is my badge, and here are half a dozen letters bearing my name and address. If these are not sufficient to convince you of my identity, I will send for persons who will——"

"Felix Boyd, eh?"

"That's my name."

"Ever heard of Lemuel Pope?"

"I think there is an inventor named——"

"That's right! Lemuel Pope, inventor! Behold him!"

Boyd burst out laughing. He saw that he had won the man's confidence, for the weapon had been thrust into his pocket; yet the gingerly caution with which he first had studied Boyd's letters, the grin that finally displaced the look of distrust and apprehension on his gaunt face, the air with which he had announced his own name, drawing up his tall, lank, ill-clad figure to its full height—in these there was something so irresistibly ludicrous that Boyd could not contain his amusement.

"I don't look like a crackerjack, do I?" Pope croaked and chuckled, not in the least put out. "Well, well, Mr. Boyd, gold and genius don't always trot in company. Talent and business tact seldom dwell in the same house. I'm as poor as a church mouse; as near low tide as I look——"

"Pardon me, Mr. Pope." Boyd instantly turned grave. "I would not for the world appear to make light of your——"

"Tommyrot! Don't mention it. I'm used to it," Pope glibly interrupted, with a wave of his long arms. "Oh, I can loosen up all right, Mr. Boyd, now that you've set yourself right and eased my fears. I can spin my little yarn for you at a canter; and you'll not find it uninteresting. It'll explain my doings to-night, sir, and——"

Boyd checked him with a smile and gesture.

"Let's get at it without delay, Mr. Pope," he suggested, drawing up a chair to the table. "I have other important business this evening bearing upon the case I have mentioned, yet before leaving I would like to hear your story. Possibly I can be of some service to you."

"That's a right good spirit, Mr. Boyd. Put it there, sir. Mebbe you can." Pope thrust out a hand as lank and bony as that of a skeleton, and Boyd shook it warmly.

"Who are the persons having designs upon you?"

"Three Russian spies, Mr. Boyd, who were set on my track by army officers who served in Korea during the recent war with Japan. One is named Zuboff, another Ivan Malovitch; but the name of the third I have not been able to learn. They have employed other rascals, however, in their repeated attempts to turn me down and rob me of the plans and models of an invention I have perfected. The cost of their construc-

tion left me penniless, Mr. Boyd, and, despite the dangers by which I have been menaced, I was resolved not to destroy them. They now are in that trunk, which I have guarded for months, watching it almost constantly with a gun in each coat pocket——"

"What is the invention?" Boyd interrupted.

"Hush! Not too loud. I'll tell you." Pope spread himself over the table and made his disclosures in suppressed whispers, with a mingling of confidence and caution that would have appeared ludicrous but for his intense earnestness. "My invention is a submarine torpedo, Mr. Boyd, one that will completely revolutionize naval warfare. Don't look incredulous. I'm not daffy, even if I appear to be. I know the worth of my invention. Its value to any of the great powers is beyond estimate. It will give the nation possessing it absolute protection against foreign battleships. I could sink a score of them in half a day with as many of my torpedoes. Don't smile, Mr. Boyd, for I know what I'm talking about. Tests have been made, and my models examined by experts, in whom I was led to confide by Mr. Anthony Blackmar, the American consul at Yokohama. He has helped me in this, and knows its vast value. If I hadn't been robbed of it, I could show you a letter he gave me to Amory Seward, who he said would jump at a chance to back me financially, and insure the sale of my invention to the American Government. I'm an American myself, Mr. Boyd, and am determined that no other nation shall profit by my discovery. It is all that I assert, all that I——"

"Hold your horses, Mr. Pope," Boyd again interrupted, for the man's tongue now had become as loose as his joints. "You are going too fast. Tell me your story more calmly, without rambling, for there may be details of greater importance than you suspect. Tell it connectedly from the beginning."

Pope dropped back in his chair and undertook to comply, but his narrative was punctuated with numerous digressions which he plainly could not omit, the whole evincing his remarkable eccentricity and his utter inability to grapple with any serious problem except along the lines of his own peculiar genius.

It appeared that he was in Japan and Korea during most of the Russo-Japanese War, and there had devised the remarkable invention mentioned. Having no means, he had confided his secret to the American consul at Yokohama, the Honorable Anthony Blackmar, and applied to him for advice and aid. After a careful investigation, including tests and the opinions of experts who could safely be trusted, Blackmar was so thoroughly convinced of the great value of the invention that he provided Pope with funds, instructing him to keep his discovery a secret, and hasten to New York with his plans and models, also giving him a letter to Amory Seward, a personal friend, of whose interest and influence Pope had been assured.

Despite the precautions taken to conceal the facts from the two powers then at war, the nature and exceeding value of the invention evidently became known to secret agents of the Russians, for before Pope had fairly begun his long journey he discovered that he was being followed by Russian spies. Despite his secret alarm and constant vigilance, moreover, he met with experiences that not only convinced him of the persistency and desperate determination of his pursuers, but also brought him to a state of nervousness bordering on distraction.

Twice before reaching Port Said attempts were made to rob him when ashore, the last nearly costing him his life; and his cabin on several occasions was secretly entered and searched. At Marseilles he succeeded in learning the names of two of the Russians, but had no proof of their designs, or that they had instigated the assaults upon him. Hoping to elude them he crossed France to Havre, intending to embark by steamer for New York; but there, also, another desperate attempt was made to rob him.

