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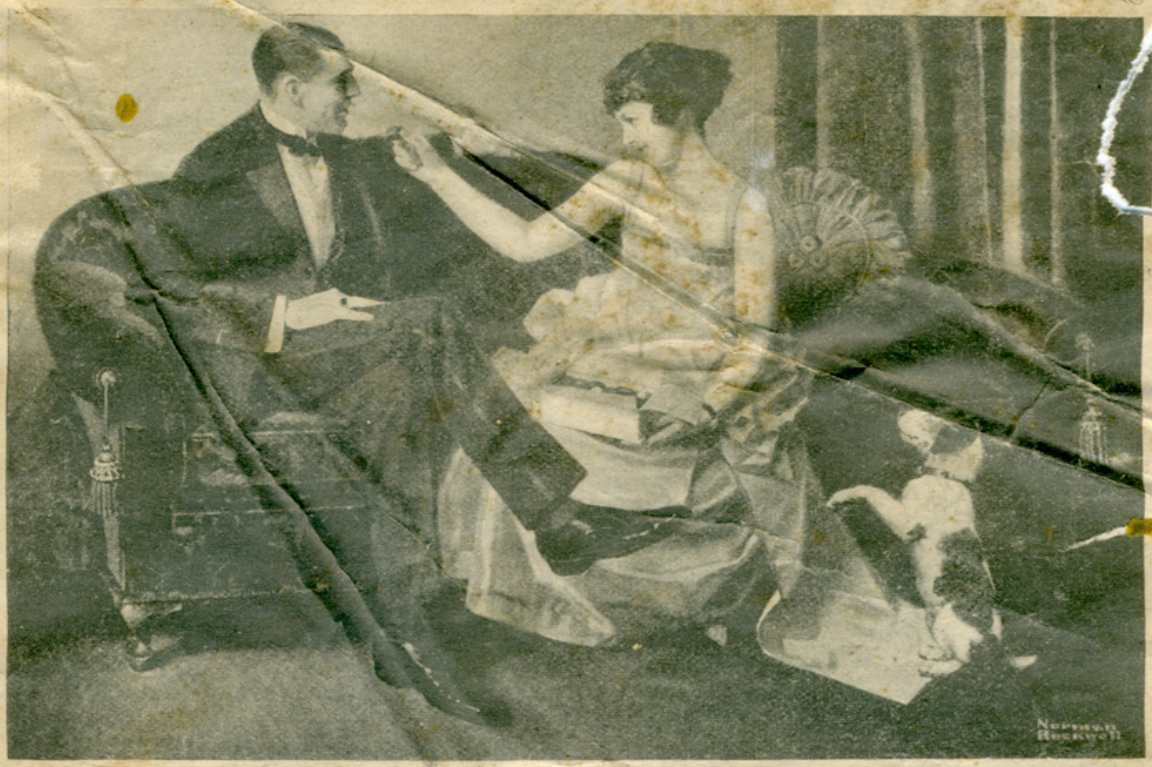

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ROMANCE CHOCOLATES

ADVENTURE
Mar. 30th, 1923

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Volume 39
Number 6

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"Home, Sweet Home"

The world's most famous song was written by John Howard Payne in a burst of homesickness for this—his boyhood home.

IN a dreamy old Long Island town—

stands a quaint cottage that has weathered the storms of nearly three centuries—the boyhood home of John Howard Payne.

Above the worn millstone step, the shining knocker on the door tells the story of the old house. On it are engraved the immortal words: "Home, Sweet Home."

No word except "Mother" grips the heart as does the word "Home", and the stranger in a strange land finds no real happiness until he makes that land his home—until he is a citizen of the country in which he lives.

There are 24,000,000 homes in America—

With the exception of the comparatively few belonging to the native Indian, every American home is the home of foreign born or the descendants of the foreign born.

There are 14,000,000 Foreign Born

now living in the United States, half of whom have not made this country Home. And by every boat, this number is being added to.

Canada's great chain of United Provinces—

has received, in the past twenty years, more than three million immigrants. With her wonderful resources, Canada is attracting yearly a greater and greater number of immigrants.

To help her new comers acquire the standards and the ideals of her noble national ancestry, the hope of the

Dominion like that of the United States, is to make her residents, citizens—to make them at Home.

A Clarion Call to Action!

Here's the red-blooded, stirring story of how *one* Pennsylvania town in *one* week by the white magic of friendship enriched the community a thousand-fold by making its aliens citizens.

Every Resident a Citizen—

was the battle cry, and every man and woman went in heart and soul to make everybody a Homebody.

The town had a population of 32,000. One third was foreign born or born of foreign parentage. 2,500 were aliens. A week was set aside in which to invite this alien 2,500 into partnership, without thought of partisanship. Enthusiasm took the town by storm. "What are *you* doing to help *your* neighbor become a citizen?" was the question asked from poster, pamphlet and newspaper.

Never was there Such a Getting Together—

except during the Great War. The mayor, county commissioner, postmaster, judges, newspaper publishers knew no party save the alien parties they wanted to help. The Y. M. C. A., Knights of Columbus, Salvation Army, and the pastors of thirty-one churches worked with one faith. The Rotary Club, Manufacturers' Association, and Real Estate Board were joined by the officers of fourteen Italian and Polish Societies in the One-for-all-and-All-for-One big purpose.

Not only were the advantages of citizenship explained and the advantages of helping to make a richer, better town, but every one desiring to become a citizen had a *neighbor* to go with him to court—to a court that knew no hour of adjournment, so long as an applicant for citizenship was to be heard.

As a result of the week's campaign about 1,000 of the 2,500 took the initial step towards full citizenship.

What this town did, every city and town can do.

What about your town?

What is it doing to make every resident a citizen—a better neighbor and a happier and more prosperous one? What is it doing to help the foreign born to make the *Land* and town of his adoption "Home, Sweet Home?"

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company has 20 million policy holders in the United States and Canada—one-sixth of the entire population. The twenty millions speak 25 different languages—thousands of them do not speak English—thousands of them are foreign born and not as yet citizens. Thousands whose families are still in Europe have no real homes on this side of the water.

In order to help its immigrant policy holders to become citizens, and to advise them about their *immigrant* relatives in Europe or on their way here, the Metropolitan maintains a bureau called the Immigrant Service and Citizenship Bureau.

If policy holders have relatives coming from Europe, they tell their Metropolitan agent—they don't have to leave their jobs to go to the port of entry—Metropolitan will greet the relatives and give what information may be needed.

Many grateful letters are received from reunited families—in numbers of cases the relatives have been saved painful anxiety and needless expense.

In the Pennsylvania town that campaigned to make every Resident a Citizen, the work was organized and led by the Metropolitan Immigrant Service and Citizenship Bureau. The Metropolitan offers the services of this Bureau to any town desiring to conduct a citizenship campaign.

The Company gives at all times definite information as to citizenship. Its booklets on how to become a citizen are written in plain, simple English. They may also be had in Italian, Polish, Yiddish, Hungarian and Bohemian.

The full story of the Every Resident a Citizen campaign is in pamphlet form and will be mailed free on request.

HALEY FISKE, *President*

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Contents for March 30th, 1923, Issue

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(*Continued from preceding page*)

ADRIFT with a cat and a dog and a hen-pecked skipper and his wife. "OH, ISABEL!" a novelette of the sea that reads funnier than it was, complete in the next issue. By Norman Springer.

WITH a murder mystery to be solved and the problem of a closed mine on their hands the lawful element of this Western country adopt drastic measures. "THE ETHICS OF A FIGHTER," a complete novel by John Joseph in the next issue.

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

Don't forget the dates of issue for *Adventure*—the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month

Adventure
March 30. 23
Vol. 39 No. 6

Yellow Head

A Complete Novelette by J. Allan Dunn

Author of "The Island," "Wild Justice," etc.

AS THE smart maid looked at him doubtfully and said that she would see whether her mistress was at home, Forster wondered whether he was making a fool of himself.

He had acted entirely upon impulse and with a purpose that had seemed eminently plain and proper when he left the ship. He wanted to see what kind of woman it was who had so effectually broken up the friendship between John Martin and himself and who was permitting and abetting Martin to take a trip upon which he would be gambling against Death with cogged dice in the skeleton hand of his grisly opponent.

Now, the friendship between men is deeper founded than that between women. It is lacking in the eccentric sex jealousies and the selfishness of the bond between a woman and a man. Male friends will share and sacrifice. A woman wishes to possess her man utterly and control his every mood and action. And, under the control of sex which, to man, is a mingling of physical attraction, pride, paternalism and protectiveness, he, for the time at least, utterly succumbs.

That John Martin was head over heels in love with Katherine Meade was as certain as the fact that his infatuation had estranged the affection existing between the two men for fifteen years. As schoolfellows first, born in the same New England village, later as shipmates, though Gideon Forster was first officer and Martin first assistant engineer. They had contrived to secure berths in the same Line and, later, in the same ship, serving together for six consecutive years aboard the *Marañon*, plying the

Pacific Coast trade as far north as Vancouver, as far south as Valparaiso.

Now they had quarreled. Forster had thrown up his job. Martin had always feared the possibility of Forster marrying, but he had hoped that such a marriage might be compatible with an extension of their friendship, soured as Forster declared Martin to be on the subject of women.

Martin's hair was still yellow and unruly at thirty. Martin was six feet to Forster's three inches short of the fathom. Forster was swart and clip-bearded, strong as an ox, almost mishapen with muscle, heavy of bone and steel of sinew. Martin was strong also but with the lithe strength of a natural athlete, wide of shoulder and narrow of hip, with the face of a Greek god. Women were always falling in love with Martin and it was only his voyaging and the check of Forster that had kept him from definite prolonged entanglements.

Doubtless Katherine Meade was in love with him. Doubtless Martin, in his desire to win the woman, had belittled the dangers of the quest which was to give him the means of worthily providing for her. Forster was giving her the benefit of the doubt. Martin had hinted something of this to his chum in his rhapsodies. And Forster, playing David to Martin's Jonathan, had fancied that he saw elements of unhappiness in the projected union and, most foolishly, had so suggested. Hence the quarrel.

Forster, anxious to be able to make amends, but with his doubts still assailing him, had taken his last two possible hours ashore before the *Marañon* almost ready for sea, demanded all his time. Martin was still making the ship his headquarters until his scant and none-too-well-received notice of quittance had expired.

"She'll not wed a sailorman, Gid," Martin had said. "She wants a man to be always a lover, to share all life with her, not the beggarly quota one has between trips. And she could never live on my pay. Gad, it would hardly pay her rent! She is a queen, Gid, and worthy to be treated as one. So I am going to make a queen of her."

"The Patate?"

"Of course. Half of it's yours, Gid, naturally. If you won't go with me I'll bring back your share with me."

"We agreed long ago, John, that the risk was too big for the returns. It is almost certain death to go up among the *Jivaros* without a big expedition. You and I are in direct line for promotion. The Patate gold is a will-o'-the-wisp."

"Then I'll go alone. You don't suppose a girl like her—" he took the framed photograph of the woman he loved and exhibited it to Forster—"is going to wait until I get a chief's pay and then be satisfied with it? She doesn't want to share me with a steamer berth, and I don't want to share her with anything less than my whole life."

"So you're risking it. Is she going to wait until you come back?"

"She's going to wait for six months. She's given me an option on her, the most beautiful girl in the world, for six months. If I don't come back then I shall never come back. I sha'n't want to. I shall have failed to make good. You're a cautious old raven, Gid! You don't know what love is."

Forster's brown face darkened.

"Perhaps I don't, John. But what I always imagined was the real article included giving for taking, a fifty-fifty proposition where happiness was the main object. It seems to me that, if a woman really loved a man, she would be content to share what he had for the sake of having him, rather than let him go out to find a fortune with a nine-to-one chance against finding it and a ninety-to-one against his ever getting back alive. But I suppose that article does not exist."

"You talk like a sour old maid. You don't suppose I have been stuffing her with tales of cannibals and head-hunters, do you, to make myself out a hero? Any more than I'm going to ask her to live on my pay and give up all her luxuries."

"What is she living on now, John?"

"She has some income. Not a great deal. But she lives simply enough. She had more and lost it in oil speculations."

Martin's voice was becoming acrimonious. The making of a triangle distorts the parallel in which two lines may have lain; it provides an apex and a thrusting angle. The slightest suggestion of disparagement roused Martin to a heat of which he was secretly surprized, though he let it rise.

"You're not going then?" he demanded.

"No, John."

"You needn't be afraid of my hogging it."

"I never dreamed of such a thing. I am trying to persuade you, as a friend, not to

go alone. We have talked this over before."

Martin dismissed this with a petulant wave of his hand.

"Oh, before——"

"But, if you do not come back after six months—I shall go in after you. I sha'n't wait that long. After three months."

"To be sure of your share?"

There was no avoiding the row that followed. Martin was bent upon it. Forster was a trifle piqued and carried things farther than his own best judgment. The woman had come between.

FORSTER looked about the room. If the woman lived simply, he decided, the word bore her own interpretation. The flat was in an expensive part of the town; the maid might not be a superfluity, but he had caught momentary sight of a white-suited Japanese disappearing at the end of the entrance hallway to the suite. The furnishings were distinctly luxurious, and there were many objects that, to his eyes, spoke of a habit of free spending. He felt ill at ease, vaguely troubled for his friend.

She took his breath away as she entered. The framed photograph had shown beauty of feature but had not suggested the radiance of the woman herself. Her gown was simple but, even to Forster's untutored eyes, it spelled exclusiveness and expense. She was a tall and slim brunette with skin like a gardenia, smooth and white and velvety. There was the merest flush of color on her cheeks, though her lips were the color of a geranium petal—a trifle full and a trifle selfish. Her dark eyes lustrous and larger than the ordinary beneath brows that were delicately penciled. The gardenia suggestion was heightened by a wave of perfume.

Forster was not without his experiences of women, nor his judgments. He strove to repress the one that came to him, that this woman was vain, selfish, luxury seeking. Not a mate for a sailor. A woman hard to be contented with the adulation of any one man beyond the indulgence of her momentary passion. Passion beyond doubt she had, but it was primarily exercised, he told himself, before he checked his appraisal, for her own pleasure.

She advanced with outstretched hand, a little doubtfully, bending her full gaze upon him. He felt its magnetic fascination as he watched the graceful movement of her superb figure. Such a woman might well be allured by Martin's magnificent manhood, but she would demand that he woo her with adequate gifts. Words and devotion were idle tribute to such a woman. Innocence she might hold, in a measure. In experience she was not lacking. There was no doubt that she adequately rated her charms.

"Forster?" she said, her accent questioning as she surveyed his shore serge, his seaman's hands, his tanned skin.

"John's friend."

"Oh. You must pardon me, I had got that name as Foster. It was stupid of me. John has spoken so much of you. He thinks such a lot of you. Won't you sit down? You have called to congratulate me? It was good of you. You are sailing soon?"

"Tomorrow. I want to congratulate both of you."

She looked doubtful at his measured tone and slightly pouted.

"John told me this morning that you are not going with him into Ecuador," she said. "He was quite disappointed."

"I am not going. I have been trying to persuade him not to go. I hope to get you to help me persuade him."

He was watching her narrowly, and he saw the flash that came into her eyes. Suspicion of him, anger at him.

"Why not? Do you not think me worth the adventure?" she asked with an effect of lightness.

"I think him worth more than the almost certain probability of death."

"Do you mind explaining just what you mean."

"That is what I came for. I have very little time. I can do it best by telling you a little story."

She settled her skirts impatiently, tapped a silver bell. The maid appeared.

"Bring cigars and cigarets, Celeste. May I offer you something to drink, Mr. Foster? I have some Scotch."

He was sure that the "Foster" was intentional, sure that there was enmity between them, that he had lacked tact and blundered. Sure now that he had come upon a fool's errand. This woman had intended in any case to break up the friendship between the two chums. Forster was not her sort—a plain, blunt sailorman.

He refused to smoke or drink—with an

apology. She lit a cigaret from a match held by her maid.

"I trust you do not disapprove," she asked.

Forster shook his head gravely.

"It is a short yarn enough—pardon me if I repeat what you have already heard—or I can make it so. John and I befriended a man at Guayaquil. He was being baited in a *café*. He was an old man and unable to protect himself and he had been badly handled while trying to peddle a tray of native cakes. He was what they call a *mestizo-montaña*, a mixed blood of a woman of the Mazenes, a mountain tribe, and a Spanish father. There was a smart row—we had to clean out the place pretty thoroughly after we took his part—and the poor —— was grateful. We got him into a hospital, but an old hernia had been broken and he lacked stamina to pull through. Got pneumonia in the end and died suddenly. I've an idea he was glad to go.

"He had been captured by the Jivaros, an unconquered tribe who live in the valley of the Patate River. They had allowed him to live because they believed him inhabited by a spirit. It seems a falling tree had once injured his head, too much sun had brought on a spell of craziness during which he wandered too far from the beaten trails and, after the Jivaros found him, when he got better, he had cleverness enough to ape insanity until he got a chance to run away. He got to the railroad at Ampato after a trip that would have killed a white man.

"His wife had gone off with another man, and he beat his way back to Guayaquil, to his relations, who kicked him out. Everybody kicked him. He was almost jellied from kicks in the café when John and I happened in.

"He told us of gold on the Patate River. There are rumors and some proofs of gold on a number of the northern tributaries of the Marañon, flowing down from the Ecuador Cordillera.

"The Patate, which is called by its common name, the Pastaza, below Agoyon Falls down to the Marañon, starts in the shadow of Cotopaxi. It is a wild stream, partly navigable, shallow toward the Marañon, but fed by snow streams and often a roaring flood. Particularly when the Tore cuts loose like a bull. A hard country to travel, aside from the Jivaros in the Valley and the savage Zaparos who live in the deep forests between the Pastaza and the Napo.

"But Lopuc told us of one of these tributaries where there were traces of ancient mining and the remains of an old bridge and a stone causeway with sun carvings in the cliffs. Built perhaps by the Incas or by the Quitus. There are lots of their remains scattered about."

Katherine Meade delicately but pointedly checked a yawn.

"I suppose John has told you of this," went on Forster. "Anyway, old Lopuc told us a straight enough yarn, aside from his swearing to it on the crucifix. He had seen the spot with his own eyes and mined some nuggets which the Jivaros took away from him. Even the Incas could not conquer them, they say. We made a map, which was hardly needed, for the directions are simple enough.

"But the way lies through an almost impenetrable jungle. The heat, the fevers and the insects are hard obstacles, and there are fierce pumas and jaguars who are housekittens compared to the Jivaros and wandering Zaparos. The last are Digger Indians, filthy and sullen. The Jivaros occasionally make villages and hoe plantations, but they are murderous and reputed cannibals. One thing is certain, that every interloper's head is to be regarded as a trophy, to be boned and smoked down to the size of a baseball. A white man's head is at a premium. One of their poisoned arrows is a mercy compared to being captured alive—their preference—and a preliminary to torture. Without doubt there is gold on the Patate or its tributaries. When the Jivaros condescend to look for it they trade it for rifles and ammunition. Little of it has ever come out and every ounce of it has cost the mutilation, the savage end of a man.

"The prospect of a fortune usually minimizes its dangers. But John and I agreed long ago that to go after this gold was a game not worth a tallow candle."

"You would be afraid to go alone?"

"Yes. Or together."

She crushed out the end of her cigaret and regarded him curiously.

"And you want me to advise John not to go."

"That was my idea in coming to see you."

He saw the utter futility of it in her face and rose as she got up.

"You would not go if I asked you to. If you were John Martin?"

Beyond a doubt she was exerting her entire powers of fascination upon him, bent upon swaying him, her eyes soft, promising, alluring. Forster felt the effect of her personality as he might have the inhalation of a gas. His head swam slightly. For a moment he saw in her only a woman supremely beautiful, offering the suggestion of unutterable things. His own eyes hardened as he shook off the spell.

"If a woman wanted me to go there as the price for marrying her, I could not believe she loved me."

Her voluptuousness vanished, the languor died in her eyes, changing to feline cruelty. Color blazed out on her cheeks, eclipsing the artfully applied rouge, and Forster knew certainly that he had more than failed.

"John would," she said witheringly. "That is one of the differences between you. He would rather chance his life to make a fortune, as many men have, than ask me to live on the pay of a ship's engineer and drag out a cheap existence in port between the voyages. He thinks the gain worth the risk. He looks beyond the gold. He is not the first man to brave death for the sake of providing a woman with comfort and lifting himself out of a life of small pay and scant leisure.

"I have not the slightest intention of marrying either a poor man or a coward, Mr. Forster."

The words stung, as they were intended to. The useless interview was at an end. Forster bitterly perceived that he had only aggravated matters and, not only failed to do anything to win his friend from a desperate and dangerous enterprise, but increased the breach between them. It was plain that the woman intended to report the conversation to Martin, colored to suit her own ends. Her eyes flashed and her fine nostrils quivered with a rage and scorn that was evidently not assumed. Without doubt, from her own standpoint, she regarded Forster merely as a man who would block her way to wealth and, as she esteemed it, happiness.

On his part, while masking his choler, Forster set her down as an adventuress, an exploiter of men. If the handsome John Martin returned bringing a fortune, she might marry him. If he failed she would use her charms upon others, seeking only the sheer gratification of the flesh, the longing for servile admiration, the flash of jewels, the delights of fine clothes and sybaritic surroundings to enhance her beauty and contribute to her own indulgence. A sorry partner for John Martin's simple manliness and belief in the inherent goodness of women.

Something of this showed in Forster's manner and in his glance as he bowed and secured his hat. She did not return his salutation, send for the maid nor do anything but ignore him as he left.

BURNING with his own impotence, Forster still planned desperately how to achieve one last and successful effort to preserve his friend from the trip and, if possible, from the lure of this woman, even if he had to forfeit friendship. That she would drop Martin as she would a match burning her daintily cared for finger if he proved unsuccessful, was certain. Martin might come out, forced to retreat by the jungle and its wild beasts of men and animals, might return broken in health and spirit. What there was left to crush would be annihilated by Katherine Meade.

Forster cudgeled his brains how to spare his friend such contingencies. But the fates were against him. As he walked down hill from the flat toward the cable-car that would transfer him to Market Street, and so to the waterfront, he was astounded and chagrined to see Martin approaching at a brisk walk. He had heard Martin say earlier in the day that he expected to visit friends in Oakland that afternoon to bid them good-by. He had been undecided whether to purchase equipment in San Francisco or Guayaquil. If the latter he would take trip on the *Marañon* as passenger and farewells were in order.

There was no avoiding the meeting. Martin came on rapidly, scowling at sight of Forster, blocking the latter's path deliberately, though Forster made no attempt to pass.

"I'll trouble you, Forster, to avoid interfering in my affairs. Unless you choose to deny that you have just left Katherine Meade."

Forster stood with troubled face. Martin's fists were clenched. He was possessed by a passion for the woman that, like some subtle chemical, had changed the

clear fluid of his friendship toward Forster to a bitter, explosive acid.

The block where they stood was deserted. Forster nodded.

"I'm sorry," he began.

"Sorry!" Martin's face was convulsed. "—— you!"

He launched a blow at his friend, straight for the jaw. Forster flung up his arm and Martin's fist grazed his cheek, hard enough to bring a crimson flush that slowly turned to a bruise. Forster made no direct attempt to return the attack.

Involuntarily his muscles swelled and hardened and his body tensed for fight but, with a powerful effort of will, he restrained his rage. The struggle for composure showed on his face and the quick fury in his eyes changed to an infinite sorrow before which Martin blanched, muttering something as Forster stood aside and Martin passed on, striding with head high toward the flat while Forster, with his chin on his breast, went down the hill.

It was all over, the close intimacies of fifteen years, the sharing of ambitions, the discussion of plans, of their work, the laughter and the frank pleasure of each other's company. Broken like a piece of pottery never to be replaced entire, save that Forster was to put together some of the broken shards and use them for a measure in which to store the love that had been slowly distilled and could not perish. Later, he hoped, Martin himself would do the same, and the mended vessel might yet hold the wine of amity. This thing that had happened to his friend was an enchantment, Vivien spell. There would come a change—he prayed it would not be when all was too late.

Sometime between night and morning—knowing well Forster's hours of duty and avoiding them—Martin came aboard and removed his belongings. He had refused to sail on the same steamer. With the chief engineer he left an envelop containing the original map and a short notation on its back.

"I shall not forget that half of the gold belongs to you."

Forster forgot the slight, glad that Martin had not returned certain gifts that he had made him. Now Martin could not sail for seventeen days, until the next steamer. That would see his trip starting, providing he had secured, equipment and what *mestyos* and *cholos* he needed for carriers, guides and machete-man—at about the end of July, well into the *verano* or Summer season which would last until December, broken only by the *inviernillo*, or little Winter, occurring after the September equinox, the best time for travel, the best chances for a comparatively uninterrupted climate, though he would have to pass through several changes with the altitudes; and storms in the Cordilleras were intermittent throughout the year.

Doubtless Martin planned to return about Christmas with his gold for a holiday gift, to claim his bride. The thought of the woman marrying him sickened Forster. He believed her to be purely a fortune-hunter, a twentieth century siren, as soulless as Kipling's vampire.

He could not now be certain of the route Martin would select. They had often discussed the two possibilities, even after they had concluded that the trip was not feasible. One might take the railroad from Guayaquil to Ampato, not far from the source of the Patate—or Pastaza—and thence fight their way by native trade-trails or through the sheer jungle, crossing torrents by the bridges of agave fiber, either carried across in a basket, *taravita* fashion, or precariously attempting the *chumba-chacas*, perilous suspension bridges formed of two fiber ropes slatted with a few slats of rattan, calling for simian agility and gymnastics. So they might reach the *Patate* and expect the desertion of their bearers, who would never brave the invasion of the Jivaro settlements for any consideration.

Little or nothing was known of the actual country they must traverse, though they had read and inquired diligently enough, fascinated by the adventure they had agreed to abandon. Scientists confirmed the legend of ancient causeways stretching through the wilds, built of great stones, with bridges buttressed, at least, by stone cemented with bitumen.

Gonzalo Pizarro and Orellana had traversed the general region when they first reached the Amazon, but it was *terra incognita* a hundred yards from any traveled track. Somewhere in its fastnesses the Caranquis had in vain resisted the victorius Huayna Capac in the Incan invasion, centuries ago. Now wild hordes roamed it, cruel and treacherous toward each other, gleefully murderous to every stranger.

Little dried heads, with the brains spooned out, the bones broken and withdrawn, eyelids and lips sewn together, shrunken to orange-size by repeated drying processes, sometimes drifted out to Guayaquil or Quito and were acquired by scientists or tourists. It was a land of horror, of mystery and death.

They had fancied it possible—supposing they secured their gold and escaped the Jivaros—to make their way down the Pate-Pastaza past Baños to San Ysidro on the Marañon, thence to Paita port on the coast of Peru. It was possible that Martin might go in by the latter route. The Pastaza was said to be navigable for boats of four feet—flat-bottomed steamers—as high as the mouth of the Huasaga, about a hundred and twenty-five miles, and, for canoes, another two hundred.

But this information was doubtful, the figures optimistic. The river was subject at all times to terrific floods from the swift rising of the upper mountains torrents. Canoes meant money, and Martin had none too much, as Forester knew, not as much as he could get together, and that was insufficient for an extensive expedition.

One white man, hardly daring to sleep as the canoes adventured closer to hostile country, striving to control mutinous cowardly natives, and half-breeds. It was impossible. Yet Martin would probably elect to make the trip alone. And Forster would follow him.

Pizarro, corsleted and mounted, an object of superstition, banded by armed followers, had done it, wracked by fevers, half-starved. But a lone white man, unaccustomed to jungle travel, beset on every hand with wild men and beasts, struggling through the wild tangle, lured on by gold and the hope of a woman, knowing little of even costal dialects. It was a desperate hazard. Whites had adventured up other rivers, seeking rubber and ivory nuts, cinchona, vanilla and dyewoods, but they traveled in force and went warily beyond established borders at a high toll of death.

Yet Martin was going, and Forster had sworn to follow.

He was bound to finish the present voyage. Martin's dereliction had been unfavorably received. Forster had passed his word that he would stay with the ship. He could not follow Martin too closely under the circumstances, even if he was not bound in honor to hold his post. The forfeiture of seniority, the black eye that his desertion—for so it would be counted, would bring, he reckoned as small things besides his duty. He could not hold Martin and he could not accompany him. Even if he broke his pledge and offered to—had eaten his own words.

Martin might grudgingly have accepted. It was hardly probable after Katherine Meade told him her version of the interview. In any event it was too late. But Forster would not wait for the six months. He could resign or obtain a vacation at the end of the trip and Martin, with weeks of lonely trail behind him, might be trusting, praying that he would keep his word and follow. He might never find him. He might go in by one route while Martin fought his way out by another.

Martin had given himself six months. Evidently he intended to work the old placer to the utmost and allowing himself about a month to go down river, raft his treasure through, with many a weary portage past falls and rapids before the *invierno*—the rainy season—commenced.

And Martin was a man. Strong and brave and keen enough. He might achieve his ambition. He had high hopes to buoy him, however insecurely they might be anchored. He adventured for love and passion. Forster would follow for friendship.

He decided that it was certain that he would find Martin—if he survived—still at the mining-ground—and he resolved to go in by what he esteemed the fastest route. Over the Guayaquil-Quito railway to Ambato.

Every spare moment of the trip he devoted to the problem before him. Since he could not command an armed force, weapons were useless. The Jivaros would attack from the bush, with poisoned darts and spears, never in front. Whenever possible he would stay out on the water—unless——

LITTLE by little, as the *Marañon* voyaged down the coast, lying off red-tiled sleepy towns to discharge or take a cargo, to land a passenger here and there, Forster evolved a scheme that he fancied the only possible one. As it grew more feasible to him he wished that he could communicate it to Martin, now following him. He wrote it out and left it finally in charge of a friend at Guayaquil

who invariably entertained both of them when in port. Martin would call there, he hoped. But, as it turned out, he did not and probably would have scorned the suggestions.

Since it was certain that the Jivaros would sooner or later be apprised of his travel, Forster conceived the plan of forestalling their information, of assisting it. It should be known that a stranger was coming though their territory, not ingratiatingly, not timidly, but boldly, arrogantly, as one who expected to be feared, not to pass covertly and fearfully.

Not necessarily a white man, but a man of no country, a being of terror and mystery, a herald of death!

Superstition had ever been the great factor with savage tribes. What rude gods the Jivaros and Zaparos catered to were not worshiped but feared. The Indians had prostrated themselves before the strange beasts that the Spaniards rode and the necessarily supernatural power of those bestriding them, more than they had dreaded even the arquebuses, the lances, the swords and the protective armor. Even the haughty Huallappa, head of Incan civilization had been unable to restrain the terror of his chieftains.

There was his opportunity. If it held a measure of madness it was in a degree a sublime insanity of the type that won through its sheer intrepidity. Forster devoted himself to details sure that he could obtain what he wanted at San Francisco. There were medicine-men among the Jivaros who controlled the chiefs—when wizard and chief were not one—by their crude tricks. He resolved so to outdo them in their own mysteries as to enable him to pass through the land avoided like a scourge, save when he took means to control a trembling audience.

The trip was an obsession with him. His first success might mean the safety of his friend. Waking or sleeping, he planned and dreamed, perfecting his scheme, gaining little fresh bits of information about the interior of Ecuador from one or two passengers without disclosing his intimate interest.

He would be a ghostman, stalking through the land like a forerunner of pestilence. By the time they reached San José he was working out a campaign of publicity. The physical hardships of the trip, the fight against the jungle and the brutes that were without reason, whose primitive souls were missing, he must conquer for himself by force and caution. But the wild untamed Jivaros and the Zaparos he believed he could handle.

To his shipmates, he was a changed man, silent, almost morose, growing lean, speaking little. They guessed partly at the cause and respected his reserve. Back in San Francisco he secured his needs from the often revised list he had made, leaving such local preparations as were necessary for Guayaquil. His vacation was granted, his seniority retained.

Through a newspaper friend he gleaned news of Katherine Meade. Her personality was not unknown to the lighter columns of the news. It was rumored that she was about to be engaged to a civil engineer whose work lay in a big reclamation project in which he was financially interested. That she did not lack for entertainment while her fiancé was struggling through the wilds was certain.

Forster did not see her. She was still living at the same address, he learned. His face grew a trifle grimmer at confirmation of his news, and he hastened his departure not waiting for the next trip of the *Marañon* but using his professional influence to secure a flying passage to Panama on a Government vessel, catching a tramp thence that made one call at Buena Ventura, then rolled him down to Guayaquil. There for a week he talked with certain friends and acquaintances and finally bought his ticket to Ambato.

IN THE early light of the morning, changing gradually from a light opalescence to crystal clearness, a condor, refreshed after heavy sleep, swung in wide circles about and above the crest of Chimborazo. The great bird must have been twenty-two thousand feet above sea-level but neither rarity nor pressure of atmosphere affected its perfect flight. Between tips his wings measured over eleven feet and the black-and-white pinions showed no vertical movement. Occasionally they tilted, like slatted blinds; the rudder of his tail shifted as he changed level or altered course.

The condor's head, naked save for the comb that proclaimed his sex, was stretched out at full length of the white-ruffed neck.

His eyes, as he turned his head from side to side, glowed like the jewels known as cats-eye. They appeared crystalline and constituted a pair of most magnificent lenses.

The bird had attained its supreme height for the day and prepared to descend slowly in a long spiral toward the earth. Its private haunts lay between the levels of ten to sixteen thousand feet. Meantime, his telescopic sight slowly adjusted focus as it traveled over the magnificent landscape that lay beneath him.

Chimborazo's magnificent mass, timbered thickly to the snow-line, its summit shrouded by constant mists. The triple crests and jagged rim of Carahuairazo or Chimborazo-embra (The wife of Chimborazo). Quirotoa's lake-filled dome to the north. Iliniza's two pyramidal peaks. Pacific Chamalari and Atacatzo. Pichincha, the vicious Cotopaxi's unrivaled cone, the highest active volcano in the world, with its ceaseless smoke-plume merged in fog. A hundred unnamed lofty peaks and the lesser summits of the Cordilleras, deep gorges, foaming torrents, waterfalls and gleaming lakes, forests stretching like green seas between. Barren plateaux and fertile, cultivated valleys.

All this the condor saw, swinging lower and lower, watching for movement, ready to swoop down on calf or sheep or dog, on a fawn or the young of guanaco, alpaca or vicuna.

Far below, tied to the earth, lacking the great bird's speed and power to cover space, there roamed the puma and the jaguar, the ocelot, the bear, the fox, the weasel and the otter, all abroad to prey upon the weak. There too were wild tribes of men, low in the scale of humanity, treacherous, vindictive, murderous, ugly creatures with flat savage features, sullen and inclined to silence in their limited speech, insect-ridden, dirty, sensual and indolent; the lice-eating, earth swallowing, cannibal Zaparos, roaming the thick forests that lay between the east bank of the Patate Cañon and that of the Napo, with the gorges of the Auishiri, the Cononaco, the Caracay, Tigré, Morona, Santiago and their tributaries all forging their way through the tropic wilderness, chilled with melting snows and laden with silt to empty in the Marañon.

On either bank of the Patate-Pastaza, but especially to the east, lay the villages of the Jivaros, fierce, proud, unconquered head-seekers, with their little patches of tillage, their log houses and fighting towers.

These human beings, credited with souls, were still asleep though the wild life of forest and plain were wide awake, intent upon feeding.

An eagle soared out upon a lower plane. Hawks and falcons hovered lower yet. Vultures and turkey buzzards were abroad. A flight of cranes winged toward a lake where herons were already at their breakfast. Flocks of macaws, parrots and trogons wheeled screaming over the treetops. Pheasants and partridges were busy in the thickets. The tuneful madrigal of the insignificant appearing flautero sounded.

Amid the primeval forest in the Valley of the Patate no shafts of sunshine could pierce the dense thatch of foliage. The light was dim and green as if water rather than air submerged it all. There were gradations of tone in variety of foliage, deep caves of density, but no distinct, sharp shadows. Enormous trees, pillared and buttressed, gave the similitude of hidden temples. Knotted lianas tied together tree and shrub. The enormous leaves of vines and bushes pended motionless.

A herd of peccaries filed through the undergrowth, trotting fast, with grunts responding to their tusky, fierce-eyed leader as he sought succulent tubers. Raiders of the Jivaro plantations these, robbers of the plantains, corn and beans. A tapir, their distant relative, went plowing down to the water.

Gorgeous butterflies, their brilliant scaling fiery even in the subdued light, turned and twisted in erratic flight, mocking the flowering vines. Lizards darted. Dragonflies criscrossed. A vast army of spiders marched everywhere, silver-frosted agile creatures with some among them which leaped every few steps. Metallic beetles. Crickets innumerable. Legions of smaller insects. The tree-horse, crawling about like an animated twig, the "devils" with their dreaded stingers, hairy black flies the *montucas* capable of inflicting genuine wounds, sand-flies, the minute *pium*, mosquitoes and *sancudas*.

The place seethed with life. On the ground, on the tree ferns, the plumy grasses, the silky mosses of the trees, the bark. Silent though the place seemed, the listening ear gradually caught up sound that differentiated itself. The subdued roar of

the river, the hum and buzz of insects, the swift rustle of parted growth, the sharp click of bamboos, the chatter of parrots and, over all, the shrill, sweet song of the hidden *flautero*.

A man came running along a hardly discernible foot-trail. His skin was light as that of a mulatto, and he was naked, save for a fragment of cloth about his loins. His face was twisted with the effort of hard-tried lungs and heart and with a terror that was manifest in his protruding eyes. Every few feet he turned his head over one shoulder and extended his stride for a few feet. Now and then he stumbled from exhaustion, but fright spurred him on.

He carried a bow far taller than himself, clinging to the weapon though the quiver that bumped on his muscular back was arrowless and the bow had to be guided carefully through the maze. It caught in a tangle of thorny stuff and he pitched forward at the drawback, lying flat and breathless with limbs jerking spasmodically, his ribs spreading as he strove to refill his lungs and get strength enough to regain his feet.

At length he got on all-fours, crouched and started off again as if released from a spring, forgetting his bow after one agonized glance back through the scant openings in the forest screen, as if he expected some horror to come swooping out of it and blast him. He ran more steadily now, his body bent and his knees still weak, but he knew his goal was close and he sensed that if the Thing had meant to overtake him it could have done so long before.

Suddenly he burst out on a clearing where maize waved tall and green, with rows of yucca and beans surrounding three community houses of logs, standing in line and in close contact. A formidable-looking log tower was in one angle of the space. Smoke curled lazily from the roofs.

Yawning women were hoeing in the rows, some dark of skin but most of them hued like the runner. Their hair hung straight and long, and they wore scant skirts of patterned cloth, naked above their waists. The majority of the workers were older women with shrunken, sagging breasts, and without ornaments. They chattered gossip as they worked, bent like baboons with toil and child-bearing.

Younger women, some with babies astride their hips, stood about in groups, languidly preparing the morning meal for their masters, who still sought their ease in the buildings, awaiting breakfast. Only in the open top of the tower, built for watch and defense, two men lolled, both armed with rifles, watching the women, occasionally exchanging sallies with the most attractive of the younger ones, whose favoritism showed in their strings of beads about their necks and flat bracelets of silver and plaited grass.

The entrance of the runner brought instant activity. One of the savages in the tower aimed his rifle then lowered it, recognizing an ally. An old woman uttered a high-pitched cry, and some fifty Jivaros came swiftly out of the buildings carrying bows, spears, axes and a few guns.

The younger women huddled with squeals. Some snatched up naked, pot-bellied brats and ran into one of the houses. The hags stood their ground, shrilly questioning the runner, who stood with bowed legs wide apart, striving for speech, until the men thrust them rudely aside and one of them, taller and more aggressive than the rest, bearing a rifle at port, his red loincloth belted with a girdle of braided hair in swastika pattern, addressed the newcomer authoritatively.

"Water!" gasped the runner.

A girl brought a gourd, and he rinsed his mouth out with part of the contents. The fear left his face somewhat and gave place to an air of importance.

"He comes," he said. "The Terror, who is without flesh yet lives! He-who-has-the-face-of-a-skull, whose glance is fire and whose breath is pestilence. He-who-communes-with-the-dead and travels with skeletons. He-who-can-kill-without-a-sound, whose height is twice that of a man. I left our village bleeding from the eyes at sight of him. Manac is dead. Manac and Hiparu!"

The chief clutched the bringer of fell news by the arm, checking his speech, with an angry look at the terrified women and his followers who gazed at each other in a kind of numb fright, as those who had heard confirmation of a hideous tale.

"Silence, you chattering fool!" he ordered. "This is talk for men. Come into the club house."

He dragged the runner with him toward the central house that had a thatched veranda about it, five logs high above the

ground. With a gesture the chief sent back to the tower the two who had left it. They went unwillingly, looking toward the forest. The hags, crestfallen, trooped away. Food was forgotten.

As the chief and the messenger, with the men close about them, neared the club house, a figure leaning on a stick came out on the wide porch. The body was thin to emaciation but upright with the assistance of the staff of *guiacum* wood, deeply carved to represent a snake. The black hair was shot with streaks of gray, the flesh a light bronze color. Two flashing eyes, the nose of a hawk, a grim, cruel mouth. He was kilted to the knees and boasted a necklace of human knuckle-bones, bracelets of tiger claws and a wide girdle of hair about his shrunken middle.

"What is this gabble?" he cried in a high but powerful voice.

The men shrank back, the chief showed instant deference before his sorcerer—the power behind his own—and the runner prostrated himself.

With a sweep of his free arm the wizard ordered the crowd in before him and followed.

There was a floor of hewn logs with a fire burning in the center on a flat stone, the smoke escaping through the roof. About the sides were low stalls, the cubicles of the club members. Mats, weapons, some pieces of pottery were in each of these. At the far end was a higher partition above which a dried crocodile was suspended, its ivory tusks gleaming.

It was the sanctuary of the wizard—not to be entered upon pain of lingering death. The chief lived in a walled-off half of the next house, with his wives.

The men assembled in a semicircle, squatting on their haunches, their eyes fixed on the wizard, who had easily taken supreme authority. Even the chief hunkered at one end of the line. The runner crouched in the bow of the living arc, while the sorcerer took seat on a carven drum, standing in front of his Black Art shrine.

"Speak," he cried. "Before I wither your tongue."

He had sensed danger to his supremacy in the confusion and, though he gave no hint, his sharp ears had caught most of the message.

The runner trembled. He believed the power of the sorcerer absolute, yet he still dreaded more the Terror that was behind him and hesitated to brook the wizard's wrath by suggesting the existence of a greater being.

"I have come far and fast," he stuttered. "I have outrun Death."

"You have come to meet it unless you loosen your speech, craven," said Yupan, chief of the Jivaro witch-doctors "Speak and I will protect you. I know your errand. I have talked with the spirits of this dead-one-who-lives. And I tell you there is no fear of him.

"As for Hiparu, I have long said he was an impostor and a fool."

His eyes glowed at the news of his rival's death. There was a bamboo flute thrust beneath his girdle. He placed it to his lips and played a weird minor strain, strangely alluring, repeated again and again while his audience sat in hypnosis.

The wizard's sanctuary was screened in front with reed curtains, fine and close, interwoven with *toquilla* fiber. They hung motionless as the savages watched them.

THE tune continued. The curtains began to wave gently. Then a snout appeared about three feet from the floor and a vicious head peered out. The snout was covered with shields instead of scales, a pink, forked tongue played in and out of the open jaws, mincingly. Two eyes shone like emeralds as the head advanced, seeming to float on the undulating neck.

Coil by coil the serpent cast off inside the recess as it visibly lengthened in sight of the breathless observers. It was a beautiful, sinuous, graceful thing with its body ground the color of ripe olives with large oval spots of glossy black arranged in two alternating rows along the back, smaller white-centered spots along the sides and black spots on its whitish-gray belly.

It was the fetish, the familiar of Yupan. An anaconda, the fury of all the boas. Amiable enough, it appeared, sidling its head toward the wizard, listening to the enchantment of the pipe. No one thought of the music in connection with its taming. None else but Yupan dared try the experiment handed down to him through ancient lore. Search back your old religions, and your new, and you find the serpent deified in all of them. To the Jivaros it was the symbol of a horrible death, and that Yupan

should make it obedient gave him eminent control over them.

The tune changed before the great snake —it was over twenty feet in length—had completely uncoiled. Some twelve feet of it lay outside the curtains, the head adoringly raised toward Yupan, slowly waving from side to side.

It did not like the shift of time and tune. Its eyes grew orange, then red, and it emitted a long hiss of displeasure. But the insistent notes held it in thrall or the reptile's organic memory told it that rewards followed obedience. Great muscles swelled in retrograde action beneath the scales, and slowly it retreated. The shielded head shoved between the reedy folds then sank and disappeared.

Yupan followed his snake and came out again immediately. In both hands he bore a bowl of polished rosewood filled with what looked like some strange fruit. This he set down in front of him and held up one of the objects.

"This," he chanted, "was the head of Liku, chief of the Zaparos. Lo, I have taken the bones of Liku's skull and made of them a powder which I mixed with my drink so that the cunning of Liku entered into me! I took his eyes and sealed the lids. I took his tongue and fastened the lips. All the poor wisdom of Liku, who thought himself so strong, is added to my wisdom, and I make a mock of him. So!"

He tossed the smoked head into the air and caught it like a ball, letting it hang by its coarse hair, a miniature mummy of Liku's countenance.

"This," chanted Yupan," was the head of a white man who came seeking wild rubber. His hair is in my girdle. His wisdom is my wisdom, and I make sport of him."

He threw up the gruesome thing and the light shone on a stubble of reddish hair which had been cropped short to make woof for Yupan's belt.

So he juggled the heads and chanted their histories while the eyes of all the Jivarus followed the dried relics as they rose to the rafters and fell back into the cupped hands of the master mummy-maker.

When the last was replaced in the polished calabash *Yupan* covered it with a cloth and set it aside. He had made the opening speech to the jury; he had reestablished his mastery before the runner began his tale. Yet all the time Yupan's ears had strained for shot or call from the tower. For he had heard things of the Stranger that filled him with misgivings, summoned all his wiles to meet and defeat him.

The one great dread of the Jivaros lies in the fear of disease and of death. Death to Yupan meant more than to the rest. To live meant the exercise of power, the toll of reverence, the pick of all he wanted. To die—meant utter darkness. He had no faith of future life save that his spirit might enter the form of a jaguar—if it was strong enough and was accorded the proper burial rites—or to some lesser animal that would be hunted instead of preying on the weak.

The tale had come whispering through the woods mysteriously, among the women first—who were Yupan's greatest coadjutors, if unconscious ones—of this awful Being advancing through the forests of the Patate, halting to hold communion with the dead, boldly exhibiting himself by night and day until the villagers hid at his approach.

Yupan knew—none better—how exaggerations grow. He discounted the tale, but still he began to acknowledge nerves. Before the tribesmen he put on a bold front. His tribe was the fiercest and the bravest of all the Jivaro settlements and he knew how to play upon their emotions as he lulled the evil temper of the anaconda with his bamboo pipe.

"Are we children?" he asked, "that we should be frightened by an old woman's story? Are we not the unconquered Jivaro? Did we not drive back the Feather people (the Incas) and those that came before and after them. When the men on horses and wearing coats of steel came, did we flee before them? No, we made their women our women and their blood is in our veins and shows in our skins that are not black like those of the louse-eaters, the devourers of human flesh, the Zaparos. Look!"

He took his choicest possession from a basket beside him and placed it on his head. It was a Spanish morion, a visorless helmet with a combed crest, damaskeened with silver, kept bright by frequent polishing. Yupan had fastened to it a plume of blue and yellow macaw feathers and under this relic of the time when the Jivaros had driven out the Spanish invaders his

face was that of a crafty, all-conquering devil.

He gave a whistle between his teeth and, with a yelp, a blazing-plumaged toucan flew up and out of the shrine and perched clumsily on his shoulder, its great horny beak caressing the wizard's cheek.

"Now tell your story," he said to the runner.

Yupan knew many tricks, the use of phosphorus, of the symbols of death, of sleep potions and fatal drugs. He was a good prestidigitator, apt at palming. He had seen some white men's marvels and heard of others. Many he considered only as superior tricks, and he had an idea that the Stranger might be a white-man-wizard. And, if this Thing was human, Yupan might fear, but he did not despair. He was far from being a coward, and he had never yet known his brains to fail him. The dried head with the rufous stubble was one proof of that.

"We had heard of this Stranger," said the runner. "It was said that he came out of the sea, to the west. That he could walk at will with his head above the tops of trees. That his glance was death to those who opposed him. Yet, because these tales came from the Piojes and from cowardly *aucas* we thought them largely lies. And, when one came with news of his close approach we, because we were Jivaros, and also because the crops were nearly ripe, took counsel.

"Manac advised that we should advance against him and take him by surprize, sending poisoned darts upon him from the trees. But Hiparu spoke for cunning means. First, he said, he would weave a spell against the Stranger."

Yupan sniffed contemptuously.

"The spells of Hiparu!" he jeered. "The prattle of a child who thinks he knows how to talk!"

"The counsel of Hiparu prevailed, and he himself said he would go out at night to spy upon the Stranger and, when his spirit was weakest, just before dawn, Hiparu would send his snake into the camp of this Man-with-the-face-of-a-skull. In the morning he would be dead, and we would take all that he had."

"It was a good plan for Hiparu," said Yupan. "But his snake! His red and black worm! My snake would not know that he had swallowed it."

The runner sent a look at the wizard that was half-malicious, half-propitiatory.

"The snake of Hiparu has bitten many men, and they have died at the bidding of Hiparu," he said.

"And now Hiparu is dead. And his worm, what happened to the worm, O friend of Hiparu?"

"That I will tell, for I was not so much the friend of Hiparu as his pupil. Therefore I went with him—though I was not eager to do so—and I saw all that happened until the death of Manac and the blinding of the people."

The man spoke quietly now and with such conviction that even Yupan shifted uneasily, turning the movement off by setting down the yelping toucan that, offended, fluttered back over the curtains.

"THEY told us that the Stranger was in camp near the river above the White Falls, and they pointed out the place to us though they would not go near him. So we waited until the middle of the night, and Hiparu and I made magic, without which doubtless I should be dead."

"And Hiparu?" mocked Yupan.

"Hiparu went too close to Death," said the dead wizard's assistant gravely. "He felt his breath. After we had made ourselves strong we set out through the forest by the river-trail and came out upon the flat that is at the top of the falls.

"It was very dark, but we could see a glow against the trees and we went slowly toward it. It was a small house, O Yupan, such as the white men sometimes use, made of white cloth. It was square-sided and as high as the curtains of your secret place.

"The light within was blue, and we could see strange shapes inside as we watched at a little distance. Then we crept closer, slowly, for the wind was back of us, and we were afraid the Stranger might smell us out. But he did not, and we became less afraid of his magic, so that we went farther.

"Now we could see these shapes were those of skeletons and, as we looked, they moved and bowed together, talking.

"The blood in us turned to water and became cold. I would have fled, but the strength had gone out of my legs. Something barked, like a dog, though we saw nothing. The light changed inside. The spirits that had been within the bones of the

dead ascended through the roof of the cloth house in burst of flame, red and blue.

"Then the Stranger appeared. At first he seemed but little higher than you, O Yupan, and he was without shape. A fiery shroud covered his bones. It glowed up and down as he raised an arm and, lo, a ray of blinding light came toward us. But not before we had seen his face. It was a skull, the face of Death! His eyes were like balls of green flame.

"The beam of light vanished and he was gone. The next moment he appeared again, grown twice, thrice as tall, stalking toward us, with the ray seeking us out.

"Hiparu loosed his snake and whispered to it, but his voice was feeble and the snake did not like the light. It slipped away in the darkness. Hiparu told me to loose an arrow that we had dipped in the rotten liver of the Gaiyu. I feared greatly, for the Stranger was almost upon us, and my hands trembled, yet I set the arrow and I loosed the string.

"Yupan, the shaft went true. It struck the face of the Stranger. I swear it entered between his teeth and hung there before it dropped. Still he came on, and Hiparu lifted his gun. He had but two cartridges, and he preferred to use his snake, but the snake was gone and we had made magic over the cartridges, as with my arrows.

"The light was upon Hiparu for I had moved aside for my aim. There came a flash from the Stranger's hand, but there was no noise. It was not a gun. Hiparu fell over against me, and the back of his head was against my arm. It was all torn away and bloody.

"I crouched, expecting death. It did not come and, when I raised my head, the house was gone. The Stranger had vanished. Doubtless he spared me to spread the tale. There was only the noise of the waters in my ears.

"Strength came back to me, and I fled to the village. In the morning Manac sent certain men for the body of Hiparu and they went trembling but saw nothing but the little the peccaries had left of Hiparu. Yupan, there was no bullet in his head. It had been rent asunder."

A long sigh swept through the little assembly as the speaker ceased.

Yupan said nothing, thinking hard and unpleasantly. Then the runner took up his tale again.

"The Stranger travels south, and the only trail leads by our village. Therefore we again went into council. We were loath to leave the crops, and Manac had made a brew of wild honey and the juice of the cactus which was passed around so that, when he talked to us, we became grave and determined to oppose the Stranger, since we were Jivaros and many.

"Therefore we put the women in the tower with the children, and we loaded all our guns, and we made pitfalls in the trail. All were armed, and Manac planned that we should let him come into the clearing and, hiding in the maize, rush out upon him. Some were to fling bird nets, the rest to loose their arrows and hurl their spears while others fired their guns. It seemed a good plan, and we were all heady with the brew."

"It was a good plan, in its way," assented Yupan slowly. "Especially the nets."

He nodded deeper approval, cogitating while he listened.

"He did not come until the afternoon." Doubtless he had cast a spell upon the liquor for we were dizzy and unsteady on our legs. Manac was very drunk. When the cry came from the tower we were finishing the brew, and we went into the maize and saw through its far edges the Stranger approaching. There was an animal with him like a dog, yet like none I have ever seen. A shaggy beast, as big as an ocelot and feathered like a bird. No doubt it can fly. It coughed at the smell or sight of us, and the Stranger paused. His cloak did not shine in the daytime nor did his eyes shine, but he gazed in our direction through hollow sockets in the great skull.

"Yupan, I tell you it was Death himself! So thought we all, save Manac, who knew not his own mind, being drunk, and valiantly rushed out calling on us to follow. We are Jivaros and we obeyed our chief. But we were afraid, for the Stranger was without fear, and our arms were heavy and our movements slow. We came out of the maize in a mob. Only I tripped and fell."

"Ha! Tripped!" said the wizard.

"I had faced the Stranger and fired at him before Yupan. It saved my eyes, if not my life. For the Stranger raised his arm and, this time, there came, not a flash, but something that whirled and glittered before it fell among us. Instantly all our courage fled, and our warriors were blinded. Tears

gushed from their eyes, and they burned as with fire and salty blood, becoming women.

"Only Manac, unseeing, staggered toward the Stranger. This I saw from the maize. Again the Stranger raised his arm, and there came the faint flash of fire but no sound, and Manac fell, as Hiparu had fallen.

"The women were shrieking in the tower, the men crawling blinded through the maize. Xinu, my own brother, called on me by name as he crept toward me like a snake with a broken back. I pulled him flat lest the Stranger might strike again. I heard the feathered beast roaring and the great voice of the Stranger, hollow and deep, calling to him. I did not know how I escaped being made blind, and I covered my eyes against the danger. The women said that the Stranger passed on through the path between the maize and the field of agaves and vanished in the forest in a flash of white flame.

"Then we tended the sick and brought in the body of Manac with his head torn all apart at the back. And in the night sight came slowly back to them. For this I had made magic.

"But I am not sure," he added simply, "that my magic was strong, for I am not a master-wizard and I do not yet know all the spells. But the people thought that my magic had restored their sight and, because Hiparu and Manac were dead and I had escaped they declared that I was mightier than they and should be their wizard and their chief.

"Now it is a dangerous thing to be a wizard if your magic is not strong," the runner added naively. "For, if you fail, the people will turn against you. While I slept my fetish spoke to my spirit in a dream and it seemed a wise thing for me to come to you, Yupan, to warn and tell you of these things and to ask you to take me as your disciple.

"So I came away before it was light, and I passed through the forest with great fear, though I thought the Stranger was ahead of me. But I heard his dog-bird cough among the trees, from above, where he must be roosting, so that the sweat broke out on me, and I ran at full speed until I came into your village. I have spoken."

There was silence in the club-house. The silence of terror that gripped all of them and made them sit with their eyes looking ahead of them, but seeing nothing, while their diaphragms rose and fell in nervous spasms and their bellies felt as if they were filled with great stones. Only Yupan brooded darkly under his helmet.

"It is well," he said at last. "I have no pupil. What is your name?"

"Quaiyi is the name by which the tribe call me. Do you want me to tell the name my fetish gave me, aloud, O Yupan?"

"You shall tell me that within. Come. My snake will not harm you. We will make strong magic," he said to the chief. "Let the club house be cleared. Set sentinels along the trail. Presently we will make known the plan. Go!"

The Jivaros filed out blinking into the sunlight. They were in no mood for food. They had too much mentally to digest. The tale of Guaiyi had been well spoken. They centered their hopes on Yupan. Lots were drawn, and six reluctant warriors took tree stations along the trail to watch for the coming of the Stranger. If they disobeyed, Yupan would surely bewitch them. They were between the devil and death.

FORSTER, high up a great tree, ensconced in a wide crotch with his Airedale, which had scratched a way, helped by collar and leash, up the rough barked slanting buttresses of the forest giant, to a place beside him.

He was alternately burning and shivering with fever. The bites of the mosquitoes, or the daggerlike thrusts of the hairy *mantucas*, had infected him. He had swallowed thirty grains of quinin, and his head, which seemed twice its usual size, throbbed and ached until he was dizzy. For three or four hours he would be almost as helpless as an infant. Then the fit would pass. He was strong still, set with his purpose, lean to the last ounce of superfluous flesh, and his lined face was almost as grim as the skull mask that he had ensconced above him with the pannier jacket in which he carried his supplies.

He was traveling light. Subsisting on what the way provided. With a perfect assimilation and digestion, Forster had always eaten less than the average man, and now that habit served him in good stead. Every pound reduced from his burden counted, for speed meant everything.

He had gone into the Patate Valley by mule-trails and fords, across shaky fiber bridges, his unwilling guides and bearers

finally left behind at the ridge to the east of the river gorge. There, in the forest, he had unpacked his goods, eaten his last real meal and disposed of his equipment about him.

There was his tent, of lightest cotton. This he set up and painted upon its inner walls with black the silhouettes of skeletons. He sewed lines here and there to the cloth so that, by slight twitchings, he could set the grisly shapes in apparent motion when the tent was illuminated.

The question of light was a hard one. Much oil he could not carry, and he had contrived a lantern with reflectors for bullseye lenses set in the sides. A good burner with a small wick burning a slight quantity of peanut oil each night provided sufficient illumination. The lenses were provided with caps of green and red glass. These he had thought out beforehand and had made in San Francisco.

A skeleton jacket of drill with many pockets, with straps for the shoulders, buckling about his waist above his gun belt, carried without great inconvenience, save for the heat, his various pieces of impedimenta.

His armament consisted of a Luger pistol equipped with a muffler, cartridge clips, a dozen tear bombs secured through his newspaper friend from the police department under promise of a story when Forster returned, and some sticks of dynamite which he carried gingerly and handled with great care so that the nitro-glycerine might not sweat out dangerously in the heat. These were capped and short-fused ready for action. A dozen times he was on the point of abandoning them, but he stubbornly reserved them for a time of stress.

He had a powerful electric torch and extra batteries. A small bottle of bi-sulfide. A conjuring trick or two he had bought at the last moment, passing a store that displayed them in its window. Magnesium ribbon and some Roman candles.

Besides these, powdered coffee, meat and vegetable concentrates, a few drugs for personal use, a folding cup, frying-pan and small pot of aluminum, matches and, for emergencies, flint and steel. He forswore tobacco and took along no liquor.

Much of all this was stowed in his capacious pannier coat. It looked something like a life-jacket when he wore it. Belt snaps toted the tear bombs, his knife, the coiled leash and collar of the dog, his canteen and the cooking tools. He was a bulky object when all was stowed, but his cloak covered all.

This cloak he had found less of a nuisance than he supposed. It could be caught up close about him and, like the burnous of the Arabs, it was a comfortable enough garment for the tropics when one got used to it. Discomfort, where it did not incapacitate him, Forster ignored.

It was made of light linen, waterproofed with salt and oil and treated in serpentine pattern with phosphorescent paint.

Its shapelessness, hiding his pack, was one of its great conveniences. By day it suggested a shroud in combination with his skull mask. By night, with the luminous streaks writhing at every movement, it gave him a truly startling and awe-inspiring appearance.

His mask was at once his great inspiration and his main nuisance. He had got it from a costumer and had shellacked its *papier mâché* for greater wear and tear. It was already provided with eyelamps that could be lit from a switch and battery carried in a pocket of his jacket. He obtained extra lamps and batteries.

There were times when it was almost insufferable to wear, stifling him though he had perforated it for air. The sweat poured down his face at first, but he became more accustomed to it later, as the excess perspiration was slowly sapped out of him. After all, it was a light affair compared with the helmets of the *conquistadores*, and it protected him from insects.

The Airedale had been offered to him by a friend whom he had simply told that he was taking a solitary journey in Ecuador. It was a faithful beast and, clipped, did not suffer greatly from the heat. Forster had thought both of its companionship and its use as a watchdog and defender, and it had proved his trust. Several times its deep, gruff growl had warned him of the approach of natives, and he had grown to rely upon it. It was the dog who had smelled out the man-scent about the pitfalls and caused Forster to investigate.

The feather coat was a late inspiration. At Ambato he had seen strips of light canvas upon which the *mestizos* fastened feathers for hatbands to sell to the tourists. Some were complete breasts for the making of women's turbans. Forster purchased

the gaudiest and tailored a coat for Rough. It was not heavy, and the dog actually seemed to take pride in wearing it.

It gave him an appearance at once grotesque and bizarre, made him a fit companion for the strange, weird figure of Death that stalked the trails.

From the first his daring plan had worked wonderfully. In many ways it proved the only possible solution of his problem.

He had learned a good deal about the habits of the Jivaros at Ambato from an entomologist who had headquarters there. The tribe was scattered in independent villages, each under the charge of an hereditary or elected chief and, usually, a wizard. They were comparative nomads, moving their villages at will but sure to remain in one spot during the growing and harvesting season of their crops.

The closer these settlements approached the towns of the *mestizos* and the borders of civilization, the more comparatively tame were the Jivaros. Their savagery progressed with the depth of the jungle. Yupan he heard of as chief of all the wizards and a dangerous enemy. Him he proposed to make an ally, willing or unwilling, or to kill.

His nature was warped with the obsession of his mind. He did not wish deliberately to destroy but to shed terror, to send it ahead of him. Unless he found that Martin had been maltreated. Then his ways would be ruthless.

He learned that the existence of the old gold workings was known by hearsay, but that the locality was inhabited by a band of fierce Jivaros who were practically outlaws. To them were accredited the deaths of all adventurers who had gone into the jungle seeking wild rubber, hardwoods, drugs or, rarely, the gold.

Some gold filtered through the Jivaros to the outer world, traded for guns and cartridges. The law was against the custom, and the townsfolk upheld the law for their own protection, so that the Jivaros were short on ammunition, though their native weapons, including the great bows, were dangerous aside from their habit of poisoning all points used in war.

At the start he found little opposition, passing through the Jivaros as if he were the plague. He heard drums booming out messages and knew that his advent was being foretold, to suit his purpose.

Traveling as he did, he not only trusted to win through by direct attack upon their superstitions, backed by his gun and dynamite, if necessary.

It had never occurred to him that it might be paradoxical to believe that Martin should fail while he passed safely through the hostile country. First of all he believed in his plan of creating a bugaboo for the Jivaros, and every day was proving his idea, childish though it might seem in detail. Yet the Jivaros themselves were only children mentally—more mischievous than most, but, from Yupan down, of light brain caliber.

D'Albertis traversed New Guinea, amid cannibals and head-hunters who knew little in his time of the white man, safeguarded by a few tricks of "burning water" and the like.

HE HAD found his letter to Martin unclaimed at Guayaquil and he was fearful for him. He had gleaned so far no news of him. He was handicapped from lack of knowledge of the Jivaro dialect, but the naturalist at Ambato, to whom he had confided some part of his mission, had not only approved his chances of getting by in his masquerade but had supplied him with three hundred words in Jivaro, which list Forster memorized as he journeyed, studying ten words at a time and, so set was his will to the one object, rapidly filing them away as he practised sentences almost perpetually, trying them on Rough, for the sake of speaking aloud.

So far he had not used them. He trusted somehow to gaining audience with Yupan and impressing him sufficiently to get on the track of Martin. Even if Martin had come up-stream instead of down, Yupan would have been likely to hear of the advent of a white man. Through the mysterious jungle wireless there was little that went on that was not known to the master wizard. Only the circumstance of blindness had prevented him knowing all about the disaster to Hiparu and Manac ahead of the runner.

Yupan, it was said, was the only man who might go safely among the outlaw horde near the gold mine. Yupan he must contrive to use.

He had brought with him the news-clippings hinting at Katherine Meade's dalliance with another man. He did not

consider them of much immediate use even if he overhauled Martin. An infatuated man would resent such things as libelous to the woman he loved and, to exhibit them, might widen the breach between the two men.

But he trusted that the presence of the hostile tribe might prevent Martin from a quick cleanup. Or he might contrive illness, even an accident to himself. Martin, he felt sure, would not desert him under such circumstances. If he could keep Martin from getting back within the time set, or from cabling to San Francisco, Forster was convinced that the woman would have used the other string to her bow and married the civil engineer rather than wait for the maritime one who was risking his life for her fortune.

He felt sure that his talk with her would have impressed her of the perils of the journey for her lover, even if she ignored them to suit her own purposes. Martin was to her but a pawn in her own game, to be sacrificed without pity if it did not win through to the royal square.

Then he could show Martin the clippings and help to salve the wound by the display of how the woman had been perfidious even while he was enduring hardship and danger for her sake. So the old friendship might come back again.

Not until it had been severed did Forster realize his full loss. The steady flow of friendship had provided such a smooth and pleasant current that he had not appreciated their happy voyaging together until it was abruptly ended. In his loneliness he grew bitterly vindictive against the woman.

He fought constantly against the idea that Martin had perished. If he had—he would wreak such a vengeance as would be the talk of the Jivaro as long as the tribe existed. And then he would return to the woman.

That he would make other friends, that time would soften the blow that he dreaded, despite his steady rejection of fear for his friend, Forster, in his doggedness, never considered. He was a man of one purpose, to regain or cruelly avenge his friend, the man who had been his *alter ego*, his twin.

His program of action had been simple. Starting in the early mornings, he traversed the dim trails or followed his crude map by compass, keeping close enough to the river to hear occasionally its voice telling him he was on the right track.

There was not much danger of his meeting the Jivaros on the trail at these hours. The crops were being harvested, for one thing, and Rough was an excellent detector. The dog had an instinctive dislike of the smell of the native, and Forster was at some pains to check him from a fit of prolonged barking, rather than a warning growl.

Afternoons he tree-roosted with Rough and tried for sleep. At night he set up his tent with the lanterns and the skeletons on the cloth, fastening the twitch lines to his wrists. At the alarm of Rough he awoke instantly and made his appearance. The discovery of the pitfalls in his path by the Airedale was his first warning that the fierce Jivaros were, while apprized of his coming, not yet scared sufficiently to oppose him.

In a way he regretted the disastrous effects of the encounter with Hiparu and Manac though they could not be avoided and would have their result. He would have preferred to stalk through the land as a terror to be avoided. The killings might affect his gaining an interview with Yupan. On the other hand, they might provide him with a clear route to the gold diggings, now only some forty or fifty miles distant.

He had used his electric ray and the batteried eyes in his skull and hoped, with his ghastly appearance in the phosphorescent shroud, to send his midnight visitors scurrying away in terror.

His increasing height he obtained by resort to an accomplishment of his boyhood, walking on stilts strapped to his legs, leaving his hands free. He had not seen the snake but the arrow—that he guessed poisoned—striking his mask, followed by the glint of Hiparu's rifle-barrel, made him bring the Luger into play.

The mask had saved him. His loose cloak and pannier jacket might have done the same thing, but a prick of that deadly poison in arm or leg and there would have been an end of him. A lesson had to be taught and that sharply.

When Hiparu fell and while the other man lay prostrate Forster extinguished his lamplight and, through an opening in the tent top, sent up the balls from a Roman

candle. His belongings were always laid handily for quick moves and, with Rough, he had disappeared into the trees, setting off a little magnesium ribbon to blind his exit and give color to the idea of supernatural vanishment.

Even in the daytime the ribbon gave a strong flare in the shady forest, and he used it again after he had passed through the village after flinging the tearbomb and shooting the too aggressive Manac.

Now he was warned that the Jivaros were insufficiently terrified, unless his deadly demonstration had properly reduced them. In the intervals between his ague fits he planned his approach to Yupan's village. He could call to them now in their own language. He might get palaver with the wizard. If they let him pass through he determined to do so, looking out for traps.

To avoid the foot-beaten paths meant hacking through the jungle with his ax, incredible and unsatisfactory toil.

He knew nothing of the runner, though Rough had sounded warning once. He determined to set up his tent that night and get what rest he could, going on at the first hint of dawn.

The stirless heat burned through him as if he had been in a furnace, or immured above a steam plant. It was moist, and he was as soaked with heat as if he had been in a Turkish bath. His skin was patched with rash that burned like scald; insects pestered him continually though he wore a hat made from a plaited ring that fitted his skull, attached to another of bamboo that kept the veiling spread. But the winged brutes got under the veil and attacked every inch of him that was vulnerable. Rough was smeared with dope that gave him little relief from his torturers.

There was no air and little light under the woven canopy of leaf and vine. His flesh was flaccid; his very bones seemed to have become mere gristle and ached like rheumatism. His brain seemed stuffed with lead that shifted heavily.

All about rose the columns of trees from slender palm shafts to great buttressed pillars. Brazilwood, *palo-de-cruz*, rosewood, walnut and cedar. Glossy-leaved rubber-trees, holy wood, cinchona. The *tagua*-ivory nut palm, here and there a breadfruit, struggling gamely with its hand-shaped leaves. Or a *palta* with its luscious alligator pears.

Ground shrubs with leaves as big as a sunshade, ferns and ferntrees. Choking *lianas* everywhere. Twining like snakes. Snakes themselves if he could have distinguished them. Garlands and hanging gardens of more delicate creepers. Bright berries in the undergrowth. Sweet-scented growths that made the air harder to breathe, blossoms and butterflies and the busy hum of beetles and smaller insect pests. Ants everywhere in long streams or caravans, going about their business.

Overhead, hopping, gliding, flying, such a host of brilliant plumaged, strange-shaped creatures that at times Forster would think he was in a nightmare or a delirium. Parrot, toucan and macaw, *curassows*, *guans* or penelope or birds and horned screamers. The toucans glancing at him down their enormous bills of horn seemed goblin-like, the paradise-tailed, turbaned *trogons* floating from roost to roost seemed more the phantasmagoria of some futurist designer of wallpaper than real birds.

High up, their cries, seldom better than a crawk, came softly down while now and then the pure fluting of the *flautero* sounded like the call of a woodsprite. Occasionally he heard the grunt of peccaries, the soft crash of parting brush. The whirring of innumerable, unseen bats. About all the perpetual green twilight of the forest so that he seemed submerged in a sea, perched on limb of marine growth while the fantasies of a fever-ridden brain prevailed. Ripe rubber seed pods exploded like gunshots. Ripe fruit fell with soft crash and thud.

Toward nightfall he shot a partridge that Rough discovered and held rigid, the dog trembling with eagerness until Forster managed to pick it out from the foliage and despatch it.

This, with soup and coffee, made his meal, after which he set up his tent, this time among the root boughs of an enormous fig, banianlike. He surveyed it from outside before he turned in. The nights were comparatively cool, and, aside from the enormous moths that tried vainly to get in through his laced flap to the lamp, the lull of insects made them hours of restoration. The breeze riffled the light stuff and caused the silhouetted skeletons to nod and bow in realistic horror. Forster smiled grimly

at his handiwork while Rough sniffed for enemies and found none.

He entered the tent and lay down on a bed of tree moss, stretching his limbs luxuriously after their cramping in the unyielding tree.

YUPAN and his disciple had the club-house to themselves, the door closed. The place smelled of a strange blend of burned gums, of scorched flesh and hair from the spells and sacrifices they had made to their fetish.

The big snake had been coaxed out with the bamboo pipe and fed two *capibaras* and a spotted *paca*. The three big rodents were sufficient to pacify the serpent and render him sluggish so that he could be handled, but not enough to make him sleep. He lay with his head resting on the top coil, the emerald eyes unwinkingly regarding the glowing heart of the fire.

Before the snake, Yupan squatted in a species of trance. Such a necessity of the wizard's trade had not yet been reached by the pupil, who regarded Yupan with awe and envy. His own part in the sorcery had been relegated to the handing of ingredients, the blowing of the fire, the sprinkling of powders, but he was impressed and terribly in fear of the great snake.

In it, he believed fully, there dwelled a spirit of evil, controlled by Yupan. But he was still more impressed by the stranger. Yupan might make a draw of it in a manifestation of power, but he doubted whether he would win as he hunkered, looking timidly at the shadowy corners, the faintly gleaming teeth of the suspended crocodile and, especially, the row of dried heads that had been set out on a carved bench.

The head with the reddish fuzz gave him the most comfort, for surely this had been a white man, and some white men were great wizards. Perhaps there were some who were great fools. Ziku—that was the pupil's name-of-dread—did not know, but he could think a little and speculate, which had raised him to an aspirant for wizardry.

There was another white man somewhere in the country of the Jivaros, Yupan told him. He had come up the river and had been seen near where the Jivaros got the gold they traded for rifles. A big man with yellow hair. Yupan greatly coveted his head. He called the man Yellow Head. The head would be the pride of his collection.

The dried heads were the gods of the Jivaros. Yupan said—and Ziku believed him—that, having tasted of the eyes and lips of the original possessors, he could at will send back into them all the knowledge and cunning that they possessed and use it for his own ends. Even now he was communing with them, perhaps with the spirit of the man whose red hair was in the girdle of Yupan with the hair of many of the rest. Some of the heads were very old. Oh, there was no doubt of Yupan's wisdom and perhaps it was true that their spells had stopped the dread Stranger or sent him another way.

Ziku devoutly hoped so. Also he wished that Yupan would come back to normal. There were too many whisperings in the place, too many eyes. He did not know yet that Yupan had bits of rotten wood and luminous fungus disposed here and there in the roof and rafters, he only knew that the place was full of spirits who might not understand that he was a pupil of Yupan, their conjurer, might not even respect him as such, since he was only a tyro. A great many spirits, Manac had taught him, did not like being summoned.

But Yupan stirred at last, wearily, with a great sigh. Ziku, watching his face by the light of the fire, saw that he was in a bad humor and kept a discreet silence.

Yupan gazed moodily at the snake. Then he began to speak.

"I see things through a fog, like the mist upon Cotopaxi," he complained. "Yellow Head I have seen and then the mist closed in about him. But I thought I saw moving figures with weapons in the mist. It may be that the outlaws have got him. You and I must go and see, Ziku, for it is in my mind that this Yellow Head has to do with the Death-Who-Lives."

Ziku shivered. The prospect of a trip to the outlaw tribe did not please him at all, even under the wing of Yupan.

"Of me they are afraid," said Yupan. "Once they mocked me, and I sent them a great sickness, so that now they make me presents of what the white man calls *oro* (gold). If they have Yellow Head, if they have made of him an *imbrizu* (literally Guest-for-always) we must make a deal with them. We shall see."

"What of the Stranger, O Yupan?"

"You chatter like a Marañon monkey. Ask no questions, and people will think you wise even if your head is empty. The Stranger will come, and we shall see if he is flesh and blood."

"There is no flesh on his skull," said Ziku timidly.

Yupan made no immediate reply.

"He can not be hurt by weapons. He has no flesh. One can not kill bones. He did not fall into the pits."

"Yet we may trap him. I have talked with the ghost of the white man whose head is there and I have heard a plan. Ziku, go and wake the women and bid them make lights in their house."

"It is forbidden for a man to enter the women's house after nightfall."

"Fool!" barked Yupan so sharply that the snake raised its head slightly and hissed. "I, Yupan, send you. I make the laws. Put on this."

He handed Ziku the morion and tucked in a fringe of fiber through which Ziku could see but not be seen. He gave him his caravan staff, and Ziku went importantly to do as he was bid.

The women wakened sleepily, the hags in protest until one stirred the fire and saw the helmeted intruder more plainly.

"Awake," said Ziku. "Yupan comes. There is work for you tonight. Make plenty of lights. And quickly."

He left as they bustled about, some quieting the whimpering children, and reported to Yupan. The wizard took back the morion for his own use and went out. Soon the women were working feverishly at the task he had given them, seated in rings plying busy fingers. Yupan went on to the half-house of the chief. There he knocked. He respected authority even when lesser to his own. The chief was his own creature and must be upheld.

Lastly the men were roused and given their orders. Then Ziku was sent to a stall in the club-house to sleep, after they had taken the sluggish serpent back behind the curtains, hauling on it like a fire-hose with Ziku quaking but gathering courage.

Yupan sat in front of his row of heads, brooding, a little doubtful but firm in self-belief. The first test would come tomorrow. If the Stranger passed it it might be well to make terms with him.

As for Yellow Head, Yupan had made up his mind to possess his head. The wily wizard, being the only man able to treat with the outlaws, thereby controlled the supply of gold for the outer villages. With the gold the cartridges and the rifles. Old he was, and beginning to be stiff. Sometimes he forgot things, and his sight, like his teeth, was not all his younger days had provided; but his ambition and his autocracy grew with his years. While he lived, Yupan would be supreme.

If he made an ally of this Stranger he might be able to compass the downfall of the Outlaws. That would be a rare stroke. He hung to the belief that the Stranger was human. Yupan was very sure that he had heard spirits and talked with them, but he had never seen them. They were invisible beings. Materialization was not in his ritual. Surely the Stranger was powerful. He might have to be propitiated. But Yupan was very, very wise.

He sat unmoving until the toucan sleepily croaked at the approach of dawn. Then Yupan got up and issued his orders. Before the sun had touched the tops of the tallest timber, while the vast shadow of Cotopaxi still lay unshortened, a group of men started for the forest, and Yupan watched them go with eager cunning in his red-rimmed eyes.

FORSTER proceeded along the trail with infinite caution. What he lacked in actual experience he supplemented by things he had heard and read. He had always, with Martin, been an eager reader of certain magazines whose editors catered to people who wanted their adventures truthfully colored and were keen to detect error in description.

He looked out for innocent-appearing lianas twined across the path and approached every curve with especial care lest he might jog a trigger. Or fall into a staked pit.

Rough went ahead, slowly. The dog did not like these proscribed limits of the trail where he could not range. Eyes, ears and nose were alert for signs of enmity. He appeared to know perfectly that they were in a hostile country. Every few paces he would look around at his master with intelligent eyes that seemed to say, "All right so far, come along."

The skull-mask enclosed Forster's head like a helmet, the gathered collar of his coat fitted closely about a cape of black cloth

that hid the ending of the mask at the neck. His stilts he discarded. They had been effective, but they were a nuisance and, having advertised his capacity for change of height, Forster figured he could now dispense with it.

His brain was clear. The fever had left him. He felt strong and confident. He had prepared three of the conjuring tricks he had bought, ready for a demonstration before Yupan.

Rough, clad in his feather blanket, slowed down from a trot to a walk, sniffing uneasily. Ahead the trail curved. As they rounded the bend a small spotted deer came out of the jungle, stood at gaze, wheeled and bounded ahead of them, seeking a place of reentry to cover, panic-stricken at sight and smell of man and dog.

Thirty yards down the trail a liana had swung across two young tendrils that had bridged the narrow gap. They were frail looking things, seemingly easily brushed away. One was knee high, the other about five feet from the ground. Between and below them the web of a saltigrade spider gleamed frostily, closely woven. The strands, as Forster knew, were tough and slightly gummy with considerable tensile strength. The natives sometimes wound them about loops for nets or stretched them in coverts when they drove partridges and *guans*.

The presence of the web seemed a safeguard. It could hardly have been woven a lesser time than overnight. The main strands were attached by cables to either side of the trail. In the web a few insects struggled feebly. Innocent enough to all appearance, the thing was an effective barricade that would have to be removed or smear the traveler with viscous threads. But the frightened deer leaped between the two liana stems.

It had barely touched the web when, with a light rustle and a shower of light bamboo canes that had been used for its nice suspension and balance, a filmy net descended like an open parachute upon the deer, enmeshing its feet, tripping it and sending it thrashing to the ground in fold upon fold of fine meshes.

This time Forster's good luck had saved him. He had no doubt that the jungle swarmed with Jivaros, waiting to see the success of their trap, eager to bound out from cover, to drop down from the boughs and roll him and, perhaps, his dog, into a helpless bundle to be borne off in triumph, if they did not spear him.

None made an appearance. Save for the lessening struggles of the deer, the jungle was silent. But Rough growled deep and long, and what showed of his clipped mane above the feathers rose in a bristling ruff.

Forster was not far from the bend. He stepped back and hastily took one of his sticks of dynamite, carried with infinite care but ready for action. He lit the short fuse and, stepping up to the curve, sent it hurtling through the air in a high parabola.

It crashed sputtering through the vines and fell within the bush, exploding with a vicious roar that was multiplied a hundred times. Great boughs snapped and leaves and twigs came pattering down like a Summer shower. Startled yells supplemented the screeching of birds. There were frantic, plunging, headlong rushes through the thick growth. The air was heavy with nitrous fumes.

Slowly the forest settled down again after the uproar to comparative silence and, after a little, Forster and the dog proceeded. The deer was dead as he stooped to examine curiously the fathom upon fathom of fine netting that had been so cunningly prepared. He left the carcass to the ants.

There might be a dead or injured Jivaro or so in the bush, or carried off by his fleeing comrades. Forster, with set jaw, devoutly hoped so. He figured Yupan for this device. With each trap passed his own prestige must grow. The village would be warned of his wrath, perhaps too effectively and he would have to forego his interview with the wizard.

Inside of half an hour he came to the clearing. There was no one at work in the plantation. Over the tall maize he could see the thatched roofs of the log houses and the fighting watch-tower. Rough gave no sign, and he went on boldly to the trodden ground where the meals were prepared and the villagers loafed or danced on occasion in the shade of great fig trees. The place seemed deserted, though he reckoned that at least a hundred pairs of eyes were watching him through chink and crevice.

He stood in the middle of the empty plaza, Rough beside him, his feather coat gleaming in the sunshine that struck the

clearing. He called aloud in a deep bass made more profound by the mask.

"Yupan! Yupan! Come without fear, O Yupan!"

He could almost sense the suspended breathing, the knocking hearts of the hidden tribesfolk, watching with awe this thunder-flinging Horror that stood like a specter in the sun-flecked place, summoning their wizard.

Yupan appeared in the entrance to the club-house. He was nervous over the failure of his net and this last display of power. One man had been brought in stunned from a flying bough, another had been pinned to the ground and others flung prostrate by the concussion. Two were bleeding from flesh wounds. The only comfort he held was that they had not all been utterly annihilated. Either the power of the Stranger had its limits or he stayed his hand because he wanted to talk with Yupan.

