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AND

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VOL. XXXI. SEPTEMBER, 1899. NO. 2.

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THE ARGOSY.

Vol. XXXI. SEPTEMBER, 1899. No. 2.

IN BELEAGUERED PARIS.

BY F. KIMBALL SCRIBNER and E. W. MAYO.

A story of the Franco-Prussian war. The experiences of an American citizen, who, after undergoing not a few difficulties in effecting an entrance to Paris under siege, encounters divers and serious misadventures before he is enabled to carry out his mission there.

(*Complete in This Issue.*)

CHAPTER I.

THE UHLANS AT CHAUMONT.

AT four o'clock in the afternoon the tavern of M. Malmort was practically deserted. At a quarter to five a courier clattered up to the water trough, climbed wearily from his saddle, and banged upon the door with the butt of his riding whip.

He had scarcely gulped down the wine which, at his impatient demand, M. Malmort handed him, tightened the saddle girth, and regained his mount, when heads began to appear in doorways along the broad street. As, jerking the nose of the unwilling steed from the bubbling water, he wheeled and dashed away in a cloud of dust, the owners of the heads appeared upon the thresholds.

At five o'clock a hundred persons were gathered about the door of Malmort's tavern. Word had gone forth that a courier from the north was riding through with despatches.

The noise of the clattering hoofs and babble of tongues beneath his window aroused Grey from contemplation of the letter which he had half completed. Through the open blinds floated the eager questions of the crowd and the replies of the landlord.

"They are at Chaumont," he heard M. Malmort say. "And they fired at him. *Mon Dieu!* what if they should come here?"

The crowd took it up and the babble grew louder. "The Uhlans are at Chaumont! The Uhlans are at Chaumont!"

Grey laid down his pen and took his pipe from his mouth.

"The Uhlans at Chaumont?" he mused aloud. "Then the Prussians must be in the neighborhood—horse, foot, and dragoons. These Uhlans are the ravens which hover on the German flanks—follow a Uhlan and you find a regiment."

He sat for a moment toying idly with his pen, beating unconsciously a quick tattoo upon the table. The murmur of the voices below grew louder; the whole surrounding country, startled by the report that Uhlans were close at hand, was flocking to the inn, the common news center.

Presently Grey lifted the letter and began to read aloud what was written,

keeping time with the tap, tap upon the board:

You will be surprised to hear of me in France; I, whom Fate and the President consigned to a desk in the Minister's office in Vienna. But, believe me, this is no wild escapade such as we indulged in at the Point, before the war. Perhaps you have already heard, at any rate you know, that the colonel and my sister were doing the principal places over here. The old man is always putting his foot in it, bless his old heart. Because she wanted to see Paris they must come to France, when old Bismarck, Von Moltke and the rest of the beer drinking crowd had made up their minds to have a try at Paris themselves.

But that wasn't what I started out to tell you; about these Germans. They are a long way from Paris yet, I fancy, and these Frenchmen are going to make a stand somewhere. You want to know what I am doing here when my place is in Vienna; I hasten to save my reputation.

As luck would have it, no sooner did the old man get well settled in Paris than the wound he received during our late trouble opened again. That might have been nothing, a little reminder of Gettysburg as it were, if the old hurt hadn't called up reserves in the shape of a jolly fever. He is hard hit I fear, and I heartily wish he was in New York, instead of that infernal hotbed of a Paris.

So upon receiving a message from my sister, saying that the colonel was in a bad way, and they two alone, I showed the epistle to the Minister and struck for a leave of absence to run up to Paris in order to straighten out the tangle. Coming by way of Munich I crossed the border out of the fighting zone; I don't care to be held up by these thick headed Germans. So here I am at a little inn, giving my horse a breathing spell and——

As he reached the closing sentence of the unfinished page, Grey poised the pen, felt for the ink well and his pipe at the same moment, and hurriedly dashed off the remainder of the communication.

——myself a chance to stretch my legs.

Now, what has happened? 'Tis just my luck. A red trousered, gold bedecked sublieutenant, or something on that order, has just frightened the community out of its seven senses by riding into the village like the devil, with the announcement that the Uhlans are in the neighborhood.

I must go down and look into this matter, then I'm off for Paris. I don't fear trouble from these Frenchmen; my passport will carry me through them all right, but if I run up against the Prussians it may be another matter. Not that I wouldn't enjoy a brush with them, only the old man and the kid need me and there isn't any time to be lost.

If I get through I'll drop you a line from Paris; there may be something interesting to tell.

Yours as ever,

JACK GREY.

TO CAPTAIN J. B. HALL,
Fortress Monroe, Va.

Carefully sealing the letter, he thrust it into an inner pocket and, filling and lighting his pipe, descended to the room below.

M. Malmort was there with a dozen excited Frenchmen. Grey approached the landlord.

"What's all this talk about Uhlans?" he asked. "Are they going to attack the town?"

Malmort raised his hands in a gesture of protest.

"We do not know," he replied. "How can we tell anything? But they are over there." He swept his hand toward the north.

A flash of amusement danced in the American's eyes; so much excitement and from a rumor brought by a flying courier! At home, the people would have gone about their business quietly, arranging for the reception of the enemy. These Frenchmen could only stand about and chatter.

"Well," said he, "if you expect a visit from these fellows, why don't you wake up and do something? A village full of Frenchmen are a match for a regiment of Uhlans."

"It isn't that," put in a man who was sitting upon a table swinging his leg ceaselessly to and fro. "Let those Uhlans come here if they want to, but this is what we'd like to know: Where is the French army?"

"Between Paris and the Uhlans, I suppose," replied Grey; "at least, that's where it ought to be."

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders, and, to Grey's surprise, replied in excellent English:

"That's it; that's just what every one

is thinking. Being an American, it strikes you as rather odd, doesn't it? Grant wouldn't have sat still and allowed the enemy to overrun the country."

Grey looked at the fellow curiously; what did he know about Grant and the style of fighting in America?

"You see," continued the Frenchman, clasping his hands about his knee, "I was over there with Grant before Richmond. Perhaps you saw service and remember it. If he was here, or Sherman, or some of the other officers, these Germans wouldn't be pushing right through to Paris. Now, what's to stop them?"

Grey began to grow interested; Frenchmen weren't in the habit of talking that way. Besides, the man was unlike the majority of the Frenchmen he had seen; almost a giant in stature, with piercing black eyes, a costume half military, high riding boots, which suggested Sheridan's cavalry, and he had the appearance of having been of late on the road.

"I take it you are in the service," ventured Grey, desirous of learning something of this strange companion.

"Not since I left America," replied the man. Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, "There is plenty of chance, with the Prussians everywhere."

"Why don't you go to work and organize these villagers?" asked the American. "All they want is a leader, and you've evidently had experience. Get together and beat off these Uhlans if they come this way."

"I've other business," replied the man, sliding from the table and straightening himself. "And you? Are you going to Paris?"

"I reckon so," said Grey, "but I don't like this rumor about the Uhlans being at Chaumont. What does it mean, any way?"

"That the country between here and Paris is alive with the Prussians, and nothing is going to stop them. That is what it means."

Grey looked sober.

"Very bad," said he. "I had no idea anything of this sort would come up. The Germans don't know me, and my passport is only good in France. I fancy the Prussians will not let me ride through their lines into Paris."

"Then you did not expect to run across the Germans, and you have business in Paris?" The man was examining the young American with half closed eyes.

"I expected to go right through; that's why I avoided Lorraine and the fighting zone. I wish these Prussians had held off for a day or two."

"Might I ask why you go to Paris?" Grey noted there was a certain sharpness in the question.

For a moment he hesitated. The man continued:

"I am going to Paris, you see, and we might ride together. The country above is apt to be dangerous and—well—we should know what to say if the Uhlans take us."

"I think I can explain all right, and it's a personal matter which takes me to Paris. But I wouldn't mind having a companion. I don't know the lay of this country, and you——"

"I can take you through—if the Uhlans don't stop us," replied the Frenchman, "but we mustn't lose time; every hour may count for something."

He pushed through the crowd which filled the room and disappeared. Grey turned to M. Malmort.

"He isn't one of the villagers, is he?" he asked.

The landlord shook his head.

"Like monsieur, he is a stranger," was the answer; "he arrived but two hours ago."

CHAPTER II.

MUTUAL SUSPICIONS.

By the time Grey had settled his score with the landlord and prepared himself for departure, the stranger re-

appeared from the direction of the stables. He threw a gold piece carelessly before M. Malmort and skilfully rolled a cigarette while waiting for his change.

Then, leaning against one of the pillars which supported the low ceiling of the room, he puffed luxuriously upon the weed. His half closed eyes, while apparently fastened upon the ash of his cigarette, were in reality roving continually about the room.

They took in everything that went on within the place, and returned often to the young American, who sat with his chair tilted back against the framework of the open door engaged in consulting a small notebook which he had taken from his pocket.

A keen observer would have had no difficulty in seeing that the two men were furtively studying each other, though politeness or some other reason kept them from doing so openly.

Grey appeared to be as completely absorbed in his notebook as the other was in his cigarette. In reality he saw nothing of what was on the page before him.

He had drawn the forepiece of his riding cap down upon his forehead, so that the stranger might not detect his scrutiny. His thoughts were running like this:

"Those eyes tell of oriental blood as plain as can be. They might belong to an Arab sheik, and his figure would make him a captain of the janizaries. That nonchalant manner and the way he rolled his cigarette says: 'I've seen a lot of the world.' Any way, he isn't French and he isn't English. I dare say he can talk the German lingo just as well as he does the two I've heard him in. The question is: 'Shall I go along with him or shall I cut his society with some excuse about my horse being tired?'

"I don't see any reason for doing that, though I shouldn't pick him out of a crowd for a boon companion. But he seems to know the country, and may help me to keep out of the way of those Uhlans. I don't propose to be afraid of him. If he's a villain, he's of a higher grade than a cutthroat, and if he tries any tricks I rather think my pistol practice hasn't got so rusty but that I can take care of myself."

Involuntarily Grey's right hand moved back toward the hip pocket that held his big army revolver. The stranger was looking in his direction at the moment, and perhaps guessed the thoughts that inspired the movement.

At any rate, there came a gleam in the dark eyes that might mean much or little.

Tossing the remnant of his cigarette aside, the unknown one strode across to the doorway and looked out.

"There are two good hours of daylight," he said, addressing Grey, "and I have no mind for further company with these canaille," waving his hand in the direction of the chattering townsfolk. "I propose to push on some two leagues or a little more to Ardelot, where there is a better inn than this. Am I to have the pleasure of your company? Is your horse fit for more work?"

"He has brought me from Dijon already," answered Grey. "That must be forty good English miles and I don't know how many of your French kilometers. But Colonel is a game boy, and he has done twice that for me before now. You say you know the roads?"

"Perfectly. I shall be happy if my knowledge can assist you."

"I'll be happy if it keeps us out of the hands of these Uhlans," said Grey with a smile, "because, you see, I'm in a deuce of a hurry to get to Paris, and I don't want to be delayed."

His companion bowed assent.

"Since we are to travel together," he said, "it might be well to know each other's names. Accept my card."

He extended a card on which was engraved "Raoul St. Albans," and in small letters in one corner, "Paris."

Grey glanced at the card.

"Hm!" he thought, "looks like a stage name. I'll bet he wasn't baptized in it."

Aloud he said: "I'm very glad to know you, Monsieur St. Albans. I will not forget your name. It's the same as a town in Vermont where my sweetheart lives. I'm John Grey," he added, "usually of the United States, but shortly to be like yourself, I hope, of Paris."

St. Albans bowed again with a show of polite interest, and then, stepping outside, signaled to the stable boy to bring up the horses. As he waited he looked away to the northward along the road which they were to take, and hummed a Parisian air.

The young American could not know that the thoughts which kept company to the tune were the words written in German on a crumpled piece of paper in the man's pocket:

Capture courier traveling north with description of forces in the Loire and other important papers. We desire to stop all communication.

WERDER, Chief of Staff.

"So, so," he muttered softly. "I think I have found what is wanted: a young man traveling in haste to Paris; anxious to avoid the Uhlans, those terrible Uhlans; not anxious to tell his business. It looks convincing. Very well, my young friend, I'll show you the way to Paris—but it may lie through the German camp."

"Beg pardon, Monsieur St. Albans?" said Grey's voice at his elbow.

St. Albans started.

"I was merely computing whether we have time to reach Ardelot," he said. "I find that we shall do it easily in two hours. We shall then be in better position to avoid the Prussians."

When the two men swung into their saddles the discussion which had begun among the townspeople half an hour before was still going on. St. Albans waved a disdainful gesture in the direction of the group.

"They stand chattering there like a flock of sparrows frightened by a hawk," he said. "And all because the Uhlans are at Chaumont! I wonder what they would say if they knew that their army was overwhelmed at Sedan three days ago, and that the emperor was a prisoner in the hands of the Germans."

Grey was astonished at this information.

"The emperor taken!" he exclaimed. "How did that happen?"

"Simply as the cat takes a mouse. In this case Napoleon was the mouse."

"You seem to take it easily," said Grey, somewhat bluntly. "I should say that it was a bad blow for France."

A faint flush mounted the other's cheeks. He seemed to realize that his tone at least had been indiscreet. What he thought was:

"I startled him with that, but he did not forget to show only the interest of an American. I was the fool not to appear more downcast."

After a moment's silence he reined his horse closer to Grey's side and said in a confidential tone:

"You see, it is like this: My experience in America spoiled me for a monarchist. I do not regret the emperor's misfortune because I think that when the news of it reaches Paris there will be high times, and perhaps an end of kings in France."

Grey looked sober.

"Then it's all the more necessary I should get to Paris quickly," he said. "I don't take much stock in kings and emperors myself. But I believe with Lincoln, that it is poor policy to swap horses while you are crossing a stream. Don't you think this will demoralize your forces?"

"I will tell you what I think," answered St. Albans, adopting the solemn tone which he seemed to think appropriate to the subject. "I think that France has come to a time of misfortune. Her leaders are like those chattering peasants. They have a dozen different plans.

That is not the way to meet an enemy like Von Moltke. He fought this war out years ago with his head. Now he uses only his hands, and they will force France to her knees."

"I guess you are right," said Grey. "My sympathies are with France in this row, and I wouldn't mind carrying a musket in the ranks for her if things were fixed so that I could. But I've come to the conclusion from what I have seen that your side isn't prepared to put up much of a fight, and I guess that one more or less wouldn't make much difference."

"You may be of greater service to France than merely carrying a musket," said St. Albans pointedly. "You come from the south. Perhaps you saw our commander—know his plans—some message?"

Grey turned in his saddle. He had no mind to be pumped by any stranger.

"See here!" he said bluntly, "I'm a neutral. I saw your general and came through his lines, but of course my position wouldn't let me use my eyes and ears."

St. Albans tried to conceal the annoyance in his tone as he replied:

"Quite so. Your position! I had forgotten that, and was speaking as one Frenchman to another."

By this time the September sun had sunk out of view behind the Marne forest, and the cool of the evening was coming on. At the suggestion of St. Albans, the two put their horses to the gallop and did not draw rein until they were before the inn of Ardelot.

There was no further opportunity for conversation until they were at supper. Even then the Frenchman seemed to have lapsed from his former loquacity to an indifferent silence.

Later, as they sat smoking on the inn porch, he regained his good spirits, and the two chatted over a couple of Grey's cigars.

"We will take the road again at daylight," said St. Albans. "My plan is to pass to the east of Chaumont. We shall then avoid the detachment of Uhlans of which we heard back yonder, and once beyond them we have a clear road to Paris."

"That sounds reasonable," rejoined Grey. "Any way, I'll leave it to you. I don't care to fall in with these Uhlans because they might delay me with embarrassing questions, and I want to get to Paris by the safest and quickest way. If we're going to make such an early start, I'll turn in now."

"I shall smoke one more cigarette," said St. Albans. "It will refresh me more than sleep, of which I require little. You may rely on me to wake you in the morning. *Bon soir.*"

"Good night," replied Grey, and mounted to his room, while his companion remained upon the porch puffing rings from his cigarette in the direction of the moon.

"He's a queer bird," thought Grey, as he prepared for bed. "Not much of a patriot, but I fancy there are plenty like him in France." Then, as his head touched the pillow, "If there's a row on in Paris I wish I was there with pop and sis now."

His eyes closed on the instant, and he slept heavily until the sound of horses before the inn door brought him upright in bed.

CHAPTER III.

TRAPPED.

THE noise in the yard below aroused Grey to full consciousness. The clatter of hoofs told him that a considerable body of horsemen had stopped at the inn and—what was more startling—the few sentences which he heard were German.

It did not require many minutes for him to make a hurried toilet; then, taking care that his revolver was handy, he took a more careful survey of the yard through the half closed shutters.

It was dark outside except where the light from the lower windows threw a

yellow glare across the space which separated the threshold from the highway. Beyond this circle of light the American could distinguish only a confused mass of moving heads, black forms, and occasionally the glitter of steel. Above the dark outlines arose what appeared to be a grove of willowy, slender trees.

Grey comprehended their meaning at a glance, even had not the quick spoken German words told him. The grove of slender poles and the flap, flap of the little pennons in the wind made it plain to him. The house was surrounded by a company of Uhlans.

As he strove to pierce the darkness, that he might obtain a better view of the horsemen, two or three rode into the circle of light. Then he knew that there was no mistake, and his heart beat more rapidly.

There were the little shining caps, the yellow edged shabracks, the white and black pennons fluttering from the lance points. His familiarity with the personnel of the German troops was too vague to permit of a guess as to whose command was in the yard below. He only knew that they were Uhlans, and that he was in all probability a prisoner.

His first thought, formed upon the spur of the moment, was to barricade the door and defend himself. Then he saw the folly of such a move, and recollected that, after all, he had really no reason to fear the Germans; his arrest could mean nothing more serious than a detention of a few days until his identity was established.

Communication with Vienna would result in his liberation. Had there not been so pressing a reason why he should reach Paris at the earliest opportunity, he would have enjoyed the position in which he found himself.

He was not a Frenchman, nor had he any part with the French. It would not be such a bad thing to follow the fortunes of the Prussian army in its swift and relentless descent upon Paris. Had he been free to chose and his time his own, he would have liked nothing better.

His second thought was of Raoul St. Albans, whose room was at the back of the house, and who was probably sleeping, unmindful of the arrival of the Uhlans.

Leaving the window, he opened the door softly and hastened down the hall. As he expected, St. Albans' door was locked, but, to his surprise, there was no response to his impatient knocking. The man must be a sound sleeper, not to be awakened by the noise.

Grey's first impatience was giving place to anger at the other's non response, when the sudden unbolting of a door below arrested his attention. He heard the landlord's voice inquiring in trembling French what was wanted, the frightened exclamations of two or three women, and a gruff voice demanding that the owner of the place surrender quietly. Then there was the rattle of steel and the tread of heavy boots in the hall below.

For a moment the thought flashed through Grey's brain to hide himself, trusting that the Uhlans would depart at daybreak without troubling themselves to search the house. The next sentence uttered below showed him the fallacy of such a plan.

"Herr Captain," said a voice in German, "had I not better send two men up stairs to search the rooms?"

The reply startled the listener more than the sudden appearance of the Uhlans had done. It was not so much the words as the voice which uttered them —he knew now why St. Albans had been deaf to his knocking, for it was his voice that made the following answer:

"Call a dozen men into the house and look carefully to the windows from the outside. We want to take the fellow alive."

The "*Sehr wohl*" of the Uhlan officer followed the command. There were a few sharply spoken orders, the sounds

of men dismounting, and Grey knew that the room below was filled with the Prussian cavalrymen.

The words of Raoul St. Albans filled him with alarm. Who was the man, and why did the German address him so respectfully? Why had he, Grey, not clung to his first suspicion, and sent the fellow about his own business—this Frenchman who talked so glibly of the fall of Paris and the undoing of the Empire? The man was a Prussian spy.

As Grey stood in the dark hall, leaning over the banister, listening to the movements of the troopers below, he tried to remember just how much he had said during the ride northward. Then the humor of the situation flashed over him and he smiled.

Evidently the Uhlans thought he was some one of importance, a messenger en route to Paris or—a spy.

This last thought sent a chill up and down his spine. What if they should condemn him upon appearances, and he should have to face a drumhead court martial? They might shoot him first and send to Vienna afterward.

Quick to carry out a resolve when formed, he decided upon his course of action. It would be better to face the Germans then and there, and not wait for them to come to him.

The next moment he was descending the stairs; in another had crossed the lower hall, and stood in the presence of the Uhlans.

The Germans stared at him stolidly, instinctively the hands of one or two sought their sword hilts. Raoul St. Albans was leaning against the mantel puffing a cigarette; an officer with tilted schapska and mud bespattered boots was giving directions to half a dozen blond bearded giants. The steel scabbards glittered in the lamplight; the pennons from a dozen lances piled in a corner, hung limp against the staffs; as many pairs of blue eyes were fixed upon the American.

Raoul St. Albans took the cigarette from between his lips.

"Ah!" said he in German, "our man has come to *us*, Herr Lieutenant."

Grey stepped forward. "I understand German," said he, "enough to follow you and comprehend what you may say. You have come to arrest me. What for?"

The Uhlan lieutenant straightened himself. "We have our orders, Herr American, to allow no one to pass to Paris."

"Then you don't take me for a Frenchman? You know that——"

"You are an American," interrupted St. Albans, "but we do not know your business in Paris, and, you will pardon me, there are many of your countrymen in the armies of France."

"And in yours also," replied Grey contemptuously, "but they are not *spies*."

St. Albans shrugged his shoulders; the sneer upon the American's lips did not ruffle him. It was with extreme good nature he turned to the lieutenant.

"You will see to it that our friend does not harm himself; these Americans grow reckless sometimes. I——"

"You need not be afraid," cried Grey, hot to the ears with anger. "I am this officer's prisoner, thanks to you, M. St. Albans. I suppose you referred to this."

With a quick movement he whipped out his revolver and laid it on the table. "Now," said he, "I cannot harm myself or—you."

St. Albans produced another cigarette and lighted it. "Tut!" said he, "there is no reason to lose one's temper. You said you could explain when the proper time came—the desire to avoid the Germans and push through to Paris. Now——"

"See here, lieutenant!" burst out Grey, "I don't deny you've a perfect right to hold me up and inquire into my business; but that fellow can keep his nose out of the affair. He might be satisfied with what he's done already. I'm an American, an attaché of our minister at Vienna; you can verify that

quick enough. My name's Grey—John Grey, and I'm going to Paris to hunt up my father and sister, who are in trouble there. That's why I wanted to go right through."

"There is no reason to doubt the Herr American's explanation," said the Uhlan politely; "the matter will, without doubt, be verified. But until then I must detain you."

A sudden idea flashed through Grey's head. Diving into his pockets he emptied their contents on the table, and proffered the letter he had written the previous afternoon to the officer.

"If you'll read that," said he, "you'll see I'm not lying to you, and here's my card and—a passport."

"The Herr American's correspondence is his own," replied the Uhlan; "it may be examined at headquarters;" but he took the passport and read it hurriedly. "It is for a safe conduct through France," said he. "But there is something else. Herr Grey will understand."

"You want to search me?" said Grey, coloring.

"With your permission," replied the officer politely, and, with deft fingers, he performed the duty.

"Now," cried Grey angrily, when the unpleasant task was finished, "you are satisfied I suppose that—that—this fellow has lied to you."

A weight had been lifted from his mind; his fate would not be decided by a sub officer of Uhlans.

St. Albans spoke:

"I might resent the imputations which Mr. Grey has cast upon me," said he sternly, "but I consider the circumstances; neither will I offer an explanation except to say that I am an officer in the Prussian service, and I have but followed my orders."

Grey, quick to acknowledge justice, smiled faintly. "It was a mean trick you've played on me," said he, "and spying isn't much in my line. Perhaps if I'd told you *why* I was going to Paris you'd have kept out of this business?"

St. Albans made a gesture signifying neither negation nor assent. "I trust there will be no difficulty in explaining your mission satisfactorily," he remarked. "In that case it can mean a detention of but a few days, or hours."

"Yes," thought Grey, "but I don't fancy I'll be sent to Paris with all the honors of war." Then aloud: "If you don't mind, and since we're to stick together, I'll sit down and smoke a pipe. I fancy sleeping is out of the question, after this."

Some of the Uhlans smiled; the nonchalance of the young man was refreshing.

St. Albans nodded and pointed to a chair.

"You will permit us," said he good naturedly, "and our friend the landlord doubtless has something in his cellar. You will find, Herr Grey, that these dreaded Uhlans are not such bad fellows after all. Perhaps you'll give up the idea of carrying a musket in the French ranks; the schapska would suit you better."

"So you remember that?" laughed Grey. "But you know I was speaking to a Frenchman *then; nicht wahr?*"

The experience was becoming interesting. If it had not been for thinking of the colonel and the kid awaiting him in Paris, he could have enjoyed the situation hugely.

CHAPTER IV.

A BRUSH ON THE ROAD.

By the time the innkeeper and his terrified servants had prepared a hasty breakfast, Grey's good humor began to return. He saw the advantage of treating the situation diplomatically.

He was in no danger. The worst that could happen to him would be detention at the Prussian headquarters. That would be bad enough, in view of the urgent need of his presence in Paris.

But Grey had seen enough of life to know that it is better to look on its

pleasant side whenever possible. He was as cheerful, therefore, as any of his captors, and joked with them in German almost as good as their own.

Nevertheless he did not forget his journey to the French capital. At the first opportunity he laid his case plainly before St. Albans, and urged that he be taken at once to the German headquarters.

"That is exactly what is to be done," said St. Albans.

He spoke frankly, and in a tone of friendship. Apparently he admired the American for the coolness with which he had taken the whole affair.

He was a man of the world, and had the worldly man's respect for real courage, as well as his disregard of conventionalities. He would have been ready to shake hands with a brave man on the scaffold, though his own duty had compelled him to send the fellow there.

"You see," he continued, "your wishes and ours coincide perfectly. I am informed that the commander in chief and his staff are now returning from Sedan toward Chalons to take up the march against Paris. We shall meet them at Chalons this evening, and you can then explain your mission. I trust they will be satisfied with your account."

"I guess that will be all right," said Grey, with more confidence than he really felt.

He meant to have a good laugh at the expense of St, Albans if the authorities let him off.

It was a brave company that took the road for Chalons with the coming of daylight. In spite of their night ride every bit of metal on the trappings of the Uhlans shone like burnished silver in the morning sun. The men sat their horses like statues, and the pennons fluttered in perfect alignment.

Grey's eyes sparkled as they swung away in the easy gallop of travel hardened cavalry. It carried him back to the old days in the Shenandoah, and he wished they might meet a detachment of the French troops, "just to see the fun."

It was evident from the eagerness with which they scanned the roadway in front of them at every rise of ground that the troopers were even more anxious than he for an encounter.

There seemed little likelihood of such an event, however. The country through which they passed looked almost deserted. There was nobody at work in the fields. Smoke curled from the chimneys of some of the cottages, but the doors and windows were tightly closed. The dreaded cry of "The Uhlans! The Uhlans!" had gone through the countryside, driving the people to shelter and concealment like moles at the shrill scream of a hawk.

The Uhlans appreciated the terror they inspired, and enjoyed it hugely. Whenever they approached a village they put spurs to their horses and clattered up to the tavern door with a rush that made the windows rattle.

These inns were always closed and silent, but the pounding of saber hilts against the door usually brought out a trembling host, who fell to his knees and begged them to take whatever they would, but to spare his life.

To such appeals the riders replied with good natured jests, and flung their silver pieces at the fellow's feet, telling him they would soon pass current in France. Then they clattered away, roaring with laughter at the open mouthed astonishment with which he gazed after them as they disappeared in a cloud of dust.

They reached Joinville before noon, and halted there to rest the horses and refresh themselves. The place was as quiet as the smaller towns, but at a little village a half hour's ride further on the first sign of resistance was encountered.

The hamlet stood at the top of a long rise. As the Prussians approached the place they could hear the singing of a bugle and the roll of a drum.

A small body of men in uniform could be seen drawn up in line at the crest of the hill, while others, with guns in their hands, were running to join them.

The Uhlans straightened in their saddles, and looked at one another with the pleased smiles of boys on a lark, while a few of them exchanged jests over the prospect of the sport they had been longing for.

At the sight, St. Albans, turned toward Grey, who had been riding by his side. His dark eyes glowed with excitement, and his lips curled in a smile, as he said:

"Now, if those fellows will but wait for us, you shall see whether French boasting or Prussian drill makes the better soldiers."

The Frenchmen were no more than two hundred yards away. They had taken their position behind a low barricade, made of stones and timbers from the roadside wall, which had been hastily thrown across the highway.

Their chassepots were in their hands, but they waited in silence for the Prussians to come nearer. An officer on horseback was directing them; the others were unmounted.

St. Albans scanned the company of Frenchmen intently for a moment, as though to learn their numbers. Then he turned toward his own men, with no word of command, but with upraised saber.

At the signal half a hundred weapons flashed in the air. The men bent forward upon their horses, and the whole band moved onward in a swift gallop, like a powerful machine suddenly set in motion.

Grey was carried away by the enthusiasm of the thing. It set all the soldier blood in his veins throbbing, and made him forgetful of the danger and of the fact that he was unarmed.

He forgot that he was virtually a prisoner, and pressed forward in the foremost line, keeping close to St. Albans, who was leading.

At forty yards a volley blazed out along the French line. It toppled some four or five of the Uhlans from their saddles, but the troop never halted its speed. Instead, a fierce shout came from the throats of the Prussians as their horses rose at the low wall. It was the cry of the falcon descending on its quarry.

In a moment horse and foot were mixed in inextricable confusion. St. Albans spurred straight for the Frenchman on horseback, who was evidently a captain or officer of some rank.

The latter proved no mean adversary, and the two circled about each other in a contest that would have been the delight of the troopers if they had not had other business to attend to.

Right and left whirled the Prussian sabers, while the Frenchmen, finding their guns unwieldy in such close quarters, threw them down and, drawing their pistols, fired point blank in their opponent's faces.

The air was filled with the crackling of shots, the crash of steel and the neighing of horses.

For an instant Grey was left alone, and he glanced about him at the affray, noting with admiration the skill and horsemanship of St. Albans and his opponent. Then he saw a giant in the red uniform, who had just emptied a Prussian saddle with his chassepot, hurrying toward the Uhlan leader with clubbed weapon. It was evidently his purpose to fell St. Albans by a blow from behind.

Acting on the impulse of the moment, the American dashed forward and rode down the Frenchman just as he poised his weapon for a blow at the Uhlan captain. The man measured his length upon the ground, and Grey's horse passed over him, trampling his body with its flying hoofs.

At the same moment St. Albans, with a sudden swerve to one side and a quick upward movement, thrust his opponent through the shoulder and unseated him.

The fall of the French captain ended the fighting. Those of his followers who were not already stretched upon the ground threw down their arms in signal of surrender. The Uhlans as promptly sheathed their own weapons and turned their attention to the prisoners and their wounded comrades.

It had been a short but bloody struggle. More than a score of Frenchmen lay dead or wounded upon the scene of the contest. Half a dozen of the Prussians had been killed outright, and as many more suffered injuries more or less severe.

But it had been an equal handed combat. It was, as St. Albans said, an epitome of the whole struggle between France and Prussia, and it showed that France was doomed to defeat.

The party was soon under way again. Those of the prisoners who were able to endure the journey were mounted behind Uhlan troopers. The others were left behind, to the mercy of the villagers.

St. Albans soon reined his horse alongside of Grey's once more, and leaning over the saddle extended his hand.

"I ask your pardon for my suspicions," he said. "A French spy does not conduct himself as you did just now. You were hardly a neutral in the fight, but," with a laugh, "I do not think that will be held against you. I also find that personally I owe you a debt of gratitude which I fear I can never repay."

"Oh, that's all right," replied Grey, easily. "Seeing there was a row on I just couldn't keep out of it. As far as you were concerned, I only wanted to see fair play. We think a lot of that in my country."

"We are not entirely ignorant of it over here," said St. Albans, with a little touch of irony. "What I wished to say," he went on, "is that while I have no further doubts about you, Mr. Grey, it will still be necessary, as a matter of form, to conduct you to headquarters. You will have an entirely favorable report, however, and I can assure you of considerate treatment. Whether you will be permitted to pass directly on to Paris or not I have no authority to say."

"That is just what I am going to do," rejoined Grey boldly, "even if I have to make my escape from the German camp. There's a day lost now, and no telling how badly my sister may need me."

St. Albans smiled.

"Escape might not be out of the question if other means fail," he said. "But at best there would be some risk in it, and I would advise you to try persuasion first."

The two men looked at each other meaningly, and Grey put out his hand as his companion had done before.

"You're not such a bad fellow after all, St. Albans," he said, "and I forgive you for the way you tricked me yesterday."

St. Albans clasped the hand and held it for a moment. It was a pact of friendship between the Uhlan and his prisoner.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN OF BLOOD AND IRON.

It was late at night when the Uhlans reached the camp at Reims, dusty, travel stained and weary from the hard labors of the day.

Grey could make out long lines of tents, standing white and spectral in the darkness. He knew that the tents sheltered the German army, but he was too tired to ask questions, and dropped gratefully on the blankets in the tent to which the Uhlan lieutenant conducted him.

St. Albans had gone off to make a report of the expedition.

Grey slept soundly—all the more so that there was a canvas over his head and a sentry pacing up and down outside.

The singing of bugles awakened him at daybreak. Instinctively he jumped from his blankets and began hastily to don his clothes. He was half dressed before he realized that the bugles were not calling him.

"How it takes one back to old times!" he mused, smiling at the fancy that had taken possession of him for the moment and made him think that he was among the Virginia hills. "But the transition from the rôle of peaceful American to that of French spy, and then suddenly to that of a Uhlan trooper, all in one day, is apt to confuse one's thoughts. What next, I wonder? I seem to be getting plenty of experiences, but I'm not making much progress toward Paris."

While these thoughts were coursing through his mind Grey had finished his toilet. He stepped outside his tent and confronted St. Albans, who had come to inquire after him. The two men exchanged greetings.

"I came to ask you if you would care to see the morning inspection," said St. Albans. "The king, Bismarck and Von Moltke will conduct it."

An orderly brought up the horses, and as the two rode along through the streets of the tented city, St. Albans added:

"I have referred to you in the report I have turned in, saying that we met you at Ardelot, that you describe yourself as an American officer attached to the United States legation at Vienna, that you are on the way to attend a sister and sick father in Paris, and that you desire permission to proceed immediately. I have recommended that the request be granted, as there is nothing suspicious in your story or your conduct. I didn't consider it necessary to describe all the details of what went on in the inn at Ardelot."

"That's generous," said Grey. "I was afraid that French spy business would cause delay, if not trouble, in case you told of it. I appreciate your kindness."

"Not at all," protested St. Albans lightly. "I do not wish to appear as making such mistakes." But Grey knew that it was a less selfish reason that had caused the other to omit mention of the affair at Ardelot.

When they reached the broad field which had once been a part of the grounds of a French chateau, but was now utilized by the Germans as a drill ground, the troops were drawn up in preparation for the inspection. Line on line they stretched across the meadow. Beneath the caps of the foot soldiers and the polished metal helmets of the horse were bronzed faces and fair faces, the short, stocky men of Bavaria and the lithe, long limbed North Saxon.

There were a hundred thousand of them—blood of the rich soil of Germany. They were the men of Sedan, flushed with victory, and already in their mind's view marching along the streets of Paris. They were the sons of warring parents, welded together by one watchword, the watchword of Bismarck and of William, the cry of "The Fatherland."

Grey and St. Albans took their places among the crowd of aides, unattached officers and newspaper correspondents who had gathered to witness the inspection, and who were ranged on either side of the roped off passageway leading from the quarters over which floated the royal standard of Prussia.

Presently the heads of these spectators were uncovered, and a little group of men came riding down the lane between the onlookers. They rode two by two, and Grey had no difficulty in identifying the first pair.

He had seen William I at a court function in Vienna. The gray haired man whom he now saw again, stately, benevolent, smiling, with well trimmed beard and modest uniform, looked as though he might have come from that affair direct to this.

As he rode along he smiled and bowed to either side; courtly, yet pleasant in his manner, the friend of the men

in the ranks; it was small wonder that he was beloved by his advisers and reverenced by his troops.

But it was the man who rode by the side of the king who chiefly interested Grey. He was the man whose name was heard oftenest in Vienna and the other capitals, who was remaking the map of Europe.

It needed no second glance at the massive form, erect upon the gray steed, the immobile face and thoughtful mien, to tell that this was Count von Bismarck. He gave no heed to those about him. His eyes were bent upon his horse's mane, and the firm lines of the mouth beneath the mustache gave no indication of what was passing in his busy mind.

Behind the king rode the "Prussian Eagle," Von Moltke. Alert, energetic, with an eye for every detail, he looked the great field marshal.

"I shouldn't feel comfortable with those eyes turned upon me if my equipment wasn't in apple pie order," thought Grey, as he noted the hawk-like features and piercing glance of the commander.

There was a fourth member of the royal party, who had been obscured behind the generous bulk of Bismarck. Grey gave a start as he recognized the familiar form, the short stature, the ruddy face and drooping mustache, the perfect horsemanship, the blue coat with the three stars of a United States major general on the shoulder straps.

"Why, it's Sheridan, Phil Sheridan!" he cried.

He spoke excitedly, and in the respectful silence of those about him, his words reached the man to whom they were applied.

The latter turned slightly in the saddle, a half smile playing about the corners of his mouth. Evidently the enthusiasm in his countryman's tone was amusing to him.

Instinctively Grey's hand went to his cap in salute. St. Albans observed with astonishment that the salute was returned, and others who had noticed the incident turned to stare at Grey.

"I was so surprised that I forgot myself," said the latter, somewhat confused by the attention he had attracted, "but the old man won't mind."

"You know General Sheridan?" exclaimed St. Albans. "Why didn't you tell me so before?"

"Rather," said Grey, in answer to the first question. "I served on his staff for three months. But I didn't know he was here."

"He has received permission to accompany the German army as an expert military observer," explained St. Albans. "The request was first presented to the French, I believe, but I hardly think that he is a sufferer by their refusal. If he will vouch for you there should be no further difficulty."

"Then all I ask is to get a note to him explaining my position," returned Grey.

At that moment the imperial party emerged upon the field. Further conversation was cut off by the music of a band, which struck up the national anthem that was making France tremble from end to end.

The sharp orders of the officers rang out, the arms came to present, and the long line of men stood silent and at attention, while their leader rode slowly across the field, noting with careful interest the appearance of each company.

Something of the grimness and invincible determination of Bismarck and Von Moltke showed in the look of the German ranks.

The confident hopes which Grey had built upon the expectation of assistance from General Sheridan proved to be well founded. No sooner had the note which St. Albans caused to be sent reached the American general than he summoned Grey to his presence, expressed the greatest pleasure at seeing him once more and the profoundest concern at the illness of Colonel Grey, and wound up by saying:

"There is just one man who can help

you out of your difficulty without delay or red tape. That man is Bismarck. We will present your case to him."

Grey's experience in Washington and later at the Austrian court, had made him familiar with the society of famous personages, but he was conscious of a feeling very nearly akin to awe when he entered the presence of the man who held the destinies of Germany in his strong right hand.

The simplicity of Grant himself could not have exceeded that of Bismarck's quarters. His furniture consisted of a chest, a rough table, a cot and two chairs. That was all.

When Grey and his companion entered the man of iron was busily writing. A courier, booted and spurred, stood waiting to take the paper when it was completed—a message to Berlin, perhaps, for during the time he was in the field Bismarck did not relinquish the care and oversight of the central government.

His white helmet and gloves lay upon the table. He wore the same great boots and dusty coat that Grey had seen in the morning, as though he had taken up his pen immediately upon returning from the field.

He finished his writing in a moment, and turned toward his visitors. In a few words General Sheridan explained Grey's mission. Bismarck listened attentively. At the conclusion he said, looking suddenly full at Grey:

"You were in haste to reach Paris. Why did you come here?"

"Because I couldn't get through in any other way," replied Grey promptly. "Your officers told me they had been directed to stop all communication from the south."

"Ah," said Bismarck, beginning to write on the sheet of paper before him. "That is very good. It is well to know that they are carrying out the orders."

He called General Sheridan to his side, and after a few minutes of low toned conversation, evidently relating to the truthfulness of Grey's story, he extended the paper he had penned. It was a pass to all points in the German lines, signed simply "Bismarck."

"My aide will conduct you to the chief of staff. When countersigned by him this pass is good at all points in our control."

Grey began a speech of thanks, but the other interrupted.

"You saw the review this morning," he said. "You are a soldier. What did you think of it?"

With the query he fixed his penetrating gaze once more on the young American with the manner that seemed customary to him when trying to elicit information.

"I think," said Grey promptly, "that there is nothing in France that can withstand your troops. That is why I am in such haste to reach Paris and get my family away before you arrive there."

Another man might have smiled at the ingenious compliment implied in the latter portion of the remark. Bismarck did not. His eyes returned once more to the papers before him, and he said slowly:

"I think so myself." It was the first time he had permitted himself to speak of the outcome of the struggle, and he added, as though regretting the expression of opinion:

"I trust that your mission will be successful."

Accepting this as a dismissal, Grey bowed himself out, and went in search of St. Albans, before whom he waved the precious paper containing Bismarck's signature. Half an hour later he was well started on the interrupted journey to Paris, and had left the last of the German outposts behind him.

CHAPTER VI.

BIRDS OF PREY.

FROM Reims to Paris is twenty eight leagues, as the crow flies. By road it is some four leagues further.

Grey could not hope to reach the capital on the day of his departure from the German camp. Therefore, he decided to make the journey in two stages and to divide it at Thierry. This would bring him to Paris on the following afternoon.

He was in fine spirits over the prospect of being soon with his family, and he took the road easily, noting with interest the preparations that were going on for the reception of the Prussians. They were of such a nature as to bring a smile to the lips of a trained soldier like the American.

Detachments of the *gardes mobiles* were drilling in the towns. They were picturesque in appearance, but it needed no second glance at their disarray and the antiquated weapons that they carried to tell that they would run before the first volley of the well ordered Prussian troops.

In one or two of the towns workmen were restoring ancient earthworks and rebuilding the rotted carriages of outdated muzzle loaders. There was brave talk about the inns at which Grey drew rein, but the peasants were driving their cattle to the woods and concealing their household goods in ricks and stables. They knew what resistance these raw guards would make to the German cohorts.

Thierry was thronged with a disorganized mass of troops. There were companies and detachments withdrawn from the smaller towns to aid in the defense of the capital. There was a multitude of stragglers from all quarters slowly falling back toward Paris.

In the talk about the tables of the hotel's public room much was said of a stand against the Prussians here in Thierry, but Grey knew that the officers had no intention of attempting any such rashness. Provincial France was prostrate, paralyzed. Paris alone remained.

If Paris held out French honor would be vindicated. If Paris fell the Prussian triumph would be complete. Therefore, the bold spirits, the patriots and the adventurers were all making the best of their way toward Paris.

At Thierry Grey learned of what had taken place in the capital. The empire was down; the republic was up; Eugénie had fled from Paris, and Gambetta was the hero of the hour.

"Now we shall see a change in the way things are going," said one and another of the red capped loungers as they rehearsed the details of the 4th of September.

Grey smiled, almost in pity of their ignorance.

"Poor fools!" he thought. "They do not know that the sickness which prostrates France is too serious to be cured by a Parisian propaganda."

On the second day there was a decided change in the character of those whom he passed on the road. There were still many men in uniform, toiling wearily along, but there were more of another sort.

Some of them were attired in fantastic costumes, half military, half beggar. These persons, the greater number of them men, but some women, trooped along singly, in bands of three and four, sometimes a dozen together.

Their faces were all dark, lowering, evil, and they were all turned toward Paris. It was not difficult to recognize the motley throng or to know why it plodded on so persistently. They were the flotsam and jetsam of the nation, the thieves, profligates, and adventurers who had been driven out of the capital, but who were returning at the scent of revolution, as vultures flock toward the odor of carrion.

At Lignon, where he halted for a half hour's rest, Grey found a group of these fellows. There were half a dozen of them gathered about a table sipping from glasses which evidently contained the drippings of the landlord's wine casks.

Three of them wore soldier caps and belts, which they had probably stolen. The remainder of their gar-

ments, like those of the others, consisted of the tatterdemalion costume of the Parisian slums.

The one who by right of greatest ugliness seemed to be the leader of the party, was a little man with a bullet head and ferret eyes. His bulbous nose was twisted to one side, and his wide mouth displayed an array of blackened, protruding teeth.

With such features his face could hardly have been attractive under any circumstances, but it was rendered more grotesque by the fact that both ears had been cut off close to the skull. The lack of ears and the crinkled yellow skin tightly drawn over the bones of his face gave his countenance the frightful, staring appearance of a death's head.

There was something so peculiarly sinister in the man's appearance that the first glance of it impelled a second look even though it filled one with sickening horror. Grey stared at him in wonder that so much ugliness could be crowded into a single human countenance.

Presently the earless one looked up and noted the intentness of the American's gaze. His lowering brows came together in a frown that all but obscured the beady eyes.

He got up from the table and advanced to the spot where Grey was sitting, moving with a swaggering walk that may have come from the wine he had drunk.

"Monsieur stares at me," he said, thrusting his evil features close to Grey's face. "Perhaps he does not like my appearance?"

Grey had no mind to quarrel with a tipsy cutthroat. He turned his gaze from the other's sickening face and did not note that the ferret eyes were taking in every detail of his costume, and resting greedily on his gold watch chain.

"I beg pardon," he said politely, "I did not mean to be rude. But Moncieur's face is somewhat—unusual."

"It is," said the earless one, with unconcealed pride. "There is no other like it in France. I am known as Le Bete."

He returned to his companions, and after they had drained their glasses the whole party disappeared outside the door.

Grey lingered for a few moments over the wine which the landlord had set before him. Then, after unavailing calls for the stable boy, he went to secure his horse, having no mind to waste further time, with Paris only five hours' distant.

The animal was gone.

At first Grey thought that the hostler might have removed the steed to some other part of the stable, but a hasty examination convinced him that the place was empty. Then he thought of Le Bete and his companions, and felt certain that they had taken the horse. If so they could not be far away, for they had left the inn only a few minutes before.

Without waiting to summon assistance or to explain his loss, Grey started at top speed along the one street of the little town, gripping the pistol in his pocket as he ran, and vowing to recover Colonel if he had to fight all the thieves between him and Paris.

At the branching of two roads, a full quarter of a mile beyond the starting point, Grey paused to ask of a decrepit old peasant who was limping along with a basket of herbs on his arm whether he had seen a man with a broken nose, wearing a red cap, and mounted on a big bay horse. The peasant stared stupidly at him, but after half a dozen impatient repetitions of the question, a faint gleam of intelligence came into his face, and he pointed along the road that led to the right.

Grey ran on, flinging back his thanks to his astonished informant, who stood in the roadway staring after him.

At a turning of the road a little further on he was rewarded for his exertions by seeing Le Bete mounted upon

his horse and surrounded by the ragamuffin troop. They were standing before a little wine shop which marked the extreme end of the village.

As he came up, panting and breathless, the men stared at him impudently, but with no sign of recognition. Le Bete was in the act of receiving a stoup of wine from the landlord.

"See here!" demanded Grey angrily, "what do you mean by running off with my horse?"

Le Bete was in no way abashed. He took a pull at his glass and said affably:

"Monsieur mistakes; the horse is my own."

"You thief!" shouted Grey, purple with heat and rage. "Do you think me a fool to let you walk off with my horse from under my very nose? If you don't get down from his back instantly I'll bring you down."

Le Bete appealed to the landlord.

"The man is mad," he said. "It is my horse. You saw me ride him up to your door."

An echo of assent came from Le Bete's followers. The landlord gazed from one to another. Then, seeing that numbers and patronage were on the side of Le Bete, he exclaimed:

"Mon Dieu! it is true. I have seen you mounted on him often."

Le Bete turned toward Grey with a fierce air.

"And you! Who are you to call an honest man names? No Frenchman, it is certain." Then to his followers: "Seize this man and search him. He may be an enemy of the country."

The ragamuffins made a move toward Grey, but found themselves confronting a large and business-like revolver, at the other end of which the American's voice commanded:

"Stand back or I'll fill your skins with lead."

The group wavered. One, bolder than the rest, raised his club and advanced a step. There was a flash, a sharp report, and the weapon fell to the ground, while the ruffian clasped the hand that had held it and howled in agony.

In a twinkling the four others had disappeared around the corners of the wine shop.

Le Bete, seeing himself deserted by his men, struck frantically at the sides of Grey's horse in an endeavor to escape. In this he met an unexpected difficulty. Colonel, accustomed only to Grey's familiar hand, resented the new rider's blows by plunging and rearing frantically, with very little forward progress.

"Drop or I'll shoot," commanded Grey.

Le Bete, more terrified by the horse's antics than by Grey's threats, clung to the animal's neck and frantically belabored him with his heels. There was another report; Le Bete's right arm loosed its hold, and at the next plunge he rolled to the ground.

The horse galloped on for a few yards, and then began quietly to munch the grass by the roadside.

Grey paid no heed to the figure writhing in the roadway, but hurried after his horse. Reassuring the frightened animal with gentle patting, he sprang to the saddle. Then he glanced back at the scene of his late encounter.

Le Bete was sitting upright in the roadway clasping his injured arm with his left hand, and shouting curses after his assailant. Grey waved a hand toward him in derisive gesture of farewell. Then he put his horse to the gallop, his face once more turned toward Paris.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO RIFLE SHOTS.

FOR a quarter of a mile Grey rode at a gallop, then eased the horse, mentally thanking his lucky stars that he had escaped so cleverly what might have been a serious difficulty.

Ahead, the road seemed clear, save for an occasional peasant, who, at the

sound of galloping hoofs, drew to one side and stared stupidly at the rider.

Grey knew that the fortifications of Paris could not be far away. He was surprised, therefore, to encounter no detachment of regular troops. The country seemed filled only with the rabble, an insight into whose characteristics he had so recently gained.

He settled himself comfortably in the saddle preparatory to making a last rapid dash for the distant city. Suddenly the horse pricked up his ears, swerved from the middle of the road, and, nearly jerking the reins from the rider's hand, bounded forward in a mad gallop.

The instinct of the animal probably saved Grey from death, or at least from a serious wound. At the same moment, when, uttering an exclamation, he tightened his grasp on the reins, the zip of a bullet whistled past his ear, to be followed by the crack of a rifle from the bushes beside the road.

For an instant Grey, too startled to realize his narrow escape, clung to the reins. Then, with a quick movement, he grasped the butt of his revolver and looked back over his shoulder.

The rapid progress of the horse had already carried him a hundred paces beyond the ambuscade, the location of which he could note by a cloud of bluish smoke which hung above the shrubbery. Even as he looked, a head appeared, and a second and a third.

Instinctively Grey ducked, nor was he mistaken. A gun barrel glittered in the sunlight, and a second shot was fired from the bushes. Whether from over haste, or the poorness of the marksman's aim, the bullet went so wide that its whirr was lost to him.

The dastardly nature of the attack aroused the American to action. The first momentary fear gave place to anger and a desire to avenge the unprovoked assault upon his life. The second shot had scarcely died away when the crack, crack of his heavy Colt's revolver answered it.

The faces disappeared as though by magic, but, whether his bullet had found a mark or the would be assassins feared another shot, Grey could only surmise.

His first care was hurriedly to reload his revolver, his second to urge the horse to a fresh burst of speed.

He had gone scarcely a quarter of a mile when a new and unexpected danger was revealed to him.

The highway swept in a great curve to the right, then to the right again. Whether from intent or to avoid an obstacle, the designer of the road had formed it into a gigantic horseshoe, the outer rim of which he must follow to continue on his way.

As, urging his animal forward, he glanced over his shoulder, he saw half a dozen figures running across the open ground toward the spot where the second curve of the road would bring him parallel with the first calk of the horseshoe, from whence had come the rifle shots.

On the instant Grey realized that it would be an easy matter for the runners to gain their object, and be ready to receive him as he passed the second calk of the shoe. If he kept on he must run the gauntlet of six rifles; to return was equally dangerous.

Already the men were half way across the ground between the points of the curve. He could see the sunlight sparkle on the barrels of their guns, and knew that he could expect no mercy. They were either companions of Le Bete, or others of their ilk. But he would fool them yet, these cutthroats of the Paris slums.

Thrusting his revolver into his belt, he tightened his grip on the reins, and, with a skill which came from long practice and experience, checked the mad gallop of the horse ere the flying hoofs had covered a dozen paces.

The animal, trained to obey the well known touch and voice of its rider, stood quivering in the highway. Grey rose in the stirrups and made a hurried

examination of the country beyond the rim of the horseshoe.

Close to the road was a ditch flanked by a growth of thorny bushes rising to the height of a man's shoulder. Beyond the hedge the country stretched in a broken line of hillocks and depressions.

The men were already nearing the second ambuscade. So intent were they upon their object that Grey's sudden action was unobserved.

For a moment he watched the six dash across the field. Then, encouraging the horse by a kindly word, he touched its flanks lightly with the spur.

Obedient to the rider's will, the steed gathered his feet together, and, summoning all its energy in a supreme effort, rose at the hedge like the thoroughbred he was.

With a sense of exhilaration Grey felt himself rising, but the sigh of relief was frozen upon his lips. For the first time in his life the bay failed him.

Whether the hedge was higher than he thought, or the horse wearied with its mad gallop down the road, the horseman could only conjecture. One moment steed and rider were in the air, the next the horse was floundering upon the ground beyond the hedge with a broken leg, and Grey, hurled from the saddle, sat stupidly upon the grass, shaken into semi unconsciousness.

The struggles of the wounded animal aroused him to a sense of his situation. Fortunately, the turf, softened by recent rains, had broken his own fall and no bones were broken.

He stood up, but a dizziness seized him, and for a moment he reeled like a drunken man. He knew that each moment was precious. Those who awaited him beside the highway would presently discover that a trick had been played upon them. He had no hope that they would give up their purpose so easily.

His first thought was to make his way along the hedge, trusting that before the bandits discovered the horse and learned the manner of his escape, he would be too far away to be overtaken.

He turned toward the horse, and a lump rose in his throat that he must leave his faithful companion in sore distress. Even in its agony the bay knew him, and it seemed to Grey that the dark eyes pleaded for him to stay.

Kneeling beside the tortured animal, he gently stroked the soft nose—a silent farewell. A spasm of pain contracted the great limbs, the horse rolled in its agony, and a groan almost human came from between the parted lips.

Grey hesitated. To leave the horse thus was the act of a coward. His hand went to his revolver.

He realized what his contemplated act might bring upon him. The sound of the shot would reveal his position. He would be discovered, and, lame as he was from the effect of the header he had taken, it was almost a certainty that his pursuers would get within rifle shot.

As he stood deliberating, a cry from the direction of the highway reached him. Already those who sought his life had discovered they were the victims of a trick, and were doubtless coming upon the run to learn the meaning of it. Grey's fingers loosened from the butt of the revolver, then tightened with a grip like iron.

"It is cowardly!" he muttered, "and it is my fault that Colonel took the hedge."

Stepping back, he drew the revolver from his belt. At the click of the hammer the horse pricked up his ears. How many times he had heard that click when Grey was in the saddle.

For an instant longer the young man hesitated, then, pressing the muzzle of the weapon behind the panting animal's ear, he pulled the trigger.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN OFFICER OF CHASSEURS.

For a moment following the report of the shot all was silent. Then a sec-

ond shout came from the direction from which Grey knew his pursuers were coming.

He had accomplished his purpose and done his last duty to a comrade; with the flash of the cartridge, Colonel died.

Holding the revolver in his hand, for he knew not at what moment he might be called upon to use it, Grey hurried along the inner side of the hedge, keeping close to the shrubbery.

The force of his fall had wrenched one of his legs badly, but, despite the pain the exertion caused him, he ran on, intent only in putting as great a distance as possible between himself and the enemy.

It was evident that the report of his shot had made the men wary, for it was some moments before they appeared through the hedge near the body of the horse. Then they halted, as though suspecting that the American lay in ambush and that the dreaded revolver might speak again.

Grey knew that only a momentary respite was granted him, but he accepted it thankfully. A half mile separated him from the pursuers. Had he been sound of limb he would have laughed aloud; not a man in France could have overtaken him, with such a start.

But already the injured leg hurt him cruelly. Twice he stopped, his lips white with pain; the unevenness of the ground augmented the torment.

He realized that there was but one chance of escape; to strike the level highway, where at least one cause of his slow progress would be removed.

Glancing back, he saw the men examining the dead horse and heard their yell of triumph at the discovery. The next moment a figure ran into the open and looked up and down the hedge. Then Grey knew that nothing except his legs would save him.

Dropping upon his hands and knees, he found an opening in the hedge, through which he crawled; for a few moments longer he would be concealed from those whom he knew had discovered his whereabouts.

The curve of the highway left half a mile of meadow between the track he had been following and the thoroughfare. He saw the white, dusty road winding like a great serpent far to his right. By making a sharp angle with the hedge he could reach it without fear of losing ground.

The pursuers were already hot upon his track, coming like a pack of hounds along the inner side of the hedge.

Gritting his teeth, Grey broke into that long, easy lope which had placed him among the best long distance runners at the Point in the old days. The pain from his injured leg was almost forgotten in the excitement of the race, but it hindered him so much that, before the first quarter mile was passed, the enemy had gained a dozen rods.

A stretch of level land still separated him from the highway when they broke through the hedge and came dashing across the open ground.

A rifle shot sounded behind him; already they thought to end the race in that way. But the distance was still too great and the firing ceased.

Limping painfully, Grey climbed up the slope which slanted down from the road, paused for an instant to regain his breath, and ran on in the direction of Paris.

A peasant, trudging along with spade on shoulder, stopped and gazed at him in amazement. Grey spoke no word as he ran panting past the fellow, and the man, noting the pursuers, sprang into the ditch and made off across the fields.

The incident aroused a new fear in Grey's heart. At any moment he might come upon those stamped with the same mark as the six behind him. In that case—well—there were five shots in his revolver.

The crack, crack of an irregular volley behind gave warning that the others were rapidly gaining. The sharp zip, zip of the bullets cut the air above his

head. At any moment he might be struck.

With a desperation born of peril, he turned suddenly and fired twice at his pursuers. They were, he knew, out of pistol range, but, as he surmised, his unexpected action brought them to a standstill.

For a few moments the unequal duel continued. A bullet plowed the sand at his feet; another came so close that instinctively he dodged, like a raw recruit in his first battle.

Then, unexpectedly, the rifle firing ceased, and he perceived that the enemy were holding a consultation. Its object was soon made plain to him.

Suddenly three of the six separated from their companions, and, jumping across the ditch, ran toward him, while those in the road resumed the firing.

With a sinking heart he turned and ran, knowing full well that the next quarter of an hour would decide the race in favor of the Frenchmen.

Some rods ahead the road ascended a steep hill. If he could reach the summit he would, for a breathing spell, be hidden from his enemies.

The three who had crossed the ditch were drawing gradually nearer; the shots from the road redoubled. A bullet grazed his sleeve.

The zip, zip was like the humming of a swarm of bees. Little clouds of dust arose from the road; a splintered stone hit him in the face.

Expecting that each moment would be his last, he reached the base of the ascent. His strength was gone, every gasp was an additional pain; he knew that to toil up the long hill was impossible.

As, white to the lips, he stopped and faced his pursuers, there came to him upon the soft autumn breeze a sound which sent a thrill tingling through his veins. It was the thud, thud of galloping horses, beyond the summit of the hill.

Standing in the highway, panting, covered with dust and perspiration, every nerve and muscle racked with pain, he waited.

The dull echo of the advancing hoofs grew louder. With the hoof beats upon the hard road was mingled the jingle of steel, the rattle of cavalrymen's sabers.

Upon the summit of the hill appeared waving plumes streaming in the wind, metal helmets, then bewhiskered faces and the glimmer of polished cuirasses.

What followed, Grey scarcely comprehended. He knew the road behind him was filled with galloping horses and the rattle of a charging troop. Instinctively he staggered across the highway and dropped inertly into the friendly shelter of the ditch. Then all became a blank.

When he opened his eyes a dozen faces were bending over him. Then the mouth of a flask was thrust between his teeth. The strong liquor strangled him, but drove away the faintness.

"*Tiens!*" cried a voice; "that is well; he is coming around again."

Grey raised himself upon his elbow. The highway was filled with dismounted troopers—the Chasseurs of the Line. One, who appeared to be an officer, held a brandy flask.

His late pursuers stood sullenly a little way off, surrounded by an equal number of the French cavalrymen.

"*Diable!*" said the officer, "but it was close, *mon ami.* Are you wounded?"

Grey smiled faintly. "Thank you, no," said he; "in another five minutes they would have riddled me." Then soberly: "I have to thank you——"

The Frenchman waved his hand. "I am only too glad of the opportunity to meet these Franc-tireurs."

"I did not think they were of your army," replied Grey, "they fired at me from ambush, and——"

"*Dame!*" cried the Chasseur, "you mistake, *mon ami;* Frenchmen they may be, but of the army—never; these cutthroats who disgrace the name of France."

Grey understood. He had heard something of the Franc-tireurs—irregular troops banded together, seeking whom they might rob and assassinate, in the name of France.

He rose painfully and attempted to brush the dust from his clothes. The officer regarded him narrowly.

"You are an American?" said he. "I have had the honor to meet many of your countrymen."

In a few words Grey explained his position, and produced the passport which permitted him to pass safely through France.

"You are going to Paris," said the officer. "It's lucky we happened along just as we did; those fellows have no regard for the rules of war." Then, extending his hand with a frank smile: "I did not know what the firing meant, unless it was a scouting party of the Prussians, and—we charged down the hill hoping to have a brush with those slippery Uhlans.

"But I haven't introduced myself; I'm Jean de Marc, captain in the 40th Chasseurs, and at your service. I'd like to hear more about your brush with these fellows, who will be attended to. A horse is at your disposal, if you are able to ride."

Grey thankfully accepted the generous offer. At the command, the cavalrymen fell into rank, the one whose horse Grey appropriated mounting behind a comrade. Then, with the crestfallen Franc-tireurs closely guarded, the cavalcade took its way toward Paris.

CHAPTER IX.

A VACANT HOUSE.

As they rode along Grey explained to the Breton captain the adventures he had encountered in his journey, and the object of his visit to Paris, at a time when most foreigners were hurrying away from the threatened city. De Marc expressed his concern, and courteously offered to be of any possible assistance to the Grey family.

"Thank you!" said the American, with the cordiality he was always ready to show toward an acquaintance who impressed him favorably. "If the Prussians spring the trap before we can get away from Paris I may call upon you for some favors. At present the principal thing I want is——" he paused and consulted the address upon an envelope which he drew from his pocket—"to know the shortest way to 49 Rue Avon."

De Marc started slightly and repeated the address after him.

"I can direct you there easily," he added after a moment, "but I advise you to remove your family from that section as soon as possible. The house must be under the very shadow of the fortifications at the Porte Dauphine, and I'm afraid your rest will be disturbed when the big dogs on the ramparts begin to bark."

Grey looked anxious.

"We'll move bag and baggage if the governor is able to travel," he said. "I've seen a part of the German army, and it's my opinion that if we don't get out of Paris within the next few days we can't get out at all."

Grey parted from De Marc before the latter's quarters, one of the fashionable hotels of the Boulevard des Italiens, now turned into a barracks for the Breton regiment, and set off in search of his family. As he went along he contrasted the appearance of the city with what it had been a year before when he passed through on his way to Vienna.

Then he had seen the Paris of pleasure and fashion. Now he beheld a somber, silent Paris, subdued by the impending threat of siege.

The shops were closed. The cafés still held their throngs of frequenters, but these were gathered in little groups about the tables discussing the latest news, the rumors from the front, and the preparations for defense.

The streets had lost all their bright

colors. The few women whom he passed wore gowns of black or gray or violet, the colors of mourning. Carriages had almost disappeared from the streets. Their places had been taken by men on horseback, officers, aides, and couriers galloping hither and thither.

But while civilian Paris had disappeared, martial Paris was everywhere in evidence. Four out of every five men wore some badge of war. Those who could not display the red stripes of the Guard appeared with the Geneva cross of the ambulance corps.

The theaters had been converted into hospitals. A regiment of the National Guard was quartered in the Bourse, and marched up and down the inclosed space before the building to do its prescribed amount of daily drill.

No dramatic effect that could heighten the tension of the situation was lacking. In characteristic fashion Paris was preparing to resist the invader to the last.

Grey knew the city well enough to find his way under ordinary circumstances, but its aspect had changed so greatly that he paused frequently to inquire the proper direction from one of the uniformed "guardians of the peace" who had replaced the gendarmes. They answered his question readily enough, and the answer was always the same:

"Over yonder by the Porte Dauphine."

It was taken for granted that everybody in Paris knew the location of the Porte Dauphine. It was the spot to which the eyes of the Parisians turned often and anxiously.

There were planted the great cannon which were the final defense of the city. The newspapers and the popular orators declared that the Prussians would never get within range of those cannon, but the populace liked to gather about the big, silent, black guns and address them by affectionate names, and estimate how many Prussians could be exterminated by each discharge from their brazen throats.

Grey found a crowd of two hundred or more collected there when he finally reached the fortification. Their necks were craned upward as the necks of similar crowds had been craned every day for two weeks watching the soldiers who were adjusting the pieces in position, training them on the hills outside the city where the Prussians were presently to appear, and signaling to other detachments on the other fortifications to north and south.

Grey paused to watch them for a moment, and a friendly bourgeois at his side said with a chuckle, as he pointed to a piece just placed in position:

"That new one is the largest of them all. The soldiers call it the Terror. Its range is three thousand meters. It will give the Prussians a shaking up if they come too near. They say that when it is fired it will shatter every window for ten squares around."

Grey nodded and pressed on through the crowd. The Terror was well enough, he thought to himself, but its vicinity was no place for the colonel and Celia. He inquired of a civil guard with a grimy tricolor in his cap for the Rue Avon.

"There it is," said the guard, pointing to the entrance of a deserted street directly before them, "but it is in the hands of the military."

"In the hands of the military?" gasped Grey in alarm. "What for?"

In his excitement he spoke in English, but the man evidently understood the import of his question.

"They are tearing down some of the houses," he said, "so that ammunition and additional guns may be hauled up there," pointing to the top of the fortifications. "The others have been ordered vacated because it would be unsafe for people to remain in them after the cannonading begins."

Grey pressed on to the entrance to the street, where he was stopped by a national guardsman, who presented the

bayonet of his *tarbetaire* at the American's breast, but spoke civilly enough.

"It is not permitted to pass here, monsieur," he said.

"But I must go inside," replied Grey. "I am an American, and have just arrived in Paris. My father and sister have been residing here. If they have removed I may at least find where they have gone."