Again changing his plans, he made his way to Liverpool. He secured pas-

sage on a returning cattle-steamer, the best he could then afford, and believed he finally had eluded his followers. Purely by chance, however, on the very day she cleared he learned that all three of the Russians had embarked for New York the previous day on one of the fast liners, and would arrive there nearly two weeks before him.

Boyd checked him at this point of his narrative. It was encroaching upon his time. That he was deeply impressed by it, however, and now believed most of the statements of this eccentric genius, appeared in his own grave face and the intent expression of his eyes.

"You've made it plain enough for the present, Mr. Pope," he said. "I now can appreciate your caution on the street, and the threat with which you received me."

"Do you wonder at it?" cried Pope, parting the hair above one of his ears and displaying a scar that still glowed red and feverish. "I got that in Port Said. In Havre I fared but little better. If those ruffians now are in New York and on the watch for me, you bet I'm lying low until I can meet Amory Seward and land my trunk in the keeping of one I can trust. When he hears my story——"

"Why haven't you appealed to the police?" asked Boyd.

"Too much at stake," Pope tersely declared. "I'll not trust them."

"Yet you have confided in me."

"Only because you, also, are seeking Mr. Seward, and you had me where I must make an explanation. Your frankness impressed me favorably, and I decided to trust you."

"I think I may be able to help you," Boyd replied. "Are you willing to try me?"

"I reckon so. You look and talk on the level."

"When did you arrive in New York?"

"Last Thursday."

"Have you called at Seward's office?"

"Not by a long chalk! I reckoned the three Russians might be watching it, or some one in their employ, with a view to locating me again. So I took these lodgings and telephoned to Seward's office instead of going there. I was told that he was out of town, that it wasn't known when he would return. Since then I have ventured to watch his house each evening, hoping to see him there when he returns. It was for that I glanced into the carriage to-night when it entered his driveway. I dare not go to his office. I tell you, Mr. Boyd, I am up against desperate men. They know the value of my invention, and are determined to rob me. They would kill me without a scruple in order to secure——"

"Your plans and models—I have no doubt of it," Boyd interrupted. "Listen to me, Mr. Pope. I have a much better head for this sort of business than you have. Your nerves, moreover, are in no condition for you to properly tackle a threatening situation, as the bad judgment you already have used plainly indicates. I now suspect that your affair and mine are closely united, never mind for what reason. I wish you to follow my instructions for a day or two, however, if you are willing to do so."

"Will it be to my advantage?"

"Not to your disadvantage, I promise you."

"I'll chance it, Mr. Boyd. Say what you want."

"At present I want only to know where you were robbed of Blackmar's letter to Seward."

"In Havre."

"You think that Zuboff, or one of his confederates, secured it?"

"Yes, surely. I haven't a doubt of it."

"Nor have I," Boyd dryly declared, rising to go. "You lie low here until to-morrow, Mr. Pope, and leave your affair to me. I will land these Russians for you, take my word for that; and I'll locate Amory Seward at the same time. You shall hear from me before noon to-morrow."

III.

Jimmie Coleman, the Central Office man, found Felix Boyd with knit brows and a threatening gleam in his eyes upon entering Boyd's office in Union

Square at nine o'clock the following morning. He was reading a letter received in the morning mail, and he tossed it quickly to Coleman, remarking curtly:

"Read that, Jimmie, and see what you make of it."

The letter was from Amory Seward, postmarked in Philadelphia at twelve o'clock the previous night. It was addressed to Felix Boyd, stating only that his services might be required soon on an important case, and requesting that he would defer making other engagements; also that the writer would return to New York in the course of a week and arrange a personal interview.

"Humph!" Coleman returned the letter with a shrug and grunt. "That settles the matter, doesn't it?"

"Far from it, Jimmie. It only complicates it."

"How's that? You think it a forgery?"

"No. Seward wrote it; also the letter received by his wife. I established that fact late last evening."

"He's in Philadelphia, eh?"

"No. He's here in New York."

"Come out of the clouds," growled Coleman, frowning perplexedly. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I say, Jimmie," Boyd replied, with a convincing nod. "Seward wrote this letter, but he was forced to write. One of his abductors then took it to Philadelphia on the evening express, and dropped it into the mail in that city. It was done to throw me off the track; to convince me that Seward voluntarily is away on business."

"Abductors! Do you think he has been abducted?"

"I know that he has."

"But how can they have learned of your interest in the case? You were engaged on it only yesterday afternoon."

"That's just the point, Jimmie. Obviously, my interview with Mrs. Seward must have been overheard. There must be a spy in Seward's office; one bribed by the rascals responsible for his absence. In no other way could they have learned of my part in the case."

"Got any clue to their motive or identity?"

"Both."

"The deuce you have!"

"Could you learn anything about his movements last Wednesday evening?"

"Not a thing, Felix."

"I'll tell you what I learned," said Boyd, with a dry laugh.

The Central Office man listened, stared amazedly at times, and finally cried with a growl when Boyd concluded:

"Well, by thunder! You must have run up against a curious freak. If what he told you is true, it looks as if the Russians who are after his pelt now have Amory Seward in their clutches."

"In my opinion, Jimmie, that hits the nail on the head," replied Boyd. "I'm inclined to believe most of Pope's remarkable story. That he's a rattle-brained genius, with all the idiosyncrasies of one, as well as an utter lack of practical common sense occasionally seen in such characters, was painfully obvious."