The eyes of the tribe were on him, his prestige was at stake. He was not a coward, so he slowly issued forth, leaning a little more heavily than usual on his staff, his hands clammy with sweat. The motionless figure seemed so bold, composed and confident, fraught with dangerous intention and capability.

It had spoken in his own tongue. Yupan knew a little bastard Spanish, and he had trusted to discovering from the speech of the Stranger—whom he had hoped to see brought in netted like a wild-fowl—whether he was a Spaniard or one of the more adventurous Americanos. The owner of the head with the red hair had been one of these, or an Inglese. A spirit could talk in his own tongue. Few white men knew anything of it—cared to use it.

Forster stood still with Rough at heel. Slowly Yupan advanced to within ten paces, then squatted down. He had felt his dignity oozing out of him, and he was glad to assume the pose.

"What do you want, O Man-with-the-head-of-a-skull?" he asked.

"To talk with you, Yupan. Maybe to ask a question."

Forster spoke slowly, forming his sentence carefully. His speech, booming hollow, was all the more effective. But he caught a glint in Yupan's eyes that puzzled him for a minute.

If the Stranger wanted to ask questions he was not omnipotent. Yupan's nerve began to come back.

"Can I give news to Death, who knows all?" he asked.

"I would see if you speak with a true tongue," answered Forster sternly. "If this is so I will reward you. If not, I will destroy your village in a moment, and you shall all know Death in his own place. For I am here and there and everywhere and my eyes are the lightning."

It was tall talk, and he watched its effect narrowly, supplementing it.

"I will put out their eyes. I will turn them cold, cold as the snows on Cotopaxi. Do you think I can do these things, O Yupan?"

"I am a wizard, and I have seen many wonders," muttered Yupan. "Also I can do wonders myself. It may be that you can do these things."

"Some of them I have done already, Yupan. But not to those who do not stop my trail. It is not so easy to stop my trail, Yupan. Your young men do not make webs as well as the spiders can. Let me see your wonders, Yupan. Let us see who is the greater wizard."

He spoke banteringly, loudly enough for all the listeners to hear, knowing the wizard could not forego the challenge.

"You will come into the club house?" asked Yupan.

"Not so. Any one can fool children in the dark, Yupan. Great magic is made in the open."

Yupan glowered. The Stranger had command of the situation.

"So be it," he said, and took out his bamboo pipe.

Forster guessed what might be coming and spoke to Rough, who looked up inquiringly and then obediently lay down back of his master.

THE audience was none the less impressive for being unseen as the high notes of the pipe sounded in the stillness of the sunny enclosure. Yupan played on in minor key, a plaintive but compelling air. Ziku, in the shadow of the doorway to the club house, shrank back as the anaconda came slowly from behind the curtains, gliding on in rippling, mottled splendor with sharp, shielded snout pointed toward the music that lured it out into the glare.

It hesitated at the veranda, but the tune shrilled more imperatively and either the music, strangely affecting its sluggish nerves with pleasant vibrations—or the prospect of *cavies* and *capybaras*—beckoned it on, a glorious, evil thing, capable of crushing to a jelly anything it encountered. Its two primitive legs, spurlike hooks, make faint dints in the packed dirt over which its moving body left no trail.

Forster spoke a warning to Rough, gazing himself, fascinated, as the music changed and the huge reptile coiled. Then he laughed.

"I could fill this place with snakes, Yupan," he said. "Or I could shrivel up your snake. Do you want me to kill your snake, O Yupan?"

The wizard looked at him evilly.

"Where is your pipe?" he asked. Yupan had bluffed himself.

"Pipe? I can bring them from the ground. I can breed them. Behold!"

His cloak was a perfect cover for his hands, and he knew just where to find what he wanted in his jacket. He produced a small box holding white pellets which he placed on the ground.

"How many snakes do you want Yupan?"

His manner was easy. Irresistibly he thought of Moses and Pharoah's wise men. He touched a match to the chemical balls and immediately they projected into brown wormy, snakelike forms, writhing with apparent life while Yupan's eyes widened and his jaw became slack. Forster laughed again and stepped on the powdery things, crushing them into the soil.

"Try again, Yupan," he said.

A faint rustle had come from the house. The shifting of uneasy bodies.

Yupan took a grain of corn from his girdle, with a square of cloth. He forced the seed into the ground and covered it with the square. Then he began to pipe and the snake, that had coiled sleepily in the sun, unobservant of Rough, lifted its head and swayed it from side to side. Forster did not take his eyes off the cloth. Presently it began to move and raise.

Yupan whipped off the cloth and displayed two green blades of corn.

"It is enough," said Forster scornfully. "It would be better if you could do it without covering, Yupan. It is my turn. Fetch me some water."

Yupan sulkily snatched up his cloth. His best bit of legerdemain had failed. Now he would watch the Stranger. He called to Ziku who came out fearfully and set down a calabash of water.

"Is it pure water?"

Yupan drank some for answer. Forster took out his drinking-cup and poured it half full. He too sipped it and handed it to Yupan. As the wizard doubtfully reached for it Forster let fall into the water a morsel of sodium wrapped in blotting paper. It blazed up and the wizard dropped the cup, stifling a yell.

"A wizard should not fear fire," said Forster. "I could have burned you to ashes, Yupan, had I chosen. Death burns with fever, but his last touch is cold. Give me the rest of the water."

He brought out a small flask, apparently of dark glass, removed the stopper and turned it upside down. Then he filled it with water and poured some of it out upon the ground, some into his own palm.

"Put out your hand, Yupan."

Yupan obeyed. He thought he knew this trick. To pour liquid into the palm and pretend to see things there. It was impressive to the credulous, but unless he, Yupan, saw these things with his own eyes, he was not going to give it much credit.

Forster pressed the catch that closed the main outlet of the trick bottle and opened a compartment that held the bi-sulphide. Slowly he held up the flask and breathed upon it.

"The breath of Death is like the wind that blows from Cotopaxi," he said. "It stops the blood and the heart. None may escape it."

He let a drop of the bi-sulphide fall on Yupan's open palm. For a second the wizard gazed at it. His hands were not horny; they were creased with age and soft. The chemical evaporated immediately, and Yupan felt as if an icicle had stabbed him through the hand. To his excited imagination the intense cold ran up his arm, clutched at his heart. In stark terror he lost his balance and toppled backward with a howl.

It was the involuntary cry that defeated him more than the trick that those within the houses could not see, though they had heard. They believed Yupan dead. Ziku, who had retreated, stood as if turned to stone. Following the cry Forster swiftly ignited a strip of magnesium ribbon and the

white glare brought out a startled cry from the onlookers. He had tossed the magnesium towards the snake and, with a hiss, the anaconda struck at air, uncoiled and, dazzled, glided straight for the maize, disappearing among the emerald shafts.

"Rise, Yupan," shouted Forster. "Death does not always kill."

The sweat was pouring down his face inside the mask. The heat in the clearing was suffocating. But he had won. Yupan got trembling to his feet, no wizard but a frightened old man, holding one hand with the other, his face working. He looked like a chastised baboon who has played with fire.

"What would you with Yupan?" he asked.

"Come to me at nightfall. The way will be made clear. Come, or I shall send my full breath out upon you."

Forster pointed to the forest whence he had emerged. He wanted further to impress Yupan, fancying that his defeat would leave him finally vindictive. He had no mind to enter the houses nor to speak further in public. The ordeal of standing in the sun cased in the mask was bringing on a touch of fever.

"I will come," said Yupan. "But first we will make a feast."

"I do not eat. I do not drink," lied Forster with a parched tongue.

His pulse was beginning to race, his head to throb. Presently a chill would shake him from head to foot, undo his work. He fought it off.

"I will tell your snake to come back to you, Yupan," he said. "If your magic is still strong it will come when you pipe for it. Tonight, as soon as it is dark."

He called to Rough and stalked away down the path between the corn. A rustling disclosed where the anaconda lurked. Forster staggered, almost before he was out of sight. As he reached the dim forest trail the chill was on him, and he leaned against a tree, helpless, while Rough whined in sympathy. Gulping down quinin he made his way to the place where he intended to camp, clambering weakly up a tree to the crotch where he had left his tent and some of his outfit hidden. His last act was to aid the dog to a place beside him before he collapsed, racked with the fever brought on before its time.

AT SUNSET he was himself again and able to eat. He did not set up his tent. Yupan could not be coaxed inside. But he daubed the mask with liquid phosphorus, set up two Roman candles in convenient places and suspended a strip or so of magnesium ribbon from handy boughs. Before it was dark he took the Airedale down the trail toward the village and ordered him to watch. Then he returned to the spot he had selected and seated himself between and under the branches of the giant fig, a ghastly, ghoulish figure in shimmering shroud, topped by the skull on which played the semblance of decay.

Rough barked, and he whistled. The dog came to him, panting.

A dim shadow on the trail announced Yupan. Forster touched off magnesium with a glowing punk, and the flare revealed the old wizard, panoplied in his morion, his claw and knuckle necklaces, painted with black and yellow in grotesque stripes, his eyes starting from their sockets at the dazzling flash. As his sight returned he saw the ghostly figure alight with lambent flame and heard its mocking laugh.

"I told you the way would be plain, Yupan. Did your snake return?"

"Yes."

"Sit down. Yupan, there is a white man in this valley. A man who is tall and strong and who seeks the gold that is the color of his hair. I seek him. He is mine. If any have hurt him it would be best for you to make them your enemies and yourself my ally, Yupan. Much best. For I shall destroy them. What do you know of this?"

Yupan cogitated. His doubt of the Stranger's omnipotence returned. He had noticed his hands. They were very human hands. The Stranger was a man with blood that might be spilled and flesh that might be torn, for all the glowing skull. But he was without doubt a wizard—a great wizard. It was necessary to be wary. Even if the Stranger was a spirit, if he, Yupan, did his bidding, he might be rewarded and the Outlaws might be destroyed. While the Jivaros invariably united when they were threatened as a community, their tribal wars were many. The annihilation of the Outlaws would leave the gold open to Yupan and do away with powerful and hated rivals who might at any time take it into

their heads to wipe out the village and Yupan with it, for all his cunning.

Also he might yet outwit the Stranger who had humiliated him. His head would not be much good—if that was his head, for Yupan knew the use of masks in sorcery.

Forster foresaw his weakness in asking questions, but the point could not be evaded.

"I wish to know if you speak truthfully," he said. "For I may have to use you as a messenger. The people are afraid of me. And I will pay you well."

"What will you pay?"

"I will give you some of my power, Yupan. I will make you able to do what I have done this day?"

"All of it?"

"For a certain time and within limits. Now speak."

"I have heard of this Yellow Head. And I think my people that live near the *oro* have made him *imbrizu*."

Forster did not understand the word but made no sign. He had made up his mind how to act whether Martin was alive or dead.

"When did he come?"

"Some seven suns ago. But, if he is dead, you must know, for he would be with you in your country."

"The dead are more than the leaves of this forest, Yupan. Yet I shall know. For I shall send a messenger. Watch, Yupan, for the colors will tell if you have spoken truly."

He touched off a Roman candle. It hissed and sent a blue ball spouting up through the boughs. Another and then a crimson one, a burst of steel filings igniting in starry radiance.

"One lie you have told, Yupan," Forster said sternly.

It was a good bet.

"Nay, save that I am not sure if he is *imbrizu*. But I know that he came seeking gold seven suns back, as I have told you."

Yupan was uneasy. He did not like the dark in unfamiliar places.

"How long will it take you to travel to this place, Yupan?"

"Three days."

"Then go and make certain. I will meet you on the trail. If this white man is safe I will make you the mightiest of all wizards."

"I will start at dawn."

"Good. Now go."

The magnesium flared out, and Forster slipped behind the main trunk. The wizard rubbed his eyes and slowly departed. Forster gave him twenty minutes to get back to the village before he set off his second Roman candle as a final incentive.

Yupan curled up in front of his fire. He had a problem to consider. He was greedy of all he could get and afraid of the Stranger. If Yellow-Head was *imbrizu* he would be made a great wizard. In any case the Stranger had promised him enough for that. And, if Yellow Head was made an "everlasting guest" doubtless the Stranger would kill the Outlaws and raze the village. He would win most that way and then, after he had got his reward, he would test the Stranger's immortality. Not by his own hand. Ziku would be the operative.

He kicked the slumbering disciple awake and left him sleepless for the rest of the night with the news that he was to accompany him to the village of the Outlaws. When they started, before the village knew it was day, Ziku carried Yupan's rifle with a dozen precious cartridges.

The morion was placed at the entrance to the club house as a taboo. None might enter when it barred the way. Also it hid the fact of Yupan's presence or absence. It was no trick at all to handle his own villagers.

FORSTER stood with Yupan where the trail pitched down the side of a steep cliff that walled the gorge of the gold-bearing tributary. They were in the covert of the dense jungle, looking down on the remains of bridge buttresses of stone and pitch. The trail itself, for the last ten miles, had run over immense stone blocks. The river surged through banks of red gravel that showed ancient washings by some hydraulic process. There were stone troughs with stone riffles to catch the gold, broken, most of them. There were patches of cultivated land higher upstream with the thatched dwellings showing plainly.

Behind his skull Forster's face was set in hard lines, his eyes like steel. Unless Yupan lied Martin was *imbrizu*. What that term meant Forster could not, with his primary knowledge of Jivaro, determine. He had fenced about for an explanation, and the best he could get from Yupan was that it meant a guest, or perhaps a prisoner,

with whom the Outlaws would not willingly part.

He fancied, as he stood scowling toward a rock carving of the sun and some five and six-rayed stars, that Yupan wore a jeering look. He had come to a showdown and he hung in doubt a little how to proceed.

Yupan was not entirely happy. Though he was a wizard, he was human, and he had drunken a little too much and boasted a little too much overnight. He was not even certain of the fate of Yellow Head. He had not been profusely welcomed, to begin with, and he had been denied, with Ziku, the entire liberty of the club-house. They had kept him, with a show of politeness that was firm in its limits, on the veranda.

He had found the Outlaws highly wrought up over the trespassing of Yellow Head, aggravated by the advent of the Stranger. They were as excited as a swarm of bees that has been interfered with. And, when Yuban boasted of his influence with the Stranger, describing him vaguely as a great sorcerer who had met his match in Yupan, it had been more than suggested that he bring the wonderworker into the village and let the Outlaws see how greatly he was to be feared. Only upon that promise had he actually been allowed to leave without restraint. Ziku they had actually held as a sort of hostage. It had all been very unsatisfactory, and Yupan was glad to have got away with a whole skin.

Now he proposed to pit the Stranger against the tribe and stand by to see the devil take the hindmost. That the Stranger would do damage before he went under he was assured. Then he would reap what he could. Ziku did not count.

He spoke vaguely of Yellow Head as being in the club-house.

"Do not destroy that," he pleaded. "Or you will see nothing of Yellow Head. It is the *imbrizu* place. They would not let me enter. Can you not blast them or turn their blood to ice, as you did mine?"

Forster did not answer. He mistrusted Yupan, yet he believed that Martin was held by the tribe. Yupan had given certain unmistakable details that identified him. Delay might be dangerous. He had suffered symptoms of an approaching fever fit. Slowly he made up his mind to descend and at least parley with the tribe. He ordered the wizard to follow him, but when they reached the plantations Yupan dropped out of sight in the maize. Rough was barking.

Out of the rows of beans, man high, sprang the horde of Outlaws, intent upon surrounding the Stranger. His appearance daunted them somewhat, but they were the fiercest of all the Jivaros, and they had spent the night working themselves up to brave deeds.

Arrows and spears came flying, a few shots were fired as Forster made for the *plaza*, firing his Luger, Rough beside him. He saw men go down. Arrows hit his mask and stuck there. Others tangled in his long robe.

He gained the clear place and saw a scurry of women racing for the bush, carrying their children. The Jivaros stayed in the cover of their crops, firing at him. Some aimed and discharged rifles from the tower.

Forster dodged behind a tree and lit a stick of the dynamite he had carried so carefully, packed each in sawdust in a cylinder. One he flung into the beans where it exploded and sent warriors pell mell, some crawling, one minus an arm, terrified. One he hurled beneath the base of the tower, and the structure toppled sidewise and fell at the detonation.

A band of savages came on in a body and the third stick fell fairly among them before they scattered to surround him. The survivors fled with yells, but a spear had hit Forster in the shoulder grinding on the bone and he leaned against the tree faint and dizzy, the red blood streaming down his cloak.

The Jivaros were diving for the forest, convinced that the end of the world had come, but Yupan, from the borders of the maize, shouted for Ziku. His pupil had been made a hostage. He had not been bound. If he had the courage, if they had not taken away his rifle——

"Ziku! See the blood. He is a man. Kill! Kill!"

But Ziku did not come. He had been in the men's sleeping-quarters, and he had no rifle. He saw the Stranger wounded, knew that he was human, but he would as soon have attacked a wounded puma.

Yupan plucked up courage as he saw Forster reeling. He came out of the maize and snatched an ax from the hand of a dead tribesman, rushing in to finish Forster, who had dropped his Luger and was groping

for it. He would get the head beneath that skull-mask. He would have that of Yellow Head. He would loot the village.

As he raised his arm for the stroke there was a flash of metallic plumage, a body launched from the ground as if shot from a catapult, sounding a fierce snarl.

The Airedale leaped true, sending the wizard to the ground, his teeth in the corded throat, worrying, snarling as he tasted blood. For a few moments Yupan writhed and thrashed with arms and legs, seeking the dog's neck with feeble hands. Then he lay still, with Rough standing over him, defiant of interference, his whiskers dripping red, his teeth showing.

Ziku slunk out of the back of his house as Forster recovered his pistol with his left hand. To the last of Ziku's days he was convinced that the dog-bird spread wings and literally flew at Yupan.

Forster called to Rough, but the dog would not leave his kill. Flames had sprung up from the tower and caught the next house. Like a drunken man Forster made his way to the club house and staggered up the steps, calling Martin's name.

THE fog was thick when Forster, leaving the steamer, boarded a Market Street car to transfer to Powell. He had wealth enough in the purser's care to have bought a hundred cabs, but there were none in sight, and the car was waiting near the Ferry. Rough he had left temporarily with the steward.

His leanness had given place to emaciation. The conductor and the few passengers stared at the man whose clothes hung on him like towels on a rack, whose face was so set with hard purpose, with cheek-bones and jaw-bones showing through the leathery skin, with eyes that were like balls of heated steel. He carried a small basket of strange weaving which he guarded on his lap.

He was clean shaven, but his hair was long and they looked at each other and at him as if he had been an escaped lunatic. The intensity of his gaze as he regarded them—though without real interest—was almost the glare of madness.

He had gone through enough to send him insane, but he was far from mad. More like a man who has burned up his energies on a long, long trail but sees the end of it at last and rallies the last of his reserves to accomplish a fixed purpose.

The maid was not the same who had opened the door of Katherine Meade's flat to him five months before, but she gave a gasp at his face and strove to close him out.

Forster, without much notice, brushed her aside and strode in. It was seven in the evening. There was no one in the reception room where he had once talked with Martin's fiancée but voices and laughter, the laughter of a man and woman, came from the adjoining room.

The maid caught at his arm.

"What do you want? I'll send for——"

Forster turned on her with such a baleful look that she sank, hysterical, into a chair while Forster stalked into the inner room with his basket.

A table was set for two with rose-shaded electric lamps, with flowers, with all the crystal, silver and porcelain of a dainty dinner *tête-à-tête*. Katherine Meade lifted a glass across the table to a man in dinner clothes who had risen from his chair with a toast. She was laughing up at him, wooing him with her eyes, enticingly beautiful in her low gown, when she caught sight of Forster.

Her gardenia skin turned chalky, the color in her cheeks appeared the paint it was while her eyes grew big with fright. One hand she set to her bosom, struggling for breath.

The man turned. A big chap, sunburned and vigorous, handsome and attractive enough. At another time Forster might have been sorry for him. There was no pity now in his heart.

"Who the —— are you?"

"Ask her," answered Forster as he set down his basket. "Ask her. I am Martin's friend. John Martin. Perhaps you have never heard of him."

The man looked at the woman, irresolute. Katherine Meade was shaking from head to foot. The wine was spilled across the cloth. She made an effort to recover herself, her features twisted as if with a stroke, marred in an agonised attempt at control.

"John Martin," she said, "was some one I knew—quite well. I must have told you about him, Marshall. He once rather lost his head over me. He— This man——"

Forster's harsh laugh broke in as he tore off the lid of the basket and set something

on the table amid the flowers of the centerpiece.

A strong odor of spices and camphor, of something vaguely suggestive of imperfectly cured meat, filled the room. The man shrank back, the woman covered her face with her hands but peered through them at the dried and shriveled head of Martin, taken by Forster from the Jivaro club house and preserved as best he knew.

The bones had been removed, the eyelids and lips were stitched. The head had shrunken to a wrinkled, horrid thing, the hue of putty, the size of a grapefruit. Only the golden hair preserved some degree of luster, shining brassily in lank strands under the lamps.

"He lost his head," said Forster gratingly, "because he thought you had a heart. I told you I would go after him and I have brought back for you all that is left of him—for a wedding present."

He heard the man exclaim, "My God!" as he left the room. At the door he turned for a moment to see the woman swooning to the floor, dragging with her the cloth, the flowers, the head of John Martin.

JUDGE CREANER'S NOSE

by **John L. Considine**

AN ODD character of the old California days was Charles M. Creaner, judge for several years of the Fifth judicial district, which embraced a number of mining counties. He did not know much about law, but he had a good store of what is known as "horse sense," and, what was more, he was a fighting judge—one whom no lawyer cared to trifle with.

Lawyers in his court learned to study his characteristics, and when the point of his nose began to wrinkle like that of a hare in the act of smelling they knew that trouble was brewing.

One of those lawyers was Benjamin F. Moore. His knowledge of law was limited and so was his vocabulary. He had committed to memory extracts from speeches by Clay, Calhoun and Randolph, and, by twisting these to suit the occasion, managed on all occasions to make a talk that sounded well to the ears of the groundlings. He had a good knowledge of human nature, however, and as he was dealing with jurors more ignorant even than himself he managed to win many a case against lawyers of greater knowledge than himself.

Once a fellow lawyer rebuked him for the ridiculous quality of an address he had made to a jury.

"You talk as though I was talking to twelve judges," retorted Moore, "when I know I was talking to twelve —— fools. I went in for winning my case, and I'm going to do it."

Which he did.

In a case in which Moore appeared before Judge Creaner the jurist made a ruling to which Moore took exception in strong terms, saying it seemed to him that any old cow would know better. Creaner's nose began to wrinkle.

"Mr. Moore!" he exclaimed.

But Moore, scenting trouble, pretended not to hear, and tried to divert the current of the judge's thoughts by proceeding with his argument.

"Mr. Moore!" exclaimed the judge quite loudly.

Still Moore affected not to hear.

"Mr. Moore!" shouted Creaner, banging the desk with his fist.

Moore paused and gazed inquiringly at the court.

"Did I understand you to say that an old cow had more sense than this court?" asked Creaner.

Moore paused a moment.

"No, sir," he said, "I did not say it."

"Ah! Then I was mistaken. Proceed, Mr. Moore."

After court had adjourned a fellow lawyer intimated a belief that Moore had trifled with the truth in making the answer he did.

"Oh, lied, you mean?" inquired Moore. "Of course, I lied. I had to lie or kill old Creaner, and I'd lie a thousand times before I'd do that. You'd play —— making apologies to that old nose!"

Author of "Captain Blood's Dilemma," "The Sea Hawk," etc.

IN THIS short story, complete in itself, taken from the series which the author has been pleased to call "The Historical Nights' Entertainment," an attempt has been made to draw a group of more or less famous events using the fiction form, but without amplifying it by imagination.

Each incident here pictured is an actual historic happening; the dialog is such as was chronicled at the time, added to by the paraphrases of contemporary chroniclers; the settings are authentic.

A hard task, this, the author has set himself, but his labor was lightened by being able to choose the most vivid and bizarre "nights" in all countries and all periods of history. How greatly he has succeeded is for the reader to judge.—EDITOR'S NOTE.

PATRICIAN influence from without had procured his removal in August of that year, 1756, from the loathsome cell he had occupied for thirteen months in the Piombi —so-called from the leaded roof immediately above those prisons which are simply the garrets of the Doge's palace.

That cell had been no better than a kennel seldom reached by the light of day, and so shallow that it was impossible for a man of his fine height to stand up in it. But his present prison was comparatively spacious and it was airy and well-lighted by a barred window, whence he could see the Lido.

Yet he was desperately chagrined at the change, for he had almost completed his arrangements to break out of his former cell. The only ray of hope in his present despair came from the fact that the implement to which he trusted was still in his possession, safely concealed in the upholstery of the arm-chair that had been removed with him into his present quarters. That implement he had fashioned for himself with infinite pains out of a door-bolt some twenty inches long, which he had found discarded in a rubbish heap in a corner of the attic where he had been allowed to take his brief daily exercise. Using as a whetstone a small slab of black marble, similarly acquired, he had shaped the bolt into a sharp octagonal-pointed chisel or spontoon.

It remained in his possession, but he saw no chance of using it now, for the suspicions of Lorenzo, the jailer, were aroused, and daily a couple of archers came to sound the floors and walls. True they did not sound the ceiling, which was low and within reach. But it was obviously impossible to cut through the ceiling in such a manner as to leave the progress of the work unseen.

Hence his despair of breaking out of a prison where he had spent over a year

without trial or prospect of a trial, and where he seemed likely to spend the remainder of his days. He did not even know precisely why he had been arrested. All that Giacomo Casanova knew was that he was accounted a disturber of the public peace. He was notoriously a libertine, a gamester, and heavily in debt; also—and this was more serious—he was accused of practising magic, as indeed he had done, as a means of exploiting to his own profit the credulity of simpletons of all degrees.

He would have explained to the Inquisitors of State of the Most Serene Republic that the books of magic found by their apparitors in his possession—"The Clavicula of Solomon," the "Zecor-ben," and other kindred works—had been collected by him as curious instances of human aberration. But the Inquisitors of State would not have believed him, for the Inquisitors were among those who took magic seriously. And, anyhow, they had never asked him to explain, but had left him as if forgotten in that abominable verminous cell under the leads, until his patrician friend had obtained him the mercy of his transfer to better quarters.

This Casanova was a man of iron nerve and iron constitution. Tall and well made, he was boldly handsome, with fine dark eyes and dark-brown hair. In age he was barely one-and-twenty; but he looked older, as well he might, for in his adventurer's way he had already gathered more experience of life than most men gain in half a century.

The same influence that had obtained him his change of cell had also gained him latterly the privilege—and he esteemed it beyond all else—of procuring himself books. Desiring the works of Maffai, he bade his jailer purchase them out of the allowance made him by the Inquisitors in accordance with the Venetian custom. The allowance was graduated to the social status of each prisoner. But the books being costly and any monthly surplus from his monthly expenditure being usually the jailer's perquisite, Lorenzo was reluctant to indulge him. He mentioned that there was a prisoner above who was well-equipped with books, and who, no doubt, would be glad to lend in exchange.

Yielding to the suggestion, Casanova handed Lorenzo a copy of Peteau's "Rationarium," and received next morning, in exchange, the first volume of Wolff. Within he found a sheet bearing six verses, a paraphrase of Seneca's epigram *Calamitosus est animus futuri anxius*. Immediately he perceived he had stumbled upon a means of corresponding with one who might be disposed to assist him to break prison.

In reply, being a scholarly rascal—he had been educated for the priesthood—he wrote six verses himself. Having no pen, he cut the long nail of his little finger to a point, and, splitting it, supplied the want. For ink he used the juice of mulberries. In addition to the verses, he wrote a list of the books in his possession, which he placed at the disposal of his fellow captive. He concealed the written sheet in the spine of that vellum-bound volume; and on the title page, in warning of this, he wrote the single Latin word, *Latet*. Next morning he handed the book to Lorenzo, telling him that he had read it, and requesting the second volume.

That second volume came on the next day, and in the spine of it a long letter, some sheets of paper, pens, and a pencil. The writer announced himself as one Marino Balbi, a patrician and a monk, who had been four years in prison, where he had since been given a companion in misfortune, Count Andrea Asquino.

Thus began a regular and full correspondence between the prisoners, and soon Casanova—who had not lived on his wits for nothing—was able to form a shrewd estimate of Balbi's character. The monk's letters revealed it as compounded of sensuality, stupidity, ingratitude, and indiscretion.

"In the world," says Casanova, "I should have had no commerce with a fellow of his nature. But in the Piombi I was obliged to make capital out of everything that came under my hands."

The capital he desired to make in this instance was to ascertain whether Balbi would be disposed to do for him what he could not do for himself. He wrote inquiring, and proposing flight.

Balbi replied that he and his companion would do anything possible to make their escape from that abominable prison, but his lack of resource made him add that he was convinced that nothing was possible.

"All you have to do," wrote Casanova in answer , "is to break through the ceiling of my cell and get me out of this, then

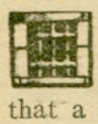
trust me to get you out of Piombi. If you are disposed to make the attempt, I will supply you with the means, and show you the way."

It was a characteristically bold reply, revealing to us the utter gamester he was in all things.

He knew that Balbi's cell was situated immediately under the leads, and he hoped that once in it he should be able readily to find a way through the roof. The cell of Balbi's communicated with a narrow corridor, no more than a shaft for light and air, which was immediately above Casanova's prison. And no sooner had Balbi written consenting, than Casanova explained what he was to do. Balbi must break through the wall of his cell into the little corridor, and there cut a round hole in the floor—precisely as Casanova had done in his former cell—until nothing but a shell of ceiling remained—a shell that could be broken down by half a dozen blows when the moment to escape should have arrived.

To begin with, he ordered Balbi to purchase himself two or three dozen pictures of saints, with which to paper his wall, using as many as might be necessary for a screen to hide the hole he would be cutting.

When Balbi wrote that his walls were hung with pictures of saints, it became a question of conveying the spontoon to him. This was difficult, and the monk's fatuous suggestions merely served further to reveal his stupidity. Finally Casanova's wits found the way. He bade Lorenzo buy him an in-folio of the Bible which had just been published, and it was into the spine of this enormous tome that he packed the precious spontoon, and thus conveyed to Balbi, who immediately got to work.



THIS was at the commencement of October. On the eighth of the month Balbi wrote to Casanova that a whole night devoted to labor had resulted merely in the displacing of a single brick, which so discouraged the faint-hearted monk that he was for abandoning an attempt whose only result must be to increase in the future the rigor of their confinement.

Without hesitation, Casanova replied that he was assured of success—although he was far from having any ground for any such assurance. He enjoined the monk to believe him, and to persevere, confident as he advanced he would find progress easier. This proved, indeed, to be the case, for soon Balbi found the brickwork yielding so rapidly to his efforts that one morning, a week later, Casanova heard three light taps above his head—the preconcerted signal by which they were to assure themselves that their notions of the topography of the prison were correct. All that day he heard Balbi at work immediately above him, and again on the morrow, when Balbi wrote that as the floor was of the thickness of only two boards, he counted upon completing the job on the next day, without piercing the ceiling.

But it would seem as if fortune were intent upon making a mock of Casanova, luring him to heights of hope, merely to cast him down again into the depths of despair. Just as upon the eve of breaking out of his former cell mischance had thwarted him, so now, when again he deemed himself upon the very threshold of liberty, came mischance again to thwart him.

Early in the afternoon the sound of bolts being drawn aside froze his very blood and checked his breathing. Yet he had the presence of mind to give the double knock that was the agreed alarm signal, whereupon Balbi instantly desisted from his labors overhead.

Came Lorenzo with two archers, leading an ugly, lean little man of between forty and fifty years of age, shabbily dressed and wearing a round black wig, who the tribunal had ordered should share Casanova's prison for the present. With apologies for leaving such a scoundrel in Casanova's company, Lorenzo departed, and the newcomer went down upon his knees, drew forth a chaplet, and began to tell his beads.

Casanova surveyed this intruder at once with disgust and despair. Presently his disgust was increased when the fellow, whose name was Soradici, frankly avowed himself a spy in the service of the Council of Ten, a calling which he warmly defended from the contempt universally, but unjustly, according to himself, meted out to it. He had been imprisoned for having failed in his duty on one occasion through succumbing to a bribe. Conceive Casanova's frame of mind—his uncertainty as to how long this monster, as he called him, might be left in his company, his curbed impatience

to regain his liberty, and his consciousness of the horrible risk of discovery which delay entailed. He wrote to Balbi that night, while the spy slept, and for the present their operations were suspended. But not for very long. Soon Casanova's wits resolved how to turn to account the weakness which he discovered in Soradici.

The spy was devout to the point of bigoted, credulous superstition. He spent long hours in prayer, and he talked freely of his special devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and his ardent faith in miracles.

Casanova—the arch-humbug who had worked magic to delude the credulous—determined there and then to work a miracle for Soradici. Assuming an inspired air, he solemnly informed the spy one morning that it had been revealed to him in a dream that Soradici's devotion to the rosary was about to be rewarded; that an angel was to be sent from Heaven to deliver him from prison, and that Casanova himself would accompany him in his flight.

If Soradici doubted, conviction was soon to follow. For Casanova foretold the very hour at which the angel would come to break into the prison, and at that hour precisely—Casanova having warned Balbi—the noise made by the angel overhead flung Soradici into an ecstasy of terror.

But when, at the end of four hours, the angel desisted from his labors, Soradici was beset by doubts. Casanova explained to him that since angels invariably put on the garb of human flesh when descending upon earth, they labor under human difficulties. He added the prophecy that the angel would return on the last day of the month, the eve of All Saints—two days later—and that he would then conduct them out of captivity.

By this means Casanova ensured that no betrayal should be feared from the thoroughly duped Soradici, who now spent the time in praying, weeping, and talking of his sins and of the inexhaustibility of Divine Grace. To make doubly sure, Casanova added the most terrible oath that if, by word to the jailer, Soradici should presume to frustrate the divine intentions, he would immediately strangle him with his own hands.

On October thirty-first Lorenzo paid his usual daily visit early in the morning. After his departure they waited some hours, Soradici in expectant terror, Casanova in sheer impatience to be at work. Promptly at noon fell heavy blows overhead, and then, in a cloud of plaster and broken laths the heavenly messenger descended clumsily, into Casanova's arms.

Soradici found this tall, gaunt, bearded figure, clad in a dirty shirt and a pair of leather breeches, of a singular unangelic appearance; indeed, he looked far more like the devil.

When he produced a pair of scissors, so that the spy might cut Casanova's beard, which, like the angel's had grown in captivity, Soradici ceased to have any illusion on the score of Balbi's celestial nature. Although still intrigued—since he could not guess the secret correspondence that had passed between Casanova and Balbi—he perceived quite clearly that he had been fooled.

Leaving Soradici in the monk's care, Casanova hoisted himself through the broken ceiling and gained Balbi's cell, where the sight of Count Asquino dismayed him. He found a middle-aged man of corpulence which must render it impossible for him to face the athletic difficulties that lay before them; of this the count himself seemed already persuaded.

"If you think," was his greeting, as he shook Casanova's hand, "to break through the roof and find a way down from the leads, I don't see how you are to succeed without wings. I have not the courage to accompany you," he added. "I shall remain and pray for you."

Attempting no persuasion where it must have been idle, Casanova passed out to the cell again, and approaching as nearly as possible to the edge of the attic, he sat down where he could touch the roof as it sloped immediately above his head. With his spontoon he tested the timbers, and found them so decayed that they almost crumbled at the touch. Assured thereby that the cutting of a hole would be an easy matter, he at once returned to his cell, and there he spent the ensuing hours in preparing ropes. He cut up sheets, blankets, coverlets, and the very cover of his mattress, knotting the strips together with the utmost care. In the end he found himself equipped with some two hundred yards of rope, which should be ample for any purpose.

Having made a bundle of the fine taffeta suit in which he had been arrested, his gay cloak of floss silk, some stockings, shirts, and handkerchiefs, he and Balbi passed up

to the other cell, compelling Soradici to go with them. Leaving the monk to make a parcel of his belongings, Casanova went to tackle the roof. By dusk he had made a hole twice as large as was necessary, and had laid bare the lead sheeting with which the roof was covered. Unable, single-handed, to raise one of the sheets, he called Balbi to his aid, and between them, assisted by the spontoon, which Casanova inserted between the edge of the sheet and the gutter, they at last succeeded in tearing away the rivets. Then by putting their shoulders to the lead they bent it upward until there was room to emerge, and a view of the sky flooded by the vivid light of the crescent moon.

Not daring in that light to venture upon the roof, where they would be seen, they must wait with what patience they could until midnight, when the moon would have set. So they returned to the cell where they had left Soradici with Count Asquino.

From Count Balbi, Casanova had learned that Asquino, though well-supplied with money, was of an avaricious nature. Nevertheless, since money would be necessary, Casanova asked the count for the loan of thirty gold sequins. Asquino answered him gently that, in the first place, they would not need money to escape; that, in the second, he had a numerous family; that, in the third, if Casanova perished the money would be lost; and that, in the fourth, he had no money.

"My reply," writes Casanova, "lasted half an hour."

"Let me remind you," he said, in concluding his exhortation, "of your promise to pray for us, and let me ask you what sense there can be in praying for the success of an enterprise to which you refuse to contribute the most necessary means."

The old man was so far conquered by Casanova's eloquence that he offered him two sequins, which Casanova accepted, since he was not in the case to refuse anything.

Thereafter, as they sat waiting for the moon to set, Casanova found his earlier estimate of the monk's character confirmed. Balbi now broke into abusive reproaches. He found that Casanova had acted in bad faith by assuring him that he had found a complete plan of escape. Had he suspected that this was a mere gambler's throw on Casanova's part, he would never have labored to get him out of his cell. The count added his advice that they should abandon an attempt foredoomed to failure, and, being concerned for the two sequins with which he had so reluctantly parted, he argued the case at great length. Stifling his disgust, Casanova assured him that, although it was impossible for him to afford them details of how he intended to proceed, he was perfectly confident of success.

"So long as the mist isn't made of oil," I am content," said Casanova. "Come, make a bundle of your cloak. It is time we were moving."

But at this Soradici fell on his knees in the dark, seized Casanova's hands, and begged to be left behind to pray for their safety, since he would be sure to meet his death if he attempted to go with them. Casanova assented readily, delighted to be rid of the fellow. Then in the dark he wrote as best he could a quite characteristic letter to the Inquisitors of State, in which he took his leave of them, telling them that since he had been fetched into the prison without his wishes being consulted, they could not complain that he should depart without consulting theirs.

The bundle, containing Balbi's clothes, and another made up of half the rope, he slung from the monk's neck, thereafter doing the same in his own case. Then, in their shirt-sleeves, their hats on their heads, the pair of them started on their perilous journey, leaving Count Asquino and Soradici to pray for them.

Casanova went first, on all fours, and thrusting the point of his spontoon between the joints of the lead-sheeting so as to obtain a hold, he crawled slowly upward. To follow, Balbi took a grip of Casanova's belt with his right hand, so that, in addition to making his own way, Casanova was compelled to drag the weight of his companion after him, and this up to the sharp gradient of a roof rendered slippery by the mist.

Midway in that laborious ascent, the monk called to him to stop. He had dropped the bundle containing the clothes, and he hoped that it had not rolled beyond the gutter, though he did not mention which of them should retrieve it. After the unreasonableness already endured from this man, Casanova's exasperation was such in that moment that, he confessed he was tempted to kick him after his bundle.

Controlling himself, however, he answered patiently that the matter could not now be helped, and kept steadily on.

At last the apex of the roof was reached, and they got astride of it to breathe and to take a survey of their surroundings. They faced the several cupolas of the Church of St. Mark, which is connected with the ducal palace, being, in fact, no more than the private chapel of the Doge.

They set their bundles down, and, of course, in the act of doing so the wretched Balbi must lose his hat, and send it rolling down the roof after the bundle he had already lost. He cried out that it was an evil omen.

"On the contrary," Casanova assured him patiently, "it is a sign of divine protection; for if your bundle or your hat had happened to roll to the left instead of the right it would have fallen into the courtyard, where it would be seen by the guards, who must conclude that some one is moving and so no doubt, would have discovered us. As it is, your hat has followed your bundle into the canal, where it can do no harm.

Thereupon, bidding the monk to await his return, Casanova set off alone on a voyage of discovery, keeping for the present astride of the roof in his progress. He spent a full half-hour wandering along the vast roofing, going to right and to left in his quest, but failing completely to make any helpful discovery, or to find anything to which he could attach a rope. In the end it began to look as if, after all, he must choose between returning to prison or flinging himself from the roof into the canal. He was almost in despair, when in his wanderings his attention was caught by a dormer window on the canal side, about two-thirds of the way down the slope of the roof. With infinite precaution he lowered himself down the steep, slippery incline until he was astride of the little dormer roof. Leaning well forward, he discovered that a slender grating barred the leaded panes of the window itself, and for a moment this grating gave him pause.

MIDNIGHT boomed just then from the Church of St. Mark, like a reminder that but seven hours remained in which to conquer this and other difficulties that might confront him, and in which to win clear of that place, or else submit to a resumption of his imprisonment under conditions, no doubt, an hundredfold more rigorous.

Lying flat on his stomach, and hanging far over, so as to see what he was doing, he worked one point of his spontoon into the sash of the grating, and, levering outward, he strained until at last it came away completely in his hands. After that it was an easy matter to shatter the little latticed window.

Having accomplished so much, he turned, and, using his spontoon as before, he crawled back to the summit of the roof, and made his way rapidly along this to the spot where he had left Balbi. The monk, reduced by now to a state of blending despair, terror and rage, greeted Casanova in terms of the grossest abuse for having left him there so long.

"I was waiting only for daylight," he concluded, "to return to prison."

"What did you think had become of me?" asked Casanova.

"I imagined that you had tumbled off the roof."

"And is this abuse the expression of your joy at finding yourself mistaken?"

"Where have you been all this time?" the monk counter-questioned sullenly.

"Come with me and you shall see."

And taking up his bundle again, Casanova led his companion forward until they were in line with the dormer. There Casanova showed him that he had done, and consulted him as to the means to be adopted to enter the attic. It would be too risky for them to allow themselves to drop from the sill, since the height of the window from the floor was unknown to them, and might be considerable. It would be easy for one of them to lower the other by means of the rope. But it was not apparent, how, hereafter, the other was to follow. Thus reasoned Casanova:

"You had better lower me, anyhow," said Balbi, without hesitation; for no doubt he was very tired of that slippery roof, on which a single false step might have sent him to his account. "Once I am inside you can consider ways of following me."

That cold-blooded expression of the fellow's egoism put Casanova in a rage for the second time since they had left their prison. But, as before, he conquered it, and without uttering a word he proceeded to unfasten the coil of rope. Making one

end of it secure under Balbi's arms, he bade the monk lie prone upon the roof, his feet pointing downward, and then, paying out rope, he lowered him to the dormer. He then bade him get through the window as far as the level of his waist, and wait thus, hanging over and supporting himself upon the sill. When he had obeyed, Casanova followed, sliding carefully down to the roof of the dormer. Planting himself firmly, and taking the rope once more, he bade Balbi let himself go without fear, and so lowered him to the floor—a height from the window, as it proved, of some fifty feet. This extinguished all Casanova's hopes of being able to follow by allowing himself to drop from the sill. He was dismayed. But the monk, happy to find himself at last off that accursed roof, and out of all danger of breaking his neck, called foolishly to Casanova to throw him the rope so that he might take care of it.

"As may be imagined," says Casanova, "I was careful not to take this idiotic advice.

Not knowing now what was to become of him unless he could discover some other means than those at his command, he climbed back again to the summit of the roof, and started off desperately upon another voyage of discovery. This time he succeeded better than before. He found about a cupola a terrace which he had not earlier noticed, and upon this terrace a hod of plaster, a trowel, and a ladder some seventy feet long. He saw his difficulties solved. He passed an end of rope about one of the rungs, laid the ladder flat along the slope of the roof, and then, still astride of the apex, he worked his way back, dragging the ladder with him, until he was once more on a level with the dormer.

But now the difficulty was how to get the ladder through the window, and he had cause to repent having so hastily deprived himself of his companion's assistance. He had got the ladder into position, and lowered it until one of its ends rested upon the dormer, whilst the other projected some twenty feet beyond the edge of the roof. He slid down to the dormer, and placing the ladder beside him, drew it up so that he could reach the eighth rung. To this rung he made fast his rope, then lowered the ladder again until the upper end of it was in line with the window through which he sought to introduce it. But he found it impossible to do so beyond the fifth rung, for at this point the end of the ladder came in contact with the roof inside, and could be pushed no farther until it was inclined downward. Now, the only possible way to accomplish this was by raising the other end.

It occurred to him that he might, by so attaching the rope as to bring the ladder across the window-frame, lower himself hand over hand to the floor of the attic. But in so-doing he must have left the ladder there to show their pursuers in the morning, not merely the way they had gone, but for all he knew at this stage, the place where they might then be still in hiding. Having come so far, at so much risk and labor, he was determined to leave nothing to chance. To accomplish his object then, he made his way down to the very edge of the roof, sliding carefully on his stomach until his feet found support against the marble gutter, the ladder meanwhile remaining hooked by one of its rungs to the sill of the dormer.

In that perilous position he lifted his end of the ladder a few inches, and so contrived to thrust it another foot or so through the window, whereby its weight was considerably diminished. If he could but get it another couple of feet farther in he was sure that by returning to the dormer he would have been able to complete the job. In his anxiety to do this and to obtain the necessary elevation, he raised himself upon his knees.

But in the very act of making the thrust he slipped and, clutching wildly as he went, he shot over the edge of the roof. He found himself hanging there, suspended above that terrific abyss by his hands and his elbows, which had convulsively hooked themselves on to the edge of the gutter, so that he had it on a level with his breast.

It was a moment of dread the like of which he was never likely to endure again in a life that was to know many perils and many hairbreadth escapes. He could not write of it nearly a half-century later without shuddering and growing sick with horror.

A moment he hung there, gasping, then almost mechanically, guided by the sheer instinct of self-preservation, he not merely attempted, but actually succeeded in raising himself so as to bring his side against the gutter. Then continuing gradually

to raise himself until his waist was on the level with the edge, he threw the weight of his trunk forward upon the roof, and slowly brought his right leg up until he had obtained with his knee a further grip of the gutter. The rest was easy, and you may conceive him as he lay there on the roof's edge, panting and shuddering for a moment to regain his breath and nerve.

Meanwhile, the ladder, driven forward by the thrust that had so nearly cost him his life, had penetrated another three-feet through the window, and hung there immovable. Recovered, he took up his spontoon, which he had placed in the gutter, and, assisted by it, he climbed back to the dormer. Almost without further difficulty, he succeeded now in introducing the ladder until, of its own weight, it swung down into position.

A moment later he had joined Balbi in the attic, and together they groped about it in the dark, until finding presently a door, they passed into another chamber, where they discovered furniture by hurtling against it.

Guided by a faint glimmer of light, Casanova made his way to one of the windows and opened it. He looked out upon a black abyss, and having no knowledge of the locality, and no inclination to adventure himself into unknown regions, he immediately abandoned all idea of attempting to climb down. He closed the windows again, and going back to the other room, he lay down on the floor, with a bundle of ropes for a pillow, to wait for dawn.

And so exhausted was he, not only by the efforts of the past hours, and the terrible experience in which they had culminated, but also because in the last two days he had scarcely eaten or slept, that straightway, and greatly to Balbi's indignation and disgust, he fell into a profound sleep.

He was aroused three and a half hours later by the clamors and shakings of the exasperated monk. Protesting that such a sleep at such a time was a thing inconceivable, Balbi informed him that it had just struck five.

IT WAS still dark, but already there was a dim gray glimmer of dawn by which objects could be faintly discerned. Searching, Casanova found another door opposite that of the chamber which they had entered earlier. It was locked, but the lock was a poor one that yielded to half a dozen blows of the spontoon, and they passed into a little room beyond which by an open door they came into a long gallery lined with pigeonholes stuffed with parchments, which they conceived to be the archives. At the end of this gallery they found a short flight of stairs, and below that yet another, which brought them to a glass door. Opening this, they entered a room which Casanova immediately identified as the ducal chancellery. Descent from one of its windows would have been easy, but they would have found themselves in the labyrinth of courts and alleys behind St. Mark's, which would not have suited them at all.

On a table Casanova found a stout bodkin with a long wooden handle, the implement used by the secretaries for piercing parchments which were to be joined by a cord bearing the leaden seals of the Republic. He opened a desk, and rummaging in it, found a letter addressed to the Proveditor of Corfu, advising a remittance of three thousand sequins, which he would have appropriated without the least scruple. Unfortunately they were not there.

Quitting the desk, he crossed to the door, not merely to find it locked, but to discover that it was not the kind of lock that would yield to blows. There was no way out but by battering one of the panels, and to this he addressed himself without hesitation, assisted by Balbi, who had armed himself with the bodkin, but who trembled fearfully at the noise of Casanova's blows. There was danger in this, but the danger must be braved, for time was slipping away. In half an hour they had broken down all the panel it was possible to remove without the help of a saw. The opening they had made was a height of five feet from the ground, and the splintered woodwork armed it with a fearful array of jagged teeth.

They dragged a couple of stools to the door, and getting on to these, Casanova bade Balbi to go first. The long, lean monk folded his arms, and thrust head and shoulders through the hole; then Casanova lifted him through into the room beyond. Casanova threw their bundles after him, and then placing a third stool on top of the other two, climbed on to it, and being almost on a level with the opening, was able to get through as far as his waist,

when Balbi took him in his arms and proceeded to drag him out. But it was done at the cost of torn breeches and lacerated legs, and when he stood up in the room beyond he was bleeding freely from the wounds which the jagged edges of the wood had dealt him.

After that they went down two staircases, and came out at last into the gallery leading to the great doors at the head of that magnificent flight of steps known as the Giant's Staircase. But these doors—the main entrance of the palace—were locked, and, at a glance, Casanova saw that nothing short of a hatchet would serve to open them. There was no more to be done.

With a resignation that seemed to Balbi entirely cynical, Casanova sat down on the floor.

"My task is ended," he announced. "It is now for Heaven or chance to do the rest. I don't know whether the palace cleaners will come here today as it is All Saints, or tomorrow, which will be All Souls. Should any one come I shall run for it the moment the door is opened, and you had best follow me. If no one comes, I shall not move from here, and if I die of hunger, so much the worse."

It was a speech that flung the monk into a passion. In burning terms he reviled Casanova, calling him a madman, a seducer, a deceiver, a liar. Casanova let him rave. It was just striking six. Precisely an hour had elapsed since they had left the attic.

Balbi, in his red flannel waistcoat, and his puce-colored leather breeches, might have passed for a peasant; but Casanova, in torn garments that were soaked in blood, presented an appearance that was terrifying and suspicious. This he proceeded to repair. Tearing a handkerchief he made shift to bandage his wounds, and then from his bundle he took his fine taffeta Summer suit, which on a Winter's day must render him ridiculous.

He dressed his thick, dark brown hair as best he could, drew on a pair of white stockings, and donned three lace shirts one over another. His fine cloak of floss silk he gave to Balbi, who looked for all the world as if he had stolen it.

Thus dressed, his fine hat placed with the point of Spain on his head, Casanova opened a window and looked out. At once he was seen by some idlers in the courtyard, who, amazed at his appearance there, and conceiving that he must have been locked in by mistake on the previous day, went off at once to advise the porter. Meanwhile, Casanova, vexed at having shown himself where he had not expected any one, and little guessing how excellently this was to serve his ends, left the window and went to sit beside the angry friar who greeted him with fresh revilings.

A sound of steps and a rattle of keys stemmed Balbi's reproaches in full flow. The lock groaned.

"Not a word," said Casanova to the monk, "but follow me."

Holding his spontoon ready, but concealed under his coat, he stepped to the side of the door. It opened and the porter, who had come alone and bareheaded, stared in stupefaction at the strange apparition of Casanova.

Casanova took advantage of the paralyzing amazement. Without uttering a word, he stepped quickly across the threshold, and with Balbi close upon his heels, he went down the Giant's Staircase in a flash, crossed the little square, reached the canal, bundled Balbi into the first gondola he found there, and jumped in after him.

"I want to go to Fusine, and quickly," he announced. "Call another oarsman."

All was ready, and in a moment the gondola was skimming the canal. Dressed in an unseasonable suit, and accompanied by the still more ridiculous figure of Balbi in his gaudy cloak and without a hat, he imagined he would be taken for a charlatan or an astrologer.

The gondola slipped past the customs house, and took the canal of the Giudecca. Half-way down this, Casanova put his head out of the little cabin to address the gondolier in the poop—

"Do you think we shall reach Mestre in an hour?"

"Mestre?" quoth the gondolier. "But you said Fusine."

"No, no, I said Mestre—at least, I intended Mestre."

And so the gondola was headed for Mestre by a gondolier who professed himself ready to convey his excellency to England if he desired it.

The sun was rising, and the water assumed an opalescent hue. It was a delicious morning, Casanova tells us, and I suspect that never had any morning seemed to that audacious, amiable rascal as

delicious as this upon which he regained his liberty, which no man ever valued more highly.

In spirit he was already safely over the frontiers of the Most Serene Republic, impatient to transfer his body thither, as he shortly did, through vicissitudes that are a narrative in themselves, and no part of this story of his escape from the Piombi and the Venetian Inquisitors of State.

STOWAWAY

by Bill Adams

I CROSSED the gangway in the Winter's raining,
Late in the night when it was dreary dark;
The only sounds the rain's hiss, and complaining
Of chafing hawsers, holding that lean bark.

She sailed before the dawn. The evening found me
A seasick nipper, hidden in spare sails.
I feared they'd drag me out and maybe drownd me—
The bark was trembling, dipping both her rails.

Soon I crept out. Her long lee rail was sweeping.
A homing ship drove by with hurrying feet,
A school of porpoises all round her leaping,
While stars dipped low, her dizzied spars to greet.

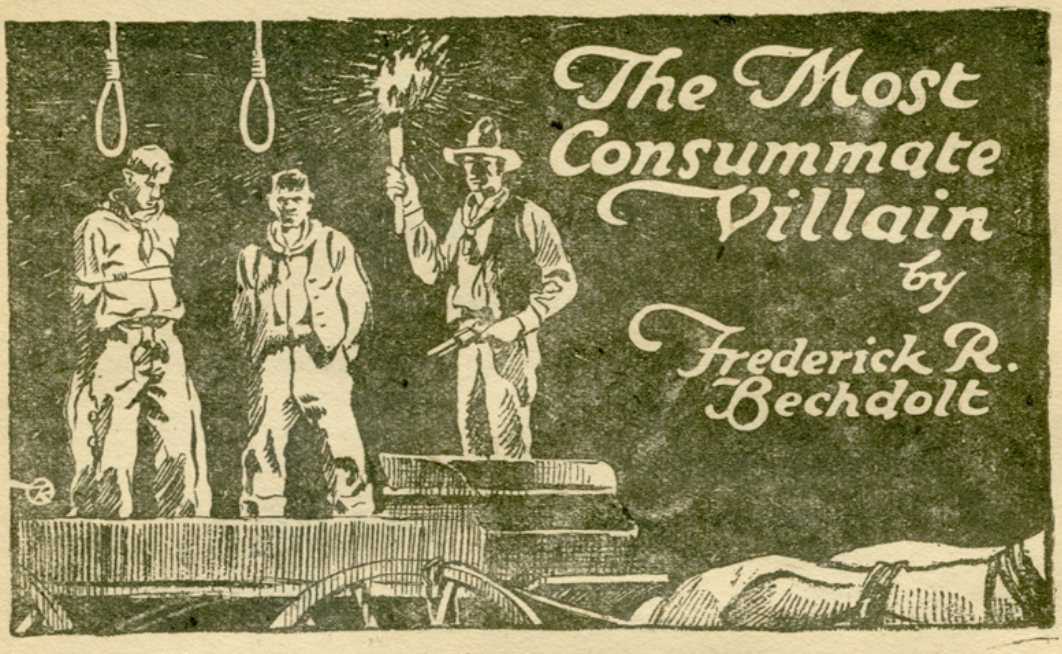
"Three cheers!" they cried, and I could hear their voices,
And the sharp beating of her clanged iron bells;
Her musics faded, merged in the sea's noises,
And she was gone, loud cheering down the swells.

And in me then a something seemed to waken,
And I was mazed. It was as though the sea,
Or her big topsails, by the night's wind shaken,
Had cast a sort of magic over me.

The mast-heads reeled. In the bright north the Dipper
Hung dazzling diamonds round the sails, ghost-white.
The seas were dim, and the deep-breathing clipper
Quivered her feet, and shook with sheer delight.

It's long ago, my first night on the sea,
And I'm grown old, and sailing days are sped.
And I am waiting, waiting patiently,
Till other topsails gleam above my head.

There'll be a wharf, I know, where I am going;
There'll be a gangway for the likes o' me;
There'll be some lofty packet seaward blowing—
They'll be fine ships on that eternal sea!



Author of "The Texans," "The Forgotten Expedition to Santa Fé," etc.

THIS man, Henry Plummer, came to the new placer camp of Bannack late in the Fall of 1862. A nest of lofty peaks in what is now the south-western corner of Montana enclosed the spot. The wind was moaning in the passes; the drifts were growing deeper on the granite crests, creeping nearer to the dark green timber every day. Take a good look at him as he appears before this grim backdrop to the rushing sound of the approaching storms—the most consummate villain in all the melodramas of the Old West.

He comes with cat-like tread; still in his twenties, slender, taller than the average; well dressed after the negligently picturesque fashion of the placer-camp gambler. His feet and hands are small, and there is that in his bearing which proclaims that here walks the gentleman. His lean face shows the mark of high intelligence. There never was a mouth more firmly held. His voice is always even, passionless. He owns that intangible asset which, for want of a better word, we call an air—the compelling presence of one born to leadership. But when you look into his eyes you feel a chill mounting your spine.

The eyes of common villains often betray their depravity. Plummer's betrayed nothing and because of that were the more terrible. Their color was the dull gray of old ice, and like the ice of late Winter-time they were opaque. No light came from them, and they reflected none. They were like the eyes of one without a soul.

Although he had not passed his twenty-seventh year, his trail for a full decade was marked by blood. Son of a good New England family, reared in decency, he came to California in 1852 to attain almost at once a certain prominence. He had bright prospects of going to the Legislature when he turned his back on decency to seek the companionship of the viler elements in the placer camps.

In that first year he murdered a man. A brief prison term, a pardon gained on the plea of mortal sickness, a second murder; and then he fled to Washoe, Nevada, where he joined a band of road-agents. When Idaho's gold discoveries were drawing adventurers from all parts of the West he came northward, masquerading as a gambler but secretly acting as the chief of a band of professional thugs who littered the roads about Florence and Oro Fino with the bodies of their victims until new strikes over on the Salmon River depopulated the camps.

The band broke up. Plummer went to

the Sun River country on the upper Missouri not far from where Great Falls now stands, and with him went Jack Cleveland, a loud-tongued, black-bearded desperado who knew his history back to the California days. It was their intention to take a boat for the States in the Spring; but a girl made them change their plans. Plummer wooed her as he had never wooed woman before—in the sincerity of decent love; and they became betrothed.

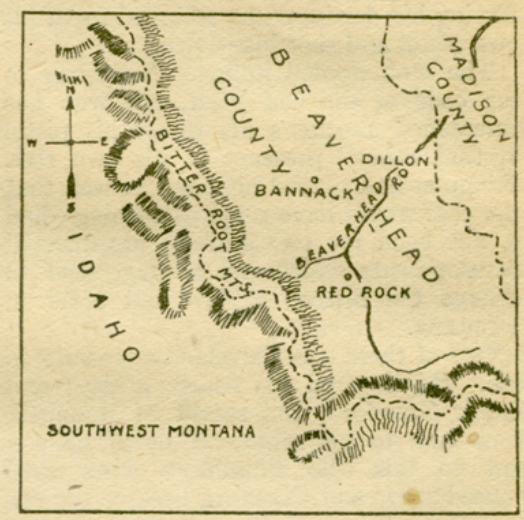
With the betrothal there rose a quarrel between the partners. Jack Cleveland from this time on was Plummer's mortal enemy. There was thenceforth a bond of mutual distrust, to hold these two together more tightly than ever mutual interest had done before. The determination that his past must remain buried forbade the one to let the other out of his sight.

So when the news of rich placer beds on Grasshopper Creek lured Cleveland southward to Bannack, Plummer followed. Of course, the identity of neither man was known. There is no doubt as to Plummer's intentions; there is no doubt that Cleveland knew that he was marked for death. From the day of their arrival Bannack was treated to a curious spectacle—a black-bearded ruffian, on fire with whisky, boasting that he would kill his enemy on sight but all the time sweating with fear; and the enemy, silent, watchful as a waiting cat. Bannack saw it and did not understand. There were some things which Bannack did not yet realize.

The camp was in its infancy. Only a few weeks before, a party of Colorado prospectors had discovered the riches of Grasshopper Creek. Every one was extremely busy at his own affairs. The narrow street which followed the windings of the original pack-trail was crowded with sleighs and mules and men on foot. New parties of adventurers were arriving daily—old-time miners, gold-seekers who had never twirled a pan, merchants with stocks of clothing, tools and foodstuffs; professional gamblers, women of ill repute and roughs.

The thoroughfare was lined on either side by log cabins and tents. Here fiddles squeaked the long nights through; horns blared; bad whisky went across the bars; and chips were forever clicking on the gambling tables.

The same conditions existed as in every American placer camp before or since. The reputable element was entirely engrossed in making money; the disreputable crowd was just as busy doing the same thing and the so called gambling fraternity, which included the owners of the saloons and dance halls, formed a sort of connecting link between these two extremes. For, while it was accounted no disgrace to deal



faro or to sell liquor, and while these people held as high prestige as any of the population, they owned at the same time the allegiance of the ruffians who had flocked in to steal and murder. So they possessed domination.

From the beginning Henry Plummer was identified with them. He became a leading citizen. Men sought his advice on public questions and learned to respect it for its soundness. Nor was this respect abated by the fact that the most notorious rascals in the diggings were often seen in his company.

Meantime Jack Cleveland swaggered up and down Bannack's winding street, telling all who cared to listen how he was going to kill his former partner. No one concerned himself over the cause of the feud. No one worried over the outcome. Such things were common in the old placer camps, and there was not a man in Bannack who so much as suspected the thoughts and memories that lurked behind Plummer's impassive face.

AT LAST on a December morning the affair came to an end. Bad whisky had made Cleveland bolder than usual that day. He entered a saloon where Plummer was sitting with a number

of others and, with his hand upon his pistol-butt, he flung out a veiled allusion to his former partner's past.

At the time the bystanders did not understand the import of his words, and with uncanny coolness Plummer waited until the speaker had shifted his abuse to another in the room. Then, while Cleveland was waving his derringer, he whipped forth his own pistol and shot him down.

The man needed killing. According to the code of the Old West, one who has threatened another's life draws his pistol in that other's presence at his own risk. Plummer had played his hand so well that the case would have come to nothing—had it not been for two entirely unsuspected developments which did a great deal to change the history of law and order in Montana.

One of these was Cleveland's tenacity to life. He lingered for nearly a day; and Hank Crawford, the sheriff of Bannack, took him to his cabin. A dying man is apt to talk. So Plummer's fears were roused anew, and Crawford became the object of his hate. How much did the sheriff know? He strove to find out, and—because Crawford knew nothing—he got no answer for his pains. This in turn made him the more suspicious; he determined that Crawford must die.

At this juncture the other development came. A few days after Cleveland's death two ruffians, Bill Moore and Charley Reeves, ran amuck in a village of Indians on the camp's outskirts and began firing indiscriminately into the teepees.

Among their dead was a white trapper. Straightway the cry for vengeance rose. The murderers fled, and Plummer fled with them, for the first loose talk of lynching had included his name; and when the people of a mining community begin to look for rope they are very likely to make a general cleanup without much regard to right or wrong.

A pursuing posse overtook the three fugitives in the mountains not many miles away; but the latter had the advantage of shelter and so, in spite of their inferiority in numbers, they were able to secure a parley. They surrendered on condition that they be given jury trials.

There were no courts in Montana at that time. Men administered justice in open gatherings which were free to every one. Two methods were employed to determine guilt or innocence—a jury of twelve or a miners' meeting. In the latter case the proceedings were informal and the will of the majority decided all questions. The old-fashioned legal paraphernalia encumbered the jury trial, for which reason it was never high in favor save with those accused.

That night Plummer's case was heard by a jury; and, as was to have been expected, he gained his acquittal on the plea of self-defense. No one was dissatisfied over the verdict, and all of Bannack proceeded to forget the matter for the time. What every one wanted to know was whether Charley Reeves and Bill Moore were going to escape their just deserts.

That was the question. As to their guilt there was no doubt in any mind. But when it came to punishment, there was no certainty. For the riffraff of the old Overland Trail and the offscourings of Colorado's mining camps had already begun to drift into this corner of Montana; former stage-robbers, horse-thieves, short-card swindlers, bravos and common thugs. No man knew his neighbor; and the decent element, with their lack of coordination, feared the power of these others whom they called "the Roughs."

So on the outcome of this case hung the issue of whether decency or lawlessness should rule.

The next morning the whole male population gathered in a half-finished log building on the main street. There were no doors nor windows; hoar-frost silvered the walls; the steam of many breaths rose to the ceiling, where it congealed in long white filaments. The crowd packed the long, bare room—a booted throng; most of them bearded, roughly dressed—blue shirts and red; here and there a particolored mackinaw; and occasionally the sober raiment of a gambler. Some wore pistols openly; the belts of others displayed long bowie-knives; and there was hardly one who did not carry a weapon somewhere on his person.

In the room's rear a narrow space was railed off by bare poles. Within this, seated on upturned boxes, were sheriff Hank Crawford, the two prisoners and the presiding officer, whose name has not come down. He had his hands full from the moment he rapped for order.

At once some one made the motion that the case be tried by miners' meeting. A

howl went up. The Roughs raised their voices for the first time in Bannack's history, and their yell of protest was appalling in its volume. But the members of the law-abiding faction had expected opposition, and they met it with a roar which shook the roof. Then a burly fellow who stood near to the rail whipped out a derringer and leveled it at the chairman.

"Put that motion," he shouted, "and you're a dead man."

A neighbor struck the weapon down. A shot was fired near the door. In an instant the place was bristling with pistols and bowie-knives. A dozen fights were going. The noise of upraised voices was punctuated by revolver reports, and the air was thick with powder-smoke. Only the determination of a few cool men who risked their lives in deflecting the aim of their wilder companions prevented fatalities.

While the confusion was at its height, with yells of "Jury! Jury!" and "Meeting! Meeting!" mingling with cries for order, Nathan P. Langford pushed his way through the milling crowd to the space within the railing. There he turned and faced them, raising his hand. For some moments he stood thus; and the shouting began to die away. The fighters were parted; order was restored.

Langford had been summoned from his sawmill in the mountains to act as a juryman. Those who were on the side of the law gave him heed because they knew his sympathies were with them; but as he went on the Roughs began to pay stricter attention, for he was advocating a jury trial. His argument was simple enough; the posse had pledged their word, and right was right.

A vote was taken, and the miners' meeting won out by more than two to one. Still Langford insisted while some who had been his closest friends shook their fists in his face, and in the end he gained his point. The gathering chose J. F. Hoyt as judge; they named counsel for both sides and picked twelve men to pass on the question of guilt or innocence. Langford was one. The Roughs rejoiced at his selection, for they thought he was one of them.

The trial took all day, and as the hours went by the lawless element gathered before the railing with drawn revolvers. When Judge Hoyt was called upon to make a ruling they leveled their weapons at him and yelled threats of death. Time after time he looked into the muzzles as if they were not there and decided against the prisoners.

But the Roughs centered the most of their attention on the jury. They leaned across the barrier which enclosed the twelve men, brandishing bowie-knives and pistols.

"We'll kill the man that votes guilty," one told his neighbor, and, "If you hang Moore and Reeves you'll not live till sundown," another growled, while those around yelled their assent.

Sometimes they varied the monotony by baiting the witnesses or assuring Sheriff Hank Crawford that they intended to murder him. Always some of them were hanging over the rail, thrusting their faces close to the jurymen, daring them to find a verdict against the prisoners on pain of death.

In the early evening the last argument was finished. It was nearly midnight when the twelve arrived at an agreement. With the exception of Nathan P. Langford, every one of them cast his ballot for acquittal from the start; but Langford held out for a death penalty until at last they reached a compromise and sentenced the prisoners to banishment.

THE reading of that verdict was succeeded by a whoop of joy. Most of the men who had stood for decency remained silent during the uproar. They saw some who had formerly been loudest on their side throwing their hats in the air and shaking hands with the prisoners, and they realized that the Roughs were to rule Bannack from that day forth.

Within twenty-four hours the thieves and thugs were tightly organized, and it was resolved that all identified with the prosecution of Reeves and Moore must die. Now Plummer saw his opportunity to bury the secret of his past; and when the leadership of the Roughs was offered him he accepted it. He placed Hank Crawford's name at the head of the list of proscribed men, and he undertook the task of killing him.

During the next three months Bannack was in the grip of a great silent fear. The honest men in the camp found themselves a futile majority whose members dared not so much as whisper their suspicions to one another. The sole idea among most of them was to make a stake and leave the

country for their homes as soon as possible. So they stood by and did not so much as lift a voice, much less a hand, against what was going on.

Of the witnesses against Moore and Reeves there were a goodly number. The bodies of several of them were found along the trails that Winter.

One, who was set upon while he was on his way to work his mining claim, managed to escape his assailants alive and left for Fort Benton late in February. Three murderers followed a day behind, but he eluded them by leaving the wagon road and striking off into the untracked wilderness. He reached the Missouri by this cross-country route and lay encamped on its bank until the breaking of the ice, when he hailed a Mackinaw boat and got away to the States.

Judge Hoyt and Langford, the stubborn juryman, remained in Bannack; but when either of them went out a companion was usually with him, and they walked literally with their hands upon their pistol-butts.

Meantime Plummer followed up his project of slaying Sheriff Hank Crawford. Although the whole neighborhood was now under their domination, the Roughs did not yet dare to do cold-blooded murder in the open. This thing had to be accomplished under some guise of fairness. So the cold-eyed leader set to work to pick a fight.

However, it takes two men to make a quarrel, and Crawford had heard enough in the trial to make him wary. He never left his cabin save in company of his partner, Harry Phleger. When one of them was taking a drink the other would stand before the bar facing the crowd in the room. Did a member of the Roughs start a dispute with either, he found, before he had an excuse to draw his weapon, that he was facing both. A dozen times at least Plummer had Crawford cornered with no chance for backing out, but on every occasion, just as he was bringing matters to an issue, Phleger would loom up in the background with his pistol in his hand.

The game went on. At last as Spring was drawing near things came to a pass where all the camp realized that it was one or the other, Plummer or Crawford, and many were betting who would die. No one, however, knew the real cause of the feud.

One morning the word went round that Plummer was gunning for the sheriff. Crawford was in the cabin of a neighbor when he got the tidings. He borrowed a rifle and stepped to the door just in time to see his enemy taking his stand behind a wagon a little way down the street with a shotgun in his hand.

The time for observing the amenities of fair play had gone by. Crawford brought the rifle to his shoulder and took a snap shot. The bullet shattered Plummer's right arm.

That night Crawford made up his mind that Bannack was no place for him and fled for the Missouri. He had a good horse, and he pressed the animal to its utmost; so he managed to outdistance four of Plummer's men who followed him more than half-way to Fort Benton, where he took the first steamer down the river in the Spring.

With his departure the camp was without a sheriff. An election was called. The Roughs set up Henry Plummer as their candidate and won hands down.

He took the office and gave it out that he intended to do his duty. The statement was generally believed. One reason for this credulity was his marriage; a good woman was a rarity in the placer diggings and Plummer's bride was as good as he was bad. Her decency cast its reflection on him and men said, as men have said so many times before and since, that here was a wild fellow who had settled down.

There were a few who cherished suspicions, but as yet these had no evidence to make them certain. And there were some who knew the truth—for the riffraff from Idaho's exhausted mines had begun to drift across the mountains, and in the van were several who had been members of the old outlaw band.

Perhaps the arrival of these former companions had more to do than his own innate evil with influencing Plummer in his next step. For it is certain that if he had tried to live respectably some one of them would have let fall the truth concerning him.

At any rate he took that step and organized such a campaign of robbery and murder as the world has seldom seen. He became the chief of a band which numbered some thirty-odd in all. Every member had his own separate duties, and the work of killing victims for their gold was done with genuine efficiency. Within a year more

than one hundred and fifty bodies were found, and no one knows how many more remained undiscovered.

This secret society of thugs had its council room in Bannack. The password was "Innocent." The badge was a sailor's knot for necktie. Members were pledged to follow any of their number who should betray even the least of their secrets, and to kill him on sight. The outsider who gained any knowledge of what was going on was marked for death.

Plummer was chief. Bill Bunton, who had been one of the most notorious desperadoes in the Idaho days, was next in rank. George Ives, a well-educated young blackleg from a wealthy Wisconsin family, was usually in charge of the road-agents who did the actual robbing. Boone Helm, a burly, loud-spoken ruffian whose long list of murders was varied by two cases of cannibalism; Dutch John, a gigantic highwayman, and Clubfoot George, who was famous among his fellows as a spy, were among the more prominent members.

Several road-houses were established along the stage routes and used as rendezvous. These were in charge of thugs whose business was to pass along such news as they could get concerning travelers. Clubfoot George was placed in Bannack, where he posed as a hard-working cobbler with his bench in Dance & Stewart's store, and kept track of gold shipments. When a rich Wells-Fargo box was due to leave he would get the word to Plummer or, if this was impossible, would mark the stage with a symbol to betray the secret to members of the band along the road.

As Sheriff, Plummer was naturally in the best position of all to know what was going on. He took part in many of the larger robberies. When it was necessary for him to ride away from Bannack on such a mission, he gave it out that he was going on official business.

Occasionally he varied this ruse by another. He had the reputation of being an expert on ores. Men representing themselves as prospectors would ride into camp and ask him to inspect their claims. Whenever he went, either as sheriff or assayer, he invariably started in one direction to some rendezvous where a fast horse was awaiting him, took the fresh mount and doubled across-country to the scene of the prospective crime.

SPRING came. In Alder Gulch, some sixty miles from Bannack, prospectors discovered the richest bit of placer ground since the days of forty-nine. Before the end of May ten thousand men had flocked to the new diggings; the creek was lined with sluices for more than ten miles; Virginia City and Nevada sprang into being within two miles of each other, the liveliest—and perhaps the wickedest—camps in all the West. As sheriff, Henry Plummer held dominion over the new territory; and his band immediately enlarged its scope of operations to include it.

Plummer had an honest deputy by the name of Dillingham. How he had come to get the office is not known; but he was holding it in good faith, without suspicion of his chief's secret activities, until one day when Buck Stinson, Hayes Lyons and Charley Forbes came to him with a proposition to join them in a robbery.

Then Dillingham's eyes were opened, for these three were close friends of the sheriff. He realized the danger he incurred when he refused their offer, but on top of that he dared to warn one of their prospective victims. The man had a loose tongue. He told the secret which Dillingham had confided to him; and the news came back to Plummer.

That night, by order of their chief, the three conspirators set forth to kill the deputy, who had gone to Alder Gulch in search of some stolen horses. They found him the next morning in the midst of a crowd which had gathered in the willows by the creek-bank to witness a civil trial by miners' meeting. They walked up to him while the case was in full swing and drew their pistols.

"Don't shoot!" Forbes cried.

It may have been a signal, or he may have been trying to save himself from appearance of guilt. In either case the shot was fired. Dillingham fell dead. The three murderers sauntered away.

Dr. Steele, president of the Gulch, who was presiding at the miners' meeting, headed a posse and overtook them within a half-mile. They surrendered without resistance. The civil case was adjourned, and the trio were placed on trial.

Steele took the chair; counsel were named, and Forbes managed to secure a separate hearing on the plea that he had tried to prevent the shooting. The case

of his two companions consumed all of that afternoon and most of the day following. At last the question was put to vote and the crowd sentenced the pair to hanging. A man was sent to build a gallows; two or three others were set to work at digging graves.

Then Charley Forbes was placed on trial. He was a handsome young fellow, and he owned the gift of eloquence; one of those smooth-tongued blackguards from good people who were to be found in every placer rush. He chose to be his own lawyer, and he faced the crowd alone.

To make a long story short, he talked so well that the gathering gave him the benefit of the doubt and acquitted him. This done, they drifted away to watch the execution of his two companions.

By the time they reached the spot the Roughs were getting to work. Lyons and Stinson were standing on the wagon which was to be used as a drop, begging for mercy. Half a dozen women, who had been recruited for the purpose, pushed their way through the throng and climbed upon the vehicle. They threw themselves upon the prisoners and pleaded with the crowd to spare them. While they were in the midst of these theatricals a man leaped up beside them waving a sheet of paper.

"Listen," he shouted, "while I read this letter which Lyons just wrote his mother."

A babel of voices arose. Some cried to hang the pair and have it over.

"Give them a show," others yelled. "We let Forbes go. Let them go, too."

A hundred ruffians bellowed demands for the reading of the letter. At last when some measure of order was restored the man with the paper got his chance. It was exactly the sort of an epistle which one might expect when one takes into consideration the fact that Hayes Lyons had no mother living.

"Aw, give him a horse and let him ride to his mother," some cynic cried when the reader had finished.

That brought a laugh. The Roughs seized their opportunity; and while the mob was still guffawing, a leather-lunged follower of Plummer called for a reconsideration of the vote.

No one knew exactly what did happen then. The question was put, but in the pandemonium that followed there was no telling where the majority stood.

Nor was there any clear account as to who announced the results. The honest people were all at sea; the thugs were working in unison; and when some one shouted that those in favor of acquittal were in the majority there was no concerted opposition to his word.

Dr. Steele had gone down to his cabin at the close of the original meeting. He was startled by rapid hoofbeats soon after his arrival and looked up to see the pair whom he thought safely hanged, riding past him at full speed. Hayes Lyons waved a mocking hand at him.

So the Roughs came to power in Alder Gulch, and Henry Plummer sat in Bannack planning a campaign of robbery and murder throughout all the placer camps of southwestern Montana.

They say that he was a good husband and that he loved his wife. His home was quiet; he owned the respect of many neighbors. One can imagine his strange thoughts as he led this double life, the constant watchfulness, the occasional wild rides across-country to the lonely places where black deeds were done; the returns to his cabin—and those opaque eyes always hiding what was in his mind.

A few men were beginning to realize the part that he was playing. N. P. Langford and his partner, Judge Walter B. Dance, repelled his attempts toward friendship.

One evening a miner passing Langford's cabin saw the sheriff of Bannack crouching beside a window with a pistol in his hand. Hearing the step behind him, Plummer rose.

"I was just going to play a joke on Langford," he said coolly; and the miner thought so little of the incident that he said nothing about it until long after the final exposure came.

Samuel T. Hauser was in business in Virginia City at the time. He too had some inkling of what was going on. One day when he was going to take the stage for Bannack with $14,000 in gold dust, he got warning that the road-agents knew of his treasure.

His suspicions grew sharper when he climbed into the coach and found that Henry Plummer was to be his fellow passenger. So before the vehicle pulled out, he took the buckskin sack of nuggets from its hiding-place and turned it over to the bandit leader in the presence of several witnesses.

"Here," said he. "You're sheriff. I want you to keep this safe for me."

And the gold went through in Plummer's custody.

Colonel Wilbur F. Sanders was one of the first reputable citizens of Bannack to get direct evidence concerning the sheriff's secret activities. In those days silver was as potent a word as gold, and when a number of business men came to him with word that Henry Plummer was heading a stampede to stake rich claims, he consented to represent these men and secure properties for them. He went to Plummer, who tried to get rid of him, first on one excuse then on another. At last, seeing that Sanders would not be put off:

"My friends and I," the sheriff said, "are going over toward Rattlesnake Creek, and we'll pass the night at Bunton's road-house. You are welcome to join us there if you can catch up with us."

Even then he maintained that his business was official and that his petitioner would be disappointed.

Sanders had to make the best of this arrangement, for he had no mount as yet. Some time later he secured an animal, and started on the trail of Plummer's company. Snow had fallen. The tracks showed plainly for several miles; but on the summit of the range near Rattlesnake they vanished.

A storm came up. Sanders had a hard time reaching Bunton's. But Plummer was not there. A stage-robber by the name of "Red" Yeager was in charge of the place. He had not seen anything of the stampeders.

Sanders put up for the night. Some time near morning Jack Gallagher, who, like Yeager, was afterward identified as one of the band, came to the cabin and got shelter. He had been looking for a horse in Bannack when Sanders left, and the latter very naturally asked him whether he had learned anything of Plummer's whereabouts.

The two were standing before the road-house bar at the time, and before the question was fairly out Gallagher had his pistol in his hand. But Sanders had seen the movement in time to seize a double-barreled shotgun. Yeager, who was serving drinks, hurried to make peace between them, and it is possible that the incident might have been forgotten if it had not been for the arrival of more visitors just before daylight.

These newcomers were Sanders' friends. They bade him leave with them, and when they were on the road home they told him why they had come after him. A young fellow by the name of Henry Tilden had been held up twenty miles south of Bannack by a half-dozen men, one of whom he had recognized as Plummer, and had brought the news to Mrs. Sanders.

Now Bunton's cabin lay west of the town. The situation was plain enough. Plummer and his crowd had started out in that direction and had doubled back across-country to carry out this robbery. Jack Gallagher, who was to have joined them, had been forced by the storm to take shelter in the road-house. Sanders bade his friends keep their knowledge to themselves and warned the victim of the robbery to say nothing.

These men—Sanders, Hauser, Langford and Judge Dance—began to compare notes. Neil Howie, J. X. Beidler, John Fetherstun and a few others joined their quiet conferences.

The nucleus of this coterie originated in the Bannack lodge of Masons. It was the first secret order in the country and none of Plummer's men were members.

As they discussed the state of affairs the little handful of citizens began to plan toward putting an end to it. The idea was simple—gather more men like themselves; keep their number free from any doubtful persons; and when the opportunity came, stand together to force a fair trial.

That nucleus was formed in the Summer. Autumn came, and by October there were more than one hundred men scattered through Bannack, Virginia City and Nevada who were ready to assemble when their leaders said the word, willing to risk their lives in carrying out orders.

The number was purposely kept small. No man knew his neighbor overwell. It was becoming more evident daily that the robbers had their spies at work in all sorts of places. And the Vigilantes—for so they called themselves—believed that once they got the upper hand a good three-quarters of the population would flock to their support.

ONE day in November Nicholas Tiebalt sold a span of mules to a firm of merchants in the town of Nevada. Because he was a popular young fellow with a good reputation for honesty,

the buyers advanced him the price, and he went out to round up the animals on Stinking Water Creek. He rode a black mare mule.

Time passed. Tiebalt did not come back. The Nevada merchants began to believe that he had embezzled the money and left the country with the team.

Then William Palmer went grouse-hunting in the hills. Afternoon was getting on toward evening—he had got a pretty good bag—when a bird rose several rods ahead of him and flew off at a sharp angle. It was a long shot and difficult, and when he brought the gun to his shoulder he had half a mind not to risk it. But he took the chance—and perhaps there is something in the idea of a Fate which steps in to shape men's ends.

For the long shot scored a hit. And the wounded bird veered sharply from its course. And when Palmer found it, it was lying on Tiebalt's dead body.

The corpse was hidden in a clump of brush. The rigid fingers were clutching tufts of sage. There was a dark mark round the throat—the imprint of a hair rope. A bullet-hole marred the forehead.