The guard bowed politely to show that he understood, but kept his weapon poised before him, and said merely:

"We have our orders. No one is to pass."

Grey protested volubly in French and English, but with no effect on the guardsman. Presently a sergeant came up. Grey appealed to him, but he was as polite and as firm as the other had been. He finally consented, however, to lay the matter before the lieutenant in charge of the guard.

A third time Grey went over his story. The lieutenant protested that the proceeding would be irregular, but, yielding to the urgency of the case, he offered to accompany Grey to Number 49.

The result was disappointing. The house, a roomy, old fashioned one, was empty and deserted. The floors and walls had been stripped, the doors stood open, and the windows had been taken out. There was nothing to show what had become of the occupants.

On the trampled grass plot before the building men were piling cannon balls, food for the capacious maw of the Terror, frowning above them.

They searched in vain for the concierge or for any one who could tell them whether the late occupants of the house had gone.

At length one of the workmen remembered that Calcart, the concierge, was now a sergeant in one of the regiments of reserves. He could not recall the number of the regiment, but believed that it was the 27th.

Wearily Grey set out to follow this slender clue. He succeeded better than he had dared to hope, for he found Sergant Calcart without difficulty, going through wonderful evolutions in company with his regiment in an open space near the Jardins des Plantes.

Calcart remembered the old gentleman and his daughter perfectly. The father had been very ill, but improved of late. When the order to vacate the house came he had been able to go away in a closed carriage driving very slowly. Where they had gone Calcart did not know.

It had all happened so suddenly; there had been much confusion; nobody left any address; he had enlisted on that day. Probably monsieur and his daughter had gone to a hotel; but, on the other hand, they might have gone to some other apartment. Really, Calcart could not tell anything about it.

Finding that he had followed a blind trail, Grey turned to retrace his steps. He was tired out from the exertions of the day, and sick at heart from his disappointment.

The short September afternoon had waned. Darkness was coming on. There were few lights along the avenues, and the interminable rows of buildings showed in ill defined outlines in the dusky twilight. Somewhere in that great forest of brick and stone were the colonel and Celia. But where?

Grey could not answer that; he could only search for them through Paris. Meanwhile, the march of the Prussians came steadily nearer and nearer. Time was passing, the precious time which they three should improve by putting the greatest possible distance between themselves and the doomed city.

CHAPTER X.

A MEETING IN THE RUE ST. LAZARE.

UNDER ordinary circumstances, to find a person of unknown address in Paris would have been no easy matter. At a time when the city was turned upside down by the presence of war, when

troops were everywhere, and many houses had been closed by their owners, it became doubly difficult.

It was with small assurance of success that Grey set out on his quest the following morning.

He resolved to go first to the American legation. At a time like this the minister should be informed as to the whereabouts of all the Americans in Paris.

He found the legation readily enough, but no tidings of those whom he sought. The minister had been away, had returned since the outbreak of the war. He had heard nothing of Colonel Grey and his daughter.

At the hotels Grey met with no better success. In most of them he was informed curtly that no Americans were stopping there. Thus another day passed—the fourteenth. On the morrow the gates of the city were to be closed, and nobody could pass in or out without special permission.

As a result of his experiences on his second day in Paris, Grey learned to be careful in the matter of asking questions. The manner of every person interrogated at once became suspicious. He found that the fact of his being an American was the reverse of a recommendation to most of the inhabitants.

He saw many instances of the senseless suspicions of the populace. On the Fauborg St. Antoine an old woman was going along with a basket half full of vegetables on her arm. She had the stalwart form of a peasant, though somewhat bent with age. Her face was seamed and wrinkled, and she had the misfortune to display a perceptible growth of hair on her upper lip.

The latter fact was observed by the loiterers before one of the wine shops, among whom were several *gardes mobiles*. Instantly they surrounded the harmless creature, demanding to know her business and her destination.

Those on the outskirts of the crowd that gathered were unable to see what had happened, and repeated the story told them by those in front—that a German officer had been arrested disguised as a woman.

The poor creature, bewildered by the cries and shouts that arose on every side of her, stood helpless in the center of the mob, which, with Parisian abandon, soon worked itself into a frenzy. The dame was hustled from side to side, and half her garments were torn off before an officer of the guards, seeing her plight, drove back the crowd and carried her away to a police station for protection.

Other instances of the unreasoning suspicions that filled the minds of the citizens Grey encountered at every turn. These affairs filled him with anger and alarmed him for the safety of his family. He must find them, and must find them quickly. The mood of Paris was one of violence that would not respect either age or weakness.

Having reached the end of his own resources, Grey resolved to go and visit his new found friend, the Breton captain, in the hope that he might be able to suggest something.

De Marc showed genuine concern when he heard that the other had been unable to find his family. He looked thoughtfully at the floor for a few moments. Then he said:

"It is a difficult matter. The confusion in the city makes it impossible to seek one out by the ordinary means. I can think of only one recourse that you have not tried. That is to go to the prefect of police. He is the Count de Kératry, a Breton, and a man who can be trusted. I know him and shall be glad to accompany you to his office in the morning. Meanwhile do not be disturbed. The fact that you have been unable to get tidings of your family is the best indication that they are safe."

It was cold comfort, but the hearty sympathy of De Marc was reassuring, and decided the American to follow the captain's advice. Accordingly, he promised to be on hand at noon on the following day, and returned to the lodg-

ing he had occupied the night before, declining De Marc's offer of a bed in his own quarters.

The visit to the prefect did not help the case. The officer listened to his recital, took down his name, and a description of Colonel Grey and Celia. He would call the attention of his agents to the matter, but he could promise nothing.

On their return they visited the station of the Western Railway. De Marc had a package which he desired to send, and it was feared that communication with the outside world would cease in a day or two more. Thence they strolled slowly back toward De Marc's quarters.

In the Rue St. Lazare, near the Church of the Trinity, they came upon one of the gatherings that were frequently met in the streets of Paris in those days of alarm and violence.

A gesticulating crowd had gathered about a carriage, which was endeavoring to make its way along the street. The carriage was closed, the curtains were drawn, and the driver made his way slowly and with care.

Curiosity or some other motive had led a few loiterers to follow after the vehicle. Others saw and joined them, until there was a good sized crowd on either side, keeping pace with the progress of the coach.

None of the crowd knew quite why they were following the carriage. The various additions to the mob inquired of the others who was inside. Nobody knew, but there were plenty who were ready to hazard guesses.

Somebody averred that it was an aged royalist who was making his escape from the city. Another added that it was the Marshal Vaillant. A brawny workman from the Fauborg St. Antoine caught the remark and shouldered his way forward.

"Running away, is he, the old aristocrat?" he said loudly. "We'll make a republican of him before he goes, at any rate."

He seized the horses by the bridle reins and brought them to a stop, unheeding the expostulations of the coachman.

"Tell the aristocrat to step out and shout 'Vive la Republique!' if he wants to go any further," he called out to the crowd.

As the carriage came to a stop the mob had closed in on it. Now they began howling like wolves after a quarry.

"The oath! Let him take the oath."

De Marc and Grey, who had been advancing in the same direction as the carriage, had watched the proceedings with interest. As the shouts arose, De Marc said bitterly:

"Paris is always Paris. When revolution stirs the cup the dregs rise to the surface."

Suddenly he uttered a sharp exclamation. Grey, who had been intent in watching the burly workman who had begun to harangue the crowd, looked inquiringly at him.

"There is a woman inside the carriage," said De Marc. "I saw her face an instant as she drew back the shade. By Heaven! she shall not be insulted by this canaille," he added hotly, moving hastily forward toward the crowd. Grey followed.

"Stand back there!" cried De Marc, commandingly, as he came up to the outskirts of the group.

The men near at hand gazed at him without moving, while the speaker stopped his harangue for a moment in surprise at the interruption.

"Stand back," the Breton cried again, but nobody moved.

The captain's dark face flushed. He drew his sword impetuously and struck the men nearest to him across the breasts with the flat of it. There was a sudden murmur from the crowd, but they fell back slowly.

Force could command its way with them where fair words would have availed nothing.

Breaking his way through the crowd,

De Marc took his place at the horses' heads, while Jack took the opposite side. They moved slowly forward into the open space before the church, while the crowd stood in silence watching them.

When they were clear of the throng, De Marc relinquished his place and turned to let the carriage pass, gazing at the window as though he hoped for at least a smile from the fair face to reward him.

The shade had been raised a few inches. The young woman was looking out. De Marc received the expected smile and raised his hat gallantly. He was not prepared, however, for the sequel to the affair.

Grey had come around from the opposite side of the carriage and paused beside him. As he appeared the carriage door was thrown open and the young woman stepped hastily out. There was a cry of "Celia" and another of "Jack." In an instant the two were embracing each other.

De Marc stood in amazement, his plumed helmet still in his hand, while the crowd melted away, convinced that it had been mistaken in believing that it had unearthed a treason against the republic.

Explanations followed quickly. Grey grasped the bony, wasted hand of his father, who lay on an improvised pallet inside the carriage. Then he introduced De Marc.

"We are nearly at the end of our trip," said Celia, when they had begun to recover their composure. "You see, we are moving to new quarters. Our first place, a pretty old house well outside the city, was torn down to make room for the fortifications. Then we went to an obscure little hotel, hoping to remain undisturbed, but the government took that to quarter troops in. I hunted two days before I found an apartment that seemed to be safe and at the same time what we wanted. It is just around the corner in the Rue Clichy."

"Then drive there at once," said Grey; "we can talk later."

They did talk later, going step by step over the story of their various experiences.

Grey found that the colonel was still too ill to think of leaving the city. The excitement and the moving about had made him worse once more.

"It's just as well you have this apartment," said the son, finally. "The gates of Paris are to be closed tomorrow. I reckon we shall want to occupy these quarters for some time."

CHAPTER XI.

THE NINETEENTH OF SEPTEMBER.

SINCE it was impossible to remove his father from Paris in his weak condition, Grey settled down to make the best of affairs. What with remaining in the invalid's room, making himself familiar with the surrounding neighborhood, and visiting the inner fortifications, the first three days passed quickly.

Everywhere he found a spirit of restlessness. Wild rumors were rife as to the Prussians. Bulletins appeared on every corner, each a contradiction of the others.

At one hour it was announced that the black and white pennons of the Uhlans had been seen fluttering in the direction of Versailles. This was superseded by the report that the enemy were yet two days distant from Paris.

Of one thing Grey was sure. The circle of invasion was closing in like a garotte, to throttle Paris. Twenty times each day he cursed the luck that held his father from attempting a journey.

There was yet time to leave the city; once outside the fortifications, the order signed by Bismarck would assure a passage through the encircling Germans.

He had thought to conduct the colonel and his sister to a place of safety, then attach himself, as an observer, to

St. Albans' Uhlans, or perhaps to the general staff. All the excitement was to be found in the Prussian ranks; the French were like rats caught in a trap—and he with them.

On the nineteenth of September all doubts were removed as to the location of the Germans. On the morning of that day Grey accompanied Captain De Marc to one of the outer forts, a chain of which encircled Paris.

Standing on the ramparts, he examined through his glass the horizon to the east. Dark specks hovered everywhere, the advance guard of the besiegers. De Marc, who had been gazing intently in the same direction, shut his glass with a snap.

"The siege has begun," said he bitterly, "but those Prussians have reckoned without their host. We shall see if Paris is helpless."

Grey shook his head. Mentally he was calculating how long it would take that magnificent fighting machine, welded together by Von Moltke and Bismarck, to batter down the defense of a desperate people.

"Today," continued De Marc, "there will be a sortie against those fellows, and—you will see. My Chasseurs are to take part in the engagement." Then, more soberly: "You have been in Paris for some days; what is your opinion as to the mind of the people?"

"Paris will fight," said Grey, "and she comprehends the seriousness of her position. Last night I dropped into a billiard room, and picked up a cue. The proprietor raised his hands in protest.

"'*Mon Dieu!* would you play at such a time?' cried he; 'it is the hour for muskets.'

"Your women are dressed in black. Your theaters closed. Yesterday I saw a cartoon of the emperor; the people remember Sedan."

The captain of Chasseurs smiled faintly.

"You are a keen observer, M. Grey," he said; "if the Prussians entered the streets of Paris they would find a barricade on every corner. Even the women would fight."

"You say there is to be a sortie?" asked Grey.

"Today," replied De Marc. "I must return at once to prepare myself. You should see my Chasseurs then, *mon ami*."

A sudden idea seized Grey.

"Captain de Marc," he said, "would there be an objection to my accompanying your Chasseurs?"

The Frenchman raised his eyebrows.

"As to objections, there could surely be none," he replied; "it would be an honor to have one who has served under your famous Grant, ride by my side against the Germans, but——"

"I did not mean in that way," interrupted Grey, seeing the other's mistake. "The nature of my errand to Paris and the probable necessity of again passing through the German lines, force neutrality upon me. But I would like to see the fight just the same and—your Chasseurs in action."

The last touched the Frenchman, as Grey knew it would; De Marc was very proud of his Chasseurs.

"*Dame!*" he cried, "I cannot deny you that; to see them break those terrible Prussians. But has M. Grey considered? There will be bullets in plenty, and your father is still in Paris."

Grey's face sobered.

"You speak truly," said he, scarcely able to conceal his disappointment. "I'm not afraid for myself, but the colonel and my sister; that's another matter."

De Marc looked his sympathy. Born a soldier, he understood his companion's eagerness to witness the prospective battle.

"*Tiens!*" he exclaimed, "there is a way—the ambulance corps, and you need not be idle."

Grey jumped at the suggestion. With the Red Cross he would be less exposed to danger, which, for his father's sake, he must avoid, and the sem-

blance of breaking faith with the Germans would be obliterated.

Returning to the city, he found it as De Marc had said. The streets leading to the fortifications on the west were filled with soldiers. There were infantrymen of Rénault's corps, in baggy scarlet trousers, short blue frocks, and white gaiters; chasseurs in blue and silver; zouaves with bewhiskered faces surmounted by the little fez cocked over one ear, their jackets heavily braided, the deadly saber bayonet dangling at belt.

There were also battalions of mobiles, vicious, insubordinate, armed with breech loading rifles, the use of which they understood but little.

Grey could not but compare the appearance of these French soldiers who were to be hurled against the Prussians, with the Prussians themselves, and the odds were all in favor of the latter.

Keeping close to Captain De Marc's side, he wended his way through the crowded streets to the headquarters of the 40th Chasseurs.

Already the command was under arms, their faultless equipment and soldierly bearing forming a striking contrast to the regiment of mobiles drawn up along the street opposite.

De Marc pointed to a brick building a few rods away.

"It is the quarters of the ambulance corps," he explained; "I will introduce you to the officers."

A score of sober faced men were hurrying to and fro when Grey entered the building. A row of stretchers stood against the wall, ready to be borne out to receive their ghastly burdens. The red cross on its white background was everywhere; on the sleeves of the members of the corps, on the little square flags hanging limply from their poles, stacked in a corner.

A white haired surgeon greeted Grey's companion. In a few brief words De Marc explained his errand.

"You are welcome to accompany us," said the surgeon, extending a moist hand to Grey; "we are rushed to death; the order to accompany the troops came only an hour ago."

Grey declined the offer that the red cross be attached to his sleeve. It seemed to him a betrayal of trust in any way to ally himself with the French service, but he told the surgeon he would accompany the corps and assist if his aid were required.

The morning was yet young when the sallying party was put in motion. The Germans occupied the plateau of Châtillon, and it was the purpose of the French commander to drive them pell mell from their position.

The troops were well out of the city when Grey, with the ambulance corps, passed the inner fortifications and moved toward the plateau. The sun shone clear in a cloudless sky, a gentle breeze swept up from the west; all about the fields were green.

Grey's mind went back to the days of his campaigning in the Shenandoah. The blare of bugles, the glitter of arms, the rumble of the artillery stirred his blood. A wild desire filled his breast to be in the saddle once more, knee to knee with Captain De Marc's Chasseurs, but he plodded along beside the stretcher carriers, nursing his impatience.

Had the Germans refused him entrance into Paris, or obstructed his way, it would have been different, but he remembered Bismarck's kindness and the friendliness of St. Albans.

Suddenly, far in front, the crack, crack of an irregular discharge told that the infantry were opening the battle. The plateau of Châtillon was in sight. A cloud of white smoke floated heavenward, marking the firing line.

The rattle of the discharges grew more frequent. Then the deep cadence of a cannon rolled over the plain. The pieces of twelve on the earthwork redoubt by which the French commanded the plateau, were smoking like a hundred forges.

The ambulance corps quickened its

step; the stretchers would not long remain empty.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PLATEAU OF CHATILLON.

THE battle was raging fiercely. Grey, from his place of vantage, swept the field with his glass.

The red legged infantry of the line was crawling like a snake toward the curling bar of smoke which marked the German position. To the right he saw the battalions of Zouaves standing motionless as though undecided what to do. On the left there was an inexplicable inaction; what was the French commander thinking of?

The center was hurling itself upon the Prussians; firing, charging, staggering, under the deadly fire from the needle guns.

An almost uncontrollable impulse seized Grey to rush forward and urge the wings to advance upon the enemy. Already the Germans were taking advantage of the stupid blunder. Their fire was concentrated against the valiant soldiers of the line, pushing straight across the center of the plateau.

In the excitement of the scene before him he forgot the ambulance corps of which he was supposed to be a part. Its members were already busy at work upon the field; the snowy whiteness of the stretchers was gone; the blood of France had changed it to a darker hue.

Far to the front Grey saw the dark lines of the Prussians, their front flecked with the drifting white smoke from the needle guns. The plateau was covered by vapor, which concealed the progress of the battle.

Suddenly, on the right, the raw Zouaves wavered. He heard the cries of their officers bidding them stand firm. A shell from a German gun exploded above their heads, scattering a rain of iron in every direction, and the next moment the Zouaves were gone, fleeing like frightened sheep toward Paris.

Grey swept his glass around the field until it rested on the Prussian ranks. They were moving forward, firing as they advanced, halting, moving on, firing again. Here and there fluttered the black and white pennon of a Uhlan, above the smoke floated the flags of Germany; but advancing, always advancing.

"They come on bravely," muttered Grey; "in a moment it will be too late; if the Zouaves had only stood firm."

Even as he spoke the Prussians broke into a run, seized the position which the Zouaves should have held, and turned to outflank the French division under Caussade. A third of the battle was already lost.

Suddenly Grey's attention was riveted upon a movement in the center; the Chasseurs of the 40th were advancing to the charge.

On its flanks thundered the French artillery, sweeping the plateau with a shower of lead and iron. The fire of the Prussians slackened; flesh and blood could not withstand that torrent of death from the French guns.

The smoke, piled up in rolling clouds, drifted away. Grey heard the shrill tones of the cavalry bugles; through the smoke he saw the glitter of steel as the Chasseurs hurled themselves upon the lines in blue.

He knew that De Marc was there, but in the seething mass of charging horsemen he could not distinguish individuals.

Suddenly, from the grove of Clamart, the objective point of the Chasseurs' wild dash, burst a great puff of white smoke. The Germans had unmasked their mitrailleuses and received the intrepid horsemen with a storm of iron.

Grey, trembling with excitement, stared through the glass until his eyes ached. It was glorious—the grandsons of those who made that famous charge at Waterloo were repeating history.

The boom, boom of the Prussian cannon seemed to increase; then it died away, and the war cloud hung sullenly over the plain. In his eagerness to see what was happening, Grey could have brushed it aside with his hands.

He lowered the glass and wiped the lens with his pocket handkerchief. When he raised it again a groan burst from his lips. The Chasseurs were coming back—their ranks decimated. The deep boom of the iron guns had given place to the crack, crack of the Prussian rifles.

Grey could see that the sortie had failed. The Zouaves were probably well within the second fortifications. The battalions of Mobiles, unable to stand against the fire of the German cannon, were in full retreat. The repulse of De Marc's Chasseurs ended all hope for the French.

From his elevated position Grey could see the center, which had for hours beaten against the wall of invaders, fall sullenly back. There was no disorder, no tumult, but the French were in full retreat.

First a few companies, dust covered and smoke stained, drifted past. The soldiers moved as though overcome with weariness, but the tricolor snapped defiantly in the evening breeze. Then came some pieces of artillery; the majority of the batteries were in the Prussians' hands. Behind the artillery the plateau was filled with the red legged soldiers of the line—falling back upon Paris.

Mingled with the infantrymen rode the Chasseurs; Grey sought for De Marc. At last he saw him, blackened and blood stained, but sitting upright in the saddle beneath the flag of France. At the same moment their eyes met and a faint flush sprang to the Chasseur's cheeks; the American had witnessed the triumph of the Prussians.

Picking his way out of the crowd, he reined in his horse at Grey's side.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he muttered, "you saw it all, and—my Chasseurs!"

Grey seized the hand hanging limply at the rider's side.

"Could valor have won, their line would have been cut in pieces," said he kindly. "It was magnificent—like Waterloo, but against those cannon, the best troops in the world could not have crossed that plain."

"It was those cursed Mobiles," said the captain savagely; "had they stood their ground—but wait—you saw the *line* stand firm; next time it will not be the French who run."

The troops fell back rapidly, leaving the plateau in possession of the Germans. These did not follow up their advantage; the cannon in the forts of Issy and Vannes kept them at a respectful distance. Perhaps they were content to have held their own.

Grey reëntered Paris with the weary soldiers. The streets leading from the fortifications were thronged with military. News of the defeat was in every mouth. There were angry murmurs against the officers who, it was said, had sold themselves to the enemy.

A man was nailing a placard to a wall. It announced the "momentary check of the sallying party," and called upon all Frenchmen to take up arms for the defense of Paris.

Nearer the center of the city the crowd was more boisterous; it was composed of those who later would plunge Paris into a senseless revolution; the embryo of the Commune.

Grey's path led him through this crowd. Everywhere he saw scowling faces, evil looks, and heard the mutterings against the governor and the ministers. Some one shouted, "*A bas traiteur!*"

The cry was taken up and carried along the street. A man crazed with wine and anger struck wildly into space, another waved frantically a red handkerchief.

Grey quickened his step, anxious to escape from so unpleasant a locality.

Reaching a corner, he found the way blocked by a shouting mob, one of

whom was reading aloud from a placard. Something flashed before his eyes. Instinctively he turned, his fingers upon the butt of his revolver. It was none too soon; close at his side stood Le Bete, an open knife in his hand.

CHAPTER XIII.

A WAIF OF PARIS.

A THRILL of something akin to fear swept over Grey as he noted the savage grin with which Le Bete regarded him. There was something uncanny, devilish, about the fellow's ugliness.

Le Bete seemed in nowise disconcerted by the failure of his attempt to take the American's life. He backed quickly away into the crowd after his first ghastly grin.

Nobody in the throng made any effort to interfere with him. The news of the bulletins was too engrossing for an attempted assassination to divert them.

Grey's impulse was to shoot the creature down. He could never feel secure in Paris with the thought that this earless being might spring upon him at any moment. Then he reflected that such a course might lead to complications, might interfere with his plans for leaving Paris.

He advanced in Le Bete's direction. He would at least show the fellow that he was not frightened.

Le Bete, who had converted himself into a presentable *garde mobile* by the addition of a uniform coat and trousers to his previous outfit, watched his coming. He did not seem to be afraid either, but backed against the wall of the street, holding his right hand in his pocket. Probably it grasped a knife or revolver.

Grey observed with satisfaction that his other arm was bandaged and in a sling. That was a memento of their former meeting, and the motive of Le Bete's attack.

He moved close to the ruffian's side.

"You cowardly sneak!" he began in the tense, quiet tone that always indicated his fiercest anger. "Trying to knife me in the back, were you? I'll let you off this once, but if ever you come near me again, I'll shoot you down on sight."

Le Bete's answer was a torrent of the vilest abuse. Grey paid no attention, but turned back to take his former place beside De Marc. As they went on he related his previous experiences with Le Bete and his fellows.

"Oh," said the Breton bitterly, "there are many cutthroats, such as he, who disgrace the uniform, seeking not fighting, but pillage. You should have turned him over to the police."

"To tell the truth," replied Grey, laughing, "I did not want him to think that I was afraid of him. I will admit, though, that when I first caught sight of him it gave me a queer start."

"You cannot afford to laugh at him," said De Marc. "Knaves of his ilk know the byways of Paris as a fox does his burrow. A knife thrust in a dark alley is their reliance. You must not be too rash."

"Oh," rejoined Grey carelessly, "I'll be ready for him next time. You see, I never thought of his being in Paris, or he wouldn't have caught me napping."

The conversation turned to other matters, and Grey dismissed the incident from his mind. Only, as he was turning into the courtyard of his new home in the Rue Clichy, he caught sight of a figure shambling along in the obscurity of the trees on the opposite side of the street.

There was something familiar in the slouching gait. Grey looked intently, but was certain that he must be mistaken. He had come at a brisk pace. Could it be that Le Bete had kept up with him, was dogging his footsteps?

"I'll keep a weather eye out for that gentleman," he thought, as he turned to enter the yard.

And he whistled cheerily to drive off the uncomfortable feeling that the thought of Le Bete inspired in him.

At the breakfast table the following morning Grey recounted the events of the preceding day.

"That means that Paris is bottled up," he explained at the end of his narrative. "Von Moltke will see that the cork is well driven in. The city is in no danger for the present, but we had best lay in a good stock of provisions. I don't fancy that anything without wings will get in or out for some time to come."

Celia had taken it upon herself to do the marketing, and went out every morning to buy fresh meat and such vegetables as were to be had.

Grey accompanied her at first, but he soon found that she was much better able than he to cope with the extortionate shopkeepers. For himself he found much more enjoyment in roaming about the city, visiting the fortifications or chatting with De Marc.

The latter had called at the house in the Rue Clichy several times on Grey's invitation. Colonel Grey and he soon became great friends. The old soldier and the young one admired and respected each other for the courage common to both. Even Celia, who affected to despise all foreigners, admitted that De Marc was a charming companion and an exception to the general rule.

To the mind of the young girl, their experience was highly entertaining. With Jack's presence and the gradual recovery of her father, she began to enjoy it thoroughly. It was her first taste of war. She knew nothing of the dangers and privations that were likely to occur.

But it was thrilling to think of being shut up in this great city with an army outside pounding at the walls which, the Parisians said, would never yield.

So she went wherever she pleased under the guise of marketing. She proposed to see whatever of interest was going on in the city, and made her way about with the self possession characteristic of an American girl.

She took flowers to the hospitals, little delicacies to the ambulance headquarters, and a dozen times a day underwent risks that would have made Jack's hair stand on end had he known of them.

One morning, some ten days after the beginning of the siege, Miss Celia reappeared at home, followed by a queer bundle of tatters, that proved, on closer inspection, to be a girl of twelve or thereabouts. Her hands were black and grimy, her short hair was twisted into an unkempt braid, and her feet were incased in sabots of different sizes. Her face had the old, drawn look of the street child.

Her eyes were black, roving, hawk-like, with the glance of the scavenger, the look that distinguishes the waifs of Paris.

Celia introduced her new charge at luncheon.

"This is Héloise," she said; "I found her near the Quai d'Orsay. Some boys were tormenting her, and I drove them off. She said she had no home to go to, so I brought her here. You know I have the care of the house on my hands, and I really need some one to help me. Héloise can do the rougher work."

Jack surveyed the new acquisition with distinct disfavor. He did not like those eyes. Somehow they reminded him instinctively of the eyes of Le Bete.

But he had not the heart to interfere with his sister's charitable designs, so he kept his distrust to himself.

Héloise seemed to feel little interest in the change that had taken place in her fortunes. She was obedient and silent, carrying out Celia's orders with doglike fidelity.

She ate ravenously for the first few days whenever food was offered to her. Evidently she feared that a state of affairs which included enough to eat was too good to last.

Gradually, however, as she found that there was to be plenty of food and no beatings, her first attitude of mistrust wore off, and she evinced a will-

ingness to do whatever was required of her.

Little by little Celia got her story, and detailed it to her father and Jack.

Her mother Héloise could not remember. She had had a father, but had not seen him for a long time. He had been kind to her sometimes, though he had beaten her often. The woman in whose charge he had left her when he was taken away by the gendarmes had beaten her always. She had sent the child into the streets to beg, and had whipped her because she did not bring home money enough.

Since the siege there had been little giving to beggars, and Héloise had not dared go home. On the day when Celia found her she had intended to throw herself into the Seine. That was the history of Héloise.

The supervision of her household and the care of her new charge afforded plenty of occupation for Celia. But as day after day went by with no change, it began to pall upon the others.

Now that he had recovered enough to get about, Colonel Grey was impatient of the circumstances which kept them shut up in the besieged city. Jack was in despair at the inactivity.

"There's absolutely nothing doing," he declared ruefully. "It's simply a game of freeze out, and we are on the losing side."

One evening early in October, however, he came in with a more cheerful countenance than usual.

"General Burnside is in the city," he said excitedly to his father. "He came through the German lines today. You and I will call upon him at the legation in the morning, and if it can be arranged, we will go out with him when he leaves, in a day or two."

CHAPTER XIV.

A VISITOR FROM THE PRUSSIANS.

When Jack and his father reached the house of Minister Washburne on the following morning, they found that they were by no means the only Americans desirous of leaving the besieged city. There was a crowd of their countrymen there, all anxious to meet General Burnside, and more anxious to know when they could get out of Paris.

The minister explained the situation to them, saying that the great number of requests for passes made it impossible to grant any of them without consulting the German authorities.

Through General Burnside, he was sending a message to Bismarck asking the latter to set a day when all properly accredited Americans who desired to leave the city might pass through the Prussian lines. The twenty seventh of October had been suggested as a satisfactory date for this purpose.

There was every reason to believe that Bismarck would assent to the plan. His answer would be received in the course of a few days. Meanwhile the best that they could do would be to contain themselves in patience.

This arrangement was far from satisfying the Americans. They had at first announced their intention of remaining in Paris to the end of the siege, but as its rigors became more and more severe they decided that they would much prefer to be outside the walls.

The prospect of a definite date on which they would be permitted to depart, however, was something, even though that date was three weeks' distant. Most of them were suffering no great inconvenience by their isolation from the world. It was the prospect of long months of this dreary waiting that was discouraging to them.

Therefore, they accepted the minister's plan with the best grace possible under the circumstances.

Grey did not wait for the conclusion of the conference at the legation. A balloon was advertised to leave Paris on this day, and he was anxious to reach the station at Montmartre, from which it was to depart.

His mission was an important one,

nothing less, in fact, than the sending of a letter to the young woman in Vermont of whom he had spoken to St. Albans, and who had not heard from him for a month or more.

A balloon could carry only one hundred pounds of mail, and there was nearly a hundred tons of it waiting to get out of Paris. But Grey had secured the favor of sending his missive from the American who was one of the managers of the balloon express, and he did not propose to miss the opportunity.

Having delivered the tiny package and wished his compatriot a successful voyage, he joined the waiting throng of thousands who had gathered to witness this attempt to communicate with the outside world.

An adverse wind had made the departure of the airship impossible on the preceding day, but now everything was favorable. Four persons were to make the hazardous attempt. Two of them were the aeronauts who managed the enterprise. The passengers were M. Gambetta, who was going to take the management of French affairs outside the city, and his secretary.

At the aeronaut's cry, "*Lackez tout!*" the balloon was freed from its moorings. It swayed to and fro for a moment, and then rose slowly into the air. The immense crowd burst into excited cheers at the sight.

Presently the balloon paused for an instant; then, catching the breeze, it swept away to the northward. M. Gambetta waved his handkerchief to the dense crowd below. There was another torrent of cheering.

All at once this ceased. The balloon had dipped from view behind the heights of St. Denis. The Prussian camp lay there. Were the bold voyagers to fall into the hands of the enemy?

No, the balloon reappeared, now a speck in the distance, growing smaller and smaller, until it vanished altogether in the blue haze to the northward.

With a final cheer, the crowd scattered in various directions. Grey, having viewed the spectacle to its end, turned to betake himself homeward.

He paused here and there to catch a word from the conversation of the little groups on the street corners and about the bulletin boards. There was much excitement everywhere, but little real information.

Rumors had crept into the city that Strasburg and Toul had fallen. All the groups were discussing it, but nobody could say for certain whether the report was true. The authorities denied all knowledge of it, and the newspapers gave nothing but rumors.

There was a group larger than the others at a corner of the Rue Cardinal. Its members were listening to a man in the center of the circle whose narrative appeared to be highly interesting. At any rate, it held his auditors silent.

Grey attached himself to the crowd. He could hear the speaker's voice, though it was impossible in the dense throng to see what manner of person it was.

The narrator was giving the details of the recent engagements between the French and Prussians in the provinces. He confirmed all the rumors that had depressed the citizens. It was true that Toul and Strasburg were both in the hands of the Prussians, and that a new corps of 15,000 men would soon advance from the latter place to reinforce the besiegers of Paris.

"I know the truth of what I tell you," he went on, "for I reached Paris only today, after making my escape from the Prussians, who gave me this memento."

He held up the sleeve of his coat so that all could see the two bullet holes through it and the bandage wrapped about his arm.

Grey had listened, at first with a puzzled look inspired by some familiarity in the speaker's tones. Gradually a light dawned upon him, and he wormed

his way to the inner circle of the listeners in order that he might see the speaker.

He reached this vantage point just as the man finished his story and held up his injured arm. As he did so he turned about and stood face to face with Grey. It was Raoul St. Albans.

CHAPTER XV.

RAOUL ST. ALBANS.

ALTHOUGH the voice of the speaker had forced into Grey's mind a suspicion as to his identity, the sight of St. Albans filled him with astonishment.

Unconsciously a greeting sprang to his lips, but he checked it ere its utterance betrayed their acquaintanceship. The eyes of the Uhlan gazed straight into his, but the expression of the face or the cadence of the voice did not change.

A start, any manifestation of surprise might have been dangerous. Were the suspicions of the crowd aroused it would become an infuriated mob.

After that one glance St. Albans turned and readdressed the crowd about him. Grey surmised his purpose. With pitiless words he laid bare to the murmuring Frenchmen that which the authorities were desirous of keeping hidden.

"*Dame!*" cried he, pointing to his bandaged arm, "this was received a league from the walls. I tell you, my friends, the Prussians are everywhere; a cat could not pass through their lines."

"And you? You say you came through. How was that?" cried a voice.

"Like a snake!" replied St. Albans quickly. "Between the legs of their horses, under the cannon, close to the campfires. *Mon Dieu!* the army of the empire——"

An angry murmur drowned his voice. He had touched them where the wound was sorest.

"I will tell you, my friends—something," continued he, his voice growing confidential. "I saw the emperor—after Sedan—seated before an inn, smoking with Bismarck. Why was he there? He who should have defended France? Will you tell me that, my friends?"

A wave of passion swept through the listening hundreds; the faces about him grew black and threatening.

"*A bas traiteur!*" cried a score of voices; "he dare not come to Paris."

"He cannot," replied St. Albans; "the Prussians are everywhere. In the fields the plows are idle, but the furrows are deep—cut by the wheels of German cannon. They would deceive you—the ministers, but my eyes have seen it, and—we should have crossed the Rhine."

Driven to frenzy by his words, the crowd surged up and down the street like an angry torrent seeking a channel through which to vent its wrath. Even Grey was moved by the speaker's passionate words; a few such speeches and Paris would have to contend with something worse than the iron grasp of the Prussian, Von Moltke.

St. Albans pushed his way into the crowd, casting, as he did so, a meaning look at the young man.

Grey also moved away, pushing, jostling until he reached the outskirts of the mob, and turned into a narrow, deserted street. Walking slowly, he became aware that footsteps were following. A shadow fell athwart the pavement; then the voice of St. Albans, low but distinct, reached his ear.

"Do not notice me, Herr Grey," it said, "but tell me where you live. I will come tonight."

Mechanically Grey replied. The tall figure of the Uhlan passed him and turned the corner; a shutter clattered above his head; some one had been listening, but the words had been too low to be overheard.

During the remainder of the day Grey thought much of the meeting in the street and the approaching visit of

the Uhlan officer. The hardihood of St. Albans in venturing into Paris at such a time filled him with admiration for the man. Any one of a hundred trivial incidents might disclose his identity to his enemies; he was a spy, and if taken his fate was sealed.

Grey had heard that nothing happened in the French capital which was unknown to the Germans. The state of the city, the restlessness of the populace, and the miserable condition of the troops. It was to such as St. Albans that the Prussians were indebted for their information, and to others—who were bound less closely to the cause of Germany.

At first he thought he would tell the colonel of his meeting with the Uhlan and of the expected visit. But the information would doubtless alarm the invalid. If St. Albans was recognized as a spy, and found in their apartments, even the American minister could not save them from the evil consequences.

As night drew near the young man's restlessness grew stronger. He began to wish that he had appointed some other meeting place with St. Albans; he was burning with impatience to hear from his lips the condition of affairs outside of Paris, and to tell him of the movement set for the twenty seventh, but it might be wiser if they did not meet in the colonel's apartments.

Finally he left the house and paced restlessly to and fro upon the pavement before the door. Half an hour passed; he would return and await the coming of the Prussian.

As he turned the knob of the inner door voices from within arrested his attention. His sister's and another—a manly voice, deeper and gruffer than the colonel's. Astonished that any one should enter the house without his knowledge, he pushed open the door and crossed the threshold.

His father was in his accustomed place in the big armchair; Celia sat beside the table; opposite them, his elbow upon the mantel, stood the Uhlan spy.

Grey stared blankly from one to another. A smile played about the corners of St. Albans' mouth.

"I obtained your address," said he, advancing with outstretched hand, "and hastened to renew old acquaintanceship. I have been telling Colonel Grey that we campaigned together in the Shenandoah."

Had the colonel regarded his son closely he would have seen that something was amiss; the young man's face was a study. He pulled himself together and welcomed St. Albans as befitted the occasion, as an old acquaintance whose coming was a surprise.

The Uhlan hastened to explain his unexpected presence. There was a garden back of the house. He was perfectly familiar with the neighborhood. It was a liberty, but he had come in by the back way; it was always wise to be careful in everything, and—the thing was simple.

Grey accepted the explanation in silence. What manner of man was this reckless Prussian who knew Paris like a street gamin?

The conversation turned upon the war and the investment of the city. St. Albans spoke bitterly, as a Frenchman who realized that his country's cause was lost. The colonel noted that his knowledge of the Prussian army was wonderful; he had no idea that the French were so well informed.

To Celia St. Albans related incidents of the campaign in the provinces, the battle of Sedan, and the meeting of Bismarck and the emperor.

An hour passed quickly. The Uhlan rose to take his leave, promising to call again if his duties permitted. Reaching the street door, he linked arms with Grey, and sank his voice to a whisper.

"You are surprised to see me," said he, "but perhaps you do not know, *mon ami*, how easy it is to get into Paris. Already I have learned much, and a few days will see my task completed. Have you had enough of this fated city?"

Grey acknowledged that he had, and

explained the plan for the twenty seventh.

"I fancy there will be no trouble," replied St. Albans, "but the matter lies in Bismarck's hands, and—he is friendly toward the Americans, as you have seen.

"I would advise you," he continued, "to lose no time in removing Colonel Grey and your sister from Paris. It is quiet now, our forces are not ready, but some day—the city will be filled with bursting shells, famine, and revolution. You heard the mob today?"

"France is lost," interrupted Grey; "Châtillon showed me that."

"They will try again," replied the Uhlan, "but the result will be always the same; a few sorties can gain nothing, but these Frenchmen have not learned their lesson."

Reaching a corner, he stopped and held out his hand. "I will not say farewell," said he, "for we shall meet again; then I may be of service to you."

Breaking into a swinging step he moved away, humming an air of the Latin quarter.

Grey retraced his steps thoughtfully. When nearly opposite his door he saw that he was being followed. Upon the threshold he turned, suddenly. The light from a street lamp fell upon the sidewalk across the way.

Crouching against the wall stood the form of a man. It was Le Bete.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PIGEON'S FLIGHT.

IT is always some little thing that upsets the best laid plan. If a pigeon had not flown out of the yard of the house at 30 Rue Clichy it is probable that Grey and his family would have left Paris on the twenty seventh of October. The pigeon's flight changed many things.

The pigeon was innocent enough. It had been attracted by the crumbs which Celia threw out every evening for the special benefit of their feathered visitors. It had been coming there daily for a week before the evening of October twenty sixth. But its movements had been unnoticed.

This time when the pigeon flew over the low wall alongside the street it lighted in a small tree directly above the heads of two volunteer officers of the Guard, who were taking an evening stroll.

The men halted and gazed up at the bird. Then they looked significantly at each other. They had been talking of the manner in which the Prussians got information of every incident that occurred inside the walls. Perhaps they had found the key to the mystery.

"Who occupies the house?" asked one of the men.

"I don't know," replied the other, who had been a concierge in the vicinity. "It was vacant until a month ago, when it was taken by a family of foreigners."

The two men remained staring in the direction of the house, from which a dim light could be seen shining above the wall. Presently other passers by halted and likewise began gazing towards the house. In fifteen minutes after the pigeon had disappeared in the direction of St. Cloud a hundred persons were gathered in the street.

The newcomers inquired eagerly from those already on the scene as to the cause of the excitement. The two men who had first halted before the house had told them of the pigeon's flight. These passed on the information that some one within the house was sending off pigeons to the Prussians.

By the time the crowd had grown to a hundred, those on its outskirts were relating that a Prussian spy had been tracked to the house and caught in the act of sending pigeon messengers to the army outside.

The populace, eager for excitement, placed ready credence in this last report. Some one inquired if the military had been sent for.

"Why the military?" shouted a red

shirted fellow who carried a big bludgeon in his hand. "The people are here. Let them take care of the spy."

The crowd took up his cry. "*Bien!*" they shouted. "If the spy is within, bring him out. We know how to deal with such as he."

The red shirted one shouldered his way to the front and jangled the bell beside the courtyard gate. Presently the gate opened a crack, and a child's face, the face of Héloise, peered out. At sight of the man her narrow eyes half closed.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

"We want to come in," said the leader roughly. "We have business inside."

He took a step toward the child, but she was too quick for him. Slamming the gate, she sped quickly back toward the house, while the mob, howling with rage, hurled itself against the wall.

It was a large crowd now, and stretched far along the Rue Clichy in both directions. The scent of pillage, as precious to the rabble as the breath of sweets to a swarm of flies, had been carried along the Fauborgs and the dark alleys leading from the side streets.

In response hundreds had emerged from their quarters and followed the trail to the Rue Clichy. They were the dregs of Paris, a gathering of dark browed, evil eyed men and women, and among the foremost was Le Bete.

No intimation of danger had come to those gathered within the house until Héloise, now white with alarm, appeared among them. St. Albans was there, chatting with Colonel Grey. Jack and Celia had been making their final preparation for departure.

It was to be their last night in Paris. On the morrow they would go outside the walls and leave the hungry and despairing city behind.

When Héloise made her appearance Jack looked up inquiringly. He saw from her face that something was amiss.

Héloise was breathless from running and terror. She could only gasp:

"The mob! They are outside. They demand to come in. They will kill us all."

At the same moment, in corroboration of her story, came the angry shouts of those outside, the sound of heavy clubs pounding upon the gateway, the wild cry of the pack in pursuit of its prey.

The five in the room instinctively moved closer together. Celia placed a hand upon her father's shoulder. Héloise cowered behind St. Albans. Jack and the latter looked inquiringly at each other.

St. Albans drew out his revolver and laid it on the table before him. Jack motioned it away.

"Not that," he said, "there is no use in fighting. Some mistake has been made. They will not harm us. I will go out and speak to them."

"If any one here is wanted," said St. Albans quietly, "it is I. Let me go alone."

"No," answered Jack, "you are a guest here, in an American house, and with the rights of an American citizen. Let these bloodhounds satisfy their curiosity. If they try to do more than that I shall demand reparation from the authorities."

The yells from outside were becoming more and more fierce. Jack saw that he must act quickly or the gate would give way before the onslaught.

He stepped outside and advanced to the iron grating in the gateway. Peering out, he could see only a confused mass of human faces looking evil and distorted under the flickering shadows from the street lamps.

"Citizens," he said, in the best French at his command, "I fear that you are making a mistake. What is it you want?"

"We demand entrance," roared the red shirted leader. "There is a Prussian spy inside."

Jack felt his face pale. He feared

that the mission of St. Albans had been discovered. But he replied composedly:

"There is no Prussian spy here. We are Americans and friends of France. But you are welcome to enter. Stand back and I will unbar the gate."

The crowd relapsed into silence at this unexpected acquiescence in their demand. They hesitated a moment when Jack swung wide the heavy iron portal. Then the red shirted man sprang forward, shouting out:

"Now for the spy!"

"The spy! the spy!" echoed the mob and poured into the garden.

Those in front were swept on by the pressure from behind. They could not have halted had they desired to do so. The mob of plunderers in the rear, excited by the hope of loot, were pressing all before them.

Jack led the way to the house. At the threshold of the outer door he turned and faced the crowd.

"Let ten men enter and search the rooms. The others can remain outside to see that nobody escapes."

The man with the cudgel, who had taken the chief part in the proceedings thus far, led the way. Jack let him pass. One by one nine others followed him.

Then Jack barred the way. "I don't mind your searching the house," he said, addressing the throng before him. "But ten men are surely enough for that. My father and sister are within. I won't have them insulted. The first man that tries to force his way in I'll shoot."

He raised his hands, and those before him saw the gleam of a pair of pistols. There was an angry murmur, but several of the men in uniform shouted out:

"That's fair. Let us hear what they find within."

Whether this logic or the sight of the weapons pointed steadily at them convinced the attacking party, they accepted this arrangement and contented themselves with a few jibes and jeers at the Americans until the searchers emerged from the house. Their leader faced the crowd.

"An old man and a girl," he reported, "both Americans. There is also a servant and one of our fine aristocrats, who is merely a guest. That is all. We find nothing suspicious."

He turned to Grey as though to apologize for the action of the crowd. At that moment a man who had pushed his way forward from the rear confronted the group at the door.

It was Le Bete. His ghastly face was inflamed, and there was a malignant gleam in the ferret eyes as he fastened them on Grey.

"This man is a Prussian spy," he shouted hoarsely. "I know him as such, and I denounce him in the name of the republic!"

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE HANDS OF THE MOB.

At this fresh turn of events the crowd surged forward again with another angry howl. Jack's heart sank as he recognized the seared face of his enemy, but he did not lose his outward composure.

As the first outburst of the rabble subsided, he spoke again.

"This man," he said, pointing in the direction of Le Bete with one loaded pistol, "is a thief and an assassin. He tried to rob me, and because I foiled him he now seeks my life."

The mob hesitated, but was not appeased.

"Search him! Search him!" shouted one and another.

Involuntarily Grey took a step backward. He thought of Bismarck's pass which he had carefully placed in his pocketbook for use when they should reach the German lines. It was likely to prove damning evidence against him here.

Those in the crowd who were nearest to him saw his hesitancy and redoubled

their cry of "Search him!" Grey saw that it would be useless to resist.

"Very well," he said, lowering his hands, "you may search me, but I protest against this outrage on an American citizen."

Without more ado the men nearest Jack began to ransack his pockets. They found several letters, and after glancing them over laid them in a little pile at his feet.

When they had nearly completed the inspection the red shirted workman thrust his hand into the breast pocket of Jack's waistcoat and drew out his pocketbook.

Grey's heart stood still as he watched the man open the book upon his knee and begin to run hastily over its contents. Would he discover the fatal paper or would he overlook it?

The latter seemed likely. He had reached almost the end of the list when his eye seemed to light suddenly upon something important. He called excitedly to two men with torches to hold their lights nearer. Then he spread out the paper and ran over its contents. He sprang excitedly to his feet.

"It is true!" he cried. "Here is a pass, a pass through the German lines. It is signed 'Bismarck.'"

The mention of the hated name seemed to throw the mob into a frenzy. A hoarse cry of triumph broke out. It was followed by jeers and catcalls.

Missiles hurled by men in various parts of the crowd began to fall about Grey. Le Bete fairly danced before the accused man in a delirium of joy.

"A thief and an assassin! Is it so?" he cried, showing his ugly fangs. "It would have been better if you had thought less of my thieving and more of your own affairs. I warned you that you should hear from me in Paris. You see that I spoke the truth."

Grey paid no attention to this outbreak. He was waiting for the shouting to subside so that he could make himself heard. At the first lull in the uproar he called out:

"I demand to be examined by the authorities. I can explain all, but it must be before the prefect of police or some officer."

A chorus of jeers greeted this demand.

"We can deal with spies as well as the prefect," shouted one. The rabble continued its one outcry: "Hang him! Hang the spy!"

Grey backed into the doorway.

"Perhaps you can take me," he shouted, "but somebody will bleed for it first."

He closed the door, shutting out the crowd. St. Albans was in the room, his weapons ready.

He had prevailed upon the colonel and Celia to retire to another apartment. The two men placed themselves side by side, behind the upturned table, and prepared for resistance.

In a moment the door crashed in. The red shirted man had broken it down with his cudgel. As he appeared on the threshold one of Grey's pistols spoke, and the intruder fell to the floor. Those beside him would have drawn back, but others behind pushed them on.

"Crack, crack, crack!" went the shots from the weapons of Grey and St. Albans. Their fighting blood was up, and they proposed to make their assailants pay a dear price for their capture.

Four more men fell in the doorway before the tide of battle turned. Then a shot fired from without struck St. Albans in the shoulder. With a groan he sank to the floor.

The child Héloise had been crouching in one corner of the room, unobserved in the excitement. As she saw St. Albans fall she rushed forward with a shrill cry. At the same instant Le Bete, who had climbed to a window ledge outside the room, fired upon the American.

His aim was true, but the shot came at the moment when Héloise was between the two. The ball struck her in

the side and she fell, clutching wildly at the air.

So much blood letting calmed the frenzy of the foremost assailants. The shooting of the young girl put an end to the combat.

A dozen of the uniformed guards who had worked their way as far as the door formed themselves in line and drove back the crowd.

The mob itself had lost its leaders—the red shirted brawler and Le Bete. Therefore it offered no resistance to the guardsmen.

It was true that Le Bete had not been injured, but he was in no mood for further fighting. At the very moment when he fired upon Grey he had caught sight of Héloise rushing across the room.

In an instant he had smashed in the window and was kneeling beside the prostrate girl. He seemed to be in an agony of fear and remorse. Beads of perspiration stood upon his forehead and his hands trembled.

"Holy Virgin! I have killed her," he cried, as the white face was upturned to his; then piteously, "No, it was not I, but some evil spirit that directed the shot."

He paid no attention to the crowd of uniformed men and officers of the police that gradually filled the room, but continued to call alternately upon the Virgin and the unconscious Héloise.

At length the girl opened her eyes and looked up at Le Bete bending over her. She smiled and then closed her lids again, murmuring softly: "*Père! mon père!*"

At that Le Bete drew back as though ashamed of his exhibition of feeling. But he continued to hover near until a surgeon had dressed the girl's wound and declared that it was not dangerous.

Then he slipped away and disappeared in the crowd outside.

Meanwhile news of the affair in the Rue Clichy had sped through Paris. Officers of the police appeared on the scene and took charge of the house and its inmates. Ambulances clattered up and bore away the injured men—all except the leader of the fray, who was beyond the help of surgeons, and St. Albans, who remained in the house, a prisoner like the others.

Captain De Marc, breathless and excited, soon made his appearance. He lent his aid in reassuring the hysterical Celia, gave orders to the guardsmen as though he had been the governor of Paris, and then hastened away to bring his friend, M. Kératry, the prefect.

The latter arrived in company with Mr. Washburne, the American minister, who had come to see that the rights of Colonel Grey and his family, as American citizens, were respected.

M. Kératry listened to the various accounts of the affair, and expressed his regret for it to the minister. The attack of the mob had certainly been unwarranted. There was no ground for believing Mr. Grey to be a Prussian spy. But he must consider himself under arrest for the killing of a citizen.

Doubtless he had been justified; it was a mere matter of form; but the laws must be respected. Curiously enough nobody seemed to think of accusing or suspecting St. Albans. The manner of an aristocrat is a valuable possession at times.

Jack had listened to the discussion with mingled hope and fear. At its conclusion he let his head fall on the table before him with a relieved laugh that was half a groan.

"I suppose we ought to be glad it's no worse," he said, "but it's bad enough to know that we cannot leave Paris now."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE OPENING OF A WINDOW.

THE twenty seventh of October passed, but Grey and his friends still remained in Paris. The efforts of Captain de Marc had saved the young American from a personal accounting

for the " affair of the pigeons," as it was called by St. Albans.

The wound in the Prussian's shoulder proved to be of small moment; a few days under the care of the colonel's doctor set the disguised Uhlan upon his feet again.

With Grey, he was forced to undergo the embarrassment of having every movement watched. De Marc could make no headway in that direction. A soldier was always stationed beside the gate opening into the street.

When Jack or St. Albans appeared a second guard arose from somewhere and followed at a respectful distance. It was plainly the purpose of the authorities to run no risks.

Grey chafed under his enforced constraint. A week had passed since the twenty seventh of October, and he brooded over the lost opportunity to leave Paris with the colonel and his sister.

The colonel took matters quietly. When it came time to leave the city he was ready. To Celia the matter did not seem one of great importance; she was comfortable enough and—De Marc was a frequent visitor at the apartments.

And St. Albans? He was always the same; the cool, cynical aristocrat; bitter against the empire, smiling when the name " republic " was mentioned in his hearing, accepting his surroundings with a calmness which exasperated Grey.

Sometimes he would retire early to his room, and remain there until morning. One night Grey knocked repeatedly upon his panel; the result reminded him of their first night upon the road—there was no answer.

He began to suspect that the Uhlan had a purpose in accepting his lot so contentedly. A subsequent incident confirmed his theory.

One night, ten days after the affair with the mob, Grey left the house, and, followed by the guard, strolled aimlessly through the streets.

Turning a corner, he came upon a body of Mobiles crowding about the door of one of those second rate cafés in which the neighborhood abounded. He was unknown to any one in the crowd, and, pushing his way through it, entered the low, smoky room, in which two score or more men were smoking and drinking.

The thirty first of October had witnessed the first outbreak of the Commune, and the majority of the occupants of the place belonged to the lawless element.

Grey found a vacant chair, and, seized with a sudden feeling of hospitality, beckoned to his guard to join him in partaking of what the house afforded. The fellow, nothing loath, cleared a place for himself, and was soon hidden in a cloud of smoke.

Grey watched the occupants of the room with idle curiosity. There were Mobiles in their slovenly uniforms, half a dozen infantrymen of the line, and a goodly number of less favored personages. It was such a place as Le Bete must love to frequent, and Grey caught himself glancing from face to face, thinking to come upon the evil features of his enemy.

Suddenly he started and leaned forward in his chair. At a table not far away five men were seated; a sergeant of the line, three Mobiles, and a fifth, who, to all appearances, was a cross between a respectable citizen and a bully of the streets.

Grey caught the drift of the conversation. The sergeant, drunk and talkative, was making free with an interesting bit of information he had picked up at headquarters. On the morrow, at dusk, there was to be a grand sortie. The Prussians would be taken completely by surprise, and their lines scattered to the four winds.

The Mobiles remained passively quiet; they had had enough of sorties; the Germans were always ready; they could shoot better than the French and—the authorities were fools.

Not so with the citizen. The sound of his voice, as he dropped here and there a question, which the sergeant readily answered, sent the blood surging to Grey's heart. Despite the disguise, he recognized the questioner. It was St. Albans.

Bewildered almost out of his senses, the young man could only sit and stare, until his fixed gaze attracted the Uhlan's attention. There was a slight upraising of the eyebrows, a lurking smile about the corners of the mouth, and St. Albans went on with his questioning until he knew of what would be of incalculable value to the Germans.

Then he arose, lighted a cigarette and strolled to the door. Few noticed him. The Commune was stamped upon every feature. If any one thought of him at all, it was with the conviction that he was some person in authority, a maker of new conditions, and a man who was best left alone.

When he was gone Grey paid his score, and, followed by the guard, wended his way homeward. In the morning St. Albans was late at breakfast, and there was a sleepless look about his eyes.

The sortie was made and failed, as so many had before. De Marc complained bitterly that in some unknown manner the Prussians had learned of the plan, and were fully prepared to meet it.

St. Albans took the occasion to rail against the authorities. What was the use, he asked, of sending the citizens of France to pour out their blood fruitlessly? Evidently those in command were fools.

Grey caught his eye, and saw the smile lurking there. A feeling of pity for the French filled his breast. There were probably in Paris half a hundred employed in the same duty as St. Albans.

Later, when they were alone, the Uhlan broached the subject.

"There come many surprises," he said, "and I have often astonished you, my friend. I was not sent to Paris to be cooped up in idleness; there is always a way.

"The thing is very simple. There is a garden beneath my window, perhaps twenty feet. A rope is easily obtained, and the guards—they watch closely the front door. Perhaps some night you will go with me; it is so easy."

"But afterward? I do not understand?" said Grey.

St. Albans laughed. "How the information is carried to my countrymen?" said he. "That I am not permitted to tell. It is a secret which even you, my friend, need not know. There are more ways than one, and these Frenchmen are very blind."

A few nights afterward Grey accompanied him on one of his secret expeditions. He found that St. Albans had concealed in his room a knotted rope, and that the descent to the garden was an easy matter. Once there, all that remained was to scale the low wall, creep along in the shadow for a few rods, and they could go where they chose.

Matters continued in the same monotonous way until the beginning of December. Paris was commencing to experience the rigors of a protracted siege.

As yet the Prussian cannon were silent, save when the French attempted a sortie; then they spoke loud enough. But at any moment the first shell might shriek over the devoted city.

One evening Grey prepared to accompany St. Albans, as it had become his habit to do. The weather was bitterly cold, and a threatening storm made the night intensely black.

Lowering himself from the window, Grey turned to steady the rope that St. Albans might descend. Suddenly a hand touched his shoulder. Letting go the rope, he sprang back, expecting to hear the gruff command of the guard to surrender quietly. Instead a low, whining voice fell upon his ear.

"Monsieur," it said, "do not be

alarmed. I have come to take you out of Paris."

The voice was Le Bete's.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE THIEF OF PARIS.

GREY remained motionless, dumb with surprise and bewilderment.

The shaking of the rope told him that St. Albans was descending. He felt him at his side and heard the click of a pistol hammer. Le Bete heard it, too, and spoke quickly.

"Monsieur fears treachery? *Bien!* it is natural. He asks himself why is Le Bete here? M. St. Albans has a pistol, but too much noise is dangerous; the guards would be aroused, and then—if I were still your enemy—*Dame!* a knife thrust is quick and—there would have been no need to speak."

St. Albans drew closer to his companion.

"There is something in what the fellow says," he whispered; "he could have knifed you in the back and gone over the wall like a cat." Then, louder: "We have reason to believe you our enemy. Why have you come here?"

They could hear Le Bete shifting uneasily from one foot to the other. He was not five feet away, but the darkness hid him completely.

"Come!" said the Uhlan, "why are you here?"

"To save M. Grey and his friends," replied the man. "There is but little time; in a day, perhaps two, then——"

St. Albans took a step forward and laid his hand heavily upon Le Bete.

"I could kill you now," said he, "before the guards could reach the garden."

The sound of steel ringing upon the ground reached Grey's ears.

"I have thrown my knife away," whined Le Bete. "I wish to speak to M. Grey."

St. Albans hesitated a moment. "See here," said he, "we are desperate and will stand no fooling; this is no place to talk. How did you know we could get into the garden?"

"I have watched," replied Le Bete, "many times. I have often followed you, but you did not know."

The Uhlan turned to Grey. "If it is as he says," he said, "the fellow must be sincere; it would have been an easy matter to have betrayed us to the police." Then, to Le Bete: "We cannot listen to you here, but if you are not afraid, there is the rope. M. Grey will go first, you will follow, I shall come afterward. At the first sign of treachery—the guards cannot save you."

Le Bete growled a reply. Grey, obedient to St. Albans' suggestion, seized the rope and went up, hand over hand; when he reached the window he drew back and awaited the coming of Le Bete.

The man went up like a cat, so quickly that he was in the room before Grey realized that his hands were upon the rope. St. Albans followed, closing the window behind him.

The turning up of the light revealed the shivering form of the thief crouching against the wall. His features were sunken and haggard; he was without coat and hat, an object of pity rather than of scorn.

St. Albans motioned to a chair; it seemed to him that Le Bete would tumble in a heap.

"Now," said he, "what have you to say? Why are you here?"

Le Bete refused the proffered seat and faced the speaker with more boldness than he had yet shown.

"Monsieur knows of the Commune," said he. "*Bien?*"

"What has the Commune to do with us?" asked St. Albans. "We are not here to discuss the Commune."

A sickly smile distorted Le Bete's features; evidently he was trying to choose his words.

"Monsieur does not understand," said he; "we have our societies, each one is rewarded according to his zeal for the cause of freedom. I had an enemy. It was M. Grey. So, when it was asked of me by the society: 'What is that which may be done for you, Le Bete?' I replied quickly: 'There is a man in a house in the Rue Clichy; he is my enemy and an enemy to the republic. If I have done anything to deserve a favor at the hands of the citizens, I ask a simple matter—the death of the American, who has sold himself to the Prussians.'"

Le Bete stopped and gazed at Grey as a dog does at the face of one who holds the lash above his head. A dark frown settled upon the forehead of the Uhlan officer; Grey was too amazed to utter a word.

For the first time since he had arrived in Paris a sense of fear seized him. He realized fully the danger in which he stood. He knew something of the societies of Paris; to be marked out as one deserving death, proscribed at the request of a member as zealous as Le Bete must have been, meant only one thing—a merciless death at the hands of an assassin.

"My God!" he muttered, turning to Le Bete, "I expected you would avenge yourself against me for that pistol wound, but—in another way."

The look which had crept into Le Bete's face vanished. He turned his bloodshot eyes from St. Albans to the young American.

"I have told monsieur all," said he, "and now—I have come to save him; there is yet time."

Grey's head was in a whirl; he could not understand; he was thinking only of the colonel and his sister. What if Le Bete had proscribed them also?

St. Albans' hand was clenched upon the edge of the table; there was a terrible sternness in his voice as he turned wrathfully upon the ragged man before him.

"By God!" cried he, "it is too much; I have a mind to kill you now—you coward!"

For an instant Le Bete cowered before the look in the Uhlan's eyes, then he straightened himself and turned to Grey.

"Monsieur wonders why I have come. He thinks the thief of Paris has no heart. Monsieur has a sister!"

Grey started as though a lash had struck him. "You dare to mention her name!" he cried, "you who——"

"*Tiens!*" whined Le Bete, but there was less of the whipped cur in his attitude. "May not a dog think of the angels, monsieur? You will listen to me, then you will know."

He shuffled his feet uneasily; evidently the rôle he was playing was new to him.

"A few days ago, when the pigeon flew from monsieur's garden, M. Grey had no worse enemy in Paris than Le Bete; that you perceived plainly. Monsieur remembers the day the citizens came hither; he surely has not forgotten. I was here also; during what followed I climbed to the window and—monsieur remembers the wounding of the child, the little servant of Mlle. Grey."

He stopped to wet his lips with his tongue.

"Go on!" said St. Albans gruffly, half suspecting what the man had yet to say.

"*Bien!*" continued Le Bete, "monsieur remembers it, but he does not know the shot which hit the girl was intended for M. Grey. I fired it."

"So it was you, you coward!" burst out Grey. "You shot the child, and—you come here to tell us *that*."

"I did not know she was here; I had not seen her for many days; there was no time to attend to children.

"On the day of the affair of the pigeon I learned something—something which monsieur does not know. Mlle. Grey had been kind to the little one, to the waif of Paris whom I, Le Bete, had left to the mercy of the

streets. And, monsieur—even the thief of Paris has a heart."

He stopped and gazed hard at the floor, as though ashamed that he had acknowledged what he considered a weakness. Grey understood; there was a touch of gentleness in his voice as he replied:

"Then the child is yours? There was always something in her eyes which reminded me of you. Yet—yet, I am not sorry my sister took her in; she is too good—to have such a father as you."

There was a suspicious moisture about Le Bete's eyes as he raised them from contemplation of the carpet.

"Monsieur now knows why I have come tonight, and—and—monsieur will take the child with him from Paris? Le Bete will not forget."

Grey gazed at the man curiously. Was it possible that this creature, after all, had a heart, a glimmer of tenderness for the homeless waif whom he had turned loose to live or perish, as fate directed, on the streets of Paris?

St. Albans replaced his revolver in his pocket. "We can trust this man," said he, with conviction; "let us sit down and talk it over."

CHAPTER XX.

LE BETE PAYS A DEBT.

LE BETE'S plan, when reduced to a system, was a simple one.

The following night promised to be dark, and he proposed that under his guidance the occupants of the house should make their escape from Paris. The most difficult part of the undertaking would be when they reached the fortifications.

To leave the house by the rear door, which had been locked and sealed by the authorities, would be no great task for Le Bete to engineer. In an unknown manner he had obtained possession of a key, and when it was discovered that the seals had been broken the birds would already have flown.

Once in the garden he would conduct the party by means of an underground passage to a building close to the fortifications. There the real difficulty would begin, but that, also, Le Bete hoped to overcome.

During the conversation Grey discovered the power for good or evil in this creature of the slums. His brain was filled with resources and cunning devices. Reduced to a few lucid instructions, Le Bete's plan was as follows:

Early in the evening he would drop over the wall into the garden a bundle containing uniforms for the entire party; it was necessary that even Celia and the child should, for the time being, become soldiers, members of one of the many Mobile companies which had been organized for the defense of Paris. The party would, therefore, be taken as a squad of militia. Its presence near the fortifications would occasion no comment; at all hours of the day and night detachments of Mobiles were moving about all parts of the city.

If possible, Le Bete would obtain the password of the night upon which the escape was to be made. With it, they would have no difficulty in getting by the inner fortifications. Beyond that point they must depend upon their wits to carry them through the outer lines into the territory occupied by the Germans.

Once there, Le Bete's mission would be accomplished. St. Albans would then undertake to see the affair to a satisfactory conclusion.

What Le Bete intended to do afterward, did the plan work successfully, he did not say; perhaps he had taken no thought of that. In any case, the Uhlan determined that no harm should come to him.

St. Albans himself was perfectly ready to leave Paris. As he told Grey, his duties were finished. He had en-

tered the city for a specific purpose; his subsequent actions in obtaining information was a side issue, undertaken because he did not choose to remain in idleness.

Grey could not but smile when Le Bete's plan to put Celia in a uniform was broached. He pictured to himself the girl's indignation and embarrassment. But he knew how sensible she was, and the idea might appeal to her romantic nature.

The colonel would doubtless object —at first. The undertaking would require much exertion, and he had small inclination for escapades of that sort, in which underground passages, the danger of being fired upon, and a hundred hair raising incidents formed a part.

There was one thing which the young man determined upon, but of which he made no mention to Le Bete. He would reveal the prospective plan to Captain de Marc, knowing full well that he could count upon his assistance. Besides his presence would insure safety while passing the inner fortifications.