"I should judge so."

"I am convinced that he has an invention of great value, however, or Russian spies would not have dogged him half-around the world to steal it; nor would Blackmar have become so interested in it. It's odds that Blackmar already has written to the secretary of war about it, which accounts for his anxiety to communicate with Seward."

"I reckon you're right," Coleman assented. "There are too many out after his blooming invention for it to have any insignificant value. Yet I fail to see why these Russians have abducted Seward, as you suspect, since he at present knows nothing about——"

"Pshaw!" Boyd quickly interrupted. "It's as plain as the nose on your face. They robbed Pope of Blackmar's letter to Seward, which informed them of this cranky inventor's intentions and destination. In all probability, Jimmie, they afterward lost track of him. They then rushed to New York, and have contrived to abduct Seward, whom they now are holding prisoner, thus aiming to discover Pope again and accomplish

their designs. The two letters from Seward, neither of which is entirely consistent, plainly show that he is in the hands of rascals who forced him to write them, with a view to heading off an investigation until they can find Pope and contrive to rob him."

"The Russian spies?"

"With others employed to aid them—I have not a doubt of it," Boyd declared. "In this case, Jimmie, you have my deductions in advance of the work to be done. It now is up to us to accomplish something. I want those three Russians in irons before sunset. Come with me. First of all, we'll learn who has turned crook in Amory Seward's office. We may force him to reveal the hiding-place of the rascals."

His hurried movements, his frowning eyes, the threatening ring in his low voice — these now displayed Boyd's eagerness, his determination, his faith in his various deductions. That he had measured the case correctly and now had it well in hand he had not a doubt. Upon arriving in Seward's private office, where he found Mr. Radford, he at once demanded, with characteristic bluntness:

"Whom have you got here, Radford, that is not trustworthy?"

"Not trustworthy!" Radford stared with surprise.

"Who is capable of accepting a bribe? One who would betray Seward into the hands of——"

"Not a person; not one, Mr. Boyd! There's not a clerk employed here who would deceive Mr. Seward, or in any way injure him. He's beloved by one and all, and——"

"Nonsense!" Boyd curtly interrupted. "I've no doubt you think so, Radford, but you are mistaken. Seward has been abducted. His abductors have learned, moreover, that I have been employed to find him. They can have done so only through some person in this office; some dishonest clerk who overheard my interview with Mrs. Seward yesterday afternoon, and who has been bribed to inform—oh, by Jove, hold on a bit! I'll take it all back!"

With a toss of his head while he so forcibly declared himself, Boyd's upturned glance met the arched ceiling previously described, and the myriad of translucent lenses through which the morning sunlight then was shed. His countenance changed like a flash. Without waiting to make further apologies to Radford, he turned abruptly to Coleman, and cried:

"I'm wrong, Jimmie. The spy was not here, but above. Come with me, old man. I'll wager now that I'm on the track of the rascals."

Coleman followed in some amazement, despite that he was familiar with Boyd's peculiar methods and the startling moves that he frequently made. Without another word Boyd dashed out of the office and up a flight of stairs, then hastened to a window of the second-floor corridor, from which he could look down on the roof above Seward's office.

"Ah, here we have it!" he cried. "Don't display too much interest, Jimmie. There may be watchful eyes in some window of the opposite wing. Note the roof just below us. That's where the spy was last evening, take my word for it. Yes, by Jove! and there's the window from which he climbed down. Note on the bricks below it the marks left by his boots. The office now appears to be vacant, however. Can it be that the birds have flown?"

The roof mentioned extended over several ground-floor offices, located in a space left for light between two separate wings of the lofty building. The second-floor windows of the wing opposite that in which Boyd then was standing were not more than twenty feet away, with the slightly arched roof, studded with lenses, about five feet below them. On the bricks under the window of one of the opposite offices, Boyd's searching eyes had quickly discovered numerous long marks, such as might have been left by the boots of a man who had let himself down to the lensed roof, and afterward climbed back through the window.

Coleman now appreciated the significance of the discovery so shrewdly made, but before he could reply to

Boyd's remarks the latter quickly added:

"We'll see what that vacant office has to offer. This way, Jimmie. We can reach it by passing through the front part of the building."

He led the way while speaking, and they presently arrived in the corresponding corridor of the opposite wing. There they encountered one of the janitors, whom Boyd at once led to the door of the office mentioned.

"How long has this been vacant?" he inquired, after making himself known.

"Well, it's not exactly vacant," said the janitor. "It has been rented by parties who haven't moved in."

"How long ago?"

"About two weeks."

"Two weeks, eh?" cried Boyd, with a dry laugh. "Just about the time our quarry arrived, Jimmie. You've seen these new tenants, I suppose."

"Yes, sure," the janitor nodded.

"How many?"

"I have seen three at odd times."

"What style of men?"

"Two are dark, bearded fellows, who appear to be foreigners. The third, who always comes with one of the others, is a smooth-faced man, evidently an American. He does most of the talking."

"Some local crook, Jimmie, who has been employed to aid them."

"They paid a month in advance, but said they might not move in for a week or two," the janitor continued. "They're waiting for furniture that's coming from the West. They've got an old desk and some chairs in there, and two of them have been dropping in late in the afternoon to do a little writing, they say. They are never here mornings——"

"That's enough," Boyd tersely interrupted. "Got a key that opens the door?"

"Yes."

"Open it for me."