Any one could read that story—the rider in this lonely place; the murderer in ambush; the casting of the noose; then the slayer mounting his own horse to drag the victim away from the trail and shoot him dead.

"Long John" Wagner and George Hilderman were living in a cabin a mile or so away. Palmer had no idea that the pair were members of the outlaw band; but when he rode down to the place and asked their help in bringing the body back to Nevada, they laughed at him.

"They're killing men every day in Alder Gulch," they said. "Why should we bother our heads about a corpse?"

They would have been wiser had they showed less callousness, for Palmer got a wagon elsewhere, and when he told his story in Nevada he did not forget to mention them.

A miner identified the body.

"Nick Tiebalt," he said.

It was late in the evening. The wagon was standing in Nevada's narrow street. A flaring torch cast wavering light upon the corpse and the man who was bending over it. He swore and pointed to the rope-mark on the throat. And the tightly packed faces all about grew ugly; a murmur rose.

Several men silently left the crowd. No one noticed them as they went down the street. No one saw them separate and hurry off in various directions. And so there were no outsiders to spy on them, and the others whom they had summoned, when they gathered in the back room of a store—twenty-five of the best men in Nevada.

They sent for Palmer. He came and repeated the tale of that chance shot.

"It was," said he, and his voice was heavy with solemnity, "as if Providence had done it. I had to run as fast as I could to find the bird, for it was dusk. And there it lay—right on the dead man's chest."

Now one went forth to get horses, and before midnight the twenty-five were in the saddle. Palmer rode with them. They left the town by different routes and met beyond its limits. They struck off into the hills. The weather had turned bitter cold.

The wind rose as they traveled, and when they reached Wisconsin Creek they found it frozen over. Their horses broke through the ice, and before they had gone another mile every rider's clothing was frozen stiff. Some time near dawn they surrounded the cabin of Long John and Hilderman. Several men were sleeping inside.

"Don't one of you move, or we'll kill him."

The sleepers awakened at those words to look into the muzzles of a dozen leveled shotguns.

"Where's Long John?" one of the Vigilantes demanded.

He rose from his blankets and came out to them, and they took him away beyond earshot of the others, to the summit of a ridge.

"I never saw the man before," he told them stolidly and stuck to the story until the sun was coloring the eastern sky.

The growing light was revealing every object on the sage-brush hills. One of Long John's questioners looked about and drew in his breath sharply.

"Where did that come from?" he asked and pointed.

The prisoner's eye followed his gesture; and when he saw Tiebalt's black mule grazing on the slope less than a hundred yards away, Long John broke down.

"George Ives is the man that did it," he said, and went on to tell how the chief of the road-agents had murdered Tiebalt for his money and boasted of the deed.

George Ives was among the group down in the cabin, under guard. The twenty-five took him and Hilderman and Long John back to Nevada. It was afternoon when they arrived.

Now horsemen raced to Bannack, carrying word to Henry Plummer; and the Roughs began to gather for the trial. Some have maintained that the sheriff was among the number, but if he was he did not show himself.

On the morning of November 19th the proceedings began. Colonel Wilbur F. Sanders and Charles Bagg were prosecuting attorneys. Alexander Davis and Charles Thurmond represented the prisoner. Ives was tried alone; Long John and George Hilderman were witnesses against him.

Nevada's main street was packed with men from building wall to building wall—men of all kinds, miners, merchants, gamblers, thugs. Who held the majority was more than any one could say. But from the beginning things moved more swiftly than in any case before, and there was a precision in the movement which made the doubtful pluck up hope. Perhaps this trial was going to come to something after all.

There was a jury. Its functions were purely advisory. The majority rule was to decide all questions. A full half-day was taken up in preliminaries, and then the witnesses began to tell their stories. The spirits of honest men rose higher at this juncture, for the Vigilantes had been working hard, and there were half a dozen men to testify that the defendant had committed other felonies. Long John and Hilderman gave damning evidence.

In the beginning the Roughs crowded around the jury-box. But when they neared the railing which enclosed the twelve they saw themselves facing a line of silent men with pistols in their hands. That ended their demonstration. On the morning of the second day, when lawyers' quibblings were promising to drag on interminably, the majority of a sudden found its voice, to pass a resolution that the case must end before evening.

The jury retired late in the afternoon. They were back in fifteen minutes with a recommendation that the meeting find the defendants guilty and sentence them to death. A moment of stillness followed. Then one in the crowd's rear shouted:

"The strangling murderers! They'll never dare to hang him."

A roar of approval followed. Pandemonium broke out. It died as suddenly as it had come. There was something in the sight of that line of men before the jury box which encouraged silence. Colonel Sanders sprang to his feet.

"I move," he said quietly, "that George Ives be forthwith hanged by the neck until he is dead."

The chairman put the question, and men who had not dared to whisper a protest against the state of affairs a week before, raised their voices to shout, "Aye!"

Two men were sent to build a gallows in an uncompleted cabin down the street. They placed the butt of a young pine trunk under the bottom log of one roofless wall and left the upper end projecting into the street over the summit of the opposite wall—exactly like an old-fashioned well-sweep. A noose was made fast to this, and a dry-goods box placed beneath it for a drop. They took George Ives to the place under a heavy guard.

He climbed to the box. The street was packed. It was bright moonlight, so bright that every face in the crowd was visible. Men had climbed to the tops of neighboring buildings. And now when the solitary figure stood there with his head beside the dangling noose, the Roughs made their last attempt.

A roar of execration rose. Weapons flashed in the moonlight. And then the tumult died away all at once into a thick silence. Twenty-five men, moving as one, stepped out before the dry-goods box in a straight line. There came into the stillness a metallic sound—the clicking of rifle hammers brought to the cock.

The crowd stood motionless and watched the hanging of George Ives.

They gave Long John his freedom for his evidence. George Hilderman got off with banishment because he was an old man and half-witted. While these things were being done, word came that Lloyd Magruder, a well-known Idaho merchant who had left Nevada for his home some days before, had been murdered and robbed along

with four companions in the Bitter Root Mountains.

If there had been any dispostion toward delay this news did away with it. The twenty-five who had accomplished the arrest of Ives saddled up that night and rode forth after Stinson and Lyons, the murderers of Deputy Sheriff Dillingham. The idea was to start a clean-up of the placer camps.

Red Yeager, whose identity as a member of Plummer's band was as yet unsuspected by most people, met them in the hills and managed to misdirect them. They finally reached the camp of the murderers to find that they had fled. On their way back toward Bannack they got an inkling of the part that Yeager had played and captured him along with John Brown, another member of the band.

Before daylight they had managed to play one prisoner against the other until they got confessions from both.

Yeager gave a complete list of the band's members and of their methods.

"I never killed a man," said he, "but I've robbed many. I tell you, you men are doing a good thing."

It was still dark. They took the pair to a grove of cottonwoods beside the creek. Brown begged for mercy.

"If you'd thought of this three years ago," Yeager told him coolly, "you wouldn't be here now, giving the boys this trouble."

Just before they pulled him up he bade his executioners good-by.

"Promise me to follow the rest of this infernal gang and punish them," he begged.

"Red," one who was standing beside him answered, "we'll do it if there's any such thing in the book."

So the twenty-five left the two bodies dangling from the cottonwood limb and hurried back to Nevada with the news.

"Dutch John," who ranked next to Ives among the road-agents, was captured in the hills by Neil Howie, who brought him back the next day to Bannack. Plummer met the captor and tried to take possession of the prisoner, but when this was refused he did not dare to make a demonstration. He was beginning to realize that he was walking on thin ice. A committee of Vigilantes took charge of the road-agent, and after some hours of examination he made a complete confession, corroborating everything which Yeager had said.

MEANTIME the Vigilantes had openly organized in Virginia City, Nevada and Bannack. Men from all over the diggings were seeking admission. The power of the Roughs had vanished. And Henry Plummer read the writing on the wall. His wife was in the East; he prepared to flee from the camp.

But he had no idea that his name had been connected with the robberies as yet. He went about his preparations slowly. And of the men who passed him on the street few owned any knowledge of what was going on. So he scanned their faces and saw nothing to disturb him; and he maintained his usual quiet exterior, greeting acquaintances and friends and enemies with cold, impassive calm.

It was Saturday night when Neil Howie brought Dutch John, to Bannack. Then Plummer began to see the need of haste. No telling what this man might disclose; and even if he kept still, there was the danger of some other being captured. Buck Stinson and Ned Ray were also in town. He warned them to make ready and sent out to the nearest rendezvous for three fast horses.

That same night while the local committeemen were examining Dutch John, four Vigilantes came over from Virginia City with news that their companions were preparing for a roundup of thugs on Alder Gulch, near by. This news encouraged the Vigilantes of Bannack to such an extent that before daylight a secret meeting was convened. Henry Plummer, Buck Stinson and Ned Ray were condemned to die.

Sunday afternoon a rider brought the three horses into Bannack for Plummer and his companions. A Vigilante saw him and recognized the animals. He hurried to gather his fellows. There was no time now for a meeting. When a half-dozen men had got together they set out to search the camp. They arrested Stinson and Ray without any trouble.

Plummer was in his cabin washing his face when they arrived.

"Be with you in a moment," he said when they flung open the door and told him he was wanted.

He went to a towel, wiped his features slowly, rolled down his shirt sleeves and started toward a chair where his coat was lying.

"I'll hand that to you," one of the party said and picked up the garment.

He withdrew a pistol from its pocket; and those who were there said afterward that for once Henry Plummer changed color.

They took him to a little clump of pines near the outskirts of Bannack. There he himself as sheriff had built a gallows and hanged a murderer the Summer before. Three nooses dangled from the rude framework; his two companions were standing under them. Armed men surrounded them. He saw these things and fell upon his knees, begging for his life.

Stinson and Ray were cursing their executioners. They were coarse-grained thugs; they died in character, with vile words on their lips.

When it came his turn Plummer pulled himself together. Now that he had tried everything that he could do, he shrugged his shoulders and resumed his old impassive rôle.

"We've done enough to send us to hell twice over," he said quietly before they drew him up.

Within a few days after his passing the men of Virginia City had hanged six more of the band. For weeks afterward the Vigilantes continued pursuing the robbers who were fleeing across the mountains. They captured them in twos and threes and singly, and left their bodies swinging from the limbs of trees.

In all some thirty-odd went to their deaths. And when the work was done the Vigilantes disbanded. There were some brief interludes of lawlessness during the decade that followed; and there were other vigilance committees.

But these were minor affairs. The end of the era of evil really came when those men in Bannack placed the noose around the neck of Henry Plummer, the most consummate villain in all the melodramas of the Old West.

SWASHBUCKLERS

by Eugene Cunningham

HERE is a term that probably came into being in London in the 16th century. In that period it was used synonymously with "ruffian" or "swaggerer." Judging from the contemporary writers, in that day "sword-men" were a serious nuisance to quiet folk, as they had been for long. An extract from the records of the city of London states—

> On the 13th day of March, 1311, before Sir Richard de Befham, Mayor, among other delinquents: Master Rober le Skirmisour, attached for that he was indicted for keeping a fencing school and enticing respectable persons to waste property in bad practises . . .

For a long time even the teaching of swordsmanship was prohibited. Then Henry VIII, who loved military sports, incorporated the most celebrated masters of fence into a company. He forbade any but members to teach the art and prescribed rigid rules for the company. Novices were termed "Scholars," and, having progressed satisfactorily, became "Provosts of Defense." Last, after trial "well and sufficientlie performed before manie hundreds of people, they do proceed to be Maisters of Fence."

Company-members usually practised before spectators in theaters or halls. Ely Place, in Holborn, and the Belle Sauvage, on Ludgate Hill, were favorite resorts. But despite restrictions much bold swaggering was done by gentry of the sword. The term "swashbuckler" was coined, referring to their habit of "swashing" (moving noisily) the bucklers (small shields or "targates") that inevitably accompanied the broadsword. This was before the day of the rapier, or the use of point instead of edge.

Fuller in "Worthies of London" remarks that the swashbucklers were also called "ruffian, which is the same as a swaggerer, because they tried to make the side swag, or incline, on which they were engaged," and that West Smithfield, the only place where their brawling was tolerated, became known as "Ruffian Hill."

Author of "The Education of Snapper MacNeill," "Corrigan," etc.

IT WAS one of the invariable customs of the McMullen flight of the Air Service border patrol that the first step toward preparing for dinner after the day's work should consist of foregathering on the veranda of the recreation building. Somehow or other every available member of the flight could always be found, in the late afternoon, in his favorite attitude of rest and relaxation, sprawled somewhere around the steps. It was a time for casual conversation, invariable badinage, and sometimes serious discussion.

On this afternoon it was particularly hot, and the young men charged with the duty of peering down from the air on some two hundred miles of the Mexican border had had an unusually trying day. The flat, sandy field lay baking between the rows of hangars to east and west, and the flyers stewed in their own perspiration on the porch.

The discussion had included a short dissertation on women by the youngest member of the flight, twenty-four year-old Carson; surmises about the reasons which might have been responsible for a De Haviland of the Marfa flight having smashed into the ground after a thousand-foot dive straight downward the day before, killing Bob Forsythe and his observer, "Carry-on" Cady; some kidding of little Pete Miller and his projected venture into matrimony with the charming niece of the Honorable Sam Edwards, Mayor of McMullen, and had finally turned to insects and reptiles for no good reason except that a lizard had hove into sight and streaked along the ground in front of "Pop" Cravath, the adjutant.

Pop was an indefatigable seeker after information, and had collected a wide assortment of diversified facts about many subjects, so now he waxed oratorical upon the ability of the chameleon to change its color in harmony with its environment. His dissertation embraced the characterestics of the reptile, the reasons for its changing color, some theories as to how the miracle was worked, and other matters. The other khaki-clad young men, principally through lack of inclination to talk, listened somnolently.

Finally, tall, wide-shouldered Tex MacDowell put in his oar. He was draped along a step, knees in the air.

"Chameleons are right game little chaps, too," he drawled. "A year or two ago when I was up home at the ranch Freddy Folsom and I were playing checkers on the veranda one afternoon and one of these lizards ran across the porch. I caught him and put him up on the checkerboard for no good

reason. The little fellow was lying along the black and red squares, and —— if he didn't blow up and bust trying to turn himself red and black at once! I felt right sorry for him."

Thus was the natural history disposed of.

"About time this new man Atkins was showing up, isn't it?" inquired Jimmy Jennings.

Captain Kennard, C. O. of the flight, nodded.

"He was ordered from Sill over a week ago," he said. "May be in this afternoon, but if he doesn't let me know when he gets in he can't kick if we don't meet him at the train."

The roar of a plane came to their ears.

"Sleepy Spears getting in," remarked Cravath. "Gentlemen, hush! I have heard language, and am an expert in the parts of speech, but Binder showed me some new wrinkles over the phone when he told me about making a forced landing on account of a burned-out generator. He said that any man who was —— fool enough to spend his life flying a double blankety blank triple dashed and asterisked air-plane over such a mesquite-ridden, fly-bitten, sand-strewn, forsaken pimple on the face of the earth as the Mexican border ought to be sent to an asylum. He talked for five minutes and when he got through the telephone was nothing but a mass of molten metal. He said he'd have to spend the night in a deserted shack where tarantulas as big as toads played leap-frog twenty-four hours a day."

"I'll bet the boy was sore. Got down all right, didn't he?" asked Hickman.

"Yes, but he says he doesn't know how in —— he's going to get out."

"Did Sleepy drop him a new generator?" inquired Tex.

"Yes, if he wasn't flying in his sleep," returned Cravath.

Tex, whose wooden couch commanded a view of the air-drome gate, tilted his Stetson over his eyes to shield them from the sun and then announced:

"A Ford is entering the precincts. Looks like Sheriff Trowbridge driving—it must be, because there's nobody else in the world as big as he is. His companion is wearing a uniform."

"Probably Atkins," grunted Kennard.

The flyers straightened against the wall or arose on their elbows to inspect the clattering vehicle which was approaching down the line of barracks and frame buildings along the southern boundary of the field, fronting the road. The landing De Haviland's motor was quiet as it skimmed the fence at the northern end of the airdrome.

It was Sheriff Trowbridge at the wheel, tried and true friend of the air-men and partner of theirs in many an exciting event. A chorus of greetings were flung at him as the car drew up in front of the steps.

"I'm deliverin' Lieutenant Atkins," boomed the huge old-timer, grinning beneath his mustache. "Shake hands with Captain Kennard."

The short bow-legged C. O. got to his feet and shook hands. His scarred face was marked by no less than twenty air-plane wrecks and surmounted by a spike-like pompadour. He grinned widely as a pair of keen eyes appraised Atkins.

"Why didn't you let us know you were coming today?" he asked.

Atkins, a stocky, rather pasty-faced man, who looked older than bald Pop Cravath, saluted and shook hands. His grasp was cold and limp.

"Meet the gang," Kennard went on. "Jennings, MacDowell, Hickman, Carson, Ransom, Miller. And here come Sleepy Spears and Dyckman. This is Atkins, fellows."

Atkins shook hands all around, but said nothing. Tex noticed that he seemed nervous, and his eyes did not meet the level regard of the bronzed Texan for more than a split second before wavering away. He was not very prepossessing in his appearance—his uniform did not fit any too well, and his full face was white and flabby compared to the tanned countenances of his future comrades. His eyes darted from face to face, as though seeking some haven where they might rest for a moment.

"Give Hickman there your baggage checks, and he'll see that your trunk gets up. I think you'll like it here, Atkins. Tomorrow morning we'll decide what to do with you. Orderly!"

The captain's stentorian roar caused a uniformed youth to burst out of headquarters as if shot from a gun.

"Show Lieutenant Atkins to tent three!" ordered Kennard. "Come around again after you get cleaned up, Atkins. You'll find the bath-house at the end of the boardwalk, south of the tents."

"If you need a bath-robe, Sleepy's tent is next to yours. Just grab anything you want," offered handsome, curly-haired Jennings generously.

"I like to treat a guest with courtesy," responded the lazy-eyed, tousled flyer whose chunky body lay flat on the floor, a study in complete relaxation. "But to me a bath-robe is as sacred as a toothbrush. Now——"

"When did you start using a toothbrush?" demanded the lounging MacDowell.

Atkins laughed mechanically, and handed his trunk-check to Hickman, who was an observer, and nearly as big as Sheriff Trowbridge. As Atkins started down the walk in the wake of the soldier who was carrying his suitcase the captain asked:

"How did you happen to run into Atkins, Sheriff?"

The sheriff's booming bass replied:

"I was up sayin' howdy tuh Baldy Eckert, and thought I'd catch the train and have a look fur this here Worthey that's supposed to've shot young Blade. He's makin' fur the border out o' San Antone——"

"I thought they'd have him by this time," remarked MacDowell.

"Nope. Seems to be a right elusive *hombre*," returned the Sheriff.

They were referring to Worthey, suspected of the murder of young Blade, son of one of the richest men in Texas. The boy had been found murdered in a rooming house in Dallas. The room had been rented by a stranger named Worthey, and evidently he and young Blade had been playing cards, for a littered deck had been found on the table, along with a whisky bottle. It was thought that Worthey was making for the border, and all Texas was joining in the search for the suspected murderer.

"Well, what d'yuh think o' what I brought yuh?" inquired Trowbridge.

"You never can tell about these fellows that transfer into the Air Service. They have to change their ideas around so much they sometimes aren't able to fit in," returned Kennard with a grin. "We'll soon see, though."

"I'd never pick him for no flyer," remarked Trowbridge. "He looks kind o' old to me—more like a bank cashier or somethin'."

"I believe he's nearly half as old as Pop Cravath," yawned Sleepy Spears.

The bald observer, who was well over thirty, grinned without rancor.

"When you kids get dry behind the ears you'll have sense enough to be properly respectful in the presence of your superiors in age and experience. I would mention intellect, except that you would not know what I was referring——"

"How did you like George Washington? Was he a pretty good commanding officer, Pop?" inquired Tex.

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed Trowbridge, who enjoyed renewing his own youth with the flyers, in many ways so reminiscent of the range-riders of his youth.

"Atkins sure acts like a rookie," observed Kennard. "He didn't seem to know just what to do with himself."

"To be perfectly frank, I don't think I'd burst into any eulogies about him," said Jennings. "He don't look you in the eye enough. However——"

"Did you all notice his hair?" drawled Tex. "Looked like a toupee to me. He had a sort of pasty-looking face, too. However, I've known good scouts that couldn't look you in the eye, and pimply-faced rat-eyed fellows that would go to —— and back for you. By the same token, there are liars and thieves that——"

"Show all the earmarks o' bein' real *hombres*," Trowbridge concluded for him. "When I spoke to Atkins on the train he was lookin' out the window, absent-like, and jumped a foot. Nervous kind o' specimen."

"So you didn't run across young Blade's murderer, eh?" asked MacDowell. "I knew Blade a little—he was a good egg. I'll bet his dad is loaded for bear. If he ever got hold of the murderer the noose would look like a rest-cure. He and dad were pretty good friends one time."

"There wasn't nobody on the train but three drummers that's been makin' McMullen for a year, and other folks I know—every one of 'em, except Atkins. This bird Worthey has sure pulled a neat getaway, ain't he? There ain't been such a systematic search for a man in Texas fur years. I know he ain't passed through McMullen. He may be hittin' for El Paso. My guess is he's crossed 'em either by holin' in right in Dallas, or goin' north."

"It's always been my opinion that a real smart man—a man whose brain worked straight, like an honest man's—would have a —— good chance to live as free as air the rest of his days, no matter how thorough

the search," opined MacDowell, settling his more than six feet of bone and sinew more comfortably against the wall. "Look what a dumb-bell this Worthey was, if he killed Blade. Why, if he'd fixed it so that the blood wouldn't ooze under the door he'd have had at least twelve hours more of time for his getaway. Not to mention all the other details. It was sure the work of an amateur."

"Just a drunken row," agreed Kennard.

"The funny part of it is, that prob'ly the circumstances is such that a lot o' men that never had a real blood-thirsty thought in their lives might o' done it," mused Trowbridge, tilting his sombrero farther down over his eyes. "I've knowed many a man in my days as a ranger and sheriff that committed murder in the wink of an eye without havin' any more idea they was goin' to do it, or capable of it, than you an' I. With them kind, if they stay free, there's one o' two things always happen, if they're to blame: they're either good men and Old Man Conscience gets 'em sooner or later an' they give themselves away, or else they become criminals by design. Most of 'em go down, and they're dangerous to corner. Well, what say to some trap-shootin'?"

"Where are the old reliables?" queried Beaman.

"Here's one of 'em."

Trowbridge had no idea of making a quick draw—in fact, thought he had moved slowly, but nevertheless the big pearl-handled six shooter was in his hand as if by magic. It was one of a pair of twins that were famous throughout the border country.

"Carried it in a shoulder holster t'day," stated Trowbridge, handling the gun lovingly.

A majority of the airmen got to their feet lazily, and Jennings, who handled the armament section of the flight, sent an orderly after the sergeant. They made their way past the tents to the trap-range. In a few moments the sergeant appeared, accompanied by another soldier carrying shotguns. With the private out in the pit and the sergeant handling the pull-lever the flyers, lined up by the ammunition boxes, shot in turn as the clay pigeons sailed through the air at various angles.

Sheriff Trowbridge, his stalwart form a picturesque incarnation of the old West, used nothing but his six-shooter. Time after time he threw down on a clay disc and shattered it cleanly—rarely did he miss chipping it at least. Few of the flyers had better scores with shotguns than the old man had with his revolver.

"Well, it's close to chow-time," announced Kennard. "Better stay, sheriff!"

"Can't do it. I'd better mosey around to the office and find out whether any o' the boys have got anything on this Blade case. Principally through old man Blade all us border men are gettin' prodded good and plenty. They shore don't want this Worthey to slip through 'em. See you-all later." The dilapidated Ford chugged back to town, and the flyers scattered to their tents.

II

AN HOUR later they had all gathered in the recreation room, a few feet from the mess-hall, and were engaged in the blithesome pastime of shaping up *tequila* cocktails before dinner. Atkins was the only absentee, except the luckless Binder. There were heaps of magazines on the long table, which was surrounded by easy chairs, and two card-tables. A big fireplace occupied one end of the room, and was a popular gathering place when one of those chill northers caught Texas in its chill grip. A phonograph, a piano, and a wide assortment of pictures completed the furnishings.

The fat and taciturn Chink who was charged with the welfare of the flyer's appetites rang the bell vigorously, and they adjourned to the mess-hall. They were attacking the soup in force when Captain Kennard remarked—

"Somebody'd better go and get Atkins."

Pop Cravath, always willing to oblige, slipped out. Within two minutes he returned and announced:

"He was sleeping like the dead. I yelled at him,without any answer whatever. When I shook him he jumped clean across the tent. Were I not a man of prodigious courage and stupendous daring, the expression on his face for a moment would have scared me."

Half-facetious as Cravath's words were, there was nevertheless an undercurrent of seriousness.

"The sheriff said he seemed sort of nervous," drawled Tex.

"I told him where the liquor was and told him to get himself an appetizer if he wanted

it," Cravath went on, easing his chubby body into a chair.

Atkins entered in a short time, and took the seat Kennard indicated. His face was slightly flushed, and his light eyes were brighter than normal.

MacDowell, a close observer by instinct and training, watched the new man with the beginnings of a mocking smile twisting the corners of his mouth.

"He took more than one drink," he thought.

Which was the truth. Atkins had gulped two big ones greedily—he needed them if ever a man did. The consequence was that he was temporarily more companionable than he would have otherwise been, and his tongue was loosened. He injected himself into the lazy repartee which was tossed back and forth across the table, and in general comported himself with more of an air of ease than had been the case that afternoon.

"You got your training at Fort Sill, didn't you?" asked Hickman during the meal.

Atkins nodded.

"That's where I got mine," nodded Hickman. "That's a——"

"'Old Chief' is a great egg, isn't he?" interrupted Beaman, another observer who had received his training at Sill.

"Er—who?" stammered Atkins.

"Old Chief—the perennial sergeant."

"I don't believe I knew him, although I might have," said Atkins.

The silence of absolute surprize settled over the table. Tex MacDowell, acting on that uncanny instinct which seems to be the inevitable attribute of men of the open, glanced around the table in quick warning.

"I sure never get tired of watching Sheriff Trowbridge fire that 1800 model cannon of his," he said smoothly.

Captain Kennard, grasping what he thought was the idea in MacDowell's mind, helped along the change in subject. The C. O. thought that Tex was trying to save Atkins from embarrassment. The captain had never been at Fort Sill. The men who had been there quickly regained their equilibrium, and all of them successfully masked the astonishment which Atkins' answer had generated within them. However, they did not yield to the temptation to question him further.

For Old Chief of Fort Sill was a character famous throughout the Army, and it was almost a certainty that no officer, soldier or civilian could spend a week at Fort Sill without hearing about him, and very probably seeing him. He was an aged, seamed and wrinkled old Indian. Back in the days of the Indian war he had guided a distinguished American general—still living—on his trip through the Indian country as ambassador of peace.

Old Chief had been loyal time after time when life itself was at stake, and by risking his own safety many times he had saved to the country a man who later became one of its most distinguished leaders. For months he had guarded and advised his charge, and he was mainly responsible for the success of the general's mission—and the effects of that mission are not easy to realize or appreciate until one knows what might have happened. Congress passed a law whereby the old Indian held the rank of sergeant for the rest of his days, drawing full pay and allowances of his grade, and which provided that he should do no duty whatever, but be a free agent entitled to live wherever he wished, and draw his pay from the nearest Army post.

He lived on the ground his ancestors had trod, a few miles outside the reservation of Fort Sill, and every week or so wended his way to the post to purchase supplies at the commissary. His weekly pilgrimage was an event, and the commanding officer usually found an opportunity to pay the old Indian his respects by having the band play for him, which pleased the old man tremendously. Every necessity of life he got from the commissary—clothing, food, household articles, blankets and other supplies. And every month he drew his pay.

Hickman's description of him, "the perennial sergeant," had been purely facetious, of course. The name had been mentioned twice, and it was almost impossible that Atkins could have misunderstood. And it was totally impossible that a man could have spent three months at Sill without knowing all about Old Chief.

MacDowell smelt an unmistakable rat, and yet he could not put his finger on any explanation. It might be that the new man had only been at Sill a few days, or that by some miracle he had never heard of the old Indian. But just for his own satisfaction, he was going to try out the new man a bit more. Apparently the rest of the flight had comprehended his intention well, for they made no other references to Atkins' break.

It was after dessert had been served, and the time had come for setting fire to numerous cheroots that Tex, his remarkably large gray eyes dancing with a brand of devilment which was very familiar to his intimates, asked Atkins:

"What's Wild Bill Selkirk been up to lately around Sill? Pulled off any more stunts like jumping twenty-four thousand feet in a parachute or anything like that?"

Atkins, his eyes darting away from MacDowell's and then back again, shook his head.

"Everything's been pretty quiet," he said.

Every man in the flight knew that Wild Bill Selkirk had been killed in Florida several months before.

"Well, if you'll pardon me I'll turn in again," said the new man after the meal was over. "I'm so sleepy I'm about dead, and tired with it. Good night."

The reaction of days when he had been tensed to the breaking point had set in. He had got by, he mused as he stumbled toward his tent, on that Fort Sill stuff, but he'd have to be very careful. For the moment though, nothing seemed to matter much except that he was utterly spent.

His fatigue was the natural result of the past few hours, for many and diversified things had happened to him.

III

AT THREE o'clock in the afternoon of the day before the arrival of McMullen's brand-new observer a man sat motionless in his chair in the lobby of the St. Anthony Hotel, San Antonio. The newspaper on his lap slid to the floor with a soft swish. His eyes, staring steadily across the shadowed lobby, did not shift from their absent survey of a whirring electric fan. A few people moved negligently in the oppressive heat which intruded itself even into the huge, fan-cooled hotel promenade.

His restless mind, casting eagerly for some possible method whereby he might escape the pursuers who were closing in on him, could find none. Finally his eyes tore themselves from the gleaming metal of the fan, and with quick, lightning-like looks around the lobby seemed to be seeking a loophole even there. Feverishly bright and unceasingly active, they were, contrasting with the solid immobility of his body.

The minions of the law were watching every train leaving town. Even the roads were picketed, and automobiles being stopped for explanations as to their destination and the identity of their passengers. San Antonio, for him, was hemmed in by a wall of enemies. Perhaps that wall could be pierced, but what good would it do, he asked himself hopelessly. All of Texas was on the look-out for him—and he did not possess twenty dollars, despite the prosperity of his outward appearance.

He did not look like a criminal as he sat there, dry lips closed around an unlighted cigar. He was almost totally bald, and this, added to the effect of nose-glasses, made him seem like a solid, middle-aged business man. His eyes were light gray, almost white, with a curious opaque quality about them. His sharp, prominent nose jutted over a thin mouth, below which his clean-shaven chin receded slightly. He was dressed quietly in gray—gray that seemed to harmonize with the fringe of hair, the eyes, even the smooth, full face.

How long he had sat there he did not know. He had thought and planned so long and so continuously that it seemed to him as though his brain was doomed ever to grind on and on, creating queer, blurred fantasies.

He stooped mechanically and picked up the paper. It was a copy of the San Antonio Express. Despite the fact that he knew every line of the article below the four-column head, he read it over. He dreaded the headlines:

CROWELL BLADE, JR., MURDERED IN DALLAS ROOMING HOUSE; MURDERER BELIEVED TO BE IN SAN ANTONIO!

The article itself was a reasonably accurate statement of the facts. Crowell Blade, son of one of Texas' richest and most distinguished men, had been found in a room, his head crushed. A heavy chair, smeared with blood, had been the weapon. An empty bottle, and another one partly consumed, two decks of cards, and nearly three thousand dollars in cash had been found on the table. The body had been discovered at about three o'clock in the morning, by a lodger who, returning at that hour, had noticed blood oozing under the door, which was locked.

The Dallas correspondent of the *Express* had constructed the inevitable theory—a drunken row over the card game, with murder as its climax. That so much money had been found was explained by the theory that the murderer, appalled at his crime, had rushed out with no thought of anything but escape.

There had been little time for investigation before press-time, but included in the story was the evidence of the landlady and other lodgers that the room had been hired that day by a heavy-set well-dressed man with gray eyes and brown hair, rather full face, and appearing to be about thirty-four or five years of age. He had given the name of George C. Worthey.

After rereading that accurate story of his crime, Worthey remained immersed in torturing reverie for several moments. His mind traveled back over the trails he had followed of late, and the gruesome end to which they had led him.

It had been the Army which had started him—the Army, and Charley Carter. Carter had been quartermaster sergeant, like himself, and his mind, trained to crookedness for years, had sought out and found dozens of opportunities for graft. With Worthey as accomplice, the two of them had feathered their nests successfully for more than a year. There were limitless opportunities for rake-offs in the tremendous amount of buying which the Quartermaster department handled, and Worthey, under the tutelage of Carter, had improved them with increasing skill and finesse.

It had been Carter, too, with his tales of easy money, who had otherwise undermined the very slight moral fibre which Worthey possessed. He had learned the tricks of the professional gambler, and after a short time the percentage of his company's payroll which he held on the first of the month was very gratifying. No more work as manager of the public market back in Missouri for him, he had decided; the big cities, and the flesh-pots therein, were awaiting him.

For over a year he had achieved his desires to a moderate degree. He had traveled around the country, and managed to live well, on the whole. A few days before there had come his big opportunity for a clean-up, presented in the person of young Blade. For three days he had played with the wild youngster as a cat with a mouse. Last night had been the climax.

He had succeeded in getting Blade drunk—so drunk that he had deemed it safe to try methods as coarse as switching decks, something that he almost never chanced. He had not been satisfied with slowly winning Blade's money, he told himself with vicious self-contempt. In an effort to get it all at once he had given himself away.

He had not intended to kill him, of course. When the reckless young Texan had pushed his chair back and made a leap for him the instantaneous plan which flashed through his brain was to knock him unconscious and escape with the money.

He, too, had been drinking, and the heavy chair had crashed down on Blade's skull with a sickening thud. One look was enough—that gruesome sight on the floor scarcely needed the evidence of a stilled heart. Blade was dead.

In the rush of realization he had been insane, momentarily. There could be no doubt of that. He could not remember closing and locking the door at all. His hat had been on his head, or he might have left without that. To take the money had never recurred his mind—he did not even know it was there.

In a daze he had gone to the depot and bought a ticket for San Antonio, an overnight trip. Not until he paid for it did he realize that he had nineteen dollars remaining in his pocket, and that his half-formed plan of reaching the Mexican border was impossible of realization unless he obtained more money.

On the train, through the sleepless night, his thoughts kept pace with the drumming click of the wheels over the rails. In his ecstasy of horror and fear he could not think connectedly or logically—over and over again he lived the murder, and time after time his thoughts, despite the inhibition he laid upon them, stole ahead to prison, and expiation for his crime.

There had been but one ray of hope to offset the trembling fear with which he had alighted from the train next morning. He was convinced that no one in Dallas had known that he wore a toupee. He had taken that off, and put on his reading glasses. With his hat off, those two things aged him at least ten years. He had taken care to be fanning himself with his hat as he walked out of the train-shed and through the gate. He had almost sobbed aloud with relief when he was safely ensconced in

a taxi on his way to St. Anthony Hotel.

Now, however, his small success seemed negligible. He did not dare attempt any of his usual methods of procuring money—according to the evening papers San Antonio was being combed with a fine-tooth comb, and strangers had to give an account of themselves.

Worthey shook himself, and got to his feet. Suddenly it seemed to him that he must have some physical outlet for the chaos within. He strode over to the newsstand and bought the last edition.

SUSPECT IN BLADE MURDER PROVES ALIBI

was the headline running it's black length all the way across the page.

Aside from that, there was little new in the day's developments. The authorities were certain, according to the paper, that the murderer was Worthey, and that he had undoubtedly left for San Antonio on the ten o'clock train. Medical testimony was to the effect that young Blade had been dead over four hours when he had been found, and the train for San Antonio was the only one for three hours which an escaping murderer would be likely to take. In addition, it would carry him toward the border—that magic line which all the major criminals of the southland seek to cross.

There were additional details as to the thoroughness with which the city was being combed. Worthey could not repress a shudder as he thought that that man at the desk might be a detective, planning to interview the guests of the hotel and make them identify themselves. Any of the men around the lobby—that thin, bespectacled man in a derby hat who had been watching him the last few minutes—might have him under surveillance.

Undoubtedly, with the aid of his really effective natural disguise, he might escape from the net being drawn around him, but how could he without money? Once again his mind took up the weary search, only to end up against a blank wall. There seemed no hope.

IV

HE WAS totally unconscious of the approach of a man until he heard some one sit down in the chair next him. A sickening wave of fear which left him weak—and then he forced himself to look around. His glance took in an Army officer, who was in the act of abstracting a cigaret from a leather case.

The Army man, a stocky, pleasant-faced fellow, looked up and met Worthey's gaze.

"Cigaret?" he asked, offering his case.

"No, thanks," Worthey responded in a deliberately throaty voice.

He indicated the cigar in his hand. It was half-chewed up now.

"I see you don't believe in smoking much," laughed the officer.

As he lit his cigaret Worthey's eyes traveled from head to foot of the man next him. He noticed particularly the half-wing of an observer in the Air Service. The man seemed close to thirty, although he was only a first lieutenant. He had a square, rugged face, deeply bronzed by exposure to the weather, and a pair of frank, gray eyes. Worthey speculated fervishly on the possibility of victimizing him somehow—he would give a finger for a hundred dollars.

The officer's eyes traveled to the headline of the paper.

"That was a horrible affair, wasn't it?" he asked, indicating the paper with a wave of his cigaret. "Old man Blade is one of the most prominent men in the South. Sure is creating a sensation down around here! I understand they believe the murderer is right here in San Antonio. I should think he'd have gotten out of here for the border, though, by this time."

"They've watched every out-bound train, and even automobile, ever since early this morning, according to the paper," responded Worthey. "Every living soul has got to give an account of himself, I guess. I'm a stranger here myself, and I'm expecting a policeman to walk up any minute and ask me who I am and where I'm from."

It was a strained attempt to be natural and jocular, but the officer did not seem to notice anything unusual.

"I'm glad I've got my papers with me, then," he said with a grin. "I'm leaving tonight for McMullen, down on the border. I've just been ordered down there from Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Stopped off a few days at Donovan Field—four miles out of town—on the chance there might be a ship flying to McMullen. It's one of the stations on the border patrol."

Worthey suddenly tensed. He turned

his face away quickly, as though afraid the flyer might read his thoughts. Into his fear-crazed brain there had flashed a wild possibility.

"What do you mean by the border patrol?" he asked slowly. His eyes followed with apparent interest the gradually growing number of people in the lobby. Well-gowned women, a sprinkling of uniforms from the numerous Army posts, and a considerable number of younger people bound for *thé dansant* were commencing to make the lobby a colorful and animated scene, far different from the quiet of mid-afternoon.

"The Air Service runs an aerial patrol all along the Mexican border," explained the air-man. "They have small landing fields at McMullen, Laredo, Marfa, Sanderson, El Paso, Douglas, Nogales and on out to San Diego, California. They cover the whole Mexican border twice a day from Gulf to Gulf. They've got the best bunch of flyers in the world down there, I guess. I'm only a rookie observer—transferred into the Air Service from the Artillery and just finished my course at Fort Sill—but I feel like some punkins being assigned to the border patrol!"

"Very interesting," stated Worthey. "Know anybody down in McMullen—isn't that where you said you were going?"

"Nobody personally," was the reply. "I guess nearly everybody in the Army knows of 'em by reputation, though. The C. O., Captain Kennard, got a couple of German planes to his credit in the war, and another one, Jennings, is a well-known ace. And then there's Tex MacDowell, the guy that was responsible for breaking old Fitzpatrick, that used to be king of the border—smuggled fire-arms over to Mexicans and drugs and hooch back over here. He was a power, all right, but MacDowell tied into him in a variety of ways, and Fitzpatrick ended up in jail, in spite of all his influence."

"What's the patrol for?"

"Keep an eye on smuggling, and the border in general. From what I can understand, the border, underneath the surface, is pretty near as it always has been. There's a lot of excitement down in that country, I'll tell you. I'm delighted at the chance to get down among 'em, believe me!"

"You're not a flyer, eh? That is, you don't fly the plane yourself?"

Worthey was as motionless as ever, but it was the quiet of a cat poised for a spring. The rather fleshy hand was clenched tightly around the newspaper, the other slowly crushing his cigar.

"No indeed. I'm an observer—ride in the back seat and keep an eye on everything below. In artillery spotting and all that sort of work the observer conducts the shoot by wireless—spots the shots and radios down how far each shot is off. Down on the border, though, our main duties as I understand them are to keep a constant watch on patrol, make out a complete report, and wireless back anything that looks strange."

A flush showed dimly on Worthey's smooth, full cheeks, and his light eyes were glittering with a light that was almost that of madness. The twenty-hour strain he had been under, plus his slowly increasing desperation, was making of him something as dangerous as a cornered rat. And he saw a chance of escape, now. It was a slight one, and yet——

"Might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb," he told himself with leaping pulses.

He fumbled for a match with shaking hands.

"I'd enjoy talking with you very much, Lieutenant—er——"

"Atkins," smiled the flyer.

"My name is White—Gerald White. Glad to know you. When did you say you were leaving?"

"Ten fifteen, tonight."

"I'd be glad if you'd have dinner with me tonight, lieutenant, and tell me some more about the Air Service. There's a company being formed in my city—Minneapolis—to carry passengers and freight between Minneapolis and Chicago, Omaha, Louisville, Detroit and other cities. I've been urged to invest in it, and I'd be glad to have some information from you about possibilities, and so forth. What say?"

"Delighted, I'm sure."

Atkins, being new to the Air Service, was an enthusiast on the subject, and more than glad to hear himself talk about it. Worthey, so nervous that it was torture to sit and listen, nevertheless bent every effort toward drawing the flyer out. Little by little he switched the trend of conversation toward Army flying, particularly on the border, and to the details of Air Service organization and custom. While his companion was talking of commercial aviation, or along some other line which was not immediately

important to Worthey, the murderer was busy perfecting his plans.

At six o'clock he suggested dinner, and they went into the dining-room. As the meal was drawing to a close Worthey asked:

"Is your baggage at the depot?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Well, if you have your ticket and checks and have nothing particular to do, how would you like to motor around the city a bit? Personally, I'd like to look it over."

"Suits me fine, as long as I make my train."

"Let's go, then."

Worthey signed the dinner check, tipped the waiter, and then led the way out of the dining-room. He could hear other diners discussing the murder, expressing various theories about it. In his abnormal state, he felt what amounted to a thrill of pride at his notoriety. Now that hope was dawning, the horror of his crime was temporarily in the background. His overstimulated nervous system had brought him almost to the verge of hysteria. He became suddenly talkative, feverishly gay, as they left the hotel.

They walked the half-block to Houston Street, and he turned southward along the busy main thoroughfare, toward a garage he had noticed on his way to the hotel that morning.

"I enjoy driving, and don't have a chance once a year—traveling all the time," he said to Atkins. "I hope it won't be beneath your dignity to ride with me if I get one of those 'Drive-it-Yourself' Fords and chauffeur you around myself."

"Not a bit," laughed Atkins. "This is my first trip to San Antone, too, and I'd enjoy looking it over from a lumber wagon."

They turned into a garage which flaunted a big sign stating that Fords could be hired for fifteen cents a mile, with a ten dollar deposit required.

Worthey had no trouble negotiating for a sedan—his appearance was that of a substantial middle-aged business man. His hat was almost constantly in his hand, the better to call attention to his bald head.

"How about tools?" he enquired of the mechanic who indicated the car they were to use. "The lieutenant here has got to make a train, and we don't want to get stuck."

"Right here, sir."

There was a heavy tool-kit in a side-pocket. Worthey opened it, inspected it briefly, and nodded.

"All O. K. We'll be back in a couple of hours, probably."

It was nearly eight o'clock, and as Worthey tooled the Ford up Houston Street, through the thickening traffic the sidewalks presented a colorful sight. Women in the lightest and gayest of Summer clothes, Army men, mostly in white uniforms, a sprinkling of Mexicans in picturesque sombreros, curio shops ablaze with light. Alamo Plaza was an animated square, holding a packed crowd listening to a band concert. High in a cloudless sky the moon rode in white splendor, adding the last touch of romance to the night.

V

WORTHEY was now living in a dream which resembled that of a drug addict. There was an unrealness about his surroundings—he felt as if all about him might be swept away in a moment, and that the hours he was living through must turn out to be the creation of his disordered fancy. It was unbelievable that these thousands of people should go on about their business calmly, while he fought for his life.

He drove around the Plaza, and then back toward the St. Anthony. He parked the car a short distance from the hotel.

"I won't be a moment—something I forgot," he told Atkins.

He entered the hotel and went up to his room. From the hiding-place he had cut in the mattress he drew forth his toupee, and put it in his pocket. He had not yet decided whether to use it or not, but the chances were he would. This accomplished, he checked out at the desk. After paying his bill, he had less than two dollars left.

"Well, we're all ready to go, I guess," he said as he reentered the sedan. "Any particular place you can think of that you'd like to look over?"

"Not a one. It's a treat to drive anywhere tonight."

Worthey, calling to mind the slight familiarity which he had with San Antonio as a result of several flying visits, started out Main Avenue. Within three or four miles that route would bring them past the outskirts of town, and it would be easy to find a sheltered, quiet side-road.

They rode silently, Atkins enjoying the rush of warm, scented air. Worthey, the creature of a brain that was a mass of chaotic, unreal fantasies, had he had time for introspection, would not have recognized the man within as himself at all. He had gone far in twenty-four hours.

A quarter of an hour, and houses became more widely spaced. A few moments more, and they were traversing a quiet thoroughfare, with only occasional passing cars to break the monotony of quiet woodland.

Worthey, trembling with excitement, kept watch for a suitable side-road.

"Here's a good place to turn around," he said thickly, guiding the car into a lane which seemed made for his purpose.

A big pair of headlights rounded the curve which had been ahead of them, and as the car passed drunken voices could be heard, singing a ribald ditty.

"They're having a large evening," laughed Atkins as Worthey brought the car to a stop, well up the road.

"Before I back out I want to look at that left front wheel. It steers as though it was loose," said Worthey, licking dry lips.

He climbed out, bent as though in inspection, and then straightened.

"Hub needs tightening," he said briefly.

He took out the tool-kit and drew forth a heavy wrench. He handed the electric flashlight to Atkins.

"Would you mind getting out and holding it?" he asked.

"Sure thing!"

Atkins got out, and bent over, his hand reaching out to test the wheel. As he did so Atkins snapped off the headlights. The wrench smashed down on the bent head of the flyer.

What followed was the work of a fear-crazed man. Astride the unconscious body, Worthey tightened his fingers around Atkins' throat with maniacal strength. When he loosed his hold there was no life in the body below him. The flashlight was out, and the road was so shadowed by thickly overhanging branches that the darkness was a perfect shield.

Worthey rapidly stripped the dead body of his victim. Leaving the clothing in the car, he picked up the body and carried it through the thick undergrowth. It was dark as pitch in the woods, but ahead there was a small clearing. In the pale moonlight he could see a depression in the ground—evidently a pit where campers had built a fire.

He laid the nude body in it, and made his way back to the car. Once again he took the wrench. With this crude tool he worked like a beaver, until finally the body was covered. He did not stop to add any artistic touches to the small heap which hid Atkin's body, save for throwing a few sticks of wood and some dried branches over it.

He was perspiring profusely when he had finished, and his eyes were those of a wild man. He made his way back to the car, and within the shelter of the sedan took off his own outer clothing. He drew on the breeches of the dead officer, and his own socks and shoes, which were brown. In another moment he was fully arrayed in blouse, cap and puttees. They fitted fairly well—he had made a careful comparison of his figure with Atkins' back there in the lobby.

Occasional cars had rushed by on the main road, forty yards out, but apparently no one had noticed the sedan, which was well screened in the thick darkness. He made a bundle of his own clothing and the underwear and shoes of the dead man. He adjusted his toupee on his head—it might be needed back at the garage, in the event that the same man who had rented him the car was there. In the Army uniform, without his glasses, and with the aid of the toupee his change in appearance was complete.

He backed out of the lane, first listening for any approaching cars, and started back for the city. The most immediate problem was the disposal of the clothing.

Sinking it in the water seemed the best method of getting rid of it. He was not familiar enough with San Antonio, however, to know where this could be done. He glanced at the dead man's wrist watch, which he now wore on his own arm. Nine fifteen. He had an hour before train-time. He must work fast.

His problem was solved for him. On one side of the road was a deep excavation, surmounted by the charred remains of a building. It had evidently been a fair-sized bungalow. It was surrounded by trees, and perhaps two hundred feet from the main road.

He stopped the motor, and listened again for any approaching cars. He could hear no sound. It was the work of a few moments only to climb down into what had

been the cellar of the house, and safely hide the clothing in the débris. If it was found, he reflected, the clue would be a deceitful one, for a possible victim of foul play would be traced as a civilian.

He had been lucky. So far as he knew, he had been absolutely unobserved. He drove back to the city at high speed, and drew up before the garage a little before ten o'clock.

He had not inventoried the contents of the dead man's pocket book, but it had been well filled with bills. He drove into the garage boldly. A quick glance into the office showed the man who had rented him the car sitting on the desk, talking with another. A third man was at the window. Worthey felt certain he could carry the thing through in the dim light, even if he had to pay his bill to the same man he had rented the car from, but nevertheless it was a mighty relief when the man at the window took a look at the number of the car, drew the card from a file, and came out to collect payment.

He had driven nearly thirty miles, Worthey discovered, and received $5.75 of his ten-dollar deposit back.

With bounding heart he walked out on the street, and examined the ticket in Atkin's pocket-book to find out which depot his train was scheduled to start from. This done, he hailed a taxi, told the driver he was in a hurry, and settled back with a sigh of relief.

His quick inventory of the note-case revealed a ticket to McMullen and one for a lower berth, fifty-three dollars in cash, orders for Lieutenant John T. Atkins to report to the Commanding Officer of Flight A of the Eighth Aero Squadron for duty, and two personal letters. One of them was signed "Your affectionate brother, Al," and was from Scranton, Pennsylvania.

Two baggage checks, one a railroad check and the other for temporary storage completed the contents.

He alighted from the taxi, paid the driver, tipped him liberally, and entered the depot. A prominent sign apprized him of the location of the checkroom, and in return for his check he received a heavy leather suit-case. He glanced at the clock, and found that he had nine minutes before train time. He went into the lavatory to make final preparations for getting to the train. He knew that keen-eyed police would be there—that his first test, perhaps his greatest, he would meet in his passage through the gate.

A glance in the mirror was reassuring. There were no suspicious spots on his uniform, and while the collar of the blouse was none-too well fitting, it was passable. He washed his face and hands rapidly, adjusted the toupee slightly, set the cap at a jaunty angle, and with suit-case in one hand and tickets in the other started for the open gates of his train.

As he had foreseen, there were two men at the gate with the trainmen. It seemed as though the beating of his heart must be noticeable to them as the slowly moving line brought him nearer and nearer to them. He could feel the eyes of the two detectives on him as he presented his tickets for inspection. The presence of those orders in his pocket were all that upheld him. The police could not well ask for further proof than that.

However, it proved unnecessary to use them.

"Track six," directed the trainmen, and Worthey walked on through the gate without molestation.

The aged porter directed him to his berth on the dusty, ramshackle car—the only Pullman on the train. Worthey wasted no time. He closed the curtains and undressed. The train was pulling out before he had made ready for bed.

He opened the suit-case, which was unlocked, and looked over the contents. There were clothing, keys, a few unimportant letters, a toilet kit—the usual appurtenances of travel. Worthey put on the pajamas, slipped the suit-case under the berth, switched off the single dim light and sank back against the pillow.

VI

HE WAS so utterly spent that for a moment he was in a state of semi-coma, and yet his physical immobility was shot through with the ceaseless hammering of his brain. In a moment every nerve in his body was on edge again, his thoughts leaped from event to event without logic or sequence, and he was powerless to stop them.

Finally however, soothed by the monotonous roar of the train, he got himself together to review his scheme. His eyes

stared into the gloom of his berth as he forced himself, step by step, over the happenings of the last few hours and strove to weigh his chances.

With a moderate amount of luck, Atkins' body would not be discovered for several days, at least. The clothing, probably, was equally safe. In the event of either being found, it would take days to trace down any clews. Atkins would not be identified except by chance for considerable time, if at all.

The dead flyer had said that he knew no one at McMullen. Certainly, then, Worthey himself, reporting to the flight as Atkins, ought to be safe for several days. He would have Atkins' baggage, and he was familiar with the Army to an extent amply sufficient for him to pass except in technical Air Service matters. On the plea of illness or some other excuse, it would be possible, for a time, to avoid suspicion as to his ability as an aerial observer. Perhaps there would be no immediate need of his doing anything in the air to show his lack of experience as an Air Service man.

If he could only hold on until the end of the month, now a week away, that would be sufficient. He would draw Atkins' pay, then. And perhaps there would be other opportunities to get money, he reflected. In a small town, as McMullen must be, his connection with the Army would be ample identification. He could probably get a sizable check on some San Antonio bank cashed without question. Familiar as he was with Army matters, he decided that it would also be possible, perhaps, to abscond with one or two of the other officers' pay checks, get them cashed in town with false endorsements, and then, under protection of his uniform, get across the border without any one being the wiser until he was far beyond their reach.

Of course, it would be the part of safety to get into Mexico as quickly as possible, but the thought of landing in that strange country, practically without funds, was a prospect that made him shrink. He would be a stranger in a strange land, having no knowledge of the language, nor any acquaintance with a living soul therein. He would not even have money enough to get to some center like Mexico City, where his talents might have some scope.

No, it was better to gamble for a few days on the very audacity of his scheme. Not a soul at McMullen would have the slightest suspicion of him, stranger as the real Atkins was. And it would be a simple matter, with his pay check, a cold check on a San Antonio bank, perhaps some winnings at poker, and other possible perquisites, to collect a thousand dollars or more before going over into Mexico.

For the hundredth time he cursed the insanity which had caused him to leave all that money behind in Dallas. Now that another murder was on his head, the memory of the first one had no power to particularly affect him. In fact, fear of arrest for the death of Crowell Blade was blotted out entirely. As George C. Worthey he was swallowed up in the earth, he believed; it was the possible chance of being traced as the murderer of Atkins which was in the forefront of his mind now. But what better hiding-place in all the world was there than McMullen, and the rôle of an officer in the Army?

Nevertheless, hopeful as he was, there was ever in the background of his mind the grinning specter of the hangman. He had become calloused to the horror of the murders—it was the sudden breaking of moral timber which had been steadily weakening for years. He had finally gone the limit, and for the moment was unaffected by it. But fear—persistent, numbing, naked fear—was ever with him. In the reaction from the hectic hours of the last day he tasted the dregs and gazed into the abyss he envisioned before him until he was utterly terror-stricken.

So, far into the night, his thoughts pursued him like torturing devils. Even when nature would no longer stand the strain the fantom creatures of his overwrought imagination danced through his mental consciousness, after physical consciousness had left him.

He awoke to find oppressive heat forcing beads of perspiration out on his face, and seemingless endless mesquite marching slowly past the dusty windows. He shaved with Atkins' kit, dressed in Atkins' clothes, and got breakfast when the train stopped to allow the passengers to procure provender, paying for it with Atkins' money.

Although the total distance from San Antonio to McMullen was considerably less than three hundred miles, the porter told him that the train was not due until four o'clock that afternoon. It clattered and

rattled its crawling way like a huge snake winding along through the forest. It was not the Texas of Dallas and San Antonio now; the Texas of modern hotels and up-to-date stores and automobiles and well-gowned women. Instead, desolate wilderness hemmed in the train—cactus, mesquite, sand, and broiling sun pouring a golden stream over all.

It was utterly in keeping with the picture to find one or two sombreroed, armed riders in boots and chaps sitting their horses beside a shack which represented a station founded for the benefit of ranchers.

And then with the suddenness of a magician producing an egg from a hat, there would come an end to the seemingly endless desert, and open fields, then houses, and finally paved streets would greet the traveler as the train pulled into one of the few towns along the route. Then another plunge into country which was now as it had been in the days of the Alamo.

It was an ordeal for Worthey, and his face was drawn with the strain of it. His fellow travelers were few, and he took no notice of them. There were three or four men who had all the ear-marks of traveling salesmen, one very good-looking girl and three middle-aged women, two of them fashionably dressed. The other men, all of them deeply bronzed as to face and hands, ranged from the conventionally dressed type to typical out-of-door men in flannel shirts and boots. Worthey fidgeted in his seat, chewed up innumerable cigars and smoked the package of cigarets which he found in Atkins' clothing. Several of the men spoke to him in a friendly way, but his curt answers kept them at bay.

His mind traveled over and over the same trail, until he felt as if he would like to leap off the train and rush wildly through the mesquite to give physical expression to the nervousness which racked him as his thoughts went from past to future, and the traps which would be laid for him on every side. The trip seemed endless, the progress of the train as slow as the passing of the time.

A stop for lunch, and then a weary hour and a half of constant stops. More often than not, the station itself and perhaps one more building were the only habitations within sight. Two o'clock came, and another stop at a fair-sized town.

Two passengers got on the train, Worthey noticed. One of them, a huge, sombreroed old man with a flowing gray mustache, dressed in flannel shirt, vest, and trousers tucked into embossed boots, came into the Pullman. He greeted a majority of the car's occupants by name, and passed ponderous persiflage in a loud voice with the conductor.

Worthey, after a short apparaisal, turned his eyes again to the deadly panorama unfolding without. His mind took up its accustomed round. He had got to the point where the slightest incident of the day before—a look, a whispered word, a hundred other things—had become evidence that he was suspected. He thought of a thousand and one things he should have done to make his position safer. There might be blood on the fender—on the wrench he had used—the men at the depot had seemed suspicious——

"Hello, son!" boomed a hearty voice, and Worthey, with a perceptible start, looked up into the puckered, twinkling eyes of the old man who had just boarded the train at the last station.

"Didn't aim tuh scare yuh none," he went on with a rumbling laugh. "Yo're the new man comin' tuh McMullen, I reckon."

For a moment Worthey was absolutely incapable of speech. The old man, in the act of sitting down in the seat opposite Worthey, had flipped his vest back and a huge star was momentarily visible.

"Y—yes, sir," stammered the pseudo-flyer at length.

His forehead was beading with perspiration that was not the result of the heat, and his eyes did not rest on the Texan's for more than a split second.

"Glad tuh meet up with yuh. I'm from McMullen, myself. My name's Trowbridge—I'm Sheriff o' Hidalgo County and I know all the boys out tuh the field right well. My headquarters is McMullen, and once 'r twice they've helped me out runnin' down some hombre by airplane. What did yuh say yore name was?"

"Atkins, sir. I—I'm very glad to meet you, I'm sure."

His hand was enveloped in the huge paw of the Sheriff, who thereupon settled down in his seat with an air of permanence.

"Yes, sir, it's shorely a great gang o' men yo're comin' tuh join up with," he opined. "And likewise, a good town. Ever since the border patrol got started McMullen's took to the idea—they're proud o' the

flight and they like every man in it. It's been right lively fur the boys ever since they been there. And there ain't no doubt they're one o' the best gangs o' young hellions I ever see. Know any of 'em?"

Worthey shook his head.

"Yuh got somethin' ahead o' yuh, then. I go out tuh the field right often fur some poker or trap-shootin' or such as that. Sneak a ride whenever I can. I'll tell yuh it's an eye-opener fur us old fogies that knowed the border back in the nineties and before to think o' havin' that whole schemin', Spig-ridden, mesquite-covered, rattler-infested stretch o' country patrolled by youngsters a mile or so in the air. You fellers are sort o' air-rangers—twentieth century riders. I'm old enough to know better, but I'll be doggoned if it ain't kind o' ramantic tuh me every time I see one o' them roarin' De Havilands disappearin' out over the mesquite along the Rio Grande."

Worthey negotiated a respectable smile, as though deprecating the compliments of the old Texan.

"Which most of 'em ain't to be fooled with, likewise," resumed Trowbridge, settling his bulk more comfortably in the seat and removing his tremendous sombrero. "Take this here Dave Fitzpatrick, now. He was the worst influence on the border. Ran everything for his own crooked ends, and had an organization workin' for him that included everybody from the heathen Chinee up through spigs, outlaws and government men. Fact! He tied in tuh young Tex MacDowell, and when the dust cleaned away Dave was in the pen and his gang broke. Ever hear about that?"

"Something, but no details," returned Worthey cautiously.

Trowbridge proceeded to tell the story, which had become a classic of the border patrol, and then under the spur of Worthey's questioning went on to talk of other achievements of the McMullen flight. Twice the sheriff had made trips by airplane after fleeing criminals—once in company with Tex MacDowell, and the other time with "Sleepy" Spears, the newest addition to the flight. Worthey was properly humble regarding himself, and acted somewhat diffident, as indeed he really was, at the prospect of becoming a comrade of those young veterans.

The last two hours of the trip passed more rapidly than previous ones by reason of Trowbridge's conversation, and Worthey succeeded in getting some information which might be valuable to him later. There was one thing which he learned which caused him a measure of satisfaction, and that was that the McMullen poker games were neither small nor infrequent. Likewise, according to the sheriff, some of the players, Spears and MacDowell especially, were a long way from being amateur.

Trowbridge told with great gusto the tale of that famous game at the Del Norte in El Paso when MacDowell had taken the first trick from Dave Fitzpatrick—or rather Fitzpatrick's men. Worthey listened with real admiration as the grizzled sheriff told how MacDowell had been invited into a game by a man he had met casually, and how, suspecting that there might be crooked work afoot, had played and watched until he caught a switch in the decks. He had four aces pat, and figured that a pat straight flush, the only hand which could beat him, would be too much of a giveaway.

So he had played his four aces strongly before the draw, believing that there was a four-card, open-end straight flush against him which would be filled in the draw. When the draw came, the flyer drew two cards instead of one, or none, and thus got the two cards on top which would have filled his opponent's straight flush. He had given away four aces for three, but it had resulted in his having only a valueless hand to beat instead of a nearly unbeatable one.

"That's what I call a poker player," nodded Worthey at the conclusion of the sheriff's tale. "I enjoy the game myself."

"Well, yuh'll get all yuh want of it out there. Me an' Sam Edwards—he's Mayor o' McMullen now—go out right often and play some."

Smiling fields were rolling past the windows now, and small houses dotted the level, sunlit landscape. The mesquite had been left behind, and it was a pleasant country which rolled away to the horizon.

"We're pullin' in, son. Expect yo're not sorry, either. Do they know yo're comin' on this train?"

"Not—er—definitely, I don't believe. That is, I left it to a soldier to send a wire for me and I don't know whether he did or not," stammered Worthey.

"Well, if there ain't a car tuh meet yuh

I'll crank up my Ford, which I use when the hoss ain't feelin' good, and we'll gallop out there."

Thus it had happened that he arrived at the aerodrome with Sheriff Trowbridge. Then had come the long strain of meeting the flyers and passing their inspection. It was no wonder that as he went to bed that night in his tent even the ever present thought of the hangman's noose seemed to have no power to affect him. He was too tired to be afraid of anything, and from the moment his head touched the pillow he slept the sleep of utter exhaustion.

VII

BACK in the recreation room Captain Kennard was sorting his bridge hand.

"He may be one of these recluses," he opined. "Might've been unpopular up at Sill, and never got around much. He looked sort of drunk to me tonight, too. Maybe he didn't know what we were talking about. As for that Selkirk question—he might not have known whether there was a fellow named Selkirk on the post or not. Atkins has only been in the Air Service a short while, and probably never heard of Selkirk. It is rather peculiar he shouldn't know about Old Chief, though, unless he was drunk. When his pilot book comes in we can tell more about how long he was there, if it will ease your mind, Tex. Well, I'll bid a no trump."

The captain's words seemed reasonable, under the circumstances. It did not occur to any of them, except Tex MacDowell, that the man might be an imposter. Tex himself did not really believe so, at that time. He was simply interested. The rest of the flyers dismissed the matter from their minds and scattered into card games or to town.

MacDowell was the only one who devoted any further attention to the new man, and as he played poker with Hickman, Beaman, Cravath and Jennings his mind, at intervals, returned to Atkins, and he decided that on the morrow he would conduct a few scientific tests. Had any one told him he was a cynic, he would have laughed. And yet, having run away from home in his early youth and spent a year on the outskirts of the underworld, and having been pitted against a large variety of unscrupulous criminals during his struggle with Dave Fitzpatrick on the border, the stalwart young flyer had more or less unconsciously reached the point where he did not take a man's trustworthiness for granted, no matter how well-founded his confidence might have seemed. Men had to prove themselves to him, now. Time after time, in the struggle with Fitzpatrick, men who had seemed frank and above-board had proved to be crooks of one kind or another. And undoubtedly the restless urge within him contributed considerably to his attitude of constant watchfulness.

For Tex loved excitement—he was never happier than when thrown into the midst of some affair which meant action. Captain Kennard, his rancher father, Sheriff Trowbridge and others who should have known, always maintained that almost every one of the succession of events which had marked MacDowell's career along the border was the result of the young Texan's joy in walking into traps for the pleasure of getting out of them again.

And so just the tiny chance that in the person of Atkins there might be the genesis of some out-of-the-ordinary experience was sufficient to add a bit of pepper to life. Things might be more interesting than usual, trying to figure out the new observer.

Breakfast was at seven the next morning, and immediately thereafter Tex and Hickman sent their big DeHaviland booming westward on the morning patrol to Laredo. Pete Miller and Beaman went eastward to the Gulf. The armament section trundled ship after ship to the machine-gun butts to make sure the guns mounted on the cowling of each bomber were properly synchronized and would shoot through the whirring propeller. Pop Cravath, adjutant, went through a succession of papers with Captain Kennard. The business of the field proceeded with quiet expedition.

Worthey, unpacking Atkins' trunk in his tent, was breathing more freely than he had since he had first gazed with horror-stricken eyes on the sprawled form of Crowell Blade. His heart still accelerated until it was almost physically painful whenever he thought of his position, but the more he thought the more certain he became that escape was a certainty. And it was not the murders themselves that made him afraid—it was the thought of punishment therefor. And so his belief in his ultimate escape made of him a different man.

At nine-thirty an orderly summoned him to Captain Kennard's office. The short homely little flyer, who in pre-war days had roved over two continents as an engineer, leaned back in his chair, lit a cigaret, and then motioned Worthey to a seat.

"I don't know just what to do with you, Atkins," he said. "Anything you're specially good at?"

"Most of my experience has been as a supply officer," Worthey said respectfully.

It had come like an inspiration to him. His previous experience as a Quartermaster sergeant had made him familiar with the complicated paper work, and in addition, the supply end of the Army always has and always will hold possibilities of graft for an unscrupulous officer.

The scarred face of the C.O. wrinkled into a grin.

"Boy, you can sure have it. Carson'll be so tickled to get rid of it he won't know what to do. He's radio officer, too, which is enough for any man. All right—I'll get out an order making you aero supply officer and regular supply, besides."

Another inspiration struck Worthey.

"Before the war I was manager of a big public market," he said. "Maybe I could run the squadron mess—I wouldn't mind it, and most fellows hate the job and don't know anything about buying."

"Seven saints and forty sinners! We have a paragon among us! Atkins, I'm glad you're here. Did I say I didn't know what to do with you? Consider yourself mess officer starting tomorrow. Cravath'll turn things over to you. If you can run it as it ought to be run, you'll be the most valuable man in the flight, not excepting myself."

In the rush of exultation which filled him as things came his way inspiration number three came to Worthey.

"I realize I'm only a rookie in the Air Service, sir, and I'm perfectly satisfied to take the little end of the horn for a while. I can start on those unpleasant jobs that I can do, but I'll be disappointed if I don't soon work into a regular Air Service job."

"Good," said the Captain heartily. "Of course, after a few practise patrols, you'll take your turn as observer, in addition to your ground duties. The time has passed when all a flyer has to do is fly, or an observer to observe."

"Yes, sir."

Worthey, eyes on the floor, was congratulating himself with pride and satisfaction. He had landed two jobs which would mean money that week perhaps, and in addition, his humble attitude had got him in right with Captain Kennard. He realized the importance of avoiding unpopularity or dislike, and was prepared to exert every effort in his power to be one of the gang until the blow-off came.

Kennard blew a couple of smoke-rings ceilingward, and then, having reached a decision, announced it without delay.

"I like your attitude, Atkins. To show you my appreciation, I'll start you right away on flying training. As you undoubtedly know, the chief is smiling on the idea of all observers being capable of flying a ship—not experts, but able to land and take off and handle it in the air. We've got a Jenny down here to train in. I suppose, like all observers, you'd give your left ear to be able to fly. Ever had the stick?"

"N—no, sir," stammered Worthey.

For an instant an excuse to get out of flying training was on the tip of his tongue, but then a thought came to him which dammed the fear-stimulated words he would have uttered. In case of an emergency, why not an escape by air across the border? For a moment he wavered, dreading the thought of the air. Then:

"Thank you, sir. The quicker I start the better I'll be satisfied," he replied.

"No time like the present!" stated the forceful Captain. "Orderly!"

The young soldier entered and saluted.

"Go tell Sergeant Cary to have the Jenny brought out on the line and warmed up. Then find Lieutenant Jennings and have him report to me."

Just as the noise of a motor came to their ears Jennings came in.

"Jimmy, Atkins here is anxious to start flying training. Take him up this morning, will you, and let him have the stick. Jennings," he went on, turning to Atkins, "is an old instructor and a man with five boches, so what he tells you will be straight."

The slim young flyer grinned.

"I haven't destroyed half as many Huns as I have American ships," he remarked. "Got a helmet and goggles?"

"N—no I haven't."

"Draw 'em from the supply!"

Jennings led him to the supply office, where he signed for the equipment, and then

sent him over to the ship while he went after his own stuff. The lath-like master sergeant in charge of the line was in the cockpit, and the motor was gradually increasing its roar as the throttle came slowly open on the warm-up. Clouds of dust swirled up behind the ship as the propeller entirely disappeared from sight, save for a circle of light that marked the tip. Enlisted men leaned against the wings to keep the ship from leaping the blocks. Although the motor was less than half the horsepower of the Liberty, and the ship itself, an ordinary training plane, much smaller than the De Havilands on either side of it, was nevertheless a fearful and wonderful thing to Worthey.

VIII

IT WAS probably the nerviest thing he had ever done—climbing silent and white-faced into the rear cockpit. It took him a moment to figure out how to adjust the belt, and he did not dare to ask for assistance. Had he been able to talk loud enough to make himself heard, and could have thought of an excuse, he would have renegged as Jennings, owl-like in his helmet and goggles, turned to him from the front cockpit.

"All right?" he shouted.

Worthey, perforce, nodded.

"—— if he don't look scared!" Jennings thought curiously. He scrutinized his prospective pupil for a moment, and then, with a slight shrug, turned and nodded to the waiting mechanics.

They crawled beneath the wing and pulled the wheelblocks, and then, gathering in front of the left wing, held it while Jennings shoved on the throttle and gave the ship left rudder and right aileron. They turned almost in their tracks, and went bumping over the field for the takeoff.

Worthey's thoughts were turning longingly to Mexico, and he was cursing himself for not getting across the border without delay. He was utterly afraid, now. The heat of the motor came back to him in a blast—the whole machine frightened him. His imagination leaped forward a few moments to the time when things on the ground would be pigmy-like, and there would be only this frail contraption between him and a terrible death. For Worthey, like a great majority of criminals, was yellow to the core.

They turned again, and then the roar of the motor seemed to fill the universe. Worthey, holding to the cowling with hands that gripped until it hurt, felt the tail of the ship rise as the ground sped by. With the fascination of fear he watched the ever moving stick in the back seat, daring once in a while to look out.

Suddenly the ground dropped away, and momentarily the riding was smooth. Then, with no warning, there came a sickish feeling in the pit of his stomach as the ship shot upward in a zoom. Jennings leveled off, and banked. Worthey clutched the upper side as the earth suddenly appeared to one side of him. It was a great relief when the ship righted, but it was nearly a minute before he looked down. And that moment marked the exact time when he started losing his dread of the air.

The Jenny, although the altimeter read less than five hundred feet, did not seem to be moving very swiftly over the flat brown earth below. His ears had accustomed themselves to the roar of the motor, and above all, he did not feel any sensation of great height, nor the nausea which nine hundred and ninety-nine people out of a thousand experience when looking down from a high dwelling. For the fact that the ship was moving made the earth seem like a painted canvas.

It was difficult to realize that he was actually in the air, and that the small buildings and tiny fields below represented the ground. The sensation which all people dread more than any other when thinking of flying is no sensation at all.

In fact, within two minutes Worthey, ignorant as he was about all things pertaining to flying was probably less afraid right then than was Jennings, with his knowledge of the thousand-and-one things that might go wrong. Jennings knew that they had had their lives in their hands when they took off, with no choice, had the motor cut, other than to smash straight into the buildings ahead. And he knew that it was very possible that Worthey, when he took the stick, might "freeze" the controls, through nervousness. To Worthey everything seemed suddenly safe. He did not realize the thousands of complexities in the roaring motor, nor the real dangers of the air.

Flying always has been, and for considerable time will be, a profession of thrills

and danger. But the idea that nobody except a man that combines a college education with the ability to hear a pin drop a mile away, spot a fly at a thousand yards and combine in general the attributes of a demi-god can fly, is wrong. Any normal man with fair eyes and ears, a good sense of balance and the common or garden variety of nerves can be taught to fly. It may be that his first forced landing will mean a wreck and that his first wreck will ruin his nerve, and the chances are a hundred to one against his ever becoming a good flyer. Good flyers, to a considerable extent, are born and not manufactured. But there are few men walking up and down the world, excluding the blind, the deaf and the aged, who could not be taught within ten hours to take off, fly around the field, and land.

Worthey was as nervous as a witch when Jennings motioned to him to take the stick. He did not know that Jennings own skillful hand was on the stick in the front seat, helping him. Immediately the ship started tilting as a bump hit the left wing. In semi-panic Worthey threw the stick over—so far that the ship would have completely lost equilibrium the other way had Jenning's hand not steadied it.

Like all beginners, Worthey overcontrolled. He would become passable on straight flying in a few hours—not for hundreds of hours would he have the delicate sense of balance and the light and sure touch whereby a fraction of an inch of movement would give to rudder or elevators or ailerons the precise amount of change necessary to keep the ship flying absolutely level.

He felt like a man walking a tight-rope—there was never ceasing movement of the controls to keep level. All the time it was necessary to keep compensating for bumps that alternately threw the nose up or down, or one wing high in the air and the other pointing at the ground. The slightest movement of the stick seemed to throw the plane way off balance.

His lesson lasted an hour. The Jenny droned round and round the air-drome, about fifteen hundred feet high, never out of gliding distance of it. Toward the end there were brief intervals when Jennings removed his hand from the stick, and by constant signaling to his student succeeded in making Worthey keep it right side up by himself. He was strained and white there in the back seat, but the knowledge of the stake for which he might be playing—life itself—kept him grimly at his task. The greater fear swallowed the lesser.

He sank back in the cockpit with a sigh of relief when Jennings took the stick, and cut the throttle. With fascinated eyes he sighted down a wing to the ground as Jennings banked steeply, nosed down at the same time. With the lower wing-tip apparently remaining pointed at one spot on the ground, the ship cork-screwed down in a tight spiral. There was not the sign of a slip or skid, but Worthey did not know that. He did dimly realize that in the graceful evolution of the craft there was a sense of the pilot's absolute mastery of it. And the controls did not seem to move at all. It was flying art.

Worthey was dizzy and sick when they got to three hundred feet, and sped northward. Now that they were so low, the sensation of speed was increasing. His ears seemed stopped up, and there was a roaring in them as well as an uncomfortable stuffed sensation. Suddenly, when the ship was pointed at the field, there came again that sudden sensation in the pit of his stomach. Jennings had nosed over suddenly, and with idling motor was coming in. They landed smoothly and bumped slowly over the level ground.

As they walked toward headquarters Jennings explained about overcontrol, and mentioned some of Worthey's more glaring errors.

"Keep you head working, don't get scared, and force yourself not to overcontrol. It's kind of a panic, when a man jams the stick all over the cockpit for a little bump. You'll get to the point where a bump can tip the ship and you'll never move—know that she'll right herself. And don't hold the stick tight. Just a light touch with your fingers." And so on, except that Worthey was spared the usual caustic nature of a flying instructor's remarks. Particularly when the student comes to landing the instructor has one of the prize jobs of the world. When every mistake may mean crack-up, it is perhaps natural to become somewhat peeved and waspish over each one. Particularly when the same man has probably made the same mistake at least a dozen times before, and other students have done that thing a thousand times before.

"Thanks very much, Jennings, and next

time I'll try to do better. Would it be too much to ask for another lesson this afternoon? Now that I've got the chance, I'm afraid it's going to slip me," he said as they came to headquarters. Another trip that day did not hold a single, solitary charm for him, but he was in no position to pass up any bets.

"Good Lord, what an air-hog!" laughed Jennings. "We'll see. If I don't feel like it or something else should come up, maybe one of the other boys'll take you. I wanted to test out my machine guns in the air this afternoon."

Worthey, having nothing in particular to do, walked into the recreation room, musing on the fact that no matter what happened now, he was sure of escape over the border. In a few hours he would be able to fly well enough for a straight flight the few miles to Mexico—he could get away if the police were entering the gate!

On the magazine table lay the morning paper. He wondered whether the Blade case was still prominent in it—and still more important, whether the body of Atkins had been found.

Slowly he unfolded it to the front page. His pasty gray face got whiter as he read the headline.

NEW CLUE IN BLADE MURDER. POLICE GET INFORMATION THAT WORTHEY WORE A TOUPEE. BELIEF IS THAT HE REMOVED IT AFTER MURDER FOR PURPOSES OF DISGUISE.

They had traced his record back to his Army career, and had a complete and accurate description of him. Due to the inconspicuous nature of his calling since the war, they had little knowledge of that, and he was not listed as a professional gambler. "His activities shrouded in mystery," was the way the paper put it.

He sat down heavily. Would they be able to trace him now! It seemed likely. Hotel clerks had undoubtedly scrutinized every guest that day, and the St. Anthony clerk might remember him. But he had boarded the train in a toupee, and in uniform. Worthey had disappeared into Gerald White, and White into Atkins. If by any chance the new angle to the inquiry had resulted in the man White, one-day guest at the St. Anthony, being traced, it would once again run up against a blank wall. He had disappeared when that Ford sedan had driven away from the garage.

If by any chance the presence of an officer with him should become known—and that was generously granting that the hotel clerk or garage owner should connect a bald customer with the case—it would be almost impossible, he believed, to trace down the name of the officer. For Atkins was merely a visitor at Donovan Field, and had spoken to no one while with him, Worthey. All in all, it would take Coincidence's longest arm, and Lady Luck's most wicked wiles to trace him, for some time anyhow.

IX

BY THE time lunch came around he was able to sit and listen to casual mention of the latest developments in the Blade case without undue embarrassment. He had spent a great deal of money on that toupee, for he was a vain man, and it had seldom been detected. And as always, the audacity of his impersonation was his greatest comfort. The last man suspected is the one who sits at your right hand.

"I'll bet they gave you the once-over when you were leaving San Antone," remarked MacDowell when the subject came up. "Texas hasn't been so excited since I can remember over one man getting killed."

"They did," returned Worthey easily. "I had to show my papers and almost the laundry marks on my clothes to get by the gate."

"Just stopped off at Donovan on your way down from Sill, eh?"

"Uh-huh."

For a moment there was silence. Tex stole a long look at Worthey's head as he bent over his pie. Brown hair, shading off into a plentiful sprinkling of gray.

"I hate to ask a man point blank whether he wears a toupee or not. In present circumstances, that would amount to a considerable insult. It sure would be funny if that head o' hair of his didn't grow there," he thought.

It was mostly that never ceasing urge of his after the unusual and interesting which led him to go over to the operations office after lunch. Whereas the rest of the flight bothered their heads not at all over the peculiar ignorance of the new man regarding his last post, Tex scented something

that might possibly be worth investigating. So he procured the pilot book of Lieutenant Atkins—the record of a man's Army flying which is kept up to date always and is sent from post to post with him.

He looked over the entries carefully.

"Now wouldn't that cause you a slight flicker of thought," he mused. "This bird sure was at Sill for four months."

He lounged over into the recreation room and sat down, a magazine lying unread in his lap.

"There is something almighty mysterious about our friend Atkins," he finally decided.

And those remarkable gray eyes of his glowed with pleasure.

Late that evening he found Worthey in his tent.

"Atkins, I just got a letter from Frank Gallard up at Sill. He's passing through here in a few days. You know him, of course. He asked to be remembered to you, and said that maybe we could have one of the old-time parties the night he was here."

He leaned carelessly against the table, his eyes hidden by drooping lids, and his softly slurred speech coming calmly. Beneath the laziness of his attitude there was the tenseness of a gambler making a throw for a big stake.

"Oh, yes indeed. Ei—when is he coming, did you say? Nice fellow!"

"Not for a week or so. Well, see you at supper."

And he walked out. Had Worthey been a mind-reader, he would have followed Tex out of the tent, and never again would that temporary abiding-place have known him. For Tex was saying to himself, with surging interest not unmixed with pure delight:

"That man is *not* Atkins! And therefore, who is he?"

There was no such man as Frank Gallard.

JIMMY JENNINGS, arrayed in bathrobe and slippers, was coming down the boardwalk which split the two rows of tents.

"Why the heavy thought, young man, and above all, why that look in your eye which seemeth to shout 'the world is my oyster?' " he queried.

"I don't care for oysters. I've just been conversing with Atkins to pass the time away."

"Sort of a queer egg," said Jimmy carelessly. "Sure a nut on flying. I had him up about an hour this morning, and Sleepy Spears just told me that Atkins begged so hard that Sleepy took him up an hour and a half this afternoon. He sure yearns to fly."

"Uh-huh. Any good?"

"About average. They all can do more stunts trying to fly straight than I could on purpose, when they first start. Sleepy said he was going pretty good this afternoon. Well, let me proceed to the rinsing station."

Tex did not confide in Jimmy. He found Captain Kennard reading the paper.

"My dime-thriller mind is getting away with me," he told himself mockingly. "Before I say a word I'd better be —— certain, or somebody will be justified in plugging me. Well, what's the lastest, cap'n? Have they caught the murderer yet?"

"Nope. He's long gone by now, I guess. They've got this guy Worthey pretty well traced down, though. He was a professional gambler, in a small way, according to some men that knew him a little. They're getting dope on him from various parts of the county. He evidently didn't plan anything like what came off, for he wasn't using an assumed name. Must be a pretty clever cuss to get away as clean as he has."

"Uh-huh."

Tex relapsed into silent thought, and did not emerge from his musing after the gang had started to gather. For if the supposed Atkins was not Atkins, where was the *bona-fide* officer? And who was the imposter?

The answer to that last question was obvious, and yet almost unthinkable. MacDowell believed that if Atkins was not Atkins, he was Worthey. If so, though, by what conceivable combination of circumstances had he come into possession of Atkins' effects, and come to impersonate him? And after all, there might be some explanation so obvious as to be overlooked regarding his ignorance of Fort Sill.

Tex was silent and distraught at dinner that evening, although Captain Kennard noticed, and wondered at the glow in the Texan's eyes. From long experience, he knew that that look meant something. So he was not completely astounded when Tex invited him for a short trip into town.

He was completely at a loss, however, when Tex confided his suspicions.

"Well, what do you think?" concluded Tex. "Bawl me out if you want to—I just

can't help letting the thing work on my mind."