The conference being finished, Le Bete, who during the interview had remained standing beside the window, opened it softly. He was ill at ease and desired, his errand being done, to return whence he had come.

The cold blast from outside sent a shiver through his ill clad frame. Grey filled a glass with liquor and proffered it to him. Le Bete hesitated a moment, extended a dirt begrimed hand and held the glass poised in the air.

A faint smile touched the corners of St. Albans' mouth. Filling two other glasses, he pushed one toward Grey.

"M. Le Bete," said he, raising the liquor to his lips, "success to our undertaking and—happiness to Héloise."

A look of gratitude flashed into Le Bete's eyes. It was the first kind word he had received since he could remember. The next moment he had gulped down the contents of the glass, set the crystal gently on the table and disappeared through the window.

St. Albans drew up the rope and closed the sash.

"Let us retire, my friend," said he to Grey; "tomorrow night will be a hard one."

* * * *

The night of the tenth of December opened cold and stormy. In the house in the Rue Clichy there was repressed excitement. One who chanced to look therein would have thought that a company of Mobiles were gathered in the dimly lighted reception room.

Garbed as they were, in the uniforms which Le Bete had dropped over the wall, no one would have taken the party for a company about to undertake a desperate venture.

De Marc was there in his uniform of the Fortieth Chasseurs. Under his ardent gaze Celia's face was the color of a poppy, and she shrank timidly behind the full form of the colonel.

But the Chasseur's glance was one of admiration. The slim figure of the girl was as though molded into the tight fitting uniform. The cap concealed the long braids wound about the top of her head; the blue eyes danced with merriment. If Jean de Marc's heart beat more quickly it was not alone because of the danger which lay before.

The childish figure of Héloise, with the drummer's straps across her shoulders, looked shrunken and deformed; the privations of the streets were not to be easily obliterated.

Le Bete was not present. Somewhere in the garden he was crouching beside the wall awaiting the appearance of those from within.

Presently the door, sealed by order of the authorities, creaked upon its hinges. St. Albans crossed the threshold, guiding the colonel by touch and low whispered word. Celia and the child followed, then Grey and the captain of Chasseurs brought up the rear.

Le Bete arose from his hiding place.

"This way, messieurs," he whispered, "we have but to cross the street to reach the passage."

Silently he led them to a gate concealed beneath a tangle of vines, the presence of which no one had suspected.

Weird shadows of the night, they crossed the narrow street and followed their guide through the door which he opened for them.

In the dark hallway Le Bete struck a match, and the rays of a bullseye lantern pierced the blackness, revealing the rough stone walls of the passage, which seemed to disappear into the bowels of the earth.

How long it took them to follow it to the end Grey could not tell. The way turned and twisted, ascended and descended, until Le Bete threw open a door, and the cold wind set them shivering.

Grey saw that they were near the fortifications. The muffled tramp of a sentinel reached his ears. Suddenly it ceased, and the man's challenge rang upon the crisp air.

De Marc replied, "*Versailles*"; the chassepot of the sentinel grounded with a crash, and—the first danger was safely passed.

Twice again they were challenged while hurrying across the ground between the inner and the outer works. Each time the voice of De Marc replied. He had come provided with the necessary "open sesame."

Suddenly Le Bete held up his hand; in the darkness no one except St. Albans perceived the movement.

"What is it?" whispered the Uhlan.

Le Bete pointed to the right. "The outer fortifications," said he; "we do not know the password." Then, shrugging his shoulders: "Let monsieur wait; I know a way."

The next moment he was gone, a vanishing phantom in the darkness. Five minutes passed; to those awaiting him it seemed as many hours.

All at once Le Bete appeared before them. There was a chassepot in his hand; his knife was bloody, but they could not see it.

"Messieurs may go forward," he whispered, "the sentinel is—sleeping."

St. Albans shrugged his shoulders, Grey and the colonel shuddered. De Marc bit his lip; he had not thought it would come to that.

Le Bete led the way, cautioning the others to step softly. Ten rods, fifty, a hundred. He stopped and pointed to the distant gleams in the darkness.

"*The Prussian camp fires*," he said.

De Marc laid his hand upon Grey's shoulder. "I must say farewell," he whispered. "I can be of no more service to you, and——"

Their hands met; the young American knew what the other would say. The bloody object lying beside the passage through the fortifications would shortly be discovered. De Marc must be well in Paris before that time or his life would not be worth a moment's purchase.

The Chasseur wrung the colonel's hand in silence, and returned the hearty pressure which St. Albans gave him, in kind. Turning to Celia, he hesitated. The girl's face was white as the linen at her throat, but none saw it; De Marc took her hand.

"Good by!" said he softly. "Some time—some time——"

What Grey saw he did not reveal for many months, not till long afterward. Extending his hand to draw his sister away, he felt her clasp slip from his own. Through the darkness he saw her face uplifted and heard the "*Jean*" so brokenly uttered. Then the captain was gone, and Le Bete stood in his place.

"Monsieur has no more use for me," said he; "I will go——"

Grey caught his arm. "You are going with us," he said sharply. "St. Albans will see that no harm comes to you. I shall not forget this night, *mon ami*."

Le Bete hesitated.

"The child will ask for you," continued Grey; "what shall we tell her if you are gone?"

"It is as monsieur says," replied Le Bete gruffly; "yonder are the Prussians."

Picking their way over the uneven ground, the party hastened forward, St. Albans and Grey supporting the colonel, the girls following closely behind.

The lights from the distant campfires grew plainer, glimmering red in the darkness; the faint sounds incident to a picket camp reached them through the crisp wintry air. In another fifteen minutes they would reach the German lines.

Suddenly from out of the darkness came the clatter of hoofs, the clank of sabers, the flap, flap, of little pennons.

Le Bete started like a frightened deer.

Then a dozen dark forms appeared around them, and the click, click of as many gunlocks sounded sharp on the night air. A voice, in German, cried to them to stand where they were.

Before St. Albans could reply, Le Bete was off like a greyhound. His inborn terror of the dreaded Uhlans overcame all other feeling.

"Stop!" cried St. Albans. "For God's sake don't shoot; it is a friend!"

His voice was drowned by the deafening report of a carbine. Le Bete threw up his arms and pitched headlong upon his face. There was a moment's silence, then the voice of St. Albans rang like a clarion through the night:

"*Gott verdammt!* I am Captain St. Albans, of the commander's staff, returning from Paris on secret service. We are friends!"

The Uhlans closed around them. The officer in command peered into St. Albans' face.

"*Gott im himmel!*" cried he; "it is you, St. Albans!"

The latter turned to Grey. "They are my Uhlans," said he, "but Le Bete?"

"The man is dead," replied a voice; "two of the men have just examined him. The ball went through his heart."

THE END.

LINES FROM THE PAST.

A few lines written in a long lost book:
"With love, from Jack;" and swift my soul takes wings
To a fair scene, where summer gladdened springs
Make murmurous answer to the brawling brook:
I sit once more within an arbored nook,
While high in air the tireless skylark sings;
To a strong hand my own responsive clings;
Heart beats to heart, and eyes give look for look.

Alas for summer dreams! Stern winter's feet
Are pressing now on autumn's lagging heels.
Brown leaves—like dead hopes—idly float up stream;
The ink is faded—I wake from a dream;
Wake to a present whose pain naught conceals—
Nor will—till we in God's own springtide meet.

Elsie Harrington.

BEYOND THE GREAT SOUTH WALL.*

BY FRANK SAVILE.

'Being some surprising details of the voyage of the steam yacht Racoon on a trip undertaken by her owner with a full consciousness of its foolhardy nature, but without the faintest conception of the extraordinary happenings that were to become part and parcel of it.

CHAPTER I.

A GREAT DEPRESSION.

THE purr and throb of London was quivering in stuffily through the open windows. The heat of a London summer lay heavily over us; the undying rattle of wheels beat up to us wearily, the midseason blare and hurry of town echoing irritatingly in their jingle and clatter as they streamed ceaselessly by. The stew and hubbub of the afternoon inclosed us as with a pall of depression.

By us I mean Gerry and myself. Flung back listlessly was I in my club chair, and watching him as he strolled monotonously up and down before the great bow windows that gave upon Pall Mall.

His hands were scabbarded hilt high in his pockets. His brows and the corners of his eyes were hard and wrinkled. His gaze was cast steadfastly before his toes. He did a very sentry go of moody vexation.

Each time he paused, as he turned against the light, every wrinkle and line was silhouetted mercilessly. Wretchedness covered his face as with a mask.

My heart began to go out to him, bursting through its own crust of dejection. Wretched we both were, but I was seven years his senior. I began to commune with myself, seeking comfort for him out of my own hard won store of disappointment, and trying to forget that our sorrows sat upon an even base.

Suddenly he turned towards me and broke the silence that had lasted between us the greater part of the afternoon.

"Well," he said harshly, "that's the end of most things for me."

"Possibly," answered I, "but probably not. The future's very spacious yet, my dear boy. I don't say it in any patronizing spirit, but you're only twenty four. Try to forget the 'might have been,' and buck yourself up into imagining the 'may be.' It's not all over yet."

He grunted contemptuously, tramping off again upon his beat.

A waiter who chanced in with the evening papers coughed ostentatiously, and with obvious intention towards the cloud of dust that followed hard upon his track. Gerry stared him down, and as the door closed behind him, brought himself to anchor before me again.

"That's all rot, and you know it, Jack," he said dogmatically. "Do you think I'm going to stay here and see Vi come back another man's wife? I'm sick of it all—sick of the work, sick of the play. Deathly sick of the utter sameness of what we call life. I'm going to chuck it, I tell you. Hausa Police, Egyptian Army, Hong Kong Regiment—something of the kind I'm going to try. There's nothing most assuredly to keep me any longer in Her Majesty's Foot Guards. I'm dipped, and I've lost the one thing that might have kept me to the collar.

Great Heavens! what in the name of goodness *should* I stay for?"

I stared back at him answerless. I knew he was talking cheap sentiment which a month or two later he would be the first to despise.

I, too, was feeling in a modified form all he felt. To me had also come the animal desire for action that follows hard upon mental stress.

But that seven years made the difference. Though that day had brought me the supreme discontent of my life, I was still aware that the world continued to wag, and that we should swing along with it. Yet how could I comfort without offending?

Now the reason of all this affliction was simple enough and old as time. To each of us had come the desire of his life, and in each it had been denied.

That morning we had spent at the Albert Docks, and seen a tall ship sail out for foreign lands, and she bore upon her decks two maidens who were taking with them our hearts to the world's end.

I never was much of a chap for lover's rhapsodies, so I will make no effort to explain to you how sweet a girl was Gwen Delahay, nor why she held my heart in the hollow of her hand. She was one of the many good and beautiful women—God bless them—who walk this earth, and are to their lovers peerless.

And as I worshiped her, so did Gerry worship Vi, her sister—a thing perhaps inexplicable, in that he had seen Gwen, but one to be truly thankful for, seeing that we were friends beyond the ordinary sympathies of life. And now were we left hopeless.

Plain Captain Dorinecourte was I, with a slender six hundred pounds beyond my pay, and Gerry, poor lad, had less. You will not exhaust yourself with wonder then, when I relate the fact that Lady Delahay declined on behalf of her daughters our attentions, contemned our eligibility, and hated poisonously the sight of our ingenuous faces.

For all these things, I take it, a society mother is bound by her allegiance to society to do. Yet though we felt that she played the game as we understood it, none the less did we cry out upon our luck in being the losers. And now it seemed that we might well throw down our cards.

The fond mother's fears of the blight which our undivided attentions might throw upon her daughters' careers had culminated that morning. A month before an announcement in the *Morning Post* had spurred her to an action which her fear alone would never have conceived. It ran as follows:

Among the passengers by the S.S. *Madagascar*, which sails on August 4 for her winter's cruise around the world, will be the Earl of Denvarre. His lordship will be accompanied by his brother, the Hon. Stephen Garlicke.

This item of intelligence had caught the dutiful mother's eye, and taken vigorous root in her somewhat languid intelligence. Two eligible young men were to be shut up for eight or nine months in a space of one hundred yards long by twenty wide.

Walking lawlessly in London were two extremely ineligible youths, unchained, ready and willing to wreck her daughters' happiness. Why not extract the victims from this hazardous propinquity, placing them at the same time in the financially commendable vicinitude of a live earl and his brother.

Action was born only too rapidly from reflection. We had seen them off that very morning.

So there sat we in the desolation of a mere club, disconsolate amid the roar of the city, while the sunset became twilight, the shadows of the lamp posts lengthened, and darkness fell upon the town, even as upon our hearts.

And out of my plentitude of my regret I failed to find the word of sympathetic comfort for Gerry.

Silently we entered the dining-room, chose a table apart, and my companion endeavored to find what solace he could in the columns of the *Westminster*.

Suddenly the decorum of the room received a shock. A sound burst from Gerry's throat which I can only term a crow. He endeavored frantically and indecently to masticate the portion which he had placed between his teeth, beating the paper at me furiously.

The sounds which continued to issue from his lips were such as no one could approve. He mouthed unutterable things at me.

Hastily I arose and thumped him on the back, and noticed that his finger continued to tap viciously upon a headline which he thrust into my face. As the distressing symptoms modified themselves, he gradually found his breath, but ceased not to bulge his eyes upon me.

"Look, old man, look," he insisted faintly, and I took the paper from his hand.

We regret to announce the death of Viscount Heatherslie at Greytown, Central America. His lordship had lately been traveling in the vicinity, and his death is ascribed to malarial fever. As yet no details can be ascertained.—*Reuter.*

The words turned red before my eyes as they danced up and down the green columns. Uncle Leonard was dead—was dead. And I—well I had to think it very hard indeed before I dared repeat it silently even to myself—I was Lord Heatherslie.

Only one thought had possession of my mind. Not a regret did I spare for the dead, not a single reflection as to what this thing meant to me or my prospects did I give beyond the fact that my luck—my cursed Irish luck—had been too late. That one idea had possession of me.

A week earlier—a few hours earlier, and what might have been?—what might have been? A curse snarled from between my teeth as I sat down again to stare white faced across at Gerry.

The excitement had died from his face. His sympathy was quicker than mine had been. He stretched his hand across the table and gripped mine hard.

"Frightful luck, old chap," he murmured; "I know what you're thinking. But—but it needn't be too late yet, Jack."

I shook my head. Things had become blurred in my brain, but one fact stood out bright as a searchlight to my mind's eye. Gwen was going out of my life, going away from me as fast as breeze and steam would take her.

And the thing that might have stayed our separation—have given her to me—was a week—nay, only a day—too late. I could have smitten my head against the wall in my agony of disappointment.

And yet I had resigned Gwen as fatalistically as any son of Islam. I had schooled myself to think of her as already belonging to another. I had bidden her good by without a quiver.

Even the look she had given me at the last—a tender, questioning look it was too, and straight from her heart through her dear eyes—I had met with a smile that told of nothing.

And now—now I had the right to win her, and honorably. Only a soldier I might be, but I had a place of my own to take a wife to. Nor would she come to me to sink into a nobody.

Half a county would welcome Lady Heatherslie, though half that county might be in rags. Poor we should always have been, but not hopelessly. Modestly we should have had to live, but we could have kept our rank befittingly. And now the chance was gone.

Away beyond the seas she would set herself to forget me, and Denvarre would show her how. The black curses fell over each other in their haste to reach my tongue, and the salt tears nigh fled out along with them. I made an effort and pulled myself together.

"Come along," said I. hoarsely to Gerry in a voice that I hardly knew myself, and blundered out of the room.

Without another word I crept into the hansom the commissionaire called and together we drove down the glaring streets to my rooms, Gerry offering no sympathy but a silence which I understood and was grateful for.

The next day I was summoned to our family lawyers, Meadows and Crum.

"Desperately sudden, my lord," quoth old Mr. Crum, making me twitch in my chair as I heard myself addressed by my title for the first time, "desperately sudden. We received advices from his late lordship on financial matters only a week ago, and now—it's come like a thunder clap, I assure you."

"These are matters of fate, my dear Mr. Crum," said I piously. "I suppose there's no doubt about the report?"

"None whatever, as I learn this morning. We cabled his lordship's valet last night and got the press message confirmed. Death took place up country it seems. Baines, his man, talks of bringing the body to the coast and sailing next week by the Pacific Mail steamer."

"That, of course, is the only decent and orderly thing to do," said I, "and no doubt you'll kindly see to all these matters—arranging for the funeral and so forth. But what about funds now? I expect this horrible succession duty will make me as poor as a rat for the first year or two, won't it?"

He lifted his glasses, regarding me with a curious expression. I immediately divined by a sort of intuition that he purposed giving himself the pleasure of surprising me. There was a decorously cunning light in the corner of his eye that made him appear not unlike a respectable and intelligent magpie.

"I think you and your uncle were comparatively strangers to each other, were you not? Ah, I thought so. You have the impression, doubtless, that he was restless by choice and temperament alone? I can assure you, in that case, that you are mistaken. Your uncle, for the last few years of his life at any rate, has been dominated by a very determined purpose."

"Philanthropic or personal?" I queried. "Not the former, I sincerely trust, or the pickings will be even less than I hope for. I know he's been roaming the wide world mysteriously ever since I can remember, but I thought it was the inherited taint of travel. We've had a lot of sailors in the family, Mr. Crum."

"That is very true," answered the man of law impressively, "and in a certain indirect sense I won't say you are altogether wrong. But the simplest way will be to put the whole matter before you as I learned it from your uncle. Excuse me for a moment."

He turned to where a row of tin boxes, shiny and white lettered, lined the walls along a broad shelf.

Old Crum found what he wanted at last. Replacing all the papers but one —rather a musty looking document— he kenneled his legs comfortably beneath his writing table and began his revelation, tapping his fingers upon the dusty law books before him to emphasize his remarks.

I'll give you the tale as he gave it to me. Then judge me if I was a consummate fool or not, in that I followed in the footsteps of my uncle.

CHAPTER II.

THE TALE OF A COINCIDENCE.

"THE late Viscount Heatherslie," said Mr. Crum, tapping the desk before him like a school master demanding silence for a lecture, "was a collector, and at the same time an economist. These, you will probably think, are walks in life entirely incompatible one with the other. I will explain fur-

ther. Though he lived far within his income, he had the mania for collection and gratified it. But he did this by making it a rule never to buy what had a merely temporary or sentimental value, but only what was likely to be intrinsically marketable.

"I never knew a man with a sounder sense of finance, or one who, without professional knowledge, made such use of unprofessional experience. I doubt if he ever struck a bad bargain in his life. You will today reap the benefit of his judgment. I do not think I exaggerate when I say that you may safely count on his treasures fetching a sum of not less than one hundred thousand pounds."

I gasped in amazement, nearly bouncing from my chair. My excited shuffling upset a blob of ink from the inkstand before me. With an air of respectful deprecation Crum began to mop it up methodically, before answering the questions I fired at him like bullets.

"Great Heavens!" I exclaimed, "the leery old dog! You mean to tell me in sober earnest that he has amassed all that money by simple grubbing after curios, when we thought he just roamed around for mere amusement and love of travel. Where has he stuck them all? Not at Kilberran, I sincerely hope, or they're all rotten with mildew by now. And what are they? Pictures, bronzes, china? Why, neither my mother nor my poor old dad had an inkling of it. Great Scott! One hundred thousand pounds. Now, really, don't you think you may be exaggerating, my dear Mr. Crum?"

"I may say that it is not a habit to which I am given, my lord," he answered drily, "but it will not be hard to convince you. The collection has been valued by more than one expert, and the lowest figure rendered by these gentlemen was a hundred and thirty thousand pounds, and the collection has been added to since then."

"But what in the name of goodness can be worth all that money? Why, it would take a large gallery to house pictures up to that figure."

"Certainly. But I may as well explain at once that the whole collection is within these walls. It is in a large safe in my cellars. It consists wholly of coins."

"Coins," I bawled delightedly, "then I hope the half of them have her majesty's face on them, God bless her. I see what you're getting at. You mean the old boy was a miser."

He drew himself back into his chair with an air of offense.

"I am not given to jest on business matters," he said in his stateliest manner. "No, your uncle was simply one of the first numismatists of the century. His is the finest harvest of ancient coins ever made by any private individual. If you see fit to turn it to its marketable worth, you will create an excitement among collectors unparalleled for the last five decades. And till the catalogues are published, not one of them will have an idea of the treasures they will find listed there."

"Well, as far as I am concerned, I don't mind how soon they're gratified and surprised," said I, "but I should like to have a look at the lot now, if it's not seriously inconveniencing you. Can we descend to visit them?" for I itched to view this astounding hoard with my very own eyes.

"Of course, my lord. It would be only natural that you should wish to inspect such an important part of your inheritance. But I have something more to say. It was not in mere zeal for collecting that your uncle had lately traveled so widely. I have another astonishment in store for you—not so entirely agreeable, no doubt, but out of the common, I think I may say, absolutely out of the common."

"Well, as we're out of the range of coins this time then, I trust it's nothing less than bank notes," I answered. "But for goodness sake what is it?" I added impatiently. for his self im-

portant deliberation began to get on my nerves.

He did not suffer himself to be the slightest degree flurried by my impatience. His sentences, in fact, seemed to gather a yet more leisurely accent as he unfolded his tale.

"You must let me tell the thing in my own way, my lord. It will be far more conclusive than jerking it out at you in scraps. The facts in sequence were as follows:

"Among the family treasures which have come down the centuries—and I sincerely wish there had been more of them—was a certain amount of old coins which have been in the custody of my firm for at least five generations. They comprised for the most part specimens of the gold and silver coinage of most European countries during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Some were of great value. Some were by no means rare.

"Evidently one of your ancestors—probably, I should say, Sir John Dorinecourte, the famous Elizabethan admiral—had the craze of collection, which has since broken out in your late uncle's case. At any rate, the box contained moidores, zecchins, pesos, crowns, and every sort of currency of every known land—known to our ancestors of that time, at least—to a very considerable amount. The mere bullion, I should say, would be worth a considerable sum. Among them were, however, a couple of gold pieces placed apart, and these had no signification opposite them in the catalogue, and bore no sign either on the face or the reverse in any language known at the present day."

"It sounds charmingly mysterious, my dear Mr. Crum," I interrupted. "Now you aren't going to tell me that the secret still remains unfathomed?"

"My lord, my lord," said the old fellow entreatingly, "you must allow me to tell you the thing methodically, or not at all. If I'm hustled I shall forget some detail, and I have given time and effort to memorize the matter completely."

I apologized humbly, settling myself back in my chair resignedly to hear the thing out without further interruption. Crum continued in his slow, modulated tones.

"I think that it was the sight of that hoard, when your uncle saw it on his accession to the title, which first woke in him the craze for collecting. He no doubt reflected that here was the nucleus for an exceedingly fine numismatic museum, and from that day he set himself steadily to add to it, with an increasing knowledge of his subject, of which you are now reaping the benefit.

"But those two unknown coins were always a sore mystery to him. Many a time have I seen him take them up—he used to visit me two or three times every year to place what he had possessed himself of in that time with the rest—and turn them over and over in his fingers wistfully, studying every line and figure as if there must be some concealed clue which he had missed. But it was only last year that he gained the trace which put him on the road to success, and also, as it has unfortunately turned out, to death as well."

"What?" I shouted, nearly jumping out of my chair. "Do you mean to say——"

He held up his hand deprecatingly.

"Please, my lord, please restrain your impatience. You shall have every detail in good time, I assure you. I only mean to say that it was in pursuit of his intense desire to solve the origin of those coins that he was traveling in Central America, where he caught the fever which has been fatal to him. The rest I will tell you as shortly as possible.

"It was last year, as I was saying, that the first trace came to his hand by the merest accident. His lordship was in Portugal. From there I got a letter from him on business matters,

and at the end—his lordship was aware that, of course in a modified form, I was interested in his quest—he remarked, 'A most extraordinary thing has happened. I have found a dozen more of the unknown coins, and what is more, an ancient document—no less than a letter written by Sir John Dorinecourte, my ancestor. I will tell you more on my return.' It was some three weeks after that that his lordship came to see me.

"Nearly his first words to me were, 'Well, Mr. Crum, the mystery of the coins is pretty well solved, but a greater mystery has arisen on the ashes of the first. The gold pieces are Mayan.'

"The word Mayan, I must confess, conveyed nothing to me at the time, but he very soon explained it. The Mayans inhabit—though perhaps your lordship knows as much—the land of Yucatan to the south of Mexico. They are a wild and savage race, but there is every reason to believe that centuries ago theirs was a mighty empire. The coins dated from this extinct civilization of long ago. And now for the method by which your uncle ascertained as much.

"He was wandering along the side streets of Lisbon one afternoon, when he espied a small curio shop. Outside the window were displayed various articles of furniture, china, etc., for sale, and among these was a curious cameo brooch which rather took his fancy. He entered to make a bid for it, and managed to secure it for what he considered a fair price.

"He wandered listlessly about the shop, as the woman in charge was placing it in a box for him, and suddenly came upon a glass covered box full of coins. You may imagine his surprise when, among the rows of copper and silver pieces, he saw staring up at him no less than twelve gold replicas of these mysterious coins of his own. His astonishment was great, but he managed to conceal it from the shopkeeper when he asked her the price she demanded for these 'medals,' as he prudently called them.

"She named one very little higher than their simple worth as bullion, intimating at the same time that, as they did not seem to commemorate any special event, customers for them had been few. She went on to relate how she came to possess them. A strange story indeed.

"With some pride she told your uncle that her husband was really of noble blood, but sunk to a narrow pittance beyond the keeping up of his title. Ruined by the failure of vintage after vintage, he had at last compounded with his creditors by giving up his landed possessions, and she and he were now living by the sale of art curios, a good proportion of which, she sadly explained, was from their own dwindling inheritance.

"Further inquiry elicited the fact that the 'medals' had been discovered in an ancient box of cedar wood, which had been left to rot and molder in an attic of their former mansion, where wrapped in papers covered with writing in a foreign tongue, nigh fifty of them had been found strung together on a slender chain. She pointed out that all of them had a small hole beside the rim, and your uncle remembered that the same thing was noticeable in those he possessed himself.

"The first and most natural thing was to inquire for the paper wrappings, but for some time these could not be discovered, and it was feared they were lost. However, the next day his lordship received a message from the woman to the effect that she had found them thrust away among a heap of similar refuse, and that they were at his service if he chose to purchase them for a small sum.

"Your uncle did not dally in returning to the shop, as you may suppose. You may also imagine his surprise that one of the documents was not only in English, but absolutely signed by his own ancestor. You shall

see the original, so I will not stop to describe it. It is of the other document that I wish particularly to speak.

"It was inscribed on a peculiar yellow looking fabric, more of the nature of linen than of paper or parchment, and experts have since decided that the coloring matter used as ink is the fluid emitted by the octopus. But the most curious part was the writing, if writing it can properly be called.

"It consisted of squares, oblongs, parallels, and other geometric figures ranged in a sequence which was not easy to understand, but the chief point of interest was that these figures resembled in every particular the figures on the coins. His lordship immediately and willingly paid what was asked for them, took his passage straightway home to England, and, armed with his document, paid a visit to the British Museum to get what expert help he could in translating them.

"It is an extraordinary thing how circumstances dovetail into one another. No sooner had he entered the department where he had so often been before to get light on his coins, than he was greeted with the following question by Professor Barstock, the head, before he had even mentioned his errand.

"'I am particularly pleased to see you, Lord Heatherslie,' said the professor, 'because information has lately come to hand which I think will settle the origin of your coins, which we have so often pored over. Monsieur Lessaution, of Paris, the well known Egyptologist, has discovered that there is a connecting link between the ancient Egyptian script and that on the monuments of Yucatan. It seems absurd, considering that they are divided by five thousand miles of sea, but he puts his points very plausibly, and I think you should see him.'

"When you have seen the other paper which your uncle discovered—the one in English—I think you will understand that these words came as a most astounding confirmation of his suspicion that he was on the right track at last. He simply opened his bag and spread the mysterious scroll before Professor Barstock, laying one of the coins beside it.

"You may imagine the astonishment of the latter on seeing not only the coin, with which he was familiar, but the scroll covered with similar symbols. Nor did he fail to astonish your uncle in his turn.

"Taking him to another part of the building, he showed him some gray, fibrous looking slabs of dried pulp, and they, too, were covered with the oblong, square and parallel figures of the document, only that instead of being raised they were indented. They were, as Mr. Barstock explained, squeezings, taken from the temple façade at Chichitza, where M. Lessaution was now conducting his investigations.

"The Frenchman's theory was that by comparing the Egyptian symbol with that in Yucatan, and using the grammar and accidence of the former language as a guide to the latter, these inscriptions, which have as yet been undecipherable, would be made clear, and much would be learned about the Mayan civilization of long ago.

"This was quite enough for your uncle. He decided that he would not wait for M. Lessaution's return, which was not expected for another six months, but would cross the Atlantic and interview him on the spot where he was conducting his experiments.

"After reading the letter left by your ancestor, I can quite understand that to a man of leisure like his lordship, and a man with a taste for wandering to boot, the fascination of such a quest would be great. At any rate, he sailed for Greytown about five months ago, and with the exception of a single letter, purely on business matters, I have heard no word from him since."

"Well," said I, "I am certainly astonished, but I cannot say I am greatly moved by your tale, Mr. Crum. It

would certainly never have occurred to me to cross three or four thousand miles of ocean to interview a foreign savant about a coin or a document. But then, I am not made that way."

"Very likely, my lord," submitted the lawyer, "but you will pardon me if I say that you have not seen the letter by Admiral Sir John. That sheds a very curious light on the question, and certainly adds vastly to the interest one of your family must take in it. But I will show it to you at your leisure."

"I am as leisured now as I am likely to be for the rest of time," said I, "but before I see the letter I should just like to squint at the coins, if you are not particularly occupied for the next hour."

He rose at once and preceded me to the outer office, where a door opened on to a flight of stone steps. Down these he guided me, ushering me at last into a broad, whitewashed cellar, wherein not less than half a dozen great safes faced each other from wall to wall. He clicked a key in the lock of one, and turned a handle.

The great door swung back, and showed row upon row of numbered sliding drawers, lined with velvet, and covered—every square inch of them—with coins of every degree of dirt, ancientry, and denomination. One drawer alone was nearly empty, and this held two gold pieces, and placed beside them on the velvet a sheet of ancient paper, covered with crabbed writing and faint with the dust of ages.

The lawyer took it up and unfolded it carefully, and then I saw for the first time the screed that sent my uncle speeding across the ocean at its behest, and which was to leave its mark on my life also.

CHAPTER III.

THE TESTIMONY OF SIR JOHN DORINECOURTE, KNT.

THE lawyer pushed back the drawers methodically, clanged to the safe door, and turned to me as I labored toilsomely to decipher the faint, scratchy handwriting. He held the two coins in his hand.

"I think," he said slowly, "if you will permit me to read this document out to you, you will find it much easier to interpret if you decide to read it yourself a second time. I may say that I have conned it pretty thoroughly—it took time to master it, I confess—and faint and yellow as it is, I can decipher it at sight."

I was only too glad to accept this benevolent offer, and we returned to the upper office again. Here I settled myself back in my chair, old Crum found and very deliberately donned his spectacles, unfolded and smoothed the sheets of dirty parchment, and then began to expound the writing as follows:

"I, John Dorinecourte, of the parish of Sellwood, in the county of Somerset, here make oath and declare that the writing hereto, to which I have set my hand and seal, is the very truth, so help me God.

"On the seventeenth day of August, in the year of our Lord one thousand five hundred and seventy eight, being in command of the ship *Pride of Barnstaple*, and Captain Fowler of that port and Dom Pedro da Suhares of Maceira being my fellow adventurers, we were in mid ocean, having passed the straits discovered by the Admiral Magellan about two days, and were bearing north along the coasts of the Indies.

"It happened then that one of the ship's company at masthead hailed the deck, declaring a ship to approach; whereat we, as was but reasonable, supposed the same to be some Spanish craft, and beat to quarters, tricing up boarding nettings and getting powder on deck. But as we approached nearer to the strange sail, we perceived it to be a lateen and under no control of steering, for she yawed and came about, and then of a sudden fell away

upon the other tack, being waterlogged, and as it seemed deserted.

"So, calling to me the crew of the pinnace, I set to board her, which, the day being calm, we accomplished easily enough. Then we were horribly astonished to find upon her decks no living man save one, and him at the point of death. Six bodies there were, and one living soul, and the men were a fair and noble company, but like to no other men whom I have seen.

"Now Da Suhares, who hath been in Mexico—for being renegade he joined our vessel at La Guayra after slaying the nephew of the governor in duello—protested that in most respects these unfortunates resembled the inhabitants of that ill fated empire, now ravished and enslaved by the devil serving Spaniards. Which might be like enough, for the men were covered with gold ornaments, and bedecked with the plumage of bright tropic birds, such as is the custom of these tribes, as I have always understood.

"'Twas evidently thirst that had brought them all to their death, for no drop of sweet water could we find upon the craft, and the tongue of the living man swelled forth from his lips, forcing his jaws asunder, and his sweatless skin cracked as tense parchment. We hastened, therefore, to bring our surgeon, and water with a little wine. With difficulty he swallowed it, and revived, though but slightly. He gazed upon us as one affrighted, and shuddered, placing his hand upon his breast as if holding there what he would fain conceal. By which, I take it, he imagined us Spaniards, and expected their deviltries, as well he might.

"But we spoke to him gently, and tended him, taking sails to make him a couch to lie upon. Yet he rallied but little, murmuring we knew not what, nor could Da Suhares understand him, though he had knowledge of some few words of Mexican.

"Then the poor wretch raised his finger slowly and pointed toward us, and afterward held up his open hand many times, which we took to mean that he had been of a numerous company; making gesture also to our ship, which swung, heaved to, some quarter of a mile away. He swept his hands abroad wildly towards the waste of waters, implying doubtless that his was one of a great fleet of vessels.

"As in a flash came to me then that tale which was at that time a by word in the South Seas, of the great expedition of the natives which had set sail from the coasts of Southern Mexico, the which was witnessed by the Spanish forces advancing from the north, yet could in no way be prevented of them. Mayax is the name of the land whence they sailed, and the fiendish warfare of the Spaniards—ravishers of women and slaughterers of babes as they be—had so prevailed by terror upon these simple folk, that they had committed themselves to the deep to escape their villainies, and had vanished, forty sail or more, no man knew whither.

"The memory of this tale came back to me, as I say, vividly—and indeed it had been the common talk of every port along the coasts of the Southern Indies this year past—and I pointed inquiringly to this poor fellow as he languished and lay dying at my feet, and then swept my finger northward, as if determining that to be the direction whence he came.

"Whereat he nodded, and then swung his hand southward again, as if to say that now he sailed from the opposite direction. Then, reluctantly, as it were, he drew from his breast the scroll which I have here set aside for your care and consideration, and I beheld for the first time those symbols and the presentation of that wondrous beast which are to me now as the alphabet for familiarity. As he gave me the relic, he feebly took from his wrist the golden bracelet which hung haggard thereon, and from his neck a string of gold pieces. The armlet he

gave to me, and the necklet to Da Suhares, as if in thanks for our consideration, which came thus too late.

"Then, with the last throb of strength left in his withered frame, he raised himself from the loins, and turning, faced the sun, which sank cloud free and ruddy into the open main. Bowing himself toward its fading glories, he spread abroad his hands with a single word and fell back and died, unconquered remnant of a conquered race. And for a space we stared silently at the dumb dead, wondering, half afraid, but full of pity for his sad case, and of admiration for his uncomplaining end.

"Then did Da Suhares, Master Fowler and I take counsel together upon the matter to imagine what this might mean. For I called to their memory the tale of the escaping Mayans, and Da Suhares vouched for the truth of the same. For his own brother had been of the company of conquistadores that had advanced south from Mexico, had seen the men of the escaping fleet fare out into the deep, and had with others made strenuous effort to overtake and capture them before they launched forth to sea.

"For report went that they carried with them the ancient treasures of that hapless race for centuries back. Adding that within a month an expedition of adventurers had set forth to track them along the southern coasts, but had returned empty and rewardless. And common talk held that he who should find that company would also find wealth beyond desire or conception. Here he doubted not that we had one of them. For when we came to examine their bark there was great store of gold upon her, not as treasure indeed for the most part, but put to plain uses; for though the ornaments upon each corpse were of gold, yet were the very bailing vessels made of wood shod with golden bands and held with strips of golden metal.

"Upon each man's breast also was a medal, or some such decoration, bearing upon it the similitude of the same wondrous beast that appears upon the mystic scroll which you have herewith. So we reasoned upon the matter, and in much thought the solution thereof came to us.

"The expedition had sailed, and had come to some secure sanctuary as they had desired. Now they sent back this small company to advise their fellows left in bondage of the same, that they too might leave their own land, overrun by the Spaniards, and come also to safety and a sure dwelling place. And the more we thought on this, the more the truth of it came home to our minds.

"Now this I write in the glorious year of our Lord, one thousand five hundred and eighty eight, when the Lord hath, by the destruction of the Spanish oppressor, so signally shown His favor to His children who hope in Him. The news of which final deliverance hath come to us long months after by chance of our meeting Captain Bostock of Bristol, who saileth in the Guinea and West India trade.

"Ten years have I and my comrades, Da Suhares and Captain Fowler, sought wearily for this people, and naught hath come to us in reward. Yet have we got to ourselves sufficient of this world's goods, in that we have taken more than one of his Catholic majesty's treasure galleons, and three years agone five of his pearling fleet, which we fell upon when they were storm sundered from their fellows. Rich are we therefore in possessions, but not yet in knowledge, and the madness of the quest hath bitten into the souls of all of us. Not an island, not a bay, not a single river's mouth, have we missed for nigh two thousand weary miles, but unavailingly. And now I draw into years, but I cannot rest from it.

"Thus have I put down the matter plainly for my children to wot of, and if I come not back to them, a charge do I lay upon them. Ten years have I

sought, and wrought, and toiled, sparing none of mine and least of all myself, and it may well be that from this last adventure I come not back. Ten years, therefore, do I lay upon you that come after me, ten years each of you unto the tenth generation, and the blessing of the Almighty be with you in your search.

"Do the matter diligently, but in secret, lest it come to the ears of the Spanish folk, and they triumph at the last. If ye find this people (and of a verity I know in my soul that they still walk God's earth) be to them a safeguard from their enemies, using the might of England to bulwark them from their foes, and get to your race and family great honor. So do, and my blessing be upon you. Forego this quest, any one of you, and my curse rest with you unceasingly. To which charge I put my hand and seal this nineteenth day of December, in the Annus Mirabilis, one thousand five hundred and eighty eight.

"JOHN DORINECOURTE, KNT."

Crum placed the musty sheets of lettering on the table before him, solemnly took off his spectacles and wiped them, and then stared across quietly at me without a word, as if he would let this astonishing balderdash sink deeply into my all too shallow soul.

There was a silence in the office, unbroken save by the buzzing of the bluebottles at the windows and the distant roar of the Strand, filtered by intervening acres of brickwork. For my part, I found no words to express my emotions. For really it came upon me as a shock to think what crack brained enthusiasts our fathers were.

Here was a sound, apparently intelligent old British seaman, who had knocked about the world more than a little, worrying himself to set curses on the head of his unborn descendants if they should fail to be just such fools as himself. He meets a half dozen of forlorn savages in midocean, by purely circumstantial evidence connects them with another band of niggers of whom he has only got word by hearsay, and proceeds to spend ten years of his life in tracking the latter to a lair which probably never existed.

And not satisfied, as I say, with this astounding waste of time and energy, but he expects ten other fools to do the same. I stared, therefore, at the good Crum with these unvoiced musings extremely vivid in my brain, the while I thanked God softly below my breath for civilization and common sense.

It was the lawyer who broke the silence before it got strained.

"I may say, my lord," he remarked, "that we have compared this writing with the signature of your ancestor's marriage record in Sellwood church. It is identical, and there seems to be no doubt that it is authentic. I would remind you that it is beyond question that he spent many years in what was called 'The Indies' at that date—the Southern Seas of America, in point of fact—where he left the reputation of a valiant sailor—I'm afraid I must say buccaneer. But you must remember that times were different," he added hastily, feeling that as a supporter of the law he must not seem to favor equivocal methods.

"That, I believe, is entirely true," I conceded. "Tradition has it that he was one of the most energetic old pirates of his day. But may I ask how you propose to explain his document getting to Lisbon into the shop of the local rubbish dealer, or whatever he may have been. Why did it not come home to those for whom it was intended? My unfortunate forefathers for twelve generations have had these curses hanging over them, and have lived in comfortable ignorance."

"I don't think there is much difficulty in finding explanation," he replied deliberately. "You know that Sir John *did* perish out there, and to this day no news has been heard of his ultimate fate. My own suspicions are

that Da Suhares—by the way, the people from whom your uncle purchased these documents bore the name of Soares—very possibly brought him treacherously to his death to possess the wealth that they had reaped in company.

"It is a very possible solution of the mystery, and we are not likely at this time of day to find a better one. But I must say, my lord, that to my mind the authenticity of the document is absolutely determined, and I have had experience of similar matters, I may say for over half a century."

"It's plausible enough," said I, shifting my ground, "but not good enough in my discretion to send a man fussing over to Yucatan for further explanations. Supposing the thing is absolutely correct, both in itself and in its deductions, what good is to be made of it at this time of day? Surely my uncle did not expect to find this unknown race after they had been lost three centuries or more? At any rate I shouldn't have thought it of him. He showed no signs of brain softening ten years ago—or twelve, was it?—when I last interviewed him."

The lawyer leaned his elbows on the table, and drew the tips of his fingers together in a judicial attitude before he made answer in his intolerably cautious accent. Then he delivered himself of his opinions weightily.

"I think you are forgetting the other scroll—the one in symbol which was purchased with the one now before you. Recollect that if this could be interpreted, the mystery in all probability was one no longer. Your uncle was a man of leisure, fond of travel, and with the collecting mania. I am bound to say that under these circumstances I can understand his attitude.

"He knew that in Central America was the one man who could translate—if anybody could—this extremely recondite document. He also knew that in any case at his journey's end he would find a vast field of interest in the lately discovered monuments of Yucatan. I must say that considering these things I should have been surprised if he had *not* gone. If you think of the astounding possibilities opened up to him in discovery if he *did* find a meaning to this scroll, and remember the enthusiastic nature of his temperament on matters of this kind, no room for wonder is left—at any rate not to my mind."

I was fairly dumfounded. To think that a little cut and dried old solicitor could absolutely find, not only excuses for this absurd conduct, but a positive encouragement, was more than I could have believed possible. I gaped upon him.

"My dear Mr. Crum," said I pityingly, "we are not in the sixteenth century. I can conceive a rampant adventurer like Sir Walter Raleigh, let us say—a man with the heart of a lion and the brains of a four year old child—setting out on some such wild goose chase, but that a British peer, of good health and wealth, nigh three score years of age——"

He interrupted. His spectacles were tilted rakishly on the bridge of his nose, and his eyes positively glinted behind them. He absolutely barked an explanation at me.

"Yes, my lord; he was all you say. And I am not ashamed to add, that in his case, and with his opportunity, I should have done the same!"

"You!" I shouted—yelled, in fact, so taken aback was I. "You would have gone to this unspeakable climate, to seek out a forsaken French adventurer, to get a clue to a fudged up cryptogram three musty centuries old! Mr. Crum, Mr. Crum, I should have as soon believed it of the lord chancellor."

He had regained his aplomb by now, and arranged his papers methodically in front of him before he ventured another word. Then he looked up again, his calm and judicial air entirely regained.

"I have no wish to pose as a sentimentalist, or to have it thought that the mere glamour of a mystery would carry me outside the realms of common sense. But I must say, my lord, with all due deference, that it seems to me that your uncle was simply guided by weight of evidence in what he did. From the facts connected with its finding and those since elicited, I should say there can be no doubt that the document before us was written by Sir John Dorinecourte, and that the matters detailed in it were true. The good knight's supposition about the identity of the persons he encountered seems to me extremely reasonable.

"Your uncle had nothing in his life to check his desires for adventure and discovery. It would have been marvelous to me if he had let such an opportunity escape him. I can see, too," he went on with a smile, "that our temperaments differ, my lord, and that though you are the soldier and I the lawyer, our blood flows with an irregularity that is not in sympathy with our professions."

It is not pleasant to be called a coward by your own lawyer, I confess, and I will own that I flew into a rage. I rose and took my hat.

"Thanks, Mr. Crum," I said coldly, "it is more than probable that I am in every particular the absolute inferior of my late uncle. However, I fear that I am using your valuable time for reflections and deductions which are not professional" (put him back in his place there, thinks I). "Is there any other business you wish to see me about this morning?"

The old chap flushed and rose in his turn.

"I—I'm sure I trust I have not been offensive or indiscreet, my lord," he stammered. "I only wished to prove that in my poor opinion your uncle was justified in the course he took. There is naturally much I should like to talk over with your lordship in connection with the estate, but it can wait till the will is proved. But perhaps you will not consider it necessary to employ me further."

I saw I had hurt the worthy old chap badly, and could do no less than make immediate amends.

"Is thy servant a dog?" said I holding out my hand, "that he should do this thing? No, my dear Mr. Crum, though I may be of a slow blooded, not to say poltroon-like spirit, and you are still in the midst of the middle ages, if you will excuse my saying so, as far as the practicalities of life go, I'm sure we shall get on together as well as two thorough opposites always do, and I can't say more than that."

Then I wrung his hand heartily and fled, but for the life of me I couldn't say for certain that I was right and he was wrong.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT BAINES KNEW.

It was three weeks after my first interview with Crum that I found myself traveling down to Liverpool to meet Baines, my uncle's man, who was bringing home his body. It was a dull, rainy, depressing day as I stood upon the dock side above the landing stage and watched the tender come sidling up with the crowd of umbrellaed passengers upon her deck, and my errand was not of a kind to elevate the spirits.

Beyond the mournful circumstances that had brought me there, I had a sense of foreboding as if undefined evil was coming to me with the dead, though, considering my very slender acquaintanceship with my uncle, it seemed extremely unreasonable. But there it was, all the same. I put it down to the weather and the worry of the last three weeks.

For really I had had a very trying time. Gerry was more or less at the bottom of it, and Crum and my own conscience helped largely. The fact was that in a moment of weakness I

had detailed to Gerry the story of the screed and the two mysterious coins left by my old buccaneer ancestor. He had fastened upon the thing like a dog chewing a meaty bone, and rested not day or night dinning into me his opinion that my bounden duty was to investigate the affair " up to the hilt," as he inappositely remarked. And in another astoundingly weak phase of absent mindedness I had taken him with me on one of my visits to Crum.

The two had managed somehow to get on the subject of the mystery, and then they started in full cry together to browbeat me for my lack of enthusiasm, proving—Gerry with terse vulgarity and the lawyer with deliberate decorum—that I was throwing away the chance of a lifetime, failing in my duty to myself, my honor, and my nation, and showing forth a pusillanimity and poverty of imagination which was a disgrace to the name of Dorinecourte.

And out of their badgerings a wild and hasty promise had grown—wrung from me by pure bullying—that should any further news of the ancient scroll of hieroglyphics come to hand, or perchance the scroll itself, I would not fail to do my utmost to obtain translation for the same, even to the extent of crossing the Atlantic myself and interviewing Professor Lessaution.

Pondering, therefore, this rash mortgaging of my future happiness and freedom of movement, I stared down upon the snapping little steamboat with melancholy eyes, reflecting that she possibly bore to me a cargo of worry and unrest which would shadow my life with unmerited discontent.

There was the usual fuss when the dripping passengers landed, the usual rush for the customs, the grating of the rolling luggage stage, the interchange of impudence between the dock porters and the crowd, in fact the everyday hurly burly of a liner's incoming, and it was not till after an hour's patient toil and the signing of various detestable documents, that Baines and I were permitted to load our burden upon the hearse that waited, and get it to the railway station. I had no chance in the crowded train of conversing with the man in any sort of privacy, so arranged that he should call at my rooms that evening, and that there he should tell me all there was to tell.

Fortunately Crum had notified a firm of undertakers to meet us at Euston, and there take charge of the coffin, and finally I was at liberty to make my way home, change, and eat with what appetite I could. Then lighting my pipe, I set myself to await Baines and his revelations with all the apathy I could command.

And then Gerry saw fit to drop in. He was brimful of inquiry and investigation regarding the day's doings, and showed unbounded disappointment that as yet no further developments had ensued. He hinted, in fact, that I was burking all further knowledge of the subject, and sat arguing and discussing like an Embodied British Association.

It was in vain that I tacitly agreed to all his premises, and passed over his insults. He sat and sat, and there he was when Baines arrived, and then I knew that the game was fairly up. Under Gerry's encouraging cross examination I felt sure that the worthy valet would have seen and heard marvels which no man could gainsay, and would be guided into revelations of my uncle's last words and messages which might bear any sort of meaning that Gerry chose to apply to them.

I groaned as the smooth faced, dapper little chap was ushered in by Barker, and Gerry's face of enthusiastic delight was a picture.

He stood in an uncertain sort of attitude near the door, fingering his hat, and waiting, after the first good evening had passed between us, for me to speak. I motioned him to sit down, and as he deposited himself gingerly on the edge of a chair I rose, and strad-

dling across the hearthrug, began my interrogation.

"Well, Baines," said I, "it has been a sad time for you. Can you give us any details of your master's illness?"

"It was very short and sudden, my lord," said Baines, with a terseness for which I blessed him. "It came on at 'Uanac, where we were camped. 'Is lordship went about much as usual for the first day; the second he was very bad, and we sent on down to Greytown for a doctor, but by the next day 'is lordship was delirious, and died the day after. The doctor came too late. I nursed him all the time, my lord," and Baines' eyes shone mistily for a moment in the candle light, "and I think all was done that could be done, but there was no help for it. They tell me these malarial fevers always are like that, but 'is lordship was never what I should call robust, my lord."

"Do you think he knew that he was dying?" I queried, as he paused. "At least, was he delirious all the time, or was there an interval of consciousness?" I added hopefully.

"Oh, yes, my lord. He was quite calm at the last, and knew he was going. I think what vexed him most was that he hadn't finished the business he'd come for."

"And what was that?" demanded Gerry and I as with a single voice.

Baines looked at Gerry a little uncertainly, shuffling his hat between his hands, and glanced at me interrogatively before he made answer. I understood what he meant, and hastened to put him at his ease.

"You can speak freely before Mr. Carver," said I. "I have no secrets from him."

"Well, my lord," said Baines, with a sort of apologetic hesitation, "I cannot think that his lordship was altogether himself these last two or three months. He had possessed himself of a piece of paper covered with what you'd call 'jommetry'—at least that's what I believe it is called, my lord—when we were in Lisbon, and for hours together he would pore over this when we were going out to Greytown, and mutter away to himself in a really most extraordinary manner. Then when we got to Greytown, he wouldn't stop there a day—and they say you should always take a day or two to get acclimatized before you go up country—but got mules together and started at once for Chichitza——"

"Chichitza?" I exclaimed, remembering Crum's story. "Are you quite sure that was the name?"

"I know it only too well, my lord, considering we spent nigh a month there. A horrible place, too. Uncanny, I called it."

"Uncanny. Why?"

"Oh, it was all shut in with trees, my lord, and there was nothing but great ruins all covered with figures and carving that looked diabolical, I thought, even in the daytime, and as for night—well, I never dared stir from my tent. There was moans and rustlings going on in them all the time. 'Is lordship used to say that it was only the monkeys and sloths that lodged among them, but I didn't care to go and find out. I kept pretty close in camp after dark, I can tell you."

"And what did my uncle do all the time?'

"His company and conversation was reserved pretty much all the time for the French gentleman we found there," said Baines, with an air of some contempt. "He seemed to find a good deal to say to him, my lord. Then when they weren't examining and digging among the temples and things, they used to press lumps of squashy stuff on the carvings, and pick them off when they dried. Really, my lord, without meaning any offense, I think I should have had to give notice if we'd stayed there much longer. The dullness and the bad food and one thing and another was too much for any ordinary Christian as wasn't concerned in carvings and such like."

"When did they give up?"

"Just about six days before his lordship was taken ill. They'd packed up and were going down country to camp a little way—about two days' journey, I think they said—outside Greytown. There they wanted to stay another three weeks or a month, I understood, to see something of the natives. And what there was to see, I can't say at all, my lord. A dirtier, horrider set of ruffians I never come across, and I've been with 'is late lordship in a good many countries before now."

"What was the cause of the illness, d'you think?" I queried. "Bad food? Bad water? Anything of that kind?"

"Just the pure reek and stink of the places, I consider," said Baines impressively. "There was a white mist that rose at night which fairly got one in the chest, my lord. And up at the ruins it was worse than anywhere. I only wonder I didn't go down with it too. Only I was more careful at night than 'is lordship."

"Well, Baines, what did his lordship say when he was conscious? Did he send any message to any one, or give any directions?"

"Yes, my lord," replied Baines with a promptitude that made Gerry heave in his chair with unrestrained excitement, "he sent your lordship a message which perhaps you'll understand, for I must confess I didn't."

It is not advisable to wear your emotions upon your sleeve before a servant, and it was a stonily indifferent face I turned to Baines and an unquivering voice in which I bade him deliver his word from the dead, but I will own that discomfort and nervous expectancy had me by the throat. Gerry's face expressed nothing but unstinted and tremulous glee and triumph.

"'Go and see Captain Dorinecourte,' he said, 'when you get home, Baines. Mr. Crum will have told him why I'm out here. Then say to him from me that if he's worthy of the name he bears'—I'm only repeating it as he said it, my lord," interposed Baines apologetically—"'that he'll continue with Monsieur Lessaution what I've begun, and what's nearly done, too,' he added.

"He was getting weaker all the time, my lord, and I don't think I caught all he said, but there was a lot about the alphabet, and the ruins at Chichitza, and that the French gentleman had nearly got it all—all of *what* I don't know, my lord—and things of that kind, when I think he must have been wandering, but just at the last he sat up on his cot and spoke quite loud and clear.

"'After all these generations, when I had it in my grasp, it's gone to Jack. It's the cursedest luck in the world, Baines,' he said, turning to me very wild-like and passionate, 'the cursedest luck, and if Jack throws away his chance, I'll—I'll——' and then a sort of cough or sob took him sudden in the throat, and he fell back gasping.

"I held his head, my lord," went on Baines, his voice getting perceptibly unsteadier, "but it was no use. He turned his eyes to me, and I'm sure he took me for some one else, for he smiled so beautiful and glad that it made him look quite different and like some other person. His lips moved again, but I couldn't hear any sound. He just breathed deep and quiet-like two or three times, and then was still, and I'm sure he had no pain," and as he concluded his simple tragedy a large tear rolled over the brim of the faithful valet's eye and fell with quite a sparkle on the carpet.

The silence held complete possession of the room for a good minute after Baines had finished speaking.

I ruminated sadly over the confirmation and support that would be given to the wild theories of Crum and Gerry by this unfortunate testimony from the dead; Baines was lost in pathetic reminiscence of the end of a master whom in his way he had loved, and to whom

he had given nigh a score of years of faithful service; while Gerry, a single glance showed to be indulging in fantastic dreams of triumph which only a certain feeble sense of decency prevented him divulging to us on the moment.

"What about Monsieur Lessaution, Baines?" I queried to break a silence which was getting heavy with foreboding. "Did he stay in Greytown, as he didn't cross with you?"

Baines flushed suddenly, and looked yet unhappier.

"No, my lord, he went back to Chichitza—at least so I understood."

"Why?"

Baines stammered and fumbled his hat diffidently before he answered, striving evidently to use chosen words in describing a disagreeable incident. At last he burst forth incontinent, forbearing circumlocutions:

"He was very impudent to me, my lord—I can't describe it any other way. He wanted to possess himself of one or two of his lordship's papers—particularly the one with the signs on it, that I've spoken of—and was quite passionate to me about it. Of course I knew my duty, and wouldn't let him have it, and he used dreadful language to me in French—at least I'm not a scholar, my lord, but it sounded almost devilish. At the end he rounded on me.

"'Well, pig of pigs,' he said, 'take it to England then. It but remains for you to bring it back when you get there. Tell the new Lord Heatherslie that I await him at Chichitza till Christmas. After that I shall work on my own account,' and that was all I got out of him after that, my lord."

There was a gurgle of unrepressed delight from Gerry's corner, followed by a murmur of "No getting out of it, my boy."

I quelled him with a glance, and proceeded with my interrogation.

"And that was the last word you had with him, Baines?"

"That was the last word he spoke to me, my lord," answered Baines guiltily.

I understood. "You should not have answered a gentleman back," said I severely. "What did *you* say to *him*, Baines?"

He grew perceptibly hotter, but answered honestly.

"Well, my lord, I didn't expect ever to see the gentleman again, and he *was* very outrageous about the papers. I only said that you came of an obliging family, my lord, and if he meant to wait all that time in America, your lordship was just the man to do as much in England. He didn't make any answer, my lord, but just bit at his knuckles, and went away dancing."

Gerry walked to the window and looked gravely into the night. I assumed a sphinx-like expression.

"It was an unpardonable reply, Baines," said I sadly, "but it cannot be helped now. I must write and apologize to M. Lessaution for it. I think that will do for the present. Of course I shall continue to pay your wages till affairs are settled, and shall probably want to see you again more than once. Lodge as near as you can. My man will give you a glass of wine," and I rang the bell and delivered him into Barker's hands, the latter's usual impassivity being marred by a bubbling excitement as he received this traveled *confrère*, who might be expected to entertain him with astounding histories of adventure by flood and field.

"A peculiarly pleasant gentleman, Mr. Baines," said Gerry, turning pink complexioned from the window as the door closed. "So versatile and gifted in the lighter arts of conversation and repartee. Now, old chap, do you realize that you've got to go through with this thing? Not only is it proved beyond a doubt that there *is* something to be looked into, but it appears more than likely that the investigation thereof may become amusing. What more could any reasonable person desire?

"We're both of us down in the

mouth, and require relaxation and a tonic for diseased minds. Here is an unexampled chance ready to our hands. Apply, therefore for leave; run over to Chichitza, and interview the good Lessaution before he is tired of waiting. And I tell you what I'll do—I'll come and look after you."

"You overwhelm me with your consideration," I sneered. "I can't possibly permit myself to trespass on your kindness."

"Don't trouble yourself to be sarcastic, old man," said Gerry composedly. "If you desire it, I'll openly avow that I'm crazy to go and forget all the brooding and whining of the last month, and therefore I mean to make your life a burden till you consent. That's all for tonight; but tomorrow we'll go and see Crum again and hear what he has to say. So good night, old man."

I suffered myself to be led an unwilling captive to Crum's office the next day, and the old man heard our version of Baines' story patiently. And thus he made remark, speaking didactically:

"I must say," said he, leaning forward and tapping the points of his fingers ceaselessly together, "that what Baines has to tell us seems to me to be most conclusive that your uncle, in conjunction with M. Lessaution, has lighted on some further clue to this mysterious document. Though apparently they have not solved it in its entirety, they have satisfied themselves that it is Mayan in character, and has some bearing on the adventure described by Sir John Dorinecourte.

"The French gentleman evidently has accumulated knowledge which makes him the only authority on this subject, and it is to him you must address yourself if you would go further in the matter. I think, my lord, that you would very possibly find it interesting so to do, but it rests with you. It is regrettable that M. Lessaution is not returning to Europe at once, and that he remains at Chichitza. It is also evident that he has—or thinks he has—information which may make him independent of you in this question, or, on the other hand, his threat of working without you may be merely a piece of bluff to induce you to go and interview him.

"In conclusion, I must say, that all things considered, it is the only course I see open to you, my lord, if, as I say, you think the matter of sufficient interest to be inquired into."

"And of that there is no possible, probable doubt, no shadow of doubt whatever," interposed Gerry. "But don't you think we should have a look at the thing which has been at the bottom of all the excitement? It's among the boxes which have been deposited here, Mr. Crum."

Crum smiled. "I have so far expected this visit that I made bold—in my character of executor—to open your late uncle's despatch box, which was deposited here last night. I have found the thing in question, and speaking for myself, am of the opinion that there can be no question but that the coins and the document are in the same symbol," and opening his writing table drawer he produced a tin case.

Out of it he took a sheet of yellow rough looking material wrapped in tissue paper. He spread it out before us.

It was moldering and musty, and emitted a faint, incense-like odor of perfumed wax. It was covered, as Baines had described, with "geometry" of sorts, namely squares, and oblongs twisted and welded together with intricacy, but with apparent method.

The long lines of them ran across it in ordered rows from top to bottom, though which was the beginning, it would be hard to say, except that at the end appeared a drawing—the presentment of as diabolical a looking monster as I have ever seen. It was of the nature of a huge lizard, with a

long, sinuous neck doubled into terrifying contortions and flung back upon its thick and lumpish body. The lines which radiated from its eye evidently represented the baleful glare which was supposed to proceed from that organ. But it was portrayed with a rough skill which was more or less admirable.

"Well," said I, after a pause, when we had ceased to gape upon this absurdity, "I think you are driving me into an escapade worthy of the worst kind of lunatic, but as you are all against me I give in. We sail for Chichitza, but while I say it, I am calling myself a fool, fool, and again fool, and there is no other word to characterize all of us."

And so, amid Gerry's shouts of acclamation, was set on foot that outrageous adventure which brought us to the Great South Wall.

CHAPTER V.

PROFESSOR LESSAUTION'S OPINION.

It was a hot, damp, oppressive October evening when our little coasting steamer deposited us at Greytown, whither we had come after being landed by the Pacific Mail at Colon.

Gerry and I fought our way ashore amid the crowd of niggers and half castes of varying degree, while the melancholy Baines brought up the rear, eyeing doubtfully the all too easy porterage afforded our baggage by the longshore loafers who had annexed it tumultuously.

Baines had accompanied us under strong compulsion, and only by the promise of a stipend that many a weary curate would have deemed beyond the dreams of avarice.

When the point was mooted—and we felt that his experience was a thing worth struggling for—he had met our proposals with a flat refusal. He had explained emphatically that he had already had sufficient, for one life at least, of irruptions into the tangle of primeval forests where the dark green abyss of jungle made twilight eternally. Where, as he forcibly expressed it, the crawling beasts of peculiar noisomeness were thick as flies upon a butcher's stall; where the water was soup and the soup water; where the gray mists of malaria enveloped one as with a blanket of ague germs.

All these things, as I say, were contrary to him. But the financial allurements held out to him, and the magic of Gerry's silver tongue had prevailed, and now he conducted us personally, though lugubriously. He it was who hustled a way eventually for us to the wretched inn, and set himself to prepare our morrow's transport.

Nothing, we ascertained, had been seen or heard of M. Lessaution, and it was therefore to be supposed that he was still encamped amid the ruins of Chichitza. By noon the next day we had accumulated our carriers, and set forth a half day's stage in that direction before evening, full of excitement in our quest, and of hopes of adventure in the attaining of it.

For now that we found ourselves in these tropic wilds, visions of encounters with savage man and beast loomed largely before our mind's eye.

A greater disappointment than the reality I have seldom, if ever, had to undergo. Instead of varied and delightful travel, enlivened by brilliant experiences of peril at the hands of the aboriginees, or the claws of the forest denizens, the advance was simply one long, perpetual grind.

Eternally we hewed our devious way through the thickest brush which exists, as I believe, on this earth. Every moment of the day and night were we devoured by mosquitoes and other noxious beasts, including "jiggers," which lamed us both for the best part of a week. Nothing did we eat save cassava bread and the perpetual monkey and porcupine steak, and over every portion of our bodies were we

covered with enormous tropical boils, by reason of which we rested not day or night.

So in stupendous misery did we proceed to Chichitza, seeing neither man nor beast of the slightest import during the whole ten days we spent in the transit.

Well do I remember our arrival at the ruins. The last few miles we had stumbled on a faint track among the creeping lianas and spiky aloes, and Gerry and I, hearing that the end of our quest was only a matter of an hour or two, had begun to head the party with some small show of *élan*.

Thus as we strode hopefully through the endless gloom, we saw a ray of blessed sunlight flicker down between the masses of dense foliage about a quarter of a mile ahead, and yelled with pure delight at the sight, the monkeys and parrots answering back defiantly. Then we took to our heels and ran like lamplighters down the aisles of rotting logs that lay between us and the gladsome shaft of brightness, shouting uproariously.

Still sprinting, we emerged suddenly into an encampment where white civilized tents gleamed in the noonday sun—oh, the loveliness of open skies—and tripped with startled outcry upon their pegs, rolling at the feet of a little wan, wizened, black bearded man, who stared down upon us with timorous amazement.

It did not take his invocation of the sacred name of a pig to convince me that we had in very truth stumbled upon our man. I rose and bowed to him with dignity.

"I believe," said I in French, "that I have the honor to address M. le Professeur Lessaution? Allow me to introduce myself as Lord Heatherslie, and this gentleman as Mr. Gerald Carver, of her Majesty's Regiment of Foot Guards."

He flung up his arms ecstatically.

"But what a joy!" he shrieked in his native tongue. "Monsieur has not failed me. But I convinced myself that a gentleman of monsieur's blood would not. I said, no, it is not possible that any Englishman, with his native love of adventure, will forsake this so great quest. Monsieur, I have the honor to embrace you with all my heart," and he'd have done it, too, not only with his heart, but with his lean little arms, if I had not dexterously caught his tempestuous hands and wrung them with an effusion that left him too exhausted for more familiar demonstrations.

When Gerry had also evaded the luscious raptures that the good little man in the fulness of his soul would have inflicted on him too, and the ingenious abandon had somewhat subsided, we proceeded to explain ourselves, detailing under what circumstances we had received his message, how we had been affected thereby, and how our purpose to visit him had grown into fulfilment.

Then tremblingly he demanded if we had with us the original document, and satisfied about this by its exhibition beneath his sparkling eyes, turned to evolve an entertainment worthy of the occasion. Meanwhile we sought changes of raiment—by this time our carriers had overtaken us—baths, and such like luxuries which we had been without for ten long and weary days.

As we emerged again into the sunlight—and how we reveled in it, hot as it was—we found our host in the full ardor of hospitality. He was dashing about from tent to tent, cuffing relentlessly those of his servants who failed exactly to meet his behests, personally superintending the cook, and flitting from saucepan to saucepan with strange bottles and jars of piquancies like a very *cordon bleu*. The result, when we sat ourselves down before it half an hour later, was in every way a success.

Finally, as the coffee circulated in choice little cups, and pipes and cigars were lit, and contentment sat upon every brow, the little chap proceeded

to open the conference, speaking as one who conducted a very rite, rather than a mere discussion.

"In the first place," said the little man, speaking in French, "I have to ask your pardon, M. de Heatherslie, for the attempt I made to deprive your uncle's servant, the good Baines, of the contents of the despatch box with which he charged him so rigorously. My action was inexcusable, I admit. But on the other hand, put yourself in my place.