Followed by his companions, Boyd quickly entered the office. It contained only two chairs and an old desk, in which there was not so much as a scrap of paper. Opening one of the windows, Boyd glanced at the bricks below it, on which, upon closer inspection, the numerous marks previously mentioned were plainly visible.

"One of the rascals has been down to the roof each afternoon, Jimmie, as soon as it came dark. It was easier than watching for Pope on the street, which they probably have done while daylight lasted. These are short days, you know. No chance to miss him here, Jimmie, if he called, which they might have done on the street after dark. They rented this office for no other purpose than to peer down into——"

"But those lenses are not transparent, Felix," growled Coleman. "It would be impossible to see through——"

"Stop a bit, Jimmie."

Boyd climbed over the sill while speaking, then let himself down to the lensed roof. For several moments he moved about on his hands and knees, studying one circular piece of glass after another until he had covered several square feet. Finally he discovered one held in its place only by some soft putty, which he easily removed with his knife. Then he pried out the lens, and peered down through the small circular hole that was left—straight down into Amory Seward's private office!

"That's all there was to it, Jimmie," he cried, glancing over his shoulder and holding up the piece of glass. "He could both see and hear. No wonder, Jimmie, that I received a letter in the morning mail."

"You've called the turn, Felix, for a fact," said Coleman, with hearty approval. "But what's the next step? The rascals may become shy, and possibly will not show up here again."

Felix Boyd did not reply until after he had replaced the lens and putty and clambered back into the vacant office. Then he cautioned the janitor to say nothing about their visit, after which he turned to Coleman and said, with grim assurance:

"There's one way, Jimmie, by which we can land them—one sure way!"

"How is that, Felix?"

"Have Pope visit Seward's office a

little later. We will be on hand, and—ah, but you know the rest! Surely you know the rest!"

That Felix Boyd clearly foresaw it appeared later in the day. Just before dusk the tall, gaunt figure of Lemuel Pope appeared in Wall Street, heading with uncertain gaze and wobbly strides in the direction of Amory Seward's office.

There could be no mistaking such a man. There never was another face and figure like his; never a form on which garments hung so lax and loose, flapping with his every move like those of a bean-field scarecrow on a windy day. He could be seen from afar, like a lighthouse, and identified as readily.

This may account for the fact that, just as he arrived at the entrance of the proper building, an elderly, well-dressed man who was approaching through the corridor—a man with gray hair and beard—hastened up to him and cried, with manifest eagerness:

"Isn't your name Pope — Lemuel Pope?"

"Yes; sure." Pope turned and gazed.

"I thought I couldn't be mistaken," cried the other. "In a letter from Blackmar to me he describes you perfectly. My name is Amory Seward, and I judge you were about calling at my office."

"Yes, yes, I was!" Pope eagerly admitted, grinning broadly while his hand was warmly shaken. "You're just the man I want to see."

"I'm aware of it, Mr. Pope, perfectly. I returned to town only this morning. The letter to me from Blackmar has told me all about you; all about your wonderful—but we'd better discuss that under cover. I'm sorry I cannot go to my office with you, but I have a brief engagement outside. If you will come with me, however, I will detain you only briefly, and we then will go to my residence. There we may discuss your affairs at our leisure."

It is needless to say that Pope readily complied.

As they moved away together in the falling dusk other figures moved after them; plain-clothes men who followed singly or in couples, mingling with the throng of pedestrians in the several streets through which they passed—until Pope and his companion disappeared into a faded brick dwelling in the Russian quarter.

There was very little to it after that—only the stealing of men to the rear of the house, the shrill sound of a whistle on the deeper gloom of the evening, the noise of doors violently opened, the rush of many feet through entries and over stairs, the hoarse cries of alarm from men unexpectedly cornered—mingled with that of one unexpectedly rescued.

"Quick work, Jimmie, so it was," Felix Boyd admitted, as they sauntered up-town an hour after the raid. "As you already know, however, the case was exceedingly simple after I heard Pope's remarkable story. A curious fellow, that. The simplicity of genius, Jimmie."

"I should say as much," commented Coleman.

"Ah, well, I reckon that Seward now will look after his interests, since there is so much to be gained. He tells me that he was approached after leaving his office last Wednesday evening by one of the scamps we've just taken in. Pretending to be Pope, the rascal showed him Blackmar's letter, and prevailed upon him to go to the house in which the Russians were located, stating that the plans and models were there, and that he must take them to Washington the following morning. Seward consented to go, thinking there could be no delay in the matter, and he telephoned home that he should be engaged most of the evening."

"Ah, that explains how it was done."

"Yes, and that settled it, Jimmie," Boyd dryly added. "Upon arriving at the house he was promptly overcome, and afterward compelled to write the letters received by his wife and myself. You know what I deduced from them. 'Twas a curious case, in a way, take it all in all. Luckily we've landed the rascals, however, and they now must pay the price. Let's go to dinner, Jimmie."

A Chat With You

A MONTH ago we asked you to write to us and tell us which stories in THE POPULAR pleased you most. We had several reasons for wanting special information on this subject. We wanted to find out if there were many people who bought the magazine for one class of stories alone and did not read the others. As near as we can ascertain from the hundreds of letters which we have received on the subject there are not. We are glad of this. In the first place we want you to get your money's worth, brim full and running over, in every number that you buy. We want each purchaser to read the whole issue through from cover to cover, and to enjoy it all. We owe it to you to give you this kind of a magazine, and we have another reason for wishing to do so on our own account. The more thoroughly read a magazine is, the longer its purchaser carries it with him, the more people he lends it to, the better it is for the man who advertises in that magazine. We knew that there were three hundred and fifty odd thousand people who read THE POPULAR, but we did not know how many read it through from cover to cover.