"By ——, you may be right," granted Captain Kennard. "But listen, Tex, we can't simply walk up to this bird and accuse him of being a murderer—probably a double murderer. The chances are all against it—where did Atkins go and how did an imposter get his stuff? If we were wrong, which we undoubtedly are, we'd be in wrong for life. Atkins would hate me, with reason, and it would be impossible for him to stay here. The thing would undoubtedly leak out and follow him all around. The publicity and all that stuff would be a horrible thing for him. What we can do is wire Fort Sill tonight for a full and complete description of this Atkins, including a photograph if possible.

"That's what I thought," nodded Tex as they turned into McMullen's wide, well-paved main street. "And I thought it would be a good thing to tell Trowbridge. He'll keep his mouth shut, and he'll be the one to make the arrest. I believe that if this fellow is Worthey he'll stay to draw a paycheck—and say, he might cash bad checks, too! According to the papers he left all the money. He'd be broke and would take this chance of getting some dough before beating it into Mexico."

"I'll arrange that he stays on the post, and assign old Sergeant Cary to watch him all the time so he can't get away," said Kennard. "That'll be easy enough."

They drew up before the jail, and found the sheriff sitting in the office, conferring with some cronies on unofficial matters. He greeted them heartily, and came outside with them. When Tex laid the story in front of him the old man suddenly stiffened. He drew a long breath as Tex ceased speaking.

"Now wouldn't that there be a scheme?" he asked oratorically.

He paced up and down the walk for a minute, responding to cordial greetings with absent-minded gestures.

"I can see yore view-point, cap'n," he said at last. "It'd be a —— of a note if you was wrong. Tell you what I'll do. I'll have a man loafin' outside the gate all the time, and you have this *hombre* watched inside till we hear from Sill. He can't git away, and if there's nothin' to it he won't never know. I'll bring Sam Clark out this evenin' some time, and he can meet this Atkins or Worthey or whoever he is, and from that time on we'll have 'im covered. How long'll it take to hear, d'yuh think?"

"I'll send a night letter right now," said the Captain. "We ought to get a reply by day after tomorrow. It'll be by letter, of course. It would be hard for them to send full enough details by wire, and we want a picture and all sorts of dope besides to make sure."

"Shore," nodded the sheriff. "Tex, you limb o' Satan, how's it come you're always stickin' that nose o' yores into events an' happenings?"

Tex grinned.

"The gods are good," he drawled. "Well, see you and Clark later, eh?"

And thus it came to pass that arrangements were made so that between Sergeant Cary, on the post, and Deputy Sheriff Sam Clark, off the post, Worthey never would be out of sight except when ensconced in his tent. Every officer was let in on the secret, to make the unobstrusive espionage more complete, and to prevent any false conversational moves which might expose the suspect's ignorance to such an extent that he would realize he had given himself away and take flight.

X

WORTHEY was successful in persuading both Jennings and Pete Miller to give him a total of three and a half hours instruction the next day, and at the end of that time he had succeeded in making several passable landings and take-offs. He did not know that the hand of his instructor was always lightly on the stick, and that a slight pressure on the controls at the psychological moment made all the difference in some of his landings. Nevertheless, he had reached the point where he could fly the ship straight and level, and even made shallow banks without slipping and skidding too much.

He was congratulating himself on the success of his scheme on the morning of the second day, and making plans to cash a big check in town on a San Antonio bank. This, added to a month's pay-check, would give him several hundred dollars. Then it would be a simple matter to go into town some evening, hire a car, and get to the border.

Sleepy Spears was to be his instructor that morning, and the Jenny, along with

two DeHavilands, was on the line, already warmed up. Worthey decided to get his mail, first, and hand it over to the sergeant before going up. The mail-box of a mess officer is always well-loaded.

It was the morning on which that fateful letter was expected to arrive from Fort Sill. Sheriff Trowbridge was on his way to the air-drome, and Tex and Captain Kennard were in the C.O.'s office, waiting for the sheriff's arrival. The mail orderly was due any time.

Worthey walked into the front office, where there was a row of mail-boxes along the wall, just as the orderly's motorcycle drew up in front of headquarters. The slim, young private came in with the bag, opened it, and started sorting the mail. Worthey was looking over his shoulder, and the orderly handed him the communications addressed to the mess officer as he came to them.

Captain Kennard's clerk had not yet left his desk when Worthey's eye fell on a letter addressed to the Commanding Officer, McMullen, Texas, and on which the return address was Fort Sill. A quick thrill of apprehension went through the quiet Worthey. What in the world could that be, he wondered with a sinking heart. It might be nothing, and then again it might be something that would give him away. He gave no sign, but watched the orderly put the long, thick official envelop in the commanding officer's box.

The sorting finished, the orderly turned away. Like a flash Worthey abstracted the letter and added it to his own stack of mail. At almost the same moment the captain's clerk came up to take the mail in to the office.

"Got one of my letters in the wrong box," Worthey explained thickly, and the unsuspicious clerk said, "Yes, sir," and took the rest of the mail into the office.

The sound of an automobile motor reached him from outside, and then the sheriff's booming voice. For no particular reason the mere thought of the sheriff brought Worthey's heart into his throat. He walked out, greeted Trowbridge briefly and started for the mess-hall, tearing the letter open as he walked. If it was nothing which could harm him he would take it in to the captain and explain that he had opened it by mistake.

What he saw caused him to stop in his tracks, and his pasty face went white as chalk. It was a small snapshot of Atkins. Then, with spots dancing before his eyes so that he could hardly read, he took in the first sentence of the communication.

In reply to your telegram requesting picture and full description of Lieutenant Atkins, recently ordered to your station ——

He stopped to read no more. So they had been suspicious of him, and sent to Fort Sill for a complete description! That was the cause of the sheriff's presence that morning—he was cornered!

Instantly his one desperate chance came to him. It was better than to be caught like a rat in a trap, and swing for his crimes. Once again the greater fear stimulated him to desperate courage.

Taking care to keep out of sight of any of the officers in headquarters or the recreation room, he walked rapidly along the rear of the line of buildings, then swung widely and went down behind the hangars. Cary, lounging near the hangars, watched him. Worthey could see two mechanics working on a DeHaviland, and another standing near the Jenny.

Back in the C.O.'s office disappointment reigned. They would have to wait for the afternoon mail.

"Sure this was all, are you Blair?" asked the Captain.

"Yes, sir. There was one more letter in your box, but Lieutenant Atkins took that and said it was in there by mistake."

Tex and the sheriff leaped to their feet like one man.

"He might have seen a Fort Sill return card on it, and just grabbed it!" said Tex tersely, his eyes glowing warmly. "Let's find him!"

"Who's getting in that Jenny?" asked the Captain as they came out the door of headquarters.

He shaded his eyes against the glaring sun in an effort to see.

"Ain't it Atkins?" queried the sheriff, whose puckered eyes were accustomed to the sun.

"It is, by all that's holy! He——"

"Got that letter, and is goin' to try to make it into Mexico!" roared Trowbridge. "Come on, Tex! We can get——"

His words were drowned in the sudden roar of the motor. Worthey, emerging from behind a hangar, ordered a mechanic

to spin the propeller, which, of course, was done without question. The fear-crazed murderer knew nothing of the ship except the location of switch and throttle, but the hot motor started on the first spin.

"Pull the blocks!" he yelled, aware of a stream of running figures from the recreation room.

It was nothing but blind luck which was with him as he jammed on the throttle and turned the ship around. He did not think, nor care, about the landing ahead—nor of the risk he was taking in trusting himself alone in the air. He taxied up the field for the take-off, not daring to try it except with the maximum of space. Let them try to stop him now!

Once again he succeeded in turning his ship and started the take-off. He got the stick too far forward, and the nose dipped until Tex, working like mad in the cockpit of a DeHaviland, saw it out of the corner of his eye and waited a moment for what seemed like a crack-up. The propeller did not hit, however, and in a slightly weaving course the Jenny sped across the ground. Worthey, without helmet or goggles, was hunched behind the windshield.

Sheriff Trowbridge was in the rear cockpit of the DeHaviland, and the great Liberty burst into life just as the Jenny staggered off the ground. It barely cleared the tops of the headquarters and recreation buildings. It righted and went out of sight on a beeline for the Rio Grande, seven miles away.

With two excited mechanics on one wing Tex turned the DeHaviland and took off from where he was. It was a desperate chance he was taking, for the buildings were close ahead. He was off the ground thirty yards from them, and pulled up in a tremendous zoom. They barely cleared the buildings, and only his wonderful feel of the ship saved them. Had he not nosed down at precisely the right second the great bomber would have mushed down on top of the buildings, due to lack of speed.

As it was, he held it for a moment, until that danger was passed. Then the ship dropped almost to the ground, but it did not hit. With stick and rudder Tex kept it up, using the last atom of speed. In five seconds it had picked up speed again, and took chase after the wobbling Jenny, winging for Mexico barely three hundred feet high.

Both Tex and the sheriff were wearing goggles only—eager hands had thrust even those on them. MacDowell, his mouth curved in a grim smile and his gray eyes blazing with a sort of fierce joy behind his goggles, took a rapid survey of his instruments. There had been no warming of the motor, and the thermometer was only sixty. The oil was not warmed yet, either, and the pressure gage was wobbling queerly. The Liberty was turning up seventeen hundred revolutions a minute, however, and little by little they gained.

The four-hundred-horsepower Liberty was over twice as powerful as the Jenny motor, and there was forty miles an hour difference in the speed of the ships. If the laboring Liberty did not fail, they could overhaul the ship ahead. Tex was wondering what he would do after he did overhaul Worthey. Could it be possible that the man had ever known anything about flying? No, Jennings' testimony and that breath-taking take-off had proven conclusively that he knew nothing except what four or five hours had taught him. He had never made an unassisted landing in his life—could know nothing of the traps and pitfalls waiting for him at every turn in the air.

It would be a terrible risk to try and bring him down by diving at him and trying to turn him from his goal by getting in front of him and coming so close that through fear of a collision he would be compelled to turn. With his more powerful ship he could do it, but with a novice like Worthey at the stick a collision would be certain.

Tex was only a hundred yards back of the other ship now, and slightly below it. Ahead the Rio Grande, a twisting silver ribbon, was plainly in view, even at their low altitude. The thermometer was at ninety-five now—the motor was boiling. He opened the motor shutters and throttled a bit. As he did so he felt an iron grip on his shoulders.

The sheriff had one of his guns in his hand, and pointed with a grim smile to the ship ahead. Tex nodded his understanding.

Trowbridge's mouth was close to the flyer's ear.

"He knows I'm sheriff, by ——, an' if he don't stop——"

He straightened up. The free-swinging observer's belt, designed to give every freedom of action to the back-seat man, allowed him to stand upright. He leaned

against the terrific air-blast, and both revolvers were in his hand. In his flannel shirt, wide, embossed belt and swinging holsters, holding his two old-fashioned six-shooters, the grizzled old-timer was in ludicrous contrast to the modernity of his equippage and methods. He might have been a sheriff along the Pecos in the nineties—his method of overhauling his man was strictly of the twentieth century.

Tex buckled to his work. The Rio Grande was only a mile ahead. There was only one way whereby even such a shot as the sheriff could hope to succeed—that was for him to gage, at least momentarily, the speed of his DeHaviland so that it would be exactly that of the Jenny—and to have the ships close together.

He was directly even with the other plane now, and fifty feet below. He lifted his ship in a gradual zoom. The Jenny seemed to drop toward them. They still had speed enough left to pass the other ship, and Worthy's white face was momentarily in sight. Out of the tail of his eye he could see the sheriff motioning back. But the Jenny, naturally, drove steadily southward.

He throttled to a thousand revolutions. Slowly the Jenny banked, to get away from them. With a sudden roar the Liberty went on, and Tex himself banked steeply, straightening when he was parallel to his prey.

He was a trifle behind it now. Weary hours of formation flying stood him in good stead—twenty yards back, and the same distance to one side, he throttled again. Smoothly the DeHaviland slid forward, largely through its accumulated momentum. A trifle ahead of the other ship it was going at practically the same speed. Tex, handling the De Haviland instinctively, looked around. The sheriff's two guns were smoking, and as Tex turned they spoke again. Trowbridge, looking like a venerable Mephistopheles, leaned over the side and watched the result of his gunplay.

The Jenny wavered, and the nose came down. It tilted on a wing as the nose dipped still farther earthward.

Tex banked to watch—it was nerve-wracking, even under those circumstances. In a tailspin so shallow that it was almost a spiral the smaller plane whirled downward. It hit on one wing and the nose, only a hundred yards from the river.

A half-mile away men were already running toward the scene. Tex nosed down and banked into a shallow spiral, the motor half-on. He was watching that heap of linen and wood and metal. Slowly, as though with infinite difficulty, a figure emerged from that splintered heap, and seemed to be crawling toward the river.

The ship had fallen in a fairly good-sized stubble field. The pilot shoved the motor full on and dove recklessly for the ground. He was not over fifty feet high as he turned, cut the motor, and glided for the field. They landed smoothly, although they nearly nosed up in the soft earth. Their victim had dragged himself nearly half the distance to the river.

Leaving the motor idling, they leaped out and ran back toward him. He had apparently given up the attempt, and was lying quietly, face down.

MacDowell reached him several yards ahead of the sheriff. As he turned the prone figure over, two wide-open eyes met his gaze, and there was just a ghost of a smile. Somehow the eyes were strangely peaceful. It was as if the man did not care.

"You're Worthey," stated Tex as the puffing sheriff arrived. The young Texan waited in strained tenseness for the reply.

Worthey did not answer. Trowbridge said—

"It was a toupee!"

Sure enough, although the wig was still on Worthey's head, it had slipped partly off. There was a bad-looking bullet hole in his back, just below the shoulders. The sheriff's aim had been true. Worthey opened his eyes, already glazing.

"I —— near made it—but—but—I'm not so—so—sorry I didn't——"

"Did you kill Atkins?" demanded Trowbridge.

"Yes. Out on the Main Avenue road. It was the only—the only—up a little side road I hid his body in a camping hole—I didn't know any other way—they——"

And so, within hearing of the murmuring waters of the Rio Grande, within a few yards of Mexico and safety, he died.

Terry an' Me

by William H. Wells

Author of "Shanghai Fried Chicken."

WHAT'S that? You got a dog that's almost human? Say boy! You don't deserve to have a dog. You want a talkin' doll. Why, the whole point to a dog is that he *ain't* human. Gimme a dog that knows he's a dog and is proud of it—like Terry there. Look 'im over, kid. He's an Irish terrier, an' a full-blooded one too. Lord knows where he come from. All I know is he hooked on to me one Winter night here in Noo York up around Pier 45 an' we ain't never been separated since. I guess we won't be neither till one of us kicks the can—not after what we been through. Hey Terry?

Why last March we was stuck on the beach at Gaspey up in Quebec, an' wishin' to —— we was back here in Noo York, when I manage to strike the skipper of a Lakes boat for a job. She was the *Saginaw* bound for Brooklyn with lumber. By some wonderful luck her bosun had fell sick, so I pulled his job. The old man was a down-easter, a little short guy like me. He didn't waste no words on anything.

"Nug," he says, "we cast off tomorrow night. I want you aboard before eight bells tomorrow morning."

"Cap'n," I asks him, "I've got a terrier. It'll be all right if I bring him along, won't it?"

"Why not?" says the old man. "The chief engineer keeps a cat. Sure—if he's yours—bring him aboard."

Next morning Terry an' me come hoofin' it down the dock with me sea-bag. All they had from the dock to the ship was a narrow plank, so we had to come aboard single file, me leadin', Terry a coupla steps behind. Leanin' over the midships rail watchin' us was a ganglin', dough-faced gink with a long hook nose an' a chief-engineer's cap shoved back on his dome. Just as I set me foot on the desk I hear a *pssssss*, an' up from beside the engineer gets one of the biggest long-haired, gray cats I ever see—near three-quarters as big as Terry himself. He humps his back in the middle an' plants himself on the end of the gangplank leakin' steam for all he can go. Terry stopped in the middle of the plank to look him over. Then, "*Yip!*" says Terry.

"*Pssssss!*" goes the cat, an' he flattens out. Terry stood there half-way across not knowin' just what to make of it, while the cat begins to creep up on him draggin' his hairy belly along the plank. I dropped me sea-bag on the hatch; an' I looks at the engineer.

"Are you the chief?" I says.

"Hi am," he says. "Who are you?"

"Is that your cat?" I says to him.

"Hit is," he says; an' then—"Is that mutt yours?"

"That terrier," I says, "is mine. I'm the noo bosun and I'm bringin' him aboard."

"That's hinterestin'," says the chief, spittin' over the rail; "'e don't seem to want to come, do 'e?"

Terry crouched down as that sissin' cat kept creepin' toward him. "Chief," says I, "that ain't a bad cat of yourn, but if you don't get him off that there plank in a coupla seconds, he'll be food for the Gaspey fishes."

"'e will not!" snaps back the limejuicer, "an' if 'e hever sinks 'is claws into that hanimal of yours 'e won't even leave no fish food."

That got my goat.

"Take him off that plank," I says, "before I kick him off."

I took a step toward the cat. At that the limey straightened up quick from the rail and straddled the gangplank to hold me back.

"You'll keep your rotten 'ands off," he hollers in me face.

"So," I says, "an' you're gonna make me, I suppose."

"You're —— well right," he says.

I out with me right and give him a shove in the kisser that laid him up against the rail.

"Keep out!" I says in me nastiest when he starts to come at me again.

I took one step out on the plank and reached down for the cat; but the gray son-of-a-gun heard me comin' and give a spring at Terry, claws spread out all set to maul him. Terry had his eye on him though and jumped back; then, just as that cat came down on the plank, Terry rushed him. The cat wasn't steady yet. His hind legs slipped off the plank, an' there he hung by his front paws, spittin' and screechin' and clawin' at the air with his hind feet, while Terry lets out one good yip and comes tearin' across to me.

"Good work, Terry old boy," says I pattin' his yellow head. The chief-engineer went right off his nut. Out on the plank he dashes yellin':

"'Old on, Percy,"—a fittin' name for that cat, I thought—"'old on! —— your hide, you an' your blarsted hanimal. Ow!"

One of Percy's front paws was slippin'. Down on his belly on the plank drops the limey, and the bump bounces off Percy's other paw. He give a mighty screech. The chief makes a wild grab under the plank for his cat, just managin' to catch one front leg in both hands. Then he loses his own balance, so drops his darlin' again to catch hold of the plank, misses it, and over he goes down into the scummy water between the ship an' the dock.

Terry an' me hung over the rail to see them. There was the chief-engineer swearin', and splutterin', and splashin', swimmin' around with one hand and with the other holdin' dear Percy's head above water; the cat all the time yowlin' to beat ——.

With all the racket, out on the bridge comes the skipper, his face lathered over for a shave.

"What's the trouble down there, bosun," he asks me, not too happy at bein' disturbed.

"It's the chief-engineer, sir," I says. "He's takin' his pet cat for a mornin' dip in the ocean."

By that time the skipper was lookin' over the side where the noise come from.

"Hey below there!" he shouts. The limey shut up on the spot, but Percy kept up a cheerful howlin'. "What are you doin' down there, chief," calls the skipper, and I could see by the unsympathetic sound of his voice that they wasn't too good friends. "How d'you come to fall overboard?"

"Hi was tryin' to save me Persian cat from drownding. The noo bosun's lousy hanimal knocked 'im into the water."

I never had to listen to such injured innocence.

"Cap'n," I says, "I seen the chief drop that cat into the water; an' with me own eyes I seen him dive after it—a rotten dive, cap'n."

"Throw 'im a line," says the skipper and goes in to finish shavin'.

The men were comin' out from mess. They all stood round to watch and to help haul up Percy on the end of a heavin' line, still yowlin', though not so hearty, and lookin' skinnier and uglier than you'ld think possible with his fur plastered alongside of him. We held him until the chief climbed over the side on a rope's end we'd let down to him. An' he looked like his cat, only worse. The wind and the cold water was makin' him shake, but his teeth weren't chatterin' together too hard for him to swear.

"—— you, I'll fix you," he says. "You an' your hanimal!"

Then, when he sees everbody grinnin', he

snatches up his cat and goes aft to dry out his clothes, and his cat too, on the engine-room gratin'.

WE LET go the dock a little after eight bells that afternoon. Came two bells, knock off, an' we was rippin' right along outa Gaspey Bay toward the Madelin Islands. I was livin' in the fo'csle; when I went down to wash up I had to go in me room for the hunk of soap I had hid behind the locker. I heard a sighin', whinin' noise come from under me bunk, an' I gets down on me hands an' knees to find out what it is. Way underneath, lyin' against the bulkhead, I see Terry pantin' slow, an' not noticin' me at all.

"Terry!" I says. "What's the matter with you?"

I reached in and dragged him out. At the first look I see he was sufferin' somethin' fierce. "——!" I thought, "somethin's fell on him; maybe a hatch-cover or a beam." I felt him careful all over, but I couldn't find no bones broke. There he lay not knowin' me, his eyes droopin', breathin' slower an' slower. Then it come over me that maybe he'd ate somethin' bad that poisoned him. I couldn't figure what in blazes to do. Then I picked him up in me arms, hefty as he is, and lugged him up the fo'csle ladder. Quick as I laid him on the deck I shoves back his head. His jaw dropped open, an' I stuck me hand way down his throat. He give an' awful gasp an' a groan, but it fetched him. Poor Terry, he was terrible seasick for more'n a minute; but whatever was inside killin' him he got rid of it.

Two or three seamen was standin' there watchin' the proceedin's.

"Get some water!" I says.

Me voice must have sounded like I meant it for the whole bunch tumbled down the fo'csle scuttle like the deck was red hot under their shoes. In a second back comes one with a pail of fresh water; an' I held Terry so he could stick his tongue into it. He couldn't really drink. There was no tellin' whether he was goin' to live or die he was so weak. I took him down to me bunk. There, after I wrapped him in me blankets, I sat down to watch him. Every time he drew in his breath it sounded like a kid worn out cryin'.

Sittin' by him a while me mind began to work again.

"What's Terry been eatin'?" I says to meself. "Where could he have got it—around the galley maybe. Somebody might have been feedin' him; an' maybe they knew what they was feedin' him. We'll see," says I. Terry bein' more peaceful I left him an' went aft to the galley to have a few words with the big Alabama nigger we was shippin' as chief cook. I found him sittin' in the galley in his shirt bossin' the other two nigger cooks around.

"Say cook," I says to him, "have you by any chance got a little poison?"

"Fo' do Lawd sake, bos'," he says, "yo' de secon' main dis aftanoon what come axin' me fo' poison. Ah got only rat poison, an Ah needs dat maself in de sto'room."

"Why, cook," says I very pleasant, "who else wanted it?"

"Da chief engineer," he says.

Then he half-closes his eyes an' stares at me suspicious.

"Wha' fo' y'all want dis yere poison fo', huh?"

"Why in —— didn't you ask the chief that?" I busts out. "The dirty limey poisoned me terrier with it."

"Is 'e daid?" the cook asks. The big white eyes come poppin' out of his black mug.

"No, not yet," I says. "But if he does die; —— help that lousy, stinkin', yellow, low-down ——"

Somethin' in them round eyes made me stop an' look around. In the galley door stood the limey, his blue cap on the back of his bean, his pie face one big grin. I lost me head. There'ld have been one chief engineer less if I could have got me hands on him in that moment. The darkey saw it; he grabbed me arms. The limey saw it too, the yellow ——, an' the grin went off his face, an' his face went out that galley door the second I looked at him. I fought the cook pretty bad, but he had a grip on both me arms. Bein' near as big again as me, he just dropped me on the galley deck and held me there till I calmed down. Then he talked to me.

"Bos'," he says, sittin' on me, "yo' don' wanta kill dat pie-face," he says, "not heah on bo'd dis boat. Dey'ld git yo' sho'. Wha he's a officer; he's got a raat to shoot yo' on de spot if y'all tries any monkey-business wid him."

"Get off me chest, will you," I says. He was right. I knew it.

Off he gets an' says to me:

"Git him on sho', bos'. Git him on sho'. Dere yo' got some chaince."

"If Terry checks out, I says, "I'll hand that limey a one-way ticket to —— the same day. If they get me I'll die happy in a good deed. If Terry don't die; I'll wait till we hit port to wallop the guts out of him. But," says I, "I'm tellin' you this, cook, if I ever lay hands on that yowlin', lousy, gray milk-lapper of his I'll give him one good swing by his tail, an' over the side he goes."

I went an' had me supper an' took a little down to Terry, not sayin' anythin' to nobody about his bein' poisoned. He'd got himself together enough to know who I was. He wiggled his nose at me, but he couldn't eat much yet. I was settin' beside him on the bunk feedin' him when the watch hollers down the scuttle that the first mate wants to see me. I says, "So long," to Terry, an' went aft to the bridge.

That mate was a good fellow.

"Bos'," he says to me, "I hate to turn any one to at this time of night, but I take my orders from the old man."

"What's up?" I asks.

"Well," he says, "the skipper was just lookin' over all that load of lumber on deck, an' he says we got to have a lot of extra lashin's on it. He says we'll run square into a nor'easter tonight as soon as we get out of the strait here that's goin' to be a hummer. Look at the sky over there, bos'; I guess he knows what he's talkin' about all right. If that lumber there ain't lashed tighter we're liable to lose the whole lot of it overboard before mornin'."

We spent the better half of that night reevin' more lashin's around that deck cargo, stumblin', trippin', an' swearin' around the loaded deck in the dark. We had to use a lot of old wire falls an' worn-out cables bristlin' with little busted wires that caught in your hands an' ripped the skin. Midnight we knocked off sore an' bloody, an' not so —— happy at the idea of a storm —especially them swabs from the Lakes.

WELL, we got it. An' you won't catch this baby cryin' if he never sees another storm like that. It wasn't till we got through the strait an' out of the lee of Noofunlan' that the nor'easter hit us—but when she did! The propeller staid out of water so long every time we rode up on top of one of them waves if felt like she'ld spin off sure. When we went up the racin' engines tried to shake the tub to pieces; an' when we came down—say! It was like droppin' five miles on to cement pavement. One-half the water in the Atlantic would come down slam on the forepeak an' go tearin' aft to meet the other half. Cold, wet, wind an' fog; just the weather for a picnic! Even with all that I wouldn' have minded so much if the *Saginaw* 'd been an ordinary boat—but she wasn't. She'd been cut in half to get her out through the Welland Canal and then stuck together again in a —— of a hurry from the looks. She was comin' down here to go into dry-dock at the Erie Basin and be converted from a Lake boat into a regular sea-goin' ship. Down in the fire-room I'd had a good look at the big temporary wooden bulkhead they'd put in to seal up the after part of the boat, an' it wasn't calked none too tight. Between that bulkhead an' the forrad one was water that come in all the time through the rivet holes where they hadn't bothered to put in any rivets. She wasn't just the sort of wagon I'd have picked to be out in that storm with.

By morning the deck load started to go. That deck was the nearest thing to —— I ever hope to see. With every wave that come over a new bunch of beams an' planks went shootin' aft. Where they'd all washed out the lashin' cables was tangled over the deck to grab you by the legs just when you was tryin' to beat a comber from the fo'csle to the bridge. The wind was chasin' us south like a dog after a rat, an' the sea got to runnin' higher an' higher till we had to turn around an' buck it or swamp. After one wallopin' wave come over that stove in half the windows in the wheel-house the skipper decides it was now or never. He put her hard over an' we turned. Even at that a wave caught us broadside while we was turnin' an' rolls us over on our beam ends till I thought sure the tub would go bottom up an' us drown under her.

"If we ever do come out of this, bos'," the mate says to me, "we'll have to make some port before Noo York to get more fresh water for them boilers. If you should ask me," he says, "we're usin' it up —— fast buckin' this here sea. I know for a fac' there ain't a drop left in that big tank under the fire-room. Look out!" he yells.

We both grabs hold of a stanchion under the bridge while a big wave comes shootin'

down the deck that picks our feet right out from under us. When it was past I dodged aft. As I go, I see the limey engineer fightin' his way forrad on the other side of the deck, lookin' white like his last day was comin' just behind him. I watched a second an' see him stumble up the ladder to the bridge.

It wasn't three minutes before the little Yankee skipper, an' the mate an' the limey all come aft. The old man had on an awful scowl.

"Bosun," he says, "come below!"

It's no holy pipe climbin' down them steep engine-room ladders with a ship standin' one minute on her ear an' the next on her tail; but we gets down there an' scrambles in between the boilers to the fire-room.

"——!" says the skipper, an' he was the least swearin' man I ever shipped with.

No wonder the dirty limey was white. The black-gang had the boilers open shovelin' on coal, an' in the red light from the fires I see the deck of the fire-room covered with water. All over that big temporary wooden bulkhead little red streams was spurtin' out; I swear, for a second it looked like blood. Then the stokers slammed the doors shut again.

"Bosun," says the old man, an' his voice meant *move*, "get some men down here to recalk that bulkhead as best you can. There's oakum for'ad. This storm'll let up by tonight, an' we can't let the water get to these fires. All right!" he says.

I went up an' out of that engine-room a sight faster than I come down.

The store-room was in the fo'csle, so on me way down I stopped for a quarter of a second to speak to Terry. Poor feller, ever since he'd ate the lousy limey's poison he'd been so weak he just wanted to lie still—until that noon; then he decides he'll get up, so to speak. I was scared if he come up on deck he'd get washed over the side, so I had him tied to a stanchion in the fo'csle peak with enough rope-yarn to let him move round. It was the best plan for him, but he didn't like it for a lead nickle. As soon as he see me legs on the fo'csle ladder he begins to coax an' beg me to let him loose.

"Now Terry," I says, "we're in a bad way, but you stick right here till I come for you."

With two sacks of oakum on me back I tore up to the deck again. I sent the deck force after calkin' irons, hammers, stages an' stage ropes, an' was half-way down to the engine-room when I heard a yip an' a scramblin' behind me. There come Terry with a chewed-off hunk of rope-yarn hangin' to his collar, slippin' from one step to the next, tumblin' an' bumpin' down the ladder. I thought maybe he might lose his footin' entirely an' fall the whole way if I hollered so I let him come. At the bottom of the ladder he slid into me.

"Terry," I says, "you're a little son-of-gun. Don't you follow me no further now or you will get hurt for fair."

His stump of a tail stopped waggin'. As I waded down into the fire-room he stood watchin' me, his head way low.

IN THE fire-room we hung stages against the bulkhead, one above the other, an' the whole day force turned to an' calked. But ——! Three-quarters of them guys never had a calkin' iron in their hands before. They made a mess, a holy mess, of calkin'. It was bad enough for a man that knew how; besides tryin' to ram in the oakum against a steady stream of water, the ship was pitchin' so it was all a man could do to stick on his stage at all.

The water kept on risin' in the fire-room. It almost covered the coal where it come down from the bunkers, so that every time the black-gang opened the furnaces an' set to stokin', the place filled with steam from the soakin' coal. We worked like nailers, but the water never stopped leakin' in. It got so that when the stokers tried to chuck on coal they got half a dozen lumps in a shovel full of water. It went on gettin' deeper, finally when the ship pitched the water began to run in through the furnace doors. When they see that, the whole black-gang took their shovels an' got out. It was the secon'-engineer's watch, an' he'd had a hard enough time to hold them in there before. They were scared to death of bein' caught down below there when the ship sank, an' all bein' drowned. Up on deck was where they was bound. Some of them was half-way up the ladder when they met the skipper comin' down.

"Where do you think *you're* goin'?" he roars at them. "Huh?"

"We go on da deck," the first guy tells him. An' they all holler, "Yes a yes, up on da deck!"

"Get below—go on—get!"

The skipper was a small man, like me, but it only made him seem all the fiercer. That bunch of Greeks an' greaseballs stopped. All of them turned around an' crawled down the ladder again. There they stood jabberin' away while the old man came on down.

The first thing he says after he looks in the fire-room is, "Where's the chief?" Well, he was gone; nobody knew where. The old man was mad; you could see his lips get tight.

"Bosun," he says, "send a man up after the chief engineer. I want him here—in a *hurry*!" Say, if I could have said, "In a *hurry!*", like that skipper I'ld have been runnin' a boat of me own long ago.

"Go on calkin', bosun," he calls out. "If we can keep goin' till we get in the lee of Noofunland we may come through. The winds dyin'," he says, "but if we stop out here we won't even get a chance to sink decently. We'll go broadside an' roll over in a minute." Cheerful prospect!

The Dutchman that I sent after the engineer came down again pantin' for breath. "Where's the chief?" says the old man.

"In his room—I hear him," says the Dutchman. "I hear him—he von't answer ven I call him. Dee door is lock—ya!"

"Bosun!" snaps out the skipper, "you have a key to open that room? All right! Come up on deck with me. Second," he says to the second-engineer, "keep this gang below here till I get back. All right!"

On the way up to the deck I heard him mutterin' to himself. When we got there he says:

"Get the chief engineer, bosun. I'm goin' for'ad; I'll be right back," an' he went.

I banged on the chief's door, then I took me key an' opened it. Everything was heaved all over the room—books, papers, shoes, clothes; but the limey wasn't there. "Hang that fool Dutchman!" I says to meself. I went out the for'ad end of the alleyway to see if the chief was anywhere round the deck. Not a sign. I see the skipper makin' aft; then somethin' movin' up on the boat-deck caught me eye. Somebody was foolin' with the cover of the for'ad starboard lifeboat.

"What's goin' on up there?" I yells, an' the feller looks up. It was the chief himself. "Hey chief!" I shouts at the top of me lungs.

Instead of comin' for'ad to see what I wanted, he went aft like the bulls was after him.

The skipper heard me hollerin'.

"What's the matter now?" he says.

"The chief's comin' down the after part of the boat-deck, sir," I says.

Say, you wouldn't have thought that with them short legs the old man could go so fast. He was through the alleyway an' out the other end before the limey had his hands off the ladder.

"What are you doin' on the boat-deck when you're supposed to be down below?" bellows the old man.

"Nothin'," says the limey; but he looked as white as a clean shirt.

The old man slaps his hand to his hip pocket.

"Get back up that ladder," he says, "we'll see what 'nothin' ' is."

"So!" thought I to meself. "That's why the old man went for'ad."

The limey knew too what was in that hip pocket. He turned around *pronto* an' swarmed up to the boat-deck again with me an' the skipper close behind him.

"Where was he?" the skipper asks me.

"For'ad boat on the starboard side, sir," says I.

The boat-cover was part untied so that the wind was whippin' it back an' forth. The skipper looks into the lifeboat. Then he sticks in his arm and begins to rummage round. In a minute he hauls out a black suit-case.

"That's your, ain't it?" barks the old man.

The limey's face went whiter, but he says never a word.

"You yellow-bellied, lime-juicin' coward!" the old man thunders out.

Without even openin' the suit-case he slings it over the side. The chief give a gasp an' stood there tremblin', clenchin' up his fists.

The skipper turns on him again.

"Now—get below! You're no —— good, but get down in the engine-room where you belong. Quick!"

If ever I see mutiny an' murder in a man's face it was on that limey's. His lower teeth stuck out over his upper lip, an' all the cords in his skinny neck was standin' out. I only wished the old man hadn't had his gun so the limey would have started somethin'! Oh, I was dyin' to sink me

hooks in that guy. I wanted to spoil his face, an' stave in his ribs, an' heave him over the side after his suit-case; an' he knew it.

Well, we went down to the engine-room. I hear Terry barkin' as loud as he could bark, an' I smelt trouble. There, three-quarters of the way down the ladder stood the second engineer, a two-foot pipe wrench in his hands, cursin' like the —— himself, an' yellin' he'd beat the brains out of the first lousy stoker that tried to pass him. Just as we come down they rushed him, holdin' buckets an' shovels over their heads. A big black Greek was in the lead. Down comes the pipe-wrench with a terrible swing an' the Greek goes spinnin' back into the gang behind him. Then they see us. The skipper pushes by the second with his gun in his hand. He didn't raise his voice.

"Get down there—an' stay down!" he says. Say, they couldn't get down fast enough.

I KEPT an eye on the chief, an' told Terry to do the same, to see that he didn't bolt for the deck as soon as the old man turned his back, for he was scared blue—as bad as any of them Greeks—when he see the water up to the fires, an' the fire-room so full of steam I had to call me men out.

The skipper tried to talk with him to figger out some way of gettin' rid of enough water so we could keep the engines goin', but the shakin' limey couldn't talk sense. He wanted to go up on deck to talk. His eye lit on the pressure gage an' the thing had him hypnotized. Dumb an' white he stood there watchin' the hand drop. Every minute the engines was turnin' over slower. It began to look like maybe the lifeboats was our best bet after all.

Of a sudden an idea struck me. I shook the chief's arm.

"Isn't there a big fresh-water tank under the fire-room that's empty?" I says.

He nods.

"Is there any way to open it up?" I says.

"No," he mumbles.

"Can't you smash a hole in the top of it?"

He shakes his head.

"Why not?" I says givin' his arm a yank.

"You cawn't brike through them plites," he says lookin' down at the deck.

"What's all this, bosun?" the old man asks.

"There's a big tank empty under the fire-room there, sir," I says. An' before the old man could ask any more I calls the Dutchman. "Get me the heavy sledge-hammer," I says to him, "the one with the pointed end—in a *hurry!*"

I hadn't such a clear idea of what I was goin' to do meself, but I tried to explain to the skipper while the chief engineer stood there waggin' his fool head; an' Terry keepin' a sharp eye on him.

The Dutchman fell half-way down the ladder, luggin' the sledge-hammer. I grabbed it out of his hands. Feelin' me way in between the boilers I splashed down into the fire-room. On account of the steam I couldn't hardly see, but I felt the water a little above me knees. The bunch followed me as far as the alley. I knew they was standin' there hopin' to Heaven I could do somethin'—most of them didn't know what.

They wasn't hopin' any harder than I was when I lifted that sledge above me head. Waitin' then till a roll of the ship carried most of the water to the other end of the fire-room I brought it down on the iron deck with all me might. Sting! I thought I had tough hands, but that stung right in to the bones. Before the ship rolled back again I got in another good crack, an' that time I felt the floor plate split. It wasn't the regular deck, only the thin plate covered with little knobs to keep you from slippin' laid on top, but it was somethin'.

The steam in there made it hard to breathe. I had to rest for a coupla seconds while the water came swirlin' up around me waist. All I was prayin' now was that the deck-plates was what made the top of the tank, an' that there was only a single layer of them. I knew I never could get through two. I may be a short man, but I got a thefty swing with a sledge. There I stayed, gaspin' for me breath—slammin' the deck when the water was down, restin' when it was up, an' slow but surely puttin' a dent in the top of that tank.

I just struck through with the point of me sledge when I hear Terry start barkin'. There come a shout from the alley, but I couldn't see nothin' for the steam. Then come two shots from out the engine-room. I didn't even stop to wonder what was goin' on. I give another slam at the hole an' it got bigger. Then I give two more thefty ones. The water began to suck down into

the tank. I give one more swing. Me sledge went through the hole an' spilled me flat on me mug; an' before I could get on me feet the water came rollin' back an' banged me up against the end of the fire-room head first. I didn't see no stars. I felt numb all over, an' sleepy. It was like a dream; somehow I didn't mind what was happenin' at all. Then somethin' had me by the shirt, tuggin' at me there in the water. I put out me hand.

"Terry!" I says; but he didn't dare open his mouth to answer.

With me tryin' to stagger along an' him leadin' we got out on to the alley between the boilers. Nobody was there. Then Terry let go of me an' barked. In from the engine-room runs the skipper with some of the men. When he sees me lyin' there he got right down beside me. The first thing he says is—

"Bosun, are you hurt?"

I shook me head.

"Bosun," he says, "could you do it?"

I nodded at him.

They picked me up an' carried me into the engine-room an' laid me on the deck. After the skipper give me a drink I felt some better. I told him what I'd done, an' said for him to send some guys in there with crowbars to pry the hole bigger so the water'd go down quicker.

Me wits was comin' back. I raised up on me arm, an' there, lyin' on the deck beside me, I see another gink. An' strike me if it wasn't the limey! "What's the matter with him, cap'n?" I says.

"Dead," says the old man.

Before I even thought I ripped out with an, "Aw ——!"

The skipper looks at me like he thought I was still coocoo from the bump on me bean.

"It's all right, sir," I says, "only I wanted to do it meself. How did he get it?"

"I had to shoot him," says the skipper like he was speakin' of a worn-out horse. "Your dog caught him tryin' to sneak up on deck, an' the black-gang after him, when I was in the alley there listenin' for you. We'd have had a mutiny sure. He's a good one, that dog, ain't he?"

"You said a mouthful, cap'n," I says. "Terry!"

I looked around, but he wasn't in sight nowhere.

"Where do you suppose the scamp is now?" says I. "Terry!"

Up from a corner of the engine-room comes Terry. An' in his mouth he was draggin' that cat, Percy, like he was a mother cat with an overgrown kitten. Percy was half drownded an' near scared to death—so scared he couldn't even yowl. Terry drops him alongside of me, an' stands there with his head an' tail up lettin' out a yip proud as the King of England. Well if that Percy cat didn't crawl on to me to be warmed an' patted may I be cursed with a large family.

It was none of my doin'—it was all Terry's fault—but that cat stuck round us till we had to take him into the gang. Terry treated him like a gentleman; an' what could I do? An' you know, he really weren't so bad once he'd got away from the inflooence of that limey.

We managed to get into the lee of Noofunland an' then put back to Gaspey to calk her up right. When the *Saginaw* did get here to Noo York an' I paid off, there was three of us went over the gangplank: Terry first—Percy last—an' me in the middle, not for the honor of the place, but just to see that they didn't revive no old fightin' memories.

The Nine Unknown

A Five-Part Story

Part II

by

Talbot Mundy

Author of "Benefit of Doubt," "Treason," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

THE Rev. Father Cyprian aims at Hindu occultism. He regards it as the machinery of Satan, to be destroyed accordingly. It was for that reason that he gave King, Grim, Ramsden and the others, access to books that no human eye should have seen.

There are other books which contain all the wisdom and secrets of the Nine Unknown, a mysterious order of India, and Father Cyprian wanted those manuscripts.

The Portuguese, da Gama, after the "whisky torture" and the threats of Ali ben Ali—he "cuts with an outward thrust"—agreed to give up certain books he had.

But, doubting the Portuguese's good faith, the seven sons of Ali were appointed to follow him.

The others went to the Star of India, a hotel kept by Diomed Braganza. A search of da Gama's room revealed the fact that it had been recently raided.

Going up on the roof they were joined by Ali.

Ramsden innocently insulted the Afghan and the two came to blows. The fight ended with their swearing eternal friendship.

"Together thou and I will beard the Nine Unknown," Ali boasted. "We will——"

But he was interrupted.

Ali's seven sons arrived and confessed that they had failed to keep in touch with da Gama. Six of them blamed the seventh for their failure.

"Beat him," said Ali.

And they did.

But the noise and disturbance of the beating aroused the anger of all the roof-top dwellers and shouts of, "They are spies! They are Government agents! *Bande Materam*" were answered by the shouts of Ali and his brood.

Then, when the fighting was at its fiercest came another cry—

"Fire!"

The smoke billowed upward and screams arose from the people jammed in the stair-head.

Escaping from this death-trap, they went to the house of Gauri, a woman who was known to be in the confidence of da Gama. She agreed to lead them to a place where he might be found.

And in an old deserted temple, underneath a pile of débris, they found da Gama.

There was no explanation of how he had died. There was no wound—no smell of acid poison—no snake-bite—nothing but a corpse with a scarred chin, smiling!

CHAPTER V

"The Nine's spies are everywhere."

FOR those who sacrifice themselves upon the altar of her needs—whether supposititious needs or otherwise—India holds recompense, as such quarters for instance as Father Cyprian's, wedged between two gardens in a sleepy street, with the chimney of a long-disused pottery kiln casting a shadow like that of a temple-dome on the sidewalk in the afternoon. From India's view-point Cyprian was all the more entitled to consideration in that he had never openly conducted any siege against her serried gods. He had saved the face of many a pretending pagan, holding in the privacy of

his own conscience that the damned were more in need of comfort than an extra curse. So pagan gratitude had comforted his old bones, unpretending pagans not objecting.

He was housed ascetically; but there is a deal more repose and contentment to be had in quiet cloisters than in the palaces of viceroys, princes, bishops. Tongue in cheek, he had pretended to the arch-pretenders that he thought their magic formulas bewildering, doing it repeatedly for fifty years until it was second nature, and men, whose minds were rummage shops of all the second-hand old-wives' tales, not only used their influence to repay flattery but labored, too, to unearth facts for him beyond their understanding. India, surviving Anglo-Saxon worship of the playing fields and all unnecessary sweat, takes her amusement mentally. It was "entertainment exquisite" to bring to Father Cyprian, the alien albeit courteous priest, new facts and revel in his intellectual amazement. (For in fifty years a man learns how to play parts, and, as Jeremy had noticed, Cyprian was "all things" to a host of various men.)

He could discuss the metaphysical, remote, aloof though omnipresent All of Parabrahman just as easily as listen to the galloping confession of a Goanese in haste to unburden conscience and, as it were, dump burdens at the padre's feet. Shapely, dignified old feet, well cased in patent-leather slippers, resting on a folded Afghan *chudder* to keep them off the tiled floor.

Fernandez de Mendoza de Sousa Diomed Braganza watched them, as he knelt and searched the very lees of his imagination. He was very proud indeed to confess to Father Cyprian, a rare enough privilege, that of itself, if boasted of sufficiently, would raise him twenty notches in the estimation of the envious world he knew. All he could see below the screen was those old aristocratic-looking slippered feet, but they were reassuring, and he longed to touch them.

"And so, father, that Arab, speaking English veree excelentlee, so that in fact I was awfulee taken by astonishment and made suspeecious—yes indeed—recommended me to come to you for confession!"

"Why did you obey an Arab?" wondered Cyprian.

"Oh, I think he was the devil! How else should he speak English and laugh so lightheartedly? I saw his head against the night sky and I think he had horns—oh yes, certainlee!"

Cyprian cautioned him.

"If *he* was not thee devil, that one, then the other was—the great brute dressed as a Jat who seized me as if I were trash to be thrown away and hurled me against my customers! Father, I assure you I was like a cannon-ball! He hurled me and I upset many men—oh yes, decidedlee! And though the whole hotel was subsequently burned, and from below I saw those veree selfsame individuals burning in the flames, I have seen them since! If they are not the devil, they are salamanders——"

"It is not for you to say who the devil is," warned Cyprian, aware of how the Goanese mind leaps from one conclusion to another. "How is it you escaped?"

"Oh, veree simple. I have been most faithful in the matter of the candles for the altar of Our Lady of Goa, so when that—I am sure he was thee devil!—hurled me into the ranks of my customers I was assured in my conscience that that is enough, and I fled first, before there was a stampede, which I foresaw infalliblee. So when the stampede began I was on the stairs, and there I smelt the smoke and went to see as Moses went to see thee burning bush, and seeing flame I ran to thee street and was saved. But my whole hotel and my fortune are up in flame—oh pity me!"

So Father Cyprian pitied him with due restraint, and dismissed him after a priceless homily in which he pointed out how profitably Diomed might have given all that property to the Church, instead of keeping it for the devil to make a bonfire of. Whereafter he told his servant to open the slats of the jalousies and admit sufficient of the morning sun to make the place look cheerful.

And a plain, cool, white, stone room with an ancient tiled floor and vaulted ceiling is a great deal easier to make cheerful than any sumptuously furnished boudoir in the world. The delights of mild asceticism are immensely keener than the pleasures of the epicure. The sun came in, obedient, and the light and shadow alternated in long triangles on floor and wall, leaving the rear of the room in shadowed mystery.

There was no sign of the library—merely a breviary, and one or two books liberally marked with penciled slips on a table against the wall. In addition to the chair that

Cyprian used there were six others, equally simple and equally almost impossibly perfect in design and workmanship—each chair as old as the Taj Mahal and no two chairs alike, yet all one unity because of excellence.

A man may be ascetic without craving ugliness—an anchorite, in moderation, without shutting out his friends. A bronze bell from a vanished Buddhist temple announced visitors.

The servant—Manoel—another Goanese—soft-footed as a cat and armed with pots of fuchsias came in to announce what he regarded as too many visitors at that hour of the morning.

"They are *not* elegant. Not in the least—oh, no."

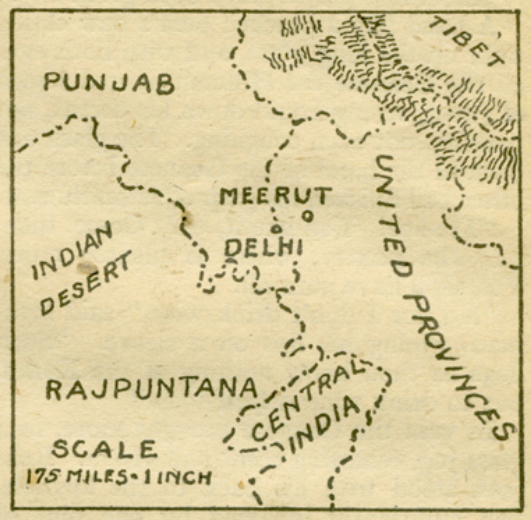
"Their names?" asked Cyprian.

Manoel mispronounced them, was reproved, set the pots down, and departed to admit the visitors, changing his mood like a chameleon, only much more swiftly and with rather less success. For instance, it did not convince Chullunder Ghose, who entered first, as impresario.

"Hitherto not having poisoned padre *sahib*, said sacred person being vigilant, you therefore impel malevolent influence of evil eye on these unholy *sahibs* who are honoring this babu with employment? Stand back, son of miscegenation! Cease from smiling!"

Who *would* smile if addressed in those terms by an arrogantly fat babu? Not a *bishop's* butler. Still less Manoel. He scowled and—so tradition says—a man must smile before he can blast with that dreadful bane called Evil Eye in which the whole of the Orient and most of the newer world believes implicitly. Under the protecting scowl Chullunder Ghose, with his back to Manoel for extra safety's sake, marshaled the party in—Grim, Jeremy, King, Ramsden, Ali of Sikunderam, Narayan Singh, and one of Ali's sons who was beckoned in by Chullunder Ghose for "keyhole prophylaxis," as the babu explained in an aside. The other sons remained squatting in the dust in the patterned shadow of a great tree opposite. Falstaff never had a raggeder, less royal following as far as mere appearance went—inside or outside the priest's house. They all looked like men who trod the long leagues rather than the pavement.

For though in the new, raw world, where twenty centuries have not sufficed to give the sons of men a true sense of proportion, he who would be listened to must masquerade and mountebank in new clothes of the newest cut, India knows better—looks



deeper—and is more wise. So in vain that net is laid in sight of her. Viceroys, kings and all their pomp are side-shows, and the noise they make is a nuisance to be tolerated only for the sake of more or less peace. They are heard in the land and not listened to—seen, and appraised like shadows on the sands of time. The men who go in rags outinfluence them all.

Manoel the Goanese, for instance, with all European error multiplied within him by miscegenation, scorned that ragged bodyguard beneath the tree for servants of men of no intellect or influence; and even so, a passing constable, with native vision warped by too much European drill, but with all his other faculties and fondnesses alert, paused over the way to meditate how innocence might be made to pay tribute to worldly wisdom—paused, scratching his chin with the butt of a turned wooden truncheon and both eyes roving for a safe accomplice.

"That constabeel is a Hindu pig with hair on his liver, who designs an inconvenience to us—by Allah!" said one Hill brother to the next.

And all six nodded, in a circle, resembling bears because of sheepskin coats hung loosely on their shoulders.

SO WITHIN; the padre's servant Manoel approached the seventh, who stood guard by the door of Cyprian's sitting room, offering cakes to Cerberus.

"Taste it," he suggested. "Veree excellent—from oversea—the land of my ancestors—it came in a great flagon. Onlee veree distinguished people have been given any."

A hand like a plucked bear's paw closed tight on the long glass, and with both eyes on the Goanese the Hillman poured a pint of sweet, strong liquid down his throat, not pausing, not even coughing. The glass was back in the hand of the Goanese before the other had finished his gasp of astonishment.

"Tee-hee! You like it, eh? Come, then, into the pantry, where is plentee more. You shall have your fill.

"No, for I don't drink wine," said Rahman, wiping his lips on a sleeve. "Such dogs as thou know nothing of the Koran, but to drink wine is forbidden."

In vain the Goanese brought more, in a glass jug, tempting scent and vision. Rahman stood with his back to the keyhole, just sufficiently inflamed by one pint of Oporto to have split the Goanese's stomach open at the first excuse, and not quite sure that he hadn't already excuse enough for it. So Manoel kept his distance, and the conference within proceeded safely.

Cyprian began it, naturally, beaming on them with his loose, old lips and eyes that never betrayed secrets.

"So you failed? I see you failed," he said, glancing from face to face. "He gave you the slip, that Portuguese?"

"They killed him," Grim answered simply.

"Ah! A longer spoon than ever! Too bad! But his hat—you found his hat of course?"

"No. Missing!" answered Jeremy. "He had a five-pun' note inside the band, with my signature."

Cyprian's lips moved, but he said nothing audible.

"Worse than that!" King added. "In his pocket should have been a paper on which he had jotted down terms he was prepared to make with us. We wouldn't sign it, but the terms were down and an enemy would draw conclusions."

"Gone too?" asked Cyprian.

"Yes. Taken," King answered. "Pocket was inside-out."

"Worse yet!" put in Ramsden. "All those ancient coins have disappeared. Here's the bag—empty!"

"All except this one!"

Jeremy held up the one he had given pledge for. Cyprian took it, turning it over and over in a hand as soft and smoothly wrinkled as a royal grandmother's.

"Coins gone? Hat gone? Eh?" said Cyprian. "That hat—he kept his memoranda on a strip of parchment inside the sweat-band. If we had the hat—well—if we had the hat, I might have fitted his key into my lock, as it were. Well—so we are worse off than before!"

"Much worse!" remarked Chullunder Ghose. "Flesh creeping, holy one! This babu, consumed by elementary anxiety, calls attention to arresting key of situation, which is: Enemy lurking in ambush, is now aware of opponents' identity. Opponents being us! Alarming—very! Unseen, and selecting opportunity with exquisite precision, will sneak forth and smite us shrewdly, wasting no time! *Verb. sap!* Your obedient servant, *sahibs!*"

"He knows," said Cyprian nodding. "He knows."

Ramsden half-unconsciously clenched two enormous fists, and Cyprian laughed.

"If we could deal with them in that way, their secret would have been the world's five thousand years ago—wouldn't it?" he said whimsically. "No, my friends. They may do violence to us; we must admit that possibility. But it behooves us to use other means. We are lost if we try violence—babes in the wood, eh? No wit safer then than Sennacherib's Assyrians. We might as well walk barefoot into a cavern full of snakes! But the Lord slew the Assyrians. The Lord, too, fought against Sisera. Wisdom! We must be wise! You understand me?"

He was trying to be all things at the same time to seven men of differing creeds, not one of which was his, and he was much too wise to venture on the freehold of religion, although that, and no other motive, was the impulse that had kept him laboring for fifty years. He knew that Jeremy, for one, would openly rebel at the first suggestion of creed or dogma, to say nothing of Narayan Singh and Ali of Sikunderam, who perhaps were not so important, although quite as unwilling to be compromised.

"Nobody understands a —— thing!" answered Jeremy. "I know what we saw—a dead Don minus hat, and his pockets inside-out. We all know what the woman said. I've heard you. It all amounts to nothing, plus one gold coin——"

"Perhaps I'd better hear about the woman," Cyprian suggested.

Jeremy told him, reproducing the whole scene and Gauri's conversation, down to the last remark of Gauri when she saw da Gama lying dead.

" 'See? See? They fooled him, and the fool tricked me! I am a greater fool! I tell you, none but a *fakir* has the better of a *fakir!* Men say of me, and such as me, that I learn secrets. *Phagh!* Go and be *fakirs*, all of you!' That's what Gauri thought of it," said Jeremy.

"And she was right. She was right," said Cyprian.

Whereat Jeremy whistled. He smelt adventure coming down wind—unexpected—just the way he likes it best. Chullunder Ghose, who loves to feel his own flesh creep, made a noise like a stifled squeal and shivered.

"Padre *sahib*, be advised by me!" he interrupted. "Being far from affluent babu perspiring much for underdone emolument, am nevertheless like package of Autolichus containing products of experience! That Mister Ross can be a *fakir*, yes. He is so clever, he can even imitate himself, same being most difficult of all cynicisms. But he is Australian. His deity is *Nth* power of Irreverence, same if brought in contact with high-church parties lacking sense of humor, being much more dangerous than dynamite with fuse and caps! I speak with feeling! Mister Ross will make conjuring tricks with seven-knotted bamboo rod of holiest *mahatma*, and we are all dead men—families at mercy of the rising generation—oh my aunt!"

Jeremy smiled, pleased; he likes applause. Head suddenly on one side like a terrier's who hears the word cat, he watched Cyprian's face, alert.

"There is truth in what Chullunder Ghose says—truth, and exaggeration," Cyprian announced. "There is always danger in attacking deviltry. But exaggeration in such cases is—" he was going to say a sin, but checked himself—"a serious mistake because it terrifies."

Every man in the room except Chullunder Ghose smiled broadly at that. Cyprian smiled too, and none of them, except perhaps the babu realized that he had chosen that means of eliminating any shade of terror from the argument.

"You!" he said suddenly, pointing a finger at Jeremy, "You! Are you able to govern yourself? Can you understand that if you play this part, one laugh at the wrong minute may mean death?"

"I hope I'll die laughing—in my boots," said Jeremy.

"Your death—and others!"

"Whose, for instance?" Jeremy came back at him. "I've seen men in India I'd kill for sixpence each!"

"These—your friends," said Cyprian.

"That's different. All right. I don't laugh. I make up as the lousiest-looking holy man you ever saw. What after that?" demanded Jeremy.

Cyprian looked hard at him. In one soft palm lay the gold coin, and he tapped it with a forefinger.

"This is our only point of contact," he began. "You must take it and do tricks. You must challenge the Nine in public! It is dangerous, and others must go with you to prevent abduction. Are you willing?

"Bet your life!" said Jeremy. "Who comes?"

"Oh my ——!" remarked Chullunder Ghose, aware of the wheels of Destiny.

"My young friend Jeremy, do you command sufficient self-control to let yourself be disciplined by our babu?" asked Cyprian.

The padre's lips moved pursily, as if he were masticating something, and his face was toward Jeremy, who grinned, but his mind was already far away considering something else. Grim noticed it and grew aware that Cyprian had made his mind up without waiting for the answer. Quick work! But Grim is constitutionally cautious.

"How about the babu?" he objected. "Can Chullunder Ghose——"

Cyprian banished the objection with a gesture.

"You must be dumb, friend Jeremy—dumb!" he went on, forcing deep thought to the surface through a sieve that strained out all unnecessary words—particularly all unnecessary argument. "Chullunder Ghose must talk."

"My ——! You see me shudder?" exclaimed the babu, not exaggerating.

His fat shoulders heaved as if an earthquake underlay them, and a kind of grayness settled on his face. Nevertheless, none doubted his intention. A century or two

ago he would have braved the Holy Inquisition out of curiosity.

"Whatever is said, Chullunder Ghose must say," repeated Cyprian.

"Hear me say it now, then! Caesar, *morituras te saluto!* Speech, committing me, silence absolves actual offender! My belly shakes, yet family must eat. *Sahibs*, increase my microscopical emolument!"

NEVER was a man more serious. Chullunder Ghose, all clammy with anxiety, rolled his handkerchief into a ball and caught it with his naked toes repeatedly; but King moved over, and sat on a cushion on the floor beside him.

"You and I have tackled worse than this together," he said.

"Ah! Yes. *You* and I! But this Australian! He would tie a knot in the tail of Hanuman * himself, and trust to irreverence to get him out of it! He will cry, Cooee!—and pretend to a Brahman that such is colloquial *lingua franca* of the gods!"

"It is!" laughed Jeremy. "Australia's God's country. If I can't talk the dialect, who can?"

"Peace, peace!" said Cyprian, smiling. "Let us joke afterwards. Colonel King, may I trust you to instruct friend Jeremy—drill him, that is? We can not afford mistakes."

King nodded. In all India there was none else who had traveled, as King had done, from end to end of India in different disguises, penetrating the reputedly impenetrable. If King had but possessed a tithe of Jeremy's gift of doing marvels with his hands, he would have been the man to send. But you don't discover jealousy in men of King's attainments. A trace of that would have made them fail a hundred times. Both he and Grim were safer men than Jeremy, and knew it; but they were also much less brilliant, and knew that too. As far as courage went there was nothing to choose, although they would all have picked on Ramsden if asked who was least amenable to fear; and Ramsden, knowing too well what it cost him to control those thews of his, would have picked Narayan Singh.

"You know there is a Hindu festival at Benares very soon?" said Cyprian. "I am old, or I would go with you. I know those ceremonies. I could guard against mistakes. Now, understand: the danger is abduction! There will be a million men and women in Benares—more! You—disguised—unknown—you could vanish as easily as seven pebbles from the beach! So you must all go, each to watch the others. Be two parties. Jeremy, Chullunder Ghose, Ramsden—one. The other, all the rest of you, pretending to be strangers to the first. But all Hindus, mind—able to claim acquaintance if you must."

"We shall be in next world very presently!" remarked Chullunder Ghose. "What is object of this impropriety?"

Cyprian made a noise with his tongue. He did not like the word impropriety. He answered looking anywhere but at the babu.

"The Nine Unknown must keep themselves constantly informed. In order to know they must observe. To observe they must go, or send their representatives. To be in touch with the mind of the mass—which their purpose must be certainly—they will take care to attend the festivals, in person or by proxy. If one of their number should go to Benares—as is possible—extra precautions will be taken of course to preserve incognito. But in any case there will be at least one of their principal lieutenants there to bring dependable reports. You understand that? Now——"

The old man was warming up. He moved in his chair restlessly and kept wiping his lips on a lawn handkerchief. His gestures, losing the indeterminate, painstakingly tactful quality, were becoming imperative.

"In cryptographic books in my possession it is laid down as inviolable rule that one of the Nine *always* visits Benares at this season of the year. They receive money—gold and silver—that accumulation never ceases. And the East changes slowly; without a doubt a great deal of the money even in these days of banks goes to Benares, Hardwar, Prayag and such places by porter at the times of pilgrimage. Some one is there to receive it. You understand?"

Ramsden opened his mouth at last. Economy—constructive, pioneer economy was his long suit.

"It would take a freight-train to haul the money. The amount that disappears in one year——"

"Could be carried among a million pilgrims without attracting notice," Cyprian retorted. "Do you realize your opportunity? Contact is our problem! If, by challenging attention, you can once make

*The monkey-god.

contact with the Nine Unknown, you may leave the rest to me! We will presently find the books! Then you may have the money —any one may have it! The books—those nine books—they are the true goal."

"If the cash really goes to Benares, it would take a train to haul it out!" Ramsden insisted. "In that case we need only watch the railway——"

"Who said the money is hauled out again?" Cyprian retorted testily. "For all you know there is a hole under a temple in Benares——"

He checked himself, aware that for the first time he had awakened incredulity. Even Chullunder Ghose allowed an expression of mockery to light his face up suddenly. Ali of Sikunderam exploded:

"Allah! If the Hindus had that much money in a hole beneath a temple, the Hills would have smelt it years ago! Moreover would the English not have learned of it? They smell gold as a thirsty horse smells water in the plains. And if the English were afraid to take it on a pretext, would the Hills refrain? Would that bait not have brought the *lashkars** yelling down the Khyber? And would guns have held them back in smell of all that loot? Allah! Show me but one sack of gold, and I will show you how hillmen plunder—I and my sons!"

But Ali of Sikunderam was wax in Cyprian's hands. Swift, subtle flattery turned his indignation into boasting, out of which net there was no retreat.

"You and your sons—invaluable! Splendid! You should have a part, but oh, the pity of it! You are Moslems."

"Aye! The pity of it!" answered Ali. "When the *sirkar* needed men to go to Lhassa, who should not upset the heathen bellies of Thibetians with a true religion, was I chosen with three sons to make that journey because we could not act Hindu? Doubtless! Bring me a thousand Hindus, and if one of them can pick me out of a crowd as not being a Hindu of the Chattrya caste, I will go back to my Hills and hold my peace!"

"But not in Benares. You would not dare in Benares," suggested Cyprian.

"By Allah, in Benares they shall think me a double-holy Brahman born in paradise! I will have the *sadhus* kissing feet within the hour!"

*Hillman armies.

"So. Excellent!" said Cyprian. "That is, if you dare."

"I would like to see the thing I dare not do—I and my sons!" answered Ali.

"You speak of them as yours. I would rather hear them pledge themselves," said Cyprian.

"By Allah, they will swear to what I bid them swear to!" answered Ali. "If I say a hill is flat, they prove it! If I say a Hindu wears his belly inside out, they demonstrate that, too, on the nearest unbeliever! If I bid them be Hindus, they will even shave themselves and look that part. Wait and see! I will bring them in."

He strode to the door to tell Rahman, who was standing guard, to go and summon them. Rahman went off to obey and the door was closed again, but opened a minute later by Chullunder Ghose, who leaned his whole weight on the knob and used it suddenly. Manoel, the butler, entered on his knees and fell face-downward, saying nothing, amid silence.

"Eavesdropping?" exclaimed Cyprian at last.

The Goanese did not answer—too afraid, or too wise. He lay with his face between his hands in an attitude of abject supplication.

"Put him outside for the present," ordered Cyprian; and Ramsden took Manoel by the waistband, tossing him into the pantry as you throw a stick into the fire.

"I tell you," said Cyprian, "we war with powers! The Nine's spies are everywhere. More than once I have suspected Manoel, but——"

The door burst open again. It was like a thunderclap in that quiet sanctuary. Rahman stood with a hand laid flat on either door-post, leaning in, his eyes screwed up and glinting like the heart of flint.

"They are gone!" he said.

"Allah! My sons gone?"

Ali leaped up and drew his knife, though none, not even he, knew why.

"All gone!" answered Rahman. "There was no fight, for there is no blood. I think they went of their own will."

"By Allah, then they saw the prospect of a fight!" swore Ali.

He stood on feudal right that instant—claimed Ramsden's help, they two having plighted troth over a restored knife, and there is no pledge more inviolable.

"Brother, I need thy strength," he said with dignity.

And Ramsden did not hesitate. Believing that his wits are slow and that strength is all he has, he volunteers for all the odds and ends and heavy work, the others conceding the point to avoid discussion, but setting far too high a value on him to risk him unnecessarily. (You may discuss a man's thews to his face, but not his spirit.)

So they trooped out behind Jeff, Jeremy leading, leaving only Grim alone in the room with Cyprian.

It had occurred to Grim, as intuitions do come to a thoughtful man in a flash sometimes, that if the guard left in the street had gone so suddenly there was a chance that some one hoped to gain advantage by their absence.

If so, then Cyprian was the obvious objective. If not, even so it would not harm for one of the party to stay and protect the old man.

He offered no excuse, no explanation; simply stayed.

CHAPTER VI

"They fled before me!"

HAVING eased his mind concerning the requirements of another world, Fernandez de Mendoza de Sousa Diomed Braganza began to speculate on the improbabilities of this one—improbability of credit in the first place. None had been so foolish as to underwrite the fire risk on his hotel. It was a dead loss. It was equally improbable that any of his erstwhile guests would pay their bills, since the books were burned; they would blame him for the loss of their effects, and probably bring suit against him.

He knew equally well that the police would be in search of him that minute to arrest him on a charge of criminal responsibility. He knew his wisest course would be to go to the police and surrender himself because Father Cyprian, the next-door-to-infallible, had said so, and, deciding to do that, he hurriedly reviewed another long list of improbabilities—acquaintances, who had been friends before the fire, who might be asked, but probably would not consent to furnish bail.

So he turned to the left when the padre's front door shut behind him, minded to call on one acquaintance on his way to the police. That circumstance prevented him from seeing the arrival of Grim, Ramsden, Jeremy, King and all the others, who approached Cyprian's from the opposite direction. They were within before Diomed turned and retraced his steps. So all he saw was Ali's sons in the dust under the shade tree—them and the constable opposite, who was rubbing at his jaw-bone with the end of a yellow truncheon to assist the processes of thought.

What brought him back was nothing more concrete than one of those changes of mind, like the action of a ship in irons in a light wind; in India they call them disembodied spirits that govern men in their extremity. He had vacillated—thought of another acquaintance, who might be less difficult to pin to than the first. Noticing the constable he chose the other side-walk, naturally. And with both eyes on the law's hired man from under the sheltering brim of his soft felt hat he just as naturally stepped by accident on the skirts of the sheepskin coat of one of Ali's sons.

The men of Sikunderam don't fancy being stepped on. It is even likely they would choose a Goanese last if obliged to name the individual to be permitted some such liberty. Nevertheless, the act was obviously unintentional and nothing more than a mild curse would have followed if Diomed had not, tripping and trying to recover, kicked the hilt of a yard-long northern knife. And that is sacrilege. A Hillman would not kick his own knife.

So the curse that leaped from the lips of one of Ali's sons was like the hissing and explosion when you plunge a hot iron into oil. Diomed sprang back as if a snake had bitten him, and even the constable across street awoke out of speculative meditation, for it looked as if the gods had come to life to solve his problem for him. It is good to be alert and on hand when the gods arrange the play.

And as he sprang back Diomed knew the face of his antagonist for one that had cursed him previously—on the roof before the fight and the fire began. He recognized him as a man who had been held back by the others lest he use steel prematurely. And thought in the mind of a Goanese confronted by predicament is as swift and spiteful as an asp's. It recoils automatically on the person who aroused it.

Now he could surrender to advantage! Now he need not go empty-handed to the mills of the police that grind so small, and so impartially, so be that they get their

grist! This came of confessing his sins to Father Cyprian! Now bail was unimportant. There were dozens who would hurry to his aid if it were known he had scapegoats, locked up in the next cell, ready to be sacrificed.

All of that passed through his mind with the speed of starlight, in between the opening and closing of the Hillman's angry teeth. He beckoned the constable, who came, standing warily a good yard from the sidewalk, not enamored of the chances yet, for they were six to one and the gods not finished shuffling. It is the privilege of the gods to make things easy for a man.

"Arrest all these!" commanded Diomed, in English for the sake of extra emphasis. "They are the villains who set fire to my hotel! I warn you they are dangerous! Arrest them instantlee!"

The constable could recognize the danger without help. He was perfectly aware of six long knives—not yet free of their scabbards, but poised between earth and air like Mohammed's coffin. Moreover, the fire was news to him.

"Brothers, I *said* that constabeel designed an inconvenience to us! Stand back-to-back!"

The "brothers" stood so, around the tree-trunk, inoffensive as a third rail.

"In case you reefuse to arrest them I will reeport you! This is a highlee important case—veree!" said Diomed, pulling out a pencil to write down the constable's number. "I *saw* these men set fire to my hotel!" he added.

But the constable, preferring life to an eulogium in the Gazette, demurred.

"Where are your witnesses?" he countered, grinning.

Diomed flew into a rage immediately. He knew the law, or said he did, and threatened to invoke the whole of it, including dark and lawless influence, on the constable's unrighteous head. He named names. He cited instances. He mentioned the policeman's ancestry. Raising his voice indignantly he summoned all the neighborhood to witness cowardice—corruption—a policeman in receipt of bribes refusing to arrest six murderers!

The neighborhood had no will to associate itself with outside scandal, having plenty of its own, and the few who had been in the street departed—all but one. A man in an orange-yellow smock, with a big, red caste-mark in the middle of his forehead, a twisted orange-yellow turban, and no other visible garment, property or distinction, stood where another great tree marked a narrow cross-street and beckoned, holding his forefinger close up to his eye as if in some way that lent long range to the invitation.

And the constable by now was more enraged than Diomed, with this addition, that his rage was based on absolute injustice; for the things that Diomed had said of his female relatives were not to be borne by a man of spirit and some authority. They had reached the stage of snapping fingers, and Diomed's two arms were waving like semaphores as he leaned forward, showing simian teeth, to spit denunciation in the constable's indignant face.

"One beckons," said a voice beside the tree.

"And you are corrupt—corrupt—everybodee knows it—son of an evil mother—you accept bribes from all and sundree and——"

"He wears a yellow garment, brothers, such as the *sadhus** wear, but yellower. He is only one. We could beat him if he lied to us. He beckons, and he signals silence——"

"All together—run, then!"

They were gone like leopards flushed from cover, down street, each with a hand on the hilt of a Khyber knife, as good to stand in way of as the torrents of Sikunderam in spate. They swooped on the man in yellow as if he were foe, not friend, meaning to seize him and whirl him along between them; but he knew the nature of the squall he had evoked, and he stepped down the side-street; he had vanished when they reached the corner, and they wasted half a minute casting this and that way like a pack of hounds before one of them saw him beckoning again, and the six went full-pelt at a right-angle to their first course, hardly thinking now, but all of one mind and three purposes: to outrun the constable, to overtake the man in yellow, and to keep together.

"There!" exclaimed Diomed, pausing in a torrent of abuse. "Now all thee world can see how you let criminals escape!"

HAND the abuse had got its work in. There is poison in the stuff, that breeds miscalculation. It is like a smoke-screen thrown off by a human skunk to mortify whoever has weak sensibilities.

*Hindu holy-man.

The constable was angry and aware of duty to be done—some one to be arrested. Six criminals, accused of arson, had escaped under cover of the seventh's volleys of abuse, and so the seventh must be guiltier than all! He raised his truncheon—actually to hammer out a signal on the side-walk—but, in Diomed's excited imagination, to attack. And Diomed struck him—twice, in the face, with the flat of his hand, hysterically—struck an officer of the law in execution of his duty!

So the truncheon went to work in earnest, and poor Diomed was beaten over collar-bone and forearm until he wouldn't have dared move them for the agony. Then he was handcuffed ignominiously, swearing, beseeching, praying, and marched away, followed by inevitable small boys as free from the vials of compassion as the monkeys are that some say are their ancestors. They said things that excited Diomed to wilder imprecations yet.

And among the boys there was a dwarf—a man in orange-yellow, taller by half a head than the tallest youngster, and as stocky as two of them, but gifted with the same free movement, so that he passed in the crowd unnoticed. He edged his way closer and closer to the constable, who glanced about him nervously, aware that in these "higher education days" the riots and the rescuing are done by school boys while their elders do the propaganding in the rear. He hurried, driving his prisoner in front of him with thumps from the truncheon on the backbone just above the trousers-band. It was several minutes before the dwarf could edge close enough to speak low and yet be heard.

"You are fortunate!" he said at last. "Surely you have promotion in your grasp! You have taken the infamous Braganza, who is charged with burning his hotel and murdering a hundred guests!"

"I knew it! Come and give your evidence!" the constable retorted, for the East lies glibly or not at all. He tried to seize the dwarf as a material witness, but missed him in the crowd, and had to hurry on for fear of losing Diomed, whom he charged presently with arson and with employing six Afridis to preserve him from arrest.

"I fought them all, and they fled before me," he asserted.

Meanwhile, there was a strange assortment of individuals in more or less pursuit of Ali's sons, with Ali in the lead, of course' since the "sons" were his valuable property, and with Chullunder Ghose as naturally in the rear, as utterly indifferent to the sons' fate as the moon is to the netting of fish at ebb tide, but on the job and anxious notwithstanding.

"For if an earthquake had emptied Bedlam, releasing affinities of swine of Gadarenes, and if government officials plus editors of daily press were in charge of whole proceedings, *that* would be diamond-edged sanity compared to *this!* This is worse than acting on advice of experts! This is—oh my aunt!"

He was not far wide of the mark; for as he waddled, wiping sweat from his fat face, he could see the whole long-drawn line extending down-street, each in his own way calling curious attention. Jeremy, for instance, reveling in being taken for an Arab, looking ready to go mad and do a whirling dervish dance at the first excuse, with the long, loose sleeves of his black coat spread like wings, in full flight after Ali.

Then Ramsden angrily, annoyed with Jeremy for making such a public exhibition of himself yet unable to overtake him and remonstrate, striding along like Samson who slew the Philistines.

King next, side by side with Narayan Singh, neither of them even fractionally off-key, and therefore about as noticeable as two true notes in a flat and sharp piano scale.

"Man that is born of a woman is like ginger-pop!" remarked Chullunder Ghose, pausing to consider. "Cut string—cork flies—and he spills himself! Step one on the path of wisdom is to *be* wise—*ergo*—by the waters of this Babylon I sit me down and weep—thus—tree, I greet you, weeping sweat, not tears! Great tree, what a world of men and women you have mocked! Mock me awhile, your shade is comforting and your shafts of wit pass overhead! Now let us see—King sahib is remarkable for sanity. *Ergo*, he will notice me in rear. Observing emulation of Fabius Cunctator by this babu, King sahib will suppress inborn proclivities of Anglo-saxon and pattern his thought accordingly.

"He will follow down that street to next corner, where he will park himself broodily, sending Narayan Singh forward to repeat process. Thus, whenever I proceed as far as corner and become conspicuous, King sahib will observe me and will signal to

Narayan Singh. We shall thus be in touch. And the others will behave as the sparks that fly upward, which can't be helped. That is my guess. Being heir of all the ages, I shall sit in shade and see the world go by. Suspicious? Very!"

Chullunder Ghose was right. King did turn the corner in pursuit, and at the next one did sit down on the veranda of a boarding-house for Sikhs, where Narayan Singh, who kept up the pursuit along another street, could find him and whence he himself might see Chullunder Ghose if the babu should see fit to come to the corner and signal. The others, following Ali Sikinderam, who shouted inquiries a hundred yards ahead of him, stuck to the pursuit like people in a motion picture comedy.

"Item one, a fool is very foolish," said Chullunder Ghose to himself, leaning his fat back against the tree and flapping flies with an enormous handkerchief. "Therefore congenital deficiencies of Ali's sons comply with formula. *Verb. sap.* If they had been attacked said idiots would have stood at bay by door of padre's house, in accordance with law that nature abhors a vacuum—doubtless. Empty heads apply at spigot of authority to be filled with instructions. They would have focussed attention on padre's house inevitably. *Quod erat—nicht wahr? Ergo,* they were not attacked.

"What then? A woman? Much too early in the morning. And again—no fight! If six such idiots pursued a woman, or women, through the streets of Delhi, there would be bad blood spilt as certainly as there are speeches when a politician pursues office. Therefore not a woman. This time not the sex that bringeth forth in sorrow and regretteth same.

"Then a man! The unproductive sex! At least as sorrowful but less opaque! Motives more easily discernible. The six translucent jewels of Sikunderam have been decoyed—and by a man, or men—therefore for profit! Whose? Why? I lift a stone. Why do I lift a stone? Because I need the space it sits on—or I wish to throw it—or—if he—they—needed the space on which the sons of Ali sat—or the street in which they sat—I see—I get you—'Steve, I get you!' as Jimgrim says—behold, I see through mystery! Let us hope actions are not so loud as words. Thou tree—thou solid, dumb, obtruding tree, farewell!"

There came a *tikka-gharri** drawn by one horse on the way home from assisting at the *Rishis*** only knew what all-night revelry. Chullunder Ghose signaled the driver, who declined a fare sleepily, without success. The babu waddled to mid-street and had climbed in before the protesting jehu could whallop his nag to a trot.

"Give her gas!" said Chullunder Ghose, translating slang learned from Grim into opprobrious vernacular.

So the weary cabman whacked the wearier horse and, better to call attention to himself, the babu stood up screaming that he had a gall-stone and would die unless in hospital within the minute. He was seen, heard, contemplated.

But he only drove two blocks, around a corner, and then paid the astonished cabman the exact fare. If he had overpaid him he would only have multiplied suspicion. Then he walked back three blocks, parallel to the street in which was Cyprian's house, and turning the corner suddenly was just in time to see three men in orange-yellow smocks approach Cyprian's door and ring the bell. He stood there long enough to watch them enter and see the door shut again behind them.

"Kali!" he exclaimed then. "Let us hope Jimgrim is appreciative! Dogs of the Wife of Siva the Destroyer! Oh my aunt!"

SHE RAN like an articulated jellyfish until he reached a corner whence he could see King perched on the boarding-house veranda. There, ignoring all discretion, he pulled his rose-pink turban off and threw the thirty yards of silk in air, whirling it until King raised a hand in answer.

Promptly King leaned out over the veranda-rail at the corner of two streets and made a gesture that Narayan Singh saw from a quarter of a mile away. And the Sikh, not optimistic, having seen too much, but understanding that the gang was wanted back at Cyprian's, went at the double to retrieve as many of the gang as possible from a building in front of which two square lamps advertised—POLICE.

He had been in time to see Ali of Sikunderam charge up the steps and plunge into the building—for the men he hurled his questions at had misdirected Ali and he had covered an unnecessary mile before

*Hired cab. **Spirits.

learning that his precious sons were foul of the law.

Narayan Singh had seen Rahman follow Ali, and then Jeremy, then Ramsden. None had come back down the steps, so he was in no doubt what to do, although he did not know yet how absurdly simple the strategy of the man in orange-yellow had been, nor how simpler and more finished would be that of Jeremy.

Like will-o'-the wisp in orange livery he had simply led those six North-country swashbucklers a dance along street after street—up the stairs of the police station—and there had accused the lot of them of theft! There was nothing whatever for the police to do but hold them.

When Ali got there pandemonium was loose, for the six sons' weapons had been taken and they were resisting further search as desperately as hell's imps would object to baptism—teeth—talons—imprecation—horizontal mostly, with a couple of policemen laboring at each limb and each lot expanding and contracting suddenly in spasms. One policeman—he who had recently arrested Diomed the Goanese—went from lot to lot using a truncheon unapplauded, aiming at the heads of Afghans but oftener hitting his friends. He said nothing about recognizing them, having already claimed to have defeated them in mortal combat. The obvious solution was to stun them lest they recognize himself, but it was extremely difficult to hit their heads.

And into that confusion Ali leaped like a firecracker, knife and all, to be brought to a stand by the officer's revolver. The officer was in his place, in charge, behind the desk. There might have been murder done, for Ali was in no mood for compliance, with his darlings being whacked and twisted under his eyes. The fact that the police were bleeding, and his sons not more than warming up for a morning's work, added to his zeal, and instinct warned him that the man in yellow was the "father" of the rumpus. Therefore, Ali was for springing at the man in yellow's throat when Jeremy strode in smiling like an illustration from the Book of Ruth, with Rahman yelping like a wolf a step behind him.

"*Salaam aleikoum!* Peace! Let there be peace!" boomed Jeremy in a voice with a ventriloquial note that fills a room. He sounded, as he looked, like a man from the Old Testament. Ali detected magic in the wind and yelled a word that his sons obeyed on the instant. Even so, the police were human and eager for revenge, but Ramsden walked in.

Baring his forearms, he offered to kill with his hands the first three constables who struck a prisoner. So there was peace as Jeremy requested, and the man in yellow took advantage of it, going close to two of Ali's sons, who were held fast, with a policeman on each wrist. He said he wanted to identify them. Jeremy observed, and Ramsden observed Jeremy. The officer observed all three, but Jeremy's hand is swifted than any eye.

"They are the men who stole from me!" said the man in yellow. "I had a gold coin similiar to this one in each hand. Rushing at me, they seized my wrists and took the money, which you will find on their persons. Search them!"

He drew from a pocket in his smock and displayed one ancient coin that Jeremy and Ramsden instantly identified as having belonged to the Portuguese da Gama.

"Search them!" ordered the officer, tapping his revolver on the desk.

"Wait! First let me also identify!" said Jeremy; and he, too, went close to the same two of Ali's sons.