"Look you that your uncle and I together had toiled months—weeks, at least—to elucidate the symbol of this document—this so ancient document, in which many things of the most curious may be recorded. And understand, also, that we are very near the conclusion of the matter. At this precise moment Monsieur Baines takes from beneath my eyes the prize for which I have toiled so laboriously. Do you not imagine, therefore, that I feel a distress that is cruel—that I bemoan his obstinacy—that I endeavor by any means to alter his decision. Tell me this, and at the same time accord me your forgiveness for my hastiness."

"I think," said I, beaming upon him benignantly, "that you must have exercised great restraint, my dear Monsieur Lessaution, in refraining from destroying him and rifling his body. Let us forget this absurd incident. Happily we have returned to you the means of doing so. Here is the paper, and here are we, boiling over with curiosity to get a translation. Are you now in a position to give it?"

He bowed impressively, his soft little brown eyes gleaming gratefully at me from behind his spectacles. Then he continued his discourse.

"It may have come to your ears, my friends, that I have for some time convinced myself that the interpretation of the Mayan cabalistics, which you see here graven upon these mighty ruins"—and he waved his arms solemnly towards the gray walls that showed dimly through the foliage—"is to be found by comparing them with the ancient Egyptian symbol. This I have now proved beyond a doubt to be correct. But this being so, only half the battle is won.

"I arrive at the language spoken some centuries ago by the inhabitants of the Mayan Empire. To translate this language I must find its connecting link with the Mayan of the present day—and this is but a bastard patois of the original, being corrupted with Indian. But by familiarizing myself with Mayan, as the people of the country speak it today, I have made long strides in solving the twisted carvings of these ancient monuments.

"It was at the point where your late uncle and I had decided that some knowledge of collopuial Mayan was necessary to further our plans that he unfortunately contracted the illness which proved fatal to him. During the last two months I have familiarized myself with this language. I say it with due humility, but I believe with some certainty that in the course of a short time I shall decipher the document. But supposing this done, shall you be guided by the result?"

"That's just a little too previous a question," said I. "Don't you think you had better get the answer to the Mayan conundrum before you embarrass us with plans which have as yet no basis to start from?"

"But surely you have seen the letter of your great ancestor, who was the original discoverer of this document. Naturally the translation will show us where to seek this lost people."

He was so serious about it, not to say so cocksure, that I nearly imperiled our friendship by laughing in his face.

To my stolid British mind, the conclusive way in which he took my romancing old ancestor's yarn as gospel truth struck me as humorous. But I preserved a staid demeanor as I answered.

"Let me assure you, monsieur," said I, "that I shall feel it my duty to be guided in this matter by your advice. But before we discuss hypothetical questions, let us endeavor to deal with facts. Take then this paper and apply to it your knowledge. I have great pleasure in handing it over to your care."

It might have been an insignia of knighthood at the least, judging by the reverence with which he received the musty relic. In a very fury of grateful protestation he bore it to his tent and surrounded himself with a mass of papers, books, and references.

And there through the live long day he continued to sit amid his piled accumulations of literary matter. The door of his tent was ever open, and our view of his actions unimpeded.

Fatigued by the stress of ten days' marching, Gerry and I were only too glad to rest beneath the shade of a great granadillo tree and smoke the pipe of peace, and the sight of the little man's energy was a restful tonic to our jaded constitutions.

He flung himself upon his task like a navvy. From book to book he flew, and from note to note. He dodged about from one heap of manuscript to another like a little robin picking crumbs in the snow. He jerked his little head from side to side as he annotated and compared with the eager, intelligent air of a fox terrier before a rabbit hole. He sweated, he tore his hair, he seized his head between his hands in a very travail of mental effort. The sheets of foolscap flew beneath the touch of his practised fingers.

Symbol after symbol gave up its secret as he traveled down the lines of interwoven cabalistics. The copperplate of his translation grew in volume steadily; the pace increased rapidly as he neared the end. Not a word did we offer, not a suggestion did we make. Apathetically we listened to his curses or smiled at his squeals of triumph as the figures alternately obstructed or fell before him.

Finally, as the tropic night closed in with the swiftness of a curtain's dropping, he gave a yell of frantic joy and bounded out of his lair, waving the completed copy with terrific gesticulation. He thrust it into my hands, still shouting.

"Aha, aha! it is done, it is complete. I have them, the great race of Maya. Before the world we shall present them. We shall say, behold the glories of so long ago, and to us will be the honor—the so great honor of the discovery. Read, then, read, and say if I have not succeeded," and with his eyes aflame he hovered round me, waving his ten fingers ecstatically.

Here is what I found written down in artistic French, and render into my own bald native tongue.

From Huanhac, leader of the migration of the people of Cay, greeting to Camazmag, priest of Cay and overlord of the people who remain in the land of Mayax:

This to inform you that to the people of the migration is come prosperity and great honor, for indeed we have found the habitation of the god Cay himself. For having put out into the deep after our departure, behold a great tempest arose swiftly bearing us south, and for the space of fifteen days we saw naught but water and a sky of doom.

On the sixteenth day, when both water and victual were banished from among us, we came to regions of much ice—ice in comparison with which that upon the mountains of the Northland is as naught, at the which were we dismayed, expecting death by cold and hunger, but the purpose of the god was upon us. For as we drifted through the lanes of ice, a great wall rose before us, high and implacable, nor could we anywhere perceive a break therein.

So for some hours we were tossed by changing currents, fearing instant destruction against the frowning crags. Then of a sudden Carfag, of the tribe of Xibalab, being in the leading ship, called aloud, saying that round a jutting peak of rock before him a bay was opening, which passage was exceeding intricate, and might pass unnoticed. So following Carfag we rounded the cape and found still water and a sandy sloping beach. There we landed amid a crowd of sitting sea birds and sea beasts of surprising magnitude,

the which were not scaled as fish, but furred as foxes. Yet all was rock and pebbles, nor had we means to light a fire, save with such lumber from the ships as we could spare.

But as we wandered further up the foreshore, there ran ridge-like across the face of rock a line of black stone having the similitude of wood, and with the marks of ferns therein. This some of us knew would burn, having seen the like in the Northland.

Then lit we fires, and smote over some of the great birds which sat upon the sand without fear and unresisting, and roasted them to make a meal therefrom. As the fume of their roasting went up savorily upon the air, and all prepared to satisfy their hunger, behold one lifted up his eyes towards the land and cried aloud in awe and great terror, for thence came down towards us the god Cay himself in flesh apparent, his mouth agape as if demanding sacrifice.

Then consulted we hurriedly upon the honor which had thus befallen us of the migration—shown now of a surety to be in direct favor of the god—and selecting Alfa, daughter of Halmac, as fairest, bound her for sacrifice. Her we thrust forth into the path of the god, though Hardal, to whom the maid was promised, would have stayed us.

Then came Cay in his bodily shape, and did take the maid, and did eat her in token of blessing and acceptance to us his faithful people, and Hardal, seeing his bride rent and dismembered, ran forth to the feet of the god, and was himself devoured also. After which did Cay withdraw himself from our reverent and astonished eyes, and we gave thanks that he in his mercy had guided us to his own abode, though verily the land is passing savage and barren of every growing thing.

So we hasted and collected of our stores and put them in our best ship, and have sent unto you Migdal and six of our bravest youth, that you too may come to the land which Cay himself hath deigned to bless. In witness whereof hereunto I subscribe the sign of the god, fervently desiring that to you may be given his protections until you also come to his own seat.

HUANHAC, *priest of Cay, and chief of the migration.*

I handed the paper on to Gerry without a word of comment, and then turned to Lessaution with questioning eyes.

He was sitting opposite me chuckling and bubbling away in an indescribable manner. He beat his little hands together, digging at the soft earth with his restless heels, while Gerry also digested this astounding rigmarole, evidently bursting with the desire to speak, but restraining himself till he could spring his fatuous surprises upon us both together.

For the next five minutes he made the most hideous and unconscious faces at me, winking and smirking meaningly as he caught the emotions flitting swiftly across Gerry's features, and finally, as the latter laid down the paper with a low whistle of astonishment and incredulity, he poured forth his abounding triumph boisterously.

"You see, my friends, you see?" he shouted. "It is as plain—but yes—as plain as the great temple behind you. You have heard, you have read of the great wall of the unknown lands of the Antarctic? You have remembered what M. Borchgrevink has told? Of the great cliff that stands up unclimbable from the ocean? There they have gone. It is there they have founded their new empire in the land that no man has discovered.

"It is all in one with the letter of the good Sir Dorinecourte of long ago. Where but there could it be? Where is the ice? Where else the great cliffs? We will go to them. We will discover them again. To the world we will present this ancient race, and to us will be a glory that we cannot as yet dream of. We shall be the great ones of the century. The discoverers of the peoples of yesterday. What do you say? Hein? Hein? Hein?" and he grunted like an inquiring pig.

"My dear Professor," said I patiently, "you don't really mean to imply that you believe that this race exists to the present day? Why, they've perished long ago by cold and hunger; or been eaten by their god. I must say that I think I may safely take this document to be—let us say—an allegory, written by some mendacious old priest for wicked purposes of his own. The story of the god Cay is quite sufficient to show the absurdity of it. How on earth could such a

monstrous impossibility have ever walked the earth either in the Antarctic or anywhere else?"

"My friend, my friend," he babbled, his words nearly tripping over each other in his hurry, "it is not so; I assure you of it. Let us even allow that the race is dead. But the remains of the wonderful people exist. We can go, we can dig, we can find the traces. And remember the gold. We go not for honor alone—though for me, I am French, and it is enough—but there will be the gold. Think of the very bailing vessels made of gold in the letter of the great Sir Dorinecourte. There will be wealth, and the fame—oh, the very great, magnificent fame."

I tried to be tolerant with the enthusiastic little ass, but I will own that his credulity was altogether too much for me.

"You have not yet answered my question about the god Cay," I replied. "How do you propose to explain that very obvious falsehood?"

"And you think all this is a lie," he bawled, "just because this priest wove a little religion into his message? And who are we to say that it is not true? Have we been behind that wall of rock where these people remain either alive or dead? How then can we decide what is there or has been there? It will be time enough to say what exists or does not exist when we have made examination."

Now did one ever hear such nonsense. There may be a queer thing or two loose about the earth, but to ask one to believe that a terror such as that depicted at the foot of the Mayan scroll was alive and being worshiped not much more than three centuries ago was a trifle too much. I said so with no uncertain sound.

"M. de Heatherslie," answered the little man gravely, "you speak of what you do not know. What is that your poet says? There are more things in heaven and earth than your poor little philosophy thinks of. Why, tell me, are you convinced that such a monster cannot have existed? You but repeat what the ignorant said to M. de Chaillu about the gorilla."

"Humbug," said I, getting warm. "Monkeys there always have been, and monkeys there always will be. If this monster was like anything that nature ever invented there might possibly be something in it. But it's a thing utterly outrageous. Who ever saw a hippopotamus with the neck of a giraffe, and the legs of a lizard, and that is practically what the mythological god Cay is, both on the scroll and on the ruins here," for we had found more representations of the loathsome divinity studded into the twisted inscriptions on the façades and walls of the old temples.

As the discussion grew he began to light up as well.

"Monsieur," he squealed, with glowing eyes, "I endeavor to say it with courtesy, but you are ignorant and obstinate. You have slept away your life in the fogs of England; you think that there is nothing worth considering in the world that has not the *cachet* of Piccadilly. I tell you—I affirm to you—that I believe that far away in the unknown south much may have happened—much may still be happening.

"We are ignorant, you and I, but there is no reason that we should not learn. I have translated to you this document. I give to you my opinions on it. I say that it should be investigated, and to your family is due the first chance of investigation, if only out of respect to the honor of your uncle, who is, unfortunately, dead. But if you throw away this chance, then I claim the right to give this honor to France—my country. But I beg you to remember that I beseech you to make use of your knowledge first, that afterwards there may be no recriminations."

I bowed sneeringly.

"You do me too much honor," I replied sarcastically, "for I can imag-

ine that every savant in France is yearning to stand in my shoes. Why, heavens, man! do you think there's a fool big enough to back you anywhere between Dunkirk and Marseilles?"

He glowered at me malignantly, flapping his hands against the turf.

"Monsieur wishes me to infer then that I am a fool?" he queried coldly. "I accept monsieur's compliment in the spirit in which it is dealt to me. But let me tell monsieur this. He may have the wealth, he may have the courage, he may think he has the wisdom of the century at his back, but he has no spirituality, and I say it with assurance, but little intellectuality. He is crusted in conservative unbelief like an oyster in his shell. With all his practical qualities I pity him," and he swept his hands abroad with a wave of disdain that was dramatic in its haughtiness.

You will perceive that the makings of a good quarrel were here, however absurd the subject. A sentence or two more and I and the little ass would have been, figuratively, at each other's throats. Here Gerry stepped into the breach.

"Jack, you're in the wrong; and what's more, when you're cool, you'll own it. What's the good of looking black at another gentleman simply because he differs from you in a matter of opinion. The remedy lies in your own hands. Mr. Lessaution tells you that if you sail in a certain direction he has good reason to believe that you will find certain things, or the remains of certain things, which he judges to be of importance.

"We'll *sail* there. We've a very great desire for something exciting to do just at present, and here you have an ancient family quest ready to your hand. I can't imagine anything that could possibly improve upon such a providentially given chance. You've got the money for it, and the health, and last but not least, you've got two companions ready to accompany you. If you've any spirit left in you, *go*," and as he concluded his lecture he smote me resoundingly on the back.

I failed to see sense in this any more than in the Frenchman's hare brained purposes, but a sudden thought had come with glowing swiftness into my mind. I turned hastily to Lessaution, who was regarding me with anxious inquiry and asked him a question.

"Supposing," said I, "only supposing, we were to sail due south to the land which you believe to exist beyond Cape Horn, how should we proceed?"

"We should, of course, make the Falkland Islands our base, and steer a directly southern course from there. They would be the nearest inhabited land."

I pondered this information silently, ruminating various matters in my mind. Finally I turned benignantly towards the professor, and seized his hand.

"Monsieur Lessaution," said I, "I will say frankly that I do not believe that we shall find a vestige of this extinct race, and I am inclined to think that both the English letter and the Mayan document are frauds. But I want relaxation and excitement, and I believe the cruise may possibly do me all the good in the world. We will return to England and find out the cost of equipping a yacht for sailing in these latitudes. If my man of business advises me that I am in a position to undertake it, I shall do so. And I request the pleasure of your company if this proposal becomes an accomplished fact."

His sallow little cheeks flushed up with pleasure, and he shook my proffered hand violently.

"I was not mistaken in you, Monsieur de Heatherslie," he said, with dignity. "I felt that no man of your adventurous race would fail at a chance like this. Receive my congratulations on your decision, and my regrets that I used unpardonable adjectives to goad you into it. You will find me, I trust,

not unworthy of the honor you have done me."

Gerry used less set terms in his address.

"Thanks, old man," he remarked complacently; "I should like to come, though you haven't asked me. And now all's settled peacefully, let's have a drink," and he headed the procession which advanced with much unanimity upon the dining tent.

But I felt a hypocrite and a pretender. For what had influenced my decision was simply a sentence culled from the published itinerary of the S. S. Madagascar's winter's cruise. And it ran thus:

"On or about February 6, Port Lewis in the Falkland Isles, previous to her return home."

CHAPTER VI.

WE SAIL SOUTH.

It was the end of October before we were back in London again, and had begun our preparations for the expedition to which I had pledged myself.

Crum gave me no financial excuse for departing from my promise. In his management things had looked up during my uncle's tenure of the title, and I was a deal better off than I had believed possible.

The Racoon, formerly of the American whaling trade, bark built, and with stout timbers and bulkheads to resist ice, was for sale. With cautious advances Crum became her purchaser. She was of five hundred tons burden, had an auxiliary screw with one hundred and eighty indicated horse power, and was reputed a first class sea boat.

We had the greasy try works swept from her decks, and a skylight fixed therein, which gave light to a spacious saloon partitioned out of the barrel deck below. Aft this we fashioned a cozy smoke room, round which were four cabins for ourselves and the captain. Other cabins below the main deck housed the mates and the engineer, while forward the crew and stokers had the best of quarters. We took aboard much provision, supplied us by a famous firm of caterers, together with liquid in due proportion.

Coal we took a large stock of; not that we expected to steam more than we could help, but we wished to be independent of coaling stations. Mr. Waller, of the R.N.R. and the merchant marine came with many certificates of various sorts to be our captain, and Mr. Janson of the same service to be his second in command.

Mr. Rafferty, some time of Cork City, was boatswain, and the engineer, stokers, and deck hands were all British; the first whole colored, single tongued crew that Waller had ever commanded, as he feelingly remarked.

Under these favorable auspices we sailed from Southampton on November 22, and thus the adventure to the Great South Wall was fairly started.

I am not going to give you the wearisome repetitions which my log shows as indications of what monotonous things we did during the next six weeks. We had the usual toss as we threshed our way across the Bay, we took the usual pleasure in sighting the Canaries and Madeira, and we shipped the usual turtle at Ascension.

After the fogs we had left in England, we found the eternal heat of the line bearable for about six hours, and then cursed it with the usual malevolence after experiencing it for six hours more. We got very much bored with each other's company, and found conversation languish after the first week. We got huffy with one another more than once, and finally settled down to the voyage, shaking, each of us, into his alloted place automatically. And we grew fat and bilious.

Lessaution was by far the most energetic. His curiosity was abnormal, and he left no inquiry unmade that would tend to satisfy it. He was as sick as it is possible for a full blooded

Frenchman to be sick for the first three or four days, and after that seemed to renew his youth. Not that he was by any means daunted during the period named. He crawled about the deck in paroxysms of the most terrible description, interrupting the crew with queries on every and any conceivable subject; he attempted to mount the bridge, and was hurled back disconsolate as a green sea thundered aboard; he ventured into the cook's department and endeavored to complete that worthy's education during the height of a gale; finally he was rescued from imminent death on the bed plates of the engine room, where he was explaining the superiority of French boilers to the contemptuous chief, Eccles. When the wind and the sea had calmed down, he proceeded to bring out his gear which he had accumulated for the adventure, and overhaul it with pardonable pride.

He had certainly not forgotten anything that was likely to be of any possible use. Ice axes there were in profusion. Climbing irons, portable ladders, ropes, chisels. These to be used in the attack upon the precipice of rock or ice which he convinced himself would lie between us and our desire. He had also provided for further feats when the first difficulties had been surmounted. Toboggans or sleds he had two or three of; no less than six pairs of snow shoes, and wonder of wonders, a pair of skates!

Gerry had bought a pair of guns and a rifle, with some vague idea of sealing, and found encouragement therein from Mr. Rafferty, who had sailed in whalers. I gave it to be understood, however, that I did not purpose wasting time in the chase, and should not allow us stay our course short of our destination.

One circumstance, however, came to light, which turned the laugh strongly against the Frenchman. It was while he was examining with a depreciatory air Gerry's guns, that it suddenly occured to him that with all his store of weapons, he had no means of loading them. In the excitement of departure he had left all such practicalities as cartridges to the last, being filled with the loftiest ideas for using them.

The consequence was that he was absolutely dependent on Gerry's slender store, and Gerry, with all the good nature in the world, found that the barrels were of different bore, his being twelve and the professor's sixteen. After which discovery we had a morning's unavailing gnashing of teeth, and then the little man forgot his troubles in a new excitement.

This was the first ice. We had sighted Bovet's Island a few days before, when we saw it—a solemn stately ice hill, floating along island-like on a calm and unrippled sea.

There's something rather overpowering and awesome about a big berg. The deathly blue whiteness of it, the silence that broods about it, the great grottoes that pierce its sides like tombs of the lost, the glassy radiance that does not cheer but repels one—these things have a very depressing effect on me.

I realized for the first time the sort of business we were going in for, and confessed to myself that a very little of this sort of thing would go a very long way. But it acted on the professor's spirits in quite another manner.

We had rigged the crow's nest the day before, and he was up in it before you could wink an eye. He leaned out over the edge of this eyrie, waggling his hands ecstatically, and singing songs of victory, welcoming this indication that we were approaching our goal with a hubbub that resounded indecently among the echoes of the bergs.

That was the only one we saw that evening, but next morning there were rows and rows of them, great pyramids of sheeny white, coming along in stately columns and companies, overhanging the blue sea, crashing now and again against each other, and hustling and grinding the floe ice that dotted the wide sea lanes between.

We steamed cautiously down the aisles, dodging from one sheet of open water to another. Now and again some unsteady pinnacle, loosening from the side of its parent berg in the heat of the sun, would plunge thunderously down the smooth slopes, and roar into the sea, sending great waves of curling foam to right and left, the rainbow rays dancing in the flying spray.

The cascades poured continually from basin to basin in the laps of the ice hills, tinkling and plashing as they fell. Here and there, on the bare smooth base of some mighty piece of glacier, rows of seals lay and basked in the sun, staring at us as we slid by them with stupid, curious brown eyes.

Every now and again a sea lion rose with a snort from some pool beneath the shadow of the shining crags, and played and tossed happily among the ripples. The birds, tame as chickens, unaccustomed to the sight of men, flew and swung and whirled and circled above us in clouds, tern wailing to tern, and gull to gull in plaintive outcry. And over all the sun shone with the strength of the Antarctic summer.

It certainly was an uplifting day, and quite swept out of my head the despondent horrors of the evening before. I climbed to the crow's nest with Lessaution, and stayed beside him there hour after hour, drinking in all the glories of the scene, and listening lazily to his babble, taking pleasure in the mere joy of living.

We rolled slowly down the lessening passages all that day, and at sunset lay to with springs on our cables, for the floe ice surged upon us ceaselessly, making it too dangerous to charge in among the pack without the help of daylight. In fact, we had to keep watch and watch about and fend off with poles, as the great splinters tangled round us, and ride out and back more than once as a berg moved upon us ponderously.

With the dawn we were under steam again, and wound our way in and out, and about till, at midday, a shout from aloft proclaimed land in sight. And then we saw it. Far away, gray and shadowy through the haze it ran across the horizon, a long wall of rock or ice faced cliff, reaching from east to west and dying into the dimness of the ice strewn sea.

As we drew nearer down the long corridors between the floes, it seemed to grow higher and more implacable at every mile.

The shadows beneath hung duskily over the ripples, making the blue of the outer ocean seem to have an edge of mourning on its brightness. Here and there a berg clanged and butted against it restlessly, grinding away huge masses of its flanks in showers of twinkling splinters.

Along its sea level the pack ice heaved, eternally smoothing and planing its surface. About its face the sea birds swirled, dipping and shrilling in their clouds. From many a little channel on its summit the rivulets from the melting glaciers fell in sparkling cascades, like the swishing tails of a stabled squadron. And far beyond it, smiting up haughtily into the empty blue, a giant range of mountains reared their heads, grim, white, and glancing in the sunlight.

We slowed when we were within a mile of it, and then began to wear a way slowly along parallel to the land, waiting till we should see some sign of a break or cranny in the relentless cliff. But never a sign of one was there.

Early in the afternoon we raised islands to the northeast, and threw the lead, finding fifteen fathoms. We crept into the channel which ran between this archipelago and the mainland, and found a larger space of open water. Here, then, at Lessaution's earnest request I anchored, and dropped a boat down for him; with a crew of six we put off, and rowed down the narrow, changing passages towards the crags.

(To be continued.)

THE CHOICE OF JOHN RADCLIFFE.

BY ROBERT BEVERLY HALE.

How a young man from the West entered Boston society, and the manner in which he selected his wife.

IT was five o'clock in the afternoon. Mr. Conrad Phillips sat before a wood fire and waited for his nephew. He was ill at ease, for he was not accustomed to young men, and did not know how to amuse them. "If he were an old codger like me," he said to himself, "I'd put him up at the Hereford Club, and in the evening we'd come home and spend our time smoking and talking in front of this fire. But to have a boy of twenty five on my hands for two months is rather hard lines." The servant announced "Mr. John Radcliffe," and in another moment uncle and nephew were shaking hands.

"Sit down, sit down, John," said Mr. Phillips, after the first greetings had been exchanged. "How much you look like your mother! Take a cigar. A cigarette? Ah, that's like you boys, always at work to undermine your constitutions. Your father says you have been working too hard, but you don't look it."

John examined his uncle curiously. He had seen few such men in Chicago. Mr. Phillips looked something like his idea of an English lord, though he had never seen one.

"It wasn't entirely my health," the young man said. "Father wanted me to see Boston. And perhaps I may be able to help you down at the office."

"Not a word about the office while you're with me," said Mr. Phillips. "I'm going to launch you in Boston society. Now don't make faces. Of course you wild Westerners like business better, but you need polish. I don't believe you know more than twenty women in the world."

"That may be so," replied John smiling; "but you can't change my nature in two months. Besides, I don't know a soul in Boston."

"Oh, yes you do," said his uncle, rising and going to his writing desk. "You're one of the most popular young men in town. Here are one, two, three —sixteen invitations for you, and its only the twentieth of November."

"Why, Uncle Conrad, you don't mean to say that you took all that trouble!" True to his business instincts, John took a fountain pen out of his pocket. "I suppose I had better answer them now," he said.

"Answer them?" cried his uncle. "Why, I've answered them all."

Radcliffe put his pen back again. "Really!" he said. "Which way?"

"Oh, as to that," replied his uncle, "you've accepted every one."

Mr. Phillips lived in a large house on Beacon Street, opposite the Common, and, as his household consisted entirely of himself and the servants, he was not sorry to get hold of a younger man to help him make use of the rooms. John had a pleasant way of bursting out singing once in a while, and that made the old house more cheerful.

"Where have you been this afternoon?" Mr. Phillips asked, as they sat by the fire on the evening of Radcliffe's second day in Boston.

"Oh, I went to Mrs. Oxenham's reception," said John.

"That's right," his uncle observed. "Go to everything. You have every advantage for entering society. Plenty of invitations, plenty of time, a rather attractive appearance—though proba-

bly your charms are very superficial—and a devoted uncle. Now let's hear all about it. You went in at the front door, and what happened then?"

"Well, I went up and introduced myself to Mrs. Oxenham, for none of the ushers seemed to take much interest in me. She pretended to be glad to see me, and said she used to go to school with mother. Then she told her son to introduce me to some one. He asked me whom I wanted to meet, and I looked round and when I had decided who was the prettiest girl in the room, I said I'd like to meet her."

"My dear boy, you couldn't have done a better thing. Get introduced to the pretty girls any way. A pretty girl has at least one thing to recommend her. A plain girl probably has nothing."

John laughed. "I'll remember that," he said. "This girl was tall and dark. Her name was Dorothy Putnam. She was very pleasant and sympathetic and seemed to agree with me when I bragged about Chicago. I asked her what business her father was in, and she said he was dead, so I didn't follow up that subject, having evidently come to the end of it. I quite lost my heart to Miss Dorothy Putnam; I don't exactly know why, except that she was pretty and attractive, and seemed to like me. She'd never read any Emerson, and had much as never heard of Browning, so I think my idea of Boston girls must be mistaken. How should you like me to marry Miss Putnam, Uncle Conrad?"

"You haven't told me enough about her yet," said Mr. Phillips.

"Well, she is one of the girls who are just coming out; about nineteen years old, I should think. She's just the right height for me, and seems to be very bright and amusing, and she has a great deal of fascination about her—I can't exactly describe it."

"Should you like to sit opposite her at the breakfast table ten thousand times in succession?" Mr. Phillips asked. "That's the test of whether you had better marry a woman or not."

"H'm!" muttered Radcliffe. "I hadn't thought of that. I guess I had better not ask her just yet. She introduced me to some other girls—let me see—to Miss Evelyn Sullivan and Miss Janet Blood and Miss Alice Hastings. Miss Sullivan was a plain, round shouldered aristocrat, fonder of turning up her nose than of talking. Miss Blood was a great boaster. She is short and fat, but she tells me that next week she is going to nine balls, so I don't doubt that she'll be thinner soon. Miss Hastings was about the average in the way of looks, and agreed with everything I said. Perhaps she'd do best for the breakfast table."

"No," said Mr. Phillips. "Nonentities are worse than any other kind. But I see you are impressed with Miss Putnam. Tomorrow night I suppose you will see her at the Strangmans' ball. Thank you, Jack, for telling me so much. It makes me feel young again to hear of your triumphs."

The next night when Jack left the Strangmans' ball it was after three o'clock. He walked home, crept quietly into the parlor of his uncle's house, and found Mr. Phillips just where he had left him five hours before, in front of the fire.

"Why, Uncle Conrad, did you sit up for me?" he cried.

"Yes, I wanted to hear about the party."

"Oh, it was splendid! First rate! It was at Pierce Hall, you know; and ever so much better in a hall than in a house."

"Well, tell your times. Was Miss Putnam there?"

"Yes, and lots of others. I know ever so many now, and I danced with all of them."

"That's all very well at first; but as a general thing you'd better pick out the four or five girls you like best and dance with them. You'll have a better time and so will they."

"Well, I danced with Miss Putnam a great many times. She dances splendidly, and she was pleased to say she liked my dancing. I asked her whether she was cross at breakfast and she said she was; so you see I'm warned. Everyone wanted to dance with her, but she and I found a little corner in one of the rooms opening into the hall where we could sit unobserved, and there we remained while other people looked for her, and we told each other how much we liked each other, not as anything important you know, but just casually. It's strange what a difference there is between girls. When I brought her her supper, she was sitting beside a friend of hers named Rose Farrington; and you never saw such a contrast. Miss Putnam is always talking agreeably, and Miss Farrington hardly ever says a word, and when she does it is apt to be disagreeable. Miss Putnam dances like an angel; Miss Farrington like the devil. Miss Putnam is tall and dark; Miss Farrington short and fair. Yet they're great friends. Miss Putnam says Miss Farrington's worth ten of her; but I don't believe it. I danced with Miss Farrington once; just by chance, for I didn't happen to see anyone else I knew."

"Don't ever do that," said Mr. Phillips. "If all the girls you want to dance with are dancing, wait till one of them gets through. Talk to your hostess while you are waiting, and get the reputation of being polite. How was your stout friend, Miss Blood?"

"Oh, she had a dreadful cold. I could hardly hear what she said. She dances like all fat people; she springs about like a chamois with great bounds, and drags her partner after her. I was perspiring profusely when I got through. She complimented my dancing, but I just bowed."

"That's right," said Mr. Phillips. "Don't ever repay a compliment by another. It's like giving a New Year's gift to a man who gave you a Christmas present."

"She was very warm herself," Radcliffe went on. "If she really goes to those nine balls next week she can say, with Cardinal Wolsey, 'Farewell, a long farewell to all my greatness!' Well, good night, Uncle Conrad!"

* * * *

"Have you made any of your party calls yet?" Mr. Phillips asked, one evening after dinner, as the two men sat in front of the fire as usual.

"Only a few. It's rather a bore."

"Then just let me give you a piece of advice. Set apart Monday afternoon to make the calls belonging to all the parties of the week before. One afternoon is enough, if you know how to economize time properly. Write down the names and addresses of all the people you're going to visit, and then put them through. While you're going from house to house, keep your eyes well on the ground, or up in the air, so that you won't see any one. That will obviate the chance of meeting the ladies whom you are to call upon. Sometimes the ladies will be at home, but not often. If they are, stay longer than half an hour; if you go earlier, they will think you aren't enjoying yourself. When the servant answers your ring at the door bell, don't say 'Are Mrs. Coldstream and Miss Coldstream at home?' but mutter sternly 'Are the ladies receiving?' Then the girl or butler will surely say no. Don't ask if the ladies are at home till you're pretty sure who the ladies are. I once asked if the ladies were receiving, and the servant told me that she thought Miss Rose was at home, and went to see. I knew then that I must be in the wrong house, for I was acquainted with no Miss Rose, so I just opened the door and went away."

Radcliffe laughed. "Thank you for your advice, Uncle Conrad," he said. "It's always good. Haven't you any more for tonight? Evelyn Sullivan's mother's going to give a cotillion, and I shall be there."

"Very well, here's some advice.

Never propose to a girl with a pretty dress on. Wait till she has on an unbecoming one. Then you'll know whether it's the dress you like, or the girl."

"All right, I'll be sure. By the way, guess who it is I'm going to dance the cotillion with."

"Miss Putnam."

"No. Miss Farrington."

"Why, I thought you hated her."

"Oh, no, Uncle Conrad, she's not so bad as all that. If she didn't snub me so much, I shouldn't mind her. By the way, what ought you to say when a girl is impudent to you?"

"Don't take any notice of it at the time," said Mr. Phillips. "If you reply, things will degenerate into a squabble. Wait till she doesn't expect an attack, and then suddenly tell her that you think she has been extremely rude and that you are generally disgusted with her, and then go away. She will generally be more careful about pitching into you another time."

* * * *

Evidently the Sullivans' cotillion was not a great success, for John seemed thoroughly disgusted when he came in at four o'clock the next morning. He said nothing, but flung himself down in his arm chair and waited for his uncle to begin.

"You don't look as if you'd had a very good time," Mr. Phillips observed.

"No, I didn't. I didn't have a single good dance all through the evening."

"I suppose Miss Farrington hasn't improved, then?"

"No. But it wasn't only she. She's all well enough. But the other girls, Inez Hartington and Alice Hastings and Dorothy Putnam; none of them could dance."

"I guess I know what was the matter," said Mr. Phillips. "When you notice that every girl in the room is dancing badly, you can be tolerably certain that it's really yourself that isn't up to the mark."

Radcliffe laughed. "I shouldn't be surprised if you were right," he said. "Miss Farrington said something like that." Mr. Phillips noticed that John always called Rose Farrington "Miss Farrington." "But Miss Farrington's always saying disagreeable things. The worst part of it is that they're generally true. Now she told me tonight that I was always thinking about myself. If she'd only told me I was cruel, or mean, or even vain, I should have known it wasn't so, and laughed at her; but when an adversary finds a sore spot and pokes you there, you can't help wincing."

"Why don't you bullyrag her?"

"I did. I made her feel pretty cheap by saying she was more utterly devoid of sympathy than any one else I had ever met. That made her miserable, so we were both miserable for a while."

"What a loving pair of partners! Did you ask her if she was cross at breakfast?"

"Yes. I told her what you said about breakfasting, and asked her how she thought she and I would get on at that meal. She said she never said anything at it, and that if she was ever married she would have two newspapers and read one while her husband read the other."

"But why don't you tell me something about Miss Putnam?"

"Oh, she was there, talking and laughing as usual. She got twelve favors, one of which I gave her. Miss Farrington had ten. I don't see why, but people seem to like her. I think Dorothy Putnam is a little superficial. She's nice enough, but after all you do want a girl to have some brains. I like her better than any other Boston girl, but that isn't saying very much. I'm afraid Boston society isn't exactly my element, Uncle Conrad. Chicago and the glue business for me!"

"Nonsense, my boy! How many favors did you get?"

"Fifteen."

"In four figures?"

"In three."

"Why, my dear fellow, you're the most popular man in Boston! But I suppose you're getting sick of parties. Why don't you call on some of these girls?"

"I think I will. I'll call on Dorothy Putnam and perhaps Miss Farrington. Miss Farrington would say no if I asked her, so I guess I'll go without asking."

* * * *

One night at about eleven o'clock John came dancing into the parlor like a harlequin.

"You've been having a good time, I see," said his uncle.

"Fairly good. I've been calling on Dorothy Putnam."

"Indeed! Well, sit down and let's hear what you talked about."

"Oh, we talked about balls and teas and dinners and things of that kind. She's a mighty jolly girl, but I'm afraid she's just a little bit of a fool."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Oh, she behaves so queerly. She doesn't mind saying she likes a fellow; and tonight when we were talking and the door bell rang, she told the maid that she wasn't at home, if any one called for her."

"That was rather a compliment to you, I should think."

"Yes. Too much of a one. It scared me a little, and set me thinking. I guess I'll keep away from that house for a while."

When John came in the next evening he was very grave.

"I've been to make a call on Miss Farrington," he said; "but I guess I won't talk about it this time, Uncle Conrad, if you don't mind."

"Why, surely I don't. Are you going to the Doolittles' ball tonight?"

"Yes. I'm going up to dress."

Six hours later, John came back from the ball in a great state of excitement.

"It was the greatest thing of the season, Uncle Conrad," he said, as he sat down.

"Well, who was there?"

"Oh, the same old crowd. There weren't quite enough men there, so some of the girls were left, and I had to dance with two or three wall flowers."

"Why, John, I told you not to do that!"

"Yes, I know," said John, blushing, "but some one else told me to do it."

"But, John, the only effect is to make wall flowers come to more dances. It does them harm in the long run."

"Well, this other adviser asked me if I didn't feel mean when I didn't dance with them. I said I did, and then she said, 'Well,' as if that settled it, and by Jove I'm half inclined to think she was right."

"Whom did you dance with besides the wall flowers?"

"Oh, I danced with Miss Farrington, and — with Miss Farrington— Let's see; who else was there?"

"Why, John, are you crazy? You couldn't have danced with one girl for five hours."

"No, but there was supper."

"Whom did you take out?"

"Miss Farrington. But now I remember, I danced with Dorothy Putnam once, and with, let me see——"

"Miss Farrington?" suggested Mr. Phillips.

"No. Not so much as all that. We sat out a good while, though, and talked. We talked about you some."

"About me? That was strange. What else?"

"Well, about lots of things. In fact we got pretty intimate, and after a while——"

"Well?"

"I asked her a question."

"What was it?"

"I asked her to marry me."

The old man puffed at his cigar for a while. Then he asked:

"What did she say?"

"She said she would."

Again Mr. Phillips meditated.

"Well," he said at last, "the Farringtons are one of the oldest families in Boston."

THE PRANKS OF DESTINY.*

BY FREDERIC VAN RENSSELAER DEY.

The terrible pass to which Felix Parsons finds himself reduced, the awful resolve he takes, and what swerves him aside from acting on it. The mystery about Rita Ortega and the great game of Pike Millington, played at double quick tempo.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Felix Parsons, some time millionaire, finding himself at the end of his resources, determines to take himself out of the world rather than run into debt. He is engaged to Carla Trevor and calling at her home before the time set for carrying out his intention, he finds that Trevor senior, who has always been as a father to him, is in sore straits financially and is depending on him, Parsons, to tide him over the crisis. Parsons undertakes to do what he can, and later meeting Pike Millington, son of the great Wall Street operator, Sam Millington, feels that fate has played into his hands when Pike asks him to carry through some deals for him during his absence in Chicago, giving him the keys to his strong boxes for the purpose.

Stooping to dishonor for another's sake where he would not even incur a debt for his own, Parsons turns over some valuable Millington securities to Trevor and saves him. Later, returning to his rooms, he finds there Rita Ortega, a beautiful Spanish girl, his ward, to whom he had written stating that he was going away and who has come to find out the truth. Edna Trevor, his fiancée's sister, meets her there and places a wrong construction on the fact. Parsons goes to see Trevor on a business matter connected with his misappropriation of Pike Millington's securities, and is petrified to behold no less a person than young Millington himself in conference with the broker.

CHAPTER VII.

A MILLIONAIRE'S PROMISE.

IT has been said that when a man faces what he believes to be inevitable death, the events of his entire life, no matter how long it has been nor how filled with incident, pass in review before him in an infinitesimal space of time, and certainly every detail connected with Parsons' experiences during the previous twenty four hours was prominently in his recollection in that one instant when he saw and recognized his young millionaire friend, Millington, in the library of Geoffrey Trevor.

His face, however, betrayed none of the emotion he felt. It had been a trifle hard when he opened the door as a result of the interview he had just had with Edna, and its expression did not change.

His perceptions were, however, sharpened by the sudden encounter, and the eager start forward which Millington made told him that nothing had been discovered as yet, although he could in no way account for the young financier's presence there.

Millington stepped forward quickly and eagerly thrust out his hand.

"Felix," he said, "you are a friend in need. You have come in the nick of time."

"I'm glad of that; but I thought you were in Chicago, or very near it, by this hour," replied Parsons.

"So I intended to be; so I should have been, but for a telegram which headed me off and turned me back at Utica. I just got in town and came directly here. Sit down. There is no privacy about this interview—that is, none that you cannot hear."

"It must be something important to bring you back in the face of the orders

** This story began in the August issue of* THE ARGOSY, *which will be mailed to any address on receipt of 10 cents.*

you received from the governor," said Felix.

"It is. I came back just to see Trevor; and I might as well have gone on, for I can't do a thing with him."

"What's the trouble, pater?" asked Parsons, turning his eyes upon the shrewd old broker.

The old man smiled grimly.

"No trouble at all," he replied. "The trouble is all past—for me; it is just beginning for a few others—your friend here, for instance."

"I don't think I catch on. You know I have a poor head for business."

"I don't mind telling you," interrupted Millington, "although it does not redound to my credit. Still,"—and he turned to Trevor—"it is really the governor you must blame, not me. It's this way," he continued, addressing Parsons again. "Trevor is concerned in a deal which is immense; he ought to make three or four millions out of it; he has organized a syndicate which will control the output of copper for the entire world—that is, it will control the market, which is the same thing. The governor, through his friends here, has been working to break him, and they—or shall I say we, Mr. Trevor?"

"It would be nearer the truth."

"Very well, *we*—although it is not the truth—*we* thought we had him pinched. *We* figured, we thought, very closely, on just how far he could go, and meant to break him. That's the unvarnished truth. We looked up every security he held, or thought we did, and at the very moment when he was, as we believed, on the point of failure, lo! he bobs up with another million or two, and we're out in the cold. Now I've returned to try to induce him to take me into the deal. I've made him a handsome offer—he won't deny that, will you, Trevor?"

"No; not at all."

"But he refuses—says if I had come day before yesterday, or yesterday, even, he would have jumped at the chance—now, it's too late. I've offered to place him a million dollars to his credit at once, and to stand ready to back him for five more at the drop of the hat. He'll need it, too, before he is through with this deal, and he knows it, although he doesn't know what I know. Now, Felix, I want you to help me persuade him."

"Is this your affair, Mill, or your father's?" asked Felix. The old man did not speak and Parsons did not look at him.

"Mine."

"Your father has nothing to do with it?"

"No."

"And won't have?"

"No."

"Are you alone in the matter, or is there some one else with you?"

"I'm alone—absolutely."

"Why are you so anxious to get in?"

"I want a share in the profits; but chiefly, I want to steal a march on the governor."

"Your father?"

"Yes."

Parsons turned to Trevor.

"What do you say, pater?" he asked.

"I say no; and I'll say more; I'll see him damned first."

"If you should give Pike the chance he wants, would it affect your profits in the matter?"

"It wouldn't make them any less; it might make them greater, if that is what you mean. If he had come to me when I was in need of him—that is, when he thought I was—I'd have accepted. Now, I won't."

"When do you start for Chicago again, Mill?" asked Parsons calmly, changing the subject abruptly, to the evident relief of Trevor, and to Millington's surprise.

"On the midnight—it's ten, now."

"Shall we stroll up to the club first?"

"Yes, if you like. Can't I persuade you, Trevor?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I'm sorry—very sorry. Shall

we go at once, Felix? I'm very sorry, Trevor. If you change your mind, wire me. I'll be at the Chicago Club. Good night."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, pater," said Felix, slyly winking at the old man. "I'll see you early tomorrow."

Then the two younger men went out of the house together and strolled arm in arm up the avenue.

Parsons felt a peculiar elation because of the interview that had just taken place, for it assured him that Millington had discovered nothing, and that Geoffrey Trevor had not mentioned the title of the securities that he had deposited that day. He saw, also, or thought he saw, a way out of his dilemma, for the partnership agreement was in his pocket, and he was positive that he could induce Trevor to accept the aid of the young financier. That done, he believed that he could direct matters so that there need be no fear that what he had done would be discovered.

That is how he reasoned, but he forgot that it was not Pike Millington, but Pike's father who owned the securities that he had taken. The reckoning, if reckoning there was, would be with the elder Millington, not with the younger. He did not think of it then, but it came to him in full force at a later date.

"Mill," he said, as they walked along together, "you have come about as near making an ass of yourself as your own father could wish."

"Eh? How is that?"

"Why didn't you ask me last night to do this for you?"

"I didn't think of it."

"And if you had, you would not have asked me."

"Probably not. We thought we had him."

"I could have done it last night. I would have done it then."

"You can do it now, if you will."

"I am not so sure of that."

"I am."

"Why?"

"I saw the old man look at you as though he feared that you would insist upon his taking me in, and if you had insisted, he would have done it."

"I am not so sure."

"I am."

"Well, to tell you the truth, I think I can accomplish it, but it must be done while you are away. Now, how can I get the million you promised him, if he should desire to take it? According to my memoranda, there is not that much in the Midland, which is your own strong box."

"My dear fellow, you haven't got the keys to all my strong boxes, as you call them. There are others. If the thing comes to a head, wire me the one word 'Correct;' in two or three hours you will have the dust; it will be brought to you. If you can do this thing for me, there is nothing that I will not do for you."

"Remember that, Mill, and I'll do it."

"Agreed. Here we are. Let's have a game of billiards, and then I'll go to the train."

In the billiard room they encountered Chapman, who nodded at Millington, but greeted Parsons with a cold stare, which the latter returned with interest.

"Hello!" exclaimed Millington. "What is the matter?"

"Nothing, only I have discovered that Chapman is a cad—and told him of it."

"Humph! Well, in my opinion, he is a dangerous one. He's sly, that fellow. He'd knife you in the back in a minute, if nobody was looking. We'll have to take the next table to him, Felix."

"No matter. Come along."

They were soon busily engaged at their game, neither paying the slightest attention to those at the adjoining table, until the loud tones of Chapman, who was evidently telling an interesting story, became unmistakably distinct.

"—prettiest girl in New York," he was saying. "I didn't suppose Parsons

had such good taste, and by the same token, one would suppose that she would have had better. A regular little Spanish beauty, with big, black eyes and luscious lips—ah!"

Felix Parsons had placed his cue on the table and stood transfixed, his face as white as the ball that he had been knocking about. Those who were listening to the story eyed him uneasily, but Chapman stood with his back towards him, talking on in the same loud tones, as though he were unaware of the presence of the man whose affairs he was discussing.

"You'd have been amused to witness his indignation when I asked him who the charmer was," he continued. "He gave me the stony glare, like a tragedian and walked away in a muff. However, I stole a march on him, for I followed her and found out who she was, where she lived and all about her. Then I waited a while, and sent up my card."

"Did she receive you?" somebody who had not noticed Parsons, inquired.

"Sure! It was dead easy. I wrote on the back of it, 'a friend of Felix' and she had me up at once. I tell you, it's a fine establishment. Nothing is too good for that Seventy Ninth Street apartment, and if the senorita was beautiful on the street, you ought to see her in her own house.

"'Did Felix send you?' she asked. I didn't know what to say, so I made a clean breast of the matter and said, 'No.'

"She looked puzzled, so I confessed that I had seen her with him at the Waldorf, and that I could not resist the temptation to follow her home, etc. You ought to have seen her eyes blaze then. She——"

He ceased suddenly, for Felix Parsons stood before him. His face was white and set, and his eyes glittered dangerously. Otherwise he was as calm as ever.

"Go on," he said, quietly. "What did she do then? Relate your scoundrelism to the end. What did she do then?"

Chapman laughed boisterously, but the laugh was plainly forced.

"I didn't know that you were here," he sneered, "or I might have kept the story till later."

"Finish it now."

"Well, if you will have it, she kissed me——"

He got no farther. Felix took one step forward; his fist shot out like a flash of lightning and Harry Chapman, smitten on the point of his chin, landed head and shoulders first, upon the floor, several feet away, and laid there, quivering.

Parsons turned away, outwardly as calm as ever, wiped his hands upon his handkerchief, donned his coat, and without a glance at the still senseless Chapman, whom nobody had approached, faced the other members who were in the billiard room.

"Gentlemen," he said, quietly, "my resignation from this club dates from tonight. I regret that I was compelled to break an inviolate rule. Come, Mill; let's go."

CHAPTER VIII.

CLARITA ORTEGA AT HOME.

"MILL," said Felix, as soon as they were on the street, "you have an hour and a half, or a little more before your train goes. I want you to go to Seventy Ninth Street with me. Will you do it?"

"Certainly; but why do you want me?"

"I want to show you the woman whom Chapman insulted. If ever there was a soul without guile, hers is one. I want you to know it. It is necessary, now, that somebody besides myself should know about her."

He had hailed a cab while they were talking, and now both got inside and were driven away.

"Isn't it rather late to make a call, Felix?" asked Millington presently.

"No; I often go as late as this. She never retires till after midnight. If that scoundrel ever refers to her again, I'll kill him. I felt like it tonight."

"You looked like it, certainly. I didn't know you could be such a demon, old man."

"I know it only too well, and I am more afraid of myself than of any man living. I inherit unusual strength and a horrible temper, which, until tonight, I thought I had learned to subdue. When I lose it, a devil possesses me, urging me to kill. It is that slow, calm rage which smiles while it destroys—as unrelenting as fate."

Nothing more was said until they stood together in front of the house, where Parsons opened the vestibule door with a key and gave the electric button inside a series of regulated touches. The inner door swung open instantly, and they passed inside to the stairway, mounted one flight and found Clarita awaiting them at the head of the stairs.

She was surprised when she discovered that Felix was not alone, but she said nothing, quietly leading the way into the parlor, which was brilliantly alight.

"Rita," said Felix, in English—he usually addressed her in her own tongue—"this gentleman is one of my most trusted friends, Mr. Millington. Mill, let me present you to Miss Ortega."

Then, for an instant, he stared at his friend in astonishment, for Millington became suddenly as awkward as an uncouth boy. For a moment after the introduction was uttered he did not move. Then he bowed and extended his hand. His face was as red as a peony.

"I beg your pardon," he said, confusedly. "I—I think I was—er—surprised." Then he became silent again, still staring, nor did he regain his composure until after they had left the house.

"Has a man named Chapman been here tonight, Rita?" asked Felix at once, thus relieving the strain and permitting Millington to drop into a chair, where he continued to stare, though evidently making a heroic effort not to do so.

"Yes, oh, yes; and another man, too. What does it mean? Are you in trouble, Felix?"

"Trouble? No. Another man, you say? Who—ah!" He recalled then what Edna had said to him. "Tell me about both of them," he continued.

She tapped one of her little feet impatiently on the carpet while she replied to him, and it was plain that she was still angry.

"The first one—the one whom you call Chapman—came soon after I arrived home. He sent up a card by the hall boy, and he had written upon it that he came from you. I thought it strange, but of course I admitted him. Then—ah! I cannot tell you!—he was insulting. Marie was out—I was alone. I ordered him to leave the house, but he would not. He tried to seize me—I think he meant to—to—kiss me—he said so. I fled into the other room and locked the door. He rapped upon it, but I did not answer, and then, after a few moments, he went away, laughing."

Millington bounded from his chair and strode, like a caged lion, two or three times up and down the room.

"The scoundrel! The infernal scoundrel!" he muttered, addressing nobody in particular. "I'll settle with him!"

"I think that is already done, in part," said Felix, quietly, but that frozen smile again glistened in his eyes, and his face looked very much as it did when he struck Chapman down. "Now, Rita, the other man; tell me about him."

"Oh, the other! He came soon after the first one had gone. I had not yet recovered my composure. I wish I could tell you in my own language; no? Mr. Millington would not then understand. The boy brought up word that a man wished to speak with me. He sent no name. I said that I would

see nobody, and that he was not to admit any one else to the house, or to bring any more messages to me. Afterwards, I called to him and asked him if it was the same man who came the first time, and he said no, it was not. That is all. Who is that Mr. Chapman? Surely he is no friend of yours, Felix."

"Certainly not. He has already paid a part of the penalty he incurred, and——"

"And he'll pay the balance when I get back from Chicago," muttered Millington, loud enough for them to hear.

"I am afraid, little girl, that you will have to move again," said Felix, unheeding the interruption of his friend. "I am sorry, but it is necessary, Rita."

"I like this place so much," she sighed.

"I know, dear, but there are others just as good. I'll find one in the morning, and——"

"Look here, Felix!" again interpolated the financier, "I've got just the thing for you—just what you want; it's in the Millington—that's on Central Park West, Miss Ortega, and it belongs to me. The pleasantest apartment in the whole house—on the top floor, you know—they're always the best—is vacant. You shall have it. I won't take no for an answer and I'll stick you for double rent, Felix, if you say a word. Here! I'll write the order now."

He took out his note book, dashed off the order, passed it to Felix, looked at his watch, sprang to his feet and exclaimed:

"I've got to go if I catch that train. Good night, Miss Ortega. Awfully glad to know you. Maybe Felix'll let me come again some time," and he started for the door.

Parsons had just time to assure her that he would be on hand early on the following day, and then pursued his friend down the stairs.

The ride back was a very silent affair, and they were nearly at the station before either spoke to the other. Then Millington, with marked hesitation, said:

"Some day, old man, when you feel just like it, if you think you can, will you tell me something about Miss Ortega?"

"Yes."

"Thank you."

There was silence again until the carriage turned into Forty Second Street, when Millington spoke again.

"I thought you were going to marry one of Trevor's daughters," he said.

"I am."

"Oh, hello! Here we are. Will you come along in and see me off?"

"Yes."

"Thanks. I shan't be away any longer than I can help. I wish Chapman was going on the same train."

"Why?"

"I'd like to throw him off of it, that's all. By the way; I haven't thought to ask you: Did you attend to those matters for me today?"

"Every one of them. Your train is ready, Mill. Good luck to you. I'd like to give you one piece of advice before you go."

"What is it?"

"Don't think too much about Clarita Ortega while you are away. She is not for you, unless——"

"Well, unless what?"

"I'll complete the sentence when you return. Good night."

They clasped hands and parted, one to run for the train, having barely time to get through the door before it was closed, and the other to walk slowly back to the carriage, with head down, disgusted with himself for what he had done that day, harassed, troubled, contemptuous, but nevertheless inflexible in his resolution to play the game to the bitter end, now that he had undertaken it.

In his own room he addressed himself in the mirror, as he was in the habit of doing, whenever he was particularly in earnest.

"If you had carried out the resolution made twenty eight or thirty hours

ago, and killed yourself," he said, "you would have died with a conscience as untroubled as the surface of a woodland spring; now, if you live a thousand years, you will never regain all that you have lost—all of your self respect. Who dares to say that suicide was not the best thing for me, after all? I may live to square myself with others, but I can never square myself with myself; that is out of the question. The world may not know what I have done, but I know it, and that is infinitely worse."

Then he sat down and stared at the fire in the open grate.

CHAPTER IX.

A HAND THAT STABS IN THE DARK.

A WEEK shuffled itself into the past, somehow, after that. It was the longest, and at the same time the shortest week that Felix Parsons had ever lived through.

He had carried out the arrangement made the evening of his call with Millington on Rita, and the following day she, or rather he had her possessions transferred to the apartment which the young millionaire had so readily placed at her disposal, and she was quite pleased with the change.

During that time Felix had not once called at the Trevors', although there had not been a day when he had not spent more or less time with the broker at his office. He could not bring himself to go to the house, for he felt that he could not look into the clear, earnest eyes of Carla Trevor without revealing, within his own, the burden of guilt that he carried with him wherever he went.

He had been very busy, too. That is what he said to himself and that was his excuse for keeping away; and, indeed, he had been busy.

The plot that was hatched in the early hours of that morning when Pike Millington was called to Chicago, was beginning to unfold itself, and such was the natural aptitude for business possessed by Felix Parsons, that he already saw his way through it to success.

The man, Cummings, had taken the bait that was thrown out to him, and swallowed it whole, so that now it was only a question of days when the forecast made by Millington would mature into fact; and with it all, it was strange that Parsons felt scarcely any interest at all in the matter. His mind was constantly on those securities, for he knew it was vital to him that they should be replaced in the vaults of the safe deposit company before the return of his friend.

Millington had sent him half a dozen hastily written scrawls of a dozen or twenty words each, and they invariably ended with "regards to Miss Ortega, when you see her," so that Felix came to the natural conclusion that they were written for the sole purpose of including that sentence—and they were.

His resignation, forwarded to the club the morning after the encounter with Chapman had been returned to him with a letter stating that inasmuch as Mr. Chapman had also sent in his, the board of governors had decided to accept the latter and to request Mr. Parsons to continue a member of the club. He had not seen Chapman since that night.

Then, one morning, something more than a week after that eventful day in his life, he received a note from Carla, written the preceding night and delivered to him in the early mail.

It was in nowise different from other notes that she had written, and yet there was a difference. It requested him to call that afternoon at four. That was all. If he could not come at that hour, would he kindly send word when he would call?

It was exactly four o'clock when he rang the bell, and was ushered into the drawingroom, and there, standing in the middle of the room, awaiting him, was Edna.

"Smith," she said quite calmly, to

the butler, "you need not take the card to Miss Trevor just yet. I wish to talk with Mr. Parsons a few moments before she comes down."

"Why, Ned," said Felix, smiling, and speaking as if nothing had happened to mar their friendship, "you have quite a business air about you this afternoon. How did you know that I was coming at this time?"

"I didn't know it. I saw you from the window. I should have gone to your rooms again this evening if you had not come here today."

"You must not do that, Ned," he replied, quite seriously. "It is not at all the proper thing to do."

"It is just as proper for me as it is for that—that black eyed woman that I found there."

"Quite so, Ned, but then it is not the correct thing for either of you."

"Felix, who—*no!* I won't ask you who she is! I don't care who she is. I—I wanted to see you—before you saw Carla."

"Why?"

"You will think I have told her, and indeed I have not. I never meant to tell her at all. I told you I would, but I did not mean it when I said it."

"I never really thought that you would tell, Ned, unless you did it while you were very angry—and your anger never lasts long. It really would not have mattered if you had told, however. You must not think ill of that young lady, Ned, for she is as pure and sweet and good as you are—as Carla is—as any human being can be."

"Do—you—love her—Felix?"

She went up closer to him as she asked the question, and her face was set and white. Her big eyes, wide open and searching, looked earnestly into his own, and they expressed much more than she meant they should. He recalled in that instant what Rita had said: "She loves you. It is Edna who is jealous;" but he dismissed the thought almost as soon as it occurred to him.

He replied to her without hesitation.

"Yes, Ned, I love her very dearly, just as I love you very dearly, but not at all in the sense you mean. It would please me more than I can say, if you would let me take you to call upon her some day, and you know I would not do that——"

"Where does she live now? She has moved."

"Yes, she has moved. If I will tell you her address, will you promise to keep it a secret?"

"Why?"

"Never mind why; will you promise?"

"Yes, for I want to know."

"She is at the Millington, Central Park West. And now, Ned, had you not better send my card to Carla? She is expecting me."

"Oh, Felix, I had forgotten the very thing I meant to tell you. Carla knows."

"Knows what?"

"That—that Miss Ortega goes to your rooms. Wait; let me tell you all of it. That man whom I hired to follow her—he was a cab driver, and I gave him ten dollars for his dirty work—came here to report to me, as I told him to do. Carla was on the steps outside, and when he asked for Miss Trevor of course she said she was the one; and he, stupid, didn't know the difference. She heard his story through and then she came to me, and of course I had to confess the whole thing."

She was becoming very vehement now, and Felix smiled at her excitement.

"I could have fixed all that, and I almost did so, but the very next afternoon she received an anonymous letter written on the stationery of your club, and oh, it was terrible."

"Carla would pay no attention to anonymous letters," said Felix, contemptuously.

"Not to ordinary ones, but this was different. It began by saying that the writer was a member of your club and an intimate friend of yours, and gave

as an excuse for the letter the statement that he was under great obligations to papa, and therefore regarded it as a duty to warn his daughter. It was beautifully written and perfectly told, and it gave a thousand and one excuses for you, begged Carla not to regard the matter too seriously, but thought she ought to know; and underneath all that stuff and nonsense were the vilest insinuations. It is terrible."

"Anything more, Ned?"

"Yes, there is."

"Well, let's have it all."

"The evening before last, Mr. Chapman called here."

"Chapman, eh? Well, what of that?"

"You know he has been here once or twice with Mr. Courtright; well, this time he came alone, and I heartily wish he had stayed away. I don't know how it happened, but before he went away, he mentioned having seen you at the Waldorf and other places several times this week with a lady whom he described so perfectly that there was no mistaking her; Carla recognized her at once."

"How could she do that?"

"Didn't I tell you that the anonymous letter contained a photograph of Miss Ortega?"

"No."

"Well, it did, and a good one, too. He must have stolen it somehow—the writer, I mean."

"Possibly. What more, Ned?"

"Nothing more, only Carla has been about sick ever since. It was the last straw. I think if you had come around sooner it would have been all right, but you remained away so long that she had to send for you; and now——"

She paused suddenly, staring at the door, and Felix, turning to discover what it was that had arrested her speech, found that Carla had entered the room unheard and was gazing upon them both, with the utmost scorn in her eyes.

"It seems, Felix, that my sister has anticipated me," she said coldly. "I have heard only the last sentence of your conversation, however, so now, Edna, if you will excuse us I would like to talk with Felix alone."

She did not speak again until after Edna had left the room, and then she turned and faced her fiancé.

"Felix, why is it that for more than a week you have not been to see me? Is there a greater attraction elsewhere?"

"I have been very busy, Carla, and with two exceptions, I have not been out of my own room an evening since I was here."

"That is an answer to only one of my questions."

"The other needs no answer, and you should not have asked it."

"Perhaps not." She sighed heavily, hesitated a moment, and then, in her direct way, she added:

"Will you tell me about Miss Ortega, or would you rather not? There is such a person, is there not?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me about her?"

"There is not much that I can tell you, Carla."

"Not much that you can tell me? I do not fully understand what you mean. Is it that what should be told is not a fit subject for us to discuss?"

"God forbid!" he exclaimed, startled in spite of all that had already been said and done concerning Clarita. "You must not wrong her like that, Carla. She came to my room as Edna came, to see me, and just as innocently. It is unfortunate that you know of her existence, just at this time. Later, I intended to ask you to call upon her. Surely, Carla, you do not doubt me."

CHAPTER X.

THE BROKEN ENGAGEMENT.

CARLA TREVOR did not at once reply to the question that Parsons asked. Instead, she kept her eyes fixed upon her

lover's face, in the mean time turning her engagement ring round and round on her finger, as though it had something to do with the character of her thoughts.

There was no anger in her voice or in her eyes, but there was suffering manifest in both. At last she answered him.

"Just so long as this ring remains upon my finger, I will not doubt you. Still, I believe that you owe me some sort of an explanation. I would not have you think me jealous, for I will not—I could not permit our relations to continue if there existed any cause for such an emotion. I will ask you the question: Does there exist such a cause?"

"No dear, there does not, and I can truthfully say that there never has."

She hesitated again, for a moment, and then quietly extended a photograph towards him.

"Is that Miss Ortega?" she asked.

"It is."

"She is very beautiful."

"Yes, she is very beautiful."

"That picture came in a letter that I received concerning her—and you."

"Edna told me about it. This picture was stolen from her parlor while she was locked in another room in her apartment, whither she had fled to escape the man who forced his way into her presence. He must have taken it at that time. I can account for its presence here in no other way."

"Then you know who wrote the anonymous letter."

"Certainly. It was written by the same man who called upon you later to clinch the arguments he had used in writing—Chapman, by name. Shall I tell you the story?"

"No, it is unnecessary; tell me, rather, about Miss Ortega."

"What shall I tell you about her?"

"Everything. What relation does she bear to you?"

"She is in a sense my ward."

"Your ward! How old is she?"

"She is older in years than you are—two or three years, I think. I cannot give you her exact age."

"Will you not make this easier for me, Felix, and tell me all there is to tell concerning her and your relations with her? It is very hard for me to question you."

"I will tell you all that I can tell you—all that I am permitted to tell at the present time. For the rest, you must have faith in me."

"Faith is spontaneous, Felix. It is involuntary, and cannot be compelled to the will. I have faith now—I think I have. I do not wish to lose it, and whether I do or not, rests with you. Has this—this ward of yours—has she relatives? Father? Mother? Friends?"

"At present she has no one but me."

"No one but you! Then what are you to her? Has she an income? What supports her?"

"She has an income—yes."

"Who provides it? Do you?"

"She believes that it is derived from money that was left for her by her father."

"Do you mean by that, that her income is really derived from your own fortune, and that she does not know it?"

"Yes; but I think it is unnecessary to go into these details."

"I regard it as quite necessary. Will you tell me how long this condition of things has existed?"

"Several years. About four, I think. If you will listen, I will tell you all that can be told—now."

"I will listen."

"The obligation came to me in a strange manner, and I accepted a duty, fully realizing what I was undertaking, but also convinced that there was no other course left for me to pursue. At that time, she could not speak a word of English, but I brought her here to New York, and found a companion for her—an elderly lady, who has since died. I invested some money in government bonds in her name; so that

in case of accident to me, she would be above want, and so far as it has been possible, I have watched over and cared for her ever since; and I shall continue to do so just as long as the necessity exists. I can assure you that she is in every way entirely worthy of your respect—even of your love; and you know that I prize that higher than anything in the world. More than that, I cannot tell you at the present time. You must not ask me. I could lie to you and set your mind at rest, but that I will not do. The truth concerning her I have no right to reveal, even to you, but if you will go with me to call upon her——"

"Felix!"

"Well? Is that not the best proof that I could give you of my sincerity?"

He had been holding the photograph in his hand during the conversation, but now he placed it, face upwards on a chair near him, and rising, stepped forward and stood where he could look down into the eyes of his fiancée.

She returned his gaze placidly, and with that same directness and earnestness, still toying with the ring on her finger; but she did not reply to his question; instead, she asked one.

"Is that all you will tell me concerning her?" she inquired.

"It is all that I can tell you, Carla."

"Do you regard your duty to her as greater than your duty to me?"

"I do not compare one with the other, for they are distinct. Duty is duty. It cannot be qualified, nor modified."

Her eyes never left his face, and the next question, though it made him catch his breath, and pressed the iron into his soul, was uttered as calmly as the others had been.

"If I should make my faith in you dependent upon your telling me everything that you are keeping back concerning her, would you still retain the attitude you have taken? If our engagement depended upon your replying to certain questions that I would ask, would you still refuse to answer?"

He turned away and walked to the window, and for a moment looked out upon the street. Presently he returned and stood before her again, calm, determined, but startlingly pale.

"I should still retain the attitude I have taken; I would still refuse to answer," he said, deliberately.

Carla withdrew the ring from her finger, slowly, but certainly. It seemed reluctant to leave its resting place, and twice she hesitated; but at last it was surely off.

"Then I must return this to you," she said, without emotion. "It is the only thing I can do under the circumstances. Perhaps I am unjust; I have no doubt that I am, but I cannot help it. Will you take it, Felix?"

He stretched out one hand silently and she dropped it in his palm. For a moment he regarded it intently, then idly let it fall into one of his pockets.

"As you will, Carla," he said with a deliberation that was plainly the result of a gigantic effort of the will.

He bowed then, and turned towards the door, but before he had taken a step, it was opened from the other side, and Geoffrey Trevor entered the room.