* * *

THE small boy who was asked to name his favorite breakfast food began by naming roast turkey and ice-cream, going through a list which included practically all the edibles to be procured in this country, not omitting such delicacies as Roman punch and pumpkin pie. A good many of the readers of THE POPULAR are in somewhat of the same frame of mind in regard to their favorite stories. For instance, C. C. Britten, of Seward, Pennsylvania, writes:

Noting your several requests for expressions of opinion as to the merits of the stories published in THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, allow me to say, first, that I ride nine miles each month to get it; and second, that in my judgment—but, really, they are all so entertaining that to particularize would be an invidious comparison.

There are several hundred others who say the same thing as Mr. Britten, in slightly different words. Then there are a great many who send lists of their favorite stories. These lists almost without exception include about everything in the magazine. Mrs. Mabel W. R. Brown sums up the situation for the great majority of our readers. She says:

You ask which one particular story we most like among the many good ones every month. I reply, that I do not know how to answer you except in saying that if I had eaten a perfect dinner I should hardly think of saying what dish in it was the best, because every part of it was a part of a perfect whole.

E. W. Ford, Secretary to the General Superintendent of the Southern Railway Company, writes us a very interesting letter, which we have already an-

swered personally. We have not room to print the whole of it, but there was one paragraph in it which pleased us so much that we cannot help repeating it to you. It is this:

I have more confidence in what you say about what you will do than any other magazine publishers, because I have always found that you do what you say you will.

A reputation like that is something we are prouder of than the increase of fifty thousand circulation that we have made in the last few months. It's worth keeping, and if money, experience, determination, and hard work can do it, we are going to keep it for THE POPULAR. In the meantime, don't stop writing to us. The closer we keep in touch, the more real the intimacy between reader and editor, the better magazine we can build for you.

B. W. SINCLAIR is a writer whom we have been watching for some time with a great deal of interest. He is comparatively new to our readers, but we felt with the very first story he ever submitted that he had a future before him, and that he was going to write the kind of stories that you like to read. He has already justified our faith. You remember his novel, "The Lair of the Sun-dogs," which appeared a short time ago. You do not know as yet how good a story Mr. Sinclair is capable of writing. "Raw Gold," the complete novel which appears in the next issue of THE POPULAR, will open your eyes in this regard. It is a tale of the troopers of the Northwest Mounted Police, of a lost treasure, of stratagem and hard fighting, and of real heart interest.

LOOK out for the story entitled "The Dead One," which appears in next month's POPULAR. It is a story of a prize-fighter who lost his grip. It tells how he regained it and won his way to the top once more. It is written by A. M. Chisholm, who wrote "The Boss of the Bonnechere" in last month's magazine. Need we tell you that it is a rattling good story? Francis Whitlock, in "The Tribulations of Thomas Tinkler," tells of an American dry-goods clerk who tried to break into a Turkish harem. It is something new in the line of an adventure, and is worth waiting for.

THE Perfume of Madness" is a mystery story which will appear in the October POPULAR. It is written by J. K. Egerton, and is by all odds the best story he ever wrote. Many of you have been asking for more stories about "Norroy," diplomatic agent and adventurer. "An Alias From Burke's," which appears next month, is a complete novelette, and tells how "Norroy" had a finger in preventing a piece of Japanese diplomacy which threatened the United States.

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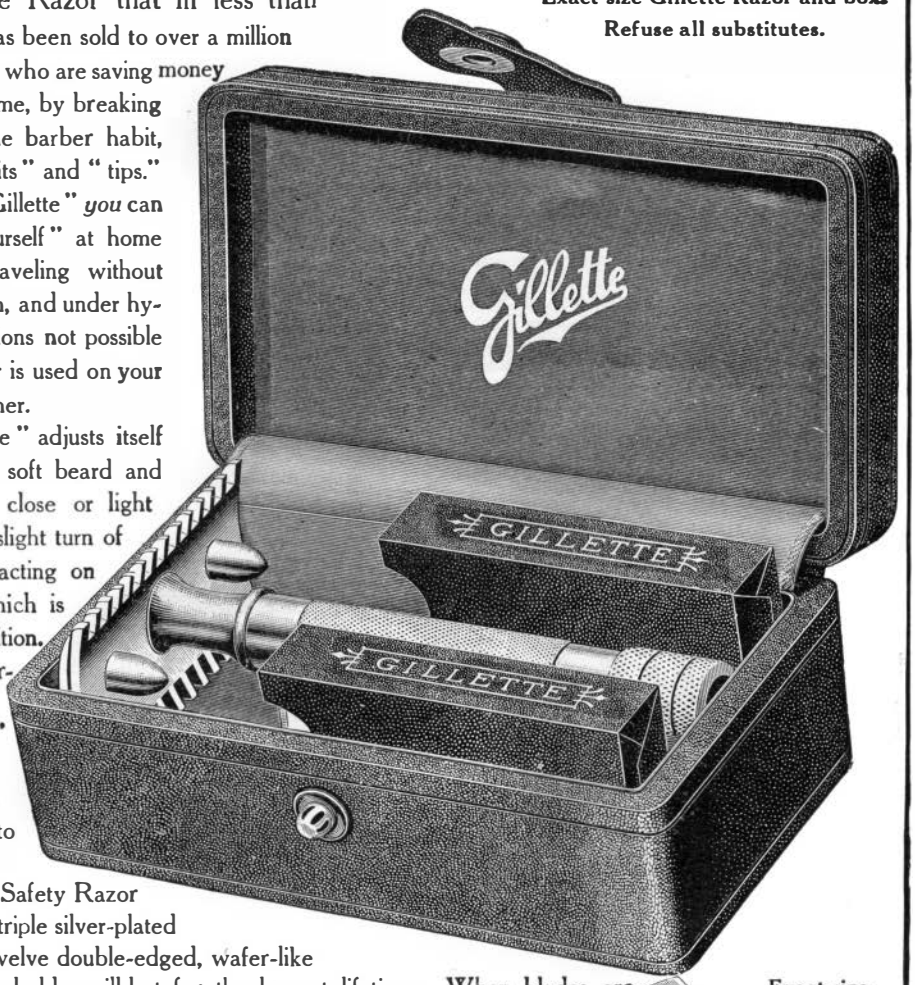