Not satisfied with that, he walked up to the police officer and whispered to him. Then, from him, to the man in orange-yellow who was beginning to look less pleased—a mite impatient.

"Have I ever seen you anywhere?" asked Jeremy. "Were you ever in Jerusalem? Jaffa? Alexandria?"

"No!"

"He lies!" said Jeremy. "I know him well! This was a trick by the Hindu to steal a gold watch from your honor," he went on, smiling at the officer as if butter hardly ever melted in his mouth. "However, as the Prophet saith, on whom be peace, 'Let not words and emptiness of speech suffice!' Search all three men!"

Now Ali's sons stood still, submitting, for they had felt what Jeremy's nimble fingers did. And Jeremy, with his back to Ramsden, passed to him two gold coins for safety's sake, stepping forward again instantly. The jaw of the man in orange-yellow dropped.

"He—that Arab—" he began.

But the searchers had stripped Ali's sons

in vain, and it was his turn. The first hand thrust into his pocket drew out the officer's gold watch and chain.

"Magic!" exclaimed the officer. "He never once came near me!"

"Lock him up then! Such as he are dangerous!" said Jeremy not turning a hair, and the officer accepted the advice, insisting, too, however, on holding three of Ali's sons as witnesses.

It was then, as the door of one cell slammed on all four and a fifth already in there, that Narayan Singh strode in, appraised the situation, and strode out again, leaving as many to follow him as could or would.

CHAPTER VII

"Shakespearian homeopathic remedy."

GRIM and Cyprian sat face to face in silence with a shaft of sunlight streaming through the space between them. Infinitely tiny specks of dust—for Cyprian was a martinet and Manoel used cloth and broom incessantly—danced tarantella-fashion, more or less as gnats do, in the golden fairway.

"You observe them?" said Cyprian presently. "Each one of those moving specks is itself made of billions of infinitely tiny specks all in motion. That is the way the universe is made. All atoms—all in motion—in an all-pervading essence known as ether you know that? It is in the books—the oldest of all books as well as the newest. The ancients knew about it seven thousand years ago, if we accept their heretical chronology. I have their books to prove it. These Nine Unknown are the inheritors of scientific secrets that used to form the basis of the Ancient Mysteries. Yes, that's so. That's so. There isn't any doubt of it. Not religious secrets, understand me—no, no, they are enemies of all religion! They use scientific truths to stir superstition by pretending their phenomena are miracles! Devils' work! They know—the rascals! They have knowledge! Compared to them our modern scientists are just as Julius Caesar would have been if somebody confronted him with Paine's fireworks or an eighteen-inch gun or the radio. Clever fellow, Caesar. Bright as a button. He would have tried to explain it away; tried—but there would be the phenomena—effect—result of cause; you have to know the cause to understand effect. No use repudiating it. Our moderns fail exactly as Julius Caesar would have done. And the Nine Unknown laugh. Devils!

"Nothing suits them better than to have the scientists, the newspapers, the governments, the secret service, the police, all vow that no such knowledge as theirs exists—no such organization. Above all they chuckle because the church denies them. Missionaries are their best friends. To declare they are non-existent without proving it leaves the rascals free to do as they please, without lessening the superstition of the crowd. You understand me?"

Grim did not. He has the pragmatist-adventurer's view of life, dissatisfied with all veils hung between himself and noumenon, and studying each phenomenon from the angle of "what's the use of it?"

"Why deny what you can't prove? Why not discover their science and employ it properly?"

Cyprian interrupted him with a frown and a flash of temper that betrayed volcanic will unweakened by his age and only curbed by discipline.

"*Tchut!* Wiser minds than yours decided about that long ago. Beware of the sin of presumption! These people have been branded as magicians—tricksters! Their pretensions, magic—tricks! Humbugs!—evil-workers!—liars!—cheats! They have imposed on superstition. Take the consequences. Banned by the Church. Outlawed. Burn their books! Who shall say then that they have, or ever had, a scrap of scientific knowledge? That is my task—fifty—two-and-fifty years of effort. Burn the books! The nine books! Burn them! They have defied the Church—*sed prevalabit!*"

"I don't get you," answered Grim. "Knowledge ought to be known. Those books——"

"Are mine! To do as I see fit! Did you not agree?" demanded Cyprian.

Grim had agreed, but that did not admit the whole contention. Grim, because he keeps an open mind, has been accused by missionaries of belonging to nearly every heathen cult in turn, but his name stands written on no muster-roll. He is under no vows of obedience. He countered:

"King and I have talked this over—lots. King has been on the trail of it for twenty years you know. Are you sure the Nine

aren't honorable men, who know more than is safe to teach the public?"

Cyprian smiled at that like a martyr prepared to die for his convictions.

"Only, some one killed the Portuguese," Grim went on. "Why? If they know so much, why kill a drunken crook you can afford to pity?"

"I have told you. They are devils," answered Cyprian.

"And while the hotel burned there was a voice urging the crowd to attack us." Grim continued. "The same voice shouted, 'Fire!'—deliberately creating panic. Some one had searched the Don's room—carried his books away. Same man—same men more likely—returned to burn their tracks. That hardly seems like men who, as you put it, have inherited the knowledge of the Ancient Mysteries."

The expression of Cyprian's face changed. He drew on his mask of patience that at eighty a man has learned to use consummately or not at all. It was quite clear that if he gave discussion rein these colts of other creeds would gallop away with him, Grim particularly. Discipline was out of the question. Whip he had none. Argument was useless. It would do no good to tell a man like Grim to let speculation alone.

"Would you go and find my servant Manoel?" he asked; for helplessness is like a weapon, in a wise man's hand.

Grim left the room.

Manoel sat cross-legged on a blanket in the corner of the pantry, hardly having moved from the spot where Ramsden dumped him down. The sin of speculation—if it is a sin—could not be laid to him, for he was dumb—determined—obstinate—like a dog that has hidden to escape a thrashing and will neither run away nor come to heel. He did not even shake his head when Grim ordered him into the padre's presence; so Grim went back and reported the state of affairs having more than one purpose in mind.

And it seemed good to Cyprian just then to supply Grim with the wherewithal to take his mind off the subject they had been discussing. Helplessness was put to work again.

"I am old. It tires me to undertake these—do you think Mr. Ramsden frightened him too much—I wonder—would you mind, eh? See what you can do with him—persuade him to come in here—yes? Such a rascal as he has been!—no, by no means always honest—but a servant—he has been a comfort. Will you talk to him?"

That was tantamount to *carte blanche*. Grim, incapable of nosing into the domestic secrets of his host, could, would and did crowd every limit to the edge when given leave. He squatted down, cross-legged too, in front of Manoel and waited until the shifty brown eyes had to come to a rest at last and meet his gray ones. (The passport says they are gray, which makes it legal, but no two agree as to their real color. Possibly they change, although his zeal is fixed.)

"You're in luck. You've one chance!" Grim said speaking in Punjabi.

Manoel did not answer; but the word luck probed the very heart of inborn passion.

"Da Gama and Braganza had no luck at all," said Grim, and Manoel lowered his eyes, not straight downward but along the arc of an ellipse because of certain racial peculiarities.

"Da Gama died. Braganza's house was burned. Do you feel brave?" Grim asked him.

Manoel looked up—suddenly.

"Who are *you?*" he asked.

His lips parted loosely. The corners of his mouth dropped, and he shifted his eyes to left and right, showing more than was wholesome of the bloodshot whites. Dread, unexpected and acute, was unmistakable; it acted like a solvent on the sullenness of fear. Grim saw his chance—almost too long to be called chance; he had nothing to go on but conjecture.

"Who do you *think* I am?" he retorted. "Look into my eyes! Who am I?"

Manoel hesitated, with the expression of self-conscious innocence facing a firing squad. Having double-crossed friend and enemy alike there was nothing to fall back on but his conscience, obviously. Grim bored in, only wishing he knew something definite to base assault on.

"Didn't you expect me?" he demanded.

"Yes, but——"

The million-to-one shot landed! Grim's face hardly changed expression, but his eyes had laughter in them that the Goanese was far too scared to recognize.

"—but I didn't look for a Punjabi. He who told me wore a yellow smock—a *sadhu*. I have not had time."

"Time!" Grim retorted, forcing the note of indignation.

"I have not had time, and I have not been paid," said Manoel, shifting his eyes again, and then himself, so that Grim, who was all alert suspicion jumped to a conclusion.

"Do you know they killed da Gama?" he asked, setting his face like brass, and Manoel shuddered. "Do you mean to tell me you have not been paid?" he went on, fixing his eyes on the Goanese and speaking slowly.

And whether or not Manoel had pocketed his price, imagination warned him he was helpless, at the mercy of some one who would harvest whether he had sown or not. Admission that he had been paid was no proof of it at all, he being what he was.

"But now he knows I was at the keyhole. He will dismiss me. And first he will investigate. So he will find out, and I do not dare! I will give the money back!"

That, too, was no proof that he had been paid. But it *was* proof that he had taken more than one step on the path of treason. Grim turned and swiped at a fly. Again the unhappy Manoel shifted—not so much his eyes this time as his whole person, although his eyes did move. It was because his eyes moved that he did not see Grim looking in the little kitchen mirror.

"Give it here!" said Grim.

"The money? I—I——"

"No. Give *it* here—or——"

"Let me go then! I must run! I do not dare stay and face his anger!"

But Grim knew now, and he is one of those who use knowledge, patiently or promptly as the case may be. He leaned forward. Manoel screamed, as a chicken does when a housewife has her by the legs. Grim seized him by the collar-band, and all ten chocolate fingers closed on the iron wrist. Grim jerked him forward, threw him on his face and sat on him, proceeding then to raise the blanket.

"Thought so! Yow! You little scorpion!"

HE SEIZED his victim's wrist and twisted it until a knife dropped—kicked the knife across the floor—glanced at the back of his thigh to observe that it was hardly bleeding—laid the folded blanket on the Goanese's head and sat on that—then lifted what had been beneath the blanket, carefully.

It needed care. It was an old book bound in vellum, cracked with age. Within, in sepia, beautifully written in the Maharatta tongue, with diagrams, on paper yellowed with age and thumbing, was what purported to be a literal translation of a very ancient roll.

The first page, on which the translator's name had very likely been, was missing. On the second was a pentagram within the dodeahedron—the geometrical figure on which alchemists assert the universe was built. Beneath that was a diagram of the Hindu cosmogony side by side with the Chaldaean. On the third page, in Maharathi at the top, as if continuing a paragraph from page one, was the following:

Whereafter, being certain that the roll would not be missed until (here a name was illegible) should come again, I hid in the cave with the hag who made provision for my needs, and by the light of the unextinguishable lamp I labored at the construing, with haste, that the whole might be accomplished, yet with diligence, lest errors enter in.

This finished volume witnesseth.

Which being done, this shall be hidden in a place known only to the hag. Whereafter, I will endeavor to return the roll lest (the undecipherable name again) should fall under suspicion and suffer for infidelity. That risk is great, for it is hard to come at the place where the rolls are kept.

But death is no more than the gates of life.

The hag has her instructions. So this fruit of my long husbandry shall fall into the right hands. He who guided hitherto being All-wise to accomplishment.

Then here begins:

On the next page, at the top, in bold Maharathi characters, was the first law of the Cabalists, and of all alchemists and true magicians since the world began.

AS ABOVE, SO BELOW.

Grim read no further, for the stuff absorbed him to the point where near-unconsciousness of every other circumstance prevailed. His whole being yearned to the lure of that musty volume and its secrets. He craved it as some unfortunates crave opium. The merely physical appeal of drugs, prodigious though it is, monopolizes no more than the intellectual attraction of the unknown does a man of Grim's temperament. If he had read another page he would have read a dozen, and a dozen would have only whetted appetite. He closed the book with a slap that brought the pungent dust out, and removed himself from Manoel's head.

"You insect! If you had the original of this I'd trade you my right hand for it!"

"Let me go!" sputtered Manoel. "Oh,

sir; I am afraid to face him! Take the book and let us both go!"

But Grim took book and Manoel, each by the back, and shoved the Goanese along in front of him into the padre's presence.

"He seems to have been keeping this for you," he said and laid the volume on Cyprian's knees.

"Had he read it?" demanded Cyprian.

"Oh, no! Oh, no, sir! Oh, father, oh, no, no! It is black magic and forbidden. I would *never* read it!"

"What odds? He wouldn't understand a word," said Grim, and Cyprian nodded.

"Let him go," said Cyprian. "Drive him from the house!"

But Grim had spoken English, and the fear that gnawed Manoel's bowels multiplied. It dawned on him that he had been tricked. Grim, then, was Father Cyprian's friend, and not——

"No, no, no!" he shouted. "No! You must be merciful! This is my sanctuaree! I may *not* be driven forth! I tell you I did it to save you from murder because you are old! You are ungrateful! You commit a great sin if you drive me forth!"

He wanted to throw himself down in the attitude of supplication, but Grim had him by the neck.

"He expected somebody," said Grim. "Shall we see this through now?"

"Face the adversary!" Cyprian answered.

But age gave way to youth. He waited for Grim to make the next decision. And Grim held his arm out, helping—almost lifting the old man from his chair.

"You'd better be seen at the door," he said. "We'll let them see Manoel go empty-handed."

He turned on the Goanese and shook him.

"Listen, asp! Get your belongings. Oh! Only a blanket, eh? Preparations all made—everything out of the house but that?"

He followed him to the pantry, watched him through the door, and seized him by the neck again as he emerged.

"Now, you've another chance. Don't speak in the street! Show you haven't got the book—look scared—walk! You understand me? If you disobey I'll——"

"Oh, oh! Onlee let me not go! I will——"

Grim stood back. It was Cyprian, trembling with age rather than emotion, who stood in the doorway and sped the errant Goanese with his left hand raised palm-outward and a look of pursed-up horror.

"I tell you, father, I did it to preevent murder!" sobbed Manoel with great tears running down into his whiskers. "Give me benediction then, I——"

Cyprian did not deny him that. It possibly accomplished more than Grim's threat. Manoel departed down-street with his head hung, and the blanket draped over one arm, avoiding all encounters; and a man in orange-yellow by the great tree opposite—where Ali's sons had sat—drew such deductions as he saw fit. Grim standing in shadow within saw the man make a signal.

"Good!" he said. "Shut the door now," and Cyprian obeyed as if learning lessons. It was hard, maybe, at eighty to learn to dispense with even a dishonest servant.

They returned to the sitting-room, whence the cloistered peace had gone, although the sunlight still streamed through the spaced jalousies.

"Pity the first page is missing," said Grim by way of making conversation.

"It isn't!" snapped Cyprian, and looked to see.

Confronted by the fact, his last strength seemed to vanish and he sat down, knocking the book to the floor. Grim rescued it.

"On the first page, at the top, was the finest cosmogony ever drafted," said Cyprian, "and underneath it an explanation of the terms used."

He spoke as if hope were dead forever. Grim changed the subject, or tried to—

"Let's hope our crowd don't return too soon!"

"I should have searched that blanket," Cyprian grumbled. "He had the first page wrapped in it. I know he had!"

Grim tried again.

"Tell me what the 'unextinguishable lamp' means on page two," he demanded.

"Mind your own business!" Cyprian snapped back, struggling to be calm. "If I will burn books, shall you rifle their secrets first? Phoenix from the ashes, eh? No, no! Hear no evil—see no evil—know no evil—that is my advice to you, my son! What I burn need not trouble you!"

"Are your books in this house?" Grim asked, suddenly alarmed at a random notion.

But Cyprian chose to be amused at that, shaking his head sidewise with the palsied humor of old-age.

"Do you think I am in my dotage?"

Grim had no time to reply. There came a long peal on the bronze bell, that clanged on its coiled spring as if the temples of all Thibet were in alarm. Grim went to the front door, opened suddenly, and stood back.

Three men entered, all in yellow smocks. They came in swiftly, almost on the run—stopped suddenly—and hesitated. They were surprized to see Grim.

"I am the padre sahib's new servant," he said in the dialect, smiling.

Then he turned the key and threw it out through the little round peep-hole that exists somewhere or other in most Indian front-doors.

"Father Cyprian is in there," he said, with a jerk of his head in the direction of the sitting-room.

They eyed Grim curiously, saying nothing. Bigger, stronger than Grim as far as appearance went, they wore the impudent expression of men who have been taught from infancy that they are better than the crowd, of other clay—bold, yet with a sort of sly air underlying impudence, and an abominably well-fed look, although they wore the simple smock of the ascetic. Finally they all three smiled at Grim, and one of them motioned him to lead the way into the sitting-room. The man next to him who motioned had a long silk handkerchief in one hand, and on his forehead the crimson signet of the goddess Kali. Grim stepped back instead of forward—ducked—stepped back again—and stood in the pantry entrance with his blood chilled and the gooseflesh rising.

"My hour is not yet!" he assured them.

Except for Grim's activity there had hardly been a motion visible, and yet—the handkerchief was in the other hand. The executioner had missed. And if there had been a score of witnesses they would likely all have sworn there had been no attempt made, for the pride of the Thug* is in his swiftness. None sees the strangling when it happens, it is so quick.

All three men smiled with the coppery, cast expression of determination that can bide its time. Grim motioned them again toward the sitting-room, and they went in one by one, the man with the handkerchief first, and the last man turning on the threshold to assure himself that Grim was not bent on reprisal. But no effort was made to exclude him. The door was left open until he walked in after them and closed it—having his own reasons.

Cyprian was very near collapse. The apparition of the three in orange-yellow came like an almost mechanical dénouement, to which Manoel's misconduct had been overture—warning perhaps. His old hands clutched and clutched again the carved ends of the chair-arms. But he said nothing. He was fighting for self-mastery. His lips were moving, probably in prayer; and repeatedly his eyes sought Grim's, although Grim refused him any answering signal. Grim knew he held the winning hand, and he who knows that is a fool if he fails to play it carefully.

His cue was to make believe he had no weapon—to postpone violence—to unmask purposes—to ascertain facts—before admitting the possession of a forty-five. Even when the orange-yellow exquisite tried thuggery he had not as much as made a gesture to reach his weapon, and the three were fairly satisfied that he was unarmed. They sat down in a row on the long strip of yak-hair rug that covered half the floor, facing the shuttered window, at an angle of forty-five to Cyprian.

Grim went and sat in the corner facing Cyprian, whence he could watch them at an angle athwart the flowing lines of light. They were nearer to the door than he was, but had no forty-fives, which made a difference. They produced what they did have—two old-fashioned muzzle-loading pistols between three of them—cocked, and fitted with percussion caps. Grim looked afraid, and Cyprian *was* afraid.

"You want what?" Cyprian demanded, speaking English for no other reason than that those words trembled out first.

"Books!" replied the middle of the three men, using the same language with a readiness and absence of foreign accent, that astonished because of his bronziness and the orange-yellow smock. There was no reason why he should not know English, except that he looked like one of those who pride themselves on their refusal to learn it at any price.

"What books?" asked Cyprian feebly.

But only his voice failed. There was no suggestion in his eye that he dreamed of yielding. Rather, he was recovering self-command as the effect of shock receded.

*Thuggee, as far as its practise by wandering bands is concerned, was stamped out by the Government long ago; but its methods, and the skill of its practitioners, survive.

"All the books you have, including that one," the same man answered, pointing at the volume Grim had saved from Manoel's clutches.

Cyprian took his own time about answering that, moving his lips and jaws as if first he had to masticate the words and glancing down at Grim repeatedly to see whether Grim had any signals for him.

But Grim sat still, the way a *chela* sits by the feet of his *guru*, unpresuming, waiting for the wisdom to come dropping word by word from the privileged lips of age. When the time should come for Grim to give a signal he was minded to make it abrupt and unmistakable.

"Who are you men?" demanded Cyprian at last; and the three in yellow looked amused. Either they disbelieved that he did not know, or they thought it amusing he should dare to ask; it was not clear which.

"We are they who demand the books," answered he with the handkerchief, and his companions nodded.

"And if the books are not here?" Cyprian asked.

"We will take that one, and you with it! Later you will show us where the others are," the man in the middle answered darkly.

Grim heard the noise he was waiting for, but did not move, for the sound was vague as if, on the sidewalk, thought was producing words, not action yet. He hoped the bell would not ring—hoped the key dropped through the hole would be interpreted—hoped Cyprian would not have apoplexy at his next remark. For it was time and he was ready.

"Holy one," he said in the dialect, playing the part of the *chela* still, "would it not be wiser if I tell them where a *few* books are?"

He allowed his eyes to wander furtively in the direction of the far wall, where the room was in shadow.

"And I win!" he exclaimed in English suddenly.

THEY had turned their heads to follow the direction of his glance. They looked back along the barrel of a forty-five. And of all things in the world that are difficult, the hardest is to tell which of three of you sitting side-by-side will be first in the path of a bullet.

"They are hollow-nosed bullets," Grim assured them. "Put your hands up, please!"

They held their hands up, palms to the front, suggesting Siva's image.

"We are not afraid," said the man in the middle. "We are watched for. Others come."

"Yes, others come," said Grim, aware of noises penetrating through the thick door and thicker walls.

"Bet you they're in here! What'll you bet?" demanded Jeremy's voice as the door flew open and the whole crowd poured in, Jeremy leading—all the crowd, that is, who had been in the room before, and two beside.

Ali of Sikunderam came last, volcanically angry, muttering Islamic blasphemy into his ruffled beard that either he had tugged at or some other man had pulled.

Narayan Singh went straight for the two pistols and kicked them away from their owners. One went off. A lead ball as large as a pigeon's egg was flattened on the stone wall close to Cyprian and the smell of cheap black powder filled the room. Using that as an excuse the three in orange-yellow put the ends of their turbans across their mouths and nostrils, moistening them thoroughly with spittle.

"Being very holy men no doubt, oh yes!" remarked Chullunder Ghose, picking up both pistols as his own perquisite. "Spirits of the cess-pool! Who invoked them? That is the worst-smelling powder! Are infernal regions advertised by Christian missionary actual? My aunt! Shall I open window, holy one?"

But Cyprian was losing consciousness. King went at a bound for the door and was in time to stop the three strange visitors with three blows. (India, who knew almost all human knowledge long before the West was born, has yet to learn to use her fists.) He bade Ali and his sons hold them, and returned to discover what the source of the reeking smoke was. He suspected a grenade with some new sort of fuse. But there was only the assassin's long silk handkerchief, dropped on the carpet as if by accident. He kicked it and nothing happened, though the smoke did not cease.

Meanwhile, Grim was holding Cyprian's head while Ramsden lifted him and Jeremy forced a window. Between them they got the old man's head into the fresh air. He showed signs of recovery. But the three coughed so violently that they could hardly hold him up, and the open window seemed to make no difference inside the room; there

was no telling where the smoke came from.

Nor was it actually smoke; rather a thin mist, with a hint of pearliness and green in it. There was a faint suggestion of sweetness and a little ether. It was a compound undoubtedly, and there was lots of it, but neither King nor yet Chullunder Ghose exploring on hands and knees could find its source nor any container that might have held it.

Outside the room, where the gas or whatever it was spread swiftly but not so densely into the hall, Ali and his sons were taking law into their own hands. There was a cellar door—a trap with big strap-hinges—and the weight of the door, with rust and friction added, was as much as two men striving mightily could move. That appealed, and the sons of Ali raised it. Down below was a stone-walled cellar twelve by twelve or so, empty of everything except some builders' trash.

Ali with his drawn knife drove the prisoners one at a time until they jumped down in there.

"If they break their legs, may Allah mortify the stumps!" he requested piously.

Meanwhile, tearing about the room, upsetting things and vowing there were devils loose, Narayan Singh lost equilibrium, fell over Chullunder Ghose, and collapsed with his head near the silken handkerchief. King seized him to drag him from the room, and noticed a burn where his face had touched the silk. Chullunder Ghose picked up the handkerchief and dropped it with a yell.

Ramsden, Jeremy and Grim picked Cyprian up between them and ran for the door with him, meaning to make for the street. They met King dragging the Sikh, and for a second there was a tight jam, into which Chullunder Ghose came headlong.

"Oh go! All go! Only go!" he shouted. "Now I know it! Manicheean magic!* It is death! It is unquenchable!"

Cyprian heard him.

"Poison—from the ancient books!" he gasped. "Come away!"

They had reeled through the door in front of the babu's impact.

"Where are those prisoners?" King shouted.

Ali and his sons began to labor at the trap-door, but it had jammed in place and was difficult to start again. Chullunder Ghose, purple with effort and choking, sized the situation up and charged back into the sitting-room.

He came back like a "soccer" forward, shouting and kicking the handkerchief along in front of him.

"Out of my way! Out of house! Quick!"

They fled before him—all but Ali and his sons. The men of Sikunderam considered dignity and flight before a babu, at his order, incompatible. They went on working at the trap, and raised it about six inches.

"So! Good! Now down again!"

The babu kicked the handkerchief through the opening and, as Sikunderam showed no symptoms of obedience, jumped on the trap, forcing it out of their fingers and down into its bed with a report like an explosion. There he squatted, looking like a big bronze temple image.

"Now is good!" he said. "Keep open house until gas shall evanesce! Practitioners of Manicheean deviltry will now be hoist like engineers with own petard! Shakespearian homeopathic remedy! *Verb* very *sap!* Oh yes! Tell *sahibs*, no more danger now!"

And saying that, Chullunder Ghose himself keeled over.

CHAPTER VIII

"He is very dead!"

IN ONE hot brick cell, closed by an iron door with a peep-hole in it, there were three of the sons of Sikunderam, one Hindu in orange-yellow with a crimson caste-mark on his forehead, who had refused his name, and Fernandez de Mendoza de Sousa Diomed Braganza, whose name and occupation were as well known as his temper was notorious and his predicament acute.

None of the others seemed to worry much. The "sons" were aware that father Ali and his patrons knew their whereabouts, and it is Law in the North, whence they came, that the feudal claims are first. There would either be a rescue, or a use of influence, or possibly raw bribery this side of midnight. They were sure of that, whether rightly or wrongly.

And he in orange-yellow, having had the trick turned back on him by Jeremy, was none the less apparently at ease. He wore the would-like-to-be-dangerous smile of the hanger-on of priests, not subtle, rather threatening—the smile of a man who holds

*The Manichees were Persians, whose teaching was a form of dualism. But they also celebrated mysteries and were said to practise magic and theurgy.

himself superior to others as rule number one of policy. There is nothing in the world more sure than that the priests and politicians *always* abandon their clients when convenient; nor anything more fixed than the assurance of the due-to-be-abandoned until the miserable fact confronts them.

Diomed, on the other hand, was neither full of faith nor hope; and he never did pin much to charity. Having counted on forgiveness of his sins, he found that there was fortune still to reckon with; and he did not believe that fortune ever favored Goanese much. He supposed he must sin some more.

"We are five in one predicament. Shall we compare notes?" he suggested.

Being first man in that cell he felt almost in *loco parentis*, a guise that any innkeeper assumes without much difficulty. That son of Ali whom he had recognized in the street was not one of those detained, so he was unaware of facing men whose enmity he had already, and could not lose without suitable compensation, of which they, and they only, would be judges.

The sons of Ali held their peace. Their knives had been taken from them. Talk is no equivalent for steel. Lacking the one, in the North's opinion, it is unheroic and incontinent to substitute the other.

"Wait!" says Sikunderam. "The hour of God's appointing cometh! Wait, saying nothing!"

But the man in orange-yellow, regarding Allah as a myth, served an even more destroying goddess, whose devotees are encouraged to seek opportunity, not wait. He spoke, and his voice was strangely reminiscent, so that Diomed stared open-mouthed at him.

"Some set fire to a hotel in the night," he said.

"Mine! My hotel!" said Diomed.

"So there are three," said he in orange-yellow: "he who knows the secret, they who wish the secret kept, and he or they who wish to know who did it."

"Do you know who did it?" demanded Diomed, thrusting his little black-bearded face forward so as to read the other's expression better.

But there was no expression, except that cast-copper smile betokening superiority. He in yellow was returning the compliment by watching Diomed, so neither of them saw the rapt attention displayed on the faces of Ali's sons. But the men of the North, who are fools, as all India knows, were born with their ears to the whimpering wind. They are easy to deceive, but as to voices and the memory of voices never. Six eyes from Sikunderam, more used to lean, long distances, met in the cell gloom and three heads nodded almost imperceptibly.

"They who wish the secret not known may bid first," said the orange-yellow man. "Nothing for nothing and from nothing. The key that opens is the key that fits. My needs are a lock that holds me. Has any one the key?"

He stared into the eyes of Sikunderam, impudently, challenging. In the dark of the cell they looked like three young startled animals.

"Whoever would take on himself the theft of that policeman's watch would have my friendship," said he in orange-yellow.

"You know!" exclaimed Diomed. "You know who burned my hotel!"

"I know!" he confessed, with another of his bronze smiles, glancing surreptitiously at Ali's sons.

His need was to make *them* understand him. Diomed might shout to heaven that he had stolen the watch, and the world would only vote him mad; but if one of those Hillmen should confess, and the other two should confirm it, what court could help believe?

"I will say who set fire to the hotel, unless——"

"It was they! It was they! They did it!" Diomed interrupted. "Now I know them! They are the devils who fought on the roof! They are the sons of evil mothers who——"

He was silenced by a slap across the mouth, back-handed, that made his lips bleed and cut the knuckles of the smiter. But not one word was said to him. Nor did he who had struck the blow speak at all, for economy is the essence of good teamwork.

It was the second of three self-styled brothers who pointed a lean fore-finger; and the third who gave tongue to what all three had in mind.

"Aye! Thou knowest! And we know! We know the voice of him who cried '*Bande Materam!*' That same voice—thy voice—cried 'Fire!' before the fire was set!"

"Ye were there then?" the Hindu answered mockingly; and Diomed, with a half-breed's instinct for coming violence, drew his knees up to his chin on the bench. He screwed himself into the corner to be able to jump either way.

"Aye, we were there, seven of us and the father of the seven, a Sikh too, and a Jat and some *sahibs*, who will swear to that voice of thine, thou raven croaking in a cave! We are not men who can be imposed on! We——"

The man in orange-yellow interrupted. Like all who pride themselves on their intelligence he underrated that of his would-be victims. He threatened them. Whereas, two things are sure: if you threaten the men of Sikunderam you must be able to make good, and prove it; and if you plead to them, you must prove you are empty-handed—a true supplicant for charity. Between those two poles all earth lies belly-upward to be bargained over. They are poles like lighthouses that no man possessed of open eyes could miss. But pride is like box-blinkers.

"You Moslems don't like to be hanged. I can call witnesses. Better make terms with me!"

The Indian courts of justice war with a system of perjury that is older and more popular than law. The consequent precautions and delays, and the system, that if ten men swear to a thing and twenty swear against it, the twenty win, may lend itself to obvious abuses that, according to Sikunderam, are avoided easiest with cold steel.

The sons of Ali had no steel. Tradition would have counseled patience and dissimulation. But the heat in the cell was growing insufferable for men born where the clean air whistles off everlasting snow-peaks, and stuffiness—being kin to strangulation—breeds hysteria, which in turn brings all innate proclivities to the surface and upsets any calculation based on intellect. He in orange-yellow was an intellectual. He knew the rules. The sons of Ali were no psychologists.

"Let him die before he does us injury! Be quick, my brothers!"

THAT was a call for action, understood and never argued over. He in orange-yellow gave a shout blended of agony and unbelief as fingers like hairy spider-legs closed on his throat. Other parts of his anatomy grew palsied with pain, in a grip that he had no more chance of breaking than a sheep has of breaking the butcher's hold. Noise ceased.

It was at that stage of proceedings that the cell-guard, whose ear had been to the peep-hole, hurried to summon his officer. He ached with ill-will, because his sinews had been twisted when the sons of Ali objected to arrest. He wanted to see them dragged out one by one and beaten. But exactly at the same moment there entered from the street three men in orange-yellow, with the caste-mark of Kali on their foreheads, who approached the desk and made signs to the bewildered officer. The bewilderment was all too obvious.

He was as displeased as a magistrate might be to whom an arrested violator of the law made masonic signals; nevertheless, not merely so certain what to do, since there was no appeal in this case to his honor and the dictates of conscience set true and square. He was bluffed before they said a word to him.

"This is a day of reckoning," announced the leader of the three. "One of ours is in your keeping. He is part of the price. We demand him."

The Moslem officer hardly hesitated. Saying nothing, but livid under the impress of that fatalistic fear which is the only force blackmail has, he started toward the cells and disappeared through a door into the corridor, followed by the cell-guard. The door slammed, but opened again a minute later. The officer stood there beckoning. The three followed him in, and the door slammed shut a second time.

"Look!"

The officer flung the cell-door open and the cell-guard brought his carbine to the charge, showing his teeth for extra argument. The three in yellow, self-controlled, peered in like visitors being shown the sights, their bronze faces showing no more emotion than the image on copper coins; but the police-officer was trembling with anxiety.

"I ask you to believe—" he stammered in Punjabi.

One of the three interrupted him, touching his sleeve, not wasting any words.

The three were interested—neither more nor less. There was possibly as much trace of amusement on their lips as you may see on the granite monument of one of the

old Pharaohs—semi-humorous acceptance of the iron rule of destiny, observed without surprize. The officer tried speech again.

"Beware, most honorables! They are dangerous!"

The same quiet hand on his sleeve requested silence. The three had seen all there was to see, but continued looking; for the processes of thought are said to be accomplished best with all eyes on the object and no interrupting voice.

In front of the door, as if laid there for inspection, was the body of the individual in orange-yellow who had threatened the sons of Sikunderam. Most of his throat had been torn out by human fingers, and the back of his head lay flat against the shoulder-blades in proof of a broken neck. Both arms were twisted so that the hands were around again to where they should be, backs to the floor. The feet were toe to toe, after describing three quarters of an outward circle, and a leg was obviously broken.

"He is very dead!" remarked the one voice of Sikunderam, speaking for three minds.

The sons of Ali sat back on the bench, backs to the wall, in an attitude that gave them leverage in case one indivisible impulse should decide them to attack. They could launch themselves from the wall like tigers out of ambush. One hint of reprisals and no cell-door on earth would be able to slam quick enough to keep them in.

But unaccountably there grew an atmosphere of calm, as if Allah, Lord of Kismet, had imposed an armistice. The electric tension eased, as it were, and muscles with it. Some one in yellow smiled, and Sikunderam answered in kind through a gap in a black beard. All three men in yellow strode into the cell, stepping over their coreligionist, and one of them turned to beckon in the officer, who, at their suggestion, sent the cell-guard to the office out of sight and hearing.

"Is it lawful to imprison these five, of three languages, three races, three religions, in one cell?" was the first question. There was only one answer possible:

"No, but——"

The same quiet finger on the same sleeve banished the explanation. Without a word said it was made clear that the legal, or rather the illegal fact was all-sufficient.

"Most honorables, that is how your coreligionist in yellow met his death!" piped Diomed, emerging out of a catalepsy. "Most worthy followers of Kali, these three savages attacked him without excuse and butchered him brutally. I offer to give evidence!"

Miscegenated intuition—perverted, that is—told Diomed that his chance lay in taking sides against the man in uniform. The three he addressed were obviously visitors, not prisoners, and the officer's fear of them was obvious.

"This policeman threw us into one cell in the face of protests. *He* is responsible."

He pointed at the officer, who scowled, but the three ignored both of them. Instead, the one who acted spokesman launched a question that was half-proposal, half-riddle, and breath-taking regarded either way.

"You understand, that if you escape from this cell illegally, you are guilty of that in addition to the charge of murdering this man?"

"And other charges—other charges, señores! They burned my hotel! Arson! That is what the judges call it—an indictable offense!"

One of the sons of Ali smote Diomed over the mouth again, and nobody objected. There was a little something after all in his thought that fortune hardly favors Goanese. The sons of Ali fell back on the code of Sikunderam, which calls for incredulity at all times, but particularly when a Hindu makes a proposition. They looked what they were exactly—men from out of town. The smiter rubbed his knuckles.

"Ye speak riddles," said the spokesman.

"You understand, that they who might set you at liberty, ignoring authority, would have the power to overtake and kill?" asked the man in yellow.

It began to dawn on Sikunderam that these were overtures for a bargain. All three faces closed down in accordance with the code, that decrees a bargain shall be interminable and he who can endure the longest shall have the best of it. But the men in yellow were in haste. One of them drew a long silk handkerchief from hand to hand with a peculiar, suggestive flick.

"You understand that for all advantages there is a price? Go free!"

"But— but—" said the officer.

The finger on his sleeve commanded silence. He obeyed.

"Go free, in the fear of Kali, Wife of Siva, the Destroyer! Go free, until a day of reckoning! When Kali asks the price—observe!"

As if one thought functioned in the minds of all three, one of the men in yellow stepped toward the Goanese and taking him by the shoulders jerked him to his feet. The Goanese was too astonished to defend himself.

"Have I not offered—" he began; but the second of the three in yellow pushed him sidewise, so that he reeled backward on his heels toward the third.

There was a motion of the handkerchief, as quick as lightning but less visible, and Diomed fell unpicturesquely—dead—a heap of something in a soiled check shirt and crumpled collar—so dead that not a muscle twitched or sigh escaped him.

"For a death there must be a death," said one of the men in yellow.

The teeth of Sikunderam flashed white in a grin of pleased bewilderment.

"Hee-hee! He didn't slay your yellow man. We did it!" chuckled the spokesman.

The Thug was at no pains to explain his beastly creed. It was better to leave the three less cultivated savages to speculate on what the sacrifice had meant. His point was won. He had impressed them. They had seen the swiftness of the silken death. Undoubtedly they would soon begin to ponder on the fact that Diomed was slain in the presence of an officer of police, and to couple that with another mystery.

"Go! Let them go!" ordered one of the three, and the officer began to fumble with the lock.

He flung the door open with an air of petulant impotence, and it struck the cell-guard, who had crept back to listen. The door hit his heel as he ran and one of the three in orange-yellow stepped out into the corridor without the least suggestion of surprize. He beckoned him. Not a word was said. The second—not he with the handkerchief—held out a hand to warn the sons of Ali that freedom was postponed. The first man continued beckoning, and the cell-guard kept on coming, carbine at the charge, as if he intended violence. But he stepped into the cell with his eyes fixed in a stony stare, as if he had been hypnotized. It was the second man's turn to beckon; and as the "wretched, rash, intruding fool" obeyed the unspoken call of nemesis, the third man used the handkerchief. The cell-guard fell in a heap on Diomed. The officer picked up the carbine mechanically and laid it on the bench.

"Now go!" said the spokesman, motioning the Hillmen out with a gesture worthy of the angel of creation bidding the aeons begin. "Kali is all-seeing. Ye can not hide. Kali is all-hearing. Ye may not tell. Kali is unforgetful. Therefore, when a price is set pay swiftly—even as ye saw this man pay!" He laid a finger on the officer's sleeve, who trembled violently. "For if not, ye will pay as these did!" He signified the corpses with a gesture. "Go!"

So the three went, wondering, not troubled as to what the official explanation would be, of three murders in a cell and three lost prisoners. The newspapers next day might call that mystery. To them another mystery was paramount, and all-absorbing:

Who were the men who had released them? Where had they learned that skill with a handkerchief? Why had they slain Diomed? And why had they three been released? Moreover, what would the price be that was mentioned, and would they—three Moslems—be justified in paying it, suppose they could, to the priests, of a Hindu goddess? How much would they dare tell to Ali, their ferocious sire, considering the silence that was laid on them? And if they should tell Ali, and he should tell Jimgrim, for instance, and Jimgrim should consult the others, would the priests of Kali visit vengeance on themselves as the fountainheads of disobedience?

There was more to it besides:

If Kali was all-seeing, as the Three had warned them, did that simply mean that they were being followed?

He in the middle faced about suddenly and walked backwards with his arms in his brothers'; but he could see no Hindus in pursuit. They tried a score of tricks that Hillmen use when the stones are lifted in the valleys and the "shooting-one-another-season" has begun—tricks that the hunted leopard tries, to assure himself that he has left the hunter guessing wild. But though they hid, and strode forth suddenly from doorways, so that passers-by jumped like shying horses in fear of highway robbery, they detected no pursuit.

"The man in yellow lied to us," said one

of them at last. "They let us go, and that is all about it."

"But why?"

"They were afraid."

"But of what? They could have killed us easily."

"Nay! None slays me with a handkerchief! By the Bones of Allah's Prophet——"

"They could have slain the cell-guard in the passage, and could then have shot us with his carbine through the hole in the iron door. They were not afraid of us!"

"Nevertheless, we three are afraid of them!" announced the brother who had spoken first. The other two did not dispute the fact. "I say—if we are wise—we will—hold our peace—a little while—and wait—and see—and consider—and if perhaps—there should seem to be a need—and an advantage—then later we might tell. What say you?"

"Allah! Who put wisdom into *thy* mouth?"

"It is wisdom! Let us consider it!"

They agreed to use their own term, to leave the proposition "belly-upward" for a while.

CHAPTER IX

"Silence is silent."

CYPRIAN was not in quandary. He would have known what to do, but his eighty-year-old lungs were too full of a sickly-tasting gas for him to function physically. That which is born of the spirit is spirit, but the brain must wait on material processes. He was just then in Jeremy's keeping—held in the Australian's arms—being thought for by Jeremy.

And as the stars in their courses once warred against Sisera, circumstances and his reputation combined to trick Cyprian. Never would it have entered Jeremy's head that dignity, discipline, responsibility to some one higher up were necessary ingredients of Cyprian's code. Having saved the padre's life the only other thing that Jeremy considered was "the game."

Then there were the neighbors. Right and left were locked godowns stored with merchandise. Opposite, behind shade trees and a wall were Goanese, who would not have thought it moral, expedient, polite or safe to interfere in the padre's doings uninvited, even supposing they had seen what was going on. And the heat prevented their seeing anything, for May was merging into June and none who could afford to stay indoors dreamed of venturing forth.

The remainder of the street's inhabitants were Moslems with a sprinkling of Hindus at the lower end; and every one of those knew Cyprian by reputation as a student, and perhaps a practitioner of black magic—a man to be feared, if not respected; moreover, a man with influence. Nine out of any ten of them would have looked the other way if Cyprian's house were burning down. The tenth in nearly every instance would have run as far away as legs or a bicycle could take him.

The constable, whose duty it was to patrol that street, having quitted himself well with one arrest that morning, retired to a basement cellar to brag of his doings and gamble on fighting quails.

On top of all that there undoubtedly had been some deliberate clearing of the street by influences never named but referred to, when spoken of at all, as "they." The street was as peculiarly empty as it sometimes is when a royal personage is due for assassination.

The obvious course for a man in Cyprian's position, with three would-be assassins in his cellar and his whole house full of anaesthetic, was to report at once to the authorities, leaving subsequent developments to take their course. But Cyprian was in no condition to give orders; and none of the others, King included, cared to invoke official skepticism. No man, who confesses to himself that he is searching for a heap of gold as heavy as the Pyramid, and for the books that explain how the heap was accumulated, is exactly unselfconscious when official investigation looms among the possibilities.

There was furthermore Narayan Singh, unconscious—in itself an almost incredible circumstance; for that doughty Sikh is a drinker of notorious attainment and less likely than any of them to succumb to fumes. He had keeled over like a gassed canary. King and Grim were giving him first aid, considering his recovery of vastly more importance than any debatable obligation to call in the police. They knew the police for mere bunglers at best and sheer obstructionists as far as true inquiry was concerned. They knelt on the sidewalk one each side of the Sikh, who breathed like a

cow with its throat cut; and Jeremy, holding Cyprian like a baby in his arms, came and watched.

"If you can make him vomit, he's yours!" he advised. "Get something functioning—no matter what. One natural process encourages the next. Knead him in the solar plexus."

King and Grim, having tried all other methods, experimented with Jeremy's.

"—— it! There's an antidote if only we could lay our hands on it," said King. "I've heard about this stuff—saw its effects before. It's a capsule as big as a rupee. They puncture it under a handkerchief. The minute the air gets to it the contents turn to gas. Beastly stuff burns the skin as it emerges, but changes again as it spreads and becomes anesthetic. The thieves who use the stuff carry the antidote with them. It's all in one of Cyprian's books."

"If pop 'ud wake," suggested Jeremy. But Cyprian only sighed.

"Where are the three Hindus?" Grim demanded.

"In the cellar. Ali pitched 'em in there—first-class job. Chullunder Ghose is sitting on the hatch to keep 'em out of further mischief," Jeremy announced.

"Ramsden—where's Rammy?" Grim demanded.

"Here."

Jeff, with a cloth about his face well drenched in water, had been exploring the floor of the sitting-room on hands and knees for evidence that would explain the enemy's method. He emerged through the front door, panting.

"Gas is disappearing," he gasped.

"Rammy! Narayan Singh is going West! Get a move on! Get those three Hindus. *Make* 'em produce their antidote! Stop at nothing!" That was Grim with the mask off—dealer in fundamentals.

So the purple patch that was the shadow of Jeff Ramsden ceased from existence on the white wall—simply ceased. He can be swift when occasion calls for it. Within, where more or less silence had been, was a great noise, as Jeff's weight landed on the trap and that of Chullunder Ghose, capsized, complaining.

"Off the trap! Lively!"

Ali of Sikunderam and his sons had been lying belly-downward listening in vain for noises from below. Imagination yearned for cries of pain and half-invented them. But the door was too thick, and sat too tightly in its bed for even their fond wish to get itself believed.

"By Allah I swear I broke the legs of all three!" boasted Ali, face to the wood.

BUT he said no more, for Ramsden seized him by arm and leg and threw him clear, the sons scampering away on hands and knees before the like indignity could happen to themselves. Then Ramsden got his fingers into the only crevice, strained, grunted, strove and gave it up. The door and frame were jammed hermetically.

"Crowbar!"

All Sikunderam—to employ their estimate—scattered in search of cold iron, while Jeff continued torturing his fingers vainly. One of the sons came in from the street on a run with loot from a Moslem godown. Blood on his forearm told the story—view of a crowbar through a window—action—acquisition.

"Good!" said Ramsden, and the woodwork began splintering forthwith—old teak, as dry and hard as temple timber, ripping apart with a cry as if it lived, and desired to live.

"Get a rope—or a ladder!" Ramsden grunted.

Out on the sidewalk, under Jeremy's running fire of comment and advice, Narayan Singh had vomited and was showing other signs of resuming the burden of life, as Jeremy had prophesied. Cyprian, on the contrary, had fallen into the easy sleep that overtakes old folk and infants, so that Jeremy, sniffing to make sure the gas was all gone, carried him inside presently and up the narrow stone stairs to the first-floor bedroom—clean, simple, severe as a monastery, yet comfortable, since only the needless things were missing.

The head of the bed was backed against an iron door that was papered over, white like the rest of the walls, with an overlapping fringe to hide the tell-tale crack.

The legs of the bed were set tight against wooden blocks screwed down to the floor, with the obvious purpose of reenforcing the lock that was low enough down on the door to be hidden by the bed-frame. Jeremy noticed how tightly the casters were jammed against the blocks, as if they had been subjected to tremendous pressure, and it was that, as he laid Cyprian down, that caused

him to scrutinize the door more curiously.

He is sure of his senses, having trained them. Too used to deceiving others' eyes he disciplines his own. He could have sworn that the door moved—inward—by a fraction of an inch; that is to say toward the wall and away from the head of the bed. He tested it, after making sure again that Cyprian was sleeping, and discovered he could get the fingers of one hand in between the bed-post and the door. And there was a long mark on the white paper covering the iron door, in proof that it had recently pressed outward against the bed.

So either the lock was unlocked, or it did not function, or else it had been locked again since he entered the room.

Curiosity eats Jeremy like acid. He must know or be miserable. Mystery merely whets appetite. With another glance to make sure Cyprian was sleeping, he cautiously pulled the bed clear of the wooden blocks and rolled it a yard along the floor. Then he stooped to examine the key-hole. There was no key in it, and there had not been, for it was still stuffed with soap, and a piece of white paper rubbed on to the soap was in place—Cyprian's modest effort at constructive camouflage. On the floor lay an irregularly oblong sliver of white stone—two inches by an inch. The door had been forced from the inside, recently.

Jeremy tore back the paper from door and wall in two considerable strips. The tongue of the old-fashioned lock projected not more than an inch into unprotected stonework and was merely resting now in a neat groove that the fallen sliver fitted. Nothing—on Jeremy's side, that is—prevented the door from swinging open. He tested it with his fingers. It refused to yield.

And he could swear he had seen it move when he first laid Cyprian on the bed.

He glanced at Cyprian, half-inclined to wake him—glanced at the iron door again and speculated.

"Probably the old boy keeps his books in there. Shock might kill, if he wakes and learns thieves are in the coop. Sleep on, Melchizedek!"

Knowing the danger to himself of using firearms, in a country in more or less perennial rebellion, where the carrying of modern weapons is forbidden except for sport, Jeremy looked about him for an implement less compromising to himself. In a corner, behind a cretonne curtain under which the padre's garments hung, he found an Irish blackthorn walking stick—a souvenir of Ballyshannon days, where Cyprian once did temporary duty. The stick was as strong as a professional shillalah with twice the length—a deadlier weapon than gun or sword in given circumstances.

Down-stairs Ramsden broke up the trap-door section by section—layer by layer. It was so thick and so well carpentered that nothing less than absolute destruction laid the hinges bare. By the time it was possible to reach the bolt, that swung in place across the whole width of the trap and bit into twelve-inch beams, there was no more sense in fooling with it, for the door was totally destroyed. Jeff used the bolt for a purchase for his rope, the sons of Ali having failed to find a ladder, and went down hand over hand into the dark.

Not even the eyes of Sikunderam could see more than an unexpected red light, and trash heaped in a mess below; but there seemed to be less of the trash than when Ali had flung the three into the pit. Where a pile of boxes had been, that should have lessened Jeff's descent, there was nothing to meet his exploring feet and he had to drop the last yard, for the rope was short.

The next they all knew was a roar like a bull's as Jeff joined battle with an unseen foe; and that was followed by an increase of the crimson glow and the indrawn roar of a furnace. It was like a glimpse into the bowels of a great ship, or into Tophet.

"Come on! Help, you fellows!" was all the explanation Jeff had time for—English at that—a sure enough sign he was excited.

King left Narayan Singh in Grim's hands—came on the run—and swung down the rope like a sailor. And Chullunder Ghose was next, "so curious" as he explained it afterwards, resembling a seaman less than any other being in the world, first jammed in the broken trap like a cork in the neck of a bottle—breaking the hold of the woodwork by sheer weight and strength—then suddenly descending with the rope like red-hot wire between his hands, to fall the last yard and be met—as it seemed to him—by an ascending floor constructed of upturned splinters.

And down on Chullunder Ghose in that unfortunate predicament there dropped Sikunderam in swift succession, sire and

sons, grateful for the cushion—but to Allah, not the babu—and stepping off without pausing to pass compliments.

AT THE cellar's farther end there was a door down, and the whole of Cyprian's arrangements for the eventual holocaust of black books were plain to see in the light of a galloping fire. The holocaust was prematurely born. The three had set the match that was to have been Cyprian's torch on his last pilgrimage. The books, stacked hundreds in a pile inside an ancient pottery kiln, were all alight and the glue in the backs of some of the more modern ones was priming for the rest.

Cyprian had stacked ample fuel under them in readiness, but to that the three had added trash. There was no fire-door to be shut to exclude a draft; the furnace-jaws gaped wide. The chimney at the junction of Cyprian's house and the godown was serving its ancient purpose, and the trap-door that Ramsden broke was letting enough draft to feed the ravening fires of Eblis, the avenging apostate. Out on the sidewalk Grim saw the shadow of sulfur-and-black smoke belching from the summit of the old quiescent kiln; Narayan Singh was left to do his own recovering, and Grim, guided by instinct, took the stairs four at a stride instead of plunging like an *ifrit* into Ramsden's broken hole.

He was just in time to see Jeremy swing the blackthorn down two-handed on the back of a head that emerged for reconnoitering purposes through the cautiously opened iron door. The blow would have cut the head clean off if the weapon had only been an axe. A man in yellow fell face-forward and his shoulders prevented the door from shutting, although some one tried to pull him back in by the feet. Simultaneously Grim and Jeremy seized the iron door and wrenched it wide open, and a stab like a fork of lightning missed Grim by the thickness of a moonbeam—not quick enough though—Jeremy brought the blackthorn down on a long knife with a serpent handle, disarming a yellow, invisible some one, who dropped whatever else he held and retreated into deeper gloom.

Cyprian slept on, moving his lips and old fingers as if dreaming. Jeremy, all-trusting to his own luck, signaled, passed the blackthorn into Grim's hand and reached for matches. Grim agreed with him. With their feet they shoved the victim of Jeremy's weapon back whence he had come and stepped through over him, closing the iron door at their backs. Then Jeremy struck a match—in time—exactly in the middle of the nick of shaven time. The blackthorn came in use again—crack on a wrist that thrust upward with another such knife as the first man had tried to sting with. The blow broke the wrist. Some one smothered an exclamation.

"—— these matches!" said Jeremy, and struck another one.

On the floor of a closet about ten by ten lay two of the Three. The man whom Jeremy had first struck was dead undoubtedly. The other's leg was broken—Ali's work—and now the wrist was added to his inconveniences. He was writhing in pain, though making no noise, and all mixed up with the dead man. Evidently two of them had been carrying the fellow with the broken leg, and the third had run back through a door that faced the iron one—a rat in a stopped run, panicking this and that way.

Jeremy struck another match and Grim tried the inside door. As he laid his hand on it the fugitive, finding retreat cut off below, came charging back and Grim recoiled against the wall, guarding with the blackthorn like a singlestick. The man in yellow lunged at him with a knife such as the other two had used, but as he lurched forward with his weight behind the thrust the point of another knife knocked his upper front-teeth out and cut through his upper lip, emerging an inch or two, then turning crimson in the flow of blood. Through the opened inner door came red light glowing and diminishing—glowing and diminishing—silhouetting Ali of Sikunderam.

"It is all in the trick of the thrust, *sahibs*, announced Ali, stooping over the victim to withdraw his beloved weapon. "See—the neck is broken—thus—the point of the knife goes in between two vertebræ, and Allah does the rest!"

"What's that fire below there?" Grim demanded.

"The old kiln. Rammy sahib——"

"What's burning?"

"All the priest's books, praise Allah!"

Grim's face looked ghastly in the waning red light. In that moment he saw all his hopes go up in smoke and flame.

"There'll be a blaze through the top of

the chimney by now that'll bring the whole fire brigade!" he announced with resignation.

"Not a bit. Trust Ramsden," said another voice.

Athelstan King came up like a stoker from a ship's inferno, more than a little singed and sucking burned finger-ends.

"Ramsden found an old sheet of corrugated iron underneath the litter and bent it to fit the fire-door. The draft's in control. It was hot work."

"And the books?" Grim asked him.

"Napoo! No more books! Where's the padre?"

"Fast asleep."

"When he learns this it'll kill him," said King with conviction, unconsciously confirming Jeremy's first guess.

Ramsden came up the narrow stairway and demanded light. The glow behind him was so low that his bulk in the door obscured it altogether. Grim cautioned him and opened the door into Cyprian's room. The light fell on Ramsden's singed beard and his clothes all charred in patches.

"All red ash now," he whispered. "No more smoke."

Jeremy tiptoed into the bedroom and stood looking down at Cyprian. Presently he felt his pulse.

"Fever!" he whispered. "He's unconscious."

Ramsden gathered up the man with the broken wrist and leg and laid him on the floor in Cyprian's room. They all trooped in, followed by Ali and his sons, Chullunder Ghose last. The babu was the only one who showed any symptoms of contentment, although he, too, was singed, and burned about the hands.

"Expensive consideration for man with family on microscopic stipend!" he remarked, removing a burned silk turban and replacing it. "What shall do next?"

None answered. None knew exactly what to do. One of Ali's sons—the youngest—succumbed to the weak man's impulse to invoke the Blessing of the Platitudes.

"Silence is golden," he announced sententiously.

"O excellent advice! O god out of a Greecian box! O oracle!" Chullunder Ghose exclaimed. "All the wisdom of all those wicked books is incarnated into this fool! Silence is not only golden, it is silent! Silence is as silence does! *Verb* very *sap!* O *sahibs*, let us muzzle all these men! Shut up this shop until darkness intervenes, then beat it in jargon of Jimgrim sahib—same expressive—very! Beat all concerned, this prisoner included unless he gives us every information, plus!"

"Plus what?" asked Ramsden.

"Plus obedience—not like these sons of Himalayan mothers, whose only virtue is that they economize by sleeping mostly in the jail!"

Ali was over by the window, looking out into the street.

"My sons are here," he announced grandiloquently, trying to hide a grin.

"Where? Outside? Call them in!" King snapped at him. "We don't want more publicity."

Ali threw the window open and beckoned. The sons came lumbering up-stairs like half-trained animals.

"Tell the *sahibs:* how did you leave the jail?" demanded Ali. Maybe intuition warned him that they had a splendid lie all cooked and ready to serve.

"We fought our way out! See—we left our knives in the guts of the police! Each of us slew three men!"

"Allah! My boys! My sons!" exclaimed Ali.

The others all looked down at Cyprian. Jeremy took a towel and put water on the old man's parched lips. None—not even Ali—as much as half-believed the story of the fight with the police, but all knew it was based on lawlessness of some sort that would not add to Cyprian's peace of mind when he should recover consciousness.

"If he pulls through this, the worry and disappointment will kill him anyhow," said Ramsden, rather ignoring the circumstance that for upward of eighty years Cyprian had been training himself to withstand the slings of fortune.

"We might give the old boy a chance," suggested Jeremy. And in his eye there gleamed antipodean mischief.

Ali was still at the window.

"Lo, a constabeel!" he announced. "He observes smoke issuing from the chimney without a tikut.* Lo, he speaks with Narayan Singh, who lies to him. A child can tell you when a Sikh lies. Lo, he writes a reeport in his parketbuk.** There will be a

*Ticket. The English word is used to mean any kind of pointed and numbered permit. **Pocket-book.

summons before municipal magistrates. I know the custom."

Narayan Singh, a little weak yet as to equilibrium, came up-stairs and thrust his head cautiously through the bedroom doorway.

"There will be a summons for smoke-nuisance against a Hindu, name of Murgamdass," he announced with a grin.

Grim caught all eyes, glancing from face to face, as a captain measures up his team in an emergency.

"Did the policeman appear suspicious?" he asked quietly.

"Very!" Narayan Singh answered. "He suspected a Hindu of seeking to avoid payment of fee for necessary permit to use furnace within municipality. I confirmed his plausible suspicion, hoping——"

"Anything else?" Grim asked him.

"No, *sahib*. Nothing else.

"You fellows game?"

Grim caught all eyes again. If they were not game, none are. There were all the brands and all the elements of that *geist* that is all-conquering because it simply cannot understand defeat.

"Two courses," Grim announced. "We can call in the police, and quit."

Chullunder Ghose sighed like a grampus coming up for air.

"Or we can carry on and face the consequences. Vote please. Those in favor——"

Chullunder Ghose raised both hands; all the others one.

"Ayes have it. Very well. Then after dark we'll take these two dead yellow-boys and plant them where their friends put da Gama. Meanwhile, take Cyprian somewhere and get a good doctor for him. Don't say who he is. Ali, you and your sons guard the prisoner while we find a good place to hide him in."

TO BE CONTINUED

ON TICKLING A SNAKE

by Eugene Cunningham

YOU were camping in desert-country and at nightfall, after the meal and tobacco smoke that followed, you spread your blankets with an end over your saddle. Then the Old-Timer motioned toward your hair lariat.

"Loop her around the blankets," he commanded. "This-here's a snake country, an' unless you got a hair rope around your bed you're mighty apt to wake huggin' a diamond-back."

So you ringed yourself around with the lariat, patting it down so that it touched ground everywhere. Then you exposed your ignorance by a naive question—

"How does that stop a ratttler?"

"Why, snakes'll *never* crawl over a hair rope, nor even a manila if it's fuzzy. The strands tickle their bellies."

So you nodded gratefully and fell asleep in comfort. For surely the Old-Timer knew. Next morning you waked snakeless, and confidence in the Old-Timer increased—especially when you encountered rattlers within a hundred yards of camp. The traditions of the West had been verified for you. But now comes a gentleman with seemingly incontrovertible proof that during all these years desert travelers have slept in false security.

Briefly, this man set out to test the "tickling" properties of hair ropes. Whenever he found a rattler he spread a hair rope before it, being careful not to disturb the snake, so that its condition would be as nearly normal as possible. He laid the rope where the snake could either cross it or go around the ends; dropped large and small loops about the snake; and when the reptile was moving away without attempt being made to direct its course the rope was thrown in front of it again and again. Did the rope—an exceedingly rough and scratchy one, built to "tickle" if any rope could—halt his Snakeship?

It did not! In every case the snake serenely and unhesitatingly crawled over. And this experimenter made photographs to prove his statements. So, another Western tradition has soured on us. When next we spread our blankets in snake-country, prayer—it seems—will be our only protection.

Peaches

by

Oscar J. Friend

Author of "Gamblers' Prerogative."

"YEAH, it's a bargain. I'll give Mr. Owens twenty dollars for it, an' then I'll paint that there rig, hitch the best DZX hoss to it, an' proceed to corral all the dates with the best-lookin' gals round Lebanon. I'll make the rest o' yuh pore punchers look like a row o' picked crows. I'll——"

"Ain't yuh coverin' a little too much territory, mister?" asked Bill Montague, pausing with his fork in mid-air.

"Nope," denied Frank Henson composedly. "I am sure the hot stuff, an' I'm a peach specialist."

"Nonk! Nonk! Nonk! Huh-uh, cowboy. Yuh sure ain't. In the first place, me an' Mr. Blaine are the only peach specialists they is. Second, yuh ain't no Greek god, an' yuh wouldn't be at home *behind* a hoss. Yuh'd keep thinkin' he'd throwed yuh. Third, when yuh can buy a bargain from Mr. Owens of Lebanon that'll be the beginnin' of the millennium."

Frank half-rose and leaned over the long supper-table of the DZX chuck-house. He glared indignantly at his challenger.

"Do I understand yuh to be insinuatin' that I can't drive a hoss? Furthermore, how does yuh know this ain't a good buggy? Yuh ain't never seen it."

"He meant yuh wouldn't know what to do with yore feet without no stirrups, prob'bly," suggested "Curly" Matthews from the lower end of the table. "O' course he didn't mean yuh couldn't steer yore outfit. Any cowboy can steer."

Frank ignored the shouts of laughter that arose at this sally. He shifted his gaze to the wit and eyed him steadily.

"Some o' them can bull too," he remarked acidly. "Not gettin' too personal, but I couldst name two bright punchers that all yuh boys can find without specs.

"An' I wouldn't talk about nobody's clumsy feet if I was a certain curly-headed blond. I noticed that his hands an' feet got in his way somethin' awful when Henry Blaine's daughter got off the train at Lebanon last Fall. As for our contradictin' hero here who can ordinarily converse on any subject from botany to—to bad whisky, an' with the ease an' grace of a five-foot shelf o' dime novels, when that peach stepped off the coach an' Blaine introduced her, he was as dumb as a deaf mute. Ain't I right, Mr. Montague?"

The owner of the DZX ranch, sitting at the head of the table, was forced to smile at this appeal.

"I believe you have them there, Frank," he conceded.

"Now, dad!" protested Bill.

"An' furthermore," continued Frank, pleased at his verbal barrage and driving

home his argument, "Jim's gonna close the deal for me today. I betcha he drives my rig home tonight."

At mention of the foreman's name the rancher glanced at his watch.

"Jim should have been in before now," he remarked. "I wonder if he stopped by Blaine's for supper."

"If he did, mebbe he'll bring home a load o' peaches in Frank's buggy," suggested Curly hopefully. "Not the kind o' peaches Frank an' Bill was arguin' about neither," he added hastily.

"Peaches are about ripe," agreed the elder Montague. "Son, what does Blaine expect to do with them? Will he make it all right?"

"There were fifty acres of peach-trees on the place when he bought it from Somerby last Fall. The trees are in their fourth year now," replied Bill. "He told me the other day that they were running good—about two hundred bushels to the acre. Ten thousand bushels at one-fifty per bush. make fifteen thousand dollars."

"That ought to place him in easy circumstances for next year," nodded Montague. "When Jim comes——"

He paused and listened. An instant hush fell over the more or less noisy cowpunchers. The faint but distinct clatter of flying hoofs came to their ears, sounding in the stillness like the eery galloping of a fairy horse upon a tiny drum. Louder thundered the pounding hoofs as the rider drew nearer.

"From town—or Blaine's," said Curly. "Must be Jim."

"That's a strange horse," vetoed Montague.

"An' Jim don't never ride thataway," added Frank.

"Whoever it is he's in a sure-enough hurry. Let's go out to meet him at the corral," suggested Bill.

They trooped down to the fenced enclosure just as the rider galloped up and flung himself from his sweating and heaving mount.

"Where's Montague?" he demanded.

"Here," said the rancher quietly. "What's wrong, Winters?"

"Jim got in a fracas with Jackson, the gambler. They're bringin' him home in a wagon. I rode ahead so's to tell yuh to fix up for him."

"Do you mean—?" began Montague.

"No, huh-uh," said Winters quickly. "They jes' had a li'l shootin' scrape, an' Jim was plugged in the right shoulder. Doc Sawyer fixed him up. He'll hafta lay round for a day or two."

"How did it happen?" the punchers demanded.

"Waal, considerin' as how I didn't see it, I dunno. I heard it said that Jim didn't have his gun with him. Yuh better wait an' let Harrison tell yuh."

"Boys, do you hear?" said Bill in a peculiar voice, all levity and slurring speech gone. "You know who Jackson is—the Chicago gambler who tried to trim dad and Blaine last year. He hates us like poison. He never did return to Chicago. I guess he never will now. Any of you want to go to town with me?"

"Wait a minute, son," said the even voice of Montague. "If this is really the first act of a planned revenge, you'd be inviting death to ride blundering into town after Jackson tonight. All of the crooked element will be with him solid. Otherwise he would never have started this. Maybe it was just a little trouble. Suppose we wait and hear Jim's story before we do anything? One of you boys go tell Sing Li to prepare a bed "

The preceding Fall Henry Blaine had come to Lebanon during the Fall rodeo, from the red hills of northern Mississippi. He had met Montague and Harrison in a poker game at the biggest hotel and gambling-joint of the prosperous cow-town and had been saved a fleecing by the two men at the hands of three gamblers, one of them Jackson.

At Montague's suggestion he had bought the section of land lying just south of Lebanon, upon which the former owner had been having indifferent success with fruit-farming. Seeing the possibilities of the place, and being an agriculturist, Blaine had mortgaged it heavily, let the rest of the land lie idle, while he irrigated and sought to realize the first year upon his peach acreage.

Although Jackson, the chagrined gambler, remained in Lebanon, nothing further had been heard of him. For at the close of the nineteenth century Lebanon was slowly but surely feeling the effects of stable government and decent civilization. Law and order were fairly well established, and all crooked work was obliged to assume

the smirking cloak of alibis, hypocrisy and deceit.

The DZX ranch was the largest holding south of Lebanon and north of Texas. Montague was rated as a power in the Southwest cattle lands. Had the Blaine farm been farther out on the ranges there is no doubt that he would have been unwelcome among the cattlemen. But as he was a steady and close-mouthed citizen, as his place lay close to Lebanon, and as Patty Blaine, his daughter, was a pretty and charming girl where pretty and charming girls were rare, he was very welcome. His place had many visitors, and Bill was pushed to hold first place in the regard of the capable young woman who kept house for her father.

THE wagon bearing the wounded man arrived shortly, and the foreman of the DZX ranch was tenderly carried into the house and placed in bed. The deft hands of Sing Li, Chinese cook and dexterous housekeeper for the Montague ménage, smoothed the pillows and held a tiny glass of whisky to his lips.

Propped up carefully, Jim surveyed the silent and tense group of punchers who crowded into the room to hear his story. He pursed his lips and studied them a moment.

"Now, boys, don't get ugly," he finally stated. "Don't yuh fret none or get impatient. They ain't no feud, they ain't no cattle war, they ain't no trouble. They's jes' one crazy gambler gone loco.

"I went to town this mornin' an' proceeded to 'tend to the ranch business—the fencin'-wire an' stuff is out in that wagon, by the way. Then I takes the afternoon to run round on the foolish errands o' yuh cowpunchers what was too lazy to do 'em yoreself the last time yuh was in—among which I looked at that ol' rig for yuh, Frank, an' I'll tell a man it's rotten. That's how Owens accumulated all o' his wealth—skinnin' cowpunchers.

"Well, some time before I was ready to start back I steps in the Texas Hotel to look round and take on a extra drink. I wasn't lookin' for no trouble, an' I'd left my gun at Wilkerson's repair shop to be adjusted an' tightened.

"This here Jackson was at the bar with that other snake Carter. They moves kinda close when I orders my throat gargle, but natchurly I didn't pay 'em no mind. I starts to drink an' Jackson jostles me. I looks at him, an' it appears to me he's already carryin' more'n his share so I passed it up.

"But he ain't content with that. He looks me right in the eye an' makes a nasty crack 'bout Bill Montague. That riles me and I flings my glass an' all in his face. He cussed and spluttered, an' then we both reaches for our guns. Mine ain't there. That's all they is to it," Harrison finished laconically.

"Do you mean that Jackson actually shot an unarmed man?" demanded Bill incredulously, ominously.

"Now, Bill, now Bill," soothed the foreman. "Don't yuh go flyin' off thataway. Everybody seen me reach jes' like he did. He didn't know I'd left my gun anywheres."

"So much for that," said Bill with a thin little knife-edged smile. "I guess we'd better be moseyin' along toward town, boys."

He turned to go, the cowpunchers all turning to follow him in a solid body. The rancher and the foreman exchanged glances.

"Remember, boys," said Montague slowly. "These are not the wild days of the 'fifties. You will be liable to arrest for murder."

"Murder! After that kind of a raw deal?" Bill asked tersely.

"Wait!" commanded Harrison weakly. "Go, if yuh insist on goin', Bill, but promise me one thing."

"What?"

"Clean up the whole dang town if yuh want to, but leave Jackson alone. D'yuh hear me? Leave Jackson plumb alone. He's mine. I'll settle with Mr. Jackson when I get limbered up again."

Bill protested vehemently, but the foreman remained firm in his demand. Young Montague turned to his father for support. The elder man's eyes were hard and cold as he considered his foreman's story, but he slowly shook his head.

"Jim is right, son. It's his privilege to settle with Jackson as he wishes."

"Promise me, Bill," insisted the man on the bed, well knowing the impulsiveness of the young man. "Promise me yuh won't mix with Jackson no time on no account."

Bill frowned.

"There's no use going to town at all if I make such a promise," he remarked.

"Don't go then. That goes for all yuh ungainly cowpunchers, d'yuh hear? Yuh wouldn't cheat a pore ol' man like me outa a little fun, 'specially seein' I've already paid the admission price, would yuh?"

"Ol' man, ——!" snorted Curly disgustedly. "Yuh don't seem to mind cheatin' us pore li'l boys outa some justifiable excitement."

"I docks yore wages one dollar for disrespect," Harrison grinned weakly. "Are yuh promisin', Bill?"

"All right," growled Bill reluctantly. "I promise, and I bet I'll be sorry I did."

"All you cow nursemaids go on to bed now," commanded Montague. "That includes you, Bill. You've got to ride fence tomorrow, and Jim needs rest."

After the room had emptied of the restless, disappointed and dissatisfied men, Montague drew his chair close to the bed. Sing Li folded his arms and took his position calmly in the doorway.

"Well?" said the cattleman.

"It was a frame-up, Bill," whispered the wounded man. "Yuh know who hangs out at the Texas Hotel as a rule. Jackson has got in solid with that bunch. They's goin' to be trouble.

"But the most surprizin' thing was that Jackson an' Carter wasn't by their selves at the bar; but I thought I'd wait an' tell yuh alone. Owens was with 'em. Think o' that! Ain't things brewin' up in a sweet li'l mess? An', Bill, they'd of got me too—all of 'em—if my gun hadn't been missin'. That was the luckiest miss I ever had. I'd have been a reg'lar sieve, an' yuh wouldn't of knowed who was—innocent."

"Owens?"

The rancher was distinctly startled.

"Yep. Owens. Bill, they're out for us, an' when we go to town we better go in a bunch an' ride herd on 'em."

"I guess the Texas Hotel will have to go," said Montague regretfully. "If that lawless element gets a fresh start they'll set us back fifty years. All of the desperadoes of Texas and the Territory will flock to Lebanon. But what mixed Owens up in this business? That gets me. This will put him in bad."

"I dunno. He ain't the most religious man I ever seen. That was pretty raw, but I kinda guess he figured he was big enough to get away with it.

"I never was so close to the happy huntin'-grounds in all my life, Bill. At Jackson's first shot I fell, an' everybody I could see all over the lobby had a gun an' was pointin' it at me. I think they was takin' my heavenly toga outa the mothballs when somebody yelled—I believe it was that gambler Tilby:

" 'Stop, yuh fools! This is murder. Can't yuh see he ain't got no gun?' "

The rancher nodded thoughtfully.

"I guess I'll ride in to see Judge Ryan shortly. We'll have to break up this pleasant little syndicate before it grows too big and unruly to handle. You forget it and try to get some sleep, Jim. Is there anything you want?"

"You slippum 'long, Missee Montaglue. See lilly cowboys shotum claps in flont loom. Sing Li allee samee watchee 'longside Missee Jlim," announced the blandly smiling Oriental at the door.

THE next morning Bill found himself detailed to carry on the work of Jim until the incapaciated foreman could again assume charge. He found it next to impossible to get out from under the watchful eye of his father. He worked patiently all day, but the following morning he determinedly saddled his horse and leaped into the saddle.

"Where to, son?"

He wheeled his mount to find his father coming down toward the corral, an indulgent but questioning smile on his face.

"Over to Blaine's, dad," admitted the young man, flushing a trifle. "The boys have their work all laid out and can do nicely until I come back. I'll return before noon."

"All right," smiled Montague. "Give Patty *my* regards too—if you think of it."

Bill grinned and shook his fist in mock anger as he galloped away.

"I'll bring Jim a few peaches if Blaine hasn't stripped his trees," he shouted back.

He found Patty Blaine making ready to ride into Lebanon for a number of household supplies. With an exultant whoop, he swung off of his horse and joyfully encircled her slender young form with his arms as she was calmly and efficiently tightening the cinch of her saddle. Quick as a bird, she stooped and darted under her horse's belly, leaving his arms empty, his hands clutching the saddle girth, while the saddle pony looked around curiously.

"Finish tightening it, smarty," she said coolly. "Then get two pair of saddle-bags from the barn. Do you want to ride to town with me?"

"Does a lost calf bawl?" responded the unabashed although discomforted Bill. "Got any peaches left? I mean fruit peaches."

She favored him with a slight grimace.

"A few. All of the market stock is gone. Dad sent the last load to town a week ago."

"Where's he going to ship them? To Memphis by steamboat?"

"I don't know, although I believe he said something about a better price if shipped north by rail. Mr. Owens is attending to that for him."

They rode into the main street of Lebanon at Dallas Corner, laughing and chatting happily like two children—like well-behaved children, that is. Cantering halfway down the street which ended at the wharfs on the Arkansas River, they laughed at the big sign staked in a now dried-up mud-hole near the sidewalk.

DON'T FISH HERE.

"That seems awfully odd," remarked Patty as they dismounted and entered Owens' General Store.

"Wait until we get the Fall rains," rejoined Bill.

A tall individual of fastidious and somewhat fantastic dress—slightly unconventional dress even in a free-and-easy cow-town, dress such as many gamblers of the old days affected—appraised them from the corner of his eye as they entered the building. He tossed away his cigaret and sauntered carelessly across the street toward the Texas Hotel.

Entering the lobby, he strode briskly up to the gambling-rooms on the second floor. Singling out two men who sat talking together, he approached them. Without preamble he addressed himself to the smaller man of the two.

"Young Montague just came to town with the Blaine girl," he announced briefly. "They're over in Owens' store."

The seated men looked around quickly. An ugly expression crossed the handsome face of Jackson, the man addressed. The other, a lanky person who showed unmistakable signs of former breeding, lowered his tilted chair and leaned across the table.

"Go easy, Jackson. No rough stuff with the girl present."

A sneering expression came over Jackson's face.

"When it comes to petty scruples and cautiousness, Tilby, you win the Scotch-Jew's birthright. We haven't heard a peep out of the DZX outfit since I sent Harrison home on a shutter."

"That is just what worries me. That was a pretty rank cut. You *knew* Harrison's holster was empty."

"Yes, and I meant to kill him with one shot too. How did I know that he didn't have another gun on him? You saw him reach, didn't you?"

Tilby shrugged. He was forced to nod. Jackson swung to the newcomer.

"What would you have done, Carter?" he asked.

"You were doing it," smiled the gambler thinly. "I didn't butt in. Only I believe I'd have shot truer."

"Rot!" said Jackson contemptuously. "He made such a queer little jump when he discovered that his gun was missing that I couldn't help it. Any one else would have missed."

"All right," agreed Carter. "What about this Montague yearling?"

"We'll get him. Maybe that'll bring Montague in where we are prepared to receive him."

"You can't go too strong, remember that," protested Tilby. "This country is getting civilized a lot faster than you think. You do anything around the girl and Blaine will complain. Carruthers will have to start something."

"Blaine!" sneered Jackson. "Blaine! Don't lose any sleep over Blaine. I've already tagged him, and his name is plain mud. The sheriff won't start anything either. He belongs to Owens. He won't make a peep. Come on."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm collecting twenty thousand dollars' worth of personal satisfaction for us, and I started in the day before yesterday. No man can pull a stunt on me like Montague pulled last Fall and expect me to forget it."

"You are going to ruin all of our other plans," objected Tilby. "I know how you feel, but why can't you leave Montague alone until—until some time in the future?"

"You fool!" snarled Jackson savagely, his lips curling back from his even white teeth.

"Can't you see far enough ahead to realize that we've got to 'get' Montague before we can go ahead safely? He's the biggest power around Lebanon.

"And let me tell you something further. If you are too white-livered to sit in on this game with that smart rancher, keep out. And keep your mouth out. Just because you haven't guts enough to even that score with Montague, don't back-pedal on me. Do you savvy?"

Tilby paled a trifle at the insult. His hands trembled as he eyed the other steadily.

"You forget," he said hoarsely, "that it was I who flirted with death last Fall when I accused Bill Montague of being a card cheat. Kindly remember what happened to that perfect scheme of yours. Now just because I don't choose to be a fool, because I caution you against muddling all our plans by your personal hatred, you insult me."

Jackson studied him for an instant. He knew himself to be the better man with a gun, but he read Tilby's fanatical intention of sacrificing himself if necessary upon the altar of what little manhood remained within him—the altar of courage. It didn't pay to kill a man like that. Besides, were he to miss——

He shrugged and smiled.

"I beg your pardon, Tilby. I spoke too hastily. But what I said was true about Montague. Think it over. Will you go over to Owens' with us?"

"Oh, I'll go, all right," agreed Tilby non-committally.

They found the young couple busily filling their saddle-bags with various small parcels. There were two or three loungers in the store who looked suddenly apprehensive at the entrance of the three gamblers. Carter halted near the door and eyed the uncomfortable ones coldly while he kept a sharp lookout on the street. Tilby leaned carelessly on a counter and faced the rear of the store, while Jackson moved softly over until his shadow fell across the counter before the busy DZX heir.

There being plenty of counter space for the new customer to be waited on by the clerk, Bill did not move. He felt the sudden quiet and feeling of strangeness; but he did not take it to himself, and therefore he did not look around. The less a bystander moves and sees sometimes, the better.

Jackson waited for an instant. Then he apparently observed the girl for the first time. He bowed and smiled. With a sweep of his hand he knocked several of the packages to the floor.

"Trying to take up all of the counter?" he asked uglily. "Get out of the way and let the lady be waited on."

Montague looked up in surprize. As he recognized the gambler a quick flame leaped into his eyes. He took in the loosely hanging right hand with its slightly curved fingers even as Patty drew back in frightened astonishment. His gaze quickly took in the situation, the positions of Carter and Tilby. He was cornered. He realized this, and the knowledge but further angered him.

"Well?" rasped Jackson, almost trembling in his eagerness, his fingers all but clasping the handle of his gun. "Why don't you move? You waiting for the lady to pick up your bundles?"

"Why don't you draw that pistol and hold it in your hand?" suggested Bill softly. "That would be a safer way to insult a man."

"That's right, Jackson," drawled Tilby. "You don't want to be pulled before Judge Ryan for murder. Give him a fair break."

Jackson laughed sneeringly and by an effort folded his arms.

"What's the matter, boy? Afraid of getting the same thing Harrison got?"

Bill, who had been tensing his muscles for quick action and having glanced behind him to see that Patty was safely out of the way, relaxed. He suddenly recalled his ironclad promise to Jim. For a long moment he stared into the hard eyes of the gambler, who, fearless man though he was, must have felt the longing he saw in the younger man's gaze. Then without a word Bill stooped and picked up the fallen packages.

White to the lips, he stuffed them into the saddle-bags and flung the leather sacks over his shoulders. Avoiding the eyes of every one, he walked out and hung the bags on the saddles, followed by the thoroughly surprized and infuriated Patty.

Still silent, fighting against his anger at his helplessness, he offered to assist the girl on to her horse. With a glance of burning scorn she drew back and swung herself unaided into the saddle. Before the amazed Bill could mount, she had touched her horse

and was galloping down the street toward home. Bill spurred quickly after her, but neither of them missed the surprized but mocking laughter of Jackson.

Bill overtook her shortly after turning out on Dallas Road.

"Say!" he burst out. "What's the matter with you?"

"What's the matter with *you*, you—you coward?" she almost sobbed.

"Oh!" exclaimed he, understanding being granted him. "Didn't you know that Jim came to town day before yesterday and was unarmed when he met Jackson? Jackson insulted dad and Jim resented it, forgetting he had no gun. The gambler shot him through the shoulder."

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, Jim will be coming back in town in a few days," stated Bill, eyeing her in surprize.

"I notice that you are not unarmed," she rejoined pointedly. "Oh, leave me alone. Don't ride with me. Don't ever speak to me again," she sobbed and touched her horse with a spur.

Bill's hand shot out and caught the bits of her horse. Calmly he loosened the saddle-bag from the cantle of his saddle and swung it before the girl.

"The rest of your packages, *mademoiselle*, " he said, frigidly polite.

Raising his hat with an exaggerated courtesy, he wheeled his horse and galloped back toward Dallas Corner, leaving a highly amazed and very indignant young woman completely in possession of the solitude she had demanded.

NEVERTHELESS it wasn't a pleasant thought that anybody considered him a coward. His conduct had looked funny. He gritted his teeth as the echo of Jackson's laugh rang in his ears. He proceeded mentally to draw and quarter the unpleasant gambler. Surely there was some way he could be revenged upon the man without breaking his promise to the foreman. Ah! There was. He'd call on——

His horse turned, stopped and lowered his head at the hitch-rail before the Mexican Dollar saloon. His good humor was restored. He laughed.

"I guess that is as good a suggestion as any, pinto," he said, patting the animal's neck. "I'll run in and take a little shot first."

As he started to swing off, three men stepped out through the swinging doors of the saloon. They eyed him in stunned surprize for a split second. Then with a startled oath one man made a swift grab at his holster. Instantly the two others caught his arms and hurried him back into the saloon.

"On second thought," amended Bill to his patiently waiting horse, "I guess that's as near a shot as I want. We'll mosey on down the boulevard. Now what the mischief is Owens doing teaming up with Jackson and Carter?"