"Ah, Felix," he said; "Smith told me that you were in here with Carla. I have just come in, and I am very anxious to see you. I tried to get you over the 'phone this afternoon, but I couldn't make it. What is the matter? I hope you two haven't been quarreling; eh?"

"Certainly not, papa," replied Carla. "We have had a discussion that has affected our spirits unpleasantly, that is all."

"Humph! The fewer discussions of that kind you have, the better for you both. Hello! What's this? Somebody's picture, eh?"

He reached out and raised the photograph in his hand, and they saw him give a sudden and violent start. Then, with quick strides he went to the window where the light was better, while with trembling hands he held the pho-

tograph so that he could scan it critically.

"My God!" he exclaimed, under his breath. "No—no! It is impossible."

He turned the picture over and saw the name of the photographer on the back, and then he studied the face again.

"It was taken here in New York, and quite recently. No; it cannot be the same," he continued, uttering his thoughts aloud.

"Carla," he called, suddenly, "whose picture is this?"

"It is the photograph of a friend of Felix," she replied.

"Who is it, Felix?" he demanded, still studying the pictured face.

"Her name is Clarita Ortega; she is Spanish," replied Felix, calmly.

"Spanish, too," muttered Trevor. "It is very strange—very strange."

"Do you know the—do you know who it is, papa? Have you ever met her?" asked Carla.

"No—no; certainly not—certainly not; but it bears a striking resemblance to a lady whom I used to know years ago—it is very like, indeed—very like. How old is this girl, Felix?"

"About Carla's age, Pater."

"Humph! Where does she live? Here in New York?"

"Yes."

"Will you lend me this picture till you come again, eh? I would like to—er—compare it with one that I have. The likeness may not be so striking then. Will you lend it to me?"

"Certainly; though I believe that Carla has a better claim to it than I."

"You may have it, papa, if you like," said Carla.

"Thank you—thank you. I'll take it."

He went out of the room hastily, then, and presently they heard the library door close with a bang.

"Is your decision unaltered, Carla?" asked Felix taking up his hat.

"Yes, Felix, unless——"

He did not wait for her to complete the sentence, but turned abruptly and left the room and the house, outwardly as unmoved as ever, but within, heart-broken, despairing, almost crazed; and could he have looked back into the room where he left Carla, he would have seen her lying prone upon the floor, as senseless and still and white, as though death had set its seal upon her; and so Edna found her a half hour later, when, knowing that Felix had gone, she went in search of her.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE MESHES OF HIS MISDEEDS.

PARSONS went directly to his rooms when he left the Trevor mansion, and when he looked at himself in the glass there was a hard, cold smile of derision in his eyes and on his lips.

"God forbid that I should tell Carla all," he uttered aloud. "Better a broken engagement—better two broken hearts, than that. We will both recover from the shock of today, but the other would kill her. And dear old Pater; how that photograph bowled him over. The resemblance must be striking indeed to have affected him like that. He will question me now, and I cannot, will not tell him. He must not know. For Carla's sake and Edna's, he ought never to know. Ah!"

It was the ringing of his bell that caused the exclamation, and he rose, went to the door, and opened it to admit no other than Geoffrey Trevor.

"He has come sooner than I expected," was his thought, but it did not manifest itself in his manner nor in his speech. Instead, his greeting was cordial in the extreme.

"I left your house suddenly," he explained, while they were shaking hands, "and entirely forgot that you wished to see me. What is it about, Pater?"

"Oh, that matter. It can wait. I want to talk about another thing, now.

Can you give me a little brandy and a cigar?"

"Certainly. You don't know how glad I am to have you come here to my rooms. I don't think you have been here before in——"

"Felix," interrupted the broker, "who is that girl?"

"What girl, Pater?"

"The one whose picture I found in the parlor; you know."

"Her name is Clarita Ortega. I think I told you then, did I not?"

"Yes, but who is she? The mere name tells me nothing. Is she a friend of yours?"

"A very dear friend, indeed."

"Do you know her people? Her parents, Felix?"

Felix lighted a cigar and replied leisurely:

"I know her father. I never saw her mother."

The old man breathed an audible sigh of relief; and then he said:

"It may seem strange to you that I am so interested in her, but I never saw such a remarkable likeness."

"Likeness to whom, Pater?"

"To a lady whom I once knew. It was a good many years ago, when I was young—and not so very young, either. I wonder if she has a picture of her mother; eh?"

"I do not think so; I am not sure, however."

"How old did you say she is, Felix?"

"Rather older than Carla, I believe; two or three years; something like that."

Trevor shook his head in perplexity.

"Perhaps her mother was a sister of the lady whom I knew," he murmured to himself. "Still, I never heard that there was a sister."

"What is that, sir?"

"I was thinking aloud, that is all. Could you take me to call upon this young lady, my boy? I would like to talk with her."

Felix did not at once reply. Instead, he stared hard at the coals in the grate, and for so long a time that Trevor had to repeat the question, believing that he had not heard it.

"Why not?" the younger man was asking himself. "I have had no hand in this part of the affair; why not let circumstances direct the remainder of it as it has this much?"

For the third time, Geoffrey Trevor asked the question, and then Felix replied:

"I will take you to call upon her," he said, somewhat coldly, although he did not mean it so. "When would you like to go?"

"Now."

"My dear sir, it is almost dinner time. Come here after you have had your dinner and I will take you to her."

"Very well, I will be here at eight."

He rose then, with a sigh and went towards the door, but he paused with his hand upon the knob and asked another question.

"Felix, what is she to you? You won't mind telling me?"

"Not at all. She is my ward."

"Your ward? You the guardian of a girl almost as old as you are yourself?"

"Such is the case, sir."

"Was she the subject of the discussion between you and Carla?"

"Yes."

"How so? Is Carla jealous?"

"She does not call it by that name."

"Have you quarreled with Carla?"

"No. We have disagreed, however. You may as well know at once, sir; our engagement is at an end."

"Good God!"

"She is convinced in her own mind that I have not been sufficiently frank with her; what else she believes, I do not know—I do not think *she* knows, but she does not approve of my relations with Rita."

"What are those relations, Felix?"

"I have already told you."

"And that is all?"

"That is all."

"Humph! I will be here at eight."

"One moment, sir; you must not discuss this matter with Carla. I must have your promise that you will not."

"Suppose I decline to promise; eh?"

"In that case you need not come here at eight—or at all."

"The devil! All right; I promise. Oh! By the way! There is another thing."

"Yes."

"Those securities. The fact of my having them has got out, somehow and I have been pestered to death about them; a whole lot of fellows asking questions; I smile and look wise and say nothing; it's the only way. Even the company has been at me."

"What company, Pater?"

"Why, that company—the X. L., you know, and I wouldn't wonder if they have cabled to old Millington about it; eh? You're all right there, aren't you? He'll keep the secret, won't he?"

"What secret?"

"Why, that the stock is yours. I wouldn't like it to get out after I have used it as mine. You'd better run down in the morning and we'll put our heads together. Tell you what; I'm almost sorry that I did not take up with young Mill's offer."

"It isn't too late yet. If you will say the word, I'll fix it; and I'll tell you frankly, it will be a favor to me."

"The deuce it will! Why didn't you say that before? You're half owner with me in this thing. You've got as much to say as I have. Wire him that we will take him in on the terms he offered if he is still of the same mind. Eight o'clock, eh? I'll be here. Egad! I hope old Mill won't peach about that stock."

He bustled out of the room, leaving Felix standing in the center of it in anything but a pleasant frame of mind, for he saw the meshes of his misdeeds closing around him; exposure staring him in the face.

"Hopes old Mill won't peach, eh?" he mused, and smiled dismally. "I would like to see him when he gets the news. I'll bet the air will be blue—and by Jove! He'll lay it all to Pike. One thing is certain, I must manage somehow to get those securities out tomorrow, and return them to the vault; but even then, it is bound to develop sometime, that I took them, for the superintendent has my letter that Pike gave me. Everything has gone wrong since I took that first false step. I wonder if they will ever go right again."

He turned to the table and picked up a picture of Carla that was there, and looked sadly upon it.

"Carla, Carla," he cried out, "I could have borne it all but this. I should not have accepted my dismissal had I been as worthy as I was ten days ago; but it is over now—it is over now."

He put the picture down with a sigh, seized his hat and went out; and within a few moments the word "Correct" was speeding over the wires to Pike Millington's Chicago address.

"Perhaps, after all, I can squeeze through, if I can get up courage enough to make a clean breast of the whole thing to Mill," he mused, as he ordered his dinner at the club, a half hour later.

CHAPTER XII.

A DANGEROUS KEEPSAKE.

PROMPTLY at eight o'clock Geoffrey Trevor appeared, and the most careless observer could have seen that he was consumed by suppressed excitement, although he strove with all his energy to conceal the fact. He had come in his own private carriage, and waiting only for Felix to don his coat, they were driven rapidly in the direction of the apartment house where Clarita now lived.

Each was busy with his own thoughts, so the drive was made in silence, neither uttering more than the most ordinary commonplaces about the weather and local politics, and in fact

anything except the subjects that were nearest the mind of each.

Clarita was at home. Felix had sent her word that he was coming and she was expecting them.

Her beauty, her winsome, pathetic face and her clear, steady eyes had a remarkable effect upon Geoffrey Trevor. He almost gasped for breath when the introduction was made, and when he took her hand, he held it for a long time in his own, looking down upon her with a steady gaze that had in it nothing to offend, strangely silent all the while.

"Very like—very like," he murmured, at last. "Child, do you remember your mother?"

She looked up at him in utter astonishment.

"My mother?" she said; "no, I do not remember my mother. I never saw her."

"Do you look as she did? Do you resemble her?"

"I do not know," she replied in amazement.

They were strange questions that this stranger was asking her, and she could not comprehend why he did so. She turned her eyes inquiringly towards Felix, but he was turning the pages of a book, and did not seem to heed what was taking place.

"And your father, my dear? Do you —is he—does he live here in New York?"

"I never saw my father, sir. Why do you ask me these questions?"

"Pardon me. You look so like a lady I once knew that I thought perhaps I might have known your mother. And your father, Felix told me that—"

"You forget, Pater," interrupted Felix calmly. "We had changed the subject then. We were speaking of another, I think." He did not look up from the book.

Trevor stared at him in perplexity.

"Certainly. To be sure," he said presently; but under his breath, he added: "I'm damned if we were."

Then, turning again to the girl, he continued:

"You have not always lived in New York? You were not born here?"

"Oh, no, indeed! I was born in Seville, in Spain. My childhood, that is much of it was passed in Cuba, and in Mexico. I remember Mexico best, for it is there where I lived the greater part of the time. I came here about four years ago, was it not, Felix?"

"Yes, Rita; a little more than four years."

Still he kept his eyes upon the book. Rita and her questioner had remained standing since the introduction, but now she withdrew her hand from his and sank into a chair.

"Will you tell me how old you are, child?" asked Trevor, also seating himself.

"With pleasure, sir. I was twenty three last June. Felix says I do not look nearly as old as that."

"No, you do not. You are more of a child than Edna, and she is eighteen."

"Edna? Ah, yes. She is your daughter. I have seen her;" and her brows contracted, for the recollection was not a pleasant one.

"You have met Edna?" he asked, in surprise. "Where?"

She hesitated, and then looked inquiringly at Felix, but he was still studying the pages before him and did not appear to have heard.

"Felix will tell you about it," she said, demurely. "We met by accident. She did not like me and I did not like her. It was—what you call—mutual; no? You see I am very frank, Señor Trevor. I do not choose my words in English. I never spoke it until I came here."

"Would you prefer your own language?" he said rapidly, in Spanish. "It is the same to me."

"Oh, yes. It is the language of my thoughts. I am glad that you understand it. And now, sir, can I not offer you some refreshment? I have been

very remiss. You will have—what? A glass of sherry? Felix says that it is very good. I do not know, for I do not like it. It confuses my brain. And a biscuit? Felix will give you a cigar. I do not object to the smoke; and now, for one moment, you will excuse me?"

She went rapidly out of the room, leaving the two men alone together.

"Felix," said Geoffrey Trevor then, rising and crossing the room and deliberately taking the book from Parsons' hand, "you told me that you knew her father, and you did not use the past tense. You said, 'I know her father.' Did you speak the truth?"

"I did."

"Then he is alive?"

"He is."

"And she does not know it?"

"No."

"Where——"

He ceased abruptly, for Rita was returning.

She went directly to him, holding in her hand an old fashioned breast-pin, the size of a goose's egg, and at the sight of it, Geoffrey Trevor's face assumed the color of ashes; but he did not speak, and she did not notice his agitation.

"You asked me about my mother," she said, brightly. "I do not remember her, but I have here a portrait which I believe is hers. Would you like to see it? Perhaps, if you once knew her, you will recognize it and assure me that it is my mother. It might have been made for me, might it not?"

"Yes, yes," he said, huskily. "It might, indeed. Can you tell me nothing about her, my child? Do you not know when she died, and where she died?"

"No, sir, I know nothing. It is strange, is it not? I do not even know her name."

"Do not know her name? Was it not the same as your own?"

"No, oh no. My name is not the name of my parents. The Holy Mother gave me my name, at the cathedral in Mexico, so it is truly mine; but it is not the name that God gave me when I was born. That is hidden. It is lost. I do not know how, nor why. Even my first name was changed, for I remember, when I was a little child, I was called Carlotta; but when I was taken to the cathedral, it was made into Clarita. I like it better, I think. Felix says that some day I will know who my parents were. Sometimes I think that he knows now, and will not tell me, but if that is so, I do not complain, for he knows what is wisest and best for me. I am assured of that."

"Carlotta — Carlotta!" Trevor groaned, scarcely heeding all that she said. "It is the name of one of my daughters; it is Carla's name. It was—was it your mother's name?"

"I do not know."

He sat staring at the picture he held in his hand, for the moment utterly oblivious to everything around him, and Felix, raising his eyes, regarded him sadly and steadily.

"Have you anything else that belonged to your mother," asked Trevor, presently. "Is there anything else that was hers that you would care to show me?"

"I think not, señor; but stay! There is one thing more that I have been told was hers. You will think that it is a very strange thing to exhibit. I do not know why it was given to me as a keepsake, only that when Señor Llorente—it was in his family I resided while in Mexico—only that when he gave it to me, he said: 'You will take this with you also, Rita. If your father is living and you should meet him, he will wish to see it.'"

Felix looked up in surprise, and perceiving it, she continued:

"I do not think that even Felix knows about that keepsake. I have never told him, but it is not because I did not wish to; it is because I had forgotten. He shall see it now at the same time that I show it to you. It is not

pleasant; it is not nice. It is a very strange thing to give a child as a keepsake, and I have kept it hidden in my trunk. It is—but stay; I will get it. You will excuse me?"

Again she left the room, and again Geoffrey Trevor's eyes wandered in the direction of the younger man; but he did not speak, and their eyes did not meet, for Felix was once more apparently absorbed in the pages of the same book.

Clarita was some time absent, but at last she returned. Her hands were behind her, and she came quite close to her guest before she exposed them. Then, bringing them suddenly forward, she said, simply:

"It is—this."

Geoffrey Trevor stood like one entranced. Catalepsy could not have held him more rigidly still than he was then, with wide open, distended eyes, drawn and haggard features, parted lips and bated breath.

At last, slowly, mechanically, he extended one hand and took the thing that she held out to him—a double sheath made of one piece of wood, skilfully carved and inlaid with gold and silver and precious stones. He did not speak. He held it in his hand and stared at it as though it were a serpent that had fascinated him.

"It is not pretty," she continued, not heeding his perturbation. "It is deadly; I do not admire it."

Slowly, and with mechanical precision, Geoffrey Trevor stretched forth the other hand and withdrew the knives from their sheaths, one by one. It was as though he were forced to do so against his will.

He seemed to have forgotten his surroundings and to see only those two curiously wrought weapons that he now held in his grasp, one, a short, dagger-like instrument, sharpened only on one side, however, but keen as a razor and pointed like a needle, the other, long, slender, deadly; venomous in every curve, glitteringly bright, murderously baleful. It glinted flashes of light from its polished surface, and the short graceful curves along its back seemed to move up and down, as though it were possessed of life—and hatred.

Trevor was so long silent, that at last Rita looked up, inquiringly; then she started back affrightedly.

"Felix!" she called.

He was at her side instantly.

"Look," she whispered, pointing at the old man, now old indeed. "What is it? What is the matter? See! Quick! My God, he will kill himself!"

It is true that he would have done so; the mysterious knife seemed to have compelled him to the act, for with startling suddenness the cataleptic condition left him. He laughed aloud, wildly, raised the weapon in the air, and would have plunged it into his breast had not the strong, firm hand of Felix Parsons seized his wrist and held it.

Then the fingers loosened their hold; the murderous knife squirmed from their grasp and dropped to the floor, point downward, piercing the carpet and penetrating the board beneath; and there it stood, vibrating, as though chuckling with savage glee over the effect that it had produced.

Then the old man hid his face in his hands, staggered to a chair, dropped upon it and sobbed aloud.

Rita looked up wonderingly into Felix' face, but he offered her no explanation; he put one arm gently around her and quietly led her into another room.

"What is it?" she asked again. "What does it mean?"

"I do not know, dear; perhaps he will tell me. I must take him home now, but I will return."

"Oh, Felix," she said, "you will come back? I am frightened. You will return? Promise me that you will."

"I promise, Rita. As soon as I have seen Pater home I will return. You need not go in to bid him good night; it is not necessary."

He touched her forehead with his lips and left her then.

The knife was still maliciously swaying above the carpet, like the head of a cobra, waiting to strike, and Parsons plucked it from the floor and returned it, and the other also, to the sheath. Then he touched Trevor gently on the shoulder.

"Come, Pater," he said. "Let us go now."

"Yes, yes! Let us go. I must get away. I must think. My God, Felix, do you know where I stand? Do you know who she is?"

"Hush! Hush! Not another word. Here, let me help you on with your coat. Now are you ready?"

"Yes, I am ready. Where is——"

"Never mind. I said good night for you;" and they went out upon the street and entered the carriage in utter silence. In silence also, they drove homeward, and in silence they parted; but their hands clasped in a pressure that meant more than words could have conveyed.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT CARLA DARED TO DO.

It is a remarkable thing that the very people whom we regard as the most self contained and calm under trying circumstances are the very ones, who when they do give way lose all vestige of self control, and plunge head foremost to the opposite extreme.

The fires that burned within the breast of Carla Trevor had hitherto only smoldered. They had been confined within herself, their presence unsuspected and therefore the danger which they necessarily generated, unguarded against, but when she recovered from the swoon in which her sister had discovered her, the smoldering embers burst forth into flame, and consumed her reason, her judgment, her calmness and her faith.

When she returned the ring to Felix, she did not really doubt his loyalty to her. The act was based upon her idea of a principle which she believed to be involved, and she had broken the engagement because he had refused to confide in her, nothing more.

She was not in any sense of the word a coquette, and yet she had coquetted with him then, for she had no idea, when she offered the ring to him, that he would accept it. She knew him only as she had always known him, not as he had been for more than a week.

She could not know anything of the self abasement under which he hourly struggled since he took that one step downward, which in his own opinion, forever removed him from the realm in which he had lived all his life—that of unqualified unrightness. Therefore, his calm acquiescence in her decision prostrated her—overwhelmed her—shocked her out of herself into another being whom she had not known, whom she did not recognize, but who dominated every impulse within her—the being that awoke with returning consciousness.

She had asked for the explanation—she had demanded it, but all the time, in her own heart, she knew that there was one, and that it would be entirely satisfactory. She had spoken naught but the truth when she said that she was not jealous. She did not doubt him when he told her what he did; but he did not tell her all that she believed he should tell.

With the return of consciousness, however, she saw things differently. Her recollection of the scene distorted everything that had been said or done out of all recognizable shape, and she discovered motives which she had not imagined at the time, and fancied reasons which were utterly unreasonable.

His refusal to explain further than he had, was now attributed to guilt and shame. His statement concerning the purity and goodness of Clarita Ortega, she now regarded as a lie. The high value that he had placed upon her own

love for him, had become a subterfuge. His pretense of mystery degenerated to a contemptible deception; and with it all, she moaned in pain while she assured herself that he no longer loved her, and convinced herself, on this line of reasoning, that he was at heart rejoiced that she had severed the bond between them.

Still, she made no outward sign. The fierce warfare that waged within found no visible expression; but in that hour she was transformed from a calm, serene, loving woman, abounding in implicit faith, into a hard, suspicious, relentless being who saw only vileness and degradation in the association of Felix Parsons and Clarita Ortega.

Edna was with her when she was again conscious of her surroundings. She had already discovered that the engagement ring was missing; indeed, it was the first thing that she looked for when she found Carla in that death-like swoon. But her usual impetuosity was, for once, wanting, and she said no word concerning it or the interview that had ended so disastrously.

They went together to Carla's room, and there Edna left her alone. It was then, when the demons entered and took possession; and it was then, during those few hours of agonized thought that she decided what she would do, and started out upon the consummation of her plans with a resolution that nothing could shake, nothing deter, nothing alter nor modify.

She did not go down to dinner, but she had it sent to her room; and she consumed it, for she knew that she had need of strength for the business that she had decided upon for that very night.

Shortly before eight o'clock she went to Edna's room, outwardly as calm and self possessed as ever, and she smiled coldly when she found her sister in tears; she knew what those tears were for, but she did not refer to them. It was presumptuous for Edna to cry when she did not.

"Carla," exclaimed that young lady, when she saw the serene face of her sister, "are you made of ice?"

"Yes, I think so," she replied. "At least, I have no tears to shed."

"You have broken your engagement with Felix, and all on account of nothing —nothing, I tell you! It is a shame—a shame—and the shame is yours, Carla Trevor!"

"So be it, then. Let the shame be mine. I can bear up under it. We will not discuss it if you please, Edna. I want to ask you some questions."

"I am in no mood for answering questions now. Besides, there is nothing that I can tell you that you do not know; and what you don't know, your imagination will supply."

"I want you to tell me about your encounter with that woman at Felix' rooms," said Carla, calmly, paying no heed to her sister's vehemence.

"There is nothing to tell, not a thing. I saw her there, that is all. She had just as much right to be there as I had, and it would be just as consistent for you to think ill of me for going there as it is to think ill of her."

Carla smiled coldly. There was no sign of softening in her manner; no hesitation.

"You are vehement, Edna," she said; "too vehement, I think, in your defense of Miss Ortega."

"I am defending Felix Parsons, and I am vehement. You are cold and cruel and heartless. He is well rid of you."

"So he thinks, evidently. Do you know the present address of the woman whom you so ably defend?"

"Yes, I do, and I'll tell you one thing, Carla Trevor, that address alone is sufficient proof that all your suspicions are groundless. Do you think, if the facts were as your jealous imagination paints them, that he would take her to a place like the Millington. That is where she is now. Would he do that if there were any grounds for your suspicions? You ought to be ashamed

of them—and of yourself. I don't know what passed between you in the drawingroom, and I don't care, but I know one thing—I know that Felix Parsons is the soul of honor, and if the whole world rose up on its hind legs and made charges against him, I would not believe a word of it."

"That is scarcely a proper express——"

"I don't care! I don't care that!" with a snap of the fingers. "I know another thing—I know a good woman when I see one, and if I ever saw one in my life, it was when I saw Clarita Ortega. Do you know what I did then? I insulted her. I refused to be introduced. Oh, I played the grand lady better than old Madame Savage could have done it, and I have been eating my heart out with shame ever since. Just as sure as I live until tomorrow morning, I am going up to the Millington and humble myself with the most abject apology I know how to make; and you will do well if you follow my example."

"You are a very good girl, but a very silly one at times, Edna," said Carla with cold scorn. "I do not think that we need to prolong this discussion. Good night."

She went out of the room then, in the same deliberate manner in which she had entered it, leaving Edna white with wrath.

It was nearly nine o'clock then, but Carla did not hesitate. She had made her plans, and she was determined to carry them out, and so it happened that only a few minutes later, closely wrapped and veiled, she was on the street, walking rapidly.

The air was cold and keen, and she walked on and on, never thinking of a car or a cab, but thinking, thinking, all the time of the errand she was on, of the young woman whom she was determined to see before she slept again, planning how she would win her way into Clarita's presence, for she had no doubt that she would be denied admittance if she were known, and she was equally sure that Felix had warned this Spanish girl against her.

Could she have looked ahead into Clarita's parlor then, she would have seen her own father standing in the center of the room with uplifted weapon, ready to strike, she would have seen agony and remorse in his face, and wonder, doubt and horror in the expression of the young hostess; and she might have turned back.

As she drew near the building, two men came out, one half supporting the other, and she recognized them both; her discarded lover, and her father; but she walked on steadily, knowing that they would not see her. She could have touched them with her hands when she turned aside to pass them.

She did not comment upon the encounter, even to herself. Her mind was too much engrossed with her own affairs; but the meeting assured her of one thing—that her own interview with the Spanish woman would not be interrupted; and she went on past the house, turning to see if both of the men entered the carriage. It would not have interfered with her plans had Felix returned to the house; but he did not, and she felt that it was better so.

When the carriage had driven away, she passed through the great front door, and went straight to the elevator.

"Miss Ortega," she said, throwing back her veil and thus disclosing the matchless beauty of her face. "She is expecting me, I believe. I will not wait to send up my card. What floor is it?"

"The top."

The boy stepped out of the elevator, led her to the door of Clarita's apartment, rang the bell for her, and then hastened back to his car and disappeared down the shaft.

It was Marie, Clarita's maid, who opened the door. Carla had again drawn her veil so that her features could not be seen, and when the door was opened, she stepped through it quickly.

"I wish to see Miss Ortega," she said, and passed on along the private corridor to the parlor, which she entered, pausing only when she was in the center of the room on the very spot where her father had stood, knife in hand only a little while before.

"Who shall I say, madame?" asked Marie, who had pursued her.

"Say that a lady—one whom she knows by name, at least—wishes to see her."

Marie courtesied and withdrew, and then Carla's eyes swept the room in swift, but comprehensive glances, and she was still engaged in that occupation when she was startled by the sound of a gentle voice behind her.

"You wished to see me?" said the voice.

She turned swiftly, tearing aside her veil as she did so, and thus Carla Trevor and Clarita Ortega, for the first time, stood face to face.

(To be continued.)

IN THE NET OF THE VISCONTI.*

BY UPTON B. SINCLAIR, JR.

A tale of the time of the Italian Renaissance. The thrilling experiences of Tito Bentivogli, son to the Duke of Bologna, who is captured while on a hunting trip by Galeazzo, the hereditary enemy of his house. Plot, counterplot, and a matching of cunning against cunning in a game of which one player's life is the stake.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

THE scene of the story is in Italy in the middle ages, when Gian Galeazzo Visconti is seeking to become master of the entire country. Tito and Vittoria Bentivogli, son and daughter of the Duke of Bologna, are betrayed into his hands by a faithless retainer, Aligheri, but Tito leaves Vittoria with a peasant family. He falls in with an Englishman, John of Salisbury, and they stop for the night at a wayside hut; Tito being recognized, a fierce fight ensues and John is killed. Tito flees, to be discovered later by Malatesta, Galeazzo's most dreaded general, but he succeeds in passing as John Salisbury and is taken to Milan. During his audience with Galeazzo four prisoners are condemned to death, among whom is Vittoria disguised as a boy; Tito interferes and gets possession of her, but incurs the enmity of Malatesta. Galeazzo favors Tito strongly, and installs him as private secretary; thus he gets hold of a despatch calling for troops and Malatesta. This he forges to the effect that no help is needed, and he starts to deliver it to Galeazzo. But just as affairs have taken this fortunate turn he is horrified to come face to face with Aligheri the traitor.

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNEXPECTED OUTCOME.

THE consternation of the two men, meeting thus unexpectedly, was not to be concealed. So flushed with success had Bentivogli been that the possibility of encountering this traitor Aligheri had not occurred to him; and surely the last person in the world that Aligheri would have expected to find in Marignano Castle was the son of the Duke of Bologna.

His amazement, however, lasted only for a moment, then it gave place to wrath.

He uttered a yell, and whipping his sword from its scabbard, bounded at the younger man.

There was scarcely time for Bentivogli to draw his own weapon as he staggered backward, but he recovered

**This story began in the July issue of* THE ARGOSY. *The two back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 20 cents.*

himself, and the two were soon in the midst of a furious battle.

Bentivogli was fighting for his life. He knew it would not be long before Aligheri's cry brought some one upon the scene. Quickly collecting his faculties, he drove his opponent backward through the hall.

He was a skilful fencer, and certainly he never had greater reason to exercise his skill than now.

Aligheri kept yelling all the time: "Treason, treason!" and his cries were answered almost instantly.

Bentivogli heard a shout. Though all his attention was required by the business in hand, he darted one glance down the hallway, and as he did so he caught sight of the one other person he held in dread.

The huge figure of Malatesta was bounding toward him, his sword in his hand!

Aligheri saw him at the same instant.

"Help, help!" he cried. "He is a traitor; he is Bentivogli of Bologna!"

The words were scarcely out of the traitor's mouth before the battle was over, so far as he was concerned.

Nerved to desperation, Tito had leaped at the man, and with a sudden turn of his wrist struck his weapon to one side; then making a savage thrust, he drove his sword through the fellow's body up to the hilt.

As the man fell Bentivogli drew the weapon free again, and whirled about in time to face Malatesta.

He expected another fight, but it did not begin; the general had halted and was staring at him in amazement.

Evidently he was completely taken aback, and was scarcely able to realize the meaning of the words which he had heard from Aligheri. But as he gradually comprehended, a look of fierce triumph swept over his face.

He sprang forward, gripping his sword in his hand.

"Ho!" he cried, "so that is who you are! Bentivogli of Bologna!"

He was about to attack Tito, who was all ready to receive him; suddenly, however, a better plan occurred to the fierce soldier.

"You are too good to be killed," he exclaimed. "Galeazzo must have you for his torture chamber!"

Malatesta turned, evidently meaning to give the alarm, although that was scarcely necessary, for already footsteps could be heard coming from several directions.

It was a crisis for Bentivogli. The swift course of events had bewildered him somewhat, but at that supreme moment he had full command of his faculties.

A sudden thought flashed through his brain, and he bounded toward Malatesta.

"Beware!" he cried; "there are other traitors!"

Malatesta started back and glared at him.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"That note from Lucio!" was Bentivogli's answer. It struck the general like a thunderbolt.

He turned white and started backward, while the sounds of footsteps and cries drew nearer.

Malatesta seemed half dazed and uncertain what to do, but Tito still had his wits about him. He sprang closer to the other, and half whispered in his ear.

"Quick!" he said, "or all is lost!"

He ran to an open door near by, and Malatesta seemed to comprehend. He bounded in, and Bentivogli followed him.

The two shut the door just as they heard several men rush into the hall. Then Malatesta whirled about and faced the other.

"What is it you know?" he cried furiously.

"I have that last note from Lucio, which you threw out of the window," was the calm response.

The great officer muttered an oath

between his teeth; he gripped his sword as if to spring upon his opponent. But Bentivogli knew of a way to check him there.

"Remember Galeazzo's words," he said; "if I am dead or missing—you know what to expect!"

And Malatesta did know; his arm relaxed, though he ground his teeth with rage.

Tito, however, was by this time calm, and stepping a short distance away, quietly replaced his sword in its scabbard.

Near him was a chair, and he sat down and watched the general; there was a minute or two of silence, and then Tito began:

"I think you and I might as well have an understanding. You are very angry with me, but I do not know the reason exactly. Certainly it does neither of us any good."

Malatesta looked at him with an expression of surprise, as if wondering where the conversation was going to lead after this strange introduction.

"The question I want you to answer," Tito continued, "is—why are we enemies?"

That thought had evidently not occurred to the general before.

"You are plotting against Galeazzo," Tito went on quietly, after he had glanced around and made sure that no one was near; "you are perhaps surprised to see that I know it. But I have the good fortune to be in possession of your cipher, and of that last note from Lucio."

Malatesta started back with a look of rage on his face.

"There is no time for me to explain any more," Tito continued. "Suffice it to say that it puts me in possession of full information. But you need not be in the least alarmed, for I assure you that I have no intention of interfering. You want Milan for yourself, and I want Bologna for myself; we are both of us against Galeazzo, and there is no reason why our interests should clash."

The effect of these conciliatory words upon the other was surprising; a flood of light seemed to burst in upon him.

"I may as well say," Bentivogli went on, "that what that fellow Aligheri said is the truth; I am indeed the son of the Duke of Bologna. And you can easily guess why I am here. If you and I were to discuss matters quietly, we would see that we could be of much help to each other."

Every trace of animosity left Malatesta's face; he put up his sword and stepped toward Tito.

"You are right;" he exclaimed; "we will keep each other's secrets."

"We can do more than that, I think," was the response. "Wait until I tell you what I have already done."

"You are certainly in a position to do much," said Malatesta; "you have had extraordinary success. Tell me the news!"

Bentivogli glanced around anxiously; by this time, out in the hall, there was intense excitement. The dead body of Aligheri had been found, and the two could hear the cries of those who were searching for the murderers.

They were, therefore, still in danger, so they hurried over to one of the windows of the room. There being a broad shelf running along the side of the building, they could easily climb out and spring into the next window.

In this way they made their escape; and once clear of the scene of the trouble, Bentivogli led the general straight to his own apartment.

Vittoria was there, anxiously waiting for news. She was of course exceedingly surprised to see who Bentivogli was bringing with him, but the matter was soon explained.

"Sit down," Tito said to the general, "and I will show you something that will interest you."

He stepped toward the place where he had concealed the letter from Bologna.

"The situation, as I understand it, is this," he went on. "You want the

army to remain in Milan, so that you can perfect your plans. Every minute is precious to you, is it not?"

Malatesta nodded his assent, and then Bentivogli held out the letter to him.

"Very well," he said, "now read this!"

The man glanced over it, and as he did so he gave an excited exclamation.

"When did this come?" he cried.

"It came about half an hour ago," answered Bentivogli.

"And how did you get it?"

"I got it from the messenger who brought it," was the answer.

The general sprang to his feet.

"You don't mean it?" he cried.

"Yes," said Tito; "why not?"

The question was asked so naïvely that the man broke into a roar of laughter.

"You are a stranger here," he explained, "and you don't know the ways of the place. Let me tell you that if Galeazzo knew that anybody else was in possession of one of his despatches, there would be the wildest time ever seen in Marignano."

Tito opened his eyes in astonishment; he had not thought of that when he had taken the letter from the messenger.

"I do not know how the fellow came to give it up to you," went on Malatesta. "It would be all your life is worth for you to let the duke know that you have it."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Tito, "and I was just on the point of taking it to him—or, rather, the other one!" he added, as he produced the second letter. "I should judge you would be very sorry indeed to have Galeazzo get the genuine one."

"It would ruin everything!" cried Malatesta. "If he had got it my hopes would be lost."

"And so would mine," the young man answered. "Accordingly, I prepared another one to take him instead. Look."

Malatesta read it, and when he had finished, he was unable to conceal his admiration for the clever trick the young man had played.

"It is splendid," he cried. "It is just what I want!"

So delighted was he that he sprang forward and seized the other by the hand.

"I see," he said, "that you and I will have to help each other after all."

The two after that discussed the situation carefully, considering every detail. It appeared that the messenger had come from Bologna at great speed, and so, Malatesta declared, there would be no necessity for giving the letter to Galeazzo until later.

"Every second is precious," he said, "and so we will wait until then."

"And how shall we get it to him?" demanded Tito. "If his rule is as you say, I do not want to take any risks."

"I can fix that very easily," replied the general. "The messengers who come from Bologna are members of my troop; I know the man who brought that despatch, and I can very easily arrange things with him. I will give him the note, and tell him not to deliver it until the afternoon."

Tito assented to the proposition, for he understood the general's anxiety.

"But don't lose it in the mean time," he said.

Malatesta very soon settled that.

"I have a better way of managing things," he said.

He drew his sword and pressed a secret spring in the handle.

He then fell to unscrewing the hilt, which came off, disclosing a small receptacle.

Malatesta already had several papers concealed therein. The letter in question was only a tiny roll of parchment, not thicker than one's finger, and it slipped into the compartment without any trouble. Malatesta screwed it up again, and laughed softly to himself.

"I guess that is all right," he said; and then he added, with grim humor:

"I am glad that I did not succeed in killing you after all."

The two then proceeded to discuss further plans.

"Tell me," asked Tito, "what are your chances for success?"

"We are certain to succeed," answered Malatesta, "if we can only get the delay that I speak of. I have here at present only about a thousand of my troopers, but I expect about ten times that number in a day or two, to join the army against Bologna; as soon as they come, I mean to make some excitement in Milan. I'll have Marignano Castle and soon put an end to the duke."

Half instinctively the man gazed around as he uttered these treasonable words; there was no one to hear him, however, except Vittoria, and Bentivogli assured him that there was nothing to fear from her.

He had introduced her to the general under the name which she bore in the castel—Lorenzo Vecci.

Bentivogli was on the point of telling Malatesta of the other plot he had put into effect against Galeazzo, his scheme in connection with Cardinal Camillo, but he concluded that he had better not do so. The discussion turned presently to another matter—that of the answer to the letter from Bologna.

"Galeazzo will certainly reply," Malatesta said, "and of course if his letter reaches Sforza he will see that something is wrong. I suppose, however, I can arrange it with the messenger so that it will not be delivered."

But Tito sprang up suddenly with an eager exclamation.

"I can fix it better than that," he cried.

"What is it?"

The young man stepped to his writing desk. There was silence in the room while he wrote a few hasty words. Then he had another note to submit to Malatesta.

"Sforza," it read, "the siege of Bologna must be abandoned at once; it is necessary that you return to Milan with all possible speed as soon as you receive this. Galeazzo."

Malatesta read it and gave an exclamation of triumph.

"That will settle it!" he cried; "I expect Sforza to help me in this plot, any way."

The two conspirators were delighted with this project; they had no doubt it would succeed, for Bentivogli was by this time familiar with the duke's signature.

"And if it goes by one of the regular messengers," he said, "it will excite no suspicion."

"And I will see that it is started within ten minutes," said Malatesta, springing to his feet.

He was in haste to get away then, and the two spent little time in further talk.

"I am anxious to tell the rest of our triumph," Malatesta explained.

As Tito shut the door, he felt that he had achieved quite a victory. He had surely succeeded in extracting himself from a most difficult situation, and there no longer seemed to be anything which could possibly foil his plans. To be sure, he had turned forger, but Galeazzo was a foe, in fighting whom one must not be squeamish in the matter of weapons.

Whether Malatesta succeeded or not, the attack upon Bologna would be delayed; and that was all that Bentivogli cared about.

"There is only one thing I have to think of now," he said, "and then I shall be comparatively content."

"What is that?" asked Vittoria.

"It is you. I do not mean that you shall remain in this place an hour longer than is necessary."

The girl declared that she would much rather stay and share the peril with her brother, but Tito was playing a desperate game, and he wisely decided that it would be safer to get his sister out of the way.

"I will find some errand to send you on," he said, "and I will get you a

safe conduct from Galeazzo, to keep you from any harm; I fancy it will not be difficult for me to find some pretext."

CHAPTER XII.

THE DISCOVERY OF TREASON.

On his return to the duke's apartments, Tito made it an especial point to pass through that part of the castle where he had met Aligheri.

He found the stains of blood still on the marble floor where the traitor had fallen, but the body had been carried away, and there was no longer any sign of excitement about the place.

Such incidents were evidently not sufficiently infrequent in the neighborhood of Milan to cause much excitement or inquiry.

Tito made his way back to the chamber of state, where the duke was still seated, busily engrossed in his affairs. The man paid dearly for his power, for the amount of work which was required to maintain it would have been sufficient to break down any three ordinary men.

Yet Galeazzo attended to everything himself, and kept the reins of government in his own hands.

And a splendid government it was, too, so far as the general welfare of Italy was concerned; Galeazzo's armies were all well paid, and his cities all well governed. It was only when one chanced to run counter to his purposes that his tyranny was felt.

Galeazzo was exceedingly busy at this time of day, and the room was crowded with emissaries and messengers from all portions of his territory. There were merchants with suits to be heard, and generals from his various armies, demanding supplies of every kind.

Bentivogli soon found himself busily at work, and he passed several hours hunting up documents among the duke's private papers, and otherwise making himself useful. It was not a very interesting task, but it was not very long before something occurred that concerned the young man more nearly.

Some matter came up which required the sending of a messenger.

Galeazzo had called up one of the officers of the court, demanding to know if there was any one intending to travel to Venice immediately. Bentivogli stepped forward.

"Your grace," he said, "perhaps I can serve you."

Galeazzo looked at him inquiringly.

"You remember the young man of whom I spoke to you," Tito went on. "I was about to send him to Venice with a letter to be given to a friend of mine, a merchant, who is undertaking to forward it to England. If there is anything the young man can attend to for you at the same time, he will, of course, be pleased to do it."

Galeazzo fortunately liked the suggestion.

"Can you vouch for him?" he asked.

"With my life," replied Tito.

"Very well, that settles it," was the response. "How soon can he be ready to start?"

"In half an hour, your grace," answered Bentivogli.

Galeazzo turned and ordered one of his officers to see that a horse was provided, and then he called for paper, and wrote the letter which Tito had been so anxious to secure.

It declared the bearer, Lorenzo Vecci, to be a messenger in the service of the duke, and all were commanded to aid him upon his journey in whatsoever manner he might require.

This Galeazzo signed, and Bentivogli, his heart dancing with delight, hurried back to the room where his sister was waiting.

"You need not go to Venice," he laughed; "you will be able to enter Bologna by the time you get there, for Sforza will have left. Just as soon as I get you the letters you are to carry you will be able to start."

Having delivered this piece of good news, Bentivogli once more hurried back to the council chamber; he was just in time to witness an unexpected scene.

He had entered, and was in the act of speaking to Galeazzo again, when there suddenly came sounds of confusion from one of the anterooms, which caused the duke to turn in some anxiety.

A moment later the warders were hurriedly pushed aside, and a man, hatless and breathless, rushed into the place.

He was dressed in the uniform of one of the duke's officers. According to his usual custom, however, Galeazzo was terrified at the sight, and shrank back cowering into his chair. His faithful body guard promptly closed in around him, and the stranger had no chance to approach.

He was seized by several of the officers of the court, who were angry at his abrupt entrance. They tried to drag him away, but the man was bound to be heard.

"Your grace," he cried. "A plot, a plot!"

Galeazzo managed to stammer out a question.

"A conspiracy against your grace's life," answered the other. "There is no time to lose!"

The despot gave a hasty order at that, and the room was quickly cleared; no one remained except the imperturbable Germans and Bentivogli, the latter of whom was, of course, curious to learn what was the matter.

But the officer objected even to his presence, and Galeazzo ordered him to leave; Bentivogli went out, leaving the two in an excited conversation, carried on over the heads of the soldiers.

Concerned as he was in a plot of his own, Tito was, of course, extremely anxious at this new turn of affairs; he paced up and down the hall for some time, but as there was no sign of the doors being opened again, he finally returned to his own apartments to discuss the matter with his sister.

Perhaps fifteen minutes more passed before Tito received definite tidings of what had occurred.

The news came in a very startling way, indeed; the silence which prevailed about the castle was suddenly broken by excited shouts.

Bentivogli listened an instant, and then sprang up and rushed to the door. As he flung it open, he found that the whole castle was in an uproar.

There were footsteps running in every direction, and yells and shouts, both in the courtyard and through the halls. By this time Bentivogli made out a single name, which was on the lips of every one who passed:

"Malatesta, Malatesta!"

He and Vittoria stood gazing at each other in suspense, listening to the extraordinary uproar, which every minute swelled louder and louder.

Several times bodies of troops rushed past; Bentivogli called to them to know what was the matter, but no one answered him; they were all too much engrossed in the task before them, and continued hurrying this way and that about the palace, waving their swords and yelling furiously: "Malatesta! Malatesta!"

The confusion growing still wilder, Bentivogli took the precaution of leading his sister back into the room and concealing her, while he himself hurried out to learn what had occurred.

He had scarcely set foot in the hall, however, before an unexpected sight met his eyes.

A figure came rushing toward him, waving a bloody sword in his hand, and Bentivogli saw that it was none other than the mighty Malatesta himself.

His face was flushed, and there was a look of fury on it. Then as he suddenly caught sight of Tito, he bounded toward him with a roar that fairly shook the walls of the building.

"Traitor!" he shouted; "scoundrel!"

So terrible was the other's wrath that instinctively the young nobleman sprang back.

"What is the matter?" he gasped.

"Villain!" the general cried, "you have betrayed me! You have betrayed me!"

In another moment he was upon Bentivogli. The latter had barely time to whip out his sword and defend himself.

At once a furious battle was raging, Malatesta driving the other across the broad apartment, all the time yelling like a fiend, and cursing his opponent furiously.

Bentivogli tried to get him to explain, but the man was beyond all the bounds of reason. At the same time that this extraordinary scene was going on, Bentivogli could hear outside the clash of weapons and a ceaseless chorus of cries.

He had his hands full, however, to attend to his own affairs, for he was facing a terrible foe. It took all his skill to parry the fierce blows of the general.

For fully a minute or two, the pair swayed this way and that through the room, fighting at a furious rate, but Bentivogli was merely defending himself, and all the time trying to get his raging opponent to tell him what was the matter.

In the mean time the cries outside were coming nearer and nearer; Bentivogli heard footsteps close behind him.

He was then at the far end of the room, and darting a swift glance around him, he made out that several soldiers were in the act of rushing in.

Malatesta saw them, too, and he gave a yell of welcome.

"Forward, men!" he cried. "Here is the scoundrel! Kill him!"

And again he flung himself into the combat.

Bentivogli was desperate by now, for he saw that his seconds were numbered; raising his sword, he aimed one furious stroke.

Malatesta also raised his weapon, and the two clashed in the air; Malatesta's snapped off short at the hilt. And Bentivogli sprang at him. Blinded with wrath, the man hurled the hilt at his opponent, barely missing his head.

Malatesta staggered backward, and all that saved him from instant death was the fact that his soldiers reached his side.

They sprang at Bentivogli, who recoiled, and then turned and dashed away.

He had not an instant to lose; he bounded toward the nearest door, slammed it to behind him, and was just in time to bolt it as the men flung their weight against it.

Tito was breathless, and he sank back against the wall; he crouched and clutched his sword, expecting every instant that the barrier would give way, and his foes be upon him again.

But from the excited yells, he judged that something else had occurred.

The hammering suddenly ceased; the mighty voice of Malatesta was heard to roar above all other sounds:

"Quick! To the courtyard, to the courtyard! We have no time to lose!"

Then again came the sound of running footsteps. As suddenly as they had begun, the confused noises died away.

Bentivogli knew that the men had rushed out into the hall again, and instantly he sprang forward and slid back the bolt.

He opened the door, and found as he expected that the apartment was deserted. The only person visible was his sister, who was still crouching behind the curtain where he had concealed her, but peering out and watching the excitement in terror.

Bentivogli sprang forward and hurried with her into one of the more remote rooms of the suite.

"What in the world do you suppose can be the matter?" she gasped.

"I haven't the slightest idea," an-

swered Tito, "except that the whole plot must have come out."

The cries throughout the castle still continued, and now loud yells also swelled up from outside the window. Bentivogli rushed toward it, and then called for his sister to join him.

They were in a position to witness a thrilling scene.

Malatesta and his faithful followers had succeeded in forcing their way through the castle, but it was now seen that they were fighting Galeazzo's body guard, who had surrounded them completely.

They had been driven back against the outer wall of the fortress.

At the head of them was the huge figure of the general himself, who had procured another sword, and was fighting like a demon; his fierce battle cry rallied the spirits of his troopers.

This way and that the combat surged; the courtyard was now crowded with men of either one party or the other, and the whole place was a scene of battle. On several sides were numbers of Malatesta's supporters, fighting their way toward him.

When they finally succeeded in doing this, they turned upon the common enemy, and for a moment succeeded in driving them back.

Bentivogli was watching the scene with breathless interest; as he glanced he saw a figure leaning out of one of the windows of the castle, and yelling furiously.

It was Galeazzo, and he was shouting to his soldiers: "Kill him, kill him! The traitor! Ten thousand florins to the man who strikes him down!"

Malatesta raised his sword, shook it at the duke, and yelled a furious imprecation. Then he turned and once more flung himself upon the Germans, who recoiled before his savage charge.

But it was evident that the little band must soon be overwhelmed, for the duke's soldiers were pouring in on every side. Malatesta's only hope was to get out of the castle.

He had succeeded in driving away the guards who were in possession of the entrance, and all that hindered him was the fact that the bridge was up.

This was operated by chains from the second story of the castle. As Malatesta comprehended his desperate situation he did not falter, but snatching a huge battle ax from one of his troopers, started to climb up the inclined bridge.

An instant later he was in full sight of all, the central figure of the thrilling scene.

He was standing over the heavy iron chains and dealing blow after blow upon them with the ax.

Galeazzo saw his intention, and yelled to his men. They surged forward again, but Malatesta's troopers surrounded him on every side, fighting like heroes.

And the general's immense strength soon prevailed.

Blow after blow was rained down on the chains, and suddenly one side gave way, and the drawbridge sagged down with a crash.

There was a cheer of delight from Malatesta's men, and a howl of wrath from Galeazzo. Malatesta flung himself upon the other side.

Encouraged by his first success, it took the gigantic man only a second or two to snap the second and only remaining support of the bridge. It fell with a deafening crash, crushing a number of soldiers beneath it.

The rest sprang upon it, and although hotly pressed by the Germans, made another stand at the entrance, and got across in safety.

Right in front of them was the forest, and toward this they bounded, cheering victoriously.

Malatesta paused until all his men had passed, and then waving his sword defiantly at the infuriated duke, he turned and joined in the flight.

Galeazzo's guard pursued, but being more lightly armed, Malatesta's men made their escape in safety, leaving

their discomfited foes to recover from the effects of the excitement as best they could.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONDEMNED TO THE TORTURE CHAMBER.

TITO'S feelings could not but be stirred by the gallant resistance of the desperate Malatesta, and all his sympathies were with him. He could scarcely restrain his impulse to cheer as he saw the party make their escape. But as the sounds died away and the castle once more began to settle down, the young nobleman's mind was recalled to his own situation.

The wild struggle he had just witnessed served to convince him more than ever that Marignano Castle was no place for him and his sister.

He had the letters for Vittoria and the passport, which Galeazzo had given him, so the two hurried down into the courtyard, which they found to be still in confusion.

But Tito sought out the officer to whom Galeazzo had spoken, and the girl's horse was brought and she mounted to start.

She hurried through the groups of wounded and dead to the gate itself, where the soldiers were on guard.

But it was only necessary for Lorenzo Vecci to produce his pass, and they promptly made way for him.

It was with a thrill of relief that Bentivogli saw his sister disappear down the road, which fortunately led in the opposite direction to the one which Malatesta and his men had taken.

Then once more he turned and made his way back to his own apartments.

He did not stay there very long, however, for he was anxious to find out what had been the cause of the sudden uprising, and who it was that had betrayed Malatesta's plans.

"He evidently thought that I did it," thought Bentivogli. "In any case, that will make me still more solid with Galeazzo."

Hence it was with a light heart that the young man set out for the hall of state again; and he was not in the least prepared for what was to befall him there.

When he reached the doorway he found the room a scene of intense excitement. Galeazzo was still almost insane with fury. He was raging up and down the place, shaking his fists at his body guard and cursing them.

"The scoundrel!" he howled, "was there ever such a plot? And hatched right here in my own castle! And twenty of my officers knew it, and only one would tell me! I will give a fortune to the man who kills that Malatesta!"

The rage of the despot was truly terrible to witness, and Bentivogli wisely decided that he would not go in until the storm had blown over; this plan, however, he found himself unable to carry out.

He was standing in the doorway, when suddenly he was startled to hear a shout behind him.

A man had come running down the hall; he yelled at the top of his voice:

"Here he is! This is one!"

Bentivogli whirled about and found himself face to face with the mysterious man who had been closeted with Galeazzo, and who had disclosed the plot.

His uniform was torn and covered with blood, and he had evidently been in the midst of the terrible combat.

Bentivogli stared at him, and then he started back with an exclamation of alarm; the man was pointing straight at him!

"Here he is!" he yelled. "This is the traitor! Seize him!"

Galeazzo had heard the cry, and so excited by it was he that he almost forgot his usual caution, and started to dash out of the room without his body guard about him.

He recollected himself, however, and

Bentivogli heard him shout: "Bring him in! Bring him in!"

At the same time the stranger had flung himself upon Bentivogli. Instinctively the young man struck out with all his might, and as the other staggered backward he whipped out his sword and rushed at him.

But the two had no time to fight it out; the odds were all against Bentivogli, for at Galeazzo's command the Germans surrounded him in an instant.

Tito's sword was struck out of his hand, and in less time than it takes to tell of it he was in the grasp of half a dozen of the troopers. In spite of his protests they hurried him into the room, the stranger still shouting excitedly.

Bentivogli was completely mystified by this unexpected course of events; but he was struck absolutely dumb when he saw Galeazzo's conduct.

As the tyrant saw him he began fairly to foam at the mouth with rage.

"Yes, it is he!" he cried. "The villain! I thought he had escaped with the rest!"

"I knew him!" laughed the other, triumphantly, "I knew him from Malatesta's description!"

So great was Galeazzo's anger that it seemed to Bentivogli as if he meant to tear him to pieces there in the audience chamber. He was simply beside himself with wrath.

"You dog!" he cried. "To think that you would betray me! You whom I trusted!"

Bentivogli was completely dazed, but he managed to stammer out a protest.

"Your grace——" he began.

"Don't answer me!" yelled the duke, "I know it all, and there is no use denying it! The whole plot was revealed, and I see through it all now! Malatesta brought you here; you are one of his men! And to think that I was alone with you!"

The very thought made the man shudder with fright. He turned toward the stranger and called him by name, and when Bentivogli heard it the whole truth flashed over him, and at the same time came a realization of the dreadful situation in which he was placed.

The man's name was Lucio; it was the officer who had written the last note to Malatesta!

The man had turned traitor and informed upon his fellow conspirators, evidently just after Malatesta had also told him of his alliance with Tito.

The room fairly swam before Bentivogli as he recognized what all this meant to him; he was helpless in the power of the dreadful tyrant, and without the slightest hope of escaping, or of denying his guilt.

He grew sick with horror as he thought of the fate that was in store for him, and of the stories he had heard of Galeazzo's unspeakable cruelty. Surely, if the despot had ever cause to punish any one it was Bentivogli.

He was pacing up and down the room, gritting his teeth and clenching his hands until the nails dug into the flesh.

"To think of such a plot!" he muttered. "He would have had all my private papers, and he might have stabbed me at any time! And I was without the slightest suspicion of him! Ah, but he shall pay for this!

"Antonio!" he shouted suddenly, "Antonio!"

One of the officers stepped forward and awaited his command.

"Away with this prisoner!" cried the duke. "Tear him limb from limb! He shall suffer as no man ever suffered in this castle before! Away with him!"

Tito strove to speak, but the infuriated man's cries drowned every word; then desperately he endeavored to free himself, but the soldiers held him motionless. And at Galeazzo's words they closed about him and dragged him swiftly away.

As he was led out of the room the last sounds he heard were the furious shouts of Galeazzo: "To the torture chamber

with him! He shall pay for this with weeks of agony; and I will watch it, too!"

Then the heavy doors closed upon Tito, shutting him out from all hope.

He was in a dark hallway, down which the soldiers hurried him swiftly; everything seemed to reel before his eyes.

His terrible fate had come upon him so suddenly that it fairly paralyzed him. He had no time to summon his faculties to face the ordeal that was now before him, even if it had been within the power of any human being to look forward bravely to that horror of horrors —the torture chamber of Galeazzo Visconti.

Many were the stories which had been told of Marignano Castle, of the dungeons beneath it, and of the horrors which were enacted there.

The soldiers led him on for a short way, and then they came to a heavily grated iron door. The officer knocked, and after a short parley the barrier creaked and grated on its hinges. The party hurried in.

They found themselves on a flight of stone steps, which they descended, seeming to plunge into absolute darkness, but it was only a minute before the officer sprang to one side and reappeared with a blazing torch. Holding this over his head, he again started forward, and the party followed him.

They descended the steps again, which wound backward and forward, going deeper and deeper, seemingly never coming to an end; the damp atmosphere from the vaults struck Bentivogli's heart with a deadly chill.

He would have cried out for mercy, but he knew there was none to be hoped for from the imperturbable Germans.

The end of the steps was reached at last, and again they were confronted by an iron door; this, too, was opened after some delay, and the party marched in.

The officer called, a door at one side was thrown back, and a man hurried forward. Bentivogli could not restrain a start of horror as he gazed at him, knowing it was his future jailer; a more terrible looking man could not have been imagined.

He was a tall, powerfully built person, clad in a bright colored costume such as Bentivogli had never seen before; he was a Turk, with a swarthy, copper colored complexion, which gleamed in the light of the torch.

When he saw the prisoner a repulsive smile spread over his face; his black eyes glistened, and his teeth shone savagely.

He muttered a few words in some foreign tongue, at the same time turning and signaling to several men who were standing in the shadows of the dark apartment.

The latter, who were of the same race, stepped down and bound the helpless prisoner hand and foot; then the Germans released him, and without a word the officer turned and disappeared.

The door clanged to; the sound which echoed through the hollow vault seemed like a death knell, striking a deadly chill to Tito's heart.

He was left in darkness in the damp cell, which was utterly silent except for the guttural tones of the whispering men.

The leader soon produced a lantern, which gave out a dull, red light; he stepped forward, the rest of the men following and dragging their prisoner with them.

They passed through several more doors and continued on until Bentivogli thought they would never stop. They could have gone very much further, however, for Galeazzo's dungeons covered the entire space beneath his great castle.

The young nobleman was straining his ears, listening with anxiety. Suddenly as the party was proceeding down a hallway he caught a distant sound which made his blood run cold in his veins.

Bentivogli was a brave man, but his

present situation had unnerved him almost completely. The noises which reached his ears were muffled cries and groans, and a moment afterwards, as the party passed through another doorway, they swelled out louder into a series of the most dreadful shrieks.

As they continued down the hallway, Tito noticed a doorway with a faint light streaming through it. The sounds proceeded from there, and as he passed it he caught sight of an appalling scene.

At last he had arrived at Galeazzo's torture chamber; there was one dim light in the black vault, and by it Tito saw one central figure.

It was that of a man, stripped perfectly nude, and hanging erect half way between the floor and the ceiling. Iron bands were bound to his feet and hands, and crouching on the floor on either side of him were two of the fiendish Turks.

They were slowly turning an iron bar, and as they did so they were gazing up in delight at their victim, from whom it was that the dreadful screams had come.

The man was being slowly torn limb from limb by the dreadful machine.

One look at his face, with its awful expression of agony, almost deprived young Bentivogli of his senses.

In the same glance he had seen another figure crouching a short distance away; it was one of the swarthy foreigners, stripped to the waist and bending over a coal fire in a small grate.

Bentivogli saw that the man was heating an iron red hot in the fire, which shone upon his gleaming skin and revealed the hideous expression of his face.

One glance was all that Bentivogli got, for his silent escort hurried him swiftly by.

At the very next door they stopped, the leader stepped forward and turned a key; the door swung back, and Tito was led forward into the dark cell.

The bearer of the lantern raised it. By its dim red light Tito saw that he was in just such another place as he had passed; the walls of the cell were lined with different instruments of torture, while the floor was stained with blood.

And lying on the floor not ten feet away was a casket, in which a shrouded corpse was lying.

There was time for only one glance; the man stepped back, and the iron door clanged to again. Bentivogli was left alone in the darkness.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SISTER TO THE RESCUE.

VITTORIA was scarcely able to realize her good fortune when she found herself clear of Marignano Castle at last. The horse proved to be a spirited animal, and made great time.

The girl was naturally anxious to put as much distance as possible between herself and the scene of her peril; her only regret was that her brother was not with her.

She felt, however, that he was safe, and so did not worry unduly.

The road she was following ran westward for several miles; there was a long ascent, and then she came out upon an open plateau, from which, far distant in the north, she caught sight of the distant towers of Milan, trembling in the heat of the midday sun.

Above them all shone the spires of the great cathedral. But Vittoria was in too much of a hurry to linger in gazing at the spectacle.

The horse galloped swiftly on, turning southward, and soon leaving the view behind him. After that came an unbroken stretch of mile after mile of level plain.

The heat was oppressive, but fear urged the girl on. The afternoon was already well advanced, and Vittoria desired to put a long distance between herself and the castle before she rested.

She passed through several small towns, and numbers of scattered cot-

tages of the peasants; but everywhere the land had run to waste and ruin as the result of the plague which had swept through it.

In the course of her journey bodies of troops were passed on several occasions. Each time Vittoria trembled for her safety, and once her evident haste aroused the suspicion of an officer in command. But a single glance at Galeazzo's safe conduct was sufficient to allay all his suspicions.

All the time Vittoria's spirits were rising, she having no suspicion of the dreadful calamity which had overtaken her brother, and believing that everything was going well.

The sun sank behind the western mountains before she began to think of stopping.

From a slight elevation she caught sight of a small town a short distance ahead; and she rode slowly through the streets, gazing about her, until she came to the inn, where she drew rein and alighted.

A crowd soon surrounded the rider, knowing that she had come from the direction of Milan and inquiring for news, but Vittoria gave up her horse to the hostler and pushed her way into the inn without speaking.

She announced to the host that she desired a private diningroom, for it was her object to avoid seeing people as much as possible.

She was soon accommodated; but in the mean time the inn was the scene of some excitement.

There came a galloping of hoofs down the street. Every one rushed to the door as several horses drew up in front of the inn. Then came a stamping of feet and voices conversing in loud tones.

A minute later half a dozen officers entered the room, calling loudly for refreshments; they were rough looking men, and Vittoria shrank into a corner to escape their view.

The soldiers scarcely gave a glance at her, however, but proceeded to make themselves comfortable about the place. A short while later Vittoria was ushered into the private diningroom.

It proved to be next to the one she had just left. Being very hungry after her long ride, she was soon sitting at her evening meal, while in the mean time she found that she could hear the conversation going on in the next room with perfect distinctness, the wall being very thin.

She scarcely noticed what was said, however, until a few minutes later; then suddenly she heard something which caused her to stop eating and bend forward breathlessly. Then she sprang to her feet and stole swiftly across the room, an expression of intense eagerness upon her face.

She had heard another man come stamping into the inn; he was evidently known to the officers, and they exchanged greetings.

"From Milan?" asked one.

"Yes," answered the newcomer.

"And what is the news?" demanded the rest eagerly.

"We have been having the wildest kind of a time!" laughed the man. "Malatesta had a plot to seize Milan and one of the officers revealed the whole thing. There was a fight at Marignano, but Malatesta made his escape."

"And who is mixed up in it?" inquired two or three excitedly.

"Oh, about twenty of the officers," answered the other; "only three of them were captured, and one other that Galeazzo seems to be angrier with than the others—some English chap he had just made his secretary. He was a ringleader, and now he's in the torture chamber!"

The effect of those terrible words upon Vittoria was like a bolt of thunder. If it had not been for the fact that she realized the peril she was in, and the need she had for watchfulness, her faculties would certainly have failed her. She staggered back and sank into a chair, as white as a sheet.

She was simply paralyzed with horror at what she had heard, and knew not which way to turn; from the height of her triumph she had suddenly been plunged into utter despair and helplessness.

Almost hysterical with fright, she thought over the meaning of the dreadful words she had heard. It was easy to understand what had occurred, for she knew that Tito was involved in the plot.

"And he is guilty, like the rest!" she gasped. "There is no way that he can be saved!"

She sank back and burst into tears; it was fully an hour before she moved from her position.

"Oh, if I could only save him!" she groaned. "If I could only think of anything to do!"

She crept back to the wall again, but by this time the conversation had turned to other matters; there was nothing more to be learned here.

The situation was such a desperate one, that after the first shock had passed it nerved all the girl's faculties; her brain was fairly in a whirl as she thought over her brother's deadly peril.

"If I could only make it appear that he is innocent!" she panted. "If I could only think of something, I would venture back to Marignano."

Her hand fell upon the letter which Galeazzo had given her and which she had in one of her pockets, and she took the packet out, intending to destroy it; but at the same time her hand came into contact with another paper, which started a new train of thought in her mind.

She had with her the cipher and Lucio's note, and also the original message which had come from Bologna, and which Bentivogli had given her to conceal.

She took them out and gazed at them. Then she sprang to her feet and began pacing up and down the room, clenching her hands and muttering excitedly to herself.

But seconds were precious, and she wasted not much time in that way. In her mind a desperate resolution was forming itself, and she suddenly stood still and gave an exclamation.

"My life is worth nothing without him!" she murmured, "and I will risk it!"

As quickly as possible without exciting undue suspicions, she settled the reckoning and had her horse brought out.

She sprang into the saddle and was soon galloping down the road again. Once clear of the village, she put spurs to the horse. Her brain was on fire with excitement as she thought over the peril into which she was about to venture.

On and on she rode, up hill and down, stopping for nothing and never once allowing her horse to pause or falter. She regretted that she had been anxious to get so far from the castle, but then she remembered that if it had not been for the fortunate accident by which she had stopped at this particular inn and thus overheard the conversation which meant so much to her, she might have been by this time sleeping peacefully, quite oblivious of her brother's great danger.

"God grant he may still be alive!" she kept repeating.

Though her horse was a good one, she feared the terrific pace would be too much for him; but she dared not relax her speed for an instant.

The road seemed interminable, and she was beginning to fear that in her haste and excitement she had missed the way altogether; but climbing a slight hill, she suddenly caught sight of the lights of Marignano Castle.

And a minute later she was galloping up the broad avenue.

Twice sentries yelled to her to halt, but she heeded not. The horse sped on, and in a few seconds more was in front of the drawbridge again.

The chains had already been repaired, and the bridge was up. But the girl

shouted excitedly, and her hails were soon answered.

"It is a matter of life and death," she cried to the officer who appeared at the bridge. "I must see Galeazzo instantly!"

The man immediately turned and disappeared. There was a long wait, during which the girl sprang off the foaming and exhausted horse, and began pacing up and down in the most intense anxiety.

A number of soldiers then appeared on the wall, the same officer with them. After the latter had made sure from the sentries that no one else was near, the great bridge was slowly lowered. As it came down Vittoria leaped upon it and rushed forward.

She found herself surrounded instantly by the Germans; her anxiety was evidently so great, however, that even they were moved to haste.

And so in a few seconds the girl was inside the castle.

"I must see Galeazzo," she still kept crying. "A matter of life and death!"

And her request was granted, for a breathless official soon came running back and commanded her to follow him.

Two of the Germans held her by the arms, and another removed her sword; then she was led hurriedly forward.

There was a moment or two of parley at one of the doors; then it was flung open and Vittoria was marched straight into the presence of the duke.

The arrival had caused no little excitement throughout the fortress; the girl found all eyes upon her as she entered the audience chamber.