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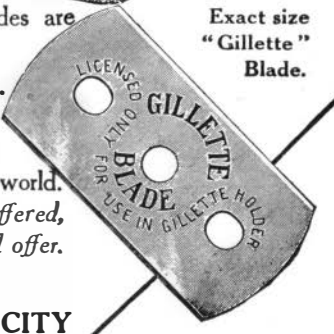

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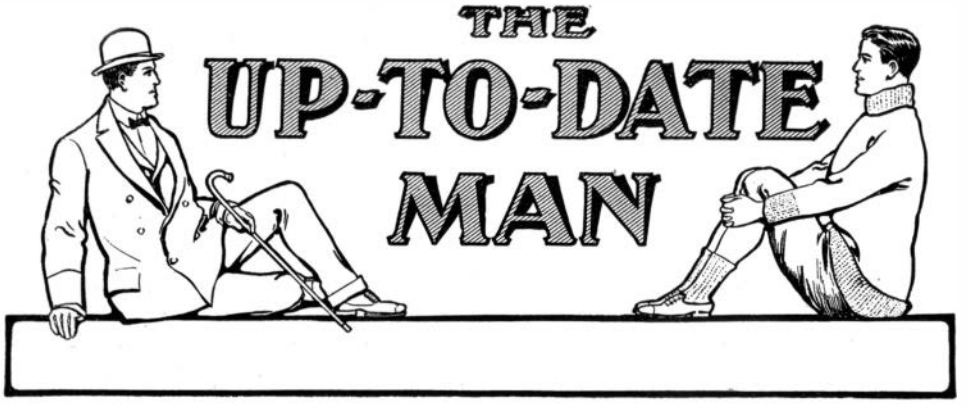
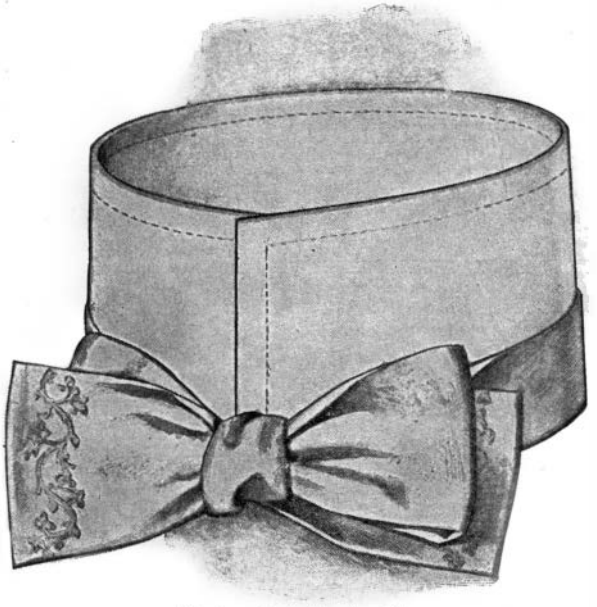


WITH autumn, most of us put aside the soft flannels, starchless shirts, and yielding straws so suggestive of field and links, and resume more urban dress. Day clothes grant a man much liberty in following his personal preferences, and the rules of good form are not sharply defined. Evening dress is different. Custom and tradition hedge it about with certain unbending restrictions, to depart from which stamps one as unversed in the polite usages, or heedless of them. Few men nowadays commit the atrocity of wearing a four-in-hand with the swallow-tail coat, but it is not uncommon to see a black tie accompanying it, or a white tie with a Tuxedo jacket. Again, many men wear a high silk or opera-hat with the Tuxedo, seemingly unconscious of the absurdity of trying to harmonize "long and short." But these sins against good taste are not a whit less offensive than those of the self-styled "dandy," who affects a velvet collar on his swallow-tail or a silk sash with his Tuxedo. The one doesn't know any better. The other fancies that he is setting the town a-flutter, when he is only setting it a-titter.

In no department of fashion are there fewer changes from season to season than in evening dress. The forms and fabrics are clearly prescribed by usage, and if there be any deviation, it must apply to incidentals, not essentials. The swallow-tail coat is still made of soft, unfinished worsted, either plain black or with pattern of faint hair-line stripes. The recent attempt to introduce evening suits of blue-black was not successful. This cloth, be it understood, is not blue, or even dark blue, but shades almost imperceptibly from blue to black. It originated in London, and, though taken up by our younger social set, has not won such general approval as to entitle it to be called a fashion. Rather is it a fad of the few.