A hundred yards farther on he slacked his reins and leaped down before a weather-beaten, one-storied, little frame building, above the door of which a tin sign swinging on a short iron arm proclaimed that this was the sheriff's office.

The door was open, and Sheriff Carruthers was present and alone.

Bill entered. He found the sheriff seated before his desk, fingers spread and pressed tip against tip. The troubled expression sitting upon his brow indicated that he was pursuing a very elusive thought. The striking feature about him was his very prolific beard, one of the most famous in the entire southwest. He was of that old school of pilose fossils whose like are rapidly disappearing today.

In conversing with one, the sheriff had a nervous or at least an irritating habit of fingering his lengthy appendage, twisting it into peculiar knots and geometric symbols. He varied the monotony of this when he endorsed an agreeable statement. In this case, he made one complete stroke of his beard horizontally, ironing out the little tangles he might have made, preparing for another intricate design and sanctioning a remark at one and the same time.

"Sheriff Carruthers, I believe," stated Bill.

The representative of the law maintained his intense legal pose. He compromised this cold and distant attitude by cocking a fishy blue eye at his visitor. Then he squinted thoughtfully at the ceiling as if weighing the remark thoroughly before committing himself to any statement. Finally he brought his hard eyes back to the slim and straight form before him.

"Kee-rect," he announced, jerking a salute with his beard.

"Ah, now we are getting on," murmured

Bill, his face reddening a trifle at the man's intentionally indolent attitude. "Kinda hard to git used to the new *alias*, huh?" he suggested politely.

"Huh?" snorted Carruthers, jerking erect. "What's that?"

"Nothin'. Nothin'," waved Bill easily. "Keep yore shirt on. I was jes' a-thinkin' yuh wasn't so very glad to see me. I didn't see yuh jump up an' give me the glad hand an' say:

" 'Glad yuh dropped in, Mister Montague. Is they anything I can do for yuh?' "

"Oh! Yore name Montague? I was deep in the study of a political problem. What is on yore mind?"

"You!" snapped the young rancher suddenly, crisply. "Why haven't you put the attempted murderer of Jim Harrison behind the bars? He's still at liberty."

"Murderer! Them's heavy words, young feller," rumbled the startled sheriff.

"I've the foolish idea that I'm heavy enough to back 'em up."

"Foolish? *Foolish?* Kee-rect," chuckled Carruthers, stroking his whiskers with a smooth motion that bespoke many hours of practise.

"Just because you swallowed a horse, don't get funny."

"Swallowed a hoss?"

The sheriff floundered heavily far behind Bill's wit.

"I don't——"

"I see you currying its tail there."

Carruthers scowled blackly. He eyed Montague uglily.

"Jackson, the gambler, shot Jim Harrison the day before yesterday in wanton cold-bloodedness. Why haven't you locked him up?" demanded Bill.

"Did yuh see the shootin', young feller?" queried Carruthers.

"No. But plenty of others did."

"Kee-rect," endorsed the sheriff, running the scale on his whisker trombone. "I've inquired all round, an' I found it was jes' a simple shootin' scrape. They both went fer their guns."

"And Harrison didn't have his gun with him," concluded Bill warmly.

Carruthers shrugged as he twisted his beard into a triangular braid.

"That wasn't my fault, I don't reckon. Yuh ain't holdin' *me* responsible fer that?"

Bill ignored the sarcasm. He pointed one finger accusingly at the bulky man behind the desk.

"Jackson knew that Harrison was unarmed," he grated.

"Huh? Is that possible?"

Carruthers was the personification of pained surprize. Bill snorted in impatient disgust.

"Prove it," said the sheriff. "Prove it, an' yuh won't even have to swear out a warrant."

He turned back to his desk and dexterously thrust a black stogie through the pilose monstrosity upon his face, unerringly finding his mouth. Bill stared in wonder, even as he stiffened at the cold dismissal.

He turned abruptly and started out. The sheriff grinned behind his whiskers—a grin that changed into an idiotic expression as the young ranchman whirled about and flung one parting retort before springing upon his horse.

"Don't light that stogie unless those Russian pets are asbestos. Kee-rect?"

IN A DISGRUNTLED mood Bill rode back to the ranch. He found his father talking with the foreman, who was sitting up in bed. Entering the room, he sat down so disgustedly that the cattleman eyed him keenly.

"Spill it, son. Patty out riding with Curly or somebody?"

"Naw. I've run a blazer on all this gang," responded Bill moodily.

"What's ailin' yuh, Bill?" asked Harrison, studying the young fellow's angry face.

Jim Harrison had helped to rear young Bill. Together with Montague he had taught him to ride, to shoot, to fight, to punch cattle. The two men were more fond of Bill than they dared let him know. Bill wouldn't have stood for any petting.

"I went to town with Patty this morning," stated Bill.

Montague and Harrison exchanged glances.

"Well?" prompted the father.

"Jackson and two of his henchmen came into Owens' place and tried to start a ruckus. I kept my promise."

"An' came home alive," added Harrison.

"I'd rather have died," declared Bill, his eyes flashing. "I had to slink out like a mangy cur."

The foreman's eyes shone suspiciously.

"It takes a braver man to do that, son," he said softly.

"That wasn't the worst," added Bill bitterly.

"What did she say, Bill?" asked his father gently.

The young man snapped erect and glared at his father.

"How did you know?" he demanded.

The rancher only smiled slightly.

"She got so mad she almost scorched," admitted Bill ruefully. "She ran away from me, so I turned round and went on back to town. Jackson, Owens and Carter were coming out of the Mexican Dollar. Jackson nearly fainted at my reappearance, and then he'd have shot me if the other two hadn't grabbed him.

"I decided to call on the sheriff and get even with Jackson another way. I found out that imitation Santa Claus had made no attempt to arrest Jackson. What do you think of that?"

"We feared as much, Bill," admitted his father slowly. "I guess this about settles it. For some obscure reason Owens, one of the richest men of Lebanon, has thrown in with the gamblers. Carruthers belongs to Owens. Doubtless he has been given his instructions, and I figure we will have to keep an eye on the sheriff as well as on the gamblers. I'll ride in to see the judge tonight—after dark."

"I'll be ready," said Bill.

"—to stay with Jim and keep an eye on the punchers," finished the elder man.

"Aw, dad! That isn't fair. Sing Li is here to nurse Jim. Are you trying to hide something from me?"

"Not now. Your place is here, particularly should anything unforeseen occur. Jim will discuss the entire matter with you."

"All right, all right. I'm the goat," agreed Bill resignedly. "Jim, yuh want me to roll yuh a cigaret? All right. Now don't overlook any points in our comin' discussion tonight, an' I'll roll yuh two or three more."

IT WAS a clear night, and the sky was of that blue-gray color which lingers after dusk in early Summer before the stars wink into being. An early moon, delicately veiled in a fleecy lacework of clouds, was sailing calmly in the east, slowly climbing her invisible ladder toward the zenith.

Montague rode silently along the clearly defined road, swaying slightly to the motion of his horse, enjoying the creak of saddle leather, his mount's "horsey" odor, the strong and comfortable gait. It took the wide, open reaches of the range, along with other things, to bring him solace for the gentle wife who had tarried with him but so short a while.

As he skirted Blaine's fence-lined property, he glanced sympathetically toward the neat, white farmhouse which was set in a bit from the main road. With all of his sorrow, he sensed that Blaine had faced a more stony life amid the bleak hills of Mississippi as a widower with a lone girl child.

A figure on horseback rode out from the shadow of a great oak-tree at the fruit-grower's gate and stopped. The rancher spoke to his horse, which immediately slowed to a walk. He quietly slipped his holster to the front. For his observant eye had noted that the rider before him wore two cartridge belts with holsters crisscrossed about his hips and carried a sawed-off shotgun.

"That you, Montague?" called the stationary horseman.

"Hello, Blaine," responded the cattleman calmly. "Riding somewhere tonight?"

"Yep," replied the fruit-grower shortly.

"Riding toward town myself. Going that way?"

Blaine nodded and swung his horse around to pair the rancher's mount. They rode in silence for a few yards, Montague glancing keenly under the brim of the other's hat into Blaine's tense face At length, violating the tacit silence of the Westerner, he said quietly—

"Anything I can do, Blaine?"

"I knew you were going to ask that. I guess not. Business deal. Got to interview a man."

"Not meaning to be too personal, Blaine, but it looks like you are prepared for a pretty stormy interview. Don't forget—your daughter."

"Thanks. You're neighborly, Mantague, and you've been kind to me. I don't see how you can help, and I don't want you just butting in, but I'll tell you. It's Owens. I turned the entire peach crop over to him—sent in the last of them last week. He was to sell them and attend to prompt shipping, storing them in his warehouse until he could get enough cars to ship 'em north. I was to pay him twenty-five cents per bushel for storage and brokerage."

Montague checked an exclamation. Things were becoming clearer. Instead of speaking, as they were passing Blaine's orchard, he looked across the fruit-grower's shoulder at the massed rows and rows of peach-trees.

"This afternoon I heard from Owens," continued Blaine in a weary voice. "He said that half of my peaches rotted before he could ship them. The balance had to be sold for culls at a dollar a bushel. He attached a bill of lading showing that he had shipped only four cars of peaches. He deducted storage and commission on the entire ten thousand bushels and sent me his check for twenty-five hundred dollars. If I——"

He ceased and drew rein. Montague did likewise, and they listened intently to a slight commotion over in the orchard.

"Who's there?" called Blaine.

There was no answer.

"I'll stir you up a bit, whoever you are," grunted the fruit-grower, and he raised his shotgun to his shoulder.

As the bellowing noise died away there was the rapid rustling of leaves from the orchard.

"Hey!" shouted an irate voice. "It ain't fair to hunt birds with buckshot. Yuh mighty near shot the britches offa me an' Frank."

"You birds come here," laughed Montague. "How many of you are there, Curly?"

"Jes' us two," replied the peach fancier.

"You had just received a check from Owens," prompted the rancher. "Go on."

"If I accept it I am ruined," resumed Blaine dispassionately. "Will hardly pay pickers and other expenses. Can't pay mortgage, can't renew it, can't even live the rest of the year. I think I can make Owens change his mind."

"I don't think you can," disagreed the rancher quietly. "In any event, remember that you can arrange the matter of a loan with me, if it comes to that."

"Thank you, Montague. I know you mean it. But that would be just that much more money to pay back. I want my own money. Not used to being held up without a gun. Don't like it."

"I fear you will never get to Owens alive. If you did, to shoot him won't relieve matters—it'll just complicate them. He had you all sewed up before he made this move, I will swear it."

"What do you want me to do? Take it lying down?"

"No! There's more to it than just stealing your peaches and shooting Jim. Listen to me a moment."

Rapidly the cattleman outlined his suspicions regarding the pact between Owens and Carruthers with the gamblers. That it was a frame-up to even the old score on Blaine and the entire DZX outfit was obvious. That some quick steps and a legal consultation were essential, Blaine saw.

"Now you come on with me to see Judge Ryan," concluded the rancher. "We want to know just where we stand before we make a move."

"Me an' Curly was after some peaches because Jim an' Bill didn't bring none," Frank began explaining as the two peach poachers came up to the mounted men. "Yuh see——"

"Where are your horses?" interrupted Montague crisply.

"'Cross the road in that clump o' laurels," stated Curly quickly at the steely timbre in the rancher's voice.

"Why all the ornaments, brother?" Frank asked Blaine curiously. "It ain't Christmas."

"Never mind that now," snapped Montague. "Listen to me, you two peach-rustlers. That shooting of Jim was merely the starting-point of a big revenge scheme. I can tell you no more right now, but do you two boys want to help and not hinder our plans?"

"Yo're sure whistlin'," said Frank promptly.

"All right. Get your horses and ride straight to town. Go in quietly and make no fuss. And *don't* stop at any of the forty-three saloons. You probably wouldn't come back—ever.

"Go straight to the depot and rout out old man Myers. Find out from him how many cars of peaches Owens shipped last week. Tell him I want to know. Waste no time, and be sure to see Myers. Don't let him show you any bills of lading. Pin him down to a straight answer. Ask about their condition too. Meet us at Judge Ryan's home in two hours."

The two punchers started joyously for their horses.

"Don't mix with any one," cautioned Montague again. "Sidestep everybody."

The pair departed in a swirl of dust.

"Now what d'yuh know 'bout that, Curly?" said Frank. "But they ain't no fun goin' to town like this."

"It looks like they's gonna be a lot o' fun later on," rejoined Curly grimly. "Git goin', cowboy."

The two DZX men rode into Lebanon like gray fantoms in the moonlight. Regretfully they passed up the luring lights and boisterous uproar of the street of many saloons. The sheriff's office was closed and dark.

Down at the station they pounded on the door of the station and freight agent's little room until the old man got grumblingly out of bed and came to investigate the disturbance.

"They ain't no train out tonight if yo're passengers," he stated in a singsong growl. "They ain't no money in the express box if yo're holdup men, an' this ain't no roomin'-house fer maudlin cowpunchers if yo're drunk. If yuh wants more information they's forty-three saloons planted 'long the whole street. Yuh can't miss 'em. Good night."

And he proceeded to shut the half-opened door.

"Wait, Myers. Leave the door open a minute. Yuh won't catch cold," commanded Curly. "Bill Montague sent us."

"Huh?"

"Can't we palaver inside?" suggested Frank. "It'd look more hospita'le, for one thing."

For answer the now wide-awake agent stood aside and beckoned them in. Carefully closing the door behind them, he faced the two punchers expectantly, his pointed nightcap lending him an elfin appearance as he stood there holding his lantern.

"How many cars o' peaches did Owens ship last week?" demanded Curly abruptly.

Myers eyed his questioner mildly.

"If I don't fergit, the bill o' ladin' an' my shippin' record says four cars," he retorted.

"Nev' mind th' william o' ladin'. How many cars was sure 'nough shipped?"

"I'm not at liberty to tell yuh boys railroad business," stated Mr. Myers calmly. "Besides, I ain't workin' tonight."

"Now don't freeze up none. Yuh had a good start," put in Frank. "Bill Montague wants to know. Yuh can bet he's got a good reason for askin'."

"Is it fer Bill hisself?" queried the troubled old man.

"Yuh know us boys, Myers. It's for his very self."

Myers looked cautiously around. Immediately, for the adventurous-minded cowpunchers, the plot thickened and took on a somber tone.

"Five cars o' general merchandise was shipped at th' same time," admitted Myers.

"Aw, shucks," grunted Frank, his rising hopes for mystery dashed cruelly to the ground.

"An' what did them cars o' merchandise consist of?" prompted Curly.

"Half-ripe peaches," whispered the old station agent dramatically, playing up to Curly's and his own lead. "An' I ain't seen as purty a lot in some distance."

"Ah!" breathed the two punchers together.

"Owens oughta join Jesse James," commented Frank. "I begin to get the general idea o' Blaine's harness."

"Can yuh swear to that statement?" demanded Curly; and Myers, after some further persuasion, agreed to do so.

This was in the days before the advent of cold-storage houses and refrigerator-cars, that splendid system to preserve and ship foodstuffs inexpensively. Thus, all perishable green stuffs had to be shipped in an unripe condition and shipped immediately. Hence, Owens' claim for spoilage was not quite so fantastic and palpable a lie as it would now seem.

"BOYS an' girls, they is two reasons for rejoicin', an' they is two for sorrow," declaimed a DZX orator to the circle of unshaven masculine faces which surrounded the dinner-table.

"Hail to Mark Antony!"

"Speech! Speech! (They'll be more food for us.)"

"Spill yore troubles, cowboy."

"First," stated the impassioned orator, hastily gulping a perfect hunk of meat, "tomorrow is pay day. Second, it will be Saturday; an' Lebanon is th' original Saturday-night town. Three cheers for th' dance-hall!"

He paused for the forthcoming applause. He got it and bowed modestly.

"So much for th' rejoicin'," he continued. "As for sorrow, it bein' Saturday, all yuh ungainly Dizzy X punchers'll hafta perform

yore weekly—an' weakly—ab-o-lu-tions. Second, this chuck shore is rotten today."

"I don't know about all th' celebratin'," shouted Bill above the rising laughter as he waved down a veritable flood of Chinese protest and vituperation. "Frank an' Curly had to get lucky las' night, an' they was sent to town by dad. So all yuh Apollo-Bell-the-steers trail up to th' big house with me after supper tonight. Don't develop no previous engagements, none o' yuh. They's gonna be some big medicine."

Bill refused to say more, and what little Frank and Curly could add served but to whet the curiosity. Needless to say, night found every puncher of the DZX outfit crowded in the big room where the foreman lay.

"Boys," said Montague after they had become somewhat settled, and studying the mass of eager faces, "social politics have steamed up a bit in Lebanon. There has been some effective wire-pulling, the result being that Blaine is practically ruined and the DZX ranch the butt of a vindictive attack. I want you fire-eating young fools to realize the deadly sériousness of the trouble. Briefly it is this."

He outlined matters quickly.

"Now, we've got to work fast, and we may need more than arnica when we get through," he concluded. "Are you still clamoring for action?"

"When do we start?" shouted a chorus of sturdy voices.

The cattleman laughed and turned to his foreman.

"Tomorrow night," answered Harrison for him. "Sing Li will have to bandage my right arm tightly so's I can ride. Shut up, Bill. O' course I go too. Now go ahead an' explain yore idee."

IN THE nineties, especially along the frontiers of comfortable and luxurious civilization, gambling and dancing constituted the main diversions of the Westerner. In Lebanon there was a regular Saturday-night dance for the recreation of the better citizens and their families, perhaps a poor substitute to offer pleasure-seekers of today with an acquired taste for picture and vaudeville theaters, bridge clubs, petting parties, magazines and motor cars. But to the simple-hearted generation of that day with their more or less colorless existence, a dance was an oasis in the desert.

The saloons were running full force, vivid splotches of light at frequent intervals along the otherwise darkened street. A veritable blaze of light from the windows of the second floor of Owens' General Store beckoned to the restless and light-footed cowpunchers. Boisterously happy men weaved their way from saloon to saloon and from saloon to dance-hall like streams of busy ants.

The Mexican Dollar saloon boasted of being the first real wet spot just off of Dallas Corner as one turned toward the river. The corner site itself was occupied by a conglomeration of one-story shanties and stock corrals that ran several hundred yards out along Dallas Road.

There were many one-story brick buildings besides the four larger structures. However, sandwiched in between these more solid buildings were little weather-boarded shacks, survivors of a roaring past, which did not quite fill the frontage allotted to them and therefore seemed to shrink and withdraw from their more pretentious neighbors.

Such a structure was the little office of the sheriff, pending the completion of the municipal building under process of construction. The office was roughly one square down from the Mexican Dollar and on the south side of the street. The windows were covered, the door was closed. Had it not been for the tiny ray of light filtering through the keyhole the place would have been thought deserted.

Seated about the ill-papered room with its inevitable spittoons and "court-house smell" was a select group worthy of note.

The eminent sheriff himself sat behind his desk, caressing his facial outrage fondly, and listened attentively to the conversation of one Mr. Jackson of nimble-fingered accomplishments.

Carter, the gentleman of immaculate if somewhat outré dress, leaned back in a chair tilted against the wall, his spotless, cream-colored Stetson slanted over his thin forehead, almost paralleling the line of the chair.

Owens, a long-faced individual who answered to the fitting sobriquet of "Horse-Head," sardonic and close-mouthed, sat squarely facing the speaking man. He had so formed the sociable habit of communing with his own thoughts that speech to him was an effort. However, in all fairness it must be admitted that the activity of his mind was unimpaired.

Tilby had folded his lanky form miraculously in a straight-backed chair, his knees drawn up to his chin.

"Now you hold tight, Horse-Head," Jackson was saying. "Just because nothing has happened shouldn't alarm you. We've covered every loop-hole, and he can't prove anything. Blaine is through."

"My God!" said Tilby, unfolding himself. "You're a fiend, Jackson. So this is how you tagged Blaine! It's a hundred times worse than fleecing him at poker. Here he works hard for six months, and then you leave him in debt! You've utterly ruined him. It *is* a wonder he hasn't shown up with a shotgun looking for Owens."

"Kee-rect," ejaculated Carruthers, making a beautiful run on his beloved appendage.

He may have thought the conversation was getting away from him, or he may have spoken from force of habit.

"Well?" gritted Jackson. "What do you care? Have you forgotten that twenty thousand dollars? They broke us. This is only half of it back."

There was the sound of running feet—fear-hastened feet—and the sudden, hurried knocking upon the door. Four figures that had crouched with ears pressed against the side walls of the shack, quickly edged toward the front. The figure at the door called guardedly in an indistinguishable voice:

"Carruthers! Quick! The Montague gang has ridden to town in a bunch like yuh figured. Open up. We got to get the gang. They——"

There was a quick scraping of chairs from within and several muffled exclamations. The door was unbolted and—Frank Henson stepped calmly in, poking a .45 into the astounded Mr. Carruthers' ribs as he waved the mate to the gun at the surprized men beyond.

"In fact, they have already arrived," he concluded coolly, as the skulking figures brought up his rear with a rush.

"Good work, Frank," approved one of the four, and Jackson looked up into the cold blue eyes of Montague.

"Owens!" hissed the second man. "Owens, what are you going to do about this twenty-five-hundred-dollar check?"

"Wait, please," said Montague, restraining the ominous fruit-grower and addressing Jackson's group.

"It is useless to make an outcry. The DZX boys have got us all neatly corraled. None of your henchmen can get to you."

Oddly enough, it was Owens who broke the silence.

"This is an outrage," he managed to clip out. "You are liable to arrest and fine for pulling weapons on the sheriff. Say something, Carruthers."

"Kee-rect!" thundered the sheriff, pulling his whiskers out at a belligerent angle. "Young feller, gimme that gun."

"Which one?" asked Frank innocently.

"Jim," cried the younger Montague to the fourth man, whose right arm was tightly bound across his chest, "you heard Jackson's talk. That sneaking —— is behind the whole thing. He shot you, he tried to frame me the same way, and he has attempted to ruin Blaine. Jim, you're not able yet, and now is the accepted time. Release me from my promise. Will you, Jim?"

He was as eager as a young dog after rabbits. The eyes of the foreman twinkled, but his face grew stern as he looked at the silent gambler.

"Son," he said, "I'll turn yuh loose on one condition. Go as far as yuh like, but don't put no permanent kink in him. Mess him up all yuh want to, but don't injure him none. He's my own li'l pet, an' when it comes time for him to go to bed—I'll tuck him in an' blow out his light."

"Now, Jackson, you sneaking card-shark," smiled Bill happily, "come out into the street. I'm going to make you show your own yellow."

"Hold on," said the cattleman. "You and Jim act like children. First we'll settle our little business. Owens, we heard the entire conversation between you. It is needless to elucidate further. Only don't ever let me catch you in any kind of a shady deal like this again or—Lebanon will be too small by far for you. Now count out twelve thousand, five hundred dollars in cash—I know you carry it—and do it quick. Mr. Blaine will return your check and that allows your more than just commission. Get busy."

Owens did not move. He merely stared at the rancher.

"This is blackmail—robbery," he finally clipped out.

"Never mind that."

Montague's voice had taken on a knife-like edge.

"I'll risk that before Judge Ryan," he went on. "No insults from you. Count."

Owens slowly reached for his wallet and counted out the correct amount. Blaine tossed down the check the general merchant had sent him and recounted the greenbacks.

"This is a hold-up," forced Owens. "If you keep this money I'll have a warrant out for you in an hour. I'll make it the most expensive robbery you ever perpetrated. I'll not forget this."

"You'd better not," replied Montague grimly. "Now then, son, I kinda guess we'll all go out into the street. Frank, remove their guns. Carruthers, you'll go with us to prove to any curious *law-abiding* citizens that everything is on the level."

"The dignity of the law!" spluttered Carruthers, the words seemingly entangled in his beard. "Don't ye dare take my gun. I refuse to go. The dignity——"

"Be ——," said Frank. "Oh, Curly! Come in an' help me carry out a young gun-factory."

Out in the street the joyous DZX punchers formed a circle about the principals. A crowd of ruffians began to gather, along with curious onlookers.

Bill handed his gun to his father and stepped out to meet the gambler, who had spoken no word from the moment Frank had entered the sheriff's office.

"I can't kill you, you snake," said Bill scornfully, "but I'm going to lick you with my bare hands—unless you run."

Jackson's heart seethed with hate. In his confidence in himself and his outposts he had once more let the Montagues slip something over on him. The realization was worse than the cutting lash of a slave-driver. He was utterly helpless and he knew it.

He so trembled with impotent rage that he had lost his usual cold consideration of consequences. When Bill decided to fight him, in that moment he resolved to kill the young man. With Carter, Tilby, Owens and Carruthers looking on and sharing his ignominy, to his unbalanced perspective it was a necessity.

Withdrawing his hands from his pockets, the gambler waited confidently for the young ranchman's first move. The idea of an ignorant cowboy matching his fists against an athlete and boxer from Chicago almost made him laugh hysterically.

For Jackson had always seen fit to keep in training. It made him calmer and surer in his profession at the card-table, not to mention the fact that at times it virtually amounted to life insurance. He didn't know that Bill had been East to school.

With the first exchange of blows Jackson knew that he was facing a skilled boxer; and the knowledge, instead of making him cautious, made him frenzied. When Bill began slipping blow after blow past his guard to the mark, he forgot that the Marquis of Queensbury ever lived. His breath began to come hard, and he fouled his antagonist.

By biting his lip Bill repressed a groan, but the blow halted him for a moment. Immediately Jackson feinted with his right hand and swung a vicious cut to the center of Bill's face with his left. The high boots of the ranchman also prevented perfect foot-work, and the blow, while not landing squarely, grazed his cheek.

With an additional thrill of anger Bill felt the touch of metal. The skin along his cheek parted like paper, and the blood started. In the semi-darkness no one could detect a glint from the polished metal. Had the blow landed, it would have marred his features for life. Jackson was wearing a pair of knuckles.

"You ——!" he gritted between his teeth, and he began deliberately to mark the gambler's features.

It took time to batter the gambler, as Bill had to keep clear of foul blows and those flailing fists which carried destruction. Jackson fought silently, taking his punishment without a whimper, but Bill could feel him flinch with the pain as his face began to lose all human semblance.

At last young Montague began to feel the strain upon his muscles and his lungs. Jackson was groggy on his feet, but indomitable hatred gleamed in his rapidly closing eyes. Tiring of the orgy of "blood and iron" and having vented his anger upon that pitiful, tottering figure, Bill gave the suffering gambler the *coup de grâce* by a quick left to the stomach and, as Jackson's guard dropped instinctively, a smashing right to the point of the jaw delivered with all of his young strength.

Without a sound the gambler collapsed. Later, Curly and Frank swore that his head hit the ground first. Bill swayed slightly on his feet and drew a tremulous, sobbing breath.

"——!" shouted Blaine, who was curiously examining the unconscious man. "This

rat's got a pair of knucks on his hands!"

There was a roar from the DZX punchers, and they surged forward.

"Nev' mind, boys," called Bill. "I knew it the second time he hit me."

"Is everybody satisfied?" asked Montague of the prisoners within the ring of cowpunchers.

Jackson being unable to answer, Carruthers being engaged in making some new hirsute design and no one else volunteering, Owens grunted.

"I'll have a posse after you before morning," he stated.

"You will not," replied Montague. "You make one legal move now and you will be through. Regardless of your shipping record, this—" and he shoved his .45 meaningly into Owens' midriff— "is a good point to remember. I have a sworn statement that you shipped nine cars of first-class peaches, not to mention those you sold in Lebanon. Tilby! It's about time you climbed down off the fence. All right, boys. Let's ride."

"Party's settled peaceably," shouted Harrison aloud. "All yuh tinhorn gamblers an' hot-check artists get on back to yore knittin'. He ain't dead, is he, Blaine? That was a peach of a swing."

"BLACK BART"—POET-ROBBER

by **Eugene Cunningham**

ON AUGUST 12, 1877, the Fort Ross-Russian River stage met a stocky individual masked by a flour-sack, carrying a shotgun. At his polite request the driver tossed down the Wells-Fargo box. The robber emptied it of $325 and disappeared without leaving a clue.

July 28, 1878, the Quincy-Oroville stage was similarly stopped. This time the mails were robbed. From a waybill on a tree Sheriff Tom Cunningham of San Joaquin County got this rimed warning:

> Here I lay me down to sleep,
> To wait the coming morrow.
> Perhaps success, perhaps defeat
> And everlasting sorrow.
> Yet come what will—I'll try it on;
> My condition can't be worse,
> And if there's money in that box,
> 'T is money in my purse!
>
> BLACK BART—P. O. 8.

Twenty-six times afterward stages were robbed. Rewards for "Black Bart" totaled $18,000. After each robbery Sheriff Cunningham reached the scene immediately.

Then the Sonora-Milton stage was held up—November 3, 1883—and Bart dropped a handkerchief. Cunningham found it and noted a laundry mark. Through Harry Morse, of the Morse Detective Agency in San Francisco, "FX07" was traced to "Charles E. Bolton," "mining man" living at the Webb House, and Bart was soon captured.

Bart, whose real name was Charles E. Boles, confessed twenty-eight robberies, boasting that he had never carried a loaded gun nor harmed any one. He is described as five feet eight inches tall, fashionably dressed, about forty years old. He wore a gray mustache and imperial, had deep-sunk, piercing blue eyes, was well educated, chaste of speech, and passed readily for a gentleman.

His methods were simple: When short of cash he took a night boat to Stockton, landed and walked thirty or forty miles into the mountains. Next day he held up a stage, regained the boat, returned to San Francisco and lived quietly until his funds were gone. He had been a member of Company B, 116th Illinois Infantry, in the Civil War.

He entered San Quentin Prison on November 11, 1883, to serve seven years. On January 22, 1889, he was released. He visited the officers responsible for his capture and announced himself as done with crime. Some one asked if he would ever write verse again.

"Gentlemen," laughed Bart, "I said I'd commit *no more* crimes!"

Bart walked out of the office and—vanished. The "Poet-Robber" was but another of California's colorful memories.

Muzzled Dogs of War

by Magruder Maury

Author of "Gold of the Yellow Gods."

IN THE smoke-grimed section of London back of Southampton Row Charles Livingston Barcroft, American, established himself immediately after the armistice.

While the fighting lasted Barcroft had done what he could to help beat the Kaiser. Man of peace though he was he had seen the light in the early days of the conflict, and had joined up with the French Foreign Legion. From the first Marne to the time Uncle Sam jumped in to settle the affair he had gone with the remnants of his corps. Then a German machine-gunner sprayed what was left of his company, and, incidentally, put a bullet through the American's ankle.

By the time he was out of the hospital the Yankees had come. Barcroft immediately applied for and obtained a transfer.

His stiff ankle kept him out of the trenches and he was put into the Intelligence Department where he did work of such a high grade that he established a tremendous reputation for himself among the insiders and those in a position to help him in the work he had selected—the balking of political crimes.

He could not have chosen a better time or a better place in which to launch his new venture. London swarmed with refugees from all over the world, men and women from every corner of the earth, running about like wasps whose nests have just been dislodged, and all burning with ardor for some cause at odds with the established order of things.

Into this maelstrom Barcroft, a worshiper of the God-of-Things-as-They-Are, thrust his pointed brown beard and bristling mustache, his brown eyes glowing and his rather diminutive form quivering with excitement at the prospect of a chase.

But when the chase was assured the glow in the brown eyes gave place to a look of vacuity, the quiver of excitement to the calm of a settled purpose.

Nor had the chase proved long in the starting. Before the paint on the little sign he'd hung inside the glass door of his office had more than time to dry, Inspector Galvin, in charge of the department of Scotland Yard intrusted with the task of watching foreign plotters, red and white, sent for Barcroft.

Galvin was not one of those who could be deceived by the stooping shoulders and vacant stare with which Barcroft tricked the less astute. As soon as the little American entered his dingy room the inspector began talking.

And the result of that conversation seriously affected the fortunes of two former Yankee Division men, stranded in London.

HARRY, whose last name was Fisk, was sitting in the cheerless reading-room of his lodging-house, nursing the stiff knee that had followed an infection from a scratch made by a barbed-wire tangle in No Man's Land, and watching the persistent drizzle that seeped down over Whitechapel, when Avery Carr entered the room and limped grouchily across to fling himself into a near-by chair.

Harry did not need to be told that Carr's search for a job of some kind had fizzled out. London had few jobs to offer to anybody in those days, and fewer still for Americans.

"Not a —— thing in sight," said Harry. Then he checked himself. "That's not exact, either. Jimmy has a wild-eyed scheme he's been talking about. I don't know what it is though."

Jimmy Cochrane, Irish fighting-man, was one of the hard-bitten lot that gathered of evenings in the dun colored reading-room of the lodging-house and paid his nightly tanner for a bed. He was a down-and-outer. So were they all—droppings and left-overs from most of the British colonies and English-speaking countries of the world.

Avery Carr snorted derision at the mention of the Irishman's name.

"Jimmy Cochrane," he said, "is as full of wild-eyed schemes as Evans over there is full of booze."

He pointed with his square chin in the direction of a drooping figure slouched down on one of the long yellow benches ranged against the wall. It was the figure of a man in the garb of a Church of England clergyman, shabby and out-at-elbows, but still unmistakably clerical.

Evans had been only two weeks in the lodging-house, but he looked as if he had never been anywhere else. He had what seemed to be a sort of fixed programme. On Tuesday he received a remittance. With it he went straight to a little pawnshop in Whitechapel High Street near Petticoat Lane where he redeemed an old ring which he brought back to the lodging-house and turned over to the clerk. Then he went out and got drunk. Not beastly oiled, but just mellow. In that state he would stay until his money ran out on Friday, when he would get the ring, take it back to the pawnshop and get enough to keep him mellow until his remittance came again.

But it was only because of his clericals that Evans stood out at all from the rest of the gang in the place. He was no worse, and perhaps no better, than any of the others that milled round and round in the eating-room, where the big open fires were, and the reading-room of the drab house. They were all queer, as men will be who are without occupation for hand or brain.

And the two Americans, Fisk and Carr, were not materially different from any of the others.

Carr reached into his pocket and pulled out three tanners, a packet of fags, some loose coppers and the stub of a lead pencil.

"My pile," he said, mournfully.

Harry Fisk duplicated his friend's action, but not the coin. Fisk was rich. He had two half-crowns, three silver shillings, some tanners and coppers, but no lead pencil.

"I've got enough," he announced, "to see us through the week."

The clerical Evans, aroused by the clink of the coin, arose and lurched over to the two Americans.

"Lend me a tanner, old chap, won't you?" he asked, his cultured accent blurred and slurring with the drink, his bedraggled beard, trembling with drunken eagerness.

Harry selected a six-penny piece and handed it over.

"Return 't Tuesday," mumbled Evans as he lurched uncertainly back to his bench.

"You darned idiot," growled Carr. "That's the last you'll ever see of that."

"Maybe," agreed the other. "But you never can tell. Besides, I'm sorry for that chap. Think what it must mean to a clergyman to be cadging tanners in an East End lodging-house."

"He's brought it all on himself, the drunken bum," said the unsympathetic Carr. "What business has a preacher got hitting the booze? He didn't have his legs knocked from under him by the armistice like the rest of us did. He spends every cent he gets on booze. I'd see him parch before I'd give him a penny."

Harry made no reply to this, and the two sat in glum silence waiting for the time to come to get some supper and to pay for their beds.

And while they waited Jimmy Cochrane appeared in the doorway, his freckled face and blue eyes gleaming with suppressed excitement.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Carr. "You look as if you'd robbed a bank. Are the cops after you?"

"They may be at that," said Jimmy, who had been making a precarious living in ways he managed so craftily that the police, though keeping an eye on him, had been unable to interfere.

He pulled up a chair and sat down in front of Harry.

"You're a machine-gun man, aren't you?" he asked.

Harry nodded.

"And Carr?"

"We were in the same company," Harry replied.

"Would you be game for another bit of a scrap? Ain't fed up on fighting, are you?"

"Not me—if I can get paid for it," answered the American.

"You will be paid. How about Carr?"

He asked this question as if the man about whom he spoke had not been sitting there, not two feet from him. Harry answered in like manner.

"Oh, you can count on Carr, too. He's a ——, though, when he gets his back up."

"Oh, I don't mind his moods. Have a few myself. Carr's game all right."

"What's all this talk about anyway?" asked Carr, coming into the conversation himself.

"Can't tell you yet. It's something I've been chasing for three or four weeks. Don't know a lot about it myself yet, but found out this afternoon that things are about ready to pop. Think I can get you two chaps in on it all right."

"Oh, ——!" growled Carr. "Another of your crazy schemes."

"Growl all you like," said Jimmy Cochrane cheerfully. "All I'm asking you is to keep a stiff upper lip and don't go and leave town before tomorrow night. You'll promise me that much, won't you? And meet me here about this time, both of you?"

"We'll be here," Harry promised, and Carr nodded a surly agreement.

They were there in the same chairs beside the same window, outside of which fell the same dull drizzle the next afternoon at the same time when Jimmy joined them.

The Irishman's face and manner had changed. He looked grave, and his sharp blue eyes took in the whole room in detail as he entered. Except for a tall Australian known as Reynolds and the drink-sodden Evans, snoring gently on his bench, he saw no one in the room but the two Americans.

Reynolds looked up, nodded pleasantly to Jimmy, then got up and went to the other end of the room where he seated himself before the reading-table and took up a magazine. Jimmy looked relieved.

"I'm leary o' that cove," he explained, in a low tone. "He looks like a detective."

"Why don't you stop your nefarious practises, whatever they are?" asked Carr disagreeably. "I would if I thought all the dicks and fly cops in the world were at my heels."

"Hush!" expostulated Jimmy. "It's this other thing—the thing I was talkin' to you about last night. We can't be too careful. I've worked it for you and Harry if you want to go."

"Go?" said Carr, with real interest. "If it means getting anywhere out of this —— hole, I'm for it. If you're not fooling us again," he added, crustily, "you can count on us for anything decent that has money in it."

"Even another war?"

Jimmy's voice sank almost to his boot tops and he gave a furtive look around him. Harry did not like either the voice or the manner. He hated men who talked out of the corners of their mouths.

"Come clean, Jimmy," he said sharply. "I take it you're not plotting blackmail or murder. Stop dodging, and come clean."

"I've got to be careful," said Jimmy, offended. "We don't know who's listening. Barcroft has agents everywhere, they say."

"Who in the —— is Barcroft?" growled Carr.

"You ought to know," snapped back Jimmy. "He's one of your own countrymen. He saved his hide in France by workin' behind the lines, or anyway, out of the danger zones, as a spy. Now he's stickin' his nose into things over here. This work I have in hand is the very sort o' thing he's lookin' for. He'd queer our game in a minute if he could—and Harry here wants me to blurt our plans out all over the shop."

"Go on with what you've got to tell us," said Harry. "What is it?"

The Irishman thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out four golden sovereigns.

"Maybe these will talk loud enough for you," he said, giving two sovereigns to Harry and two to Carr. "That's a retainer, and, if accepted, holds you both."

"But what the—?" began Carr.

"Weekly expense money to pay you both for keeping your mouth shut—especially Harry—until you're called upon for some real work."

"And then what?" demanded Harry. "An Irish revolution?"

"No!" protested Jimmy, in a vehement whisper. "Ireland's nothing at all to do with this. It's the Balkans. You'll have a chance for some real fighting, I think."

"But what are we to do now to earn our pay?" asked Carr, dropping his voice to a half-whisper.

"Keep in your usual cheerful spirits," said Jimmy, sarcastically, and added, in a tense whisper. "You're to obey orders—and the first is, to keep quiet. You'll get your detailed instructions later, perhaps tonight."

The two Yankees gazed into each other's eyes, questioningly.

Slowly Fisk nodded.

"I'm on," he said.

Carr pocketed his sovereigns.

Jimmy positively chortled with delight. Clearly he had not been sure of his men up to this time. Their acceptance of the sovereigns told him they were with him.

"Then it's settled," he said, leaning toward them and talking low and rapidly. "You pass your word to me and through me to my friend that his friends are yours and that you are ready to sail from these 'ere chalk cliffs of Old England when so instructed, and to manhandle a machine-gun and whatever else is requisite in whatsoever part of the world your valuable services may be needed. You agree?"

"We do," said the Americans, speaking together.

"Good. From now on you two sit steady in the boat, keep your jaws from jigglin' and be ready to move when you get the sign."

He half-turned in his chair as he finished speaking, got up, walked to the reading-table and sat down opposite the Australian, who smiled at him absently, and went on with his reading.

Carr's eyes followed the Irishman, and came back once more to Harry. His face, which had lighted at sight of the coins and prospect of action, fell into mournful lines again.

"Reckon there's anything in it, or is it just another of Jimmy's false alarms?" he asked.

"Rather expensive for a false alarm," said Harry. "Unless the coins are phony."

"Let's go see," suggested Carr, and they went to the desk where the night-clerk at the lodging-house was just going on duty.

"Are these all right?" demanded Carr, putting his two sovereigns on the marble top of the counter.

The clerk rang them, bit them, examined them narrowly, and passed them back.

"Seem all right to me," he said. "I'll change them into silver if you like."

"No, thanks," said Carr, and then to Harry, as they walked away from the desk: "Somebody's backing Jimmy, all right. He never had that much money of his own. But we'll probably land in the hoosegow along with a batch of anarchists or Bolshevists or something."

"You should worry," said the more cheerful Fisk. "It'll be a change from this place anyhow."

Jimmy was waiting for them when they returned to the reading-room. There was an injured expression on his freckled face.

"Well?" he asked. "They were all right, weren't they?"

"Yep," said Carr, "but we've got to meet this friend of yours personally and size him up for ourselves. I don't go into things blindfold any more."

Jimmy looked doubtful.

"He's lying doggo—quiet, you know, not seeing many people, but I'll try to fix it," he said. "See you after supper if I can arrange matters."

"Supper," suggested Fisk, always ready to eat, "and no Yarmouth bloater tonight."

They had just finished when Jimmy returned, accompanied by a long, cadaverous individual, scrupulously dressed, who looked about the place with disdain on his aristocratic features.

Jimmy beckoned them into the reading-room.

"He's not taking any chances, I see," Carr muttered to Harry, as they made their way through the crowded eating-room to follow Jimmy. "Thinks it's safer to see us here than have us come to his quarters."

"Looks so," agreed Harry. "He's a slick one, I guess."

But the first impression the head of the conspiracy—if he was the head—had made upon the Americans was dissipated when the cadaverous one began to talk. They liked the way he did business.

"See here, you fellows," he said, in clear-cut English that had almost an American tang, "this is a matter in which you'll have to trust me even more than I shall have to trust you. I'm paying you two quid a week to stand by. When we get started it will be more, although as yet I can't say just how much. It's money out of pocket now if you fail me. On the other hand, you will have to take my word for a lot of things. For instance, my name, which to you will be Taylor."

His wide, humorous mouth expanded into a smile as he spoke. Harry liked the smile. It was frank and friendly.

"All right, Mr. Taylor," he said. "I'm willing, and I think Carr is, too. But can't you give us an inkling of the game?"

"Just a hint, perhaps," agreed the man who called himself Taylor. "You know what the Peace Conference tried to do with some of the Balkan States? In brief, they're chipping hunks off some and adding them to others. This shifts the map in a way that rouses intense enthusiasm from some and equally intense opposition from others. We are among 'the others.' Is that clear?"

"Yeh! Clear as mud," growled Carr.

"It will have to do," said Taylor, with his engaging smile. "Your job will be to command a company each of machine-gunners recruited here in London from soldiers out of a job. Mr. Cochrane tells me you both held commissions in the American forces in France."

The Americans said nothing to this. Fisk had been a second lieutenant during the war, and Carr a top sergeant. It was near enough.

Taylor rose.

"Cochrane will be paymaster," he added. "Your instructions for the present will all come through him. He says I can rely upon you to obey orders and to keep quiet. I don't think Barcroft's spotted any of us yet, but we can't be too careful. The best way to do is to keep right on doing whatever you've been doing?"

"What does this Barcroft look like?" asked Harry.

"Oh, he's a little fellow, extremely active. Runs about like a scared cockroach. I don't think much of him, myself. Still, since we're not being any too good, we have to be very careful."

He smiled once more his engaging smile, and that was the last they saw of him for a week.

EVERY day of that week Jimmy vanished in the morning and reappeared in the evening, while the monotony of waiting grew heavier and heavier for the two Yankees. Then one evening, when the everlasting drizzle had changed to a down-right rain that spattered and splashed against the window panes, adding its bit to the grim dreariness of the reading-room, Jimmy came in just before supper, and strolled over to the two Americans.

"I say, Fisk," he said in the whisper Harry detested, "can you take a note over to the Borough for me tonight?"

"I'll say I can. Anything for action. Where do I go in the Borough?"

"To a little Serbian restaurant that used to be known as the White Swan," Jimmy murmured.

The three of them turned toward the eating-room where the patrons of the place were lining up before the counters over which the house attendants were serving tea and buns.

The Irishman and the two Americans carried their plates and cups to one of the bare, clean-scrubbed board-tables and sat down. Jimmy, after one of his furtive glances to make sure there was no one else who might be listening near them, went on.

"You'll find the White Swan, or whatever they call the place now, just off the Borough Road. The man you want to see should be waiting in the private bar back of the restaurant. If he's not there, wait for him."

"How'm I going to know him?" Harry asked.

"He's tall, taller than you are, I should say. His hair is black, streaked with gray, his eyes are dark and deep set, and there's a triangular scar that starts at the tip of his pointed chin and runs upward to the corner of his mouth, giving his lip a distorted twist to the left."

"Why, that's Kar——"

The Irishman's freckled hand went up in sharp warning.

"No names here," he said, quickly. "His lordship's architects put no ear-muffs on the walls of these rooms. You'll know your man when you see him. You pass through the restaurant into a rear hall, and down

the hall a few steps to a door on the right. That's your door. Walk in and deliver the note. If any one tries to stop you, just mention Taylor's name. Do you understand?"

It was still raining when Fisk left the lodging-house, walked down Fieldgate Street and turned into Whitechapel High Street. The street vendors were still busy, their carts illumined by tin-can flares that fluttered and guttered in the gusts of wind that came sweeping up from the river.

At Gardner's Corner the American turned toward the Minories in the direction of London Bridge. Soon he had left Whitechapel behind him, crossed the black river, with the streaks of red and yellow lights dancing and flickering about on its surface, and entered the Borough. Here the maze of streets fairly reeked with noisy, smelly humanity. The gutters were mere soggy kennels in which scrawny children played and screeched, in spite of the rain and the lateness of the hour.

Soon the character of the crowds changed. The smells were different—not better nor worse—just different. The scraps of conversation and the cries of the crowd through which he passed reached his ears in an unfamiliar tongue.

Presently he came to the side street he was looking for and turned down until his further way was blocked by the railing that ran around a tiny park, one of the lungs of London's slums where, if you listen quietly, you can hear the city's panting breath. Across the low shrubs in the square Harry could see the blurred lights of the restaurant he was seeking, gleaming through the mist. As he swung around the park and came nearer he could even make out the swinging signboard that once had proudly borne the sign of the White Swan.

But the board carried some sort of foreign lettering now, and there was an alien air about it. Harry stopped and looked through the steam obscured windows into the dimly lighted room. Then he pushed open the door and entered.

Instead of the usual barmaid an ancient crone, yellow and wrinkled, faced him across the counter at the end of the room. He nodded to her, mentioned the name "Taylor," and passed, without pausing through the rear door and into the hallway.

A jumble of outlandish noises—they seemed outlandish to him, in his strained state of mind—came to him from the rooms above. Several persons seemed to be talking at once, moving about, changing furniture. None of the noise was loud. Indeed, Harry felt that some sort of effort was being made to keep it hushed.

The door on the right yielded to his thrust and he walked into a room that had formerly been the private bar of the old White Swan.

A sea-coal fire burned in the grate, and before it stood two or three chairs. More chairs were arranged about a square table in the center of the room, directly beneath the uncertain light of a gas jet. For the rest, the room was empty. Evidently, he would have to wait for his man.

A bell cord of the old-fashioned kind gave him an idea. He pulled the cord, but instead of the pretty barmaid he had hoped to summon, a boy with evil eyes and coarse black hair entered.

To him Harry gave an order for a hot Scotch. The boy nodded surly understanding and departed, to return with the drink which he placed on the table at Harry's elbow.

When the boy had gone Harry stretched his tired legs toward the fire, sipped at his drink and listened to the indistinct noises overhead. The hot drink, the warmth of the fire and his long walk made him feel sleepy. He was nodding when the voice of a woman in the hallway aroused him.

It was an attractive voice, low, with a strange sort of vibrating timbre in it that carried far, and set his nerves a-tingle. He turned in his chair and fixed his eyes on the door, but it remained closed.

The voice ceased, and swift, light, staccato steps on the bare boards told him that the speaker had gone up-stairs.

He resumed his contemplation of the fire, and waited. A few moments later the door on the side of the room opposite the hallway opened, and a man entered from the outside.

The tall form of the newcomer was enveloped in a dripping rain-cape, and his hat glistened with rain-drops under the gaslight. As he removed the hat Harry saw that a triangular scar, beginning at the point of the chin and ending at the corner of the mouth, drew the lower part of the man's face into a distorted pucker.

Harry rose from his chair. The man lifted his hand in a quick command for

silence, and began to divest himself of his rain-coat, which he laid on the table.

Harry had known him at once. It was the man whose name Jimmy Cochrane had forbidden him to mention in the lodging-house, a man whose face and name had been once almost as familiar to devotees of illustrated weeklies and news sheets as the faces of Charlie Chaplin and Mary Pickford, and the name of Lloyd George or Woodrow Wilson.

Suddenly, mysteriously, both name and face had ceased to take up any space in news-sheet or periodical.

Johann Karolov, he was. You will remember that he flared into prominence as the prime minister of a little independent state which was afterward chucked by the Peace Conference into that hodge-podge of nations which was christened Jugoslavia. You may not have forgotten how he vanished as suddenly as he appeared, snuffed out like a candle when he came, single-handed, to fight the great powers gathered about the council board at Versailles.

He had made a splendid fight for the retention of the independence of his country, and the continued exercise of its prerogatives of royalty by the grand duke of the tiny principality. But he had lost.

Those familiar with Balkan affairs insisted that he had been undermined more by the opposition at home than by any ability of the representatives of the great powers with whom he battled. Surely he had opposition in his own land, and that opposition worked hand in hand with the powers that were so desperately anxious to have the Treaty of Versailles go through unchecked and unamended.

And now this man, once the hero of the down-trodden races of Europe, stood face to face with a former Yankee lieutenant in a fifth-rate little restaurant in the squalid slums of London.

"You wanted me?" he asked, his somber eyes on Harry's face.

His English was clear, precise, clean-cut, but with a slightly foreign accent.

"I have a letter," Fisk began. "I was instructed to give it to a man with a triangular scar on his chin. It is sealed and bears no address, but I was to meet the man here. I am sent by——"

He paused.

"You are sent by Taylor," said the man with the scar, finishing the sentence as Fisk had intended him to do. "Give me the letter, please."

Fisk drew the envelop from an inner pocket of his coat and was about to hand it over when the door to the hallway opened and a woman entered. She was small, almost tiny, but she dominated the room, literally filled it with her presence.

"Give me the letter," she said, in the low voice Fisk had heard in the hall.

The man's hand, extended for the letter, dropped. Mystified, Fisk held on to the missive. His instructions had said nothing about giving it to a woman.

She came nearer to him, her little hands outstretched, bracelets tinkling on the slim wrist. Harry noticed the fingers, slender, pink-tipped, weighted with rings. But the pink tips were not pointed, and the thumb showed mastery. He felt that it was a hand that, for all its tininess, somehow managed to get what it wanted.

"Give me the letter," the woman reiterated, in her low, compelling tones.

Fisk looked at the man.

"Give her the letter." Karolov's voice was expressionless, without inflection.

Harry handed over the envelop to the woman.

She ripped it open, glanced at its contents, which appeared to be brief, smiled in a way that softened her cold gray eyes to a warm hazel, and held out the sheet of paper to Karolov.

He also smiled as he read, and the triangular scar twisted and puckered his lip. When he had finished he said something in a tongue strange to Harry, and the woman turned abruptly, and started toward the door.

"You will wait, please," she said over her shoulder to Harry. "There may be an answer!"

Harry bowed. He was far past speech.

THE dull, ugly room seemed curiously empty after the woman had gone. The two men stood in silence, listening to the staccato tapping of her high-heeled shoes on the bare boards of the stairs, and then turned to the fire.

"Be seated, please," said the Royalist.

From his pocket he drew out a handsomely embossed leather cigaret-case which he offered Harry, who helped himself to one of those thin Turkish cigarets one buys in

the bazaars of the Balkans. Karolov lighted his at the open fire, and leaned back in his chair.

"So you and your companion have decided to join our little band?" he said.

"Yes," said Harry.

"Without question or reservation, without thinking of the cost—without, I take it, even considering the objective," said the man. "You soldiers are a wonder to me."

"That's war," said Harry, a bit sententiously.

"It's life, too, in a way," commented Karolov. "We march to unknown objectives for unknown purposes at the command of unseen leaders."

His somber eyes lighted up until they glowed with a strange, fanatic fire.

"That is why," he went on, with hardly a pause. "I am a monarchist in these days of republicanism run rampant. I am called reactionary, perhaps justly so. But to me republicanism leads eventually to the breakdown of discipline—military, national, civil, individual. That means chaos. Republicanism exalts and inflates the ego."

He stopped and smiled, a slow, friendly smile.

"That's my hobby," he explained, stooping and punching the fire until it roared up the chimney.

Harry was trying to form some sort of reply that would not be in contradiction to his own convictions and still would not dampen the Royalist's ardor when the door opened and her Imperial Majesty, or whoever she was, reentered the room.

"The letter you brought," she began, addressing Harry and ignoring Karolov, "contained very good news. All is ready. It also brought a warning. This Scotland Yard of London has placed a special agent to watch us. He is very, very clever. He is Barcroft. You have heard of him?"

Harry bowed assent.

"He is so very clever, is Barcroft, but he is not so clever as he thinks himself. He is not so clever as we are. We shall be ahead of him this time, but we must act swiftly. You will tell Captain Cochrane that every one must be aboard the ship at sunrise."

"That means all possible haste," spoke Karolov. "It is now past ten. You and your companions will have to work hard all night I am afraid. You have one machine-gun company, you know. Captain Carr has another and Captain Cochrane a third. Captain Cochrane has the necessary list of names. He will know what to do when you tell him we are to sail in the morning. Is that all understood?"

"Perfectly," Fisk assured him. "Where are the men?"

"Captain Cochrane will tell you."

The woman, who had been impatiently tapping the floor with the tip of her little slipper, now broke in, her voice angry:

"These details! They should have been attended to before. We waste precious time."

"Pardon, *Madame la Comtesse*," said Karolov. "There has been no opportunity. Tonight for the first time I have met Captain Fisk."

"*Diable!*" The ejaculation came in sharp, impetuous French. "We trust untried men? With Scotland Yard watching us, with that most hateful Barcroft spying and watching, we take strangers into our confidence in this fashion? We put ourselves, our duke and our land into the hands of blundering British pigs!"

She fairly spat out the last words. What a vixen she was. Fisk, who had been ready to yield completely to her physical charm, now felt a wave of dislike and revulsion sweep over him.

Seeing, perhaps, something of the effect of her words and manner, she swung suddenly to the other extreme.

"Forgive," she pleaded in English that halted. "I spoke out of a full heart. I think only of his Grace and the wrongs they have done him. His young nephew who sits now up-stairs—you see, *monsieur*, how we trust you—unless we act quickly, and oh, very surely, he too, will be defrauded of his rights. My beloved country will be turned over to the rabble. Your Lloyd George, how he has tricked us. The French—I hate them all, but more than the French I hate the unspeakable Americans, with their pratings about democracy and the rights of small nations, and their hypocrisies. And above all I hate this Barcroft, this sly maneuverer, with his prying ways. But this time we shall trick Barcroft."

She stopped, a tear dropped from her long, curved lashes. Once more Fisk felt the almost irresistible physical charm of the woman.

"This time," said the Karolov, "we shall succeed."

His long, sensitive hand went out toward the little woman he had called countess and a yearning look came into his eyes.

"Perhaps, *mon cher*," she said, with a queer, aloof smile, her eyes once more hard, cold, a sparkling gray.

The man's hand dropped, leaden, to his side.

"And now," said the woman, turning again to Fisk, and speaking in a breathless whisper, "you must hurry to Captain Cochrane. There is much to be done before morning, and the *Zirgana* sails at sunrise."

She waved a peremptory hand, glittering with jewels under the yellow gaslight.

With his hand on the knob of the door through which Karolov had entered, Fisk paused at a word from the Royalist.

"Money! You must get a taxi—several taxis before this night's work is done. Here."

He dropped several sovereigns into Fisk's palm, and again Harry turned to the door.

"You perfectly understand, captain?" the little countess called after him. "The *Zirgana* at the Victoria Docks before sunrise?"

CLOSING the door behind him upon that strange pair, Fisk found himself lashed with the spray of falling rain dashed by a high wind against the sides of the dark alley through which he would have to pass to get to the street. Half-way to the street, where a faint light gleamed through the mist, he bumped into a man who was lurching drunkenly in the poor shelter of the wall. The reek of whisky as Fisk passed wakened vague memories, but he did not stop to think what those memories were. He was in a hurry.

He was soaked before he reached the Borough Road once more and found a taxi-cab that carried him over the Tower Bridge and to Fieldgate Street without loss of time.

It was past eleven o'clock, and the whole district seemed deserted and shrouded in gloom when the cab drew up before the door of the lodging-house, and, leaving the driver instructions to wait, he hastened indoors.

Carr was sitting on a bench before the night-desk, near an open-fire. Harry hurried up to him, shedding water like a duck.

"Where's Jimmy?" he asked.

"Oh, he's stickin' around somewhere," growled Avery, who had a pronounced peeve. "Posted me here to watch for you—and a —— of a watch it's been. Why didn't you stay all night?"

Just then Jimmy came up.

"Get busy, quick," said Fisk. "The *Zirgana*, Victoria Docks, in the morning at sunrise."

"I suspected as much this afternoon," said Jimmy.

"Why the —— didn't you tell us then?" snorted Harry.

"Oh, I didn't want you two going off like a bundle of fireworks. Besides, I was not sure myself. Don't think they'd have acted so quickly if they hadn't heard Barcroft was on their trail. For my part, I think that was a false alarm, and so does Taylor, in a way. Taylor doesn't believe Barcroft has even an idea of the personnel of this crowd, everything's been kept so perfectly quiet."

"Well, we'll have to hurry now," snapped Fisk.

Jimmy got busy at once. In five minutes he had ordered two more taxis, and had given Carr and Fisk their instructions, and provided them with separate lists of names which he had torn from a notebook carried in his pocket.

These pages bore, in Jimmy's fine script, the names and addresses of men listed in the machine-gun companies. Those on the slips Fisk had were for the most part in Limehouse, Stepney, Poplar and Eastham, places where former service men and others who were jobless and reckless might be expected to live.

"Zero hour, five forty-five," Jimmy told them. "Objective, S. S. *Zirgana*, Victoria Docks. I'll be there to receive your men as they come. You'll find the men waiting the word. Warn them all to take nothing but their clothes-kit, and to keep their —— mouths shut—particularly the last. Understand?"

Carr disdained reply to this whispered tirade. Fisk grinned, thinking how well the Irishman must be enjoying himself with his new authority, his very evident love of conspiracy, and the immediate prospect of a fight.

Fisk's first stop was at a sailors' lodging-house, where he had no trouble in getting the man he was after.

"Is ut a foight, sorr?" asked this man, who had followed Harry back to his taxi, and was leaning confidentially through the door to whisper his question.

"Looks that way—a good one," Fisk assured him, and drove off leaving the big Irishman grinning and saying over and over with enormous satisfaction—

"Now, phwat d'ye think o' that?"

All the other men Harry called upon that rainy night had much the same sort of reception for his news.

By three o'clock the rain had ceased. A little later a few straggling stars began to peer through the ragged curtain of clouds over the Big Smoke. As dawn grayed faintly overhead, he called upon his last man, arousing him by pounding loudly on the door of a tiny house in Poplar down by the docks.

Then he gave the word to the sleepy driver of the taxi and they dashed back to the lodging-house where he found Carr, his own and Fisk's kits packed and ready, waiting.

Carr had dismissed his own taxi, and piled into Harry's taxi with him.

"Don't think we'll make it in time," he growled. "If we do, something else will turn up—you'll see. It's all too good. ——, though, I can't get out of this hole quick enough. It's a cesspool."

Fisk felt pretty much the same way. London was choking him. He wanted to be out in the open once more, with the sea wind or the winds from the mountains blowing upon him. He hated crowded places.

The gatekeeper at Victoria Docks came to the sound of their grinding brakes.

"Another for the *Zirgana!*" he called, wearily, but louder than Harry thought there was any reason for.

Behind a heap of jute bales Harry made out the face of Jimmy Cochrane, flanked by Taylor and the big, burly Irishman from the sailors' lodging-house. About them were a number of other men, four of whom now detached themselves and walked toward the taxi.

Fisk fancied that Jimmy or Taylor was sending the men with further instructions for him or Carr, and wondered, vaguely, why Jimmy did not come himself. It would have given him such a good opportunity to show his authority.

The chauffeur threw in the clutch and the car started ahead. Then Harry saw that one of the men coming toward them was the booze-fighting ex-clergyman. His battered old hat was pulled down as usual to hide his bleary old eyes, and his semi-clerical clothes looked as if he had slept in them for a month. Had Jimmy recommended him, Harry wondered, and, even so, why had Taylor, who seemed to know men, taken such an old soak as Evans into the gang.

Evans took a rapid step and stopped directly in the path of the auto.

"Get out of the way, you drunken idiot!" yelled Carr, as the front wheels grazed the shabby, clerical coat.

"Get out of the car, Sergeant Carr," Evans replied, calmly. "You, too, Mr. Fisk."

And now Harry saw the man's eyes, not bleary, but clear, brown sparks under his heavy brows.

"Who are you?" gasped the two Americans in unison.

"Barcroft," said the pseudo clergyman, briefly.

Dumfounded, the two Yankees sat motionless in the taxi.

"Out with you," said Barcroft, and, disgusted with their own stupidity, they crawled out of the machine.

Two of the three men with Barcroft escorted them, unceremoniously, to a stand with Jimmy and the others back of the jute bales.

"Another good job shot to ——," growled Carr. "—— everything an inch high, but first of all, —— Evans."

"What asses we were not to spot him there in the lodging-house," mourned Harry.

"Another for the *Zirgana!*" came the gatekeeper's cockney drawl.

Evans—he still looked like Evans to Fisk and Carr from the back—cut briskly into the growing morning light, his three assistants bringing up the rear.

A taxicab rolled slowly to a halt not a dozen feet from where stood the little group of baffled filibusters. Through its window the scarred face of Fisk's Royalist friend of the night before looked out. On the rear seat were the countess and a foreign-looking man, with pointed mustaches, a long nose and prominent cheek-bones.

Fisk guessed at once that here was the nephew of the grand duke they had hoped to fight for—at a price.

Barcroft—he was all Barcroft now, in spite of his ridiculous garb—stepped to the side of the car, removed his disreputable old hat, baring his shock of brown hair, and bowed like a diplomat. Then he

straightened up, and said very quietly—

"The *Zirgana* does not sail today, *Madame la Comtesse.*"

The quick, angry flush that had spread over the lovely face of the countess when her taxi was halted, faded, leaving her chalky white.

"Monsieur Barcroft!" came chokingly from her tightly drawn lips.

"The same," said the owner of the name pleasantly. "We meet in strange places, is it not so, *Madame la Comtesse?*"

Harry could almost feel the blaze of hot fury in the little woman's eyes as she turned her face away.

"Is the British Government behind you in this?" demanded the man with the pointed mustaches.

"It is, Your Grace," was the reply. "This," indicating one of the men with him, "is Inspector Galvin of Scotland Yard. These other gentlemen are from the Foreign Office. One of them will accompany you back to your lodgings in the Borough, and will convey to you—" pausing for a moment to let the significance of his words sink in— "the information he has for your future guidance and safety."

He replaced his rusty old hat. At a wave of his hand the taxicab driver backed, turned and stopped. One of the Foreign Office attachés stepped into the car and took his seat beside the tall, weary-looking Royalist. There was a slurring of wheels in the mud and they were gone.

Inspector Galvin walked over to the men back of the jute bales.

"If you men keep your mouths shut about this affair," said the Inspector, "you will hear nothing further from us. If there is any talking we'll know where it comes from and take the necessary steps. That's all."

He strode away, and the little disconsolate crowd moved off, Fisk and Carr bringing up the rear. As they neared the gate the two Americans heard their names called. They stopped and turned to face Barcroft.

"Sorry to have queered your little game," said the detective when the others had gone on, "but some one had to put muzzles on you war dogs. You won't lose anything though, and if you had got away from London—well you'd never have seen land again for the French Government has issued orders to sink the *Zirgana* without trace."

He paused to grin in friendly fashion at them.

"Thanks," said Fisk, "we are glad she didn't get away then."

"So am I," nodded the detective. "I want to use you fellows later. Mind calling to see me at my office—say tomorrow?"

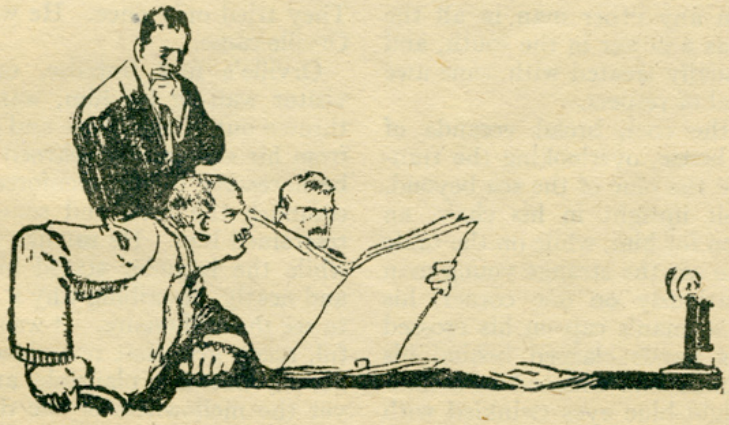
He handed Fisk a card and was walking briskly away through the morning mist when Carr broke in.

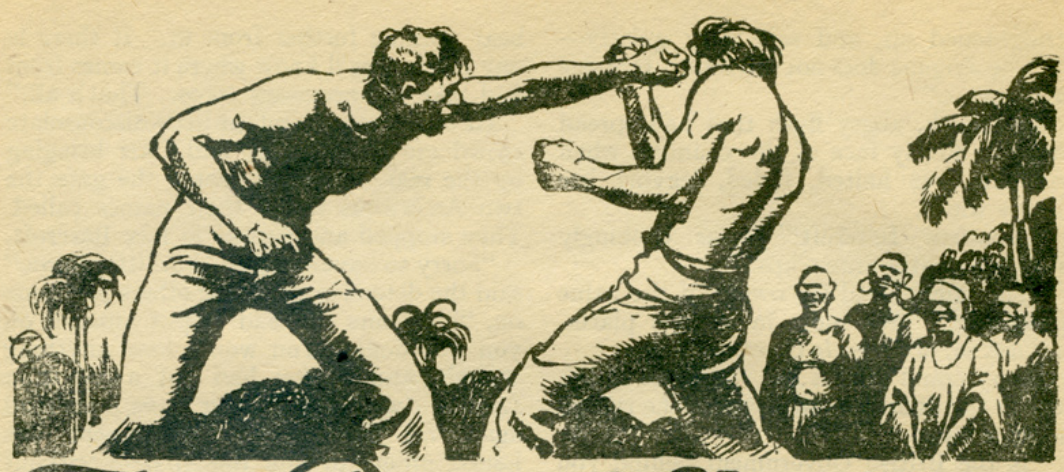
"What are they going to do with that Karolov?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Barcroft. "He's straight, but the rest of that gang are so crooked they can't lie straight in bed. They'll trick Karolov first chance they get."

"Not the countess," exclaimed Fisk, on whom the little woman's eyes had made a deep impression.

"Yes, the countess," said Barcroft. "She's the worst of the lot. She's not working for anybody except the countess."





That Pair of Shoulders

by Albert Richard Wetjen

Author of "The Treasure of Trinidad," "The Salving of the Berwick," *etc.*

IN HIS quick, jerky way, Seth Orville did several things. He removed the half-burned black cigar from his mouth, dropped into a chair with an astonished expression on his wizened face, opened his lips as if about to speak, and glared. He abruptly lifted the glass by his elbow, where a soft-footed Samoan servant had just placed it, drained it and set it down with a bang. He swore with feeling even as he glared.

"Well, I'll be ——!" he said.

The other white man laughed easily, hiding his nervousness. He was a very strange young man, strange, that is, to be acting in the nonchalant way he was in the presence of Seth Orville, who was reputed to possess more property, more islands and plantations and ships than any other man in all the Pacific. He was a power in the south, and as such was usually treated with some awe and a great deal of respect.

It was on the cool, broad veranda of Orville's Apia house, overlooking the tranquil harbor and the blue of the sea beyond. Orville sat bolt upright in his chair, an unusual position for him, while on the table before which he sat the strange young man balanced precariously on one corner, his white-covered seaman's cap on his crossed knees, and his hands clasped behind his head. His mouth was widened in a half-grin and his light-blue eyes twinkled with good humor.

"My name's Jack Peterson," he had stated calmly.

It had been literally like bearding the lion in his den for the young man to see Orville. As a matter of fact, he had been trying to see the little millionaire for several days, but up to this moment he had never succeeded. Orville was a busy man and had little time to give interviews to total strangers, many of whom came from miles away to put some proposition to him or to seek employment in his service. Tired of attempting to get an interview, the young man at the last had made his way to Orville's house veranda, despite the urgent protests of the Samoan servants, and sat himself to wait on the master's return. The servants had tried to evict the intruder. They tried only once. He was there when Orville came.

Orville's first impulse, on finding the visitor waiting for him, was to have him thrown out of the house and grounds. But from his servants he learned that it would be necessary to call reenforcements to accomplish the feat, and something besides restrained him. He sat like one fascinated while the intruder stated himself forcibly and neatly, describing why it was he wished to see the millionaire. It was not the cheerful, ready grin that restrained Orville from action, not the plausible arguments, nor yet the mellowness of the deep voice. It was the magnificence of the body.

Orville's hobby was men. He had in his employ the finest schooner-captains in all the Pacific, the best planters and traders in all the Islands, and it was his boast that he picked by hand every man and modeled him himself. And Jack Peterson, who so impudently confronted the millionaire on his own veranda, and so confidently poured forth his story, was of a physique rarely seen, and sufficient to attract at once the attention of the little sun-dried, yellow-skinned Seth Orville, who was, as usual, slightly drunk.

Peterson was at least six feet three inches in height, and his shoulders were so broad that at a distance he looked considerably shorter than he really was. It was not until one got close to him that his real height became apparent. Orville admired the shoulders even as he grunted and snorted and glared his indignation. He couldn't help it. Men were his hobby, much in same way as other men make a hobby of horses or dogs, and whenever he saw a particularly good specimen he had to stop and admire.

Peterson's eyes were rather wide apart, his chin was firm and smooth-shaven, his lips large and well-shaped and inclined to curve with laughter very readily. Fair golden hair, with a hint of a curl, crowned the rather broad head, and caught and held vagrant flashes of the sunlight that trickled through the green rattan curtains shielding the veranda from the road.

Orville sat silent, except for occasional snorts and grunts, while the other spun a wild-sounding yarn about a reputed pearl-bed in the northwest, unexploited and known to only two men—the speaker and his partner. Orville was wanted to finance an expedition to the island where the bed was located, to develop it. Peterson was enthusiastic and supremely confident, but hardly a word of what he was saying did the millionaire catch. He was busily engaged staring at the magnificent shoulders confronting him, outlined against the sun-shot rattan curtains. Then, suddenly, with four words, the millionaire shocked his visitor to astonished silence.

"What do you weigh?"

The other stopped short in his flow, gaped, forgot to grin, and then shut his mouth with a snap. He frowned, thinking the millionaire was making fun of him. It seemed such an irrelevant question to ask in the middle of a business discussion.

"Well!" snarled Orville.

Peterson caught his seaman's cap off his knee as he slid off the table and straightened to his full height.

"If you intend to be insulting, sir," he said gloomily, "I'll get out."

"Bosh! Sit down! You were just beginning to get interesting."

Orville thumped on the table.

"How much do you weigh?"

The puzzled young man dropped heavily on to the table corner again and stared.

"Two hundred and fifty," he said defiantly.

"Huh! Chest?"

"Forty-eight."

"M'm, not bad."

Orville's own chest went below the thirties, but he spoke as if it was not far short of the other's measurement.

"Experience and age?"

"But, sir, what about the pearls——"

"Pearls don't interest me so much as you do."

"Well of all——"

"Age! Age and experience! —— the pearls!"

"Twenty-nine."

Peterson's voice was irritable now. He had been warned that Orville was eccentric when he had stated his intention of going to him for financial backing. He realized that his advisers had indeed spoken the truth. He answered further questions sullenly but satisfactorily. He had been born in Tromso, Norway, and had moved to America with his family when very young. He could not even speak Norwegian. His father had been captain of one of the old New Bedford whalers; his brother even now was captain of a big Shipping Board vessel. He himself had started going to sea when he was eleven. For six years he had sailed before the mast. He had worked ashore for a year in South Africa, had wandered over Australia, Canada and the States, worked at nearly everything possible to mention, drifted back to the sea and ships again and had recently come adventuring to the Islands. He had heard of the pearl-bed and the little known island from a dying Kanaka he had befriended in Ponape. He owned no ship, but held a master's unlimited ticket, and several coastwise tickets, America, Australia and England. He had sailed everything from full-riggers to Clyde tugboats and was game to sail anything new that was invented.

The story seemed to please Orville, who forgot to call for any more drinks, but just sat and rubbed his hands as if washing them, and chuckled all the time.

He had found a man such as he loved to find, a man after his own heart. A veritable giant with the intelligence of a fine seaman, the experience of an old adventurer. There were many ways in which Orville could use such a man.

Impatiently the other brought the conversation back to pearls. He was thinking of his partner waiting for him back in the saloon, and wondering whether the outcome of the interview with the millionaire would result in enough money being raised to buy at the least a good square meal and a room for a night or two.

"Now about my proposition, sir——"

Orville snorted, ceased to chuckle, pounded on the table and called for his man-servant to produce more liquor. He glared at the other.

"—— you, sir. You jam yourself into my house, beat up my servants, force yourself on my presence, and then expect me to stake you to some wild harum-scarum venture. Who the —— are you, anyway? How do I know you're not lying?"

"That's enough," Peterson's voice was quiet and low. "I've stood about all I can from you. I was wrong to come here at all, perhaps, but it's the only way to get the ear of some of you big Island bugs. If you were a huskier man I'd lick the stuffing out of you for half what you've said to me, you—you —— little shrimp!"

"What! Insulted in my own house, on my own veranda! Watch out, my man, or— No, come back, you young fool. I want to talk business with you."

The other paused in his angry strides toward the veranda steps and looked back, his cap on the side of his head and his youthful face pink with anger and indignation. Orville chuckled at the storm he had aroused, and noted with a pleased thrill the great muscles swelling and rippling beneath the soiled coat-sleeves of his discovery.

"Listen to me."

Orville waved toward a chair drawn up to the table.

"Sit down and make yourself comfortable. Another glass, here, Hilo," the latter to a servant who noiselessly appeared with a tray of koa-wood in his brown hands.

Peterson hesitated, looked irresolutely out on the sun-baked road, thought of his partner waiting for him back in the saloon, and then relented. He came slowly back to the table, sullenly holding Orville's eyes, and removed his white-covered cap. He sat down, and pulling half of a cigaret from his pocket, lighted it and puffed at it angrily.

"Just confine yourself to business," he said grimly.

Orville positively laughed, the first good laugh he had had in years. It was so seldom the situation was taken so completely out of his hands, by a man too, he could plainly see, who was in desperate circumstances, probably hungry and sick of searching for capital to back his enterprise.

"Oh, I'll talk business," the millionaire grunted finally.

He jammed his sun-helmet lower over his eyes, not having troubled to remove it, and chewed rapidly on his cigar, his thin, nervous fingers twisting his sandy wisp of a mustache.

"Pearls are not interesting me at present," he began, and Peterson's heart sank. "I may look into your proposition later. But I think I can use you now to do a little business for me. The pay is good; you know my men are the best paid in the south. The work is —— easy when it *is* easy, and —— hard when it *is* hard."

Peterson's voice was desperate. He flung aside the mask of independence he had been bravely wearing and which the shrewd eyes of the millionaire had pierced. His face went almost haggard. Pride and reserve went to the winds.

"I suppose I'll have to give up the idea of developing the pearl-bed," he said at last. "I might tell you what perhaps you've already guessed. If my partner and I don't get to work soon it's the beach or a job before the mast for us."

"Just so," commented Orville dryly. "But to get along. I have a man in charge of a big plantation of mine near Hixon Bay. He's got two helpers, whites, and about one hundred and fifty native laborers. I have it on very good authority that one-third of my copra is never loaded on to my schooners. It is certain that this planter and his helpers have, to cut a long story short, been systematically robbing me for some years.

Peterson grunted.

"Fire 'em!" he said.

"Just so, just so. Fire 'em!" Orville

snorted and his voice rose with wrath. "—— it, I've fired them every six months for the last two years. I've sent relief planters with helpers, and they've come back to me in bandages. That —— man just won't be fired! Can't say I blame him. If he gets out of my employ no one else here will give him a job. He's a big man, all of three hundred pounds, handy with his fists, and shoots pretty straight. What's worse, he's the best planter for handling labor I ever had in those parts. I made a mistake in employing him. We all make mistakes sometimes. Bad habit though—M'm. —— shame—I've been going to make a trip and fire him myself, but various things have stopped me. I'd like to see him send me home in bandages!"

Orville paused for a while and consumed a drink with relish. He chuckled as he ran his eyes again over the interested Peterson's mighty shoulders.

"Well, what's this to do with me," suggested the object of his scrutiny.

Orville chuckled again as if he was in touch with some huge joke.

"You're to relieve Hammond," he said.

"Uh?"

"Hammond's my planter's name. Three hundred pounds and handy with his fists. You go two-fifty. I'd give ten years of my life to see the fight."

Peterson rose deliberately from the table and put on his cap. He stuck his thumbs in his belt and glanced down at the little millionaire.

"I'm not out committing suicide," he stated calmly. "Good-by."

He turned to go.

Orville grinned gleefully and shot out a bony forefinger at the broad back.

"You're broke, you're hungry, and there's no work going on for seamen just now. My offer means grub and decent clothes. If you succeed in relieving Hammond I'll back you for your pearl proposition. And if he sends you home in bandages you'll have had a few weeks' free board and lodging anyway."

Peterson paused and frowned. What Orville said was right. And there was just the right hint of a challenge in the testy voice. The young man swung round.

"And my partner?" he said.

Orville grunted and scratched his chin.

"Oh, I'll fix him up with a job of some sort. What sort of a chap is he?"

"Nearly as tall as I am. Thin as a lathe. Englishman. He comes of a good family and his uncle's got a title. I met him in Vancouver when he was broke. I believe he's a remittance-man, but a good sort just the same. No experience of the sea, but would make a good boss of laborers, for he once held a commission—army. Came with me for a lark. That's what he does everything for—a lark. Queer idea some fellows have."

"H'm. I'll have to see him. Send him up here when you get down town. Better still, the pair of you had better come up for tiffin. Quite informal. I'll fix you both up then. I think I'll give your partner a job as trader in the Carolines. I need a man there."

Peterson's spirits visibly rose. The fate of his partner had worried him.

"Aye, aye, sir," he said cheerfully, rising and replacing his cap.

He touched the peak in a sort of half-salute. Orville grinned happily and groped in his pocket for a match to light his cigar. Peterson handed him one to save him trouble.

"Thanks." The little millionaire looked up. "By the way, you'd better start training. Three hundred pounds and handy with his fists!"

"The bigger they are the harder they fall," commented Peterson darkly. "I used to box myself once."

He turned and walked away and the last Orville saw of him was his broad shoulders as he went round a turn in the road.

"Poor Hammond," said the little millionaire and chuckled to himself.

AMUSED and tolerant, Jack Peterson stood in the saloon beneath the poop-deck of the schooner, *Sea Bird*, while Orville fussed about him, feeling his biceps, running thin nervous fingers over his deep chest and narrow stomach, and glancing lovingly from the great corded, bronzed neck to the muscular thighs that bulged the spotless white duck pants encasing them.

"Fine, fine," muttered the little millionaire ecstatically.

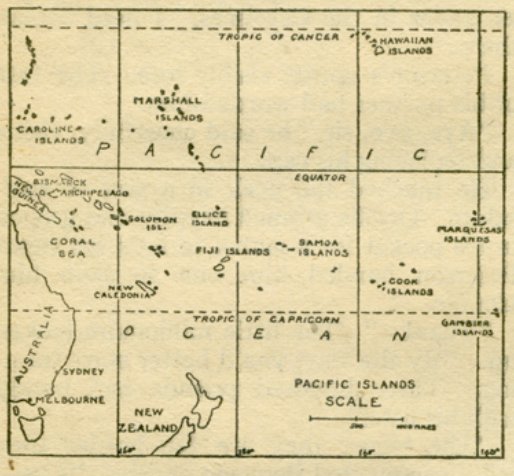
He stepped back after a while and tugged at his wisp of mustache. Peterson laughed and replaced his white jacket, straightening the collar and smoothing down the sleeves.

"Finished?" he asked pleasantly.

Orville nodded and grunted.

"You'll do. I imagine Hammond won't send *you* home."

It was in the mid-afternoon, two hours before the *Sea Bird* was due to sail for the Bismarck Archipelago to call upon the traders and planters in that savage group who watched over the interests of Seth Orville. In the saloon were five men, Orville himself, John Davies, captain of the *Sea Bird*, Bud Woods, his mate, Rodney Hyde, the supercargo, and lastly, towering above and dominating them, Peterson, who was to relieve the unrelievable Hammond at Hixon Bay, New Britain.



NEW BRITAIN IS IN THE BISMARCK ARCHIPELAGO

Orville had insisted on the laughing Scandinavian stripping to the waist that he might admire his wonderful torso, poking and prodding it as a child might a new toy. The inspection over, Orville grew gruff and testy again and gave his final instructions.

"Here are two letters, Peterson."

He handed two addressed envelopes to the giant confronting him.

"One of them is for Hammond giving you authority to relieve him. The other is for yourself, only to be opened in the event of your deciding to remain at Hixon Bay. Don't open it otherwise. If you start to come home in bandages you can pitch the letter overboard. It contains your instructions. You won't need them if Hammond declines to be fired. Savvy? You, Captain Davies, will call into my plantation at Hixon Bay and there drop Mr. Peterson and two other men who will be aboard later. You will not wait for any cargo but will make your other calls first. Then you will return to Hixon Bay for copra and bring home with you either Hammond or this man. The two of them will doubtless arrange between themselves."

The captain grinned behind his hand here. He had taken out other relief men, almost as husky as Peterson, and he knew what had happened. But he said nothing.

"I think that's all for you."

Peterson nodded and stepped back a pace or two giving the floor to Hyde and Captain Davies. Orville gave them a string of instructions for the forthcoming voyage and then, after a drink with all present, he turned to go up the companion to the poop-deck and so to the quay.

"Well, good luck, boys," he called as he disappeared.