The despot was seated at his evening meal, in the great state diningroom. He was surrounded by his body guard, as usual, and the rest of the table was occupied by officers of the court.

At one side, on a raised platform, was another table, at which a number of women were seated. They were the ladies of the court, including Galeazzo's daughters and their attendants.

As the new arrival was led in, the duke rose to his feet and gazed at her. But one glance was sufficient. The man muttered a furious oath.

"It is that Englishman's accomplice!" he yelled.

Vittoria saw her deadly peril; instantly the despot raised his voice and shouted to his officers:

"Away with him!" he cried. "He is guilty with the others!"

The men sprang forward to obey, and the girl found herself being rapidly dragged back through the door by which she had entered.

In another instant it would have been all over with her; nerved to desperation by the dreadful prospect, she fairly tore one arm loose from the grip of the men and raised it imploringly to Galeazzo.

"Your grace!" she cried, "hear me, hear me! I have important news!"

So terribly earnest was her manner that even the Germans were impressed; they halted half involuntarily, and the girl seized her opportunity.

"I have not come here for nothing," she cried; "if you hear me you will never regret it!"

Her evident sincerity carried the day. The look of rage on Galeazzo's face was supplanted by one of curiosity. Every one else had turned and was staring with the most intense interest at the figure of what seemed to them a singularly handsome youth.

"Hear me! Hear me!" cried Vittoria again, seeing her advantage. And then, to her intense relief, Galeazzo gave the word.

"Bring him forward!" he said, and Vittoria was hurried back across the room.

She stood face to face with the tyrant, who fixed his sharp eyes upon her.

"Now, what is it?" he demanded, and Vittoria knew that the supreme moment had come.

Gripping her hands and gathering all her faculties together, she raised her voice boldly.

"Your grace," she began, "my master, John of Salisbury——"

The very name brought back Galeazzo's wrath.

"The villain!" he hissed.

Vittoria flung herself forward imploringly, crying out in an agonized voice:

"Spare him! Spare him! It is all a mistake!"

But Galeazzo made a gesture of wrathful impatience.

"Is that all you have to say?" he cried.

Again he was on the point of ordering her away; the words seemed at his lips. Vittoria saw it, and shuddered, but she quickly thrust her hand into her doublet and snatched out the roll of paper; it was the message from Bologna.

"Here, your grace," she cried, "read this and you will understand."

Galeazzo gazed at the roll in surprise, and the courtiers bent forward, craning their necks.

The duke gave an order to one of his officers, and the little roll of parchment was passed in to him. He refused to take it until it had been opened and examined, evidently suspecting that it was an attempt to poison him.

But he was at last satisfied, snatched it away, and read it.

Then he started back with an excited cry.

"News from Bologna!" he gasped.

"Where did you get this?" he cried in amazement, directing a piercing glance at Vittoria.

"I got it from my master, John of Salisbury," she answered.

"And where did he get it?"

"That is the story," she cried, "hear me; it will explain all."

Again Galeazzo turned pale with rage; apparently the very thought of Tito was enough to set him wild.

But at this moment an unexpected event occurred.

At the smaller table every eye had been riveted upon the scene. Galeazzo's daughters had been watching with unconcealed interest the actions of the handsome and imperiled youth.

One of them, Olivia, the eldest, who was famed all through Italy for her extraordinary beauty, at this moment leaped to her feet; every one turned and stared at her, but she had a purpose in her mind, and carried it out boldly.

She rushed to the head of the table, and with an imperious gesture commanded the soldiers to give way.

They half obeyed, at the same time watching her with amazement.

"Olivia," cried Galeazzo, "what is the meaning of this?"

The girl pressed on through the crowd of men, flung herself upon her knees before her father, and seized his hand.

"Hear him," she cried in a voice audible to all in the room. "Hear him! I am sure he speaks the truth!"

Galeazzo was for a moment irresolute, gazing down at the girl as if not knowing whether to be angry or not; but the pleading look on the beautiful face before him won him, and he lifted her to her feet.

"Very well," he said, "he shall be heard."

The girl stood still, clutching her father's hand as he turned toward Vittoria.

"Speak out," he said. "We will listen."

CHAPTER XV.

A DARING DEFENSE.

THE reaction was almost too much for Vittoria; but she managed to gather herself together by a violent effort, and once more began:

"You have made a mistake," she cried boldly; "John of Salisbury is innocent of the crime of which you have accused him; I have known his every thought, and have helped him in all his plans. We were serving your grace to the utmost of our power. We had discovered the plot of Malatesta, and we

were waiting for nothing but to get the name of the conspirators that we might reveal them to you."

Vittoria saw the look of incredulity on the face of the duke, but she pressed on without waiting for him to reply.

"I have three things which will prove it," she said, "and I can convince you if you will only hear me out."

She thrust her hand into her pocket once more, and produced the other two papers.

"Look at these!" she cried, passing them to the soldiers.

Galeazzo took them this time without any hesitation, and quickly looked them over. One was the cipher, and the other was the patched letter, pasted on a sheet of paper, and with the translation in Vittoria's own handwriting underneath.

MALATESTA:

Everything doing well; in three days our plans will be ready. Milan will be ours in three days if you say the word, but the army must not leave before that.

LUCIO.

Galeazzo read the foregoing, and then turned suddenly toward the foot of the table.

"Lucio!" he cried.

Immediately the officer thus addressed stepped forward.

"Did you write this letter?" Galeazzo demanded, handing it to him.

The man looked at it and answered promptly.

"Yes," he said, "that is one of those I sent to Malatesta—the last one."

"And now," cried Vittoria, continuing with breathless haste, "I will tell you how John of Salisbury got it. As you know, he was a deadly enemy of Malatesta; while in the room of state he watched the general and saw the messenger hand this note to him, and saw him tear it up and throw the fragments away. As soon as possible he gathered them up and brought them to me, and I succeeded in putting them together.

"The cipher he got from the man whom Malatesta sent to assassinate him, and with that we managed to translate it as you see.

"We knew, of course, that if we were to learn who the conspirators were it must be done immediately. My master went to Malatesta and pretended to be interested in the plot, and he succeeded in gaining the general's confidence. Then came that matter of Aligheri."

As Galeazzo heard the name he started, and a look of deeper interest swept over his face.

"Ah!" he cried, "Aligheri! Who killed him?"

"John of Salisbury killed him," replied Vittoria. "He was in the plot with Malatesta, and as we were coming through the hall and discussing how we could fix the matter up as we desired, this man was crouching behind the curtains and heard it. My master saw him and struck him down!"

The girl had arranged her daring plan beforehand, and she told the story with such swiftness, and with such an air of certainty that Galeazzo seemed impressed with its truthfulness.

"But the messenger from Bologna?" he cried. "What of that?"

"That will be the proof," cried the girl. "Your secretary was a stranger in this court, and he did not know your ways. He met the messenger with this despatch at the door, and commanded the man to give it to him; he meant to hand it to you, but you were busy at the time. The despatch was not sealed, and he and I read it, and decided to deceive Malatesta with it. For he had seen John of Salisbury take the despatch, and we knew that he would wish to know the contents.

"He wrote out another one to deceive him, just the opposite of this one—that the attack on Bologna had been nearly successful, and that no more troops were needed. We knew that we could thus lull Malatesta into a sense of security, and foil his plan completely; and we succeeded."

The girl stopped breathlessly; every one in the room was staring at her, Galeazzo the most interested of all.

"A likely story," he said, "but why did you not give me this message?"

This was the point at which Vittoria felt the weakness of her tale; in spite of herself she could not help hesitation.

And Galeazzo noticed it, and a smile swept over his face.

"Why?" he demanded again. "Answer me!"

"Your grace," protested the girl, "there was no time; the alarm was given——"

Galeazzo interrupted her with an impatient gesture.

"A likely story, indeed!" he cried—"a likely story! And a message like this is kept from me for half a day!"

Vittoria saw that once more the command to take her away was upon his lips. She sprang forward with a cry of dread, and stretched out her arms imploringly.

"Oh, hear me!" she cried. "There is one hope yet!"

Galeazzo made an angry gesture, and waved his hand; but his daughter interrupted.

She had been listening to the supposed youth's narration with flushing cheeks and sparkling eyes.

"Father," she cried, "you promised to hear all!"

And Galeazzo checked himself.

"Yes, I did," he cried; "go on; but be quick!"

"The other message!" cried the girl, "I know where it is, and that will prove it!"

Galeazzo gave a start.

"You said you gave it to Malatesta!" he said quickly.

"So I did," was the prompt rejoinder. "We did give it to Malatesta, but I saw where the general put it. He has a secret place in the handle of his sword."

There was a murmur of excitement.

"But I cannot get his sword!" exclaimed the duke.

"Yes, you can," cried the girl eagerly, "for I can tell you where it is. Perhaps you did not know it, but when the alarm was first given Malatesta supposed that it was John of Salisbury who had betrayed him; he rushed into our room and we had a fight. The Englishman would have killed him if it had not been for the arrival of some of his other troops; as it was, the sword broke off and he flung the hilt across the room. It was lying there when we left."

"If that is true," Galeazzo declared suddenly, "you have proven your case," and he faced about hurriedly.

"Has anybody here found the hilt of Malatesta's sword?" he cried.

There was a dead silence throughout the apartment; no one answered, and Galeazzo turned to one of his officers.

"Search the room," he cried quickly. "Don't lose an instant!"

The man dashed out of the apartment at full speed.

He left the dining hall as silent as if it had been deserted.

All were so absorbed with interest in the case that they sat gazing spellbound upon the flushed face of the handsome young man who had so boldly pleaded the cause of his friend, and whose life now hung upon such a slender thread.

As for Vittoria, her condition of mind may be imagined. The statements she had made about the sword were true, but her dread was that the weapon might no longer be where it had been flung.

Some one might have entered and picked it up, for it was a valuable object; the hilt was studded with precious stones and inlaid with gold.

As time sped by the suspense grew so unbearable that Vittoria was scarcely able to stand; she staggered backward against one of the pillars of the broad apartment, and stood there panting in agonized uncertainty, with every eye in the place fixed upon her.

But the terrible suspense came to an end at last. Suddenly the silence was broken by a sound of distant footsteps.

All bent forward, Vittoria's heart fairly ceasing to beat as she waited.

Closer the steps sounded, and then suddenly the door was flung open, and the messenger rushed in.

Every one stared at him. As for Vittoria, she gave one glance and staggered backward with a cry of consternation. The man had returned empty handed!

"Your grace," was his report, "there is no sword there."

There was a moment or two more of suspense, during which all eyes were fastened upon Galeazzo.

The despot stood for an instant in uncertainty; when he spoke, however, his words were decided enough.

"That settles it!" he said. "He has lied!"

(To be continued.)

TRAIN AND STATION.*

BY EDGAR R. HOADLEY.

A railroad story in which the exciting experiences that befall a railroad man are related with vivid faithfulness to facts by one who knows whereof he writes. The quest of Dashwood Dykeman in search of a name that was more rightfully his and the strange happenings that marked his pathway to the goal.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

WHILE traveling with his parents on the limited express from Chicago to St. Louis Dashwood Dykeman is made an orphan by the killing of his father and mother in a collision. He is sent for by his paternal grandfather, who educates him, and who, when he loses his money, informs Dash that the latter's name is not Dykeman, and that he—his grandfather—does not know what it is, as his son married a widow, with one child, against the wishes of his parents.

After several vain attempts to secure a position, Dash falls in with Tom Tickmore, a young telegraph operater whom he had met on that ill fated train years before. Through his influence, Dash gets a chance to learn telegraphy, and finally obtains a situation as operator with the railroad company that employs Tickmore. He is suspended for sixty days on account of a mishap for which he is not wholly responsible, and so starts for St. Louis to learn his father's name. He travels part way as rear brakeman, saves the train from a collision, and receives a pass to his destination and sixty dollars as a present from the superintendent. The train Dash takes passes through a town where a hotel is on fire; he rescues a woman and subsequently meets her and her daughter, Dorothy Orloff, on the train. Though their name is that of the conductor on the ill fated train at Lonewood years ago, they prove no relation. Mrs. Orloff dies suddenly in the night and Dash meets the expenses of sending the body home with Dorothy, who has only money enough for the trip. This chivalric act lands him in St. Louis with a nickel, as he finds he was robbed of his remaining ten dollars. He goes to his mother's old boarding house, and in conversation with the landlady, discovers his right name to be Dashwood Orloff, and his father was the conductor in the Lonewood collision. He can find no further trace of his father, so goes to present his letter to Mr. Hummon; this gentleman tells Dash there will be no work for a week. Dash is dismayed but says he will sit down and wait, whereupon Mr. Hummon rings his bell sharply and Dash expects to be instantly ejected.

CHAPTER XXI.

IT IS THE UNEXPECTED THAT HAPPENS.

DYKEMAN never could understand what had induced him to make such a bold, not to say impudent, speech, as that recorded in the last chapter, for it was entirely foreign to his nature.

He would never have done it if his circumstances had not seemed desperate. He was sorry for it soon after as he thought how silly it was to try to force a man to give him work.

**This story began in the June issue of* THE ARGOSY. *The three back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 30 cents.*

He confidently expected to be shown to the door by a porter, or some attaché of the office, who would use force if necessary. But he was prepared to go quietly, and was heartily ashamed of himself.

A young man came from the telegraph office in answer to Mr. Hummon's ring.

"Ellis, didn't that night man at Madrid say he wanted a leave of absence?" asked the superintendent.

Dykeman was as much surprised at the nature of the question as he was to hear the name of the place to which Dorothy Orloff had gone. A hope that he would be sent there flashed into his thoughts, only to be dispelled the next instant.

"Yes, sir," was the reply, "he did; but he says he has changed his mind."

"That settles it, Dykeman," said Mr. Hummon, turning to Dykeman, as the young man retired; "that was the only possible place I knew of where I could place you at once. I admire your audacity and determination."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Hummon; I was so disappointed I hardly knew what I was saying," returned Dykeman in confusion.

"That's all right, Dykeman; I understand how you felt about it, and forgive you, but I advise you not to try it on other officials, as they may not take it as I do," said the superintendent, and there was a twinkle of good humor in his eye.

"Thank you; I will not, I assure you. I'm surprised that you didn't have me ejected, for I expected it."

"I've been one of the boys myself," laughed the official, "and I'm sorry not to be able to give you work just now."

"Isn't there a chance of getting a place in some other branch of the service?" asked Dykeman, as a last effort.

"Do you mean in the transportation?"

"Yes, sir; anything, anywhere."

"Well, I'll give you a note to our master of transportation of the St. Louis & Pacific, and maybe he can use you."

"Thank you; I would be very much obliged."

The note was written in a few minutes, and, as Dykeman was leaving, the superintendent said:

"If you get anything, and find you don't like it, come back to me in a week or ten days, and I'll have something."

He replied that he would certainly do so, and was soon upon the street again, inquiring the nearest way to the St. Louis & Pacific Railroad yards.

He found them to be a considerable distance out in the southern suburbs of the city, only to be reached by a long, tedious journey on a street car, or by walking. Reluctant to part with his last cent, he tramped the whole distance. It was late in the afternoon when he presented himself at the office of the superintendent of transportation.

"Have you had any experience?" asked Mr. Rodway.

"Very little; only as flagman on passenger," replied Dykeman.

"What road was that on?"

"The Pennsylvania Central."

"Have you worked on any Western roads?"

"No, sir."

The superintendent gave a sort of grunt of approval, looked keenly at Dykeman, and then asked:

"Do you think you could brake on a local freight?"

"Yes, sir," replied Dykeman, though he knew the position was a hard and trying one physically. "I could try, at any rate."

"I could give you the easiest position on the train, rear, or caboose, brakeman."

"I'll take it, though I can't promise to stay with you."

"You will not need to stay long if you are able to do the work. I have a special duty for you to perform, which I could not intrust to any one who by

any chance would be known to our train men."

"What is it?" asked Dykeman, with curiosity.

"I have been informed that there is some sort of crooked work going on on the local freight on our southern division. I don't know what it is, and I want you to find out."

This was extremely vague, and Dykeman did not know whether he relished the undertaking or not.

"Haven't you any idea of the nature of it?" he asked.

"Well, yes. There has been a great deal of lost freight reported on that division unaccounted for, and it is believed that the company is not getting all the revenue it should from the business."

"And you think the trainmen are concerned in it," suggested Dykeman.

"Yes; and particularly the conductor, who, from your position in the caboose you can watch closely. I will give you a note, telling him you are well qualified to help him in the clerical part of his work, such as making his reports and checking freight."

"Don't you think he will suspect me?" asked Dykeman doubtfully.

"That all depends upon yourself. You will be paid considerably more than a brakeman's wages, but you must take care to let no one know it. Will you undertake it?"

"Yes," decided Dash, though he had no taste for the business.

"Then report here at nine o'clock this evening, and I will deadhead you down on the night express to Joyville Junction, the northern end of the southern division. The local freight leaves there at seven in the morning."

The superintendent turned around to his desk, as if he had nothing more to say. Though he had been considering whether he would ask the official to advance a portion of his salary to meet his present needs, Dykeman's courage failed him, or his pride was still too sensitive, and he accepted the action as a dismissal, and left the office.

In his present circumstances it made little difference whether he stayed where he was or returned to the city. The prospect was equally gloomy in either place.

The impulse to return, however, was so strong that he recklessly decided to spend his last five cents in a car fare back to the city. He was soon glad that he did so, and he always believes his good fairy impelled him to the act.

During all his embarrassment and anxiety from lack of funds, Dykeman had not once thought of the resource of pawning his watch. He had never had any dealings with the gentlemen of the three balls, or known any one who had, and any resort to them seemed to him to be something to be ashamed of.

When he reached the city he experienced the recurring pangs of hunger, and for once in his life he felt it was a disagreeable thing to have a healthy appetite. The restaurants seemed more numerous than he had ever noticed them before, and his hungry eye never failed to discover every one of them.

He was walking up Fourth Street, when he paused before one of these gilded dining halls. A gentleman was just coming out, whistling a gay tune, and tossing a coin into the air.

As he passed Dykeman the coin slipped through his fingers and fell through a grating in front of the restaurant door. Merely glancing down at the spot were it had disappeared, he sauntered off.

"Aren't you going to try to get it?" interposed Dash.

"No; it was only fifty cents. You can have it, if you want it," laughed the gentleman, as he continued on his way.

"Only fifty cents" seemed a good deal to Dykeman just then, and, hesitating a moment, he stepped into the restaurant.

"Fifty cents of mine has gone down the grating in front of your place; can

I get it?" he asked of the man at the cashier's desk, who was evidently the proprietor.

"Yes, if you want to take the trouble of opening a door leading to the area that has been nailed up for three or four years."

Dykeman replied that he didn't mind, whereupon he was furnished with a hatchet, and a waiter showed him the way. The door yielded slowly to his hammering and prying, and finally, when it was opened, he felt that he had earned his fifty cents.

Lighting a match to prosecute his search, he was astonished to first discover a silver dollar instead of the coin that had just been dropped. Looking further, he found the half dollar, and numerous other smaller coins, which had been lost in the same way.

When he was satisfied that there was no more of this unique treasure trove, he found he had something over four dollars, and returned to the restaurant above.

"Did you find it?" asked the good natured proprietor.

"Yes, sir, and something more," replied Dash, as he laid all but the fifty cents on the desk.

"Well, I didn't know we had a silver mine on the place," laughed the proprietor, and he looked his surprise as he counted the coins; "but keep it. Findings's keepings, you know."

"But——," began Dash in protest.

"You've earned it by opening that door. Now we'll have that place cleaned out."

"Thank you; then I'll take something with you on the strength of it," laughed Dash, as he went over and seated himself at one of the tables.

He gave his order, and thought to himself if there was such an avocation as opening unused cellar vaults, which would pay as much as this one had, he would follow it.

Four dollars was not such a splendid increase in his capital, but it was better than nothing. It would insure meals for several days, or a week at least, and lodging could be had in a railroad caboose.

On finishing his repast, Dykeman directed his steps towards Mrs. Fedmore's. He stopped on the way at the Union Depot and got his satchel from the sleeping car company's office.

Then, feeling the urgent necessity of having some more suitable clothing for the work he was about to undertake, he decided he would pay the express charges on his trunk, and have it sent to the boarding house, where it could remain until he knew where he would be finally and permanently located.

Mrs. Fedmore was as pleased and proud to see him again as if she had not already thoroughly discussed the mysterious complication of the past. He passed a very pleasant evening, and found that Miss Fanny Fedmore was a much more agreeable young person than he had at first supposed, judging from her reception of him.

He waited anxiously for the expressman to come with his trunk, but it did not arrive until a few minutes before it was time for him to start for the St. Louis & Pacific yards. He quickly opened it to get an old suit of clothes and a blue flannel shirt to take with him, when he was confronted with a letter addressed to him, pinned to some clothing.

Recognizing his grandfather's writing, he quickly opened it, and twenty dollars, in new, crisp bills, was in his hands. He read the note which accompanied them, and the words of love and admonition made his heart ache and the tears almost come, as they carried him back to the old home, with its tranquil life and fostering care. He accepted the money for his present needs with a mental reservation that it should be returned from the first he could spare from his earnings.

He wrapped the necessary clothing in a bundle, and with his small satchel was at Mr. Rodway's office at nine o'clock. At nine thirty he was on the

south bound express, with a pass to Joyville Junction, and a letter to Conductor Cupples, of local freight No. 29.

CHAPTER XXII.

ON THE LOCAL FREIGHT.

THE night express arrived at Joyville Junction at six in the morning, which was its schedule time. Dykeman felt far from rested or refreshed by his nine hours' ride. His bones ached from many efforts to find an easy position to sleep in within the limits of a coach seat, and now he felt as if he had not slept at all.

Very few people were moving about the depot when the train arrived, except the station employees who had to meet the express. He went to the waiting room to make inquiries at the ticket office. Here he learned that the train master's office for the southern division was in the second story of the station building.

Noticing a lunch counter in the waiting room that had just opened up for business, he fortified himself with a cup of hot coffee and several sandwiches. He then went to the train master's office and asked the despatcher where he could find Conductor Cupples.

"He boards just across the way, but he will be here in a few minutes, as he goes out on the local freight," was the reply.

He decided to wait where he was, and amused himself studying the bulletin board, whereon were posted orders and special notices, and incidentally listening to the words that were clicking from the telegraph instruments behind the railing.

In a few minutes a smooth faced, blue eyed man, of something over forty years of age, came in.

"Good morning, Mr. Rushmore," he said to the despatcher. "How many have you got for me this morning?"

"A heavy run, Cupples; two local cars from the north, and twenty five solid loads for nearly every station on the division," was the reply, and he went on giving some further instructions.

As soon as he had heard the man's name, Dykeman rose to his feet and advanced toward him. When the despatcher had finished, he tendered the letter from Mr. Rodway.

"Mr. Cupples, I believe," he said at the same time.

For an answer, the other took the letter, and after opening and perusing it, said, as if it had not been unexpected:

"So you're the man Mr. Rodway wired me about yesterday. I suppose you're ready to go out this morning."

"Yes, sir," replied Dash, and as he met the clear and searching gaze of the conductor, he could scarcely believe that he was dishonest. Those large blue eyes seemed to speak only of moral integrity.

"Then you'd better get your things into the caboose as soon as you can and report here. Have you got any baggage?"

"Only these," replied Dash, indicating his bundle and satchel.

"By the way, you can take this book along and jot down the numbers of the cars in the train," continued Conductor Cupples, as Dash started for the door.

"Where will I find it?" asked the latter.

"On track ten, in the lower yard."

This was rather indefinite, but on getting outside he inquired of a switchman and soon located his train.

Depositing his belongings in the red painted caboose, and only taking a hasty survey of his surroundings, he proceeded to perform the duty assigned to him, though he had never done anything of the kind before.

But the train book was ruled in columns with headings to guide him.

First came the space for the car number, then its initial, loaded or empty, seals right and left, contents, and finally the station taken at and delivered to. He could readily fill out all the columns

except those of "contents" and "destination," as that information was only to be had from the way bills accompanying each loaded car.

All loaded box cars, except those containing freight of great bulk or of little value, are sealed; that is, a wire or strap of tin is passed through the hasp and staple, or lock, as the case may be, in such a way that the car door cannot be opened without breaking it, and its ends are secured by a piece of lead, which has been pressed flat by a seal press, which leaves a raised figure, or series of figures, designating where sealed on the leaden surface.

Each station has a seal press and a separate number of its own; so also has each conductor. This method of sealing cars is used to detect where a car is broken open, and also to protect the agents and conductors when there is short freight reported.

Dykeman passed up one side of the train towards the engine, taking down carefully the numbers and initials, and inspecting the seals, which he also recorded. He then returned on the other side to get the seals there.

When he had finished, he went back to the office, where he found Conductor Cupples examining some way bills. The latter inspected the new brakeman's work without comment, from which the latter inferred that it was satisfactory.

They then checked up the numbers of the cars with the way bills, inserting the contents and destination in the appropriate column.

When a train is made up at a terminal, solid cars are put in a train, beginning with the engine, in the order of the stations at which they are to be set off, thus avoiding unnecessary switching; then follow the local cars and empties.

Solid carloads are each furnished with a single bill, while cars of mixed freight generally have two or three to a score or more. These latter are generally what are called local cars, because they contain small lots of freight for various points on the line. A local car is also used to pick up freight on the road. All of this local freight has to be handled by the crew of the train.

Bills were found for all the cars, including what Cupples called a "stack" for two local cars.

"We've got a hard run this time, Dykeman," said the conductor, as they finished their task.

"You've never run freight before, have you?" he continued, glancing significantly at Dash's soft hands, which he had been regarding for some time.

"No, sir; but I think I've got enough here to pull me through," laughed Dash, indicating his biceps. The conductor glanced over the other's sturdy frame, and said he believed him.

It was only a few minutes to leaving time for the local, and they hastened to the caboose. Here Dykeman met the balance of the crew, three brakemen. They were rather rough but good hearted young fellows, and considerably below him in the scale of intelligence and refinement. But he put on no airs of superiority, and met them on their own level.

By the time he had put on the blue flannel shirt and other clothing he had brought with him for his labors, there were two short blasts of the whistle of the engine, and his companions sprang for the tops of the cars to throw off any brakes that were set. They cleared the yard in a few minutes, and were soon rolling through an undulating country dotted with farmhouses.

Then he had an opportunity to inspect more closely the scene of his labors.

Conductor Cupples was at his desk assorting his bills and arranging the local ones in the order of the stations for which they were destined. A leather cushioned seat ran the whole length of the car on each side, except the space taken up by two wide side doors. These seats were for occasional passengers, and were utilized as beds by the crew

when they laid up at the end of a run. They contained under them long lockers, in which were stored tools, lanterns, links and pins, etc.

At one end of the car was a water barrel and a closet, while at the other was a locker and a raised top desk. In the center was a box-like wood stove, which was at present not being utilized. A row of half a dozen small windows was on each side. There was a musty tobacco smell about the place, but it was uniformly clean and comfortable.

The run to the first station was quite a long one, and as Dykeman sat, with one elbow out of a window, watching the landscape, he thought he was having an easy time of it. But it was only the breathing spell before a long and arduous day that lay before him.

It began with a heavy lot of freight to be unloaded at the first station, the throwing out of two solid cars and taking on two more, and a lot of switching getting the two latter and placing cars at the freight depot platform for the agent.

Dykeman worked with a will, and, as he was quick and lively, Conductor Cupples was more than pleased with him. One moment he was between the cars making a coupling, and the next up the ladder on a box car, like a monkey, and swinging to the brake with all the power of his muscles. In it all was an element of danger that only added zest to the work.

But by the time he had set and thrown off the caboose brake scores of times, helped to unload and load tons of freight, and climbed the sides of box cars till he was dizzy, he lost most of his pleasure, and came to the conclusion that a brakeman on a local freight was the hardest worked and poorest paid mortal in the service.

And there were added to his labors several hot boxes, which he, as caboose brakeman, had to attend to. They are treated with a preparation called "dope," and black oil, to cool them, and when he had finished his task his own grandmother wouldn't have known him. The oil and grease were smeared all over his face and clothing in black and shiny spots.

The last stop before reaching the terminal had been made, and he had stretched himself in utter exhaustion on the cushioned seat. Conductor Cupples was forward on the engine, where he had gone at the last station.

Dykeman was just telling himself that he had not discovered the slightest clue that anything was wrong on the local freight, when suddenly there was a call for brakes from the locomotive. Then there was a bumping of the box cars and a jerking of the caboose that showed the engineer had applied his steam brake.

Dykeman felt like doing anything else just then, but he sprang to his feet and swung the caboose brake with all the strength left in his tired body. As the train slowed up, there came the call for the flagman, and he felt particularly disgusted and disheartened as he noticed it was raining hard outside.

But he was well aware of the great importance of protecting the rear of his train, and had no thought of disregarding the signal.

He had no rubber coat, so, pulling his collar up about his neck, and making sure he had some torpedoes in his pocket, he grasped his red flag and swung from the rear platform to the track. He pushed through the driving rain, which raised a mist from the smoking earth.

When he had gone back several hundred yards, he could not see his caboose. He stopped, stuck his flag in the center of the roadbed, and fastened a torpedo to the rail.

Then he looked about for a place of temporary shelter from the cold rain till he should be called in. A projecting boulder stood near at hand, and he crawled under it.

It was a dreary scene before him, and the monotonous splashing of the rain made it seem more so.

He looked up the track away from his train, and as he did so he saw something that filled him with astonishment and fear.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MYSTERY OF DEAD MAN'S CUT.

A NUMBER of white shrouded and ghostly looking forms, which looked positively gigantic through the rising mist, were slowly crossing the track in single file, not twenty yards from the young brakeman. Dykeman rubbed his eyes to make sure it was not an optical delusion, but when he looked again they were still there, marching in solemn procession.

He was about to cry out to them to decide if they were really men, when he saw a sight that made him dumb with horror. The last man was apparently without any head, the place where that member should have been being red and gory.

He was paralyzed with amazement, from which he was aroused by four sharp blasts of the whistle from his engine, calling him in. He snatched his flag, and raced down the track at the top of his speed, not stopping once to look back.

As soon as he reached the caboose and mounted the rear step, the next brakeman forward signaled the engineer to go ahead. Two more toots of the whistle, the brakes were thrown off, and the train was under way.

Dykeman sank on the cushion of the side seat, out of breath from his exertions, and with a pale face. He did not believe in the supernatural, but the horrible and weird procession had appeared so suddenly, he had not had time to reason that it must be the result of natural and easily explained causes.

In spite of the unearthly appearance of the figures, particularly the last one, he felt certain their aspect and movements could be ascribed to human agency, though he could not explain how.

"Who told you to go back with that flag?" demanded Conductor Cupples, in some excitement, when he came back to the caboose over the tops of the cars.

"No one," replied Dash, astonished at the question; "but I obeyed the engineer's call for a flagman."

"Oh," ejaculated the conductor in some confusion, "that's so. But what's the matter with you? You're as white as a sheet."

Dykeman briefly told what he had seen, just as they appeared to him.

"They're ghosts as sure as you live, Dykeman," said Cupples earnestly. "That's Dead Man's Cut, where you were. A bad collision happened there several years ago, killing nearly all the passengers, and the country people about there tell some strange stories of ghostly processions such as you saw, but I never believed them until now."

"And I wouldn't believe them now," added Dash.

"Why? What do you mean?"

"Because there are no such things as ghosts, and those figures were as much flesh and blood as you and I are."

"How are you going to prove that, Dykeman?" asked the conductor triumphantly.

Dykeman confessed his inability to do so, but stoutly contested that they were not specters from a spirit world. Cupples clung just as tenaciously to the ghost idea, and strenuously endeavored to impress upon the other that he had seen something uncanny.

Dykeman saw that he was very earnest about it, and wondered if his excited manner and strange question had been occasioned by a fear that the flagman had encountered the spectral procession. It was very odd that he should have asked the question under any circumstances, for he must have heard the signal calling for the flagman, and known that the brakeman would obey it.

The long shriek of the whistle, announcing the approach to the last station and the end of the run, was a welcome sound to Dykeman. As soon as they had come to a stop the yard crew took charge of the train, and the caboose was switched to a small siding with several others.

With a liberal use of soap and water, Dykeman removed the dirt and grease from his skin, and donned the unsoiled suit he had taken off. He had supper at the eating house near the station, where the railroad men took their meals. Then he assisted Conductor Cupples to make out his report, and afterwards sat in the office, or waiting room, listening to the talking of the trainmen till he became drowsy.

He thought it was strange he heard no reference to his experience at Dead Man's Cut, as he naturally expected to have it commented upon, and have questions asked about it. But Conductor Cupples had evidently said nothing about it to any one for some reason, and he decided he would not, either.

Finally he became so sleepy that he concluded to seek a bed in the lodging house across the track.

"Off to bed, Dykeman?" said Cupples, who was in the room, as he rose to go.

"Yes," replied Dash. "Is that a good house across the track? Jerry, the forward man, said it was."

"It's about as good as any. All the boys sleep there."

With a parting good night, Dykeman was soon in the lodging house and inspecting a room.

A survey of the apartment was far from satisfactory, and a further investigation disgusted him. Dirt was everywhere, and the bed linen was anything but clean.

Though he was utterly worn out, and could have sunk to slumber on a board for a bed, he could not stand the dirt and possibly other disagreeable things. He returned down stairs and said he had decided to sleep in his caboose.

A short walk brought him to the track where it had been left, and in a few minutes he was stretched out on the long seat of the car, with his satchel and a couple of coats found in the closet for a pillow.

It seemed as if he had hardly dropped off to sleep when there was what seemed to him a terrible crash, that shook the caboose and made the windows rattle as if they had been crushed in. He awoke with a start and sat up. As nothing further followed, he decided that the commotion had been caused by another car being thrown on the caboose track and butting against the others. The sudden awakening had no doubt magnified the force of the blow and the noise. He looked at his watch by the light of the moon, and was astonished to see that it was a little after midnight.

He was about to lie down again when he heard steps on the caboose platform and the sound of voices. They were evidently two men, and the voice of one was unmistakably that of Conductor Cupples. The other he did not recognize, though it was probably one of the other brakemen. The words were distinctly audible, and Dykeman could not help hearing what was said.

They were talking about a game of cards, and Dash was just dozing off into slumber again when he heard his name mentioned. His eyes opened instantly, and he strained his ears to catch all that was said.

Conductor Cupples was telling about what he (Dykeman) had seen at Dead Man's Cut, and when he had finished the other voice laughed and said:

"Do you think he suspected anything?"

"No; but he don't believe the ghost racket, though he was considerably rattled."

"What does he think it was?"

"He said he was sure they were living men, that's all. But I wish he was anywhere else than on the caboose."

"That's so. It was a close shave."

These words were certainly mysterious and incomprehensible to Dykeman, and "suspected" and "close shave" were very suggestive of something underhand.

What should he have suspected, and what had he missed discovering, he asked himself? He was convinced now, beyond a doubt, that he had not witnessed anything unearthly, and that Cupples did not believe he had, notwithstanding the latter's efforts to convince him to the contrary.

The conductor wanted him to believe in the ghost theory for some reason. There was a key to the mystery, and he appeared to be very near it.

The voices ceased, and the knob to the door of the caboose was turned. Dash heartily wished he was "anywhere else than in the caboose" just then, for they would certainly know he had overheard them.

But he quickly dropped to a recumbent position and feigned sleep. Conductor Cupples entered the car—for it was he—and there was an exclamation of astonishment and anger from him.

The next moment Dykeman felt sinewy fingers close about his windpipe, and he was dragged to the floor.

He tried to cry out, but the grasp was tightened, and his speech was effectually smothered. He felt that he was being choked to death, and struggled desperately to free himself.

His heart and brain seemed to be bursting, a deadly nauseating faintness came over him, and a red mist obscured his vision. Even in the agony of his suffering he wondered, with a chill of horror, if the conductor really intended to murder him, and what dreadful mystery or crime he hoped to conceal by such a deed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A WRECK ON THE LOCAL FREIGHT.

A DARKNESS succeeded the lurid glow before Dykeman's vision, and he felt himself sinking into insensibility and perhaps death. He made a last effort, how desperate he never knew, to free the grasp about his throat. He managed to half rise to his feet, and staggered against the stove in the center of the caboose.

The collision wrenched the cruel fingers free, and he struggled backward and to his feet. His face was livid, his eyes bloodshot, and his breath came in quick and laborious gasps.

In falling against the stove he had involuntarily grasped the heavy iron poker which was lying on its top, and he now held it in his hand, instinctively determined to sell his life dearly.

He was so weak, his antagonist could easily have wrenched the weapon from his grasp, but there was no further move of his assailant to renew the attack. Instead, after a moment's pause, Conductor Cupples cried in astonished tones:

"Good heavens! is it you, Dykeman? I thought it was a tramp, who has been stealing the men's things from the cabooses lately. What are you doing here? I thought you went to bed over to the house."

"Would you try to murder a tramp simply because he was found sleeping in your caboose?" asked Dash, skeptically and with difficulty.

He was slow to accept the conductor's explanation, under the circumstances, but he told himself that if Cupples' astonishment was not genuine, it was certainly well feigned.

"No; I meant to give him a choking he wouldn't soon forget. Did I hurt you very much?" replied Cupples, in anxious tones, whatever may have been his motives for the attack.

"I should say you did, with a vengeance. A little more, and you would have shut off my wind forever," replied Dash, with a weak smile at the question.

"I'm awfully sorry, Dykeman; I was a fool to make such a mistake. I assure you I didn't know it was you till

you broke away, and the light of the moon showed your face."

Cupples spoke in contrite tones, but Dykeman could not help thinking how superfluous the latter part of his explanation was, if he really had thought he was a tramp. The conductor seemed to be defending himself against a possible suspicion that he knew it was Dash when he made the attack. Whether the choking was intentional or not, Dykeman was, perforce, compelled to reply:

"That's all right, Mr. Cupples; but the next time you want to punish a tramp, be careful or he will not live to remember it."

"That's so; I was a little too savage like, that's a fact. Here, let me look at your neck."

The conductor lit the lamp in the bracket at the end of the car. Though Dykeman still had a vague doubt of the truth of Cupples' explanation, he apprehended no further violence, and the lighting of the lamp seemed a guarantee of present safety. But he could hardly suppress a nervous shudder, as the fingers which had so recently held him in their deadly grasp, were passed over his neck.

"I *did* give you a pretty tight squeeze, didn't I?" commented Cupples. "Here, I have some liniment that will take the soreness out."

He got a bottle from the closet, and, after saturating a handkerchief with some of the liquid it contained, bound it about the other's neck. The latter could not suppress his suspicions of the conductor's every act, and when he saw him wetting the bandage, he feared he intended to dose him with chloroform. But the liniment had an immediate soothing effect, and Dykeman felt considerably better.

"But how is it you were sleeping in the caboose?" continued Cupples.

Dash briefly explained.

"Why, Madden must have given you one of the worst rooms in the house. I *know* he has got clean rooms and clean beds," observed the conductor. "Were you asleep when I came in?"

"You don't think I'd have let you start in on your garroting business if I hadn't been, do you?" laughed Dash, dodging the query; and it struck him as another odd question for the conductor to ask.

Cupples was evidently anxious to learn if his conversation on the caboose platform had been overheard.

"No, that's so," he replied slowly; "but I hope you will not say anything about my blunder, Dykeman?"

"I will not. Why should I? It doesn't concern anybody but me."

In a few minutes the conductor left to go over to the lodging house to bed, and Dykeman once more lay down on the side cushions; but this time he took care to fasten the caboose doors. Though his throat still felt sore and raw, and his head ached, he soon fell asleep again.

He awoke in the morning considerably refreshed by his night's slumber, though it had been disturbed in such a startling and painful manner. His muscles felt stiff and sore from his labors of the day previous, and his throat was bruised and slightly swollen. He kept the handkerchief about his neck, and as it was a common addition to a brakeman's costume, no one remarked its presence or noticed the blue marks of violence.

As the local freight on the return trip north left an hour earlier than it did at the other end of the division, he donned the clothes he had had on the day before, and got his breakfast before half past five. Meanwhile the train had been made up, and the caboose attached to it.

On his way back to the latter after breakfast, Dykeman met Conductor Cupples, who gave him the train book, directing him to take the number of the cars as before.

He found very few loaded cars in the train. Most of them were empties, to be distributed at stations along the line,

for the agents to load. Loaded cars would be picked up at various points to take their place. Likewise, local freight north bound was very light, and was mostly small lots carried from station to station, or small shipments to be loaded for St. Louis.

When he had finished, Dykeman reported at the freight office to secure bills for what loads were in the train. He found Conductor Cupples talking to the agent, and heard him say:

"I can't help it; that car was resealed every time we opened it between Joyville and here.

"Wasn't it, Dykeman?" he broke off, turning to Dash as he entered.

Dykeman confirmed his statement, for it had been his duty to seal the local car after freight was unloaded and loaded at each station.

"Then the stuff wasn't in the car when I took it at the Junction," continued Cupples. "It must have been lost on the northern division, or perhaps somebody is over between here and Joyville."

"That's what you said about the other shortages, but they were never found. I tell you, Cupples, there's going to be a general shaking up if this thing keeps on," said the agent in serious tones.

"I can't help it if there is; I can't account for it any more than you can."

"There's something wrong somewhere, and if it's on this division I should think you ought to be able to discover it," added the agent doubtfully.

"I tell you it isn't on this division," declared Cupples with emphasis.

"What is short?" asked Dash, for information he might possibly use.

"A case of cigars and a keg of brandy," replied the agent.

"Something choice and tempting."

"Yes; and that's what makes me think some systematic thieving is going on. It's always something like that which is short."

"Well, I can show they were not stolen from my train on my run," concluded Cupples as he took his bills and left the office.

In a few minutes the local freight was clear of the yard, and another day's work was begun for the young brakeman. Though not so heavy as the day before, his duties kept him on the jump, and he was glad enough for the breathing and resting spells between stations.

No hot boxes were added to his work this trip.

Shufflers, a station twenty five miles from the terminal, was reached before anything happened out of the usual routine, or of interest to our story. The switching had been done, the local freight loaded, and Cupples went to the office to register his leaving time before pulling out.

A red flag was stuck up in the platform, notifying him that the operator had orders for his train. He remained in the office so long, that Dykeman dropped in there, merely out of curiosity, to learn the cause of the delay.

Cupples was walking up and down, fretting and fuming, and using some forcible language not very complimentary to telegraph operators in general. The operator was nowhere to be found. He had no doubt gone off somewhere, and the local had got through sooner than he expected.

"That's a nice way, to stick up that rag to hold us and then go off. No wonder we can't get over the road anywhere near on time," growled the conductor.

"I'll get the orders for you," volunteered Dash, who had heard him.

"You!" exclaimed Cupples in amazement. "Can you do it?"

"Yes, I'll show you, if you wish."

"Go ahead; but I didn't have any idea you were an operator," and there was a tinge of added respect in the conductor's tone.

Dykeman found out the office signal, and that of the despatcher at Joyville, from a list hanging before the operator's table, and in a few minutes he had called -

the latter and told him No. 30 was ready for orders.

The following order was received, and after Cupples and his engineer had signed it, Dykeman repeated it back, and the O. K. and time were given.

Order No. 215.
To Cond'r and Eng'r No. 30: S. H.
Run to Chasetown for No. Five (5). Look out for special excursion train, Conley conductor, following you, which will pass you at Chasetown.

Chasetown was twelve miles from Shufflers, and the local freight had only twenty minutes to make it in, which was very fast time for a freight. Any longer time would delay the south express (No. 5), which also had orders to meet the freight and the special at Chasetown.

The local was soon under way, and Dykeman entered the two loads they had taken at Shufflers on the train book. In scanning the way bills, his attention was first attracted by the odd number of one of the cars.

It was 41,144, about which, in the shape of 4, 11, 44, there has been much joking, as possessing powers of luck in a lottery drawing. Then he noticed that both bills received at Shufflers had the same bill numbers. He called Cupples' attention to the latter fact.

"We haven't got anything to do with that," said the conductor in sharper tones than was necessary; "those agents often duplicate their numbers."

Dykeman had no suspicion of the significance of his discovery, but he did think the conductor took the book and way bills from him rather hastily.

There was a steep grade on the approach to Chasetown, and the train had to be got under control before reaching it. But the local had such a long string of cars, and was going at such a speed, the brakemen found the brakes did not hold as quickly as they expected.

Dykeman, with the assistance of Cupples, screwed up the caboose brake to the utmost notch in the ratchet, and then he sprang for the top of the box cars to set the brakes on the rear ones. He had hardly reached the footboard of the last car, when there was a bumping and swaying of the train, a tremendous crash, and the cars appeared to be piling themselves into the air in front of them.

Then he was jerked upward, as if from a catapult, and the next minute found himself struggling and gasping in a swollen creek next to the track.

The first thing that occurred to him was that the express had run into them. And then he thought of the special, with its load of pleasure seekers, following them.

Could he reach the track, and a position to flag the special, before it ran into the wreck of his own train and sacrificed many lives, he asked himself?

CHAPTER XXV.

ST. L. & PAC. CAR NO. 41,144.

THE question Dykeman asked himself at the end of the last chapter was born of a determination to warn the approaching excursion train of the obstructions on the track, if it was within human possibility. The urgent necessity of flagging the special, if a death dealing wreck was to be avoided, was impressed upon him, when he remembered there was quite a curve only a short distance back from where the freight was derailed.

He quickly waded out of the creek into which he had fallen, for it was not deep enough to render swimming necessary, and climbed the steep and rocky embankment, down which had plunged half a dozen box cars. The caboose was slewed around, half off of its trucks, and one side crushed in.

In the hasty glance he gave, Dykeman did not see any one, and could not tell if Conductor Cupples, who was in the caboose at the time, was injured or not.

He snatched one of the red flags from its standard on the side and rear of the

car, and started down the track at headlong speed, without stopping to take a breath after his exertions.

He had not gone over two hundred feet, when he found himself floundering through loose gravel, with which the roadbed had recently been filled in the center. It seemed that he slipped back a foot every step he ran, and it required all of his strength to press rapidly through the yielding stuff.

He glanced on both sides of the track to see if there was a better footing there, but the coarse rock came close up to the end of the ties. To run on the stone would be worse than the sand, for he might stumble and go rolling down the bank.

He felt greatly disgusted that the gravel grading should happen to be just in this part of the road. How little he imagined that what seemed to retard his brave efforts, would save not only the excursion train, but his own life as well.

Suddenly there was a whistle heard. It was the special signaling for the crossing below the curve. It acted on Dykeman as a spur on a straining race horse nearing the finish.

He spurted forward with a bound, his heart almost bursting with excitement and exertion. He was just entering the curve, and a few more yards would insure the stoppage of the special and the safety of its passengers.

Almost in despair of reaching the desired point in time, on the gravelly roadway, he decided to take to the ties just outside the rail, but in crossing over, his foot caught against the latter, and he was thrown violently on the rocky ballast. The flag flew from his grasp and he struck his head against one of the larger stones, which rendered him unconscious.

The special came on, whistled for the curve, and rounded into sight.

Would the engineer see the senseless figure stretched across the rail in time to prevent running him down? There were two blasts of the whistle, the train slowed up rapidly, and with a final hiss of escaping air, came to a stand within less than a dozen feet of the young brakeman.

The engineer, conductor and other trainmen, soon gathered about the latter. The application of cold water, and a little rubbing, brought him around, though he felt he had had enough of the water treatment already.

"It's a mighty lucky thing you stuck that flag up before you lost your head, young fellow," observed the engineer, as Dykeman rose to his feet and looked into the faces about him. "If you hadn't, you'd a been cut in two, and we'd been into the tail end of that wreck."

He pointed up the road as he concluded, and from where they stood could be plainly seen the shattered caboose and the overturned box cars.

"But I didn't stick up the flag," protested Dash in astonishment; "I stumbled, and in falling hit my head against a stone," and he went on to tell of the wreck of the local freight, and of his efforts to warn the special.

"That flag was sticking almost straight up in the center of the track just the same," insisted the engineer, who had first reached Dash and removed the signal.

"I don't know how it got there, unless it stuck up when it flew from my hand," responded Dash.

An examination of the flag stick, which was whittled to a point at the end, made this explanation seem plausible. And when it was demonstrated by the engineer that but little propelling force was necessary to force the sharp end into the sand, it was accepted by those present.

"It was a Providence," commented the engineer solemnly, and those about him looked their wonder and gratitude at the strange intervention.

"It was, indeed," added Dash with emotion, when he realized what a small chance had saved him from a horrible death.

"But there's work to be done up there," he continued, as he took his flag and pointed to the wreck.

Accompanied by the trainmen from the special, and a great many of the passengers, he soon reached the scene of the catastrophe.

Conductor Cupples, uninjured, was found standing alongside the track, surveying the overturned and splintered cars. He volunteered the information that he had had a narrow escape in the caboose, and that the other men were unharmed. One of them he had sent to Chasetown, only about half a mile off, with a brief report of the accident to the train master at Joyville.

"What was the matter? Did we run into anything?" asked Dash.

"No; the eighth car from the caboose jumped the track and lost its trucks. In doing so it swung around across the track and acted as a buffer for those which followed. They piled into the air, and six went into the creek; the seventh car and the one that went off first were smashed into kindling, as you see."

The spectators walked about the splintered cars and scattered merchandise with much curiosity.

Dykeman noted the curious fact that the ninth car, which was the next one forward of the one that had caused all the trouble, was comparatively uninjured, and was the one bearing the figures 41,144, which had attracted his attention. He began to think there was some virtue of luck in the figures 4-11-44 after all, even though they were arranged continuously in a car number.

Fortunately, there was a wrecking car at Chasetown, and as soon as the remaining cars of the local freight were placed on the siding at the latter place, its crew set to work.

As six cars had gone into the creek there were only the remains of two and the caboose obstructing the track.

On most roads, the clearing of the track promptly after a wreck, to avoid the delay of traffic, is considered of prime importance, without regard to the further destruction of the demolished property. With the improved wrecking cars, which are furnished with heavy cranes and a hoisting engine, this can be done with great rapidity and effectiveness.

When as much of the freight as was possible had been removed from the crushed cars and the trainmen's effects had been taken from the caboose, it was wonderful to see with what ease the heavy ropes and ponderous machinery snatched the trucks and car bodies in the creek.

In an hour and a half after the arrival of the wrecking crew, the track was clear, and the special and the express, which had been waiting at Chasetown, passed each other.

An empty box car, into which the local freight's crew transferred their outfit, was roughly improvised as a caboose, and No. 30 continued on up the road. The waybills for the wrecked cars were left at Chasetown.

"It was odd that car was not damaged," remarked Dash, when they had got under way.

He was marking off in the train book the cars that were crushed in the accident, "wrecked near Chasetown," when he came to car 41,144.

"Why?" demanded Cupples quickly, as he looked sharply at Dash.

"On account of its number. Didn't you ever hear of 4-11-44?"

"Oh, is that all?" laughed the conductor, as if relieved. "Yes; I've heard of it as a good combination to play the lottery with. But I hadn't noticed that car had the figures."

At Burrsville car 41,144 was thrown out of the train to the siding, for that place was its destination as per the waybill.

As Dykeman rode back on the siding on top of the car, to check its speed with the brake, he wondered if there really was any mystic power for luck in the figures, and if he would see them again.

He soon found that, though the car had been left behind, its number was destined to be recalled to him twice before the end of his run and his day's work. And he ultimately learned there was a good deal of good luck for some one, and bad luck for others, attaching to that car, though he did not believe that the number had anything to do with it.

After leaving Burrsville, he sat down on a stool near one of the side doors of the box car that was being used as a caboose. Conductor Cupples came close to the door to throw out a handful of paper which he had been tearing into bits, but the rushing air fanned them back, and they were scattered about the car. He looked disconcerted for a moment, and started to pick up some of the pieces.

As Dykeman looked down towards him, he noticed a scrap almost against his foot. On it he read:

"Way Bill No. 215.

"Car No. 41,144, St. L. & Pac."

He was startled by the sudden reappearance of the mystic number in such an odd manner. Though he did not understand why the waybill had been destroyed, he placed his foot over the piece of paper with the two numbers, being moved to do so by some strange impulse.

When Conductor Cupples had picked up the larger pieces of paper, and had his back turned, he quickly transferred the bit from under his foot to his pocket.

After their arrival at Joyville that evening, three hours late, he was not called upon by Cupples to make out the report of the run, as he had done at the terminal the night before. But on glancing over the report the conductor had just finished, when the latter had his head turned talking to some of the trainmen, he noticed that car 41,144 appeared nowhere on it.

Cupples folded up the report and put it in the envelope, to be transmitted to St. Louis.

Dykeman was about to call his attention to the omission, when a thought occurred to him, and he stopped. All he had noticed about car 41,144 had been decidedly odd, not to say mysterious. Was it part of a crooked scheme that the bill should be destroyed, and the number not reported?

CHAPTER XXVI.

DASH RECEIVES AN IMPORTANT LETTER.

As Dykeman could not decide for himself whether the irregularities he had discovered in regard to car 41,144 were part of a plan to defraud the company, he determined to report all the particulars to Mr. Rodway.

Fortunately, he found much cleaner and pleasanter quarters at Joyville than he had at the terminal, and was not compelled to sleep in the caboose again. His pleasure in the anticipation of the luxury of a neat room may be imagined, when it is remembered that he had not slept in a regular bed for three nights.

He decided to write his report to Mr. Rodway in his room, as there was a small table there suitable for the purpose, and he would be away from any noise or interruptions. He procured paper and envelopes from the station agent, and the landlady of the lodging house furnished him pen and ink.

Dykeman made a complete report of his round trip, not omitting the most trifling incident. He dwelt particularly on the mysterious apparitions he had seen at Dead Man's Cut and Conductor Cupples' savage attack upon him in the caboose the same night.

He gave it as his opinion that the conductor was aware of who it was he was throttling, and knew more about the ghostly figures than he would care to tell. In fact, in spite of Cupples' open face, he said he believed the conductor was a desperate man, engaged in some desperate game.

Though it was late when he finished

his report, he wrote a long letter to his grandfather and a short one to Mr. Tickmore before he went to bed. In both he told of all that had happened him since he had left home, though in neither did he speak of his father.

It was midnight when Dykeman concluded his writing; but as it was a duty he owed, he felt a good deal of satisfaction when it was discharged.

He took his letters to the station; those for the east to go by post, and the report for Mr. Rodway at St. Louis to go by baggage car.

There were some letters in the mail box, where all communications for the trainmen were placed. Dykeman was not expecting a letter from any one, but with idle curiosity he glanced over them.

He found a large official envelope plainly addressed, "D. Dykeman, Care of Cond'r Cupples, Joyville Junction." On one corner was the train master's official card. His first thought was that Mr. Rodway had sent him some additional instructions, or clues, to work on; but would he send him such a letter in the care of Conductor Cupples, he asked himself?

Decidedly he would not, he concluded; but he decided to wait till he reached his room to investigate the nature of the communication.

He was considerably mystified when he tore open the brown railroad envelope, for it revealed another one—white, and several sizes smaller, inside. It was addressed, in a crude schoolboy sort of hand, to the care of Mr. Hummon, superintendent of telegraph.

When he had also opened this, he found a letter written on notepaper and a legal looking document. The writing was unfamiliar, and he was still in the dark as to the identity of the writer. He turned hastily to the signature.

"Well, I declare," he exclaimed in a tone of pleasure and astonishment, "who would have thought such a portentous looking document was from her?"

"Her" was Miss Dorothy Orloff, and he lost no time in perusing the letter.

We will not reproduce it here, but will say it was full of the recent sad bereavement of the writer and expressions of gratitude to the one who had aided her with his sympathy and purse in her affliction. There must have been other words of a more sweet and encouraging nature, for the reader blushed as if the whole world were looking over his shoulder.

In conclusion, she added that, owing to the suddenness of the demand for money to defray the expenses of her mother's death, her aunt was not then prepared to refund the sum he had expended, but would send it to him by the first of next month. She referred to her failure to ask him the amount he had spent as "stupid"; but Dykeman had understood that her heart had been too full of sorrow at the time to think of dollars and cents; and she requested that he tell her the sum of their indebtedness to him at once.

Then, in a postscript, followed a reference to the legal looking document inclosed. It was a deed to a section of land in Colorado, given to her mother by her uncle Petroff B. Orloff.

Before the latter had been lost at sea, she explained, the mother had redeeded the property back to the giver for some reason, and the return deed was sent to a lawyer in St. Louis, who represented the uncle, to be properly recorded and delivered to the owner. The mother had always had a doubt whether or not the return deed had ever been recorded, as she had never received any acknowledgment from the lawyer of its receipt.

If it had not, or was recorded after the uncle's death, the land still stood in her name, and it might be of pecuniary benefit to her or her child.

All this had been told the young girl by her mother, and now she wanted Dykeman to find out if the return deed had been recorded.

He smiled at the girlish simplicity and confidence in him. He was willing to go to China if she had asked him, and such a journey was just as possible as one to Colorado in the present state of his finances.

He did not know any one in Colorado to intrust the inquiry to, and it seemed necessary to him that some one should go on there to get the information. He did not know that a letter to the clerk of the county court in which the land was situated would have secured a report of the record.

The name Petroff B. Orloff reminded him of his own father's name, and suggested to him the query as to what the middle initial of the former stood for. Was it possible that Petroff Orloff was a relative of his?

Dykeman strongly suspected that the deed had been sent to him more as a sort of security for the amount due him than from any desire that he should find out about the return deed. He admired her delicate *finesse*, and decided that he would at least keep the document till the money had been repaid him, rather than return it, thus telling her he had divined her real object in sending it.

Therefore, he could not avoid expressing a willingness to undertake the mission, though he did not dream he would very soon be anywhere near the State of Colorado, much less the land in question.

Another letter, to whom will be easily guessed, was written that night by Dash, and when it was finished Dykeman was heavy eyed and ready to fall asleep where he sat.

The letter from Miss Dorothy and the legal document reposed under his pillow that night when he sank to slumber, but whether he put them there from sentiment or for security is not known. Perhaps it was both.

One of the first things he did, after eating his breakfast in the morning, was to deposit the deed in the care of the station agent, who put it in his safe. The letter from Madrid was carefully placed in the inside pocket of his coat.

No. 29's train was not near so heavy as the day before, and Dykeman was glad to find it out when he took the car numbers and checked up the bills, for he had not entirely recovered from the excitement and labors of the previous day, and he felt the loss of sleep.

There was only one local car, and fifteen solid loads. Among the latter was a Union Tank Line car, which is a long, boiler-like tank, braced in the center of a flat car, filled with oil.

He took particular notice of this car, because they were not so common on Western roads as they are on Eastern ones; but he little imagined the part that car would play in the exciting events of the day.

The run south was but a repetition of the labors of the first day, though in a lesser degree.

When they rolled into Burrsville he noticed car 41,144 still standing on the siding. He soon learned that it was empty, and by Conductor Cupples' direction it was switched into the train again. The thought occurred to Dykeman that it was pretty quick work to unload the car since the day before, for he knew the agents were not generally so prompt.

At the first station north of Dead Man's Cut, Conductor Cupples remained on the engine to ride to the next station. The train slowed up as they passed through the cut, but there was no call for brakes or the flagman this time. Dykeman kept a sharp outlook to the rear, but he saw nothing ghostly or suspicious.

Just below the cut was a sharp down grade of several miles, then a level stretch for a short distance, followed by another descent. In the center of the level stretch was Eagle Flat station.

At the foot of the second incline was Branchville station, where the local generally met the through freight and the northern mail train. Both freight trains took the siding there to let the

mail pass, but on the present occasion, the local being late, the latter had orders to stop at Eagle Flat to let the mail go by, instead of going to Branchville.

Just north of Branchville was a spur track leading off to the river, or branch, as it was called. These explanations are necessary to a full understanding of the events that follow.

No. 29 had hardly started down the first grade when the engineer whistled for brakes so as to hold the train in check.

But there followed no apparent slackening of speed. The peculiar action of the locomotive told the engineer something was wrong.

Conductor Cupples, who, as already stated, was on the engine, made his way over the tender, and climbed the first box car.

"We've broken in two," he shouted; "there's only three cars here, and the rest of them are coming down on us from the top of the hill. Don't stop, for Heaven's sake! Open her up wide and get to Branchville as soon as you can. Maybe the boys will be able to stop them on the level."

There was no stopping at Eagle Flat now, and their only hope was to reach Branchville before the mail left.

Three warning shrieks of the whistle told the brakemen of the catastrophe, if they had not already noticed it, and the engine plunged down the second grade at terrific speed.

As they neared Branchville, Cupples saw that the through freight was on the siding. As it completely filled the track at the north end, they would be compelled to go to the south end to get their engine out of the way of the mail train. Could they do it in time, the engineer and conductor asked themselves?

Even if they could, how would the oncoming cars, the downward progress of which did not seem to be slackened at all by the brakemen, be prevented from crashing into the passenger train.

Cupples grasped the whistle lever and sent out shriek after shriek, to attract the attention of those at the station.

As they whirled by, he leaned far out of the cab and shouted:

"Turn the switch to the branch spur!"

The station agent, who was standing on the platform, heard and understood. He turned and sped away up the track towards the spur.

The freight cars were thundering down upon him with a rattling roar. He had just time to force the rusty switch over, when they went rushing by, swaying and grinding on the curve, like a whirlwind, towards the river.

"God help the poor fellows!" sobbed he, as he thought of the brakemen on the local.

In a few seconds there followed a terrific crash, as the freight cars leaped off the end of the spur track into the river, and piled themselves into a mass of wreckage.

(To be continued.)

FIREFLIES.

As o'er the face of evening fair
A shade of twilight came,
Lost sunbeams, tangled in her hair,
Fell into drops of flame.

S. Raymond Jocelyn.

THE SIGN OF THE LIZARD.*

BY PHILIP VERRILL MIGHELS.

A story of adventure in Lower California, wherein Remly Sturgis and three companions search for hidden treasure. Their superhuman efforts in forcing their way through treacherous caverns, and their amazing combats with native tribes and native beasts. The guarded shrine, and the victory of sagacity.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Remly Sturgis, a young Englishman, learning from a dying Mexican the secret location of a tomb of opals, starts in search of it with Sandy Caldwell, an American cowboy, Dennis O'Reidy, an Irishman, and a Mexican man of all work, as companions. Sailing across the Gulf of California from Guaymas, dangers threaten from the first, but after landing at a cave's mouth, they come by twisting caverns to an open gorge, from which they are driven by the fire balls of attacking savages. They seek refuge in the caverns again, but O'Reidy is seized by the enemy and dragged away by a branch passage, with the others in pursuit. Finding an exit that leads to the Red Man's village, where O'Reidy is being prepared for torture, they rush upon the savages with pistols speaking and fists flying, and hurry O'Reidy back to the fastnesses of the caverns.

The next day, after some thrilling escapes, they drink from a poisoned stream and are all cast into a profound slumber. When Sturgis returns to consciousness, he is strapped to the back of a burro, going up a mountain side. The animal is halted presently, Sturgis is untied, and he with his three companions are in the midst of a multitude of people resembling the Chinese. A witch-like woman interpreter addresses him fiercely in Spanish, but with friendly interpolations warns him of his great danger, and assures him of her aid. He is then blindfolded and removed to a dungeon. Finding an entrance to a secret passageway, Sturgis bravely descends, and, after an exciting escape from spies, finds an old man whom he had noticed among the multitude. This man turns out to be Sturgis' uncle, a captive for eight years with his young daughter, whom the people believe to be a goddess. They plan an escape, but are interrupted by a sound; the old man retreats to his cell, and Sturgis bounds away in the inky darkness alone.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE IRISHMAN'S NUPTIALS.

WHEN Dennis O'Reidy was dragged away by the woman, who procured several men to help her, he was taken first to a hut and forced to a position on the floor. There he was bound so securely that movement was out of the question.

Then, while the woman danced about him with the evident intention of winning his admiration, a man quickly soaked his hair with oil and then proceeded to shave his head as clean as an apple.

Dennis called upon a host of saints and martyrs to wipe this infamous woman and her tribe from the face of the earth, but the work was finished. He was then disrobed, by four stalwart citizens, and dressed in the native costume of loose, thin trousers to his knees and a flabby blouse in place of a coat.

His shoes, which were bobnailed "brogans," were left on his feet, and they added not a little to his grotesque appearance.

His toilet being quite complete, the favored Irishman was now conducted to another room and tied down in a rude sort of chair, which was elevated on a platform. About him were ranged a number of earthenware pots, each

* *This story began in the April issue of* THE ARGOSY. *The five back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 50 cents.*

containing sand, into which seven large punk sticks were thrust, all of them lighted and smoking finely.

A little, dried up native now came in and seating himself on the floor, began to furnish wedding music on a one stringed fiddle, made of a gourd. He struck the solitary string with a thing which resembled the tail of a donkey, producing a wild and peculiar series of notes.

The bride elect now danced and pantomimed with commendable activity, frequently ceasing for a second to kneel down and kiss O'Reidy's shins, above his shoes, where they were bare.

The first time she offered him this homage he was so ungallant as to give her a violent kick, which performed a neat dental operation on one of the very few teeth she had in her jaw. After this his feet were secured hard and fast.

While all this was going on two of the men stood, one on each side of Dennis, and at regular intervals tickled him, gravely but cunningly in the ribs, to induce him to present a pleasant countenance. He squirmed violently, being inordinately ticklish, and the tears ran across his face, which was somewhat contorted in his great excess of emotions.

This was the usual means of exciting a manifestation of delight in the bridegroom, but O'Reidy became so very enthusiastic that he hoisted himself chair and all, knocked over three of the pots, scattering punks in many directions and nearly pushed out the eye of the bride, a proceeding which made her more than ever determined to possess him for her "lord and master."

His eagerness having terminated this portion of the ceremony somewhat abruptly, Dennis was taken from his throne by the woman's assistants and was led from the house.

It was now nearly dark outside. Preparations were being completed rapidly for a greater ceremonial, disconnected from his own. Crowds of people were congregated; enormous paper lanterns of every color were being lighted, and music was beginning to create a din. This music was obtained from instruments made of bamboo sticks and by beating on gongs. The former gave forth a hollow sound, not unpleasant to hear, while the gongs seemed to fill the air with deep, sonorous tones as rich in quality as they were weird in effect.

All who could had arrayed themselves in costumes of brilliant color. Red, yellow and vivid green were mostly employed, and the persons so adorned bore torches, to insure being seen. All were swarming to the spot as rapidly as so many ants; the hum of their voices made an incessant drone.

Evidently the hour was still too early for the celebration to begin, although so many of the people were about. Dennis was marched through the mob, many of whom repeated, as he passed, the genial tickling operation to which he had been already subjected, and otherwise "joked" him as he passed.

He was taken to a building fashioned almost entirely of bamboo, and the front of it appeared to be sprinkled with sparks of fire, so numerous were the punk sticks burning there in brackets and pots.