The New Suk Evening Tie.

The correct swallow-tail coat for autumn reaches slightly below the bend of the knee, has skirts moderately wide at the bottom,

and a snug waist. The lapels are broad, very long and peaked, and extend with a soft roll to within three inches of the waist-line. The shawl collar is no longer in vogue. Facings of dull silk adorn the lapels, and the buttons down the front of the garment are cloth-covered. The collar may be silk or of the same cloth as the coat. The sleeves are cut wide over the wrist, and may be plain, welted, or finished with one, two, or

A "Smart" Tuxedo Waistcoat.

three buttons and buttonholes. Mock buttonholes are out of fashion.

A "smart" effect is obtained by having the facings of the coat lapels of very dark smoke-gray silk in a "shot" design. This lends an agreeable contrast between the cloth of the suit and the lapels. The trousers are cut full, to give ease in lounging and dancing, and are braided down the outer seams with one broad or two narrow stripes.

Many novel styles of white evening waistcoats have been introduced this season. Black, as I have often said, is no longer worn. The white waistcoat is usually made of cool linen, cotton, or silk, has three pearl buttons set closely together, and lapels resembling a V, U, or egg shape. Linen and cotton are launderable, but silk must be dry-cleaned. Besides the plain waistcoat-

ings, there is a sheaf of special fabrics, including *moiré* or watered silks, embroideries, and even leather. The leather garment is made of soft white kid to match the evening glove.

Perhaps the newest thing in the accessories of evening dress is the silk tie illustrated this month. Heretofore, linen and cotton materials have been used altogether. The silk tie is expensive, and the special merit claimed for it is that one can obtain in silk the precise white tint of the shirt, a thing not possible in cotton or linen fabrics. These are prone to shade to false tones, like cream or ivory, and thus there is a lack of harmony between the color of the shirt and the tie. Silk, however, by being boiled for many hours, takes on the exact hue of the shirt and collar.

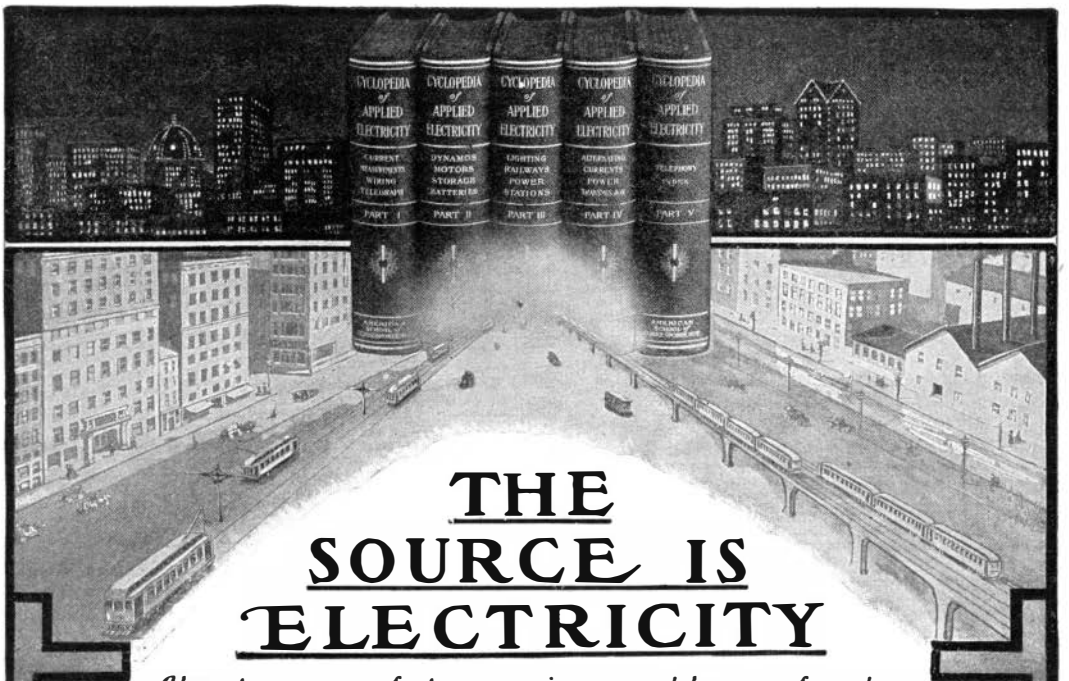
Patent leather pumps are in distinct favor to accompany evening dress. Unlike the old and somewhat shapeless paper-thin pumps with low heels, the modish pump is substantially made, and has heels as high as those on day shoes. They are not only worn for dancing, but also on the street. The ribbon over the instep may be the familiar flat bow or the more novel one, with a pinched-in-center and broad ends.

White buck or cape gloves are worn with evening clothes on the street. Indoors one wears white kid. Both gloves fasten with large pearl buttons, and sometimes they are stamped in gold with the initial of the wearer. On the newer gloves one again sees the heavy black silk embroidery which was in vogue many years ago.

The silk hat undergoes little, if any, change. Well-dressed men choose the shape that is most becoming to them, and wear it year after year, regardless of the mutations of the mode. Flat-brimmed silk hats are a French idea that a few young men favor, but most of us continue to indorse the English model with a rolled brim.