Then he was gone, and they could hear him jog-trotting across the poop. Peterson grunted.

"Queer bird," he said. Captain Davies laughed as he flung himself into a chair and crossed his legs. He was a burly man of medium height with a short black beard; very much tanned and wrinkled about the face and hands! "Queer's right. But he's the best man to work for in the Pacific, and he is a famous judge of men. He'll either break or make you."

Peterson grunted again.

"Seems he's intent on this Hammond fellow breaking me," he grumbled moodily.

Hyde and the mate laughed together. They knew something that Peterson did not know. He was a stranger to the Islands and to Orville. Both Hyde and the mate had been tested by the little millionaire before they had been accepted as trusted employees. Their own ordeal over they took an interest in the ordeal others had to face, unknowing they were facing it. The two assistants for Peterson came aboard about half an hour later, and the *Sea Bird* sailed with the high tide and slack water.

THE trading-station and plantation store-sheds of Orville & Company were situated about half a mile up the tortuous winding Langalanga which empties into Hixon Bay, on a peninsula of land formed by the river making a broad hairpin bend. On the end of the peninsula stood a considerable village of fairly peaceable natives, the houses and store-sheds of the three white planters standing some

hundred yards or so in the palms and taro patches from the last native house.

The *Sea Bird* groped her way into the river-mouth and anchored finally off the pile-built wharf on the tip of the peninsula from which the copra was loaded by means of flat, square rafts towed out by a small launch to the schooner.

Peterson and his two assistants were put ashore early one morning and, not even waiting to see the planters who hurried down to the wharf to greet him, Captain Davies immediately took his ship out to sea again and went to make his other calls along the coast and the neighboring islands.

The first man Peterson saw on straightening up from brushing some dirt off his knees, for he had been forced to scramble from the *Sea Bird's* boat on to the wharf, was Hammond. He knew the man even before he introduced himself. He could be none other than the "three-hundred-pounds-and-handy-with-his-fists" of Orville, and Peterson's heart sank rapidly.

He was at least three inches shorter than Hammond and the other looked considerably more powerful. He was of a different type from what Peterson had expected. After hearing Orville's ghastly tales of Hammond's brutality and fistic prowess, he had expected to see a beetle-browed, monstrously burly man with cauliflower ears and a protuding jaw. But Hammond's proportions were wonderfully symmetrical and his face was broad and good-humored. He was dressed in whites of a good quality drill and was bare-headed, exposing a thick crop of curly brown hair. His eyes were grayish in color, his lips thick but not negroid-like, his teeth white and even, and dimples cut the smooth cheeks on each side of the firm mouth. He was a shock to Peterson and for a moment the smaller man could not speak.

Hammond grinned, a cheerful grin, that totally gave the lie to Orville's fantastic tales, and held out his hand.

"My name's Hammond," he said. "May I ask what the three of you gentlemen are doing here?"

Peterson gulped and limply shook hands. He felt suddenly very uncomfortable and was conscious that he was perspiring freely.

"My name's Peterson," he stammered. "These two are my assistants."

He waved to the two men standing together behind him and for some reason grinning to themselves.

"Oh, yes," Hammond nodded understandingly and then introduced his own two assistants who had come up in the mean time. They too were grinning, and they hailed the men with Peterson like old acquaintances.

"I suppose you've come to relieve me?" asked Hammond pleasantly.

Peterson nodded and rubbed his hands together with some nervousness. Hammond laughed and looked at him with pity.

"Poor little boy," he bantered. "What made Orville send you to the chopping-block?"

The other stiffened and felt suddenly very cool and confident. He looked up at Hammond.

"I can take care of myself," he said grimly.

"Maybe," laughed the other, and then turning abruptly he led away from the wharf toward the trading-houses and sheds, waving aside the curious questioning natives who were flocking around.

Peterson flung back his shoulders and walked stiffly. A suspicion was growing in his mind. He looked back and noticed that the two men he had brought with him were talking and laughing easily with Hammond's men. They had evidently met before. There was something very peculiar about the whole thing, and it was certain that Orville had not spoken the truth about his difficulty in firing Hammond.

On the veranda of the long, low galvanized-iron house wherein the three planters lived, under the cooling shade of some high, feathery-topped palms, the six men had breakfast. Hammond sat smiling at one end of a rough wooden table and performed the honors, while Peterson sat frowning at the other end getting angrier and angrier at his failure to understand what it was that was puzzling him. Had he met with open hostility and a two-fisted man-killer attacking him, he would have known what to do. But he was being treated as a joke.

When the breakfast things had been cleared away and the six men sat in long cane chairs and smoked cheroots, Peterson determined to have the thing over with. He reached into his inside pocket, and pulling out the letter intended for Hammond he jerked it into the planter's lap.

"Orville sent this," he said curtly. "It's my authority to relieve you here."

Hammond laughed and, picking up the letter, he slit open the envelope. He looked at the little slip it contained and then laughed again.

"Of course you know I refuse to be relieved?" he said pleasantly, looking up.

Peterson nodded.

"I was told to expect as much—I might tell you I've got no ambition to become a planter, but Orville's promised to back me on a certain venture as soon as I see you safely on your way back to Samoa."

The four other men started to laugh at this, and Peterson jumped from his chair. A wave of anger swept him and he swore! "What's the game?" he demanded. "Anything funny? If any of you are looking for trouble you don't have to look far."

Hammond, still laughing, rose from his chair and put Orville's letter in his pocket. He crossed the veranda with easy strides until he stood and towered above Peterson, completely dwarfing even that young giant.

"I think you'll have all your time occupied in finding trouble for me, sonny. Care to start now?"

The infuriated and goaded Peterson's answer was a blow flush on the other's mouth. It was not a heavy blow, but enough to hurt. Hammond staggered slightly, wiped a cut lip, and swore.

"Come off the veranda," he said.

Peterson leaped the low rail and landed lightly on the pounded earth before the house. He stripped off his coat and rolled up his shirt-sleeves. Hammond came down by way of the steps and merely buttoned his coat across his chest. The other four men yelped with eagerness and crowded to the rail to watch.

Hammond advanced with quick lithe steps, his curly hair lifting and stirring in the light wind, his hands by his side. Peterson waited for him, pale but determined, his hands across his chest, elbows covering his stomach, his fists clenched. He was deadly cool now the moment had come, and he was confident, knowing his own strength and prowess, that he could defeat the other. But it would be a hard battle, he was sure of that. As it turned out there was no battle at all. When about six feet from Peterson, Hammond suddenly stopped. His smile vanished, and his gray eyes brightened. Peterson never knew how it happened, but he suddenly found himself stretched on the ground, one man holding up his head, and another holding a cup of water to his lips.

"Here, drink this," he heard a voice say. His jaw was numb.

Hammond had sprung, so quickly that Peterson was caught unawares. One blow, with the terrific force of three hundred pounds behind it, had sufficed. The Norwegian had been knocked twenty feet before he hit the ground, unconscious even as he fell.

He was some few minutes gathering his wits. Then he flushed crimson, struggled to his feet, and looked around for Hammond. The planter was smoking a cheroot on the veranda steps and smilingly watching his foe. Peterson staggered up to him and faced him, swaying slightly.

"Give me a week to get into training after being cooped up on that —— boat, and I'll wipe you off the map," he gritted savagely.

Hammond laughed.

"You have till the *Sea Bird* returns to accomplish the feat, sonny," he said.

With an oath Peterson stumbled away, his head ringing. He could hear the four planter's assistants laughing behind him. He swore again, bitterly. It was the first time in his life he had been knocked out, and the knowledge galled him. One thing he grudgingly admitted, Hammond was a gentleman. He had not kicked a prostrate man. It was the custom when rough men fought to kick the beaten one's features to pulp. But Hammond fought clean.

EXACTLY a week later, in the cool of the morning, the two men faced each other again. Peterson had lived hardily during the time, taking long runs along the beaches, hunting through the groves, sparring in his room in the house. He had lost his malice toward Hammond and had learned to laugh with him. He had come to like the man even. There was nothing vicious or arrogant about him. His victory did not change his attitude toward Peterson. He seemed to take it for granted that there would be another fight at the appointed time. He had realized that to Peterson defeat meant the abandonment of his hopes for Orville's financial support. He would remind the Norwegian that he, Hammond, had never been relieved yet,

though many men had tried, and laughingly suggest that perhaps he, Peterson, would be the lucky man; and Peterson would laugh in return and wonder secretly what game Orville was up to.

So it was that there was no anger in the second fight. Both men took it in a business spirit, as a matter of business. One to keep a job, the other to gain one and more. Peterson was grinning as good-humoredly as the planter, who had done his foe the honor to strip to the waist this time. One of the assistants kept rounds.

On the look-out for Hammond's lightning spring, Peterson this time evaded it, and side-stepping hit the planter in the left ribs with a blow that could be plainly heard. It shook Hammond more than he cared to admit. It almost winded him. He realized that his man was not so easy as the others had been, as he had seemed at first. Like Orville, Hammond took note now of the mighty shoulders and muscled torso and he began to wonder. There had been strength behind that blow in the ribs, such strength as is seldom met with. The planter sparred cautiously as he got back his breath. He tried no more lightning springs. They left his guard open too wide.

In the second round the two came together in a general give-and-take. It was like a scene, perhaps, from the old viking days, to view such men striving for mastery, the curly head of the one giant bobbing about and above the blond head of the other. Hammond's weight aided him greatly. Every blow he got home sent the other staggering. But it was plain, soon after the round began, that Peterson was immensely the stronger man.

He lifted the planter off his feet once with a terrific uppercut, and sent him crashing against the trunk of a palm, to come back with a fierce rebound and just miss smashing in the Norwegian's nose with a mighty swing. It was truly a battle of giants. By the end of the round both were bleeding and breathing hard, and the stripped, fair-skinned torsos were red and crimson with blows. The four watchers were gripped with awe, for they knew that they could fight nothing like this.

The third round, after a minute rest, a minute which both fighters sorely needed, was terrific. The thud of blows was sickeningly monotonous, and both men were failing under the fearful pounding each received. Science was thrown to the winds. It was a slogging match. Knuckles were split and skinned, bruised. Breathing grew to be a torture and was audible for several yards. The natives came running from the village as the word crept around that the white men were fighting. A wide awe-stricken circle quickly formed.

Peterson felt his knees quivering under him. He knew he had almost shot his bolt. He hit and swung now automatically. Never before had he fought such an opponent. There was probably not another like him in all the Pacific. And the same distress and realizations were Hammond's, though the heavier man was in an even worse condition and he was beginning to worry. The end came with dramatic suddenness. Hammond overreached himself in a wild hook to Peterson's jaw. The Norwegian swayed back a little, set his teeth and cleared the mists of weakness from his eyes, and struck with his full mighty strength, the whole weight of his body behind the blow.

Strictly speaking it was not a knockout blow at all. But really any blow is a knockout if it produces the results desired. The Norwegian's clenched fist took Hammond just below the heart, and the crack of splintering ribs was plainly heard above the hard breathing. The giant planter flew back as if shot from a catapult, his mouth gaping for air, his eyes upturned in their sockets, his fists thrashing space. He tripped over a fallen log and twisted sidewise as he fell, grounding at last with a jar that shook the very earth. He twitched a while and then lay still.

No one moved for a long time. Every eye was on Hammond. Then Peterson sighed vastly and lowered his shaking arms. He dropped his head and slowly sagged at the knees. Very quietly he collapsed and faded to unconsciousness.

The four planter's assistants rushed forward and picked the two men up, their eyes shining and their faces flushed. Many a time in after years they licked their lips when they thought of that morning on the banks of the Langalanga River. They had seen such a fight as they would never see again. It was a thing to be remembered and talked about, a thing to be recalled with awe.

And the fame of it would go over the Pacific and beyond. Wherever men talked copra and pearls and cannibals and ships,

they would also talk of the meeting of the giants, and of the relieving of Hammond by Peterson, the greenhorn and the stranger.

For twenty-four hours the planter lay unconscious. Three of his ribs were broken, and something fearful had happened to his throat. He seemed unable to swallow, and blood trickled almost continually from between his lips. Peterson came to after an hour or so and with the help of two of the planter's assistants bathed in the sea, after which he felt a little better, though still unable to stand alone. He lay down and slept painfully and recovered some of the strength he felt had been drawn from him. He almost wept when he learned how Hammond was. He had come to like the planter so. But it had been one man or the other, and the best man had won. And he knew that Hammond himself would be the first to grin and hold out his hand. It was a pleasure to fight such a man, but not a pleasure to cripple him. And so Peterson grieved and cursed Seth Orville who had sent him to Hixon Bay and cursed the pearl-bed that had sent him to Orville. Then he slept again and forgot for a while, and the four other white men walked about with shining eyes still and spoke in excited whispers. No work was done on the plantations that day.

THREE weeks later the *Sea Bird* crept up the Langalanga and dropped her anchor off the pile-built wharf. Captain Davies, searching the shore with his glasses, looked in vain for Hammond and the Norwegian. He saw the four planter's assistants standing together chattering and waving on the wharf, but of the two giants there was no sign at all. Suppressing his curiosity as best he could, Captain Davies went ashore and exchanged greetings with the four assistants. They bubbled over as they clustered round him. They were still full of the fight. It was a relief to be able to dilate on it to some complete outsider. They all tried to tell of it at once, until the captain laughingly waved them aside and set up toward the house to see for himself what had happened.

Two grinning, stiff and bruised giants rose from long cane chairs on the veranda to greet him. They had barely shaken hands before they apologized and sank back again with a groan. Then they explained together and separately to the curious captain, who laughed in his beard and rubbed the tears from his eyes as he listened.

"I'll have a bone to pick with Orville," groaned Hammond as he ran a swollen hand over a bruised and swollen jaw. "He certainly sent me a Tatar this time."

"I think I'll have something to say to him myself," grumbled Peterson, moving painfully over a bit in his chair. The action made him gasp a little.

"Well, who won?" demanded the laughing captain finally.

Hammond grimaced and jerked a thumb at his fellow sufferer.

"Clean knockout in the third round."

"Aw, I passed out about thirty seconds afterwards," Peterson protested vehemently.

The big planter retorted with a grunt—

"Aye, but you never had three broken ribs and a paralyzed head."

"H'm, then I suppose you'll be coming back with me, Hammond?" said the captain, winking for all the world to see.

The planter shook his head while Peterson fished a crumpled letter from his pocket and passed it over to the grinning captain without a word. It was the letter he had been told to open only in the event of his beating Hammond.

The captain fished the folded paper out and spread it on his knees.

If you follow my instructions perfectly you will be reading this as chief planter for my Hixon Bay plantations. I am presuming then you have relieved Hammond. Congratulations. Your instructions are to leave Hammond in charge and return to Apia on the *Sea Bird*. He will give you a note for me. Take care of it. It contains your future.—ORVILLE.

The captain grinned and handed the letter back.

"I could have told you almost word for word what was in it," he said. "You are the first man, though, to ever be able to conscientiously open Orville's envelop and read what he said."

Peterson grunted as he replaced the letter in his pocket.

"Seems I've been the sucker all along," he said moodily.

Hammond laughed and held out the letter Orville had sent him. He had not shown it to Peterson before. The Norwegian opened it curiously.

Dear Hammond, want your opinion of the bearer. Am sending two assistants to relieve your two men and Boyd will come on the next boat to

relieve you for your two months' vacation. Luck.—ORVILLE.

"It's an old game of Orville's to put men through what he calls a 'third degree' to test them out," explained Hammond cheerfully. "He sometimes sends them to sea with a hard-case skipper, sometimes to an out-of-the-way plantation to run it by themselves, sometimes to me to weigh them up. All he wants to know is how his man reacts under adverse conditions. Four men have been sent here before you. They were all clean-cut, game fellows. They came, believing I was a blackguard, to relieve me. They all failed, but I reported favorably to Orville about them and they are holding down responsible positions now. The worst and best of a man comes out in a hard fight, especially in a losing fight. One man who came here was a lean, husky fellow who put up a good scrap before I finished him. I found out afterward he was fighting with only one lung and a dilated heart. The boss didn't know it though or he wouldn't have sent him. He made an awful fuss of him when he did hear."

Peterson grunted his opinion of Orville's methods and then chuckled. Captain Davies slapped his knees with the palms of his hands, rose to his feet and laughed.

"Well," he said, "if you'll see about getting your copra aboard I'd like to sail tomorrow morning."

IN THE Islands the unexpected and the unforeseen is always happening. That is why those who live longest in the south are those who can face the everyday with ready wits and quick decisions. The others die young. The unexpected and the unforeseen occurred that night on the copra plantations of Seth Orville at Hixon Bay, New Britain, in the Bismarck Archipelago.

The whole thing really started some months before, when a wandering devil-devil doctor from somewhere in the hinterland, drifted toward the coast, muttering of great things the spirits had told him, of mighty days of feasting and war that were coming, of women-stealing and the hunting of heads. Hammond, finding the straying doctor living among his laborers, and being magnificently careless and proud of his own power and strength, had ordered him off and finally kicked him off the place and bade him return to his own people.

Now no self-respecting devil-devil doctor could do anything else after that but take some sort of revenge. And this particular ugly-visaged savage's revenge took the form of preaching sedition amongst the coast savages. It needed little to stir the cannibal natives. For long years they had looked with covetous eyes on the riches in the storehouses of Orville, and the present generation had forgotten their fathers' tales of the days when the little fair-haired man, Orville himself in his youth, had landed on the then unexplored coast and founded a trading-station, incidentally licking the coast tribes in a pitched battle on the beach with the aid of his white mate, four Samoan seamen and a couple of cases of dynamite.

The lesson had served to keep the peace for years. It had never been forgotten by the older people, and they had found that their treatment from the white men was very fair.

But the younger and hotter-headed people had no such memories. They were ripe for war and heads, burning to equal the deeds of their head-hunting fathers.

So it was that, as a culmination of the devil-devil doctor's labors, the night Hammond sat painfully on the pile-built wharf and directed the loading of sacked copra by the light of several hurricane-lamps in the breathless dark, a shrill cry came out of the groves toward the base of the peninsula and a dull throbbing of drums came from the village immediately behind the wharf. At the same time, with a few guttural cries, the native laborers working on the copra dropped their loads and vanished into the darkness, leaving the six white men on the wharf to gape at one another with startled surprize.

Hammond had never, during all his years as Orville's planter at Hixon Bay, had any serious trouble with the natives, and for a moment he was puzzled. But he had long lived in the Islands. Peterson, who sat on a sack of copra by him, was equally puzzled, for he was a green hand, but all four of the assistants had worked through the Bismarcks before. They faced the wall of night beyond the dim lantern glow and paled under their tan.

"My God!" Hammond cried. "That's the war drums!"

There came a mutter of agreement from the assistants. Then Hammond came to life. He forgot his healing ribs and his

battered body. He sprang to his feet and started toward the trading-house and the store-sheds. Peterson was at his heels. The assistants, carrying the hurricane-lamps, followed. From the *Sea Bird*, anchored in the stream, Captain Davies hailed in a loud voice.

"What's wrong, ashore?"

Hammond looked back over his shoulder.

"Trouble," he yelled, and then he was gone, running through the outskirts of the village.

The place swarmed with natives. No women were visible—a bad sign. Drums throbbed from every hut door it seemed. Torches flamed and flared blood-red. Little fires started near the broad, flat cooking-stones.

One of the assistants toppled forward suddenly with a scream, the lamp he carried dashing to the ground and going out amid a splintering of glass. Hammond stopped, bumped into Peterson and peered back. A stone whizzed by his head and a dull murmur of voices came from the shadows. The white men seemed surrounded.

"He's dead!" yelled one assistant, bending over the fallen man. "Spear between the shoulder blades."

With an oath Hammond spun around and continued toward the house.

Because there never had been any serious trouble in the past, Hammond had been lulled into believing that there never would be any trouble, and for some years now he had not carried revolvers except when he went hunting. The other white men were unarmed too, and the weapons they needed were in the racks in the big room in the front of the trading-house.

Without doubt they were surrounded. A native stepped in front of Hammond with a yell. The big planter stopped and let drive with his fist. He flattened the native's face and the man dropped with a sob. Hammond stumbled and fell over the body, pain racking his chest and tearing at his throat. He had forgotten his injuries. The other men crowded round. A flung club knocked out one lamp from the hands of an assistant. A stone shattered another. Spears flew thick. There was no light under the palms but the stars and the distant flicker of the torches and fires. The shrill voice of the devil-devil doctor could be heard above the clamor.

They were on the outskirts of the village yet and it was very apparent they could never reach the house and arm. For a moment there was some indecision. Another assistant went down, heavy with spears. The man had started off again toward the house and had met the full force of a dozen casts. Nearly all the other white men were wounded. Peterson raised his voice.

"Get back to the ship," he bellowed. "All right, I'll bring Hammond."

The remaining two men pelted back, brushing through natives, swinging hastily snatched up clubs. The darkness aided as well as hindered. The savage blood-yelps echoed without end. The cooking-fires brightened, and a dull glow came from the direction of the house where the store-sheds were being looted by the light of the burning wooden veranda outside the galvanized-iron walls.

It took Peterson all his strength to lift the unconscious Hammond and fling the planter's vast bulk over his own shoulder. Desperation lent him additional strength. He staggered at last toward the wharf, practically unmolested. The natives were eddying about the two assistants who knew now that they could not reach their objective, and were fighting grimly and in silence. They went down at last in the gloom, and the white shimmer of their torn ducks was lost to view under the cloud of brown bodies that closed over them.

A native leaped on Peterson's back and lifted a knife. The Norwegian staggered under the impact and then kicked back viciously. The native dropped off with a yell that attracted others of his compatriots. Peterson won to the place where the assistants had died and the natives flocked round him eagerly, while others carried the two white-and-red clothed bodies to the cooking-fires.

Peterson swore fitfully and suddenly let Hammond slide from his shoulder to the ground. A native rushed in swinging a war-club, the whites of his eyes glistening in a vagrant shaft of starlight. Peterson caught the descending wrist and the snap of the breaking bones sounded above the noise of the inclosing circle. The man screamed, but before the scream died he was swinging round himself, a club in the hands of the giant white man.

Peterson grinned savagely in the murk. He no longer felt stiff and battered and sore.

He almost laughed. There would be no more of Seth Orville for him, nor would he ever see his pearl-bed developed. And Hammond—Hammond was at his feet unconscious, perhaps dead. The finest man he had ever known, not excepting his own partner, unable to fight for his life. The circle closed. Peterson could feel the muscles of his legs beginning to ache with continued effort. His arms ached too. He gritted his teeth and laughed exultantly. He would show that he could die. The human club he swung was long since silent. A circle of stunned and shattered men lay on the ground. But there were plenty to take their places.

There was a sudden fusilade of shots. A few shouts. Then a deep voice bellowed—

"Hammond!"

More shots followed. For a moment the circle of natives opened to allow the irresistible passage of some white-clothed forms.

"Here!" screamed the exhausted Peterson. Captain Davies reached his side in a few seconds, firing wildly into the murk with an automatic. The supercargo, Hyde, and the mate followed.

Peterson dropped his limp club and wiped the sweat from his forehead. The circle of natives ebbed back snarling and took refuge in the trees. Spears began to snicker through the night again. Stones whizzed by. For the first time the Norwegian got angry.

"You scum!" he bellowed, shaking his fist at no one in particular. He snorted as a stone thudded into his ribs. With a heave he had Hammond on his shoulder again and started for the wharf.

It was a wild ten minutes that followed. It was mostly a succession of stumbles and oaths for the angry Norwegian. For the others it was a succession of thrusting fresh clips into hot automatics. And Hyde, the young supercargo, was the only one to reach the wharf behind Peterson and his burden. The other had been lost under the spears and in the starlight. There had been no time to see.

Peterson dropped into the rocking launch without removing Hammond from his shoulder, and Hyde leaped swiftly after him into the nearly swamped craft. The engine was still running as Captain Davies had left it on his sudden landing, and with one mighty push against the weed-grown piles Peterson sent the launch shooting into the muddy river.

He threw in the gear and made for the ship, outlined against the night sky and with a hurricane-lamp burning in her fore rigging. He remembered with a feeling of thankfulness that the eight men of the Kanaka crew were from Samoa, and therefore as much interested in keeping out of the maw of the New Britainers as were the white men themselves. From the wharf came an angry yelling.

Tiny, the huge Samoan carpenter of the *Sea Bird*, a cool-headed old warrior, to be depended on in an emergency, leaned from the taffrail midships and grabbed the limp Hammond with one huge hand by the slack of his pants. Peterson heaved up mightily and the giant planter was aboard. Swiftly then the Norwegian himself followed, turning to lend a hand to young Hyde. The launch engine purred on alongside, and Tiny questioned Hyde whether he should cut the painter and let the craft go.

"No, Tiny. You jump in and run her for'ard. We'll get the ship out of this. Get the anchor up and pass a line down to the launch."

"——!" Peterson straightened up wrathfully from the main hatch where he had been bending over Hammond and chafing his wrists. "What's the matter with you, Hyde?"

"What do you mean?" retorted the supercargo, nettled at the other's tone. "Captain Davies is dead, so is the mate, and that leaves me in charge of the *Sea-Bird*. I propose to get out of this. There'll be a canoe attack at dawn, if not before."

Peterson snorted.

"Do you think I'm letting a gang of half-baked blacks drive me away from any place I want to go? There's Hammond here, too. D'you think he'd give it up so easy? I'm staying until I see him running his plantations again."

"It's all right to talk," returned Hyde, irritated. "I'm as game as the next man, but I've got to think of the ship."

"Huh, got a girl waiting in Apia?"

"—— you, Peterson, do you think I'm afraid?"

"Not afraid. Just a litte nervous, eh?"

"Tiny!" The supercargo's voice was tense with passion. "Leave the launch for a minute. Get on deck the guns in the arm-racks below. Arm all hands. Send two

men down the forepeak for a couple of cases of dynamite. Jump now!"

Peterson laughed grimly.

"Good man. We'll wait till dawn ourselves. I'd like to save the others from getting eaten, but I guess it's too late, and anyway we're at a disadvantage in the dark."

Wrathfully Hyde turned away to make preparations, while the Norwegian lifted the reviving Hammond and carried him to the captain's room below the poop-deck, where he made him comfortable and bandaged his hurts, and left a seaman to watch him.

Ashore the drums throbbed monotonously and with increasing ardor, while the singing and shouting swelled and died and swelled again. The cooking fires were roaring furnaces that paled the light of the rising moon. A breeze sprang up after a while and brought the full force of the clamor, and a horribly suggestive smell, down to the rigid, silent group, two white men and seven brown, waiting on the poop of the *Sea Bird* with the now silent launch rocking on the water below them.

With the waning of the moon into the sea, and the first silver of the new dawn, the expected canoe attack arrived. The savages had not forgotten the white men who had escaped them, and the devil-devil doctor had reminded them that all the wealth of the store-sheds which they had sacked that night came originally from out of the bellies of ships. Therefore in the *Sea Bird* there must be much more such wealth. The devil-devil doctor did not think to remind the warriors of the dynamite of the young Orville who had defeated their fathers in the distant past.

Scouts had lurked along the banks to see if the schooner put to sea as it was expected she would, and when no move was made it was concluded that either the white men were too much hurt to give orders, or else they intended waiting till the morrow to see what could be done. Preparations went forward immediately for the attack—those told off for the duty abstaining rigidly from the feasting and the deep drinking.

Peterson, his pockets stuffed with dynamite sticks, short-fused for quick firing, two revolvers strapped about his waist, saw the first canoe slide from a muddy creek as he peered shoreward from the mizzen shrouds. Next minute the mist-wreathed river was alive with canoes, darting and curving, their paddles churning up the water, the dawn made hideous with the yells of their occupants.

The Samoan seamen, fair shots all, commenced to fire at once. A few paddlers collapsed. One man rose to his feet, stiffened, and then went overboard, upsetting his canoe. The water was dotted with bobbing heads. But it was Peterson who did the most damage.

He was smoking a huge, fat cigar, and he kept the end in a live glow. The touch of a fuse to the cigar and the spluttering trail of sparks would tell the fuse had caught. After flinging the third stick, the Norwegian was able to time his explosions better. The hoarse, splitting boom as the sticks exploded among the canoes shook the morning air. The drums in the village died away, the yelling died away. The feasters flocked to the water's edge to see the white men wiped from the face of the waters.

But the white men were not being wiped. They were wiping. In ten minutes half of the canoes were sinking, and the rest were headed back for the shore. Nor was that all. Behind them raged the fire-boat, the swift little launch with seven brown devils and two white devils in it, one white devil still flinging the burning slender sticks that did such fearful execution.

Every moment the sky grew lighter and the white men were better able to see. When the launch rasped alongside the wharf it had left in such haste the night before, there was not a native to be seen, except for the countless number swimming in the river. Every man had disappeared, running back to the village where the devil-devil doctor cursed them and endeavored to stiffen their quaking backs.

Like a fiend the raging Norwegian stormed through the groves, and like a cyclone he struck the village. The natives were gathered in a drunken mouthing mob about the devil-devil doctor and chanting themselves into a frenzy. The cooking-fires were dim and almost out. Clean picked bones told of the feast that was past.

Peterson's first stick blew the devil-devil doctor and some four of his converts into the heaven he had always talked about, and the mob, ceasing to chant, affrightedly broke and fled. Things that seemed right and proper in the night were terrifying and

fearful in the cold light of the dawn. The natives remembered the giant cruiser of the white men that appeared occasionally to see that all was peaceful, the cruiser that had blown villages and whole forests to pieces only a short distance up the coast in the not-so-very-long-ago. They remembered the law, that to kill a white man was death. Not at once perhaps, not for years perhaps, but death in the long, long run.

And coupled with the fears that rose as the drink died within savage brains, this walking inferno of explosions and sudden death, this blond-haired, bloody, gritting-teethed giant who roared and bellowed and laughed and sang and swore, came with many others and dealt death mercilessly and without end.

Panic-stricken the natives fled in all directions. There was now no devil-devil doctor to urge them on. No man wished to be called leader now. The village was fired and went up in flames. The groves were dotted with dead men and the morning was terrible with screams. For years afterward, when the memories of that night were forgotten, men spoke of that morning in fearful whispers.

The sun was well up when Peterson stopped in his tracks and leaning against a palm-trunk wiped his streaming brow with a trembling hand. His pockets were empty of dynamite, his revolvers and belts empty of shells. He felt weak and sick and was glad that the fight was over.

The three Samoan seaman with him dropped on to the coarse grass and breathed heavily and laid aside their rifles to cool. All four men boasted scratches and superficial wounds gained from fear-flung spears or stones. But all four were still capable of fighting a bit more.

From the trees on the right, behind the galvanised-iron house of the planters, now fire-blacked and gutted, Hyde appeared leading his four exhausted men. He came to where Peterson leaned, and squatted down with a sigh, while the four Samoans made themselves comfortable on the sand beside the other three.

"Guess that about sees the end," commented Hyde, gently massaging a huge bruise on his wrist.

Peterson grunted, stared away through the trees at the carrion birds gathering in the sky, and then laughed. He relaxed completely and dropped to the sand beside the supercargo, his usual good nature returning.

"About the end's right," he said. "Poor Hammond'll have a job to get things into shape again. Well, Hyde, we've seen quite a bit of life since the old *Sea Bird* left Apia."

"We have that," the supercargo agreed with a reflective grin.

He twisted round so that he could let his gaze rest on the ruined store-sheds and the gutted iron house. He grimaced.

"This will cost Orville something."

"It's cost him good white men," grunted the other. Then after a while. "Say, I think I'll stay here with Hammond and straighten things out. Do you think you can run the *Sea Bird* home with about four hands, and report to Orville?"

Hyde grinned and an old memory came back to him.

"I think I can. I ran a big schooner single-handed once from Ysabel to Samoa."

"Good man. Well, you can explain to Orville what happened and make a report to the authorities. Tell him to send some assistants for Hammond. I'll just stay till they come, and tell Orville also, by the way, that both Hammond and myself have a bone to pick with him."

"Wouldn't it be best to take Hammond to Apia?"

"Don't think so. He's not badly hurt—be on his feet, I should judge, before to-night. And anyway I don't think a schooner at sea is any place for a sick man."

"As you choose," Hyde shrugged.

He scrambled to his feet and hitched up his belt, looking arrogantly round. There was not a live native in sight.

"Well, lets get back to the ship and get the rest of that copra aboard. I'll sail as soon as I can."

IN HIS quick, jerky way, Seth Orville did several things. He removed the half-burned black cigar from his mouth, dropped into a chair with an astonished expression on his wizened face, opened his lips as though about to speak, and glared. He abruptly lifted the glass by his elbow, where a soft-footed Samoan servant had just placed it, drained it, and set it down with a bang. He swore with feeling, even as he glared.

"Well, I'll be ——!" he said.

Rodney Hyde chuckled, pulled the crease of his white duck pants straighter at the

knees, and crossed his legs more comfortably.

"And then this yellow-haired chick of yours gets mad and lands with all hands and cleans out the peninsula. Dynamite and bullets. Smartest thing and biggest chance I ever saw," he concluded.

Orville tugged at his wisp of mustache and snorted.

"He did, did he? Like his —— cheek to take the command out of your hands! Disgraceful— Give these wharf bums an inch and they take a mile— H'm—well, well. And so poor Hammond got the beating of his life? Too bad, too bad— And he's staying there till things are straight and Hammond's on his feet, eh? Good man— You'll sail in the morning, Hyde, with a new skipper and mate. Take two assistants with you, and Boyd'll go along to relieve Hammond. He deserves a rest. Bring that ——squarehead back with you. I want to use him elsewhere. Well, I'll be ——. I knew something was going to happen just as soon as I set eyes on that pair of shoulders. Hilo! The glasses are empty!"

BIG NUGGETS AND SOME OF THEIR FINDERS

by **John L. Considine**

THE largest gold nugget ever found came from Chili, weighed more than four hundred pounds, troy, and was worth nearly one hundred thousand dollars. The second largest, weighing two hundred and twenty-four pounds, was mined in Ballarat, Australia, in 1859. The third largest was picked up at Carson Hill, Calaveras County, California, in 1854. It was a lump about fifteen inches long, six wide, and four thick, weighed one hundred and ninety-five pounds, troy, and brought more than forty-three thousand dollars.

French Ravine, Sierra County, California, was a perfect nest of big nuggets. A five-thousand-dollar one was found there in 1850, an eight-thousand-dollar one in 1851, and a ten-thousand-dollar one in 1855—thus proving that in mining lightning sometimes does strike more than once in the same place.

On a number of occasions nuggets were found in California by men who were not looking for them. A man sitting on a boulder at Pilot Hill, El Dorado County, was idly chipping it with a small hammer, when his eye caught the glint of gold. That boulder yielded eight thousand dollars.

A Sonora man, taking an early stroll one Sunday morning in 1851, accidentally stubbed his toe with great violence against a large stone. In his wrath and pain, he was apostrophizing the stone in language not at all appropriate to the Sabbath when he noticed on the spot bruised by the impact of his boot the familiar and ever welcome gleam of yellow. His flow of profanity came to an abrupt stop. He picked up the stone and carried it home affectionately in his arms. It brought him several thousand dollars.

Another Sonora man, driving a mule-cart along the principal street of the town one morning after a rain storm, had the good fortune to observe a golden streak left by the passage of the wheel through the mud. Stooping, he found a solid gold nugget weighing about thirty-five pounds. Thousands had passed over the same spot, but the luck was with him.

The first nugget found by Marshall, the discoverer of gold in California, was worth but fifty cents, and the second brought five dollars. The first big nugget was found shortly afterward by a soldier of Stevenson's regiment in a little stream, as he was leaning over to take a drink. It weighed between twenty and twenty-five pounds. A nugget of about the same size was found by a Frenchman near Columbia, who became insane as a result of the excitement into which he was thrown by his seeming good fortune.

A much more valuable nugget was found by four miners, who were so wary that in bringing it to San Francisco, where it was placed on exhibition, one of them was always on guard, night and day. It was such a magnificent specimen that it was taken to the Eastern States for exhibition. There the owners quarreled, became involved in litigation with one another and lawyers got the entire proceeds.

Stepsons of Law

A Complete Novelette by Frederick J. Jackson

Author of "Reverse Irish," "Bad Men Make Good Pickings," etc.

MR. "SLIVERS" CASSIDY stepped out of the Bonanza, a combination saloon and gambling-house. There was blitheness in his manner and a perfectly good Colt .45 in his hand. Into the turbid depths of a watering-trough he dropped the revolver, then continued on his cheerful way, heedless of the scene he had left behind in the Bonanza, where several citizens of the town of Pinnacle were endeavoring to prevent Mr. "Ace" Brownell from commiting suicide by following Mr. Cassidy. Mr. Brownell was the proprietor of the Bonanza; he was likewise the owner of the weapon just disposed of.

At the present moment he was also the possessor of a rapidly swelling pair of lips, two loose teeth and a bad opinion of himself, all of which had been bestowed upon him simultaneously by the gladsome Mr. Cassidy. Lastly it must be mentioned that Mr. Brownell was the sheriff of Pinnacle County. He had been elected, as Cassidy expressed it, "through carelessness."

And the inhabitants of the county in all likelihood would be careless again, for Mr. Brownell's reelection seemed an assured fact. No candidate as yet had appeared against him, and the county elections were but three days off.

As a sheriff he had been a good politician —up to the time that evening when he rashly had made a broad statement reflecting upon the mental and other qualities of Ethel Danvers. That was certainly poor politics and may have been due to poor liquor.

The Danvers ranch was two miles distant, between the town and Cassidy's homestead. Ethel Danvers was more than "the rose of the rancho;" she was easily the belle of the county, but of this she was modestly unaware. She worked six days a week amid the clatter of a Pinnacle restaurant, to help support her widowed invalid mother; while Ben Danvers, the young son of the family, struggled single-handed to make the ranch pay. It did not.

Mr. Cassidy by inclination had been a nomad, but was now holding down a homestead on a mesa three miles out of town. He possessed the respect of the better element of the county, a weird sense of humor, a positive genius for getting into trouble and out of it again, and a forcible way of expressing himself when displeased.

On general principles his opinions always differed from those held forth by Mr. Brownell, and their misunderstanding that evening had been equally swift in beginning and conclusion. For some unknown reason Ace Brownell had made the remark

about the girl, and this had more than sufficed to bring him face to face with Cassidy, who had been within hearing.

"Ace!" Cassidy had barked abruptly. "Did you say that about the girl because she slapped your face yesterday in the restaurant? You know you're a dirty liar —and a lot of other things!"

The last few words are not those of Cassidy. His exact ones were stingingly profane and highly insulting.

Brownell's reply had been to make a drunken reach for his Colt—a foolish move, for within a fraction of a second a heavy fist had knocked him back against the bar. Cassidy had then plucked the gun from Brownell's momentarily nerveless fingers and taken an abrupt departure.

He did not know whether his striking the sheriff would be taken as a personal injury or as an affront to the majesty of the law. He did not care. But he wanted to get away before Brownell's two hard-boiled deputies put in an appearance. And he wanted to get rid of Brownell's gun.

This hasty departure was not motivated by cowardice; it was through a desire to avoid the necessity of killing off the two deputies if they started anything. Cassidy wanted to let Brownell sober up and make the next move.

Times had changed in Pinnacle County. Two decades had passed since the last public fracas, when two rival attorneys had shot it out on the court-house steps. Long since had most of the inhabitants ceased to regard a conspicuously worn Colt as a part of correct attire.

Cassidy never went armed in town. But now he was filled with a strange exhilaration. The impact of his knuckles on Brownell's mouth had been a sweet sensation.

On the morrow, when Brownell had sobered up, it was Cassidy's intention to wipe the grease from his old Colt, buckle on his old gun-belt and ride openly into town. For Cassidy felt a yearning to return to traditional ways. The prospect of seeing Ace Brownell through powder-smoke rather intrigued him. But Brownell would have to start it.

Cassidy grinned in the darkness as he walked down the street to where he had tied his horse. His words to Brownell had all been fighting ones.

His horse was at the rail in front of Dougherty's general store. The latter had been closed for an hour. Up-stairs was a lodge hall, used regularly by the Odd Fellows and the Eagles.

"Hey, Slivers!" came a cautious hail from the darkness, and Cassidy recognized Dick Dougherty's voice.

"Hi, Dick! How's the boy?" he replied.

"Not so loud!" was the warning. "Come with me. I've been looking for you. I got to the Bonanza just as you cut loose and busted Ace in the snoot. It was a peach of a wallop."

Dick led the way up-stairs to the lodge room, where behind lowered curtains were assembled perhaps forty men. Cassidy recognized most of them; they represented the conservative element of the county and the town.

"Here he is, gents," said Dougherty. "If you thought you wanted him before, you'll *know* you want him now."

And Dougherty proceeded to relate the recent scene in the Bonanza.

"What's the grand scheme, and where do I fit in?" asked Cassidy.

"Why, we want you for sheriff," Dougherty informed him. "You're one of us. If you get the office we know you'll really represent law and order. With Ace as sheriff there's been —— little law and less order.

"We want a sheriff who will enforce the law against gambling! Bet you ten to one, and put up the cash right now, that you'll be elected. It's a black eye to the county to have a sheriff like Ace—a crooked politician who runs a saloon and gambling-house —and a reputedly crooked gambling-house at that. You're the man we want!"

"It's kind of sudden," drawled Cassidy. "But that's the way I like things. I'll take the job. In the first place, it'll be a joy to buck Ace in the election, and in the second I need the hundred-a-month pay. It'll be a life-saver to me. My homestead up to this time is like all homesteads—everything going out and nothing coming in. I'll be glad to do your sheriffing if you're agreed that you want me."

The vote was unanimously in favor of Cassidy as the candidate of the conservative element, an eleventh-hour candidate. The secret meeting was adjourned; the men went their various ways. The "grapevine" would spread the word; Cassidy's election was almost a certainty.

T WAS noon the following day when Cassidy, a pair of binoculars to his eyes, sat in the scant shade of his corral fence and examined some miles of heat-eddying desert country which lay beneath his gaze. It was his favorite pastime. It cost nothing; and cheapness, to a homesteader, is alone sufficient recommendation for any diversion. But there had been a reason for Cassidy's initial payment of real money for the binoculars.

The reason was Ethel Danvers, and the high-powered glasses enabled him to worship from afar; they brought the Danvers ranch-house within easy "hailing" distance from Cassidy's eyes. From his perch several hundred feet above and about a mile distant in an air line he was enabled to watch many details of life in the Danvers household.

Sunday afternoon was his favorite. He would spend it in watching Ethel's tenderness to her invalid mother, as invariably she would wheel her out to the porch. Six days a week unfailingly he watched her start early in the morning on her walk to Pinnacle and her job. Each Summer evening he watched her return, almost hoping at times as he day-dreamed that some dire thing would happen from which he might rescue her and thus become a hero in her eyes.

Again Cassidy focused the glasses in the direction of Pinnacle. But still there was no sign of a rider, or riders, coming out of the town. Evidently Brownell had done the sensible thing by taking the affair of the night before as a personal affair.

Slivers grinned and flexed the knuckles of his right hand. He had been expecting to see Brownell ride forth with the two old-time gunmen who were under salary as deputies.

It would have been like Brownell to obtain a warrant and serve it at the point of a gun, ready to shoot at the slightest excuse. More than once had he gone forth in his official capacity when seeking personal vengeance. Cassidy suspected that the district attorney was subservient to Brownell, for the latter's methods invariably had been high-handed.

A ground-squirrel scampered across the corral. Unfortunately for the little animal, Cassidy turned at that moment. Out came his Colt. A snap shot, and the squirrel went spinning end over end, most of its flesh knocked out of its skin by the heavy slug.

There were hundreds of the little pests on the homestead; they had completely ruined Cassidy's attempted grain crop that year. But it was not for this that Cassidy had just completely ruined one of them. He has merely been demonstrating to his own satisfaction what he would like to do to Brownell.

Cassidy placed the binoculars on top of a corral post, took a seat on the top-rail and turned his back on Pinnacle. Absently he rolled and lighted a cigaret as his absent gaze focused on exactly nothing to the eastward. Again he was day-dreaming.

In front of him, five miles distant, arose the serrated crags and ridges of the San Madera Mountains. Tier upon tier they flung their irregular crests aloft—jagged blue and purple crests which forty miles or so away melted into the skyline in a cloud of smoky haze.

Cassidy reached for the binoculars. Several times in the past he had watched a band of horsemen come down from the reaches of the San Maderas. Speculatively he had watched them climb single file to the top of a certain ridge and then disappear into the depths of a cañon. Fully an hour would elapse each time before again they would creep into the vision of the binoculars. It was of them that he had been thinking; for after each time he had seen them, as if by coincidence a stage or a train had been held up and looted within the county.

Slivers had told Brownell of this mysterious band and had been laughed at for his pains. But now? Now that he himself had a chance to become the sheriff of Pinnacle County, Cassidy took renewed interest in focusing the binoculars to sweep the distant ridge-tops. Again he marked the cañon from the mouth of which he had seen the riders issue forth on to the flat desert.

Again he thought of Brownell, and determined to ride into Pinnacle early the coming evening. His intention would be peaceable—but not too much so. He would enter town purely in a spirit of scientific investigation, to discover if possible just what Brownell intended to do in the way of restoring his damaged prestige. If Brownell chose to forget it, very well. If he wanted trouble, Cassidy was overwilling to oblige.

For some time past, Cassidy had been filled with a great unrest; homesteading was too tame. A little trouble for a change

might prove to be an exhilarating tonic. The fact that the trouble was with a sheriff bothered Cassidy not at all. He rather liked the idea; it gave a different savor to the game.

He glanced over his shoulder, then suddenly squared around. Half-way between the Danvers ranch and the foot of the mesa trail a horseman rode ahead of a dust-cloud. The horse was obviously a heavy-footed animal. The binoculars revealed the rider as young Ben Danvers, astride the single plowhorse which remained on the ranch.

A little later, Cassidy greeted the youngster. Ben was a wholesome-faced cub, perhaps seventeen or eighteen. In his frank blue eyes at times flickered a shrewd light, engendered by the superficial wisdom of ways that are dark that he had picked up by spending his evenings in gambling-houses and other places in town.

One of Ben's conceits was that as a poker-player he was a fish-hook fingered gorilla. He had learned more than the fundamentals of the game from his father. For a year prior to his demise the one delight of the crippled, slowly dying elder Danvers was to play poker with his son. Ben knew a lot undoubtedly, but was far from being a champion player of five-card insomnia. Cassidy was.

"Hello, son!" was Cassidy's cheery greeting. "What's eatin' on your gizzards today?"

"Aw, ——, Slivers!" was the answer. "Everything's wrong!"

Dejection in large bunches obviously sat heavily on the lad.

"Forget it, son. I've been that way myself—lots of times. But the sun always shines again."

"Maybe. But you ain't been up against what I'm bumpin'. Slivers, here's my hand—face up. My mother's gonna die, if——

"There's just one chance, from what Doc Connolly told Sis and me. If mother can go East and get an operation done by one of these here specialists she'll get well and be able to get around as good as any of us. If she can't go East she won't live more'n two or three months. That's what's eatin' on me."

"Sho, son, that's too bad——"

"And there ain't a chance to send her east," bitterly continued the boy. "I got about forty dollars saved up. Sis has about that much, too. That's all we can raise, for the ranch is already mortgaged."

"Well," offered Slivers, "I got a little over sixty dollars. I can raise about a hundred more by selling my cayuse and a few things. If this will help, count me the same as one of the family."

"It won't help much," was the disconsolate answer. "It's —— decent of you, Slivers; but gosh! It'll take eight or nine hundred dollars altogether. Doc Connolly figured it up. Either Sis or me'll have to go along with her."

Ben sighed heavily, hopelessly.

"Seems like there ain't that much money in the world. If Brownell would buy the ranch— But he won't pay enough. He offered Sis three hundred dollars more than the mortgage he holds. The mortgage is six hundred—you know we had to put that on when dad was sick for so long. Then he died."

Ben choked up.

"—— Brownell anyhow!" he blurted out at last. "Seems like he's the only man in town who's got money. Three hundred dollars! Nine hundred altogether. Dad said the ranch was worth six or seven thousand. Brownell is a skinflint, a robber!

"Sis went to him again. He told her that the ranch was as good as his already, and why should he put up more money? He said he'd foreclose when the mortgage was due. Then he said something else to Sis, and she slapped his face. She won't tell me what he said. Maybe it's just as well, for I'd probably want to blow the top of his head off."

"Take it easy, son," advised Cassidy. "Don't mix with Ace on any gunplay. You've got responsibilities. With me it's different. An unattached old buzzard like me can afford to get careless with Ace. And we'll get the money—some way or other.

"Just trot along back to your mother, and quit worrying! Let me do the worrying for you; I'm older and can stand it better."

AS BEN rode down the steep mesa trail he was appreciably lifted in spirits. Cassidy had succeeded in cheering him up; to the younger man there still appeared to be little hope, but somehow he could not do otherwise than feel confident that the homesteader would be

able to raise the money. He had faith in Cassidy's magical powers, for he did not see how Cassidy would be able to do anything without being a magician.

Cassidy was not so confident. But he had made a promise—a rash one, to be sure—and would take a royal try at making good. From one of the deep pockets of his blue dungarees he drew some currency and counted it—sixty-eight dollars in all. Another pocket revealed some silver coins—one dollar and sixty cents.

The end of a thinking act found him with an additional motive in visiting Pinnacle during the night to come—he would attempt to win several hundred dollars from the cold-blooded professional gamblers who were paid salaries by Brownell.

Cassidy was one of the few who were aware that the Bonanza games were so crooked as to be almost "raw," but he felt that in some way he would be able to capitalize this same crookedness to his own advantage. He knew the chance to be a desperate one, but he *was* desperate. And the Bonanza was the only place in town where the tables held enough money to be of use to him. Besides, they played with hard cash. Silver dollars and half-dollars were the mediums of anteing. Golden fives, tens and twenties did the speaking instead of mere chips representing these values.

Twilight was deepening when Cassidy rode down from the mesa. Taking a circuitous route, he approached the town from the far side and finally tied his horse in the darkness back of Dick Dougherty's store. Watchful and tense inwardly, but outwardly careless, he strolled down the street to the Bonanza.

Outside he hesitated momentarily, then suddenly pushed open the swinging doors and stepped into the room. There followed a sudden ominous lull; even the clink of coins on the gambling-tables ceased. There were perhaps five full seconds of silence, with every eye turned toward him; then the play was resumed; the two bartenders again started serving the customers lined up before the bar.

Cassidy's right thumb was hooked carelessly inside the front waistband of his overalls, caressing the hammer of the Colt concealed between belt and shirt. Quickly he surveyed the interior of the large and fairly well-lighted place.

Brownell was not in sight.

In the rear of the room three poker games were going on, with every chair filled. He caught sight of Ben Danvers in one of them. The table was close to the rear wall, and Ben sat facing it.

Cassidy strode toward this table. In his heart he called the boy a fool for risking his pitiful forty dollars in a game where he would be a rank sucker.

There were six players in the game. One was Henry Stevens, owner of the Pinwheel ranch. Another was Lemuel Bender, Stevens' foreman. Ben Danvers made the third of the outside talent. Sandwiched between them were three out-and-out gamblers; "boosters" for the house were they, paid a daily wage by Brownell for using their trickery to trim outsiders.

"Hello, Slivers!" was the greeting from Stevens.

"Hello, Steve, old socks!" was the response.

They shook hands. Cassidy nodded to Bender and young Danvers, then carried a chair from a vacant table.

Heedless of the black looks from the professionals, he seated himself with his back to the wall, directly behind a gambler known as Dungan. He assumed his favorite pose, his chair tilted against the wall, his hat pulled low over his eyes. To all appearances he might be asleep, but from beneath the wide brim of the Stetson his eyes ceaselessly and sharply watched both the game and front door.

To his surprize he noted that Ben Danvers had quite a few gold coins stacked up before him. Something like two hundred dollars, was Cassidy's estimate. The boy's luck must have been good. Lem Bender, too, evidently had made a clean-up.

Stevens commented that he was slightly behind. But then he could afford to lose. The three boosters cursed the luck that had been running against them. Cassidy smiled cynically. The three had nothing to lose either way. But they had to earn their salaries by winning—and the goddess of chance had nothing to do with their methods of play. A shearing was due, and Cassidy waited.

The first instalment of the shearing came soon. Dungan was the game-keeper, the man who from each large pot drew out the "rake-off" for the house.

The game was table stakes. Both Bender and Stevens, each with several hundred

dollars before him, held large hands in one pot and began boosting each other. Dungan stayed to see each raise; finally he in turn began raising.

And no wonder! Cassidy, directly behind him and a little to his left, was the only man who saw the cards slipped dexterously from Dungan's left coat sleeve into his hand. And even Cassidy did not so much see them as suspect. He had caught only the momentary flash of the corner of a card where a card had no logical reason to be. That was enough; he knew that Dungan had a "hold-out" apparatus up his left sleeve, a mechanism worked by pressure of his elbow on the table to cause a clip to slide up and down his forearm. In the clip cards could be inserted or withdrawn as desired.

Bender finally threw away his cards. Stevens paid one hundred and fifty dollars more to see the gambler's hand. Dungan showed down four tens.

"That's good!" acknowledged Stevens, tossing his hand into the discards.

Cassidy said nothing, but was overlooking nothing. A little later, by the same cheating device, Ben Danvers was caught and robbed of every cent. And still Cassidy said nothing. Ben arose.

"That finishes me," he remarked with a brave attempt at casualness.

"Drop in again," invited Dungan.

Cassidy tilted his chair forward; his feet thumped to the floor.

"It looks like a nice soft game," he consented.

"Sit in," said Dungan. "There's a seat open."

"Not the right seat," was the objection. "I want yours. It seems to be lucky, and I don't feel like sitting—tonight—except with my back to the wall."

Dungan gave vent to a short, semi-sneering laugh.

"Guess I'll have to humor you. Have my seat."

He arose and took the chair lately vacated by Ben Danvers.

"Oh, Ben!" was Cassidy's smiling invitation. "Stick around a while."

From his thin roll Cassidy took fifty dollars and exchanged the currency for gold and silver. He called for a new deck to be brought into play, and the game went on.

He won the first three pots. The first on two small pairs, the second on a bluff and the third on three kings. The winnings in all were barely one hundred dollars.

"Bad luck, that," said Dungan as Cassidy raked in the third pot. "Luck to start with means a poor finish."

"Not for me," laughed Cassidy. "I don't play 'em that way."

He looked up and suddenly stiffened.

Ace Brownell had just entered through the front door. He sauntered up to the bar; a bartender leaned forward, spoke a whispered word and glanced to the rear of the room. Brownell nodded, downed a glass of whisky and strolled back to the table at which Cassidy was seated. In his manner was an assumed nonchalance, in his eyes a gleam of hatred. Both lips were swollen, puffed to almost twice their normal size.

Silently he motioned for one of the boosters to get out of the game. He took the seat himself, the second chair to Cassidy's left. His baleful glare was met with a quizzical grin. Cassidy was a good actor. Good-will-to-man shone from his eyes, but in his mind he was wondering—

"What—the——?"

He smiled quietly as it occurred to him that Brownell intended to seek satisfaction by making the game a duel, to gain revenge by winning every cent of Cassidy's money. Unobtrusively beneath the edge of the table Cassidy brought his Colt within easier reach. Ben Danvers was the only one who noticed this movement. The lad sidled up and placed his lips to Cassidy's ear.

"I'm with you, Slivers," he whispered. "I got dad's .38 with me."

"Keep it!" Slivers smiled whimsically. "Pick out a soft seat and keep that, too. I'll go home with you—later on."

There had been one significant interchange of glances between Brownell and Dungan. As if in response to a signal Dungan arose and left the table for a few minutes. Cassidy slouched deep in his chair, his hat-brim low over his eyes. His brain was busy trying to guess what was in the wind, and forming plans to take care of any contingency which might arose.

Brownell created a slight diversion by getting up and changing to the seat vacated by Dungan. When the latter returned he dropped into the other chair.

Brownell was now seated directly opposite Cassidy, who raised his hat-brim and smiled maliciously as he raked in a pot

containing over one hundred dollars. Laughing, he tossed his worthless hand face up on the table. He had stood pat and bluffed Brownell to a finish. The color heightened in Brownell's face; the glare in his eyes deepened in malevolence.

"Play cards!" he snapped. "That's the way children play!"

"Maybe," smiled Cassidy; "but I just wanted to make sure that you'll know you ain't playing with a child."

This served to deepen the intangible tension overhanging the game. The two cattlemen sensed something ominous behind the exchange of words. Ben Danvers pulled a chair about ten feet to one side of Brownell. Ben's hand remained in a coat pocket; his tense gaze alternated between Cassidy and Brownell.

Cassidy watched everything at once. Each shuffle, each cut of the cards, was under his scrutiny. The dealing did not require such close watching; he depended more on his ears to detect anything wrong, for cards dealt from the bottom or middle of a deck came away with an unmistakably different "snap" or "slither" from those dealt honestly from the top. The quickness of the hand can deceive the eye, but not the ear.

And Cassidy was wary in regard to Dungan's left sleeve. Whenever he was in doubt, and Dungan—who by now had sat in to the game again—was in the pot, he dropped out. Then he would find opportunity to watch Brownell, to study him. Cassidy's luck held good, but he played cautiously. An hour later saw more than four hundred dollars stacked in front of him.

Then happened the thing for which Cassidy had been waiting ever since he had sat in to the game. It was Dungan's deal. The cards were dexterously shuffled. They were cut by Stevens. At that moment a bartender came up with a tray of drinks. He shoved the tray, just above the level of the table, directly in front of Dungan.

Cassidy did not actually see the exchange of cards between the bartender's hand beneath the tray and Dungan's left hand. But he suspected it, which was enough. His five cards would tell the story—or part of it.

They did. Cassidy found himself holding four queens, which made it almost a certainty that the bartender had slipped a cold deck to Dungan just as the latter was ready to start dealing.

When the feverish betting was over, all of Cassidy's money was in the pot. Something over twelve hundred dollars was heaped in the center of the table to be gathered in by the man holding the highest hand. By the veiled gleam in Brownell's eyes, Cassidy suspected to whom the winning hand had been dealt.

"Just a minute," he drawled softly, placing his hand face down before him.

With the words, as if to lend weight and emphasis to them, his Colt popped into view.

"Brownell," he continued, "this game is crooked, as crooked as ——! And you know it!"

Out of his chair, revolver in hand, popped young Danvers.

"I'm backin' yuh, Slivers!" he yelped.

"Keep out, Ben!" ordered Cassidy. "This is *my* game!"

"What do you mean?" blustered Brownell. "Crooked is a dangerous word! You can't prove it!"

"No?"

Cassidy's voice was still an easy drawl, but his eyes were like flint.

"I certainly can prove it," he went on. "I'll leave it to Stevens and Bender if I don't prove it. Your boosters have been holding out cards. I saw them do it a while ago when the kid, here, went broke!"

He indicated Ben Danvers.

"Rats!" sneered Brownell.

In his voice was an unmistakable note of relief, of triumph.

"Go ahead and count the deck," he invited. "Let our two hands remain face down while you count the other cards. Then, —— you, you'll eat your words!"

Brownell was more than confident. The smile, even on his battered lips, was supercilious. The gleam had deepened in his eyes; he was about to show up Cassidy as a false alarm. The poor fool! He thought he had been short-carded, held out on, when in reality he had been beautifully cold-decked. And cold-decking could not be proven by counting the cards. In fact, it could not be proven at all!

"Somebody'll do some eating," admitted Cassidy. "It'll be dirt—and I'm not a bit hungry. Count the cards, Steve. Let these two hands alone. There ought to be forty-two cards in the rest of the deck."

Stevens gathered up the discards and the remainder of the deck. Slowly he counted

them, and then in amazement slowly looked around the table at each man in turn. Again carefully he counted. The cards numbered only *forty*.

Brownell turned pale.

"I—I don't understand that!" he gasped.

"No, I reckon yuh don't!" Stevens grunted heavily. "Maybe you understand this?"

He stuck his huge fist forward, and Brownell cringed away from it.

Dungan and the other booster sat as if petrified, partly through the menace of Cassidy's gun and partly in sheer surprize. Perhaps each suspected the other.

"Slivers," continued Stevens, "it sure looks like you've got the goods on them. But I want to get to the bottom of things. Got any real foundation for your accusation? Show me one bit of evidence. You won't have to show me the two cards. They could have been gotten rid of by now."

"Look up Dungan's left sleeve," suggested Cassidy.

The burly cattleman reached over with one enormous hand which clamped like a steel trap on Dungan's left wrist. Dungan struggled, but was like a child in the other's grasp.

A few seconds sufficed to expose the sleeve "hold-out" apparatus. Dungan was dragged to his feet, forced to remove his coat and unstrap the mechanism from his arm.

The short space of time had been filled with pregnant silence. Finally Brownell snarled and started to reach for his gun. His hand stopped, frozen in a mid-air position, for the muzzle of Ben Danvers' revolver had been thrust none too gently against his neck. Stevens uttered a short, sardonic laugh as he tossed the cheating-mechanism on to the table.

"Well, Lem," he put forth, "I reckon we learned something. "What'll we do about it?"

"I ain't good at riddles," Lem returned, reaching over to turn up Cassidy's hand.

"*Four queens!*" exclaimed Stevens, something akin to incredulity in his voice. "Cassidy, when you were afraid *they* wouldn't——"

"Not afraid!" interrupted Cassidy. "I *know* they won't! I've always thought it funny that so many big hands get topped in this game."

"Four queens!" echoed Brownell, pretending surprize. "Why, they're *good!* I've only got a full house."

Hastily and in feigned disgust he tore his cards into shreds and threw the fragments beneath the table. In apparent irritation he picked up the rest of the deck and sent the cards flying around the room.

"What's all this about?" he inquired testily. "Cassidy held the best hand."

"It's *about* two cards shy," retorted Stevens grimly. "And the 'hold-out' worn by your pet house-man."

"How about it, Lem?" he asked.

"Let's git our cash back. This game is crooked all right, and I'm holding out for my money. If we don't git it we'll *take it!*"

"Sure we will," affirmed Stevens. "But not out of the pot. That's Cassidy's. Better rake it in, Slivers; then fan out of here with it. Me and Lem'll stay till Ace makes a sort of adjustment."

"Give your gun to Steve, Ben," suggested Cassidy. "And then take the money—in your hat."

Young Danvers hastened to comply. No miser ever loved money more than Ben loved this heap of shining, clinking metal; to the lad it represented the saving of his mother's life.

He and Cassidy made their way to the street; behind them Stevens still held the gun on the gamblers.

"Gosh, Slivers!" was Ben's awed comment. "How'd you *know* the deck was short? Suppose it hadn't been! You took an awful chance."

"No chance at all," laughed Cassidy. "Ace was holding four kings against me—and I had to throw dust in his eyes to start a sort of back-fire. You see, his conscience was not clean. Mine was. That made the odds in my favor when I showed that the game was crooked."

"But how——"

"Oh, is that what's worryin' you?" laughed Cassidy.

From a pocket he drew forth two cards.

"Here's the answer—the jack and ten of diamonds," he went on. "It sure was a crooked game—and I proved it!"

Ben staggered in the throes of some emotion as the significance of the two cards and Cassidy's strategy came to him.

"Crooked!" he choked. "Oh, Lord! Wow! You sure proved it."

"I modestly admit that I did."

Cassidy's voice was grave, but several chuckles were beneath the surface.

"Now, son, the main thing is to get your mother aboard a train. There's no time to lose—if I know Ace Brownell. Will he let me get away with this money? Not while he's conscious! So you take my horse and hit the wind to the ranch. Make Ethel and your mother get ready in a hurry.

"I'll be there in an hour with a buckboard. I'll borrow one. Then I'll drive the ladies down to the water-tank, where the Limited always stops. By daylight Ethel, your mother and the money will be clear out of the State."

"But gosh, Slivers! The Limited doesn't come through till after midnight. What's the hurry?"

"Nothing, except that Ace is still the sheriff—and a few other things. He'll try to start something, for the district attorney is just a piece of property to him. I'll bet he's with him now, or on the way. He's liable to get out a writ of replevin, or something like that, to recover the money. Oh, he can get away with murder—because he does it legally. So it's best to short-circuit him."

"But tonight sure cooked Brownell's goose," propounded Ben. "Stevens has a lot of friends. They'll spread the word. And there's Lem Bender. The facts of Browning's running a crooked game will get around. He won't have a chance of being reelected."

"That's just what I've been thinking," admitted Cassidy. "And it doesn't hurt my tender feelings one —— bit."

At that moment they reached Cassidy's horse. Ben had transferred the money to various pockets. He pulled his hat on to his head and swung into the saddle.

"Now hustle out to the ranch," ordered Cassidy. "Get the women ready to take the train. The future sheriff of Pinnacle County—meanin' me—will be there in about an hour. So long!"

"So long, Slivers!"

Then a laugh.

"Golly!" he added. "You sure proved it!"

"Just a minute, Ben. If Ethel asks where you got the money tell her that *you* won it playing poker."

"Just as you say," answered Ben.

With that he disappeared in the darkness.

THREE hours later found Cassidy and Ben Danvers gazing at the rapidly disappearing tail-lights of the east-bound Limited, upon which they had placed the two women.

"That's what I'd call a good night's work," asserted Cassidy. "And now let's go. You take the buckboard back to Johnny Harper's barn. Me, I'm goin' home and hit the hay. I need sleep."

At nine o'clock the next morning Cassidy received three unexpected visitors when Dick Dougherty and two other prominent citizens of Pinnacle rode up to the homestead shack. They looked worried.

"Say Slivers," queried Dougherty, "what happened last night in the Bonanza? Ace Brownell is making talk that you held up and robbed his place."

"I almost wish I had—while I was about it," sighed Cassidy.

He grinned at the thought of how he had put one over on the crooked gamesters.

"No, never—no robbery at all," he said. "I got Steve Stevens, young Danvers and Lem Bender as witnesses."

"Like —— you have!" contradicted the other. "Ace is naming them as assistants in the robbery. He's pulling a smooth yarn; so —— smooth, with election day tomorrow, that it will crimp your chances of grabbing a majority of votes in town."

"What of that?" put in one of the citizens. "Slivers will grab the outside county vote almost solid. Say, Cassidy, why don't you sign a statement of what really happened last night? We'll get it printed in the *Press*. You'd better make it speedy though, for it goes to press this afternoon."

"Good idea," conceded Dougherty. "We oughta thought of that before.

"Aw, writin's too slow," objected Cassidy. "Le's ride *pronto* into town and see Starboard."

The latter was the editor and owner of the *Pinnacle Weekly Press*.

Cassidy threw a saddle on his horse. The quartet in haste rode to the newspaper office, in front of which, to their wonder, was gathered a large crowd. The objects of interest obviously were two copies of the sheet tacked to the wall on both sides of the door.

"Shucks! She's gone to press!"

Dougherty's tone was filled with grief.

"Starboard must have started getting out the paper at daylight," he added.

Cassidy leaped from his horse and strode through the crowd. In screaming headlines—something unusual for the *Press*—this announcement glared at him:

CANDIDATE FOR SHERIFF SHOWS HIS REAL COLORS

NOTORIOUS "SLIVERS" CASSIDY ROBS BONANZA

PRIVATE GRUDGE SUSPECTED AS MOTIVE; AUTHORITIES TO TAKE ACTION

The smaller print was searing invective flaying Cassidy and strongly hinting that if the truth were known there were several warrants out for him in other parts. With more than a vengeance Brownell had made political capital from the incidents of the night before.

Dougherty stood at Cassidy's elbow. He spoke:

"Brownell has a mortgage on the plant. That may explain a lot of things."

"How about it, Slivers?" called out one of the crowd.

Pale with anger, eyes blazing, Cassidy turned.

"It's a —— lie!" he blurted out vehemently. "All lies! Dick, you stay here. Let me handle this alone!"

He pushed open the office door and stepped within.

Behind his desk "Sassafras" Starboard, the editor, sat facing the door. He regarded Cassidy with a cold-eyed stare.

"Well?"

His tone was cold, discouraging; his poise such that momentarily it disconcerted his visitor.

"Oh, nothing——"

Cassidy's mildness of tone was ironic.

"I just dropped in to ask about your health," he added.

"Fair, thank you! Fair."

"That's fine," purred Cassidy. "But you're due for a swift relapse if you wrote the lies you printed."

"No?" smoothly, almost with amusement. "I was informed on excellent authority—on excellent authority, I repeat, my good sir—that the story as written for me is true in every particular. Mr. Brownell has half a dozen witnesses to vouch for its truth. He says he can get more, if necessary."

"Not witnesses!" blazed Cassidy, his calmness slipping fast. "He means half a dozen liars! Sure he can get more. I know him. But this thing has gone far enough. You change that story or you'll think a thousand steers have stampeded through your shop."

"So?"

Starboard's tone was polite, in his eyes the hint of amusement had deepened.

Warned by some vague instinct, Cassidy suddenly turned—to stare into the twin barrels of a ten gage shotgun in the hands of "Shotgun" Peters, one of Brownell's deputies. Peters was a hard-eyed, tight-lipped killer.

"Better git!" warned Peters.

His voice was sad, as it was reputed to be always sad when he was ready to pull a trigger at the slightest suspicious move of the man confronting him.

"I s'pose I oughta by all rights hold yuh," added Peters. "I hear there'll be a warrant out for yuh this afternoon, but I ain't got orders now to do more than guard this office. Git!"

Cassidy got, but was called back into the doorway by the editor.

"If it'll make things clearer to you, Mr. Cassidy, I'll inform you that the usual six hundred copies, and two hundred extra ones, were dumped into the post-office half an hour ago."

"How'd it happen you got them out so early today?" snapped Cassidy.

"Oh, maybe I wanted to go fishing this afternoon," grinned Starboard.

"Fishing! Fishing!" snorted Slivers. "Go ahead! I hope you fall in and drown—*twice*."

He slammed the door.

UPON occasion Dick Dougherty possessed a silver tongue and great powers of persuasion. This time it took all of Dick's powers, combined with seven drinks at three-minute intervals, to persuade Cassidy that it would be neither ethical nor legal to go out and win the election by filling Ace Brownell full of lead. The seven drinks had the effect of oiling Dick's tongue to greater efforts and of relaxing Cassidy to a point where he would listen.

Both of them realized that Cassidy's chances of being elected sheriff had gone glimmering, with eight hundred copies of the scurrilous story spread throughout the county. In this rather primitive region

the voters were wont to accept anything appearing in cold type as Gospel truth. And Cassidy had taken to his heart the idea of becoming sheriff. The position appealed to him in more ways than one.

"Aw, shut up, Dick," spluttered Cassidy at last. "You talk so fast you won't even let me think. I'll take your word for it. But how about the warrant Brownell is getting out for me? It's a rank frame-up. He's carrying things too far. I won't stand for it! Brownell may be mad clear through at what I put over on him, but he isn't one-two with me when it comes to being mad."

"But that's just a political trick. You've got to expect those things when you mix with politics. It's just framed up to discredit you before election day. He'll win on it, too—worse luck. But he won't try to serve a warrant."

"Won't he? Huh! I know better. There's a lot of personal stuff back of it. I've let you blarney me into promising to be peaceful—but if he has the hard-baked crust to try to serve a warrant——"

Cassidy's smile of anticipation was grim.

"Don't resist, whatever you do, Slivers. Remember that if Brownell has a warrant with him he represents the law. He'll *be* the law!"

"Yeh! I know. All I'll do will be to put a couple of nifty punctures in the law. That's all."

"That's too much," was Dick's impatient retort. "The law is the law."

"Yeh!" contemptuously. "And politics are another thing. Right seems to be wrong. I generally think I am right and wind up by getting in wrong. That's me—every time. The law treats me like a stepson. I'd just as soon bump off Ace for the good of the county and take a chance with the law then. I'll get out of it in some way. They say the angels watch over fools and cripples. I'm no cripple, but I sure qualify in the other class."

"Don't do it, Slivers. I've seen gunmen in the old days. They came and went—out with their boots on. You've seen the same. Stay peaceable. Brownell will hang himself—in time."

"I'll lend him my rope to do it with," was Cassidy's generous offer. "Dang you, anyway!" he burst out. "Dick, you've taken advantage of two of my weaknesses; my liking for you and your knowledge that exactly seven drinks makes me love the world—almost even Brownell. As an apostle of peace you're a bald-headed wonder—but how about that warrant?"

"Hang it, Slivers, you're too persistent."

"Uh-huh! I'm simply hopeful that he'll try to serve it."

"Slivers, be serious. Do you like me?"

"I *like* any man that I'll take seven drinks with. Eight will mean that I *more* than like him."

"Have another?"

"Sure!"

But service was slow. Despite their repeated slaps on the bar with open palms they failed to get the attention of the bartender, that worthy being extremely busy setting out refreshments for a group of thirsty and dusty "cow-wrastlers" who had just entered.

Cassidy grew impatient. With one arm around Dougherty's shoulders he began a serenade, in which he was joined by his friend:

"Oh, give us a drink, bartender, bartender,
For we love you, as you know;
And surely you will oblige us, oblige us
With another drop or so."

"What'll it be, gents? What'll it be?" inquired the bartender, rushing up and running a cloth over the bar.

"Yes," admitted Cassidy vaguely.

Again he raised his voice in song, beating time with one hand—

"And when we are drunk, just put us in our bunk—"

Dick interrupted him.

"Drink this, and come along with me."

A minute later, with a firm grasp on Cassidy's arm, he led him down the street to the store and into the private office. He pulled out two chairs.

"Now, Slivers, you fire-eater, you've got to do a big favor for me."

"Sure. I'll go look him up and shoot him on sight. I'll give him the first shot—just to make it even."

"You're all wrong. I'm in a —— of a hole about my ranch over in Cazadero County. I can't get a first-class foreman—one I can trust to run the whole shebang. But you're him now. You've put in six months on your homestead. The next six months as foreman will give you a stake to develop your homestead. I'll pay you

sheriff's wages—one hundred a month. But there's a string to the offer."

"Dick," mournfully, "I didn't think that of you. You're s-strhingin' me——"

"It's only this, Slivers. You've got to start right away; in half an hour."

Cassidy straightened up with a jerk.

"Want me to run out, huh!"

"Run out nothing! This is a big favor I'm asking of you. I know you want to shoot Brownell. I'm in favor of it myself when it comes right down to that. But now I want you to help me out, savvy? That's all.

"And remember that Brownell will keep. Wait six months and you can gun him up just as much—if you still feel that way about it. Maybe you can do a better job of it then. You can practise up your trigger finger. A better job, savvy!"

Cassidy shut one eye as with drunken gravity he considered the proposition. The idea of doing a better job later rather appealed to him.

"I shee. Bizzsh-ness before pleasure. Pershonal favor to you can't refuzshe."

Dick smiled to himself. Cassidy was getting more and more amenable as the liquor took effect; as a rule he never drank at all. Dick wrote a letter, then went out to get Cassidy's horse. As he passed the saloon, from within, strong in lung power but weak in harmony, came a drunken chorus—

> "And when we are drunk, just put us in our bunk——"

Dick smiled again.

"Well, liquor did two of us some good anyway," he cogitated. "It got me a good foreman and kept Slivers out of trouble."

THUS it happened that Slivers Cassidy, himself making others suffer strongly from the delusion that he was Caruso, rode forth on the road to Cazadero County. He was a little over two hours ahead of Ace Brownell and his gunmen. Backed by a warrant, they were out to collect Cassidy's scalp; but when they failed to find him at his homestead there was no attempt at pursuit. They did not know which road he had taken.

Cassidy bore a letter to the bank of Cazadero County, introducing him as "George Buckman" and authorizing him to sign checks and handle all ranch affairs as he saw fit. Dick Dougherty congratulated himself at having placed his ranch in competent hands.

When Cassidy began to sober up he did not know whether to congratulate himself or not. He wondered whether his other friends would think he had taken a "run-out powder." Also whether he had been weak enough to sell his "face" for one hundred dollars a month.

Five weeks later he was sure that he had. On a Wednesday, when in the county seat, he chanced across a late copy of the *Pinnacle Press*, which contained a news item stating that the Judicial District Judge would arrive in Pinnacle the following Friday to hold court. It also mentioned that among the prisoners being held for trial were Lemuel Bender, Henry Stevens and Ben Danvers, accused of having assisted in robbing the Bonanza. They had been held without bail.

Cassidy seethed with cold rage.

"Without bail!" he repeated. "Brownell is the lowest skunk in the world. First he cheats them, and then arrests them for getting their money back. Then he holds them without bail, because the district attorney eats out of his hand, and no judge there at all. It's just that low-down get-even spirit of Brownell's. Has to even up because he got showed up. I'm gonna do a little evenin' up myself. He ain't got a monopoly on that game."

Pinnacle was nearly eighty miles distant across-country; but Cassidy, after swapping horses twice, arrived there the following evening. He left his horse in his favorite dark spot in the rear of Dougherty's store, then stole down the alley toward the Bonanza. In his mind was no plan at all beyond a fixed determination to get his three friends out of jail. Vaguely also in the back of his brain was a desire to show Brownell up or make him suffer—a desire born of Cassidy's weird, grim humor and his sense of justice.

It was not through fear of Brownell that he kept to the dark places; it was through fear of meeting Dick Dougherty. Dick was too blamed conservative, and would try to argue. And Cassidy did not want argument; he wanted action.

Presently he became aware that ahead of him some one was sneaking along with equal caution, or with attempted caution, for the other had neglected to remove his spurs, and the occasional clank and tinkle of the latter

were what gave him away. Cassidy's spurs were on the horn of his saddle. He stole after the man through the darkness, and was surprized to discover him heading directly for the side of the Bonanza, where there was no door.

He was even more surprized when the stranger climbed in through an open window. His curiosity fully aroused, Slivers sneaked to the rear of the building, then edged along the wall until he was crouched below the window ledge.

As the window opening was dark, Cassidy surmised that within must be Brownell's room, a combination of bed-chamber and private office. There came a momentary flash of light as a door was opened and closed. Then a husky whisper—

"Hello, Ace!"

"You're late," came the reply from Brownell. "I've been waiting for an hour."

Beyond that Cassidy could hear nothing, for the two men spoke in guarded tones. He was patient, however, until finally came the rasp of a chair being pushed back. Brownell spoke a last word:

"I'll sure be out of town at nine o'clock. Do it then."

Cassidy barely had time to crawl out of sight among the foundations of the building before the stranger sat on the window ledge, swung his feet out and dropped to the ground. He clanked off down the alley and left Cassidy in the throes of a thinking act.

"Nine o'clock," pondered Cassidy. "Do it at nine!"

"Huh! And Brownell will be out of town then. Huh! Maybe he means tomorrow morning. And tomorrow's Friday. Something fishy—somewhere. Maybe I'll do a little fishing myself. Golly! That's a good idea!"

So Cassidy went fishing, with himself as bait. Dropping into another saloon, he publicly announced that he would be at his homestead the following morning. He knew this information would reach Brownell's ears. Satisfied, he headed for his homestead to await developments.

They came. At eight-thirty the next morning he spotted the sheriff riding toward the mesa. And he was not alone; he was accompanied by Shotgun Peters and Ike Meehan, his two salaried deputies.

Cassidy chuckled to himself. He had been right in his guess that Brownell would not come alone.

Fifteen minutes later the posse, after leaving their horses part way down the trail, popped suddenly into view above the mesa skyline and cautiously approached the homestead shack.

"I tell yuh it's no use," argued Peters. "He ain't fool enough to be here."

"*Freeze!*" came a sudden command from behind.

"*Stick 'em high!*"

Cassidy, lying among some rocks and effectively screened by a growth of mesquite, had the officers just where he wanted them.

Brownell's carbine dropped into the dust. Up went his hands. Peters whirled about with his shotgun, but even as he turned Cassidy deliberately splintering the stock of the weapon with a heavy .45-90 bullet. Meehan had been almost as quick to comply as Brownell. Blood dripped from Peters' fingers as he slowly raised his hands.

"Now, Ace, yank out your Colt and drop it!" ordered Cassidy. "The same for you, Peters. Fine! Just keep facing the other way with your hands up and you'll live longer. It's your turn, Meehan. That's right. Now hike, all three of you, for the dry well to the left!"

Leaving the rifle behind and with Colt in hand, Cassidy issued forth from his ambuscade. Keeping a watchful eye on his captives, he stooped to pick up one of the discarded revolvers.

"Halt!" he yelled, and walked up to the well, a Colt in each hand. "Now, Ace, see that rope tied to the windlass? Slide down it."

"Don't do it!" interjected Peters.

"Just for that, you go down first!" ordered Cassidy.

"I won't, and what are yuh going to do about it?" snarled Peters as Cassidy walked up to him. "I know —— well yuh won't shoot me—when I ain't got a gun."

"You merely *think* that I won't shoot," purred Cassidy. "Try one queer move and find out."

Peters profanely refused the offer by telling Cassidy where to go.

"Down the rope then!" was the order.

"Like —— I will, and what are yuh gonna do about it?"

"This," drawled Cassidy, and with the word he swung the barrel of one Colt viciously down on to Mr. Peters' hat.

Mr. Peters' head was inside the hat; and he slumped, unconscious, to the ground.

"Your turn, Ace. Want a dose of it?"

Mr. Brownell gave profane and emphatic assurance to the contrary.

"Then pull up the rope."

The sheriff hastened to comply, and in the mean time Cassidy stooped over Peters to unpin his star from his vest and remove a pair of handcuffs from one pocket.

"The same for you, Ace—Meehan. Take off your gun-belts, your star and drop any handcuffs you're packing."

The rope was tied beneath Peters' arms, and he was finally lowered into the dry well by the two other officers.

"You'll pay for this," spluttered Brownell. "I'll——"

"Shut up!" finished Cassidy. "Now slide down the rope before I change my mind and do something worse."

Ace slid.

Meehan took things easier. He grinned and inquired—

"What's the idea of takin' the stars and cuffs?"

"Secret," was the brief reply. "You slide too."

Cassidy was at peace with the world as he leisurely rolled a cigaret and then strolled over to peer down at his prisoners twenty-five feet below. At his order the rope was released from Peters. Then he pulled it up.

For a moment before he pocketed them, he examined the three silver stars. He grinned as his bizarre imagination and sense of humor began working overtime. The situation thus far delighted him, and he worried not at all over the morrow; that would take care of itself.

He was ready to start for Pinnacle, but delayed long enough to hoist a bucket of water from another well and lower it down to his three captives. For this he got no thanks; but he had expected none.

IN A COTTONWOOD thicket on the outskirts of the town he had tied the horses belonging to the posse. He had led the animals in from the mesa trail. With a devilish grin and an air of nonchalance he rode down a side street to the jail.

The nonchalance was not assumed; it was natural with Cassidy. And the grin was caused by the plan he had formulated, which was nothing less than to pull off a jail delivery. Together with Stevens, Bender and Danvers he would then take charge of the *Press*, lock the doors and force Sassafras Starboard to put out a special edition, in which to the world would be given their side of what had happened prior to the so-called "robbery" of the Bonanza.

Cassidy quietly dismounted in front of the jail and walked into the outer office. "Sleepy" Johnson, the jailer, was justifying his nickname, snoring loudly in a chair tilted back against the wall.

Cassidy's first act was stealthily to unpin the deputy's star from the front of his shirt. He dropped it into his pocket with the three other emblems of authority. Then he awoke Johnson by tickling his nose with the muzzle of a Colt.

As the jailer awoke to the realization that Cassidy was holding him up, they were both momentarily distracted by a fusillade of pistol shots coming up the street from the vicinity of the Cattlemen's and Ranchers' Bank. Mingled with them after the first outburst could be recognized the sharper, more spiteful cracks of rifle fire. It was evident that some one else was also seeking action—and getting it. But Cassidy had no thought of investigating. He had business of his own to carry on.