Inside, this building was lighted by seven lamps which were fashioned of shallow dishes filled with oil in which a wick was lying. An old fellow, bent and yellow, went from one of these lamps to another pulling the wicks a little further out as they were consumed.

At the further end of the place was a great shrine, which occupied the full width and height of the interior. It was elaborately carved and then overlaid with beaten gold. Ornaments of opal gleamed from it in a hundred places.

As usual the punk sticks here were legion. In the midst of all this splendor, and seen a trifle dimly in the light, was a great wooden idol, as black as tar.

To the right and left in front of the shrine were slanted slabs of stone. On one of these the bride threw herself at full length, prostrate before the idol. O'Reidy was placed on another, on his stomach, and tied there firmly, in such a position that all he could see was the glittering shrine and its great black god.

There he was left, it being manifest that he and his bride were supposed to pray to and adore the idol before their wedding could be finally consummated. Dennis being hungry, as well as wearied by his protests and futile efforts to escape, not to mention being stupified by the smell of the punks, nodded once or twice and fell asleep.

When he waked the place contained a number of people, who stood aside while the pagoda-like affair, containing the invisible emperor of the tribe, was carried in by the four attendants. O'Reidy was now released from his position, but the cords which bound his hands were left in place.

A number of the natives gathered about, the bride and himself were conducted to a place where they could kneel before the shrine, and the voice of the priestess arose in a solemn chant.

She was chanting doubtless an invocation to the idol, in the native tongue. Presently she began on something else. O'Reidy pricked up his ears immediately. The woman was droning a singsong thing in corrupted Latin. It was a fragment of prayer, plus a fragment of Ave Maria, handed down to her through generations of ancestors. It was far from purity either of pronunciation or construction, and was all but meaningless, nevertheless O'Reidy knew it at once.

He struck up a Pater Noster at the top of his voice and spouted more peculiar Latin with an Irish accent in a minute than the priestess herself had ever heard in all her life, and all of it was as wholly unintelligible to himself as it was to the meanest native in the place.

Immediately the people present stared at the man in awe and amazement. They comprehended that he could outdo the priestess by far and estimated himself and his importance accordingly. The woman also realized this fact and ceased to chant.

O'Reidy's voice rang through the building like a rooster's clarion to morning. Three of the men came running forward to where he was standing and cut away his bonds, afterward falling on their faces before him.

Dennis looked about, and seeing what he thought to be a chance to escape, suddenly darted for the door, without the slightest thought of what might be the results. A guard quickly jumped to bar the way.

They might reverence his command of Latin, but they could not permit him the "freedom of the city" on so short a notice and in a manner so unconventional.

A dozen came rushing in pursuit instantly, including the bride elect. He dodged a man who attempted to grab him by the collar of his blouse, doubled back on his tracks with the utmost inconsequence, jumped up on the shrine and dashed across it, scattering punks like a shower of meteors, and then leaped from the further side to run toward the emperor's pagoda.

By this time every man in the place was in his wake; even the "car of state" itself had been deserted in the stampede to stop the wild Irishman.

Crazy as a badger, Dennis rushed upon the pagoda and jumped inside, through the curtains at the rear. He knocked down the emperor within and discovered—not a man, but a corpse, stuffed or embalmed and seated on a cushion, his hands on his knees and his curled up finger nails a foot in length.

A shriek of dismay went up at this. The high official behind the car was livid with rage. He alone knew what was inside that pagoda, for he had brought about the emperor's death

himself, and thus was virtually ruler of the nation by seeming to voice the wishes and commands of the man within the car.

He had also killed the men who had helped him in his work, and now he feared O'Reidy would betray his secret.

He dashed to the spot, thrusting aside all the others, his rage fairly masking his face. In a second he had dragged Dennis forth on the floor, and stood there, a guard against the inquisitive, his breast heaving with fear and anger.

Ten men fell on the form of O'Reidy, who began to shout Pater Nosters.

The men were awed. They dared not strike the Irishman, and knew that the high official, or even the emperor himself dared not order his death for his unspeakable offense, while he possessed the power of speaking Latin, which they thought to be god language given only to the blest, and the mighty in power.

Then the official became aware that, strive as he might, O'Reidy could not tell the dread secret of the pagoda to the people, in his nonunderstandable language. The fellow regained the self possession which had made his crime possible, and dared pretend to consult the wishes of the much disturbed and outraged being in the car.

Horrified as the other people were at O'Reidy's actions they were nevertheless prepared for the "leniency extended by the emperor" because of the "sacred attainments" of the Irishman in Latin. Dennis had "attained" all he knew by hearing it conned by the priests all his life.

The emperor, so said the arch conspirator, merely desired that the offender be safely guarded for the present to prevent further violation of the emperor's sacred person; but his guard would be one of honor.

The marriage of O'Reidy to one of the tribe was no longer desirable, inasmuch as he was eminently fitted and would therefore be selected to be a priest of the temple. The people were requested to leave the sacred joss house in peace.

Dennis was accordingly escorted from the place, frowned on maliciously, but surreptitiously, by the high official. Some of the savages ran for a contrivance which looked like a chair on a litter. O'Reidy was seated in this and borne about amidst the gathering throngs.

In the struggle necessary to enforce this honor upon the modest Dennis, he had managed to kick a well intentioned person in the back. Immediately this creature manifested a crazy joy, covered the place with his hand and was the envied of all beholders.

Observing this and remembering what he had seen the priestess do, in the afternoon, the son of the Emerald Isle lost no time in kicking right and left at the creatures he hated so generously. He showered his favors particularly on the woman who had tried with such commendable zeal to wed him, and who clung to the litter at his side deliriously happy.

The ecstasy he provoked by using his feet in his march of triumph was simply unbounded. Kicking hard and spouting his doggerel Latin, he gave promise of becoming a very demigod of the people.

CHAPTER XXX.

A COUNCIL OF WAR.

THE large stone building with the secret passages was a jail from which men rarely emerged alive. Its chambers had known countless deeds of death by terrible means.

Sandy and the Mexican, imprisoned together, had been tied to the wall as Sturgis was, and then some mysterious thing had entered the room through a hidden trap, bringing in a basket filled with snails, which were liberated on the floor.

In the course of an hour these mollusks found the two men and crawled

upon them, unfelt and not visible in the darkness and only known to be there when they reached the bare necks, hands and faces. Then they fastened on stubbornly and began to suck the blood of their victims.

Thrash and writhe as they would, the two could not shake off the horrible things; and constantly more and more of them swarmed up their clothing to the feast. The corpses Sturgis had seen in a chamber, tied to the wall, had been the victims of these slimy vampires.

When a dozen had fastened on Sandy's hands and throat, he roared out in rage and jerked so ferociously at his bonds that he tore the metal rings to which he was secured out of the rock. The movement also snapped the rope in twain and cut his wrist, but he was so enraged that he seesawed till both his hands were loose, when he dashed away the snails and ground them to pulp beneath his heels.

He felt his way to Pablo, who was beating his face against the wall to kill his tormentors, and presently managed to free him. Together they stamped out the life of more than a hundred of the hideous things.

It was useless for the pair to attempt to talk, for neither knew the language of the other, and hence it was impossible to discuss any plan of action, but Sandy indicated with the rope that he wished the Mexican to splice a number of pieces together and then to form a running noose in one end.

"We'll fix thet feller if he comes agin," he growled to himself, and searching the wall he found the trap by which the man had entered with the snails.

It was precisely like the one which Sturgis had found in the other cell. This discovery was rendered easy for the miner by reason of the fact that cooler air was gushing in about the false stone.

Leading the Mexican to the place and making clear the use he had designed for the nooses, Sandy took up his stand at one side of the trap, while Pablo stood on the other, waiting for any one who might have the misfortune to come to the place.

They stood there a long time. In the mean while Sturgis had been on his solitary adventure and had started away, as rapidly as possible from the room containing his newly discovered uncle.

He could hear the "rounder" crawling in the passage behind him, and he knew the man was gaining, for he himself dared not move ahead except with the utmost care.

He reached the stairs at last, almost feeling the presence of the man who followed him. All thought of lying in wait and despatching the creature had vanished, for it would be so easy to fall against the poisoned club which he knew the fellow carried, not to mention the possibility of being struck by the man in the darkness.

He started up the passage to regain his cell when a chill struck fairly through his system. Another of the "rounders" was coming down in the tunnel, directly toward him!

For a second he was utterly nonplussed; he could not think what to do. Then he recalled the words of his uncle about the passages.

There were three. He would take the one that was furtherest to the left, on the chance that the men would pass it by. Acting on the instant he made his way in feverish alarm to the opening and crept into this unknown retreat as rapidly as feeling his way would permit.

Presently the hand he always kept extended to guide his movements, came in contact with a plank. He felt it over in desperate haste; it blocked the way completely. He was trapped in a *cul de sac*.

Anxiously he pushed at the barrier—it moved. The truth then broke upon him; this was a secret trap like the one he knew, but it led to another room. Noiselessly he moved the door away and made a dive to gain the cell.

Instantly a noose slipped over his head and up to his throat.

"Look here——" he started to cry. His breath was shut off instantaneously, but as quickly the pressure was released again.

"My God, it's Sturgis!" cried Sandy's voice.

In that second Sturgis comprehended what had happened. He was free of the biting noose as he rose from the floor.

"They're—coming—following," he gurgled with his first rush of breath. His ear had caught a sound of the spies advancing swiftly to the place.

Silently as a cat the miner bounded again to his post. Without a word the Mexican joined him.

Almost immediately Sandy's noose slipped over a head that was stealthily protruded from the orifice. He fetched it taut with a motion quick and powerful. The slightest gurgle of breath was the only sound; a hand was thrown wildly up.

The miner clutched the spy by the clothing at the back of the neck, still keeping the noose deadly tight, and dragged the creature bodily into the cell.

Unsuspecting, so deftly had the trick been done, the man behind came on, and a second later was struggling with Pablo, whose noose though in place was working so badly that the active "rounder" gave promise of creating a serious disturbance.

"Mind the poisoned clubs," whispered Sturgis, who was up and feeling of his neck. "Don't let them strike you—hold them fast!"

With a superhuman effort Pablo's savage thrust his hand down on the floor to force himself up, the better to fight. The palm crushed upon the points of a hundred thorns on the venomous club.

A convulsion made the fellow's body shudder, as if a shriek would burst from his choked up throat. The other spy was kicking and struggling near at hand, mixed with the second in the mêlée.

Wrenching desperately, the larger of the spies jerked up the hand which had stabbed itself down on the thorns. The club clung on and thus he dashed it against the leg of the man's comrade, sinking its poisoned points deep in the flesh, beneath the trousers.

The two men were affected fatally at once; they began to weaken in their fight, they sank heavily, twitching in every muscle. The one who was on his knees toppled over.

Sandy and the Mexican loosened the nooses, but only a series of gasps and shivers ensued.

"Sumthin's—up," panted the miner. "I didn't go fer to kill him, an' he's a goner. Got a match?"

Their pockets had been cleaned out thoroughly by their captors, but inside his shirt Caldwell had a "private" pocket from which he now produced a small bunch of matches and a three inch stub of candle.

"Funny I never thought of them before," he grumbled. "Shet the place so's the light won't show if any one's passin'."

Sturgis closed the trap. The candle was lighted, revealing the spies in the throes of death. Five minutes sufficed for the poison to complete its work.

"My word, what a place!" exclaimed the leader. "Look here, I thought my pig was stuck that time, right enough, old chap. Now what shall we do?"

He was still feeling his throat.

Sandy felt so ashamed for having come so near to strangling the man he would gladly have died for, that he hung his head and glared in fury on the bodies at his feet.

"I say now, don't be cut up, old man, you were quite in the right," Sturgis added, reassuringly. "It was quite the proper thing to do as you did. Come now, shake and look sharp for the next that's to come."

"I didn't know it was you," said

Sandy doggedly, shaking the hand extended. "How'd you come fer to be foolin' aroun' in sech a place, anyhow. Durn it all—it makes me weak as a pancake——"

Sturgis interrupted with a rapid recital of what he had done and seen. Pablo meantime dragged the bodies and the clubs to a corner.

"The way you treated me only goes to show you were ready," the leader concluded. "Give over on that now and help me decide what is best to be done. Where is O'Reidy?"

"Don't know," replied the miner. "The last I seen——"

He stopped short and jumped to catch up his noose, for another sound came distinctly from the trap. Instantly Sturgis blew out the light.

The secret door was pushed inward. Sandy was ready to strangle any intruder now, for the position of all was desperate.

"Señor?" said a voice.

"The priestess!" cried Sturgis. "Mind, Sandy, let her come in." He added in Spanish. "Come quickly, we are here. We were prepared to see a foe. Do you bring any news—any hope of escape?"

The woman entered, the trap was closed and again the candle was lighted.

"Santa Maria!" she exclaimed, gazing on the sight which the room presented. "How did you get here—how did you do it?"

The leader told her briefly, omitting an account of his visit to Remly.

"But these?" and she pointed to the bodies in the corner. "And they brought in the snails—so soon!"

An explanation was now due from Sandy and Pablo to Sturgis, who was burning with indignation when he learned of the introduction of the blood sucking mollusks.

"What shall we see when this night is day again?" inquired the woman. "The air smells of death. What shall I tell you? First it is fortune with you, for you have put these two murderers away in safety," she nodded again toward the dead spies. "Had they found that you had gone from your prison all your party would have been killed and you soon retaken and put to death."

"Yes, but now—what is the next thing to do? How did you manage to find us?"

"I went first to look for you, for you were doomed—yes, and you are still under sentence of death. The cell was empty. I came for you here. See, I have brought you food."

She gave each a number of pieces of something as hard as an apple, brownish in hue and flavored like a nut. This they devoured with the greatest relish for all had been without food for more than twenty four hours.

The substance soon gratified their hunger and gave them remarkable vigor. It seemed to be food and drink combined.

"We are very grateful," Sturgis assured her, "but tell me, how are we to escape? Where is our friend? If we can find him it will be time to try to get away."

"He is somewhere down in the mass of people, kicking all he can reach," she replied, and she related what had occurred in the temple.

"What next, that crazy O'Reidy! He'll save us all yet," said the leader. "He's quite as inconsequent as a child; but think of his luck! I say, if we can only get down there with him——" He added to the priestess, "but you said the people are still at the celebration?"

"Yes."

"That's bad for us, if we leave this building. But we will do it, if you can get the rifles and pistols they took from us when they sent us asleep. Can you do it?"

"I can get some of your things," she replied, "but not all. Perhaps I can bring the smaller things of metal; I have seen them and touched them al-

ready, but could not take them, for I was closely watched."

"But if you have seen them that is good. The pistols would be enough, but do not forget the belts. And O'Reidy? We've got to know where he is at once. You will manage that?"

"I think I can."

"That is good again. Now what is your plan? Can you tell us where to go if we do get out? Do you know the way from this tableland?"

"No," she said. "I shall search for the map which they took from your pocket. Without it we shall not be able to find our way."

"Why, that map is useless," rejoined the leader. "You said today it is only half of the one we thought we possessed. If it leads only to this place we should be seen by their spies as soon as ever we started away, the same as we four were at first. You must get the other half, the part that shows the way to the tomb of opals."

"Don't be a fool. Do you dare to covet opals when your life and the lives of all your friends are in the greatest peril?"

"No, I don't care a farthing for their opals, but the map which leads us away in another direction is what we must have. If I can get the few decent souls in this place away I shall feel myself the richest man alive! Get us the map—show us the way, any way, to escape and leave the rest to me."

"And then will you be willing to add another to your party of escape?"

"Certainly I will," said the leader. "But who is it—whom would you add to the party?"

"A child, ah yes, and her father."

"A child—why I remember now, the old man said—you mean little Vera. Save her—take her away! Well, I should say so!" He told her then of his meeting with his uncle. "Where is she now?" he added.

"She is again in her room. I brought her in more than half an hour ago—long before I went to hunt for you."

"Then we must hurry. Go for the pistols, see how the land lies. Try to form a plan, and remember the map—do you think you can get it?"

"I can try," said the woman, "but the time is not good. The people are mad with their celebration—the snakes! Perhaps I can learn the secret from one of the older men who loves me—the fool—and then I can kill him for his pains. I will go. You should all remain here, for it makes a place of meeting, and no one will come—not since you have stilled those two!"

She glanced in hatred toward the bodies in the corner and departed the way she had come.

CHAPTER XXXI.

RIVAL GREATNESS.

DENNIS O'REIDY, whose legs had grown weary from the efforts he made to win the popularity of the people, was endeavoring to plan assistance for his friends. His language being incomprehensible to the natives, he waved his arms and went through other pantomime to express his wants.

Thus he soon procured the necessaries to satisfy the cravings of his system for food and drink, but to all his dumb requests to be taken into or through the buildings, there was a studied, polite refusal, dictated supposedly by the emperor himself, but in reality by Sup Gow, the high official.

This man was watching the Irishman's career with growing fear and determination to render him harmless; he began hatching a plot in which O'Reidy was the central figure. By this time the priestess had disappeared from the scene.

During the time that Dennis had been asleep in the temple, the little white child had been brought from her room and exhibited to the joyous populace, and then she had been taken away, while the celebration waxed wilder.

Thus Dennis failed to see the child

and was wholly unaware of the nature and meaning of all the festivities.

He fancied the shouts, the waving lanterns, the splashes of color and the din of drums and gongs were somehow inaugurated in honor of himself. He therefore stood up on his litter from time to time and attempted to make a political speech, nearly all of which efforts were invariably prefaced by:

" Fellow citizens, an' ladies and gintlemen, if the Dimocrathic party, in their wisdom give meself the nomination fer President entoirely, faith O'll accept wid thanks, but l'ave me rise up to say——" and the rest of it was a modification of the statement that his friends possessed a power of " inflooence " which they would be pleased to exert if they could only be given the freedom of the place.

The mob howled about him, the woman who had chosen him for her husband remained at his side, scratched by the other jealous creatures of her sex, and all but denuded by the grasping claws which tried to haul her down by the clothing on her back.

Preparations for further frolics and for banquets were now being made. It was plain this savage horde intended to live out the night in fun.

The music grew hourly more riotous; the half wild beings began to feel old instincts burning in their veins; they commenced to dance in a hundred centers. Those about O'Reidy were hopping and swaying their bodies with sinuous grace.

Enlivened by something they had given him to drink, the Irishman ceased to harangue them with speeches. He leaped to his feet on the litter and commenced to dance a jig, to a tune which he whistled, in a shrill and lively manner.

His shaven head glistened in the light, his blouse flapped about him, he pulled up his abbreviated trousers till his skinny, hairy legs were bare more than half way up to his body, and he threw his clumsy brogans about with astonishing celerity and as lightly as if they had weighed half an ounce. The people about him were mad with joy; they jumped up and down in rhythm with his dance, their faces fairly stretched with expressions of delight.

But half an hour of this exhausted O'Reidy completely, so great had been the recent tax on his bodily endurance. He sank to his chair hurrahing for the " Dimocrathic party."

Sup Gow, the official, having watched O'Reidy's course with a baneful eye, had determined on his death. This very popularity was dangerous. O'Reidy would soon be able to make himself understood. He would then reveal the truth about the emperor.

Sup Gow, if such a premature exposition were made, having still many parts of his plot incomplete, would be struck to the earth the moment such a knowledge should spread. He decided to have the " priest " " escorted to his apartments " by a guard of two, who would bind his arms the moment they got him away from the sight and hearing of the crowd, and then place him at once in a chamber in which a door should be " left ajar for the entrance of death."

In accordance with this, when he noted O'Reidy's weariness, he issued a kindly " request from the emperor " that Dennis be conveyed away " to rest."

When the Irishman's death was finally accomplished, Sup Gow would rid himself of the two accomplices to the deed, thus insuring their silence, and would then give it out that O'Reidy met with an accidental end.

No sooner had the two men taken Dennis in charge and conveyed him, by a secret passage to the prison building, than the high official thought of a better plan to make away with his dreaded prisoner. He cursed his ill fortune that he had not thought of it sooner.

He could have charged O'Reidy with the death of the emperor at once and

so have made his execution a demand of the people. This stroke would also have cleared himself of any suspicion.

It was now too late to recall the two men who had the Irishman in charge, for he dared not leave the pagoda himself, and he dared not send another man, for fear his plot would be known by too many and so get at length to the ears of the masses.

Yet the plan of shifting the blame for the murder to this mysterious and powerful white man was still too good to abandon. If, by the morning, he could manage to rid himself of certain of his rivals, as well as of a sickly heir—the last of his line—who was then all but dying in a house near at hand, the time would be ripe for giving to the populace this overwhelming piece of intelligence.

Then he could readily announce that he himself had avenged the unspeakable crime by taking O'Reidy's life. He saw himself proclaimed the Son of the Sun by a grateful and excited people.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE MAP AND A STRUGGLE.

WHILE they waited for the priestess to return Sturgis restlessly paced up and down the cell, trying to crystallize a plan in his mind. He knew the futility of escaping from the place, yet he was persuaded it would not be safe to let the night go by and the morrow be born if they were to cheat the fiends in whose hands they were prisoners.

"I've got to go and see my uncle and the little girl," he finally announced. "I must tell them to be ready to act. You two wait for me here, to meet the priestess, if she comes. No danger now, she said, of any more visitors. Better save the candle, and I'll be back directly."

"Don't yeh think we'd better go along?" said Sandy. "It might be better not to separate again."

"I've thought of that and still I believe I'd better go alone; we run less risk. And besides, if the woman does come back and all of us were gone, she'd never know where to look, and everything would be confusion; and it might be important to find us at once. Pablo can tell her, in Spanish, that I will be returning in a moment. It is better that way; I will go by myself."

He instructed the Mexican what to say, should the priestess return in his absence, and taking one of the poisoned clubs for a weapon of defense, made his way quickly to his uncle's room.

The moonlight was entering the old man's prison. By its rays Sturgis saw that he was pale and agitated. Many sounds throughout the night had greatly alarmed him. Now he seemed to partake of the courage which his nephew fairly exhaled.

By his private route he conducted the leader from the room. They entered another apartment, into which light came and made a patch like silver on the floor. From a corner where a bed was dimly visible, a tiny figure shot from the shadow and darted to the patch of light like a fairy.

"Oh, my papa—oh my Cousin Remly!" cried a childish voice, and Sturgis was almost startled by the suddenness with which the dainty little girl of whom he had caught a glimpse in the window clasped him about the waist and lifted up her lovely face for a kiss.

He knelt, making a crooning sound which was half stifled by the lump in his throat, and placed his arms about the little form as if he had known her all his life.

"Oh, Cousin Remly, papa told me all about you, and I am so glad to see you," she whispered earnestly. "I loved you the moment I saw you, down in the crowd this afternoon, and I know you will take us away from this dreadful place, and I have got the map!"

"The map, sweetheart?" inquired the puzzled man. "Why—I don't believe Cousin Remly understands."

For answer she slipped from his arms a second and faced about in the light, then suddenly unfastened her silken night robe at the neck and pushed it aside to right and left, revealing on her chest above her heart a singular design pricked in with the blue black marks of the tattooing needle.

"Poor little sweetheart," whispered Sturgis, "my poor little girl——"

"No, Cousin Remly," the child interrupted briskly, "I am a rich little girl—I am rich, for this is really the map, and I am sure it will show us how to get away."

"How do you know, my pet?" said her father.

She placed a hand on him and keeping one on the hand of her cousin, looked at the older man seriously. "Because I heard them say it," she replied. "They thought I was sleeping when I got so very tired, but I heard them say it just as plain as day. And it shows a door where they fear the Chow Zambos will come in and eat them all up, and it tells the way to the sea."

"My word!" exclaimed Sturgis, regarding the map where the tiny fingers pointed, "it seems—yes, it could be, for the map I had might easily have been tattooed—and possibly on human skin, now I think of it again, for it certainly looked very much like this. I believe my cousin is right!"

"Oh, I am! And I'm so glad, Cousin Remly, and I know you'll take me away, and papa—and dear old Kreela, too—we'll have to take Kreela, for how kind she has always been to papa and me!"

"Yes—but I must hurry—everything depends now on what we can do tonight. But tell me, who is Kreela?"

"The priestess," replied the father quickly. "She belongs to this people, as I have told you, yet I know she loves us, and I know we can trust her completely."

"Trust her? Yes—I wish she were back! This is very important, this map. I must know the moment she returns. Put on your dress and shoes, little cousin; we may have to move in a hurry. Good by, for a moment. Perhaps you'd better both follow, as soon as you are ready, to the cell where three of us are together. At any rate, Uncle Henry, show the way to your cell again."

He bent to kiss the child before he went.

A shout from somewhere startled him. It came through a passage.

"Where was that?" he demanded. "That's O'Reidy's voice. Quick, take me where it was! Where can he be? If you know the way, don't lose a second."

"But—wait—yes, it must have come from the hall below," said Remly. "There is only one way to get there—by a drop from one of the holes, and I——"

"Take me there—don't stop for anything!" interrupted the nephew.

He saw where his uncle was heading and jumped to the passage by which they had entered.

"To the left!" cried Remly.

A trap swung inward and Sturgis entered instantly. The voice of Dennis came again, farther away. Sturgis distanced the elder man, who whispered excitedly, "again to the left!"

Sturgis found this secondary passage and a gleam of light seemed to move across its further end. He presently came to a door and swung it open.

Below was an ink black hall, dimly discerned by the light of a torch which was rapidly moving away. The leader saw only the shadows of several men on the wall far ahead at a turn.

"Oh, will no man be afther hilpin' poor Dinnis O'Reidy now?" called the voice of the Irishman. He was evidently struggling in vain with his guard, who were marching him down through the place.

"Somebody will help you, Dennis, old chap!" breathed Sturgis.

He was at the edge of a jump off, for the floor of the hall was ten feet be-

low where he stood. He slipped off his shoes in a jiffy. Then he thrust the handle of the poisoned club between his teeth and holding it firmly, backed out of the opening and hung by his hands from the ledge.

He dropped as silently as a panther, although the distance was greater than he had bargained to find.

Down the hall he bounded, feeling the wall for a guide and grasping the club in his other hand. Ahead of him now he saw O'Reidy, tied and held between two men, who were marching him rapidly forward, by the light of a torch.

A door was a few yards ahead of the group. One of the fellows darted ahead and threw it open. A gush of air came down the corridor, bearing an odious smell. Then Sturgis knew. It was the pit of snakes!

He wanted to cry out a warning—or perhaps a command to the men to halt. Could he reach the men in time to prevent them from throwing his comrade in that terrible place? Could he overcome the pair?

The last fifteen yards he covered in a few tremendous strides. The second man was coming back again, to assist in pushing the struggling Dennis on.

Like lightning from a cloudless sky the poisoned club came down on the neck of the man who held the Irishman. He screamed and dropped to the floor in convulsions, dragging the club from the wielder's hand.

The other savage, a giant in size, was holding the torch. He dashed it down to the floor and threw up his arm with a club brandished to strike.

Sturgis leaped upon him like a tiger and clutched the wrist above his hand before the blow could descend. A fight began for the deadly weapon.

The savage dug the fingers of his other hand into Sturgis' throat and attempted to bite, all the while wrenching to loosen the grip on his arm. Suddenly, pretending to weaken, Sturgis permitted the arm to come down, and leaping aside, he fetched it quickly around, threw all his weight to bend the elbow and thereby crushed the weapon so hard in the monster's face that it stuck there, when he reeled over backward and struck the wall. The fellow's head was doubled under his body, so fearfully did he fall.

O'Reidy had jerked so hard and so much at the cords which bound his hands, that by this time he got them loose. He grabbed up the torch which was still ablaze, and presented so singular an appearance in his heathen costume and with his shaven head that Sturgis all but dashed upon him for another of the savages.

The two men on the floor were writhing like dying serpents, gasping their last dreadful breaths.

"Great Scott!" cried the leader, "what in the world is the matter, O'Reidy. What has eaten your hair—and your pants? Come away—hurry along—we've got to leave this hole—for it's going to be hotter than fury!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

KREELA'S SCHEME.

THE astounded O'Reidy, who had realized only that his sudden popularity had vanished when the two unmannerly guards took him in hand, was so deeply affected by the sight of Sturgis that he could hardly tell who or what he was. He presently recovered in a sufficient degree to gallop through a recital of his adventures, however, as both men cautiously continued on up the hall.

"The king—the ruler dead!" exclaimed Sturgis, when Dennis came to that portion of his tale. "I say! If we can spring that on the people it will raise such a turmoil—hush—what was that?"

They halted at a sound that was echoed down the corridor. Sturgis blew out the torch and together they slipped behind a pillar of stone, next the wall, and waited breathlessly.

Some one was coming. Swift, almost noiseless footsteps came near and nearer.

The leader was now unarmed, having left the poisoned club with the corpses. He determined to leap upon an enemy, if necessary and choke out the life so inimical to their own.

Still nearer came the steps. The person halted, and then came on. Sturgis knew that this unseen presence was less than a yard away. He could hear the breath come quickly.

Should he throw himself upon this unsuspecting mortal then and there? He thought he could kill a giant with such an advantage of surprise. He crouched to spring.

"Señor," whispered the voice of the priestess, as once before.

"Oh, the deuce!" Sturgis exclaimed. "It is you again! You will yet make me take your life."

She started violently at the answer so close at hand.

"You don't know how near I was to killing you," Sturgis added with a nervous laugh. "For heaven's sake let us get out of here!"

"Oh, but you nearly killed me with fright," she told him. "And I have run so to find you. Come away, come away. I went to the room, where your friend told me you had gone, and then little Vera and then the old man—and he made me fear the most. But we must be in haste."

"We're mighty glad to hurry," the leader assured her. "But I have got my companion——"

"Yes, yes, I am glad."

"But where will you take us now?"

"Back to the others. We must all be together and make our plan quickly."

They left the passage for another, the woman unlocking a door by means of secret knobs.

"You know about the map—the child—little Vera, by now?" queried Sturgis.

"The map—little Vera?" echoed the priestess. "What riddle is it that you speak?"

"Why, the map—the other half, the one which shows us the way to escape. It is tattooed, you know, on Vera's breast."

"Fool! I have been a fool!" replied the woman, who had halted a second. "I have no wits—not to have known! I was an old woman, blind with weeping to see her so butchered; they hide their secrets well. But I should have known—I am a fool! Now I know—ha—ha, I know every inch of the way—every dot of color in that precious flesh. Say no more; we are here."

They had reached the room in which Sandy and Pablo were pacing up and down in restless anxiety. She opened the door as she had the other. The three passed in. A hurried word of explanation and all were soon starting for the apartments of Henry Remly.

The child had already made herself ready to leave and was with her father when the others arrived.

"Make no noise," Sturgis instructed them; then kissing his little cousin, who ran to him quickly, he turned to the woman.

"Now that you've got us together," said he, "what is the plan? Have you the pistols and the belts?"

"They are below," she replied. "They were too much to carry through these places. But I have brought more than these. The celebration outside is now at its height, for many have put on the masks, and all is madness. I have brought you masks and robes, five in all——"

"Five—why, but we need another," said Sturgis, who comprehended the situation instantly. "Vera, she is to go along and they would know her so quickly——"

"Wait, let me think," the priestess interrupted.

"I have it," Sturgis cried. "Dennis, you said the emperor in his car of state is dead—a corpse——"

"Oi did thot——"

"Hold up, I'll tell her in Spanish." He delivered the information to Kreela and saw her start.

"This is the work of that fiend Sup Gow!" she cried. "He is the enemy we have to fight and avoid."

"Yes, but that's all right—don't you see? We must steal that car of state, or whatever you call it—steal it, and put little Vera inside. Then we four, in your disguises, will carry it off, and you will show the way and Vera's father will personate that fellow behind. If you can fix it they will never molest us—we shall win. Can't you poison those rascals—get them out of the way and let us take their places?"

The woman's eyes were gleaming with pleasure at the thought.

"I can make them sleep," she answered. "But if that is the plan we must go another way. Come, first let us have the masks, and then I can go alone and do the work in the wink of an eye—if the emperor's throne has at last come away from the feast."

She led the way through winding halls to a room below. Here the masks and robes were heaped on the floor, on top of the weapons, the former great ugly things, large enough to cover the head and half the shoulders, and of most grotesque appearance.

Six of the pistols and two of the belts were there. Sandy and Sturgis took two revolvers each and the belts of cartridges; Dennis and Pablo having a pistol apiece. All five of the men were then completely disguised in the masks and costumes, which the little girl regarded with an expression half regretful, half amused.

Kreela had darted away on the other and more important mission.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE FLIGHT.

THE priestess discovered that the emperor's pagoda had not yet returned to the palace, when she reached the place. But it was on the way, deserted by all except the official and the four who bore it, for the merrymakers were too intent on their dancing and orgies of eating to do it the reverence of following after.

Kreela had prepared herself on the way, and now she swiftly crumbled something like dried leaves in her hand. Of these she placed the major part in a bowl of liquor standing on a table, and the remainder in a smaller bowl on a shelf. Then she glided from the room and peered through a crevice in the passage.

No sooner had the bearers placed the pagoda on the floor that they saluted the official and stepped aside, as he did, each to fill a receptacle with liquor, Sup Gow from the bowl on the shelf and the bearers from that on the table. All drank solemnly.

Sup Gow attempted to wave the men away, dismissed for the night. He staggered—and noted that the four were reeling as well. He tried to cry out—his jaws were locked. Then with demon-like quickness he gouged at his wrist and made it bleed, knowing that the flow of blood alone could save him. He toppled forward, even as the others did like men of dough, and all lay along the floor, as good as dead.

A sinister chuckle came from the passage, and then the priestess ran back, along this secret connection with the prison and soon returned with the party.

Sturgis glanced about the room in horror.

"Keep Vera back a moment," he requested. He then dragged the men to a corner and tore down a curtain to hide them from sight.

O'Reidy, who knew the way, went to the rear of the car and hauled out his serene highness, the emperor and left him with the heap in the corner.

Vera was then placed inside the pagoda, the men took up their positions, and the march for life and freedom began, with the priestess in ad-

vance to inform the people that the emperor was indulging this fancy, the better to mingle with his festive people.

The appearance of the maskers bearing the throne was greeted with wild enthusiasm. All of the five understood that they must not dare utter a word.

Through the throng they went, the crowd good naturedly making way, shouting comments and even rubbing shoulders with the four who carried the pagoda. Maskers were now fairly swarming in the place, the gongs were going mad with sound, a very whirlwind of barbarous music and dancing possessed the savage tribe.

Torches by the score had been added to the display of lanterns; gaudier colors had been donned; a hundred maskers, who looked like dazzling dragons and lizards and toads, were streaming great banners in their wake and these were fairly alive with sparkling ornaments sprinkled over their green and red and yellow color.

The scene was an extraordinary one. Voices arose in the wildest singing and shouting; whole masses of people surged about others who were dancing or eating. The moon was nearly set by this time; a pale light was diffusing itself in the eastern sky.

Artfully the priestess halted from time to time, and then the bearers of the pagoda waited, breathless and ready to fight if accident or anything else should betray them to the rage which would be certain and swift to follow if the populace learned the truth concerning the emperor and their captives.

Always the priestess was making her way toward a small temple, standing by itself in a group of palms, in the direction of the cliff to the south.

This temple covered the entrance to a subterranean stairway, by which alone the priestess knew they could escape. Two means were provided for entering this passage, one by a door the locks of which could be opened only by an elaborate process, requiring nearly an hour of time; the other a cave which now was sealed by a boulder, which boulder was a part of the very wall of the building itself.

This latter entrance was the secret one, known only to three or four men of the tribe at a time, and was now made known to the priestess by the tatooed map on the breast of the child—a map which she knew better than she knew the lines in her own hand.

Moving the car to the outside edge of the throng, the four were ready to proceed and were pausing only till the people should give their attention again to the fun.

A mass came surging forward, bearing in their midst the woman who had won and lost O'Reidy. She had partaken of liquid refreshments and now was clamorous for her man, whom she wished to have restored.

The crowd pushed her up to the car to make her demands of the emperor himself. She shouted her wishes in a raucous voice, fairly in O'Reidy's ear, as he stood with his hand on the throne.

"Be off wid ye, bad cess to yer loikes!" sputtered the disgusted Irishman. "Yer face makes me stomick ache entoirely."

The woman shrieked with delight and threw herself upon him. He bowled her off and the crowd applauded lustily.

For a second it seemed to Sturgis as if the jig were up. He laid his hand on the butt of a pistol, prepared to be an extravagant victim before he should die. But the priestess pushed her way among the maskers and savages about the place.

"It is the emperor's wish that this sacred priest of the temple bear him among you," she cried. "He desires that his sacred throne bearers be not molested, and you know that Sup Gow in a mask may not speak. Return then to the feast. This is the wish of the Son of the Sun!"

The crowd yelled its readiness to comply with this. There was nothing unreasonable in the presence of O'Reidy where he was; and no sus-

picion had entered the minds of the people. There was the emperor's throne, and there, they believed, was the emperor himself.

"She wishes to steal my man!" cried the jealous would be wife of Dennis.

A howl of laughter went up at this. But the woman who had almost clutched O'Reidy struggled and fought. She was ill inclined to give him over so readily.

Yet while she was momentarily endangering the feasibility of the escape, and the lives of all concerned as well, an uproar arose at the further end of the mass of the throng, more than a hundred yards away. A tremendous excitement was evidently started, for with one accord men, women and children dashed away, and the jealous creature was carried with them whether she would or no.

"Now," said the priestess, "hurry!"

The car was lifted and was swiftly borne forward. The movement was not a second too soon.

Before the palace, far in the other direction, a man had come crawling to the light, ghastly pale and wild of countenance. It was Sup Gow, the high official. When he gouged his wrist causing the flow of a small stream of blood, he partially overcame the effect of the powerful drug administered by the priestess to make him sleep.

When he woke he found the body of the emperor lying across his legs, and the pagoda spirited away. The one thought that rushed to his brain was to charge O'Reidy with the crime.

He struggled forth from the heap of bodies and crawled on his hands and knees, so weak had the drug made his muscles, and he was now excitedly crying out his announcement.

A part of the furious mob which the revelers now became, were aware that O'Reidy was actually away with the throne at that moment. This intelligence was spread like wildfire. The mob came dashing back across the ground, in hot pursuit of the car, which was moving now as fast as the four could run with such a burden.

A space had been gained by the fleeing whites, but they still had a hundred yards to make before they should reach the temple which guarded the means of escape. Before they had gone half of the distance, scores of men were dashing from the crowd, yelling like devils.

The gong boomed sonorously, as if to rouse the very dead. A hundred fleet footed savages were already brandishing their poisoned clubs as they came on.

"Drop it and run!" cried Sturgis.

The car was on the ground in a second and the leader had Vera in his arms. He placed her on her feet and she ran like a fawn.

But down she fell in the midst of the hubbub. Sandy swooped and gathered her up, outstriping all the others except the priestess even then.

Suddenly Sturgis, who was guarding the rear, stopped and wheeled, revolvers in hand. A club came whistling in the air, hurled an astounding distance. The leader blazed six shots from his guns and three of the oncoming demons threw up their hands and reeled to the earth. He then darted forward to catch his running friends.

His shots had deterred the rush of savages for a moment, but now they shrieked the louder for vengeance and dashed more furiously ahead. The five men threw off their heavy masks as they ran. All of the pistols were drawn and ready.

The priestess began to lag behind. Pablo threw his arm about her waist and fairly lifted her onward. Three of the poisoned clubs came hurtling by and fell to the earth.

Desperately the whites raced for the temple. The savages were gaining. Again the leader stopped and delivered a rain of lead. Four were downed and again their astounded comrades halted in fear and dread.

Sturgis saw that his uncle was all but winded and ready to drop. He called to

O'Reidy, and Dennis, comprehending, helped the elder man with a sturdy lift.

But the mob was almost upon them. An uproar of voices made the air alive with menace; the first gong was being seconded by another; their reverberating tones seemed to shake the air.

Sturgis snatched the pistols from Dennis and Pablo to fire again. A shower of deadly clubs fell only a yard or two short of his feet.

The temple was gained. Frantically the priestess dashed to the wall ahead of the others, breaking from Pablo's hold. Sandy was beside her instantly.

"Here—push in the rock!" she cried.

He failed to understand her words, but her meaning was clear. His shoulder went against the stone of the building and something gave way. He threw himself upon it again—a crack appeared in the solid looking wall. Once more and yet again he assaulted it with all his giant force. Pablo was with him now. The yelling horde closed rapidly in on them.

Suddenly the whole lower portion of the building yielded to the pressure. Sandy and Pablo toppled forward into a cave. The former was instantly out again and had little Vera in his arms to retreat with at once. Remly was almost tossed into the place by the leader and Dennis dived from sight headlong.

All but Sturgis and the priestess were in and nearly safe—at least for the moment. The screaming mass of savages swept up to the building. A club came whizzing viciously, aimed at the leader with fatal accuracy.

The priestess leaped in front. The missile struck her fairly in the breast, but only a few of its thorns pierced her flesh. She stopped for a second to scratch herself with a piece of bone in her hand, pushed Sturgis into the cave and then threw a dozen fallen clubs in after her as she backed away from the onslaught.

Sturgis with a groan of dismay lifted her to the shelter. With a superhuman strength, born of the terrible crisis, he thrust his shoulder to the boulder which had been rolled in to form the opening and heaved it nearly back to place.

"To the right!" screamed the voice of Kreela.

The scratch she had given her arm counteracted the poison for a time, and she had the energy to dash ahead and discover a second boulder, by the light which ere this the miner had struck to light his candle.

This rock was rolled more easily than the first had been. But the furious mob without was at the first of the boulders, hesitating a moment in unbelief that a wall could so open and close before their eyes, and then they came rushing in. Up went their cries of dismay, for many, pushed by those behind, fell headlong and struck on the nest of clubs which the priestess had drawn together. Thus a mass of prostrate beings, writhing in the throes of death, piled up in the path of the pursuing natives.

The child and her father, with the others of the group, pushed quickly into the passage on the right. Sandy and Sturgis almost tossed the boulder into place and the party found themselves at the head of a stairway, cut in the solid rock, leading downward to a black, mysterious abyss.

"What can I do?" cried Sturgis to Kreela. "You were struck. Isn't there anything I can do?"

"It was not very deep," replied the woman calmly. "And I have stayed its terrors—for a time. Let us hurry."

"How do we know the way?" asked the man, anxious on every point at once.

"I studied the map all the days I was weeping to see it on my little Vera," she replied. "I know it all by heart."

With the heaving back to place of the second boulder, every hostile sound had ceased—shut off. The advantage of a great delay had been gained.

The mob knew nothing of the pas-

sage to the right; they plunged madly away in the one to the left, throwing their deadly clubs ahead in the darkness, only to stumble on them later in their senseless rush.

Pursuit was actually impossible till some one having knowledge of the secret passages and authority over the people should come to open the way and direct the advance, and that such pursuit would be started soon was morally certain.

(To be continued.)

A JUST REWARD.

BY HENRY MILFORD STEELE.

The story of Ezra Bartow and his ambition. What grim persistency accomplished and a rise to power that recked not of the cost in a stifled conscience. The strange Nemesis that finally collected the bill.

A FEW acres of thin and stony soil, which had been coaxed and encouraged until it had been made to produce far more than nature ever meant it should; a small, old fashioned, weather beaten house; an unpainted barn which time and many storms had stained a dull gray; several small out buildings which had well advanced toward the final stage of decay and ruin; the whole place bearing unmistakable marks of the hand to hand struggle with poverty so common to the small farmers of New England.

This was the boyhood home of Ezra Bartow. And a very dreary home it seemed to him now, as he stood, his chin upon his hands, and his elbows resting on the topmost rail of the barnyard fence.

Sometimes he looked away and straight at the afternoon sun, which poured a flood of red light through the thin line of trees that fringed the distant hills. All, it seemed to him, on the hither side of these hills was barren and hopeless in its poverty.

Beyond them, he thought, must lie a fair country, a land of well cultivated fields, a land of well ordered homes, and of prosperity and happiness. But it seemed very far.

Ezra was unhappy. Something had happened that day, which, though almost pitifully commonplace, had so wounded his vanity that he had been miserable ever since.

Two of their neighbors had unexpectedly called in just at dinner time, and as their board was never bountifully supplied, he and his brothers were forced to give up a portion of their share. This was bad enough, for he had been hungry; but his mother's flutter of alarm when she saw the visitors coming humiliated him, and there grew up within him a sense of anger and shame at the injustice of fate.

They were so miserably poor! He looked about him. The whole place had such an air of privation that he was discouraged. He had tried, they had all tried, to do a little toward keeping the fences and buildings in some sort of repair; but sixteen hours of grinding toil every day had left no time or strength for anything except the most imperative demands.

And the gates would get off their hinges, and the sheds and stables held up their torn and broken sides in an appeal for help, for the most part unheeded.

He stood leaning on the fence a long time, turning these things over in his mind, but at last he stooped and took up the two great pails of milk which he had set out to carry to the house, and said, half aloud, with the air of one who has reached a conclusion:

"Neither enough to eat nor enough to wear means that there are too many of us here, and I am going to get out."

And there really seemed to be ground enough for his complaint. He was the youngest of a family of six boys, all bred up to work with their hands.

But he had been to school more than the others, and had learned enough, in the few months each winter when he was permitted to go, to make him unhappy and out of harmony with his hard life at home. The little farm, by their utmost exertions, scarcely produced enough for their bare necessities; and while these increased as the boys grew older, the capacity of the farm had long ago reached its limit.

Ezra had always hated farming. He was ambitious, and eager to be away. He felt sure that if he only had a chance he could achieve almost anything; but shut up here on this starved little place, where it was a steady fight to win from the ground enough to eat, what could he do?

"As for them," he said now, and he jerked his head in the direction of the kitchen yard, where, at the pump, two of his brothers, sleeves rolled up and throats bare, with much puffing and blowing and splashing of water, were washing their faces, "as for them, they'd be better off. One less in the family makes just so much more for the rest."

And he kicked spitefully at a stone that lay in his path, for the recollection of his mother's mortification annoyed him, though his feeling was not one of sympathy for her so much as humiliation that such anxiety had been necessary.

Ezra was determined to leave home, and on a night when they had all gathered in the kitchen to lay out their work for the morrow, as was often their custom, he startled them all by declaring his wish to quit the farm.

What he wanted, he said, was to find some sort of employment in Mapleville, the chief town of the county, where he might earn enough during the day to enable him to go to school at night. His uncle, who lived there, would perhaps be able to get him a clerkship in the bank where he was himself employed, and that much done, he could take care of the rest.

One thing was certain; he detested farming, and if the worst should happen to him, his circumstances were not likely to be more uncomfortable than they were now, and the chances were that they would be a good deal better.

There was great excitement in the family. Ezra did not usually take much part in their councils, as he was of a silent turn; but now, and for the first time in his life, he was eloquent, and his brothers, hands deep in pockets, stood about and stared at him.

"Looks as if he'd ben savin' up all his life for this, don't it?" whispered one brother to another, who replied with a grin and a nod.

"Better let him go, dad," said Joseph, the eldest son, a great, hulking, bearded giant, who had the strength of an ox, together with the disposition of a child. "Better let him go; he'll get on. No use a worrying about *him!* I never seen such a cute little cuss at a trade in all my born days. Why, the way he did do Sam Brown's boy out o' that there red steer beats *me*." And throwing back his head, Joe burst into such a roar of laughter at the recollection of Ezra's "smartness," that the house almost shook. In this he was heartily joined by the others, who looked upon big Joe as a leader, and unhesitatingly indorsed everything that he approved.

After a talk that kept the family out of bed for hours past their usual time, it was settled that Ezra might have his way.

He was eager to start, and as his preparations were very simple, in a few days he was ready. Mapleville was thirty miles distant, and by starting early, he could easily walk there in a day.

On the morning of his going the

family assembled at the gate to see him off. As he rounded the turn in the road, a few hundred yards away, and disappeared from their view, they gave him a parting cheer. But he did not stop. All the world was before him, and he felt nothing but a delicious sense of freedom at leaving the place where life had been one ceaseless round of work which gave but slight returns.

Hereafter work would be a pleasure. He felt his heart beat quickly as he thought of the future and what might be in store for him.

It was almost night when he reached the first straggling houses in the outskirts of Mapleville. As he crossed the little bridge and entered the village, and began to feel for the first time something of the rush of life in a busy town, the remembrance of his home, the years of incessant toil as far back as he could remember, seemed to drop from him like a load, and he felt himself full of hope.

He easily found his way, aided by a few inquiries, to his uncle's home, where, when the first surprise was over, and the first questions asked and answered, he was made welcome.

His uncle, Mr. Alexander Wright, his mother's brother, was a quiet and rather shabby little old man, who had been for a long time a bookkeeper in the Mapleville bank, and it was through his influence that Ezra hoped to obtain some sort of employment. He told of his hopes as he ate his supper, and at the conclusion asked eagerly:

"Now, can you help me?"

"We shall see, we shall see," said his uncle, briskly rubbing his hands, and walking quickly around the room. "Do you write a good hand? Are you quick at figures? Let me see;" and he brought paper and pen that Ezra might show his skill.

His uncle was pleased at the result.

"You will do capitally," he chuckled. "It is very fortunate, very fortunate indeed. Young Sampson has resigned his position as messenger in the bank—gone, in fact, to become a driver of a baker's cart—and it is probable—I think I may say *very* probable—that I can secure for you the position thus made vacant. For," he concluded with a little touch of consciousness, "I feel sure that my recommendation will have some weight with Mr. White, our president."

And he put his hands beneath his coat tails, and, raising himself upon his toes, contemplated, with every appearance of satisfaction, his image reflected in a mirror that hung on the opposite wall.

Ezra was a little awed. He felt that his uncle must be a very great man to be so near the president, and he wondered that he did not seem more prosperous.

The next morning, full of importance at the unusual thing he was about to do, Mr. Wright led Ezra to the bank, and there presented him to the president. Mr. White was pleased with Ezra's appearance, and, after a little questioning, said that he might come to work.

In the course of a few days Ezra was duly installed as a messenger in the bank, and he felt that his career had fairly begun.

His duties were simple, but he was quick and attentive, and was from time to time promoted. He lived with his uncle, but, as before, kept pretty much by himself, and spent much of his spare time in honest study. Thus passed five years.

At the end of that time he had, by taking advantage of every opportunity, even at the expense of others, worked his way up to the position of teller. But here he seemed destined to stop.

The post of cashier was held by a Mr. Parker, who had been with the bank since he was a boy, and had not reached middle life. This annoyed Ezra. To feel that he must pass perhaps years before he could expect further advancement, was not at all to his liking.

His uncle had watched his progress during these past few years, at first with

pride, and then with astonishment, and latterly, as Ezra had been put so far above himself, with a touch of envy. And it was with a little suggestion of malice in his tone that he said to Ezra one night:

"You have been extremely fortunate, Ezra, and wonderfully favored. I suppose you are perfectly satisfied now? At any rate," he added, after a moment, "you might as well be, for you'll never pass Parker."

"Perhaps not," said Ezra a little crossly, as he went out; "but it won't be my fault if I don't."

"I am afraid Ezra is too ambitious," remarked his aunt, looking up at her husband after her nephew had left the room.

"Ambitious?" the little man repeated, as he arose from his chair and walked quickly about the room. "Ambitious? I tell you, my dear, Ezra is sordid!"

And stopping directly in front of her, Mr. Wright shook a stubby forefinger at his wife to emphasize his remarks, and went on: "He has energy and ability, and has been wonderfully successful; but he is also mercenary, and—I am ashamed to say it of my own sister's son—but I am afraid he is not overscrupulous."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the other, "you don't mean to say Ezra would do anything wrong, do you?"

"I should hope not, I should most certainly hope not," replied Mr. Wright, as he resumed his walk; "but Ezra's greed for money is abnormal, and it distresses me greatly, for I have been proud of him. Why, only yesterday Mr. White said he felt like thanking me every day for bringing into the bank such a competent and industrious person."

And the simple little man glowed all over with satisfaction at the thought of the president's words.

Meanwhile Ezra up stairs was trying to read, but was thinking all the while of his uncle's remark. Parker *was* an obstacle, and a serious one, and Ezra wondered how he might climb past him.

Parker was a large, florid man, with smooth round cheeks and curly hair. He was exceedingly fond of dining, and was very careless in his business methods; but he was honest as the day, and in Mapleville people were not so strict in their ways of doing business as they might have been. Ezra once said to him a little impatiently:

"What a fellow you are, Parker, for leaving things around. I don't see how you can ever tell where you stand."

Parker laughed good naturedly.

"I sometimes wonder myself," he said, glancing at his books, which were strewn about in utter confusion, "but everything seems to come out straight at the end of the month."

Parker's habit of leaving his books around where any one in the office might easily examine them, first suggested to Ezra how easy it would be to fix those books so they wouldn't come out straight at the end of the month. He laughed at himself for entertaining such a possibility, but even as he did so he found himself scrawling a pretty fair imitation of Parker's signature upon a scrap of paper. Then he realized what he was doing, and angrily tossed the paper into the fire.

But as he sat in his room that night, when his uncle had spoken of his having reached a stopping place, he felt his mind, in spite of himself, ever turning to Parker's handwriting—it was so easy to imitate! and his careless methods—how simple it would be to trip him! He tried to reason himself into a belief that this would not be a crime, but he was obliged to confess that he could find no other name for it.

Forgery was not a pleasant thing to contemplate, so Ezra went out for a walk. But that night, and for many nights, he dreamed of Parker.

So the devil kept at him, and one day when he had stayed after banking hours to help Parker, as he sometimes did,

and Parker had stepped out for a few moments to see some one, the temptation became too strong for him.

He transferred to his pockets a few thousand dollars in cash and negotiable paper, and made several entries in Parker's books in a hand that would have done credit to a more experienced forger. When Parker came in from his short absence, Ezra was bending over his work very much absorbed, and Parker never noticed how his hand trembled and how pale he was.

A few days after this, Ezra stepped to Mr. White's private office and asked to say a few words to the president privately. When the door was closed he said, with the agitated manner of one who has made a discovery:

"Mr. White, some one is robbing the bank!"

"What do you mean?" asked the president in astonishment.

"I mean," said Ezra slowly, as he felt his heart sink with shame at every word, "I mean that some one has taken some money, and I have reason to believe it's the cashier."

"What, Parker? Why, what's come over you?" exclaimed Mr. White angrily. "Why, I'd as soon suspect my own son."

At this Ezra felt obliged to state in detail the reasons for his suspicions, which he did.

At the conclusion Mr. White looked very grave, and said: "If what you suspect proves true, I shall be very unhappy, for I have always had a very high respect for Mr. Parker. In any event, Mr. Bartow, your fidelity to our interests shall not be forgotten."

Ezra turned crimson as he stammered out a few words and made his way back to his desk.

Parker was in an unusually happy mood that day, and went about whistling softly to himself. Once as he passed Ezra he slapped him on the back and said heartily: "Brace up, old man! What makes you so glum today?"

Ezra muttered something about having a headache, and buried himself deeper than ever in his work.

A quiet investigation followed Ezra's interview with the president, and one day Parker was arrested and taken to jail, to his great surprise. He was not much alarmed, however, for his consciousness of innocence kept him cheerful.

Ezra did not visit him, but when the trial came off he appeared in the witness chair and told such a plausible story of his discovery of Parker's guilt that poor Parker was completely dumfounded, and when confronted with the false entries in his books he could not swear they were not his own.

He was convicted and sent to prison, where in the course of a year or two he died. But Ezra was made cashier, and the money Parker was supposed to have taken was charged to profit and loss.

Twenty five years of hard work, and a determination that never faltered to achieve all, at whatever cost, had its natural effect, and Bartow was rich.

Six years back, on the morning of one of the regular meeting days of the directors, Mr. White had asked to see Ezra in his private office.

"I am getting to be an old man, Bartow," said Mr. White.

"Oh, you mustn't say that for a good many years yet," answered Bartow, vaguely wondering what was coming.

"Yes, I am growing old," continued Mr. White. "When you came here as a boy I was quite a young man. I have watched your development from year to year, particularly since that Parker incident" (here Ezra bowed) "with increasing interest and approval. You have shown yourself thoroughly competent in every way. As I have said, I am growing old, and I feel it time for me to retire from active life. I shall resign the presidency of the bank today, with a strong recommendation that you be chosen as my successor."

Ezra was for a moment dizzy. President of a bank at forty two! That was

something worth struggling for. He felt that there were at least twenty years of active life before him.

He was sorry that Mr. White had referred to that Parker affair. His triumph would have been complete but for that—it was the one discordant note. Still, "the end, you know," he muttered to himself. And he felt that he ought to be satisfied.

Here was the highest position in the bank, and probably the most important one in the town. It carried with it social honors he could not otherwise hope for, and it gave him a standing among business men which nothing else would.

But he showed none of this feeling to Mr. White. Instead, he said, almost meekly: "You do me too much honor, Mr. White. I hope we shall have you at our head for a long time yet."

"No, no," returned the other pleasantly. "You are none too young, while I am undoubtedly too old; therefore, if the directors agree with me, and I have every reason to suppose they will, I hope to see you installed in my place in less than a month."

Ezra thanked Mr. White with more feeling than he usually displayed, and soon after withdrew.

The directors agreed, and in due time Bartow was called upon to fill Mr. White's chair. In the six years following all had gone well with him.

He was considered one of the leading citizens of Mapleville, and had represented his district two winters in the Legislature of the State. He had never married.

"I never was much of a ladies' man," he used to say when in good humor; "my talents never seemed to lie in that direction."

And so he continued to live in his uncle's house, though that worthy man had been dead these ten years. He died as he had lived, believing the Mapleville bank the most important institution in the State, and himself not by any means the least important person in that bank.

His widow, now a very old woman, was supported in comfort by Ezra. Her husband had left enough for that. It was a touching sight to see these two walking to the cemetery every Sunday, she leaning on the arm of her stalwart nephew. It made Ezra popular, too, and he was not unaware of that.

He sat in his private office one summer afternoon and listened to the sound of hammers, which came to him from across the street, where men were at work upon the new and handsome building to be occupied by the bank, which, under his able hand, had outgrown its present quarters. If any unpleasant thought of his crime of years ago, which had given such an upward push, crossed his mind, it did not show itself in his face.

On the contrary, he seemed particularly contented, and called cheerfully to his office boy that he was going across the street to see how the men were getting on.

As he stood watching the carpenters, he was presently joined by the architect, under whose direction the work was being done. After some general conversation, Mr. Bartow asked:

"While I think of it, Ellison, what sort of an ornament do you propose to put over the front entrance? I see that you have left a place there for something."

"I have a design which I finished only a few minutes ago," replied Ellison, "and if you'll step around to my office I'll show it to you."

His office was but a few doors away, on a side street, and presently Ezra was critically inspecting a design which Ellison gave him.

After pronouncing it to be satisfactory, he picked up a portfolio containing some studies and sketches, which he examined with great interest. Finally he said, looking up:

"These are very interesting. I have stuck so closely to business all my life that I've had no time to devote to art."

"Well," returned Ellison, thought-

fully, "most men would be pretty well satisfied to sacrifice a knowledge of art for the sake of what you have achieved. Your political and business success must be some compensation?"

"Yes," answered the other judicially, and was about to add something more, when one of the sketches which he was idly turning over caught his attention. "What is this?" he asked almost sharply.

"That?" said Ellison, looking over the other's shoulder. "Oh, that's a nightmarish fancy I once had for a medallion. You see it's but a sketch, and only fit for the waste basket."

Bartow did not seem to hear him, so intently was he studying the drawing. Then he said:

"I like this; it has a curious attraction for me, and suggests something or somebody, but I'm blest if I know what or who." Then turning half around in his chair, he asked: "Why can't we use this over the door of the bank?"

Ellison only laughed. "Of course you're joking," he said. "I couldn't imagine anything more absurdly inappropriate."

"I'm not joking," protested Bartow, a little warmly, and he turned to the window to get a better light on the picture.

It was a rough, bold sketch of a human head, a grotesque face, with great, protruding eyes, and a slightly opened mouth, which in its expression was half sinister, half idiotic, and wholly sensual. It had been sketched in a few hurried strokes, but had a boldness and freedom about it that made it striking.

Ellison was a little annoyed.

"My dear sir," he began again, "don't you see that such a thing never would do? It is entirely out of keeping with the rest of the ornamentation, and people would think me insane to use it."

But Ezra was firm. He wanted it, and he usually got what he wanted. Ellison had to submit, but he did it protesting loudly.

The design was finished, and in due course of time was reproduced in stone over the door of the new bank. Just before its completion Ezra was called away by some matter of business, and upon his return, a week or two later, he hurried directly to the bank, where he had the satisfaction of seeing the completed ornament in place, and the surrounding scaffolding removed.

As his eyes fell upon the face he again experienced the feeling he had remarked when he first saw the drawing in the architect's office—a sensation of having seen a similar face—but the suggestion was a very faint one, and he could not recall among all the people he had known any one who had looked like this. It troubled him, and as he passed under the ornament on his way into the building he felt an odd little shiver which both perplexed and annoyed him.

But work inside was progressing so finely that he forgot this feeling, and it was not until he had crossed the street again and turned to look at the building from that point, that the medallion again forced itself upon his attention. Now he could see nothing else, and he stood staring so long that people passing turned and looked at him.

He suddenly discovered that one of the eyes in the cutting had received a slight twist which completely changed the character of the face, so that now it seemed to leer at him in a way that was startlingly lifelike. After he had left the place and was deep in the mass of business which had accumulated during his absence, that evil look kept recurring to his mind.

All through the fall and winter, and even in the spring, when the bank took possession of its new building, that face haunted Bartow. He could not explain his feeling or the influence the thing had over him.

He studied it from every conceivable point of view, and in every possible light, and then he grew angry at himself because he gave it so much attention. He plunged deeply into business,

and tried to forget this thing, which had grown to be such a strange and irksome burden; but he found himself ever thinking of it and wondering where he had seen that face before.

Often at night he would find sleep impossible, and after a hard though losing fight to overcome a feeling that if he could see the mysterious face *then*, he would be able to grasp the resemblance that so perplexed and irritated him, he would, inwardly protesting and berating his weakness, dress himself and go down to the bank.

He would stand on the opposite side of the street, where, sheltered from observation in a doorway, he would study for hours that hateful visage by the flickering yellow light of the street lamp. If he could only read its inscrutable meaning, he felt that the thing would cease to trouble him; its strange influence over him would be gone, and he could once more rest.

In the full light of the blazing sun those half shut eyes would look at him almost sleepily, though they lost nothing of their malevolence; but in the moonlight the face was horrible. The cold light shining through the branches of the trees, as they slowly waved in the night wind, made strange lights and shadows across the face.

The expression at such times would change with startling rapidity, now smiling hideously, and the next instant a savage frown would set Ezra to shuddering as he crouched in the doorway opposite. When utterly exhausted he would drag himself back to his house, but it was only to pass the remainder of the night in distressing dreams about his enemy.

Mornings he would pull himself together, and resolutely determine that no thought of this thing should interfere with him again. But this was always in vain.

The face would come between his eyes and paper when he tried to write, and its dreadful presence completely mastered him. Questions of business that had once been simple now seemed insurmountable difficulties which he shrank to encounter.

When the bank moved into the new building he positively dreaded to go near it, and would often shut his eyes and drop his head to avoid the face as he hurried up the steps and into the building. Its resemblance to some one he had known haunted him continually, and he never passed it without struggling to recall, one after another, all the faces he had ever met.

But the likeness was elusive, and he grew more and more ashamed of his weakness. He would not have the medallion removed, for that would be a confession of defeat, and he was not yet ready for that.

He was not an imaginative man, but this thing told on him. People began to remark on his worn looks, and soon rumors were about that the bank officials had spent more on their new building than their business justified. This may not have been true, but it affected the business of the bank.

A new bank had been started in the other and newer end of the town, and prospered wonderfully. Bartow struggled on as manfully as he could, but much of his old force was gone, and when the bank, by a succession of disasters, lost a very large sum of money which had been invested in Western real estate, he felt himself physically incapable of meeting the situation.

His friends urged him to go away and rest, but he was obstinate in his determination to conquer himself. Once in the bank in the morning, he would not leave his desk all day, and often stayed at night till hunger drove him out, when he would hurry away as fast as he could; but that dreadful eye seemed always to follow and jeer at him.

Sometimes, when all the others were gone, he would drop asleep at his desk, and, waking late at night, would hastily put out his light and creep shivering away, for the influence of his old enemy

seemed stronger than ever at such times, and, as he passed out at the door, he would draw himself together as if he feared a blow.

One night, after an especially trying day, he had lighted his lamp and taken from the safe a bundle of old papers, and seating himself at his desk, began to look among them for a missing document.

Almost the first thing that come to light as he turned the papers over was a letter from his mother, written when he had been at the bank but a few years, and telling him of a dreadful illness which his father had. The letter closed with a pitiful appeal for money; they were poorer than ever, she said. He had never replied to this letter.

And now, as he sat, and the remembrance of many past actions trooped up before him, for the first time in his life he began to doubt if he had always acted wisely, and if, after all, his hard and selfish policy had been worth while.

"I have at least been consistent," he said, half sadly.

But his feeling of doubt did not last long. He resolutely shook it off, and applied himself more diligently to his papers.

He was very tired. Presently his arm relaxed, his head fell forward on his breast, and he was asleep. He stirred uneasily, and moaned as though in pain. His sleep was troubled, and he tossed his arms wildly, as if he were beating off a foe.

Once or twice his hand passed dangerously near the lamp, and at last he struck and upset it. The burning oil ran slowly along his desk, among the papers, and down along the floor. Soon the whole place was in flames.

The dancing light shining through the windows quickly gave notice to the passers by that the place was on fire, and an alarm was sounded.

Bartow was rescued, but it was a hard struggle. Never had a new building seemed to burn so quickly. When the firemen rushed into the room where Ezra was they found him sitting in his chair and staring about him helplessly.

He was already badly burned, but he seemed too frightened to cry out or move. As they carried him down the steps he turned his face toward the building which had been his pride for a last look at it. Frightened and suffering as he was, he seemed to know that the place was doomed.

The men had lost no time in dragging him out, but the fire had spread with a rapidity that was truly wonderful, and smoke and flames were pouring from very window in the front of the building. As Ezra raised his head his eyes fell on the medallion, which seemed, in the lurid glare of the flames all about it, to be starting from its place; and then, and for the first time, the evil influence of that face which had been haunting him for months, was made plain.

It was a hideous, ghastly caricature of the face of the man he had ruined twenty five years before—the face of James Parker!

Bartow was like one stunned as they carried him to his house. His painful, blistering burns were all forgotten. But one thing was clear to him, and he continually groaned to himself: "A righteous judgment, a righteous judgment."

All Mapleville turned out to see the burning of the bank. There was no end of speculation as to the cause of the fire, and some person, more thoughtless than wise, suggested that probably Bartow had started it himself.

Then it was remembered how badly he had appeared of late; how little business the bank had done, and especially how he had been seen so frequently about the place at night. The bank's heavy losses had already caused considerable comment, and it did not take long for the townspeople to have the thing all settled to their satisfaction.