Either the white linen or the silk handkerchief is carried, the linen being preferred. It is embroidered in white with the initials of the owner. If one likes a silk handkerchief, it should be of fine Japanese pongee. The socks are plain black, or black embroidered with black or white side clocks.

BEAU NASH.



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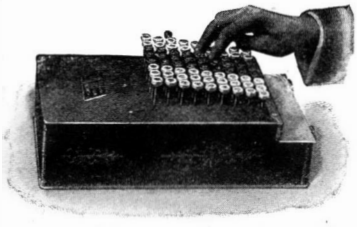

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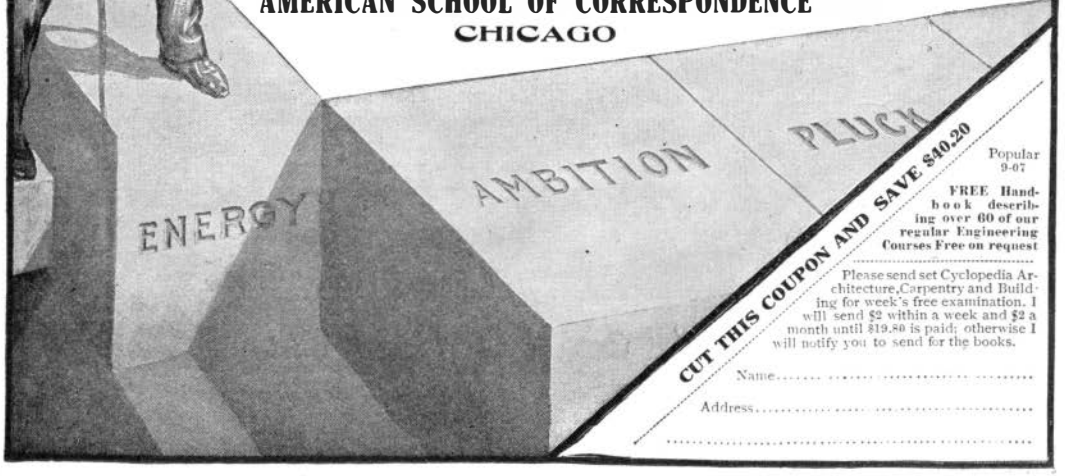

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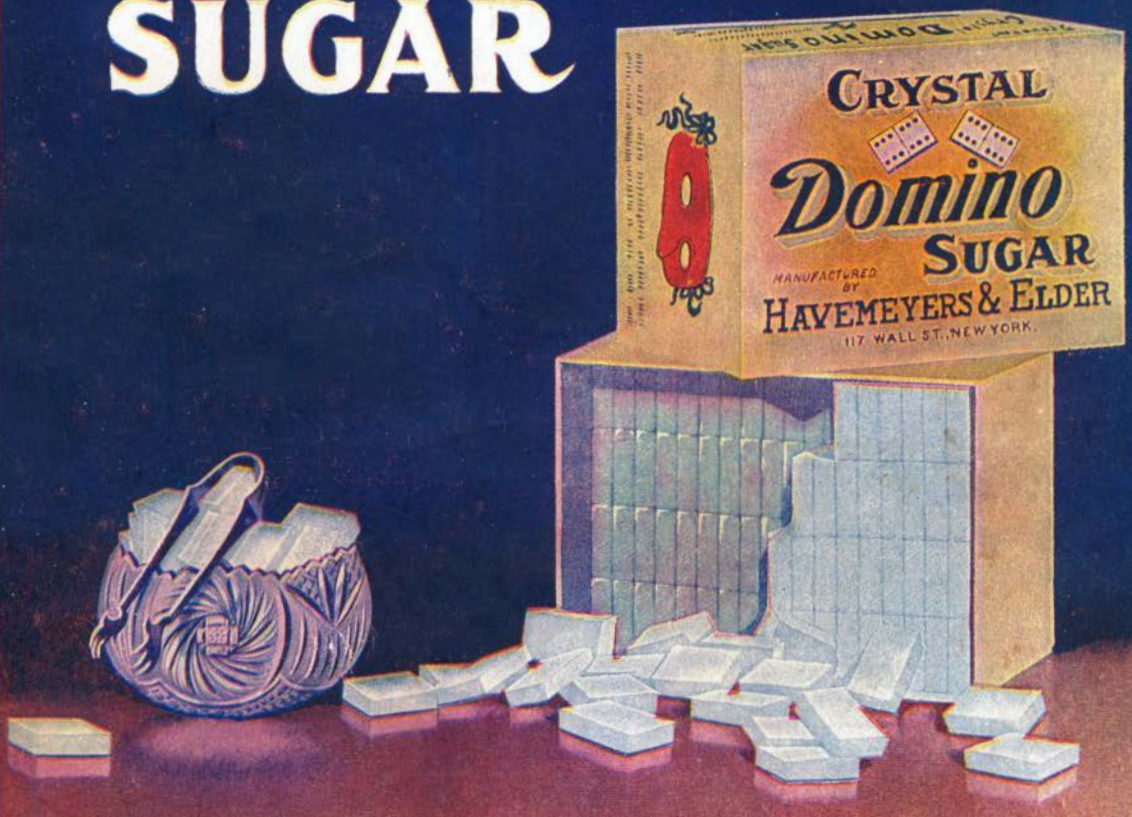

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