Not much more than two minutes later saw Cassidy and three ex-prisoners leaving the jail. Behind them they had left the outraged Mr. Johnson locked in a cell—free to continue his broken slumber. The three had helped themselves to Winchesters and plenty of cartridges.

In escaping from jail they had certainly placed themselves outside the pale of whatever law ruled in the county; but none cared. Being outlawed was better than being confined—unjustly confined—in a cell. And Cassidy's grin, working overtime, somehow served to remove any thought regarding the seriousness of what they were doing. It was good to be free! And they intended to stay that way.

With an impish grin Cassidy brought out the four stars.

"Pin 'em on, boys," he ordered. "We might as well do this right!"

"Sure; but what do we do?" queried Stevens.

"First thing is to stick up Starboard and make him get out a special edition. Make him tell the whole truth and a little more. We'll try out the power of the press to square ourselves. You and Lem can lock yourselves in the offices to keep Starboard

and his printer working. Ben and me'll scout around a bit."

"Suffering sunfish! That's a whang-up lulu of an idea!" swore Stevens.

Admiration grew as the possibilities of the scheme dawned on him.

"I've always wanted to write a few whang-up scorchers of editorials," he added. "Now's my chance. We'll print 'em all in a bunch."

Pause. Then with concern—

"Where's Ace and his depities?"

"Oh, they got themselves in a hole," laughed Cassidy. "They're at the bottom of the dry well on the mesa, and they'll stay put till I get good and ready to haul 'em out."

"Haw-haw-haw!" cackled Bender. "That's the best I've heard yet. But, shucks, it sounds too good to be true."

Bender glanced down at the star he had pinned to his vest and started to shine it up with his shirt sleeve.

"Let's go," said Cassidy. "We'll cut down through the alley. There's no use in advertising this thing till we get the paper out."

Around the corner of the building on the dead run came Dick Dougherty.

"Where's the sheriff?" he puffed, trying to regain his breath.

Then he recognized the quartet. Mingled emotions registered on his face as he tried to readjust his ideas to the extent of connecting the ostentatiously displayed officer's stars with the wearers.

"I'll bite," he confessed, grinning uncertainly. "Slivers, you're at the bottom of this, that's a *cinch!* But what's the game?"

"Button, button—!" grinned Cassidy. "Only it's sheriff's stars this time. It's a new game. I invented it. Want to get in on it? Say—" struck by a sudden thought—"what was all the celebratin'? I heard about four dollars and six-bits worth of shells go off."

"The bank was robbed," explained Dougherty. "Seeing you *hombres* here made me forget even that for a moment. Six men walked in and stuck up the bank just after it opened. They cleaned it out of cash. Then they emptied their guns to scare folks off the streets before the bunch of them breezed out of town. They had left their horses in the alley behind the bank. Where's Ace?"

"Which road did they take out of town?"

A gleam had leaped into Cassidy's eyes.

"South! But where's——"

"Never mind—now. Dick, you rustle up a citizen's posse and trail the gang. Ace is out of this, savvy?"

He motioned to the three.

"You boys follow me," he ordered. "Got horses waiting, over in the cottonwoods. Come on!"

Cassidy swung into the saddle.

For a moment Dick stood watching them. Then he scratched his head. Finally he turned and shouted down the street to several men hastening toward the jail.

Dick was more than puzzled; he was absolutely flabbergasted. But not for a moment did he doubt Cassidy. In haste he began issuing orders that would assemble a dozen armed men.

On his part, as he rode, Cassidy's mind was a seething jumble.

"Nine o'clock! I'll be out of town! Six riders!"

The six horsemen he had several times watched coming out of the San Maderas! Brownell's curious indifference!

"Nine o'clock! I'll be out of town!"

And gradually out of this mental whirlpool came a straight line of thought—and strong suspicion.

Suspicion swiftly turned into conviction: Ace Brownell had been standing in with the bandit gang—at least to the extent of a passive policy and, no doubt, a percentage of the loot.

"Hurry, boys!" yelped Cassidy.

Swift mounting followed their reaching the cottonwoods. Cassidy rode eastward, toward the mesa.

"But they went south," shouted Stevens in expostualtion as he caught up. "Ain't we goin' after them?"

"Sure," laughed Slivers. "What we wearin' these stars for? The gang went south to get around the mesa. We're goin' over the mesa and beat them to the mountains."

"You're plumb crazy!" Stevens cheerfully assured him. "You know danged well we can't go over the mesa. All the east side is straight up-and-down cliff."

"Not since two months ago," explained Cassidy. "Big landslide sliced her clear off. It ain't no boulevard—it's sure steep in some places—but with a little luck we can get the horses down. It'll cut off twelve miles, and we've gotta try it."

Stevens dropped back. A little later, however, he again spurred up alongside.

"Where'd you get these broncs and cartridge belts and Colts?" he inquired.

"Oh, they go with the stars we're wearin'."

Momentarily Stevens choked with emotion of some sort.

"Sufferin' sunfish! Slivers, have you stopped to figger up how many compound crimps you've put in the law today?"

"They're not more than ten," grinned Cassidy. "Le's see. Resisting arrest, robbery, horse-stealing, a Class-A jail-delivery, impersonating an officer, poisoning a well and a few more little things that I can't think of offhand."

"Poisonin' a well——?"

"Sure! Didn't I put Ace Brownell down at the bottom of one? It's a dry well, but——"

"Help!" yelled Stevens. "Enough, sufficient, plenty! Slivers, I love you like a brother. I'll stick with you till one of us dies or gets married or somethin'. But sticking with you breeds seven kinds of trouble, with complication. How in blazes will we ever square ourselves? I'm a man of property, of responsibility. I haven't any right to mix up with your escapades. But I get a lot out of them."

"Yeh! Five weeks in jail," dryly.

"It was worth it," maintained the other. "Ben Danvers told me how you put it over on Brownell in the poker game."

"I'll put it over on him again. I'll put it over pretty and plenty this time. Don't worry! We'll come out covered with roses and geraniums—and they won't be on our graves either. I've got two aces in the hole right now. One of them is Brownell; the other is the Governor of this State. My word will go a long way with him."

"Ace in the hole! Down in the well! Haw-haw!" chuckled Stevens. "Be careful, Slivers; my heart ain't too strong."

By this time they had reached the narrow mesa trail. Stevens dropped back. At the top Cassidy set a fast pace, and there was no more conversation until the quartet had pulled up their mounts at the edge of the landslide.

Five hundred feet below lay the boulder-strewn bed of a dry "wash." The latter was perhaps a quarter of a mile in width. Periodically each year, cloudburst waters came tumbling down from the mountains, to surge down the wash and gradually undermine the eastern side of the mesa.

A gigantic slide had been the final result; perhaps five acres on the edge of this part of the mesa had dropped away, spilling out nearly half-way across the wash. The resulting slope had a surface of soft earth mixed with rock and gravel, and at the top the grade was easily more than fifty degrees. Towards the bottom, however, the incline was less abrupt.

"It's sure a long roll to the bottom," commented Ben Danvers.

"Scared?" asked Cassidy.

"Not if you go first," said Ben.

"Let her roll!"

Cassidy forced his horse over the brink. The animal's hoofs sank deep into the soft earth. It slid for perhaps twenty feet, then fell heavily.

It happened in a flash, but Cassidy was equally swift in disengaging his feet from the stirrups and leaping clear. Digging in his heels, he slid down the slope in a flurry of loose earth and stones behind the horse. Then his mount finally caught a footing and scrambled up, to stand snorting and trembling while Cassidy quickly examined it. There was no sign of injury on the animal, and Cassidy swung into the saddle, looked up the slope and shouted for the others to follow.

Without further mishap he reached the bottom. The others had more luck in that all of them were enabled to stick to their saddles all the way down.

Across the wash they rode, climbed the farther bank and struck off over a stretch of almost flat desert. The latter was broken up only by scattered rocks, thickets of sage and mesquite, patches of cacti. Here and there a joshua-tree or yucca in full flower reared up to break the flat monotony. Ahead to the eastward towered the purple San Maderas, the foot-hills appearing to be less than two miles away. In reality they were almost five.

Cassidy had laid his landmarks well. Unhesitatingly he led the way toward a certain cañon—the cañon from which several times in the past he had watched the mysterious riders come forth. He was playing a hunch, and was playing it strong.

It was slow traveling and a zigzag trail as Cassidy picked the best going. Three-quarters of an hour later they arrived at the mouth of an *arroyo* leading into the

foot-hills. On its rocky floor were discernible no traces of hoofprints. Cassidy pushed his hat back from his forehead and rumpled his hair.

"Anybody got a pair of dice?" he finally inquired irrelevantly. "I'd like to 'pee-wee' with one of them to see which cañon we pick. I had this one spotted—but you can take your choice. They all look alike."

Meanwhile his searching gaze had roved around until it located evidence that horsemen had at times entered this particular *arroyo*. Satisfied, he gave instructions for the horses to be hidden, then picked four spots in which the men were to lie in ambush. It was a made-to-order place for a trap, and they settled down for the bandits to ride into it—if they came at all.

THEY came at last, six riders spurring along the edge of the foot-hills in a sea of heat-waves which created the illusion that the horses were traveling sixty feet above the earth and kicking dust-clouds out of thin air. From the time they first appeared in sight less than ten minutes passed before they turned into the *arroyo*—and into the trap.

Cassidy arose from behind a rock, ready to shoot from the hip.

"Raise your hands!" he shouted, and the command obtained quick results.

Five of the bandits half-way complied immediately. Five hands came up—smoking; and Cassidy was the target. But he was a poor target; he had figured on swift resistance and had beaten the game by dropping back out of sight. Shots fired from the back of a moving horse are not likely to be accurate, but Cassidy was taking no unnecessary chances. He had placed his three men where they would do the most good.

Ben Danvers, entrenched directly across the *arroyo*, cut loose immediately. In his overanxiety to make good he missed completely, but his bullet solidly creased the forehead of a horse just beyond the man at whom he had taken aim. The horse went down like a pole-axed steer and pinned its rider beneath by one leg.

Cassidy shoved his rifle over the top of a rock. His head came into sight just in time to have a bullet send his hat spinning. And about a second later the sender of this bullet went out of the fight with a smashed shoulder. Cassidy's aim had been good. He had shot to cripple, not to kill.

This was too much for the remaining four bandits. In frantic haste they wheeled their horses and sought to escape back down the cañon.

But Stevens and Bender were hidden on opposite sides about one hundred yards down the ravine. They were there to cut off any attempt at escape. Their fire killed the two leading horses and wounded the rider of a third. The bandits were through. Those who were able, raised their hands in token of surrender.

In the mean time, Ben Danvers had fired one more shot, and missed again in his excitement or in an attack of "buck fever." Then he had heeded Cassidy's shouted order to stop shooting. Cassidy himself had fired only once.

Half an hour later a sort of caravan started back along the edge of the foot-hills. Ben Danvers rode in the lead. Behind him, the reins tied to his saddle, came a horse carrying two handcuffed bandits. Then came a horse with a bleeding forehead; it had only been stunned by Ben's wild bullet. On its saddle rode a wounded bandit.

Lem Bender rode beside him to render what assistance he could. Stevens performed a like service for the wounded man next in line. Behind them came another bandit-laden horse carrying double.

Cassidy fetched up as rear guard of the slow parade. Across his saddle lay a sack stuffed with currency and gold. Ben Danvers carried one a little lighter in similar contents.

Finally one of the bandits, evidently the leader of the gang, looked back over his shoulder and hailed Cassidy, who urged his horse forward.

"D'yuh mind tellin' me somethin'? I'm danged curious," said the prisoner.

"You oughta be," grinned Cassidy. "What's on your downcast mind?"

"How'd you *hombres* happen to be layin' for us in that particular cañon?"

"It's this way," was Cassidy's cryptic reply. "The ways of sheriffs, some more than others, resembleth the festive corkscrew. Chew on that a while."

The other's face darkened perceptibly as he scowled.

"D'yuh mean——"

"Maybe I do. Did it ever strike you fellows that after every time you stuck up a

train or something you became worth quite a little more delivered on the hoof to the right parties? Think it over."

"—— him! If Ace thinks he can collect on us and get away clean he's got another think comin'. We've paid him nine thousand in the last year. He thinks I can't prove it, and maybe I can't. But he'll have a hard time explaining how he got the diamonds he has locked in his safe. He made me give them to him after me and the boys stuck up the Limited last March. The dirty double-crosser! So he's turned us up and thinks he can get away with it."

Pause.

"Say, who *are* you *hombres?* Special officers?"

"Correct," agreed Cassidy. "Very special."

"Where's Ace? —— his hide, I'd like to get at him—just once."

"Oh, Ace ain't mixing much with affairs right now. At least he wasn't when I saw him last. And I think he's still doing the same thing. He's resigned—but he doesn't know it yet."

"He'll know somethin' when I've talked to him."

"Fair enough," said Cassidy. "Save the talk for the judge. I'll put in a good word for you."

Slivers dropped to the rear, and into deep cogitation.

Three miles farther on they passed through a maze of rocks a sort of miniature bad-lands, and met up with a posse of ten citizens headed by Dick Dougherty. The posse had lost the bandit's trail. Cassidy enjoyed a laugh at their expense, then turned the prisoners over to Dougherty and rode alone into town. He wanted to reach Pinnacle an hour or two before the prisoners arrived.

In town, his first act was to send a telegram to the Governor of the State. His next was to hold a long confab with the district judge. And the third was accidentally to meet Ethel Danvers and her mother as the two women came up from the depot. They had just arrived from the East. Mrs. Danvers was able to walk. The operation had been a complete success.

He talked with the women until the cavalcade arrived. Ben finally took them off his hands and hired a livery-stable rig to drive them home. Cassidy meanwhile had hastened to the court-house, where Judge Frisbie was speeding things up. The prisoners willingly gave information implicating Ace Brownell.

Then arrived a telegram from the governor.

I still don't know what the game is but will take your word for it. Brownell is removed, and you are hereby appointed sheriff of Pinnacle County until further notice. Papers go into the mail immediately.

Cassidy grinned and handed over the message for Stevens' perusal.

"Come on, Steve. Get Lem first, and then we'll make the district attorney squirm."

The official squirmed considerably, but was forced to issue warrants for Brownell and the two deputies.

"I don't know about the deputies," acknowledged Slivers. "But I'm arresting them on general principles. I've been taking so dog-goned many liberties with the law that now I'm sticking right to it by getting these warrants. It'll make my average better. Come on, Steve, and watch me spring a warrant on Ace. This is gonna be good!"

It was good. Slightly more than an hour later saw the erstwhile sheriff locked in the very cell where Stevens had spent five weeks. Cassidy put the keys in his pockets as he left the building.

"Where now?" inquired Stevens.

"To finish what we started this morning," grinned Cassidy. "We'll go over and throw the fear of the devil into Sassafras Starboard. We'll make him get out that special edition. You can write the whole paper if you still feel that way."

"Not till after I eat," protested Stevens. "And I dunno's I feel so danged enthusiastic now—the slick way things have worked out. This morning it would have been a joy to get a lot of things off my chest and into print; right now it just looks like a lot of work."

Then arrived Ben Danvers with a note.

DEAR MR. CASSIDY:

Ben has told me the truth about the money which saved mother. I must see you again and thank you. But it puts us in a terrible predicament; I do not see how we can ever repay. Won't you please come back with Ben and have supper with us?

Sincerely,
ETHEL DANVERS.

Cassidy's face was wreathed in a forbidding scowl as he finished reading. He

shoved the bit of paper into a pocket, then reached out and grabbed Ben by the hair.

"You brainless, fool kid!" he burst out. "I was giving you credit for having at least half an ounce of brains—and danged if I haven't been overestimating. I've been flattering you right along—with that half-ounce idea. You've spilled the beans, and you've got your sister worrying herself sick about how she'll pay me back—when I didn't want to be paid back.

"You fan yourself right back home *pronto* and tell her to quit worrying, because you've got fifteen hundred dollars coming. Fifteen hundred in nice hard cash."

"I'll go back and tell her that you're the biggest liar in the world," was Ben's answer. "Fifteen hundred! Slivers, you've been taking a dream pill—or somethin'."

"Ben, I'll be forced to kill you yet. You've really got fifteen hundred coming," set forth Cassidy. "The six bad *hombres* we gathered in today are worth a thousand dollars apiece. That's six thousand to be split among the four of us."

"Oh, my gosh!"

Ben threw his hat on to the roof of a stable, did a few dance steps and threatened to kiss Cassidy. Outside of this demonstration he failed to register joy at all.

"But you've got to come out to supper. Sis gave me a list of things I have to buy."

"Uh-uh! Not me! You've spoiled everything by telling. I'm plain scared to see her."

"Fat lot of good it will do you," sniffed Ben. "I know Sis. She wants you to come to supper, and you'd better come or you'll be having some real trouble on your hands."

"I can't. Now you scoot right back home and tell Ethel about the fifteen hundred. Hit the breeze!"

Ben scooted.

"I guess I'm holdin' a public reception," grinned Cassidy as Dick Dougherty and several others stopped to talk and congratulate him.

"Golly, Slivers, I'm sure glad that you got on the right side of the law—" began Dick.

"Law!" interjected Cassidy. "Law——"

"Sure," continued Dick. "That was a high-powered stunt you pulled in getting yourself appointed by the governor. You wanted to be sheriff, and now you *are* the sheriff—till the next election anyway; and it's a certainty you'll be elected again."

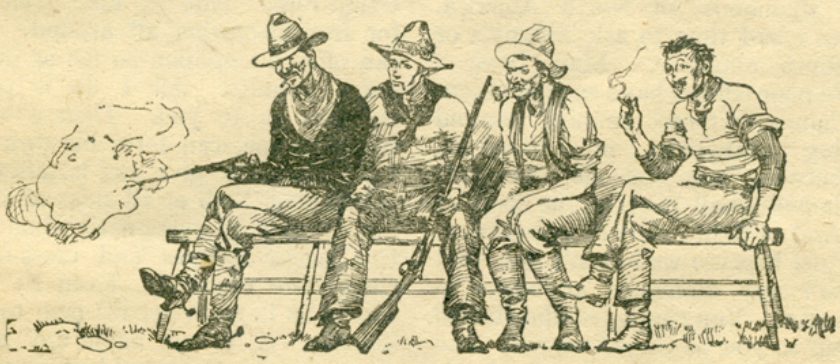
"But, dog-gone it! Dick, I don't want to be sheriff. I've found out a lot about the job and I want to resign—now!"

"What's the idea? What's wrong with the job?"

"The job's all right, but there's too danged much law connected with it. Law! I'm fed up on it."

He grinned and added—

"And as sheriff think of the fun I'd be missing!"



Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

AS TO diamonds in North America. Haven't had time to ask Tiffany's or Mr. Rayburn about it. Man, have a heart! We poor editors have enough chores on our hands without running around interviewing authorities on diamonds. Strictly between you and me, diamonds play a blamed small part in the lives of editors. And *we* didn't start this discussion, or claim, just because we haven't any, that there aren't any diamonds anywhere in North America. You comrades who started this, it's up to you to come forward. And any of you who are interested can write to Tiffany's and the other fellow.

Sometimes we in the office tear our hair because some readers persist in the idea that we vouch for every opinion offered at Camp-Fire. Not at all. Camp-Fire is for free discussion all around. Anybody can offer his opinion so far as our limited space permits. All I do is pass these opinions on to you. Then every fellow, including me, can form his own opinions. I try always to give you letters expressing opinions on both or all sides of a question, but I can't be systematic about it. Mr. Cox keeps indexes and cross-indexes of Camp-Fire material. Even as it is, the rest of us have to get his help to use these indexes. If it were made any more complicated, even Cox would go crazy.

None of which means that I'm not glad Mr. Purcue gave us this counter opinion on diamonds. Of course I've heard about the diamonds of Arkansas but I don't know

their quality, quantity or value. And didn't I read in the papers the other day of a field recently discovered in Dutch Guiana? Yes, I know Dutch Guiana isn't in North America.

Phœnix, Arizona.

I would like to bring up the subject of "Diamonds in North America."

IN THE November 30th issue I note what Mr. Ernest K. Irving has to say on the matter and it seems my duty as a former resident of Arkansas to call to the attention of the readers that diamonds which compare with the South African gems have been found in Pike County, Arkansas. In fact they were discovered some fifteen years ago, and since then a great number have been taken from this mine.

These diamonds have been on sale in the jewelry stores of Little Rock, this to my personal knowledge, and I understand by Tiffany and Company in New York, who it is reputed are part owners of the mine.

Sam W. Rayburn, President of Associated Dry Goods in New York, is also said to be a big stockholder and one of the original owners of the mine.

I am not trying to bring up any argument but only wish to state facts and to verify my various statements would like for you to have a representative call on both Mr. Rayburn and Tiffany and Company—would be pleased to know what they say on the matter.—J. M. PURCUE.

A LETTER from an old-timer differing from F. R. Bechdolt as to certain details in the latter's account of Billy the Kid. The thing to bear in mind is that, as is testified by the many of you who have already given us many and more or less conflicting accounts of various episodes in the life of the Kid, there were countless versions being passed around at the time of these happenings and that, during the passing, the reports underwent numerous changes.

Being well aware of this, Mr. Bechdolt has made it a point to collect all the data possible, to compare all the conflicting accounts, giving preference generally to those of eye-witnesses or participants, and, in the light of the evidence as a whole, to choose in each instance the version most strongly supported.

As in the following letter, it is usually not a question of veracity in those bringing forward the various versions of incidents in any of the Western material from which Mr. Bechdolt's series of articles is built. Just the usual fact that any event is changed and changed again in the telling, even when those who do the telling are entirely honest. It is the historian's job to weigh the evidence from all points of view and by all tests possible, then to map out the course indicated by the sum of that evidence. That is what Mr. Bechdolt is doing and the many letters received from old-timers indicate that he is doing it with great care and extremely good judgment.

We read and enjoy his articles as stories, but their final value is as historical documents.

St. Louis, Mo.

In your issue of Aug. 30th an article by F. R. Bechdolt called the "Law-Bringers" is inaccurate in so many particulars that I fell inclined to correct some of them. To show that I am familiar with the subject will give a short history of myself as follows:

I ARRIVED in Las Vegas, M. N., in the Fall of 1879, worked at my trade of printer and prospected around Las Vegas until the White Oaks strike was made. As soon as I could get an outfit together started for White Oaks with two partners, "Big Fort" Johnson and "Vegas Jack" Mercer. We arrived in W. O. about May 1, 1880. Finding everything staked in the neighborhood of W. O., a party of seven decided to try a range of mountains 15 to 20 miles west of W. O., which is now called El Capitan. We located in what was known as the Nogal Cañon and, finding some fair looking prospects there, there soon was a camp of several hundred men there. The Spring of 1881 opened and quite a delegation decided to go to Lincoln—18 miles—to see Billy the Kid hanged in May.

The news of the Kid's escape in the latter part of April was brought to the camp by a couple of our prospectors who were in Lincoln that day buying rations from the soldiers' commissary. The story they told was that one morning one of the deputies through some carelessness allowed the Kid to come up behind him in such a way that the Kid struck the deputy with his handcuffs, knocking the deputy down, and, securing the deputy's gun, shot him. The other deputy, hearing the racket, rushed up the stairs, only to be killed by the Kid, who secured the keys of his irons from the body of one of the deputies, freed himself and, securing arms, came down to the street, mounted a horse and rode to the mountains without pursuit.

DURING the Summer of '81 I saw the Kid in our cañon on two occasions, as he visited a Charley Conwell, whose cabin was just below ours. About August we, having finished all our assessment work and running rather short on money, decided to return to Vegas and work up another grub-stake. That Fall—I think it was in December—Frank Stewart, heading a small company of Texas Rangers, rode into Las Vegas and had as prisoners Billy the Kid, Dave Rutabaugh, Jim Grathouse (whose ranch, now the Jicarilla Mountains, a posse composed of most of the men of White Oaks had burned) and two or three other minor desperadoes, all of whom had rewards offered for them. The prisoners were put in Las Vegas jail, and after considerable trouble with the Mexican sheriff (but that is another story) got them on the train and delivered them to the penitentiary at Santa Fé and collected the rewards offered by the governor. Within two or three months the

whole gang made their escape from the penitentiary and it was in the Spring of '82 when the Kid was killed by Sheriff Garrett.

If Mr. B. had secured a version of the fight in the snow at the Stone house when the ranger captured the Kid and his gang, also of the trouble at Las Vegas with the Mexican sheriff, I think he could have written a longer and more readable history.—L. B. SHULTZ.

The accounts published at the time of the killing of Billy the Kid by Sheriff Garrett also differ materially from Mr. B.'s account.

Mr. Bechdolt's reply:

Carmel, California.

In re the enclosure. It is interesting. But so are a dozen other accounts of the capture and death of Billy the Kid which went round New Mexico at that time. Unfortunately those stories were not true, however.

AS TO my data. It came for the most part from three men: James East, John W. Poe and Charles Siringo. East was in the posse which captured the Kid. Siringo was one of those who got the evidence concerning the stolen cattle, and also he was wagon-boss of the outfit which the Panhandle cowmen sent out to capture the Kid. Poe was with Garret when the latter killed the Kid. All three of these men are well known in their communities and stand high. Poe is president of a bank in Roswell, New Mexico, and verified nearly everything in my stories. In addition to these three, Frank Coe, who was with the Kid during the Lincoln County war and an actor of prominence in that affair, went over all the incidents of the Kid's life with me. I am writing at this length so that this may stand as an answer to any others who have an idea that my articles on the Kid may not be as accurate as the tales which they have heard.—F. R. BECHDOLT.

AT THIS writing, late in December, the Lausanne conference seems to have reached the ultimatum stage. The European powers, Turkey, Russia, and our own country as an "observer" are having a tense argument as to who gets the Mosul oil fields and other pickings, with the usual camouflage about right, justice, honor, etc. Unfortunately, other considerations than oil insist on intruding. To Turkey and Russia oil is probably only a first step toward far bigger and very definite ambitions.

There is at least the possibility—to me it seems a probability—that we are definitely on our way to another world-war, a war that would make the old one a minor matter. Look to Russia. Man-power in lavish abundance; more to gain from war than from peace. Turkey is her pawn, and Turkey is the best tool for uniting most of the whole Mohammedan world as Russian allies. Germany is neither dead nor seriously crippled for war; she still hates her enemies; she is eminently trained for war and for the organization of the vast resources in men and material that Asia can provide. The Balkan and other border states would be surrounded by enemies and probably quietly crushed or taken over.

Western Europe is still exhausted from the recent struggle.

Greed and ambition are busy and, even if they claim to be working for communism, democracy, religion, monarchy, etc., greed and ambition, given rein, end in war. Because of these things the world, through all her history, has been plunged again and again into the business of destroying human beings by the thousand and the million. War is folly. It is cold-blooded, wholesale murder. The thug who kills you for your money is only an atom of wickedness compared to those who set millions to murdering one another for money. And war is generally for money. Or power. War is an abomination. *But we have wars.*

However awful and however silly they are, we have them. Always have had. Some day the world will advance beyond them, but any one who says that we have already advanced beyond them is a doddering fool.

And any nation that fails to take measures for its own protection against the greed and ambition of other nations is likely to pay for that oversight in blood and tears, in poverty and suffering, in shame and misery.

In comparison with other nations the United States is almost as unprepared as it was in 1914 or 1917. Thanks to government solely by political parties. As the following letter says, if Congress and the Administration were as much interested in the country's welfare as they are in pork, pull and party, they would not have allowed our national defense to dwindle to utter inadequacy.

An almost equal evil and danger is America's swelled head. We've always thought we could "lick" anybody. Maybe we can, if given an even break. But we most certainly can't if both our hands are tied. They're tied now.

We vastly overestimate our performance in the world war. We forget that friends *did the fighting for us for one whole year after we declared war because we were so*

unprepared that we couldn't even begin to fight until we'd had a whole year of desperate, hurried work to get ready in.

And when we did at last get to the front our boys were slaughtered no more by the enemy than they were by the inefficiency of our too hurried preparation and by our lack of real experience.

By the time the war was over we were getting into pretty good shape to carry on a war.

We got by, yes. Because our men were excellent fighting material? They were, but that alone wouldn't have seen us through. We got by for just one reason—some one else did our fighting for us for one whole year. *Otherwise we couldn't have done any fighting.* Unless you call it fighting to send to slaughter millions of untrained, unarmed and unequipped Americans.

Suppose the enemy, instead of being busy fighting three thousand miles away, had been free to attack us direct and at once?

We couldn't have put up as good a fight as Belgium put up.

Can't end war if we don't lead the way in disarming? Well, we can't end war by committing suicide either. Lead the way by all means, but be sure the others are following.

As a matter of fact, we're doing neither one thing nor the other. We're not trying our utmost to bring the world to peace and we're not taking the ordinary precaution of keeping ourselves sufficiently armed and ready to protect ourselves against warring enemies. Ours is the course of the complete idiot.

I'm more than glad to print the following letter:

Dover, New Jersey.

Our Old American Legion was organized because at that time our Government had nothing in the way of a reserve. Such a reserve now exists in the form of the Organized Reserves (Officers' Reserve Corps and Enlisted Reserve Corps). This, as was our old legion, is composed of trained men and could be mobilized on short notice in event of war or a great national emergency requiring troops in excess of our regular Army and National Guard.

The personal of the O. R. consists of ex-Army trained men who have served in our Navy, Marine Corps or National Guard or a foreign army or who obtained military training at a military academy, college, R. O. T. C. unit, C. M. T. C. camp or elsewhere and also certain qualified civilians who are specialists at some vocation (cook, baker, chauffeur, packer, telegraph or wireless operator, engineer, etc.). In short, men who would have been eligible for membership in the old American Legion are eligible for membership for the Organized Reserve.

The Camp-Fire should be full of just the type required.

Suggest that you give the Officers' Reserve Corps and Enlisted Reserve Corps some publicity at the Camp-Fire. I can't think of a more effective method of reaching the right kind of men.

Also suggest that you press-agent the C. M. T. C. a bit. I spent a month at one and they're great dope. A great vacation, albeit strenuous, and our uncle foots the bills. These camps are almighty democratic in that they indiscriminately mingle the soldiers and civilians, blue blood and otherwise, college boy and working stiff, American and foreign-born.

The one kind rubs elbows with the six or eight other varieties and the result is broadening and beneficial generally. If Congress were as generous with appropriations for military purposes as they are for "river and harbors improvement" the War Department could work wonders in the way of making good healthy patriotic American citizens as well as giving those same citizens the military training so necessary for our common defense.

Suggest, too, that you announce at "the fire" that the War Department is now conducting a correspondence course in military science for the benefit of National Guardsmen, reservists and qualified civilians.—"MEUSE-ARGONNE."

SHOOTING oneself on the draw. More about an irritating sort of accident discussed in a recent issue.

Greenwood, Mississippi.

Hello the Camp-Fire! Say, now about a fellow shooting himself pulling a gun from a shoulder scabbard. I don't know about that, but know a man that did shoot himself practising the draw from a scabbard hung on a belt. He did not have it tied down nor did he have notches filed off hammer. It made a flesh-wound below the knee. How the —— he did it, I don't know. Everybody joked him so much about it that it wasn't safe to ask him to demonstrate. That happened not thirty miles from where D. Wiggins was born.—C. F. MCCARTY.

THE following is a letter in praise of our magazine and I make no apology for printing it. We seldom pass on to Camp-Fire any of the many kind words you readers send us, but the "A. A." editors and writers mentioned have earned the following endorsement of an old-timer of the West, of Alaska, and of the Canal Zone in 1860, and it is only fair that once in a while there should be open acknowledgement of the careful, sincere work they have been doing for the entertainment and information of all of us.

There are, also, other things in the letter. As to our Camp-Fire expedition, matters

are now at a stand-still but by no means a permanent one. It's slow work, if the job is to be done right, and we want to do it right or not at all. Be sure I'll report to you as soon as things take definite shape.

Seattle, Washington.

When a man who drove a 4-horse team across the plains in '63; collected insects in the untamed forests of the Isthmus of Panama in 1860; who put the Imperial Valley of California on the map in 1869, and the southern desert of Nevada in 1866; who has spent eight years railroad building in Alaska, who lived in Virginia City, Nevada, in Leadville and Tombstone in their hectic infancy and has worked in a hundred mining camps from Mexico to the Arctic Circle on the Yukon—and has passed the 85-mile post on the toboggan slide, the arrival of *Adventure* comes none too frequently. Since the microbe of wanderlust ran in the blood of his ancestors, there is no known remedy for the virus which makes him a world-wide wanderer.

I WANT to take off my hat to your writers' brigade. When I am reading Friel I am back in the gloomy forests of the tropics with their mysterious life; I am riding the "Spine of the Monster" with Solomons; I am back on the "Geiger grade" and Lake Tahoe with Mundy; in the Magnolia Saloon in Virginia City and at Dayton and Ragtown with Pendexter, and with Bechdolt at Tombstone and elsewhere in Arizona. The Earp-Clanton fusillade lasted not more than five minutes and sounded like a lot of big firecrackers. By the way, the horse stolen from and returned to the Contention Mine belonged to my partner, I. E. James, but *two* were stolen, and when returned a matter of $200 which had been left in the manger was missing in the morning!

These men, and others, know what they are writing about, and the fact that it is so, is worth telling. It is one of the compensations of life to be able to appreciate the pageant as told by them when the body can no longer take part in it.

SHOULD the exploration scheme take definite shape I want to contribute my "bit" and apropos of this scheme, it may be well to call attention to the custom of the charcoal burners of the Panama Railroad in 1860 of never drinking the swamp water (they often had no other) until they had stirred into it a liberal dose of wild honey which is found in the forests in unlimited quantity. I followed suit, and though in the swamps daily for two months, bitten by hornets, mosquitoes and garra-patar, never had a trace of fever. Ammonia is a good external application for all insect bites and stings; for spiders it should be also used internally. Speaking of beer reminds me that the big blue wasp with red wings, known as the "Tarantula Hawk" from its habit of using these spiders to provision its young, was a pest in the early days of the San Joaquin Valley. I have often picked them off over-ripe peaches too drunk to fly!

Finally, one word of praise for the patience and courtesy of the men who answer questions. In three years I answered 8 to 10,000 questions about Alaska, and know what the service means.—R. H. STRETCH.

THE following is out of a personal letter to me from a man of our writers' brigade in times past. We had got out of touch—he adventuring and I sitting here—and there had been years between a letter just preceding the quoted one and the last letter before that. Naturally I do not give his name, since he was talking only as one man to another, but I can not resist passing on to you his philosophy of life. It is, I think, the philosophy of many adventurers of the best type, though all may not frame it in the same words. In any case it's a man's philosophy, worth hearing and worth thinking about.

Yes, we are getting old—in the body. But I am younger of soul I believe, than ever. I have had every good and evil that Life can give, I think. I have fought wars—explored—sailed far seas—and in fact known this earth of ours as few men. Like some of you, I might have had a good wife and a quiet chimney-corner, and staid respectability—but my blood craved the high places and the wilds; the onset and the cheering. And we all pay, Arthur—pay for what we *don't get;* and are prone to underestimate what we have. Anyway, I will go out of Life glad to have lived, loved and served—to have done evil and to have fought it manfully, and won. And Life has given me such beautiful friends; and I have had so much love and proved loyalty—that I go, thanking God.

WHAT has this comrade found? Wrote him for further details but got no reply.

Phœnix, Arizona.

I got some information to write you concerning some Indians that are supposed to be extinct. As far as these habitations are concerned, they are extinct. In the United States there are signs of their habitations in New Mexico and Arizona, but there is no one alive that ever saw them. I ran into one of their habitations in old Mexico where several hundred exist at present. I saw only one camp, but there are several other camps I wasn't in. They are located in places many miles back from civilization, in mountainous districts that have not been explored. They are living in the cliffs and are known as the Cliff Dwellers.—ROGER DOHERTY.

THIS is a comrade's recipe for good citizenship. If we all followed it, many of the present evils would vanish.

New York City.

THE GOOD CITIZEN SHOULD

—Discuss men and policies during the off season when partisanship is quiescent.

—Write occasionally to his district representative on pending measures in a sane and temperate manner.

—Vote at all primaries and elections, but never a straight ticket.

—During pre-election times talk against any man that is personally unfit, or too profuse in his promises.
—When voting, vote against any man he thinks unclean, dishonest or tricky, no matter what he stands for or professes.
—Always keeps in mind that the other fellow may be right.
—Never swayed by oral statement until the impression is confirmed by careful second thought.
—Draw his own conclusions from facts stated.

WE WILL always have reformers of various kinds, always have men who think the party system essential to our salvation, always have fanatics trying to make the world over in a day and so we will always have plenty of new ideas to think about.

As to the practical effect of such a course as I propose we have just had a good example. Murphy nominated Smith to please the good citizen, not himself. Now while I preferred Miller, I am not at all unhappy, because I believe that Smith will make a good governor.

With the voters divided 30% Republicans, 30% Democrats, 30% Good Citizens, 10% Fanatics, the algebraic sum of the political equation in broad terms is a positive quantity that means progress upward.

Every Christian should know the history of the world's greatest reformer and take to heart its lessons, not the least of them being patience.—GEO. HILL.

WHEN we published "The Sea Hawk," by Rafael Sabatini we did it as a test case, asking our readers whether or not they endorsed publishing in our magazine a story that had been published in book form in America some years before, but in a very small edition. It happened that before the story reached you in our pages Rafael Sabatini had scored a big hit with his "Scaramouche" and people began going to the libraries to find other books he had written, among them, of course, "The Sea Hawk." Yet in spite of this unforeseen turn of affairs letters poured in from you and probably 90% of them endorsed both the particular case and the general idea. I'll make a more detailed report later, but the endorsement was so unusually strong that it would seem warrant for our using out-of-print books by the dozen.

Wholesale use of them, however, was not contemplated and would seem dangerous ground. All we in the office wanted was your O. K. to our keeping an eye out for any unusually good story that had not been printed in an American magazine but had appeared in the United States as a book of small circulation or a book now out of print. I'll be surprized if more than one or two a year at most will be found to fill the bill.

But here's something along the same general lines. Since "Scaramouche" Mr. Sabatini's fame has taken a second bound through the book publication of his "Captain Blood," which appeared in our pages *before* book publication. Two "best sellers" have brought interest in his work to a high pitch and the book publishers have done very much the same thing *Adventure* did in the case of "The Sea Hawk"—they've gone back to his earlier books and are bringing them out again to meet the big demand for Mr. Sabatini's work, among others "The Sea Hawk" and "Historical Nights' Entertainment," the latter having had English but not American book publication or American magazine publication.

Incidentally, this would seem to stamp an extra O. K. on your O. K. of our sizing up "The Sea Hawk" as deserving serial publication following book appearance. They're adding a second book publication on top of both!

Well, by special arrangement our magazine had a chance at serial publication of "Historical Nights' Entertainment" *before* it comes out in book form in this country and found two of the stories not only good but very much in our field. Personally I think most of you would have liked nearly all the stories, but that would have delayed the book seriously and many of them were out of our usual field. The first of the two we took appears in this issue—"The Night of Escape." The second will be in the next issue. Ours is their first publication, either magazine or book, in this country and I mention them in connection with "The Sea Hawk" case only because a few copies of the English book edition have probably found their way into American libraries and been read by a few of you here and there, especially in view of the present strong interest in all that Mr. Sabatini ever wrote.

In other words, I'm explaining, not apologizing. As in "The Sea Hawk" case, the exception among you who may have read these stories is not likely to object to the rest of you getting them in our pages.

By the way, the old-timers among you will remember that years ago Rafael Sabatini was appearing in our magazine.—A. S. H.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure*, mostly free, are open to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 24 T Wharf, Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL SELL: 1st July, 1920 to Dec., 30th 1922. Price, one dollar per volume, post paid, or complete set of 75 issues for ten dollars. No single copies.—Address C. FRANCIS WOOD, Box 117, Louisiana, Mo.

WILL SELL: Sept., and Dec., 1914; Feb., 1915; Apl., to Dec., 1915; all of 1916, 1917, 1918, 1919; all of 1920 except 1st May and Mid-May; all of 1921 except Mid-Apl., and 1st Nov. One hundred and thirty-five copies in all. Good condition. All except three have covers intact. Price twelve dollars for lot, plus postage.—Address GEORGE E. GAMBLE, JR., 2811 N. 12th St., Philadelphia, Pa.

WILL SELL: All issues complete from 1915 to 1921 inclusive, except Dec., 10th and 20th, 1921. One hundred and thirty-five copies. Also twenty-nine copies of 1922. Excellent condition. Best offer.—Address R. H. HELICK, 205 Biddle Ave., Wilkensburg, Pa.

WILL BUY: Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., 1914; Feb., Mar., Apl., May, June, July, Aug., and Oct., 1915; Feb., Apl., Aug., Sept., Nov., 1916; all issues of 1917, 1918, 1919; first fifteen issues of 1920. All must be in good condition.—Address PRINCE PEARCE, Hugo, Okla.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month. Address letters regarding stations to J. Cox.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

(*See Lost Trails in Next Issue*)

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of the last issue of each month.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.

1, 2. The Sea. In Two Parts
3, 4. Islands and Coasts. In Two Parts
5, 6. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
7. Australia and Tasmania
8. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
9. New Guinea
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12. Japan
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14—20. Africa. In Seven Parts
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Lost Trails

Birds of South America

THE guacharo, by the way, is also known as the great nightjar. And as a matter of incidental knowledge it may be interesting to hear that it yields "an oil used by the natives as butter:"

Question:—"I would like all the general information you can give me about the birds of Colombia, Chile, Peru and Ecuador.

"Enclosed you will find a self-addressed envelop with postage."—RUSSELL EDLUM, Muskegon, Mich.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—The bird life of the four countries you mention ranges from the tiniest of humming birds to immense condors, largest of

winged creatures, and jaburu storks that are as tall as eight feet. Many of the various birds have not been classified, due to the fact that much of the territory I cover is unexplored. However, I shall be able to give you a list of the best known of those that occur on both sides of the Andes down through my countries.

They are as follows: Condor, coroquenque vulture, parrots of many kinds, parrakeets, macaws, partridge, ibis, gulls, flamingo, duck, water hens, eagle, osprey, kites, hawk, toucan (or big bill), large and small white crane, blue heron, egret, spoonbill, giant stork (jaburu or bata), bittern, crested curassow, pheasant, guacharo, owls, crow, flute bird, petrel, *puffinis cineros, puffinurii berardii* (resembling the awk), geese, swans, cormorants, curlews, snipe, plover, moorhens, American ostrich or rhea, and many varieties of humming-birds.

Among the most notable, for some cause or other, is the flute bird, which makes a sound very similar to a flute and is a little bird which soon dies in captivity; the pito, a brown creeper, which flutters about the rocks; the ynchahualpa, which sounds a monotonous note each hour of the night; the toucan, which has a large, colored bill about the size of a banana; racehorse duck; and the bell bird, which sounds a clear note in the forest which is very nearly like that of a bell.

In the Encyclopedia Britannica you will find the picture of most of the birds mentioned under their respective names, and you will also find mention made of them under the name of each republic and sub-head *fauna*. The Bronx Park Zoological Garden here in New York has many of these birds in its bird house and also publishes postcards with illustrations of some of the most notable on them; also several of the best known South American animals, such as the tapir, puma and jaguar.

I forgot to say that immense flocks of sea fowls are to found all along the coast and are the source of the guano exported from Peru and Chile in large quantities.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in alternate issues of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

More about "Short Stirrups *vs.* Long"

HERE are a couple of letters arising out of Brother Whiteaker's reply to an inquiry that was published in the Oct. 20, 1922, issue of "Ask Adventure:"

Omaha, Nebraska.

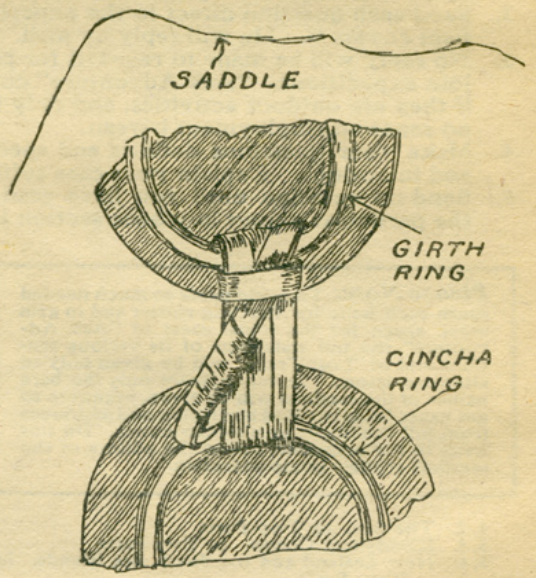
Heretofore I have gallantly resisted the impulse to break into the very alluring field for discussion that you open to your readers in *Adventure;* but now I am writing because the subject is one that I feel that I know something about. I mean the "A. A." reply to the gentleman from Pittsburgh who asks some questions about riding. The reply was not altogether as clear as it might be, and for that reason I am writing you. Taking his questions seriatim:

"How does a Westerner ride a trotting horse?"

The answer is—I mean the answer should be—that as a rule a Westerner *does not* ride a trotting horse if he can avoid it. When he does ride a trotting horse he is a sight for the gods because he rides with a long stirrup, and, being thrown out of balance, hangs on to the saddle-horn. (I am supposing that your questioner means by "a Westerner" a cowpuncher.) Cow-ponies as a rule take either a running walk or a lope, sometimes a cross between the two; but they rarely trot.

"Sitting the horse," by which I mean not rising to the trot, is very much harder on both horse and rider on a long or short ride than is rising to the trot. For that reason "sitting to the horse" has been practically abandoned in the last twenty years. The reason "posting," *i. e.*, rising to the trot, is easier on man and horse is that when a horse trots and the rider rises the weight is varied and is not continually driving on one spot. A careful rider will watch his horse and will change from time to time, sometimes rising as the near fore lifts; again rising as the off fore rises. The whole thing is shown in a study of the mechanics of the gait.

A double cinch is better in a rough country or on a horse required for rough, hard work. Also when a double cinch is used neither cinch need be drawn as tight as a single cinch need be. I enclose a rough sketch that shows the usual way of fastening a latigo (cinch strap). There are as many ways of tying it as there are men who tie it. The only requirement is that it shall be a knot that will not jam or slip.



ONE WAY OF TYING A LATIGO (CINCH-STRAP).

A good general rule for the length of stirrups is to have them so that when the foot is taken from the stirrup and hangs naturally beside it the tread of the stirrup strikes the inside ankle-bone of the foot. This varies. Some men like a longer stirrup; some a shorter. The feet must be held back—I mean the leg back. If the legs are in the proper position they can never touch the horse's shoulder. They should be about on the girth.

On a long ride one never rises on the ball of the

foot. The foot is shoved home in the stirrup, and when the rider rises to the trot he does so from the foot. On a long ride the horse is rarely trotted more than fifteen or twenty minutes in an hour. An average rate of five and a half miles an hour is darned good marching. Of course this does not apply invariably to individual horsemen. *But* a horse is never galloped on a long ride. With Western cow-ponies the running walk or very occasionally the lope is the gait. It is only in fiction that cavalry moves at a gallop.

To jump: If your questioner carries out the instructions given him he will break his neck. Briefly this is what he should do:

As he approaches his jump he should take hold of his horse's head carefully with a light feel of the mouth on the reins, pass the legs back (if they are not already on or near the girth) settle down in the saddle without any shifting of weight. If he shifts his weight in the jump the horse will most probably refuse it. The weight should be kept *off the fore hand*. This because the fore hand lifts the weight and the hind quarters push it over the jump. If the horse feels a sudden shift of weight with an additional weight on his front legs he will refuse.

Don't lean forward! If one does he will pivot on his feet and go off like a shot out of a gun. Let the horse take his jump unhampered. More men are thrown at jumps because of fiddling with the horse's mouth than from any other reason.

The man's seat in the saddle, insured by leg alone with his balance, should be so secure that the jump disturbs him no more than a walk. Then, as an old sergeant in my troop once told me, "T'row your heart over an' go on over after it."

There are many schools of riding, and all have their good points. For his own particular work the cowpuncher is—or was, for he is nearly extinct—excellent; but it must be remembered that when on round-up the cowpuncher had several ponies. When one played out he used another. He can stay with a bucking horse—sometimes.

The cavalry services of every civilized nation have universally discarded the old notion of sitting to the trot. They did so because they found it was harder on the horses than was rising to the trot.

Sorry to disagree with one of your experts but "*multi homines, multi mores*." I'm not sure of the Latin, but it sounds all right.—Geo. B. Rodney, Lieut.-Colonel Cavalry, U. S. Army.

And here's Brother Whiteaker's rejoinder. We sent proofs on to Colonel Rodney, who made the footnotes you'll see in smaller type at the bottoms of these pages. Maybe in strict justice to Friend Whiteaker we ought to have sent him further proofs containing the footnotes and then incorporate any rebuttals he might make; but a footnote to a footnote seemed rather quite too too. Anyhow if he has anything further to say he'll say it, and we'll print it, and if the colonel wants to answer it he can, and everybody else who wants in is welcome; and thus the discussion can wag on, some or all of us learning something by the way. Mr. Whiteaker has the floor:

Austin, Texas

I had no idea that the subject of riding would stir up so much discussion. Every one of us is right—at least we each have a right to our own individual opinion on the matter.

I have tried both kinds of riding, with the long and with the short stirrups. I have never found anything about short-stirrup riding that I would recommend to any one. It is owing of course a great deal to the kind of saddle that you are using—one of the light English hornless pick-me-up saddles or one of the heavy stock saddles—the kind of horse that is going to carry the saddle, and the kind of horseman that is going to sit in the saddle as to which are better, long or short stirrups.

The colonel has been used to cavalry horses for many years no doubt. I have been around a few of them myself. The cavalry horses have been trained to about the same degree as the men that ride them, so that all motions are more or less mechanical.

The cavalry horses know three gaits—a walk, a trot and a gallop; and if they began to develop any other gait they are sold out of the service. The men of the cavalry are taught by drill one form of riding; and if they do not like it—do it anyway. The rider does not get an opportunity to study much about his horse's gait, for there are the three gaits and he soon learns all of them without adjusting his own movements to his horse's.

A cowboy rides in a free, easy manner. His stirrups are usually long enough to be comfortable to the leg without being cramped by being drawn up in the shape of a T-square. The saddle-horn is used for carrying his rope, for holding a steer, and to hang the saddle up by—never used by a good rider to hold on to while riding.

A cow-pony often has all of the gaits except the hard trot—he paces, fox-trots, single-foots, lopes, and does a long running walk; but he seldom walks; for he is always in a hurry to get where he has started for, and the sooner he arrives there the better.

Sitting to a trot on a cavalry horse would be too much punishment for the rider, but on an average cow-pony he would suffer no discomfort, owing greatly to the smooth gait and the common-sense length of stirrups, which allows free movement of the upper part of the body. The seat in the saddle is firm, the inner part of the knees pressed gently, or hanging free from the horse's side, the feet thrust about half-way through the stirrups, so that the ball of the foot rests in an easy, natural position in the stirrups, as it is in walking, and it will not become cramped as the case would be if the boot-heel were all that prevented the foot from slipping through the stirrup.

Quick movements are often necessary in riding a cow-pony. The position of the foot in the stirrup often determines whether you will be unable to free yourself from a nasty fall and perhaps a long drag through prickly pear or over cactus-beds by a foot hung in the stirrup, or to alight on your feet in safety.

A double cinch is used in all kinds of rough riding, throwing and holding a wild steer, and in riding over mountainous sections of the country where the trails are hard climbing up and hard going down. A single cinch would allow the saddle to slip forward, under, or backward as the case may be. The front cinch in a double girth is drawn

nearly as tightly as a single girth, for it has to hold the saddle in place, while the hind one is just tight enough to prevent a play of the saddle. There are several ways of tying the cinch straps, and it is an individual's taste as to how he does it. The one that the colonel has drawn to illustrate the knot is a good one.

The length of the stirrups should be about two inches shorter than the leg, so that when the foot is in the stirrup the knees are bent slightly forward.[1] This allows a free, springy movement in casting a rope and a good brace to the back when the steer is roped, or in the dodging of limbs in a timbered section.

This position of the leg prevents the cramping of the semimembranous, patellar tendon and the gastrocnemius muscles, which frequently happens when one rides with short stirrups; with these the knees are bent too much, and the weight of the body is thrown upon the knees, so that one has to stand up in the stirrups and be jostled from side to side or up and down to relieve the stiffness. This up-and-down movement is rough on the inner part of the trousers, and if you are not wearing leggings the trousers work up the legs and cause soreness and other discomfort from the folded cloth. The saddle moves up and down and from side to side, thus causing the horse's back to become injured—the beginning of a setfast.

With long stirrups and a firm seat in the saddle, this trouser-traveling upward is eliminated, and the horse appreciates this firmness of seat as well, for he does not enjoy a shifting weight upon his back.[2] I can sympathize with a horse more now since I hiked over much of France with a pack on my back, and know that it was easier on me to have the pack stay in one position on my back than to move from side to side and up and down at every step I took or in doing double time.

On a day's ride of from eight to twelve hours over the range the foot is kept in the same position that you started out with—the foot is shoved about half-way through the stirrup and the ball of the foot acts as a shock-absorber in any change of gait or in case of stumbling or bucking.[3] At the end of a day's riding one is not so tired but that he can go to a dance and enjoy himself, shaking a good foot until the wee, wee hours of the morning.

In the cavalry, no doubt but the colonel is right about the length of time a horse is trotted. A stall-fed animal can not be expected to have the endurance that a cow-pony has to have. The cavalry horses are fed corn and oats, and have racks of hay, cane or other forage to stand by and eat while not drilling or on a march. Their life is somewhat like a hot-house plant's. Take in comparison the life of an ordinary cow-pony, who is picked up on the open range, often in a wild state, and taught to be led and to be broken to the saddle. Up to that time he has had to rustle for his own feed, which is principally grass, leaves and the like. He knows nothing about corn, oats and such foods that his civilized brothers enjoy. He becomes slightly acquainted with such foods later but never eats too much. A dozen ears of corn a day are ample for him, and as he does not gorge himself his endurance is not impaired. He would rather have grass to eat than corn; but grass alone is not a strength-builder so other food has to be used to keep him up to his work.

A cow-pony usually starts out in a lope and changes gaits whenever he tires of a certain one. A regular trot he seldom uses.

The average rate of five and a half miles an hour for the cavalry in marching order does not seem to be much mileage. I have never timed a cow-pony, but I am certain that he covers a great deal more ground in an hour than that.[4] I have timed myself several times on foot, and I average nearly three and one-half miles an hour for eight hours, so a horse trotting twenty minutes out of an hour certainly ought to better me more than two or two and a half miles an hour.

Now as to the jump. When the horse approaches the ravine, ditch, or what not, the rider bends slightly forward from the waist, rising on the balls of his feet, which allows about a two-inch space between him and the saddle; his knees pressing tightly against the horse's sides, which holds the rider's lower body firmly in position and allows a free movement from the waist upward.[5] By holding the bridle reins tightly and bending over slightly, if you rear backward when the jump is made you will be jarred from foot to head (the colonel must have thought that I meant to climb out on the horse's neck and whisper in his ear, which of course would spill the rider if he was using short stirrups). The horse judges the height and distance of the leap and by the steady rein on the bit gains confidence in the rider and makes the leap.[6]

The rider settles back to his former easy position in the saddle and holds the horse's head up with the tight rein until he has recovered his stride.

When a horse is running and crouches for a leap, the rider has no time to follow all instructions as to the proper method of procedure in jumping the horse, so just sit natural and imagine yourself in the horse's place for a moment and ask yourself this question: Would I rather have some of the weight on the forepart for a fraction of a minute while in the air and an equal feeling of the weight on my back when alighting, or would I rather have all the weight of the rider's body on my hind quarters when I strike the ground? Take your choice of the methods; but be certain that your length of stirrups corresponds with the one that you select.

The rearing-back position[7] with your back against the back of the saddle and the knees half-way up the horse's shoulder when the jump is made, may look all right to those that are used to cavalry mounts and those in riding-academies; but do not try any such stunts on the Western bred and broken horses that have been ridden with long stirrups, for you may find yourself so high in the air that the blue-jays will build nests in your hair before you hit the ground.

There are many ways of riding; and as an individual selects the kind that he likes, no set of

[1] Correct! This is O. K. We are at one about the length of the stirrups.

[2] The stirrups Mr. W. calls long I call right.

[3] Right—except I shove the foot home. Again it depends on the rider.

[4] He does for a few hours. Then he plays out, and the rider mounts a second horse.

[5] Not on your life! He slumps *down* like a peck of wet fish-net, closes both legs on the horse to "force him up to the bit," gives him his head, and—jumps.

[6] Never! The foot is thrust home; weight kept back; legs gripping the horse to force him up to the bit. The body is kept in place *by balance*. Reins loose; just feeling the mouth; giving the horse his head. *Drive him over* by pressure of legs; the hands and heels low; heart and head up.

[7] There is no rearing back! Sit as in a chair and *stay there*.

rules can be made to fit all cases, so each selects the kind of stirrups that suits his taste—long, medium or short stirrups.

Hunters to the fox and hounds, the Arabs, the cavalry, the American and the Mexican cowboys, circus riders, Indians and others that have their certain style of riding, can not see why their style is not adopted by all of the others. It is a question of environment mostly and the style that they have been used to. The nature of the country, the kind of horses handled and the life the men lead cause this difference in opinion. No doubt all of the representatives are first-rate horsemen in their section of the country, while in other sections they may be considered poor horsemen, such opinions being based upon the individual community's own idea of good riding.[8]

I am glad that the colonel has given voice to his disagreement with me on the subject of riding. I am always glad to hear the ideas of others on any subject that I think that I know something about, for it keeps a person from growing narrow-minded on any subject if some one disagrees with him occasionally. I take it that the colonel was using a cavalry horse as his model to write about—naturally, for that is the kind that he is most familiar with.[9] This kind of horse is stall-fed, Army-trained, curried daily or is supposed to be, petted and cared for; while I used the same kind of horse that I based my answers on to the questions asked—an ordinary, half-broken, cow-trained, grass-fed, shaggy-haired, long-winded cow-pony. Swap their positions and neither horse would last so long nor do its work so well as it would in its own stamping-grounds. It is true that many of the Western-reared horses were sold to the Government during our recent war, and one familiar with the breed could easily pick one of these out of the drove. I've had experience with a couple of cavalry horses on the ranch. They lasted about five or six months, which makes it very expensive to keep such horseflesh if you intend doing much work with them. A good cow-pony stands up to the work for years.

I should have taken the time, I suppose, in the first place, and gone deeper into the subject and made my answers clearer to my inquirer; but the man would have used his own judgment in the matter anyway even if the answers were quite clear.

Pardon for this long letter—had no idea it would be so long when I began.—J. W. WHITEAKER.

Fishing Industry of the Atlantic

IMPOSSIBLE to "tell all about it" in a single book, to say nothing of a single letter. Read Rule 4, brethren; read Rule 4:

Question:—"I wrote to you some four weeks ago, and I enclosed a stamped and self-addressed envelop, and also I enclosed five cents in stamps.

The questions I would like to know are these: What are the length and width and tonnage of the fishing-boats out of Boston, Mass.? Just one of the boats will do. And what is the cost?

How are the profits split on a fishing-boat? Namely the owner's share, captain's share and crew's share; how expenses are paid, and anything else you can tell me about it.

What is the difference between a schooner, a yawl, a sloop, a trawler and a catboat?

Can you tell me something about the commercial-fishing industry, sale of fish, how conducted, length of trip, how fish are caught, lines and tackle?

If you could I wish you would give me some tips on how to pick a boat—good points, what to avoid and so on; also any tips you can about the fishing industry of the New England coast.

Please do not use my name if this is published." — ——, ——, Greenville, S. C.

Answer, by Mr. B. Brown:—Until I received your second letter, I did not believe it possible that any one should seriously propose that I should answer, in a letter, questions which it would take a volume of considerable size to answer adequately. The purpose of the "A. A." section which I handle is to answer single questions on any one detail of any one of the subjects assigned to me, not to write books containing all possible information upon each and all of them. Your questions would be paralleled by a series of inquiries to a farm magazine asking the editor to tell all about farming; what a farm would cost; what tools should be used and how the money received from the crops should be divided between the owner of the land and those who did the work on it.

To give you some faint idea of the magnitude of the task you ask from me: There are some 5,000 vessels engaged in the fishing industry on the Atlantic coast of this country which are above custom-house measurement, and probably twice as many or more of smaller size. There are some 75,000 men engaged in the industry under all sorts and conditions of employment, from wages to shares, differing according to the kind of fishery. The cost of the vessels engaged in the industry would range from a few hundred dollars up to $40,000 or $50,000 apiece.

The off-shore fisheries alone are of six or seven distinct kinds, each with different equipment for capture and with vessels of different types. Some fishing voyages cover months, some weeks and some merely days.

There are the cod-fisheries, employing one type of vessels; the halibut-fisheries another, the mackerel-fisheries, the haddock-fisheries, the hake-fisheries, the herring-fisheries, the menhaden-fisheries and the swordfish-fisheries.

The equipment ranges all the way from harpoons, hand-lines, trawls, gill-nets, purse seines, up to practically every device invented for the taking of fish. The fishing seasons vary in almost the same proportion, every season of the year having its own peculiar fishery, as well as the few which are followed all of the year around.

The terms of employment of the men engaged are as various as the various kinds of fisheries, their vessels and their equipment. And all of this touches merely upon the off-shore fisheries, and says nothing about the dozen or more kinds of inshore fisheries, with practically the same extent of variation in craft and in equipment.

The exact information which you require can be obtained from some twenty or more good-sized volumes which have been issued from time to time by the United States Bureau of Fisheries, in addition to the annual reports of the Commissioner of Fisheries, all of which books can be found in the public libraries of the larger cities.

[8] Dead right!

[9] Not a bit! A sixteen-hand thoroughbred, green, that I trained myself.

Northern Manitoba's Mineral Wealth

ALREADY it yields oil, gold and copper; and it can still stand a lot more prospecting:

Question:—"I am enclosing postage, etc., and would appreciate the following information:

1. In what direction and in about what latitude and longitude are the oil-fields near The Pas?

2. Can I secure reliable maps from the Provincial Government if it is in Manitoba? Are there any other reliable maps published? Can one secure them in The Pas?

3. Can non-residents stake out claims the same as residents? Where can I secure a copy of the mining laws, or information covering that subject?

4. About what is the distance to the oil-fields from the nearest railroad point, by either land or water? Which do you consider the best route?

5. Can one secure complete outfits at The Pas? If not, what necessities should one bring?

6. Did the gold-mines in the Flin Flon Lake district prove valuable? Are they being worked at present? Are these mines quartz or placer? Has there been any placer gold discovered in that district? Thank you for any of the above information you may be able to furnish, or for any general information you may think pertinent to a proposed trip to the oil-fields."—THOMAS WINKLER, Munising, Mich.

Answer, by Mr. Hague:—I am in receipt of your letter and have pleasure in supplying the following answers to your questions.

1. The Pasquia Hills in which oil indications have recently been discovered are north of latitude 53 and west of longtitude 102.

2. The Geological Survey Department, Ottawa, Canada, are in possession of maps covering the Pasquia Hills district, also maps of the mineral districts in northern Manitoba. By writing them you can secure a complete set of maps of northern Manitoba and Saskatchewan. The majority of these maps are forwarded to you free of charge, but I believe there is a charge of 50c for the one of the Pasquia Hills. These maps are perfectly reliable and go carefully into geological formations, etc.

3. Any one can stake lands in northern Canada for oil or minerals, irrespective of nationality. An oil lease costs 50c an acre, the maximum number of acres one man can stake being 1,920 and the minimum 80. The recording-office is at The Pas. Dominion Mining and Oil Regulations can be secured from the Dominion Lands Office or the Department of the Interior, Ottawa.

4. The Pasquia Hills are situated some eighty miles south of The Pas and are usually reached by water route, preferably canoe, from that point. Parties also go in from the railroad some thirty miles south of The Pas. The journey is not a difficult one and can be undertaken in Winter by dog or horse team. I consider the best route by way of the Carrot River from The Pas.

5. Complete prospecting-outfit can be secured at The Pas, and it would not be necessary to load yourself down with anything on your way up.

6. The Flin Flon is a large copper deposit situated some one hundred miles north of The Pas. A sum of $750,000 has been spent proving up the property, which is known to contain low-grade ore to the value of $160,000,000. The property was recently purchased by the Canadian Mining Corporation but is not being worked owing to the unsatisfactory state of the copper market. As soon as this brightens up a railway will be built into the property and a mineral district of very vast possibilities opened up.

Some spectacular gold discoveries have been made in northern Manitoba in the mineral belt, which extends for a distance of over one hundred miles and which has never been really carefully prospected. The gold occurs in quartz veins, and up to the present there have been no placer discoveries in the district. The great drawback at present is lack of transportation facilities to the mineral belt, which are not so easy of access as the oil-fields.

A number of parties are at present prospecting in the Pasquia Hills, and a large territory has been staked. Indications seem good, and several companies have been formed and drills are being brought in.

There are vast tracts of pulp wood in the district and a certain amount of commercial lumber. For information on this subject I would advise you to write Mr. W. A. McCutcheon, The Pas, who has traveled extensively through the country and is very well informed regarding the mineral and every other aspect of the country. He was a scout for the Trail Smelter people in this district for some years, and if you are visiting this district might be induced to visit the Pasquia Hills with you if you desired a guide or companion. He is well acquainted with that district and has just returned from a trip when he took up a large area of oil land.

Syria

ITS inhabitants are the shrewdest traders on earth, according to Mr. Binda; they have to be:

Question:—"A friend of mine and myself are ambitious to go out to Syria. What is your advice as to which is the best section for us to locate in? And do you think it possible for us to find employment with some concern out there and kind of get a line on the country and business?

Do you know of any company that can use our services?

We have not much capital, so we must make expenses until we get familiar with the customs."—MELVIN V. MUNDY, Newport News, Va.

Answer, by Mr. Binda:—Why have you picked out Syria as a place to go to and start in business? Of all the barren, bleak, hard countries to do business in you have certainly picked the most impossible.

Do you know that the Syrians are probably the most clever traders in the world and can make blood flow from a stone? Now they are coming to America just as fast as they are able to get in. They would not leave their country if there were the least chance of making a penny, honest or otherwise; and if they can not, what chance would you have?

Take my advice—and I have lived five years in that part of the world—and give up the idea. If you want to go to a foreign country, go to South America, China or Africa. Do not give a thought to the old, poverty-stricken countries of the Near East. This is frank advice, but I know that that is what you want.

Farmlands of Montana

FREE homesteads for those who can afford to wait till the railroad's built; acreage at all prices for those who want action now:

Question:—"Will you please inform me if there are any Government lands available in Montana suitable for wheat-growing, also the approximate cost of and equipment necessary to raise wheat?

If such lands are available what is their nearness to railroad, civic center and schools? If there are not such lands what is the approximate price of enough acres for two men to work?

Trust you will not use my name if this is published."— —— ——, Concord, N. H.

Answer, by Mr. Davis:—In my judgment there are no Government lands available in Montana that are suitable for wheat-growing. Their unsuitability is not due to any lack of fertility but to the fact that there are virtually no public lands left in Montana to be filed on that lie closer than from forty to sixty miles to the railroad. The cost of transportation of wheat to market would more than eat up all the profits.

Ideas vary as to the approximate cost of and equipment necessary to raise wheat properly. There are many farmers in Montana who manage to raise considerable acreages of grain with equipment that consists only of a team of horses, a drill, harrow, disk and binder. Equipment ranges from this up to half a dozen tractors and enough hired men to populate a village.

Your query as to the approximate price of enough acres for two men to work is difficult to answer. Montana has irrigated and non-irrigated lands. The price of irrigated land because of crop certainty would naturally average much higher than non-irrigated values. Offhand I would say irrigated land could be purchased for from $50 to $150 an acre with an average of $100.

You can buy non-irrigated land in the Judith Basin, which is the best known and best developed non-irrigated district of the State, for around $50 an acre. You can purchase non-irrigated land in other portions of the State for from $3 an acre up. One hundred and sixty acres is a sufficient acreage of irrigated land for two men. On non-irrigated land with proper equipment two men could handle 640 to 1,000 acres, Summer-fallowing half of it every alternate year.

The Springfield Sporter

THIS sounds like an advertisement; but honest, we aren't getting paid for printing it:

Question:—"I am going hunting in eastern Canada this Fall and want to buy a rifle.

A friend of mine has just purchased a Springfield sporting rifle with Lyman No. 48 sights.

What is your opinion of this rifle?

Is it heavy enough for grizzly bears?

Is it heavy enough for the moose and bear of eastern Canada?

Would it be a good gun for Potter County, Pa., where they have deer and black bear?

Have you any suggestions to offer on any other gun?"—R. K. REDMOND, Youngstown, O.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—The Springfield service rifle, equipped with the Lyman No. 48 receiver sight and a sporting stock of the proper dimensions, leaves little to be desired as a sporter, in my opinion.

The rifle is as near trouble-proof as the Army experts can make it; the parts are strong and cheaply replaced if broken, and the accuracy is the best of any standard arm made, in my opinion. Add to this the various weights and designs of bullets available, and I think I can safely say that for the man who prefers the bolt action it's without a peer.

It's my opinion that with the 180-grain bullet it is equal to the largest game that walks in America—or on earth, for that matter. The placing of the bullets in the proper spot seems to be of more importance than large caliber anyhow.

With the 150-grain bullet, expanding type of course, it will prove perfectly satisfactory for deer and black bear. But I would prefer to stick to the 180-grain for all purposes, I believe. I use the 170-grain for target-shooting, and find a little wind drift to it not appreciable with the 180-grain. And using the SSS supplemental chamber from the Sportsman's Service Station, Tenafly, N. J., with the .32 Colt automatic pistol cartridge it's fine for grouse and rabbit, too.

No, I really can't think of any other rifle that will come nearer to an all-around weapon than a Springfield sporter. Get a gold or ivory bead front sight, though.

Porto Rico, Island of the Treble Name

HERE'S a monograph on Porto Rico which Brother Emerson has prepared for general consumption. It's been reprinted as a leaflet, which may be obtained from him free upon request accompanied by stamped, addressed return envelop:

From east to west through the south half of Porto Rico—which is fourth in size of the West Indies—runs a broken range of hills from 2,000 to 3,000 feet high.

The highest point, Yunque Peak, or el Yunque (the Anvil) is 3,790 feet high above sea-level. The land slopes away from this ridge, or watershed, into broad, level, alluvial plains and valleys with very rich soil. Around nearly all the island, next to the coast, are fertile fluvial valleys, caused by the overflow of the rivers. Forests cover most of the hills. Land swept by the northeast trade-winds has an abundant rainfall.

There are several small rivers, but most of them are not navigable, except for short distances above their mouths. They afford, however, excellent drainage, so that Porto Rico, unlike many other West India islands, has hardly any stagnant water. The climate, though hot, is healthful, the Summer temperature on the coast land reaching 100 degrees F. It is considerably cooler in the mountain districts.

The minerals and metals so far found are gold, copper, iron, quicksilver, bismuth, tin, platinum, nickel and silver, but there is no mining undertaking of importance. Brick and pottery clays and gypsum are other important minerals. Building-stone, such as limestone, marble and sandstone, is quarried in various parts of the island. Quite a lot of salt is made. Phosphates and guano—from

bat caves—has been used to a certain extent as fertilizer, but the deposits are worked only superficially.

The higher regions are heavily forested. The trees include palms, cedars, ebonies, laurels, willows and others. The island flora includes many species of plants used in medicine or in industrial arts. Some of the old natives make wonderful and terrible decoctions of roots, barks and leaves, which when taken internally kill or cure in a few minutes. Good pasturage is afforded by the native grasses; vegetation is very luxuriant in the valleys, where the temperature is high and the rainfall heavy.

Animal life is somewhat scarce; the mammals are represented by the agouti, and by small rodents and also bats. There is only one species of tortoise.

Venomous snakes are unknown, and there are but few insect pests, away from still water. The manate (sea-cow) is sometimes captured. It has five different kinds of meat and is considered a prize by the natives. Water-birds are plentiful along the coast. Food fishes of various species are common both in the coast waters and in the rivers.

Many of the people engage more or less in agricultural pursuits. Since the American occupation modern farm machinery has been introduced, but many of the natives still use crude and wasteful methods. The southeast of the island, not being reached by the trade-winds, needs irrigation to make the land productive, for which reason an extensive irrigating-system was being introduced—at time of my last visit, 1919—but most of the island's soil, especially the alluvium coast district, is exceedingly rich. Inland the soil is a clayey loam which contains an abundance of plant food.

Only 25 per cent. of the island is under cultivation. The remainder is either waste land or pasture or forest.

The exports are pineapples, coconuts, oranges, grapefruit, cacao, tobacco and coffee; but sugar is the chief thing. This crop is controlled by the immense sugar centrals, where the small "creeks" of guarapo—cane-juice—run from the systems of crushing-rollers used in these mills. Thence the juice goes to the evaporating-containers, where at a certain stage of the process it changes into commercial sugar and is then cooled, sacked and shipped to the refineries in the U. S. A. There it is made into white sugar by the process of redissolving and straining. It is then crystallized in centrifugals.

Some of the natives carry on quite extensive vegetable gardens, and many *canastas*—baskets or hampers, carried on the back of a horse on each side of the flat saddle, with the native perched on the top—are brought to the market at four A. M. and later. The *mercado*—market—closes, by the way, promptly at twelve noon, and everything has to be cleaned ready for the next day. Thus the big towns have a fine selection of fresh vegetables each day.

All tropical fruits can be grown successfully, and much attention is now given by American planters to fruit-growing for the American markets. Of late years some success has been accomplished in cattle-raising.

There are several large tobacco factories—cigar-making plants—sugar-refineries, salt-works and a tannery. Soap, matches and iron and brass castings are produced to supply local needs.

Straw hats are woven for export to the U. S. A. and to sell to tourists.

Most of the manufactured articles used in the island are imported from the U. S. A.

The spelling of Puerto Rico was changed by U. S. A. to Porto Rico; its meaning is "rich port." The Borinquen is a term applied to the island by the Arawak Indians. It was discovered by Columbus in 1493. He gave it the name of San Juan Bautista.

Ponce de Leon conquered it for Spain in 1510. Atrocious treatment of the enslaved natives exterminated them; then the Spaniards brought from Africa negroes to work on the plantations. West India buccaneers and pirates often visited the coast; the result being that many nations are now represented in the faces of the present generation, for these visitors did what they pleased.

San Juan was twice sacked by English fleets under Drake and the Duke of Cumberland. Spain ceded the island to the United States by a treaty signed on Dec. 10, 1898. The island has representative government, the Legislature consisting of two elective houses. The governor is appointed by the President of the United States.

Porto Rico is 70 nautical miles easterly from Haiti, and 40 miles west of St. Thomas of the Virgin Islands, which latter with Porto Rico are United States territory.

The island is about 100 miles (160 kilometers) long by about 40 miles (62 kilometers) wide, making the area about 3,606 square miles; population is about 1,118,000, or about 310 inhabitants per square mile. Some small islands lie off the coast. The inhabitants are chiefly descendants of Spaniards—and unknown quantities—and a considerable number of Corsicans are settled in the western part of the island, and they are good citizens. There is a large negro element noticeable all over the island.

There are over 1,200 streams—*arroyos*—50 of which may be classed as rivers, the principal ones being Rio Loiza, Rio de la Plata (River of Silver) Rio Manit, and Rio Aricibo.—CHARLES BELL EMERSON.

When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.

Mounting Elk-Horns

SOUNDS a lot easier to mount 'em than to get 'em:

Question:—"Kindly inform me if a pair of elk-horns can be satisfactorily polished and mounted by an inexperienced person? If so where can I get directions?"—MRS. B. A. KNIGHT, Becket, Mass.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—Don't try to polish, gild or improve on the natural color of elk-horns. Just clean them, washing with soap and water if dirty, but leave the natural stain as it is.

"Taxidermy for Pleasure and Profit," printed by A. R. Harding, Columbus, O., gives detailed directions for mounting horns. Cut the skull off flat, screw fast to a hardwood shield, and perhaps cover the bone of the skull with black velvet, or better yet, a piece of elk-hide or brown leather, tacked fast. The simpler the work, the better it looks. Saw the back of the skull with a common saw, or have the local meat-market man saw it flat to lay against the board, or shield.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Noah and the Wine

When Noah bade the ark farewell
And pensive sat to think a spell
An unknown figure met his eyes,
Perchance a herald from the skies,
Who said, "Since you have done your best
The gods will grant you one request."

"My dearest sir," good Noah said,
"The water here affects my head
Because the sinners great or small
Were in it drowned, both one and all;
And so my wish will be, I think,
To have some other better drink."

His wish was granted in a trice;
The vine was sent from Paradise
With lessons how to make it grow,
And counsel good for him to know;
And Noah, filled with grateful mirth,
Bowed down delighted to the earth.

Then, calling to his wife and child,
He told them both in accents mild
What all the confab was about,
And quickly laid a vineyard out.
When five or six short years were o'er
The bottles reached his second floor.

Against this you can nothing say;
He took his wine in pious way.
Like upright Dutchmen later born,
To the honor of heaven he drained his horn,
And after the deluge it appears
He lived three hundred and fifty years.

So each of you can plainly see
That wine is good for you and me,
And also that a righteous man
Ne'er mixes water in his can
Because the sinners great and small
Therein were drowned, both one and all.

Old Dutch Song Translated.

It would appear from several letters I have received from our husky sitters around the Camp-Fire that the version of "The Marines' Hymn," published recently in this department, was wrong. It came from a comrade in the Philippines, and a feller that far off has a license to make a bit of a mistake once in a while. Incidentally, compadre William L. Alden, 442 Madison Ave., Albany, N. Y., who asked for it, sent me in a peachy bit of war verse entitled "The Marine Corps." Where he got it or who wrote it he didn't say; but it's a sure winner. Here she goes, along with the correct version of "The Marines' Hymn:"

The Marine Corps

Corporal, what are your ribbons for?
Tell me what each of them means.
One I got in the Spanish War
And one in the Philippines;
One I got in the Boxer brush
For making the chinks be good,
And one for helping to block the boche
In bloody old Belleau Wood.

Corporal, if I should join your corps,
Oh, what would it do for me?
You'd learn to range this wide world o'er
By sky and earth and sea—
To be at home in lands that lie
Where the east and west worlds meet;
To front the best man, eye to eye,
And stand on your own two feet.

Oh, corporal, tell me straight: What kind
Of a man the Marine Corps makes?
The sort of a chap you're glad to find
At your side when a "rough-house" breaks—
The sort of a chap who can crack a joke
And laugh when the sky looks black—
The kind who'll share his last lone smoke
Or give you the shirt off his back.

If trouble starts over the border—
If a Haytian reb wants a scrap—
Should any one start a disorder
When Uncle Sam's bossing the map—
If bad little bandits or pirates
Insist upon pulling big scenes—
Don't worry or fret or get in a sweat;
Just call up and tell the Marines.

Just tell the Marines, just tell the Marines—
They'll get on the job in their scrapping jeans;
Ask 'em for trouble and trouble you gets,
For they've got sharp points on their bayonets;
They land on their feet, and they've got nine lives—
And they pack a punch in their forty-fives.

The Marines' Hymn

From the halls of Montezuma
To the shores of Tripoli
We fight our country's battles
On the land as on the sea.
First to fight for right and freedom
And to keep our honor clean,
We are proud to claim the title
Of United States Marine.

Our flag's unfurled to every breeze
From dawn to setting sun;
We have fought in every clime or place
Where we could take a gun;
In the snow of far-off northern lands
And in sunny tropic scenes
You will find us always on the job—
The United States Marines.

Here's health to you, and to our corps,
Which we are proud to serve;
In many a strife we have fought for life
And never lost our nerve;
If the Army and the Navy
Ever look on heaven's scenes
They will find the streets are guarded by
The United States Marines.

Accompany your inquiry with stamped, addressed envelop.

Compadre Joseph R. Phillips of 400 Columbus Ave., New York, wants the complete version of the following bit of doggerel dedicated to a Colt's revolver, to which the author gave the name of "The Equalizer." Here goes:

Fear thou not any man,
No matter what his size.
Though thou be small, and he be great
Yet I will equalize.

Brother R. C. Huelsenkamp, who serves Uncle Sam as a cook at the Presidio in San Francisco, shoots me the following lines. Can any one produce the completed song?

One night—it was in '60—
We camped on the Powder River.
We killed a calf of buffalo
And fried a piece of liver.
While eating quite contented
We heard three shots or four.
We doused the fire and listened—
We heard a dozen more.

A good *Adventure* bunkie, R. T. Tilden of Mount Morris, Ill., wonders if any of you singers ever heard the following:

Far off in wild Arizona,
Where the painted desert sweeps,
Breaks a cañon deep and lone,
Where a ruined city sleeps.
Not such a city as ye know,
Where the noonday splendor falls—
But dark aeries, row on row,
Swallow-nested in the walls.

Believed to refer to the cliff-dwellings in a cañon.

Compadre Frank Middleton of Laramie, Wyo., sends in the following neat bit called—

The Plainsman's Prayer

O Lord, have compassion on us of the savage trend.
Give us a lonely hillside with a cayuse for a friend.
Out where there's no hard feelings, back where the rattlers hide—
O Lord, let us live in the open till we cross the Great Divide.

Mrs. Ivan Petersen of Sidney, Mont., an interested sitter-in at the Camp-Fire, would like to know if any of you singers ever heard of a bit of Irish verse that started in thus:

There were two laboring Irishmen
From Ireland came over.
They rambled round in search of work
From New York town to Dover.

Miss Leona V. Shepherd, an enthusiastic compadre from 'way out in Whitney, Ore., would like to be put next to an old-time ballad about Napoleon which her grandmother used to sing, in which the following lines occur:

She dreams when she sleeps
And she wakes broken-hearted.

* * *

They say they'll bring him back
From the isle of St. Helena.

It's surprizing how many of us have our memory refreshed by harking back to the tunes of childhood. That's what this department is for. Get in line, boys.

Send your old songs, or requests for 'em, to ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 745 Riverside Drive, New York. Do not send questions to this magazine.

t's Wonderfully Good

This is the cream that comforts and refreshes the skin;—fragrant, delightful, easy to use, yet always sure in yielding most gratifying results. In midwinter, when frigid winds are injuring unprotected complexions, Hinds Honey and Almond Cream is preventing roughness and chapping, and is adding to the attractiveness of those women who are using it daily. The hands should be moistened with this cream to overcome the slight drying effect of some kinds of soap.

Among its other valuable qualities, this pure liquid emollient forms a wonderfully effective base for face powder and, because it is so simple to apply, the habit of using it is rapidly extending throughout all communities, particularly in women's college towns.

This same Hinds Honey and Almond Cream for years has been recommended as an aid in manicuring because it so agreeably softens the cuticle for removal and prevents soreness: also, as it adds to the lustre of the nails. Altogether, it is a success for the entire manicuring process.

All druggists and departments sell Hinds Honey and Almond Cream in bottles, 50c and $1.00. Cold and Disappearing Cream, tubes, 25c, Jars, 60c. Traveler size, all creams, 10c each. We mail a *sample* Honey and Almond Cream for 2c, trial size 6c. Cold or Disappearing *sample* 2c, trial tube 4c.

A. S. HINDS CO., Dept. 50, Portland, Maine

They Satisfy

The package suggests it.
Your taste confirms it.
The sales prove it.

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