No one was surprised, therefore, to hear that at the next session of the grand jury Bartow was indicted for

arson. He was very feeble, and seemed utterly broken. Although he pleaded not guilty, he was of very little service to his lawyer, for he seemed to have no idea of what was going on, and, on the whole, his defense was very weak.

All through the trial Ezra sat motionless, never raising his eyes; and when it was all over, and he had been found guilty, and after a lapse of a few days had been brought into court and told to stand up to receive his sentence, he was so feeble that he had to be assisted to his feet.

But when the judge asked him if he had anything to say why sentence should not be passed upon him, he clutched the railing in front of him, and straightening himself he said, with a touch of his old stern manner:

"It was a righteous judgment, sir, and a just reward."

A SOLDIER AND A GENTLEMAN.*

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS.

A tale of stirring adventure in many lands and in which men of four nations play prominent parts. The duel in rowboats on the ocean and what interference on behalf of fair play brought upon the American. More than one case of "out of the frying pan into the fire."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BATTLE WITH THE SHEIKS.

I HAD witnessed battles in other parts of Africa, and had even taken part in them with Rockstave at my side, as now. But I never saw anything so suddenly furious as that battle with the Arabs and Moors.

Rockstave showed how well he had studied the situation, and our friend Bergelot proved the stuff he was made of. A portion of the force under him at once attacked the few Moslems inside the fort, and they were killed.

Our own men, the disguised fellows who had arrived with Rockstave in the camel corps, blazed away into the camp across the river with their repeating rifles. The extra ones were given to French soldiers, who used them to advantage. Carlos and I each had one, and we took our places behind two gunners at the cannon embrasures, and poured our compliments into the enemy.

Bergelot had named enough men of the French regiment to man the guns, and Rockstave had studied the ammunition while planning the improvements to the forts. All the guns on the river side started to roar at once and the tents of the caliph's men began to drop. The fanatics were taken so by surprise that they seemed at first at a loss to know who had opened the attack on them.

But they were far from being cowards, and soon the caliph, rushing here and there, managed to get them into something like battle order. Of course they were at a disadvantage, being dismounted. These fellows always fight better on their horses. But alas! both for them and for us, I thought, at the beginning of the fight the horses and camels had stampeded down the valley.

The air was filled with the smoke of battle, the shouts and yells of our French and English voices, flying rifle balls and six pound shot.

On the other side of the river there was a terrible uproar. Thousands of voices were howling curses at us in choice Arabic. The long muskets and obsolete rifles of the nomads barked and spit and sent their bullets in harmless thousands against our redoubt.

Oh, it was a merry fight! Shrieks of

* *This story began in the February issue of* THE ARGOSY. *The seven back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 70 cents.*

rage and hate from the caliph's followers, were answered by jeers and cheers from the fort.

For half a mile up and down the river there was slaughter. The water was turned red with blood. And yet the Moslems fought. Sheiks ran with flying burnouses this way and that and flourished their guns as they called on their men to take the redoubt.

Marabouts walked about with uplifted hands praying to Allah for success in the terrific struggle. And all the time the fire from the fort was incessant, and Rockstave stood calm and serene, the general who organizes victory, and who meets difficulties with invincible will.

All disguises were thrown aside, but the faces of my own men were so stained that I did not recognize them. And the smoke presently became so thick that we all looked alike.

In the center of the fort stood Mlle. Victorine, calm, as became a soldier's daughter, with her eyes fixed on Bergelet, while he gave his orders to his French gunners, or took a shot on his own hook at a shrieking Moor.

Even in that terrific turmoil, her faith in Bergelot did not falter. So long as he was alive and helping to direct things, she was confident.

The fight lasted two hours. At the end of that time we had lost six Frenchmen killed, and had several wounded, but we were in good order and spirits. The Arabs had lost upwards of a thousand, their tents were leveled and torn to shreds, and the caliph ordered them to withdraw.

We cheered them from the fort as they left the vicinity of the river. We watched them with interest, and did not cease firing till they were out of range. They had not gone for good. We saw them gather in groups.

"The sheiks are not going to give up," said Rockstave. "They will besiege the fort."

"Then we are in hard luck," returned Bergelot. "We have little food."

"We have enough food for a week," said Rockstave. "In every one of our tents there is canned stuff and coffee."

A yell of joy burst from the courageous Frenchman.

"Hang me if I ever saw a man like you!" he said. "You think of everything."

Our attention was now directed to caring for the wounded, burying the dead, and relieving ourselves of the blood and smoke of the fight. In less than half an hour after the caliph took his men out of range, we were sitting in the shelter of our fort, enjoying a good supper.

Not a man in the camp had tasted food since noon. The fight had been on empty stomachs. The coffee and canned meats brought by Rockstave seemed like a sumptuous repast to men who were hungry and victorious, and full of eagerness to continue the battle.

"Well, general," remarked Bergelot, "what do you advise? What do you think of the situation?"

"The situation is just what I expected," replied Rockstave, to whom Bergelot had given the title of "general." "I did not expect to kill them all, nor to make it possible to escape at once. The thing is, we are now safely out of their hands. They will not be able to take the fort as long as our ammunition holds out. We will undoubtedly be able to maintain our position here till Colonel Ravary arrives."

"He cannot be long now," said Bergelot. "It is true, as you say, these things are done slowly. In every form of military procedure there is red tape and delay at headquarters. But once let that detachment get away, and Ravary will not let the grass grow under his horse. He is a soldier, that Ravary, and he has a daughter here."

The force was divided into three parts. One, consisting wholly of Frenchmen, and placed under the command of Bergelot, was to guard the camp during a portion of the night while the other two thirds of the weary

men found some refreshment in sleep. Another third was composed of the forty men from the Nomad and also a few Frenchmen, and this division was under myself. Rockstave took the remainder of his camel corps, and had with it a small portion of the French regiment.

Of course there was a tumult of rejoicing that lasted far into the night. I was surrounded by my men and congratulated. I also had to meet each of the adventurous spirits who had volunteered with Rockstave in his seemingly mad scheme.

They were all good fellows, full of the spirit of adventure, and seemed to enjoy the affair merely as a bit of exciting experience. These, of course, were afterward paid for their share in the rescue. We talked for a long time and then sought rest.

Each of us took our turn at doing guard duty, but nothing occurred during the night. On the following day the Arabs made an attack, but they were repulsed after an hour of hard fighting.

This defeat seemed to convince the caliph that with his present force he could not take the redoubt. The French gunners did terrific execution with the six pounders. And when they rammed home a couple of handfuls of musket balls taken from the Arabs, and sent that charge into the advancing foe, men went down like rye before a reaper.

The caliph soon had enough of this, and withdrew once more to a safe distance.

He did not attack the fort again. Another day passed, and we saw no indication of an intention on the part of the sheiks to renew the fight. They had divided into three camps, and had squatted upon three points at various angles from the fort, to prevent us from leaving.

It was evidently an attempt to starve us into submission. This perhaps would have been successful in the end, for we were entirely cut off from all supplies. Our food and ammunition would in time become exhausted. But there was relief on the way.

Bergelot was anxiously scanning the horizon one morning, and startled us all by waving his torn old cap in the air and uttering a wild yell.

"They come!" he cried. "I see the cavalry."

We sprang to places of vantage in order to convince ourselves.

"You are confident," said Rockstave. "I see a crowd coming towards us, but I could not for my life tell what they are."

"That's Ravary," insisted Bergelot. "I know it."

"My father!" said Victorine. "If Dulon says it is my father, it must be."

"Let us hope it is," added Rockstave.

With what eagerness we watched the advancing force! At last in the march across the sands it drew near enough for us to discern the uniforms of the Algerian regiments.

"This will soon be over now," said Rockstave. "We must get ready to help Ravary."

On came the French, and we could see that the Arabs were preparing to meet them.

In two hours they were firing at each other. The French were mounted, and therefore had so much the advantage. But the caliph had by far the larger force.

About a thousand of the Arabs had recovered their mounts, and these gave the first touch of battle to the scene. They rode to meet Ravary, and we were treated to a fine exhibition of horsemanship.

It was evident that the French were pressing the Arabs to the river. But having reached the bank the caliph made a stand and repulsed the French. We heard the Moslem shout of victory, and Rockstave could stand it no longer.

"Get on these guns!" he said. "We'll drag them out and support the cavalry with our artillery."

With a cheer the men seized the ropes with which the Moors had dragged the guns to their positions, and off they went, in anything but military order, to the front. After reaching a point from which the six pounders would be sure to do good service, Rockstave ordered them to plant the battery.

The Frenchmen were used to this kind of warfare, and they had the guns booming in a short time. Bergelot's division of the men remained with the artillery, and Rockstave and I led ours by a detour to attack in another direction. The Arabs were thus pressed on three sides.

They could not concentrate their power on any one of the three forces that assailed them. They stood nobly before the destroying blast for a time, but the caliph fell from his horse dead, and then they retreated in a demoralized condition.

We did not follow them, nor did Ravary. But there was a meeting by the river between Victorine, her father, Bergelot, Rockstave and myself, that was enthusiastic enough to suit even Captain Bergelot's highly excitable nature.

"I thank you, monsieur," said Colonel Ravary, when Bergelot had explained to him what Rockstave had done. "I thank you for arriving in time to save my daughter. I thank you, M. Standish, and you, and you."

He thanked everybody.

The war against the French in Algeria was over, and not a blow had been struck by the Moors who had organized the foolish movement. In fact, the army of the caliph had not set foot on Algerian soil.

We camped near the fort for a day or two, until the scouts sent out by Ravary had returned with horses, and several of the camels. These were found along the river, and were recaptured without much trouble.

Having regained enough of them and a sufficient number of horses to mount each of us, we set off toward Algiers.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A SURPRISE INDEED.

It is not my purpose to dwell on this journey, though it did not lack exciting incident; nor to dwell on the day and night spent in Algiers as the guests of Colonel Ravary. We bade him and Victorine and Bergelot adieu at last, and with my forty men boarded the Nomad and headed for Paris.

"By Jove!" I said, as the yacht glided peacefully past the frowning rock of Gibraltar, "it does not seem possible that all these things have really come to pass. Did I really enter here a prisoner? It seems like a dream."

"But what a glorious dream of liberty now!" exclaimed Duany. "If the past seems hideous to you, señor, what must it be to me? Now if we can find Inez and Señorita Edna."

"That is what we are going to do next, my boy," put in Rockstave.

Carlos had come by this time to look upon Rockstave with a feeling little short of worship. When this hero said he was going to find Inez, there was no doubt that Inez would be found. For myself, I did not feel the same confidence.

Somehow I felt a doubt of the Russian. I could not explain it, but there it was, in my mind, a poorly defined idea that the Russian had—well, had used his opportunities to his own advantage.

We reached Havre without incident, and went direct to Paris. Our carriage placed us at the door of my father's house, and we made our presence known. The servant who let us in became panic stricken when she saw me, and nearly fainted.

"God be praised!" she exclaimed. "God be praised."

"Is my father at home?" I asked.

"Yes! Shall I inform him?"

"No. Let me go in to him unannounced."

Followed by Rockstave and Duany, I walked to the door of the library. I opened it and walked in.

My father, white haired and feeble, sat at his round table reading. He looked up to see who the intruder was. I was struck by the unnatural pallor of his face.

"What!" he exclaimed in a weak and faltering voice. "Is it—can it be—Drake! My son! My son! They told me you were dead."

I stepped to my father and clasped his hand. In his white old age my heart went out to him, though I knew he had been harsh to Edna and to me.

"Father, who told you I was dead?" I asked.

"Why—why—they told me—the count, and the marquis, and Estella. They said—I think—that you died in Cuba—yes, in Cuba, of fever."

"You see now they lied," I answered him. "It was not a mistake, they lied. It is not their fault, however, that I am not dead. I have had more than one narrow escape with my life owing to the murderous plans of your wife and her lover. Do you know this person who has influenced you? Let me tell you why Edna ran away. She overheard a plot between Dona Estella and the count to marry her to the marquis, to kill me, to get you to make a will in Estella's favor, and then she, with four millions of dollars, your fortune and mine, would poison you and marry De Palma. I have been in Cuba, a prisoner of the Spaniards. I have been in the prison colony of Ceuta. I have escaped, thank God! in time to save your life at least."

My father had listened to me with a face that expressed horror and surprise. I went on, resolved to tell him the truth, let it cost what it might. He reeled when I had finished, and I caught him in my arms.

"Rockstave, ring and call for some brandy," I said.

In a short time my father had recovered.

"I understand these things now!" he said. "My God! What a fool I've been! That woman! I'll—ha! I believe every word you say. They told me you were dead. They told me that now your fortune was mine. They sweetened me with honeyed words. My wife became more affectionate than ever she had been before. She feared that I might die suddenly and she would be left penniless. She wished me to make a will in her favor. I was her tool—her slave. I made the will—I signed it today! It is not too late, however, to foil this demon. Your fortune, of course, is safe. But this would give her mine, and not one penny shall she have!"

He stepped to his secretary, and opened a drawer. From it he took a folded paper.

"What a fool I have been!" he said again. "I have allowed that woman to beguile me. I have turned away from my children and found friendship in a nest of rattlesnakes. But this will end that. So!"

He tore the will in pieces. He stood in the middle of the floor, now flushed and strong looking in his terrible wrath. The door opened. We all turned to see who entered. It was Doña Estella and the Count de Palma.

"Out fiends!" cried my father, as they stood white and aghast in the doorway. "Out of my sight, you scheming wretches! See, my loving wife, this is the will I made for you. See! Watch what I do with it! So!"

He lighted a taper and placing the handful of paper on the grate, he burned up the fragments of the will.

"Begone, hateful woman!" he cried to Doña Estella. "I will not have you in my house any longer. Take your Spanish lover and go with him where you will. Here is where I will find my friendships now."

He placed his hand in mine. Without a word, but darting a look of veno-

mous hate at me, De Palma led my stepmother from the room.

"Now," said my father, becoming calm again, "that is settled. You have a long and wonderful story to tell, no doubt. You are full of it, as I can see. But before we do anything, before even I offer you and your friends refreshments, tell me, where is Edna?"

"That, sir, I cannot tell you at present," I said. "Edna, I hope, is alive, but just where, I do not know. She left Matanzas on board the ship Leonora, for Cadiz."

"My God, no!" cried my father. "Not that ship! That ship was blown up and sank with all on board!"

"We have reason to hope, sir," interposed Rockstave, "that Edna and Miss Duany, who was with her, escaped with a certain mysterious Russian, who seemed to be their friend."

"Impossible!" said my father.-"Not a soul on board escaped. Oh, Edna! Edna! Has my blind obedience to that woman's will driven you to your death! My God, have mercy!"

The door opened again. A servant announced a visitor.

"M. le Prince Gozednoroff," he said.

We turned in surprise to see whom this might be. There entered a splendid figure, a man bearing himself with the grace and elegance of a Russian prince.

"I am happy to greet you, gentlemen," he said. "M. Standish, will you have the goodness to present me to your father?"

It was Godtchorkna.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE RUSSIAN'S STORY.

"GODTCHORKNA!" I exclaimed rushing to him and seizing his hand. "You appear just in time to satisfy our terrible anxiety. My father has just asked where my sister Edna is. I have said that we hoped, through your assistance, she was safe. Tell us—our hopes are not false?"

The Russian, with the same imperturbability that had characterized his movements when I first met him, bowed, and proceeded to shake hands with each of the party.

"M. Standish, I am pleased to meet you," he said, greeting my father. "And M. Lord Rockstave, also. I believe we have met before. And M. Duany. Now we know each other. Let us converse freely on the matter that is uppermost in our minds. Perhaps, M. Standish, I would be painting a highly colored picture if I said that the young ladies were safe. I can at least say that they are alive, and when I saw them last they were well."

"Then the story that they were lost with the Leonora was not true."

At this moment the refreshments that my father had ordered were brought in.

"Thank you," said the Russian, taking a glass of wine. "We have some long stories to tell. I will tell mine first."

"Do, for heaven's sake!" I cried, rendered eager and impatient by his delay. "Tell us where you have hidden the girls."

"You have a most eager audience, prince," added Rockstave. "And now, that I know your true name, I recall where I have seen you. You have, sir," turning to my father, "as your guest, one of the highest nobles of Russia."

"I thank you," rejoined the Russian. "I remember you very well, Lord Rockstave. When I met you on board the Nomad, I feared you. The usual feeling of Englishmen against Russians, was an element in my danger that I counted on. I felt much better when you left the yacht. I am rejoiced at this opportunity to renew our friendship, when I have nothing to conceal."

"Hang your explanations!" I said. "You are concealing something now. Come! What have you done with the girls?"

"Permit me to proceed with a slow and uninteresting story," said the Rus-

sian, while Carlos hung on his words with open mouthed eagerness. "You will remember, M. Standish, that you left the yacht in the harbor of Matanzas."

"Yes, yes!" I said. "Never mind all that! Begin if you begin in Matanzas, with the priest called Padre Francisco."

"Ah, yes. Permit me to introduce to you, Padre Francisco, a worthy priest. A priest worthy of every——"

"Enough!" said my father. "Between you, you will drive me wild. Prince, I do not know you, or why you came here. From the words that have been uttered, however, I believe you know where my daughter is at present. She left my home fairly driven away by the blind foolishness and cruelty of myself and my Spanish wife. Now for God's sake if you know where she is say so, and let me go to her."

"I sympathize with the feelings of a father," was Prince Gozednoroff's answer, "and I state at once that the two young ladies, unless something of which I am ignorant has taken place, are at present safe, and comparatively happy on the island of Majorca."

"Thank God!" exclaimed my father fervently.

"Thank God, and this mysterious Russian!" added Carlos in a half whisper. "Truly, I am meeting men such as Cuba does not produce."

"Well," I put in, "having satisfied us so far, now let us hear your story. That Majorca business floored us all."

"It has floored more than you," said the prince. "To explain that part of our adventures, I must tell you a little family history. As you know, the Balearic Islands are called the Islands of Mystery. One of the mysteries of Majorca just now is a woman. She dwells in a small castle near the northern coast. Her name is—never mind what her name is. Her name *was* the Princess Gozednoroff.

"She is my mother. She is a native of Majorca, having had a Spanish mother, and a transplanted Austrian for a father. She married my father when quite young. My father was not a man who loved the proprieties. The Gozednoroffs were never saints. Well, this woman obtained a divorce from my father, and left him, and left also your humble servant, then a small boy. My father married again, and this second wife had a child, my half brother, Alexis.

"My mother took up her abode in an eccentric fashion on the island of Majorca, but not in the town where she had formerly lived. She has built a small castle, as I say, on the northern coast, and has a number of retainers. She lives in almost feudal fashion, being wealthy, and able to supply all her eccentric needs.

"Between my mother and myself a forbidden and therefore stealthy love has been kept warm. I, as the heir to my father's title and estates, was forbidden to have anything to do with her. But I did, nevertheless, and made frequent visits to the peculiar castle, when my father thought I was elsewhere. My father died. I became his heir.

"At once my stepmother began an intrigue against me, even as yours has done. But this was in favor of my half brother. It was her aim to gain my estate and title for Alexis. In the circle much frequented by my stepmother, were the members of the Spanish legation at St. Petersburg. The most influential person here was Don Carlos Arteaga, who had married a French wife. This woman assisted my stepmother.

"A plot was formed to accuse and convict me of an attempt upon the life of the Czar. This plot actually succeeded. Something that looked like an attempt was really made—not by me, but by Alexis. Then, by perjured testimony they convicted me. I was sent to Siberia, and Alexis became my successor.

"You do not care to hear about how

I got away. It is a long and thrilling story of hair breadth escapes, and I will rehearse it some other time. Suffice to say that I did escape. I had learned through a circle of Nihilists that there existed certain letters that proved Alexis to be the person who committed the crime, if crime there was, instead of myself. Those letters were in the possession of the wife of Don Carlos Arteaga.

"I made one attempt to reach her—you saw the result, and saved me from death at the hands of a murderer. From that moment there is nothing to tell till we reach Matanzas. You left the yacht to visit Mlle. Duany. Mlle. Edna returned, with the information that she was not allowed to land. In a short time we heard of your death. The young Spaniard who came aboard the yacht was very talkative. He spoke more than he thought.

"There were others with him to whom he told much of your story. He did not think there was any one on board who understood Spanish. I astounded him when I spoke to him in his own tongue. I assumed to be a prisoner on board. I told him I was a native of Majorca, and had been detained by you against my will. He believed me. I obtained from him by a little skilful guiding, most of your story. He set me on land and I hastily made my resolutions.

"I could do nothing to aid you as a Russian, nor as a native of Majorca. In fact, I could do nothing to aid *you* at all. But I could perhaps aid the young ladies. You had saved my life. That life, M. Standish, was at the service of you, your sister, or your sweetheart.

"I became a priest. How? Why, simply by first pretending to be a sick and wounded soldier, obtaining shelter in a priest's house, and walking out with a full priestly outfit. Of course, I was compelled to leave one obstinate fool dead on the floor, but we expect these things in affairs like ours.

"I became Padre Francisco. I sought the prison where Mlle. Duany was confined. I told her my scheme. She is a bright young lady. She at once fell in with the plan, and we carried it through with amazing success.

"She made no earnest protest when Arteaga told her he had chosen her for his bride. She seemed rather pleased. This gratified Arteaga to that extent that he promised to have her brother's life saved. We know how he did it, by condemning him to an imprisonment worse than death.

"We embarked on the Leonora. I was firm in my refusal to allow the young lady, whose family had for years been my friends, to go to Spain without me. Arteaga consented. Then came the scheme to get your sister off the yacht and on board the Leonora. It was accomplished, as you know. The girls talked together about our plan, and with Arteaga I was bitter against all enemies of Spain.

"We had almost reached Cadiz. I knew that you were on board the Marguerita. Arteaga kept nothing back from me. But one unlucky night I saw that he had discovered, or at least suspected, my identity.

"That expression of opinion sealed Arteaga's doom. I had, in the pack I carried, a quantity of dynamite. This I had obtained while in Matanzas from some workmen engaged in blasting rocks for the fortifications. I now laid a new plan.

"The night we anchored in the harbor of Cadiz was dark. On board the Leonora there had been a densely ignorant sailor, a firm Roman Catholic. He became ill. I visited him. He believed in me. No man ever had an easier salvation than I gave him. He was thenceforth my slave. I used him. Between us we listened and learned.

"An officer was to be sent ashore at night with a message to Don Carlos Arteaga and the marquis, that the hated Russian was on board in the disguise of a priest. It really would favor my project if I let them go. The sailor obeyed

some instructions of mine. He did not know just what he was doing, but he did as I told him. The result was the disposition of my explosives where it would do the most good. Then we managed to get a boat round to the stern of the ship, the sailor being ready to accompany us.

"The two girls came on deck. As a priest I could go among the sailors. They would do my bidding, for they had not been let into the secret. I hated to sacrifice so many. But I had been sacrificed myself in a bad cause. They were to go in a good one. In the darkness we got away. Inside of three minutes an explosion tore a hole in the Leonora and she went down.

"We landed at a small fishing village. There I mailed a letter to Lord Rockstave, and hired a sailing vessel to take me to Majorca. There I left the young ladies in the care of my mother, and charged her to slay ruthlessly any one who came for them unless I accompanied him. She will obey that command—do not fear.

"I next went to Spain. Again disguised beyond recognition I obtained employment in the house of Don Carlos. There was much mourning for the captain. It was well known that he and the hated Russian lost their lives on the Leonora. This was just what I wanted. I waited for an opportunity. Then I struck. You have not heard of the death of Don Carlos and his wife? Ah? I believe it is said they died of heart disease, both the same night.

"Anyhow, that night I left their house and carried with me the precious letters that were to prove my innocence and give me back my estates and castles. Well, they did all that. I sought and obtained an audience with the Czar. He listened, read the letters, and my half brother and stepmother are now enjoying a long journey to Siberia, and I am once more Prince Gozednoroff. That is all my story, gentlemen. The young ladies await you at my mother's castle in Majorca."

As the Russian paused, we sat gazing in silent amazement at this terrible man who slew right and left to gain his ends. Yet that terrible power which he possessed had been used to save the girls we loved. Rockstave and I reached out and took his hands simultaneously. Carlos could scarcely conceal his boyish desire to make a god of the Russian.

"My friend," I said, "you have repaid the slight service I performed for you thrice over. We thank you far more than words can thank. We rejoice that you have succeeded in righting yourself in the eyes of your august ruler. We are ready to go to Majorca. My yacht is at Havre."

"Permit me to suggest that you let her remain there," replied Prince Gozednoroff. "It is a somewhat long voyage round the peninsula when we are in a hurry. My idea is to go by rail to Marseilles, and hire a boat there. I have a reason for this.

"Count de Palma and a Spanish woman, whom I judge now to be your stepmother, passed me as I was about to enter. The count is well aware of my position. He knows that now I am my own master, my father's wish that I have no more to do with my mother does not hold.

"He knows that the two young ladies were on board the Leonora. If I escaped, why not they? It is quite possible that it may occur to the foxy minds of the De Villegas, and De Palma, that the young ladies are to be found at my mother's castle on Majorca. Therefore, all haste is necessary."

"Go, then, by way of Marseilles!" said my father. "Bring them here. I shudder to think what crimes might have been committed with my connivance. Let me kiss my daughter before I die and beg her forgiveness. Let me kiss both my daughters. Go at once."

My father was nearly exhausted by his excitement. We placed him in care

of trusty servants, and I gave orders that Doña Estella was not to be permitted to see him till my return.

We set off for Marseilles with eager hearts. Rockstave said little. But then, Rockstave never had much to say after the danger had passed.

We reached Marseilles. We experienced some difficulty and delay in obtaining a vessel to take us to Majorca. After a day or two the indefatigable Russian found a little steamer that could be hired with her crew.

We all stood on deck as the steamer approached the island. We saw the towers and minarets of the eccentric woman's castle, rising from a forest clad hill near the inner end of a beautiful little bay.

In the bay a yacht rested at anchor.

"Ha!" said the Russian. "An old friend, indeed!"

"The Marguerita, by heaven!" I exclaimed.

"What!" cried Carlos. "Bonilla again? Is our trouble about to begin once more?"

The Russian spoke a few words to the pilot. The steamer ran out of the bay. It rounded a point, where it was soon hidden from those on the Marguerita. It drew near the shore at a wooded spot, and a boat was lowered. We got into it.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE CASTLE ON MAJORCA.

In a few minutes we stood on the soil of Majorca. It was a wild and rugged spot.

We waited until the boat containing the sailors had returned to the steamer.

"Come," said the Russian.

We followed him into a thick coppice. Among a lot of rock formations he paused. There was now no castle in sight. There was no house, no evidence that human beings resided in the vicinity. He found a rock that could be moved. It disclosed an opening.

"Come," he said.

We descended into an underground passage. Soon the flame of a lantern appeared ahead of us. I heard the Russian whispering to some one.

"Señor," said Carlos, grasping my hand, "is the Russian true?"

The same question had occurred to me. I did not dare ask Rockstave what he thought. He was too near the Russian. There was nothing to do but go forward. I knew Rockstave would not turn back no matter what lay ahead.

After a long and tiresome walk we left the passage. We now stood in an open court.

From this we passed into a luxurious hall. There advanced to meet us a woman of marvelous beauty. She was tall and stately. She was apparently not beyond middle age.

"Ah, it is you, prince," she said in French. Her voice was like music.

"It is I, mother," replied the Russian, kissing her hand. "Allow me to present to you the two friends who saved my life from Spanish treachery. M. Standish, and M. Lord Rockstave. This is M. Duany, the brother of the little lady you have with you."

"You came in time," she said. She rang a bell. A footman appeared.

"Bring my guests," said the lady of the castle.

Another moment of suspense, and then entered Edna and Inez, radiant, and looking not at all the worse for their experience.

What a reunion that was! Edna kissed me and then Rockstave. Inez kissed Carlos and then me. Then we all kissed again and again, and asked and answered questions, and forgot the mother of the prince and the prince himself. I turned to thank him again. He was gone.

A short time afterward we heard firing.

It was a regular fusillade.

"Madame! Is your castle attacked?" I asked.

"It is," she replied calmly. "The prince left instructions to prevent the intrusion of strangers unless he should accompany them. Yesterday a yacht anchored in my bay. There came from it some thirty or more men. They have been reconnoitering the castle. My own men are under arms to repel them if they make an attack. Boris, the prince, is now with them."

The lady of the castle seemed in no degree disturbed by the armed descent upon her strongly fortified abode.

In two hours Gozednoroff entered. With him came a screaming and terrified woman.

"Pardon, M. Standish," he said. "I have taken your stepmother prisoner. What shall I do with the lady?"

"Doña Estella!" I cried. "You here!"

"You fiend!" she yelled at me in mad frenzy. "You have defied me and defeated me. My happiness was assured till you returned. Now I have lost my fortune and my love."

"Unfortunately, that is true," said the Russian. "The Marguerita has been for some time lying at Barcelona. As soon as De Palma and his associates learned that you were alive, and that I was well, they seemed to divine by instinct that the young ladies were here. They sought the Marguerita, and with an armed gang of ruffians came to attack the castle. The result is, that this lady is a prisoner, and the Count de Palma, the Marquis de Villegas, and Captain Bonilla, and about a dozen others, are now being buried by our men. The others have fled with the yacht."

"Heavens! What fearful retribution follows those who oppose you," I said. "But spare this woman. She is my father's wife. I do not wish to harm her."

"You fool!" cried Doña Estella. "Do you think I want your pity! I want my lover!"

A knife flashed, and Doña Estella sank to the floor a corpse.

"It is over," said the prince. "Mother, come. We must get to a safer place than this."

"Must I leave?" she asked. "My castle suits me well."

"The castle of Gozednoroff is larger, more luxurious, and far safer than this. Will you not brighten it for me?"

"I will, my son," she answered simply.

We were not a gay party on the way back to Marseilles. There was a somber heaviness about us that seemed strange, yet could not be shaken off. It was, I think, confined more to Rockstave and the Russian. But Edna certainly shared it in a large measure.

We bade the prince and his mother adieu at Paris. They hurried on to St. Petersburg. We went direct to my father's house.

"My children! My children!" was my father's greeting. "We are now united. No foreign influence shall ever come between us again."

"Your wife is dead, sir," I said.

"That is good. I might have killed her had she come here again. But let us forget her and her scheming friends. I may have a few more years of life, and wish to live them as an American."

* * * *

The war was in full blast. I could not remain inactive. Carlos longed to get back to avenge the death of his parents. Rockstave had requested permission of his home government to take part and assist me in raising a regiment for service in Cuba. He hated the Spaniards as much as I did. The reply staggered him.

His request was refused. Not, as the private official communication went on to say, because the English government lacked sympathy with the American cause. But because, rather, they favored it to such an extent that complications were expected which would bring about an alliance between the United States and England, against Spain and those countries which still

clung to the rotting fabric. If such a contingency arose, the efforts of Lord Rockstave would be needed as a positive British force.

It was determined that the weddings should take place before Carlos and I left. I had written to the Secretary of the Navy, offering the Nomad, crew and myself. The offer had been accepted. There were prospects of lively times in Cuban waters.

My father sanctioned our project. Therefore, on a certain day Edna became Countess of Rockstave, and Inez became my wife. We had sent an urgent invitation to Gozednoroff to assist at the ceremonies. He sent polite regrets.

"Poor Boris!" said Edna.

Rockstave was not present.

"Poor Boris!" I replied. "Why poor Boris?"

"Did he not tell you?" she asked. A tear stood glistening on her eyelash. "He said—he—loved me. He—asked me—to—be his wife."

THE END.

WHY I RAN FOR OFFICE.

BY ALBERT WHITE VORSE.

The harrowing story of a campaign undertaken for love. The fair champion of Woman's Rights and the martyrdom of the "Ladies' Willie."

MARGERY'S hair was burnished copper, and her eyes were purple asters; her voice throbbed like a G-string, and the things she said kept my wits leaping.

From the morning when, introduced by my hesitating sister, she invaded the study at a forbidden hour to request my signature upon a woman suffrage petition, I loved her. I loved her. I had to refuse the use of my name, for I had already made up my mind upon the woman question; but I refused graciously. She lifted her square little chin.

"Mr. Gillwillie," she said, "you are a student. I am told that you are an agnostic."

I bowed with a slight, tolerant smile.

"But an enlightened agnostic. You assert, not that we cannot know, but merely that we do not know."

I bowed again. I was delighting in the effect of a yellow sunbeam that fell from my stained glass window over her glowing head.

"Very well; as a *man* you are bound to be consistent. You are bound to be open to conviction."

I meant to protest that that was a *non sequitur*, but the sunbeam was dancing, and I murmured that I hoped I was open to conviction.

"Very well," she concluded. "Now, tomorrow afternoon we are going to hold a suffrage meeting in the town hall—oh, Mr. Gillwillie, won't you come and hear whether we haven't anything new to say?"

The suddenness of this lowering of the chin quite staggered me. At sight of my unwonted confusion, my timid sister plucked up courage to urge:

"Do go, Benjamin; Miss Longstreth is going to speak!"

If either of them had been defiant, I should have refused. But Margery only examined her gray gloves while Anne pleaded with her brown eyes, and eventually I stammered that I could not be so ungallant as to put aside Miss Longstreth's offer of enlightenment.

With grave humility, which as I now know was flagrant tact, she thanked me.

After her departure I tried to resume Fortlage's recondite work, *Das Musikalische System der Griechen in seiner*

Urgestalt, but presently I marked my place with a paper cutter and laid the book away.

At the end of a month I had attended twelve meetings, had lost to Miss Longstreth arguments upon every phase of woman's new position, and was distractedly wondering whether I should be the one to convince her of the truth, next oldest in human fact if not in human history—that woman was made to be loved of man.

At last I told her.

Margery blushing looks like a small bust of the Venus of Melos in copper and terra cotta. She clasped her hands over her face. Doubtless the hands of the statue were not in this position, which proves that the sculptor had his limitations.

While I was thinking of this she lowered her hands and gazed straight into my eyes. I suppose Rhadamanthus used to scrutinize the new shades somewhat thus.

Before I had recovered from the extraordinary prickling sensation which traversed my body, she fled from the room.

Upon the next day my bewilderment was interrupted by this letter:

DEAR MR. GILLWILLIE:

For what occurred yesterday, I am heartily ashamed. Surely in these days a woman ought to receive with dignity such an honor as you did me. I don't know how I could have been so silly. But I will treat you now with frankness, as a woman should.

You are not indifferent to me——

In the note as it lies before me—I love to muse over these details, though they have but little bearing upon my story—this sentence is a lanky scrawl, almost illegible. All the first part of the stiff letter bears evidence that it was written in spite of Margery's reluctance. Henceforth the writing is firmer.

But while I cannot fail to do justice to your wide knowledge, to your generosity and to your probity, I cannot bring myself to admire your manner of life. You are capable of achieving great results; yet you spend your time and your powers in reading books and solving problems that concern nations dead long ago. You do not live in the present. You care for our needs today only as an observer and a dilettante. You have no business; you do not even take the trouble to vote. How then could we join our careers, you and I? I believe in marriage, but it should be a noble marriage of souls, where man and woman, each the complement of the other, work together up the course of progress to the equalization of the sexes and the benefit of the human race.

Do you not agree with me?

I shall remain,

Ever your sincere friend

MARGERY LONGSTRETH.

Wasn't it a quaint note, with its primnesses and its grandiose ending? I recognized the ending; I had heard Margery deliver it from the platform.

What I made of the missive, at the twenty first reading, was that, although I was a dilettante—by much speechifying Margery had, I knew, brought herself to despise dilettanteism—nevertheless I was not cast quite into outer darkness. There was offered a chance for discussion and for reform. I determined to take it.

I had always intended to achieve, some time, a master work. Now, I felt, was a good time for it. The question was, what should it be?

To put in form my theory concerning the Hyksos Dynasties—I have always been interested in Egypt—would take a year, and I could not wait so long for Margery's approval; besides, there was her letter to indicate that she might not approve.

While I was wondering whether it would be better to write a symphony, Jack Bancroft passed by my window. At college Jack devoted all his time to baseball and football, and now he is the State Senator from our district. Forthwith I was excited.

"She would like that," I exclaimed. "By Jove, I will go into politics!"

Although I had always lived with books, I regarded myself as not ignorant of men. I had been accustomed to converse with all kinds of people upon their own affairs. I had read Anthony Trollope and Lord Beaconsfield.

I knew that you cannot spring at once to eminence in politics; there are steps, and you must either climb or buy your way up. The second method I abhorred; I resolved to consult Jack about the first.

I found him at the clubhouse—in Massachusetts, nowadays, every suburban town must have its club. I had never been able to endure Jack; he lacks dignity; his speech is rough and ready, and his manner is aggressive. I had classed him as the typical American Philistine, a member of that class which distressed my beloved Matthew Arnold.

Moreover, I had never felt that Jack respected me. He has the contempt of his class for refined leisure.

His greeting was more than ordinarily coarse.

"Hello!" he exclaimed in a dialect prevalent among certain sets of students at Harvard College. "Here is Willie the Bald. Come in wid de gang, Gillie. Understand you are hearing de cause of suffering woman."

I had been accustomed to say, sighing, that I was growing old and bald. I am not more than half bald; I knew that, because after my conversation with Margery, I had anxiously inspected myself in a mirror. But this was no time for offense or for quibble.

"How are you, old man?" I replied, "I was looking for you. Will you have some wine with me?"

Aware that, among themselves, politicians always drink champagne, I ordered a pint of white *Lacrima Christi spumante*. Jack was visibly surprised, but accepted the situation more naturally than I had supposed he would.

I was much pleased with his manner; he listened to my plans with respect, occasionally measuring me with a keen glance. I understood that this scrutiny was quite proper, and bore myself, I believe, with becoming unconsciousness. I felt that my plans, and my exposition of them, were impressive.

Jack reflected for a moment, before he caressed me, with a hand upon my shoulder.

"My dear Gillwillie," he said, "I cannot tell you how glad we shall be to have a man with scholarship as well as principles at work among us. As you brightly put it, Rome was not built in a day, and you will, as you say, have to begin with a small stone. You suggest a town office: 'Selectman, or something' you said, did you not? How would the school committee suit you?"

It was not what I should have chosen. I saw Jack glance at my face.

"Before you scorn that suggestion, think a minute. Of course, you know what the duties of a selectman, for instance, are."

"I was forced, much to my exasperation, to hesitate.

"Why, yes," I said, "they look after streets and fences, and decide boundaries, and assess—no, they do not assess taxes——"

Jack's steadfast gaze began to embarrass me, and I paused. There was a moment of silence before he spoke.

"Exactly! Now, you see, there is no distinction for a man like you in that kind of work. Any business man or farmer could determine a boundary as well, if you will pardon me for saying it, as you could. But in educational matters, every one of your attainments would count. You ought to be the very best school committee man the town ever had."

There was heart glow in this thought.

"Besides," resumed Jack reflectively, "I ought to tell you that you will have less opposition as a candidate for the school committee than you would as a candidate for selectman. People are careful as to whom they intrust with their boundaries, but in matters of their children's education they are willing to take a good deal for granted."

Although I did not suppose that Jack discerned the implication in his bit of philosophizing, I was stung by it.

"Very well, Jack," I interrupted;

"I will undertake the responsibility. Perhaps I shall be competent to fill it."

"Good!" exclaimed Jack. "Waiter, bring another bottle of that good kind of wine. Boom the school committee, Gillwillie; make it the most conspicuous thing in town; show the hard headed ones that you are no dreamer—for I tell you frankly, your money and your library have counted against you. When you have done that, if you care to run for the General Court you will be a known man. As for your present interests, leave them to me. Here's to the future Governor of Massachusetts."

Before we had finished the beautiful wine, which always reminds me of Dr. Heidegger's Elixir of Life, in Hawthorne's story, we had arranged that my name should be presented at the caucus.

Jack anticipated little or no opposition. His last remark, as he rose to go, was characteristically blunt.

"Your good looks will carry you a long way," he said. "You know in this State the women vote for school committee."

In the late afternoon, upon my way home, I passed the town saloon. Inside, with the small of his back against the bar, and his elbows upon the rail, stood Jack.

In his right hand waved a glass of beer; his left forefinger was resting upon the chest of a burly Irishman, with flaming whiskers. Jack was talking earnestly.

"How disgusting!" I thought. "It is so unnecessary too. That is what I will not do, even if I never reach the Senate."

At home, I surveyed my comfortable leather chairs, and my brown bindings with their various tooling. My eyes rested upon the long row of volumes containing that heart history of the nation, the Adams Diaries.

Does any one take these volumes from the shelf without feeling as if he were penetrating into sacred mysteries; reading the inmost thoughts of the fine, impulsive young girl, our country?

"Hold on," I said to myself. "My constituency wouldn't understand that. I must be practical."

Nevertheless, I did not restrain my thoughts from rambling up the paths the fiery, incorruptible patriots had done so much to establish.

At last, in the White House, inspired by a presence as womanly as Abigail Adams and far better versed in practical affairs, I waved away a crown, offered by my Secretary of State, and knocked over my decanter of Chartreuse.

"I am a fool," I said, severely, and went to bed. However, next day I began a diary.

It had not been my custom to attend caucuses, but by Jack's advice, upon the afternoon when my name was to be presented, I betook myself to the town hall.

The turmoil over the choice of selectman had already begun. Men were shaking fists and shouting. Jack's friend, the enormous Irishman, was overwhelming his opponents with the rich invective of Erin.

His name, I was informed, was O'Horrigan, and he was leader of the shoe factory operatives. The leader of the German stocking knitters, a socialist named Haff, whispered continuously. Once or twice his prowling eyes reached my chin; they never rose higher. I did not approve of Haff.

In the corner a couple of settees were filled with women, chattering and waving timid, unobserved encouragements. Most eager of all was Margery, in a trim, gray bicycle costume.

I caught her eye and bowed low. She blushed and sank back into her seat. But once afterward, though I watched her with the corner of my eye, did I see her look away from her gauntlets, folded in her lap.

Jack was moderator of the meeting, and outraged my sense of justice by the cool way he had of recognizing

chiefly the men of his own party. With his influence he carried his ticket unbroken.

"If ever I am chosen moderator of a meeting," I resolved, adding as I glanced at the unquiet, ill smelling mob, "which Heaven forbid—I will at least be impartial."

At last the selectman was nominated, and Jack pounded the table with his little mallet.

"Order, gen'l'men. Nom'nations f'r one cand'date t' serve on th' school committee f'r three years now 'n order."

It was the Irishman, O'Horrigan, who proposed my name. At his extravagant eulogies I blushed with disgust, but I could not resist taking a peep at Margery.

Her hand was resting upon the seat in front as if she had meant to rise. Her eyes were intent upon me, as those of a hypnotized subject are intent upon the operator.

"Are there any other nominations—if not a motion that the nom'nations be closed is in order!" rattled Jack.

Still Margery gazed. I had not hoped for so fine an effect, and I smiled a tender delight. At the little crash of *ayes* from the mill operatives, she started.

"Those-opposed-no-it-is-a-vote!" pronounced Jack.

"No," rang out Margery's vibrant voice.

She started to her feet and glanced wildly about. All the men turned to look at her. She concealed her face in her hands and fell back to the settee.

Jack showed college breeding.

"Chair awaits the pleasure of the meeting as to the manner of election, whether by ballot or marking list!" he shouted at the top of his voice.

Pity for Margery transcended my astonishment at her opposition to me. I tried to reach her, through the line of men formed to mark their approval of my name—no other candidate had been presented. But Margery had vanished.

After the meeting had adjourned Jack detained me with congratulations upon my assured success in the *premier pas*.

"I am going away," he said. "I shall not be here at the election. But you see your affairs are perfectly safe."

"Good," thought I, as I walked home. "I am glad you will not be here. At least my campaign will be clean."

At the door my shy Anne met me with uncertain mien.

"Dear Benjamin," she faltered, "I am so delighted."

Obviously she was also perturbed. Her eyebrows were high Corinthian arches.

"Only," she stumbled on, "of course I know it—it doesn't make any difference to you, but I am afraid you have hurt Margery Longstreth very much."

I attempted to read Anne's averted face, but was, myself, fain to inspect the bronze Chinese dragon who stretches forth his ill-tempered tail for my hat.

"Little sister," I said, at last, "it does make all the difference in the world to me. Now, will you tell me about it?"

Instead of informing me, she threw herself into my arms.

"Oh, Ben, I am *so* delighted!" she exclaimed, but not in the tone which she had applied to my nomination. "Margery is such a dear girl. But you see," she continued, after she had blotted up a few tears, "—please don't be displeased, Benjamin dear—the—the—women had a candidate for school committee and—and Margery was to propose her."

I saw it all. Poor Margery!

"Don't laugh, Ben dear, it is serious. All the women refuse to speak to Margery. They had made such preparations for the campaign. They are so disappointed and they accuse Margery of stage fright; oh, Ben, that is dreadful! And Mrs. Martin, who was to have been the candidate, says that Margery has betrayed her sex and made us

the laughing stock of man. Please don't laugh, Ben."

I was not laughing, I was thinking of Margery.

"Have you seen her, Anne?" I asked. "Did she cry? Anne, little sister, do you think it was stage fright?"

Anne blushed, I suppose for Margery's sake, and smoothed the dragon's horns.

"I don't know, Ben," she murmured. "Margery never confides in any one. But she—she never had stage fright before."

"Anne," I said, after a minute, "I think I was wrong about not approving of bicycles. You shall have one at once, and you may order the prettiest clothes Redcorn, or whatever his name is, can make. If they could be gray——"

Having considered, I despatched to Margery, by my man, this letter:

MY DEAR MISS LONGSTRETH:

You have known for some time that I am thoroughly interested in the cause of woman. May I venture to ask the support of your committee in the coming election?

Yours respectfully,
BENJ. F. GILLWILLIE.

(over)

P.S.—Margery dear, if I have thwarted a single plan of yours pray forgive me. In offering myself for office I had hoped only to become worthy in your eyes. It is too late for me to withdraw now—but cannot you show the first part of this note to your committee? Don't you suppose that the Woman's Club will accept me as a substitute and withdraw their wrath from you? Tell Mrs. Martin that when I am a school committee man she shall lecture once a week in every school. Margery, I don't mean to be flippant. I want to help you. Please let me come to see you.

Ever yours,
B.

The man returned with a prim answer that Miss Longstreth would show the note to the committee. Next day their decision came.

MR. GILLWILLIE:

DEAR SIR: The Woman's Club has received your note and will gladly support you in the coming election.

Yours very truly,
MARGERY LONGSTRETH,
Secretary.

P.S.—I cannot tell you how much I thank you. But please do not call until after you are elected. Then——

M. L.

P.P.S.—You ought to see the preparations we are making for your campaign. It is *fine* of you—though you were saucy to think I needed your help. I *knew* you could do *anything*, if you would only go to work.

M.

This missive, enveloped in draftsman's oiled paper, has tenanted the inside pockets of my waistcoats to this hour.

During several days I sent for morning and evening reports to O'Horrigan. Each time the answer returned that everything was rosy.

Down town I was perpetually congratulated upon my young activity, and I cannot assert that I did not find the good fellowship of my kind, sweet. I had been used to either servility, or that stiffness which comes of envy.

As for opposition, evidently there was none; no one, I was forced to believe, cared to fight for a thankless office.

Upon the fifth morning, a week before the balloting day, driving out through the lodge gate, I perceived an extraordinary vehicle. It was guarded by a regiment of urchins.

Upon an express wagon there was pitched what seemed to be a high, narrow tent. Between the shafts of the wagon plodded Margery's own Kentucky saddle horse, and Margery's groom, out of livery, was driving. The structure stopped abreast of me. Upon the side of the tent, in shiny black letters, was painted,

Support Gillwillie,
Woman Suffrage Candidate
For School Committee.

Inside the canvas dinned a violent brass bell. The regiment waved at me a bewilderment of caps—chiefly the ill proportioned military fatigue caps wherewith so many of our schoolboys are equipped. I hastily vowed to ex-

terminate them in the first days of my reign.

A ragamuffin ran from the groom with another note:

DEAR MR. GILLWILLIE:

This is the first gun. We mean to override all opposition. Will you speak before the women in the Club House on Saturday afternoon, and at a mass meeting in the town hall on election eve? You see even Bayard is sacrificed to the cause.

Yours truly,
MARGERY LONGSTRETH,
Secretary.

As I looked up from this note and beheld poor Bayard, Margery's idol, nibbling at his unaccustomed harness, my exasperation vanished.

"John," I said to the porter, "let these boys go to the house, and telephone to David to give each one an apple."

"Bless her," I thought, "let her play at politics, if she likes. It cannot do me any harm, and it will be good training for her."

And I was so happy that, at dinner time, I raged but slightly over the devastation done to my tulips before the gardener could cast forth my future subjects.

My studies of the educational tracts, the school reports, the works in German and English which I bought to prepare for the two speeches was interrupted, upon the next afternoon, by a telegram:

Fifth Avenue Hotel, New York.

Transparency altogether inexpedient. Call it in at once. All is well. Trust O'Horrigan.
J. BANCROFT.

The peremptory tone of this message quite roused my temper. Trust O'Horrigan, indeed! No, sir, I vowed. No machine campaign for me! I would break with the machine at once, in the beginning of my career. I telegraphed back to Jack:

Transparency harmless. Decline to recall it.
B. F. G.

Absorbed in the very interesting study, educational methods, I did not issue from my house until the Saturday afternoon of my speech.

The hall was not as full as I had expected; half the Woman's Club was absent. In the audience were several men; O'Horrigan, whom I had invited, and, to my surprise, Haff. When I saw him I was apprehensive, but he behaved well.

On the contrary, I was displeased with the manners of the Irishman and his friends; they whispered and, I thought, laughed. In spite of this I spoke rapidly, and, gathering inspiration from Margery's eager face, evoked frequent applause.

When it was over and I had pressed the hands of all the women except Margery, who had escaped, I looked for O'Horrigan to rebuke him. But Haff caught at my sleeve.

"Dat vas ein guter speech," he said. "Could I spoke mit you py meinself?"

I reflected. It is best, I thought, to be gracious to your adversaries. If he wants anything he oughtn't, I shall have a hold upon him.

"Come to my house this evening," I replied, and turned away to reassure the president, who was lamenting because she couldn't think why more club members weren't out.

I received Haff in my smoking room, delighted him by speaking German, and gave him Pilsner and a pipe. At once he began to address me as the *gnädige Herr*.

He preferred his own tobacco to mine, but that I endured for the sake of his astonishing news.

Jack's faction had played me false. They had caused an apothecary, *my* apothecary, whose outrageous bills I had never disputed, to be put in the field, and they meant to betray me.

At first I doubted.

"It can't be true," I declared. "It is dishonorable!"

Haff noticed this exclamation only by a blank stare, and cut more tobacco from his dank plug. Presently he asked what the gracious gentleman intended to do.

I did not know, and I was silent.

Haff's eye prowled to my chin several times. At length he cleared his throat and said:

"If the gracious gentleman would to remember deign that I the suffrages of powerful bodies oversee, then could the gracious gentleman perhaps an outcome discern."

I asked what he meant. The question seemed to irritate him.

"Sees not the gracious gentleman that we our services to him offer?"

"By we, do you mean the socialists?"

He cleared his throat again, and his eye darted to and fro.

But for another of Margery's notes, which arrived at that minute, I should have had him put out at once. But the note warned me of Jack's action—a horrid conspiracy Margery called it, and asked whether the law wouldn't reach Jack.

She concluded by urging me to beat the old things any way. I folded it up meditatively. After all, it was to please Margery that I was going into politics.

"Look here," I said, in English. "What do you want me to do, in case you support me?"

"Nodings," he answered, apparently in surprise. "You dells me you vill be our gandidate. I dells de oders. You vill den pe elegded."

"No money to spend—no promises to make?" I waxed proud of my knowledge of what was expected in this situation.

"Vy," he stammered, "it is usual, your honor knows—a liddle for dot gampaign fund."

"How much?" I interrupted.

I was beginning to hate the whole business; I was ready to get it off my hands at any cost.

"Vy," he repeated, "for de gause, your honor knows—a schmall sum for your honor—your honor is rich."

"How much?"

"Vell, could your honor say a dousand dol——" He ceased. I was looking at him.

I stared his eyes down, drew my check for two hundred and fifty dollars, and handed it across the table.

"There!" I said. "I know there are legitimate campaign expenses, printing and—and—— Well, let that go toward them. Any extra printing bills for my personal contest you may send to me. Not a cent," I added, sternly, "to buy votes."

"Nein, nein, *gnädige Herr*," he promised, eagerly fumbling the check into his pocket. "It is then concluded, and we may in the alliance rejoice. I drink to your honor's health."

That evening I was rather proud of the smartness wherewith I had put the affair through. But next morning, in the hours of wisdom which intervene between waking time and rising time, I had misgivings.

The word "alliance" smacked somewhat rank. The check caused me apprehension. Haff was no safe man to trust with a check.

"What could I have been thinking of?" mused I. "I have sold myself to the devil, and paid him for taking me."

I could not fix my mind upon my speech, either that Sunday or the ensuing day, and when, Monday evening, I presented myself before an audience that crowded the hall, I was trembling with stage fright.

The smell of chewed tobacco and of liquor was sickening. The faces of my fellow citizens were red and hideously unkempt.

Of these two facts I was chiefly aware, when the man who had volunteered as a substitute for the terrified president of the Woman's Club finished his speech of introduction.

"Fellow citizens," I began. "Er—" My knees twitched. "Fellow citizens, the question of education——" and thereafter I said I do not remember what, but I know it was a chaos of phrases.

My throat was intolerably dry, and no water had been provided. I paused, and to my astonishment a thunder of

applause followed. It continued, persisted, and waxed loud.

Men began to cheer. Surprise displaced embarrassment; I began to distinguish details of the strange scene.

Half my audience was intoxicated, there was no doubt of it. Men were waving their hats and cheering and laughing; some were shaking hands; others, sober, were looking on, either disgusted or envious.

Penned into a corner, guarded by half a dozen of my friends, was the group of pale women.

I saw that I must act. I advanced to the edge of the platform and waved my hands.

"Fellow citizens!" I shouted.

My voice must have dominated the noise, for I had attention. I waited till there was such silence that the strains of a brass band in the street were clearly audible. That seemed to be amusing, too, but not to me. I was inspired to fervid oratory.

"We are met tonight," I declaimed, but my throat was dry.

"Haf a trink of your own viskey, Gillvillie," shouted a voice.

Amid crashes of laughter, a brown pint bottle rose above the heads, traveled from hand to hand across the hall, and was thrust up to me.

From this embarrassment I was immediately relieved. The din of the band could no longer be overlooked. It was loud upon the stairs. The door was flung open, and into the hall marched half a dozen street musicians, heralding a huge transparency.

Across one side staggered the words:

VOTE FOR THE LADIE'S WILLIE

upon the other side,

DRINK WITH THE LADIE'S DARLIG

and a third face was an inferior artist's conception of my check for two hundred and fifty dollars to bearer.

I was beside myself.

"Down with it, men!" I roared.

With a rush the mob converged. Immediately I saw that I had opponents as well as supporters. The frail structure swayed and fell; rose, a burning ruin, and was finally overwhelmed.

About its smoking remains waged a combat that I should hardly call Homeric; perhaps it was early Irish. I saw the god-like O'Horrigan, clearing his path to the center, lift men bodily and hurl them aside.

Presently, however, he went down, and became the foundation of a small hill of wrangling, writhing, clutching combatants, while the less enthusiastic heroes skirmished about the outer edge.

All at once the ladies, like a startled flock of English sparrows, skirted the conflict toward the little side door. Behind them marched my brave little sister. Her eyes were wide and her face was pale, but her fists were clenched.

She scorned to hasten. I think she had a piece of her mind ready for any one who should notice her. But no one paid any attention, and before she reached the door I was at her side.

Once without, she fainted, and I had to carry her to the carriage. On the way, we passed a muster of the town constables and members of the fire department, making bravely for the hall.

The city papers arrived next morning with two column articles. One was headed "Sinful Scrap." The accounts were fairly accurate, I must acknowledge, but the pictures of myself were defamatory. I began to dread a visit from Dr. Lombroso. Worst of all, there were illustrations not only of O'Horrigan's transparency, but also of Margery's.

What the papers said of me was irritating. I do not mind abuse, but I hate ridicule, and perhaps I should have kept immured from the sight of men had not Anne demanded my escort to the polls, so that she might exercise her right of suffrage against miscreants. Therefore I voted.

At midnight, to Anne and me, waiting, a messenger brought the result. There had been three recounts. My

opponent was chosen by only one vote. I remembered that I had modestly omitted to make a cross against my own name.

In the morning I received a statement of indebtedness to one August Dietrich, a printer, for five thousand handbills. There are about eight hundred voters in the town. I am informed that Dietrich is Haff's son in law, and I have protested the bill.

In the afternoon there came a silly letter of congratulation from my opponent. Every townsman, it said, acquaintance or not, had called to shake hands, asserting that his vote had determined the election and expecting to be treated to liquor. The apothecary represented himself as ready to prescribe for himself a dose of, etc., etc. He needn't have been so conciliating. I should not have withdrawn my patronage on account of a wholly extraneous matter.

I cast aside the letter in contempt for the writer and for myself. Ever since I had drawn that check the diary of the incorruptible Adamses had frowned upon me.

Perhaps if I had won I should have snapped my fingers in its face; but to be afflicted with defeat and a sore conscience, that was overwhelming.

"You fool," I said to myself. To my surprise I discovered that self accusation was consoling. Immediately I continued:

"You fool. You knew all the time the money would go to bribe votes in some way or other. You have been too lazy to attend to your own campaign, and, as you deserved, you fell into the hands of thieves. You deserved to lose the election. Now, as you deserve, you have lost Margery——"

Here I ceased to belabor myself. It began really to hurt.

While my brain was burning with the friction of rapid plans, Anne entered. She wore the quiet face she puts on at funerals of comparative strangers.

"Benjamin," she said, "Margery is here and wonders whether you will see her."

Before I was calm enough to reply, Margery herself stood in the door. Her face was pale, but her eyes were red. Women do not show themselves in a state of tear without good cause.

"Miss Longstreth!" I exclaimed, "what is it? Margery!"

With a gesture of protest she raised her hand. From it trailed a heavy black crêpe veil.

"Wait," she intoned in a voice rich with resignation. "Wait till I have told you all!" She pressed the veil to her lips, evidently mistaking it for a handkerchief.

"Please do not interrupt me," she went on; "let me tell it all at once. Yesterday afternoon when I was dressing to vote I—I split my last pair of gloves. It was too late to send for others and——" she cast an appealing glance at Anne, "and I knew I might meet Mrs. Martin there and—and I didn't think my vote would make any difference, so I—I didn't—didn't——"

She had been gradually breaking down, and here she fell into a chair and enveloped her face in the veil.

"And my vote," came in smothered sobs, "would have——"

I was clutching Anne's arm in frantic anxiety.

"But, Miss Longstreth, don't cry—it's nothing—don't cry. Anne, get Miss Longstreth a glass of water! Bless me, what shall we do?"

Anne ceased to regard Margery with a calm regard.

"Oh, Ben, you foolish creature!" she said, and left the room.

I looked three times to and fro from the door to the despondent figure in black. Then I knelt by the chair and drew away the veil.

"My sweetheart!" I whispered.

Her dear little arms crept around my neck, and she burst forth into fresh sobs with her head upon my shoulder. But these sobs did not for a moment grieve me.

A FLORENTINE FANCY.

BY ARTHUR BLOUNT.

The girl at vespers and the expensive luxury the American visitor made of preserving in her the charm and innocency of her pastoral background.

IT was in the duomo of Florence, at vespers.

A girl with a brown face, brought into strong relief by the orange kerchief knotted under her chin, knelt on the cold stone floor and was rapidly muttering a prayer, her rosary of coarse brown beads slipping like lightning through her rough fingers.

I do not know why I watched. She was not at all pretty, nor even strikingly picturesque, but I sat down on one of the brown benches and looked at her.

Across the church, in the left transept, a service was being held. The droning of the priests could be heard, and, from time to time, the tinkle of the bell.

It was a dark and gloomy day, and there in our corner it was wonderfully still.

My contadina knelt on, in front of the deserted altar.

The vesper service ended and I saw the little crowd disappear down the nave.

I looked at my watch. The girl with the orange kerchief had been kneeling twenty minutes.

"She will have rheumatism," I thought.

I was just remarking to myself that the lines of her neck were admirable, when a party of tourists came up behind me and began to talk loudly. I turned sorrowfully away.

Half way to the door I was stopped by a subdued cry of "Signore!"

I turned. It was my contadina.

"Il Signore has dropped his glove," she said, shyly. I took the glove and hesitated.

"You are kind," I said in the ceremonious idiom. "Let me give you a *lira* to buy some little souvenir."

She looked at me inquiringly with her childish gray eyes.

"I saw the signore drop his glove in leaving when the strangers came. They spoil the church."

She was quite right; they did spoil the church. I wondered how she knew it.

I put the *lira* back into my pocket. An Italian who doesn't understand the offer of a silver piece must not be spoiled.

"Do you live in Florence?" I asked.

"No; oh, no. I am from the mountains beyond Fiesole. I come to be painted. An artist, *forestiere*, will paint me and give me fifty *lire*. Then I shall be married to Cecco."

"This is the first time you have been in Florence?"

"Signore, *si*. Never before have I left *la mamma!*" Her heavy mouth drooped a little, then her face brightened. "But I shall have a wedding gown of silk. The signore artist has promised me fifty *lire*."

I was pleased that my unreasoning interest in the girl was confirmed by an artist.

"You are lodging here?" I asked.

"Si, signore. Sixty eight Via della Vergognosa." She looked around the great, dusky church. "I was very lonely. I came to pray a little to our Lady, and now—I must go back—alone——"

She gave a little, frightened sob.

"*Poverina*—poor little one," I said, quite regardless of the fact that she overtopped me by fully three inches.

"Cecco is now coming home from the pasture with the goats."

A goatherd! It was truly pastoral. Again I felt a thrill of self approval.

"Who brought you to town?" I asked suddenly.

"My uncle. He comes to the market."

I looked at my watch.

"What is your name?"

"Marta."

"Very well, Marta," I pursued. "Come with me. Has the uncle gone back yet?"

"Oh, yes, signore," wonderingly.

"You—does no one else go back to-night?"

She looked dully at me.

"No one but *il pastore*."

"Then we will find *il pastore*. Where is he?"

Marta could not reply, but as I was about to ask again she gave a little shriek and ran down the steps to a frowsy old priest who was ambling along with folded hands.

"Padre, padre," she cried, and I knew that she was safe.

The old man turned a suspicious face to me as I joined them and politely bowed.

"A thousand pardons, reverend father," I observed, "Marta has found that the city does not please her, and so I hope you will take her back to *la mamma* and Cecco."

"But alas! I have promised the signore artist—and the wedding gown of silk!" cried the girl.

"Never mind the signore," I returned, with an utter lack of principle. "There are plenty of models in town, and as to the wedding gown—buy one with this, *Martina mia*," I said with sudden resolve as I handed her a fifty *lire* note.

"The Holy Virgin bless you, my son; you have done a good deed!" exclaimed the priest, taking off his old shovel hat. "She is a good girl."

Marta hesitated a moment, then caught my hand and kissed it.

"I will say three Aves and a Pater Noster for you every vespers, signore mio," she cried. "Oh, I am so happy."

* * * *

"I had the most perfect model engaged for this week," remarked my friend Jennifer Clayton to me a couple of days later as I was lounging in his studio, "and, by Jove, she never turned up. They are the most unreliable creatures on the face of the earth." He held up a rough pencil sketch as he spoke. "Good head, eh? Found her beyond Fiesole, and she promised she'd come; but you can never believe them."

"I suppose you can't," I said.

ROSE AND THORN.

ADAPTED FROM THE CHINESE.

He who believes in virtue there is pain,
Or dreams in vice that hidden pleasures are,
But proves himself a stranger to the twain,
He only gazes on them from afar!

For ah! the truth strikes swift with mighty power,
When once these blossoms have been plucked and worn,
There is no barb in virtue's perfect flower,
While sin's red rose is but a painted thorn.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

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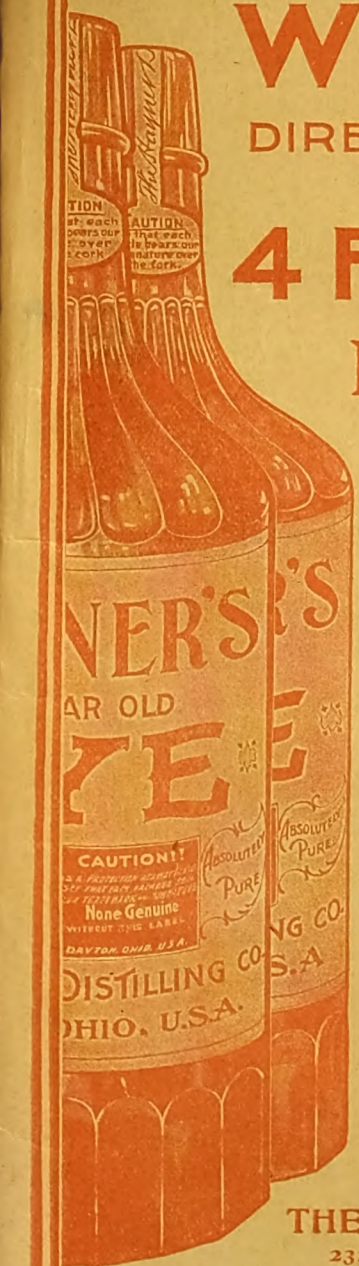

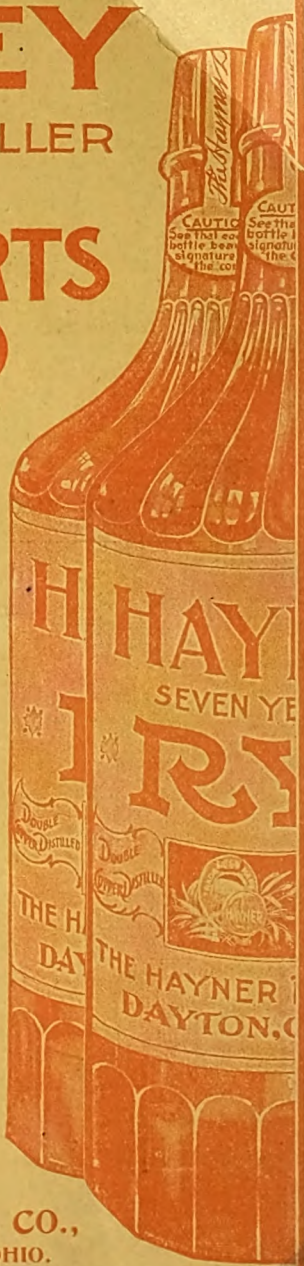

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