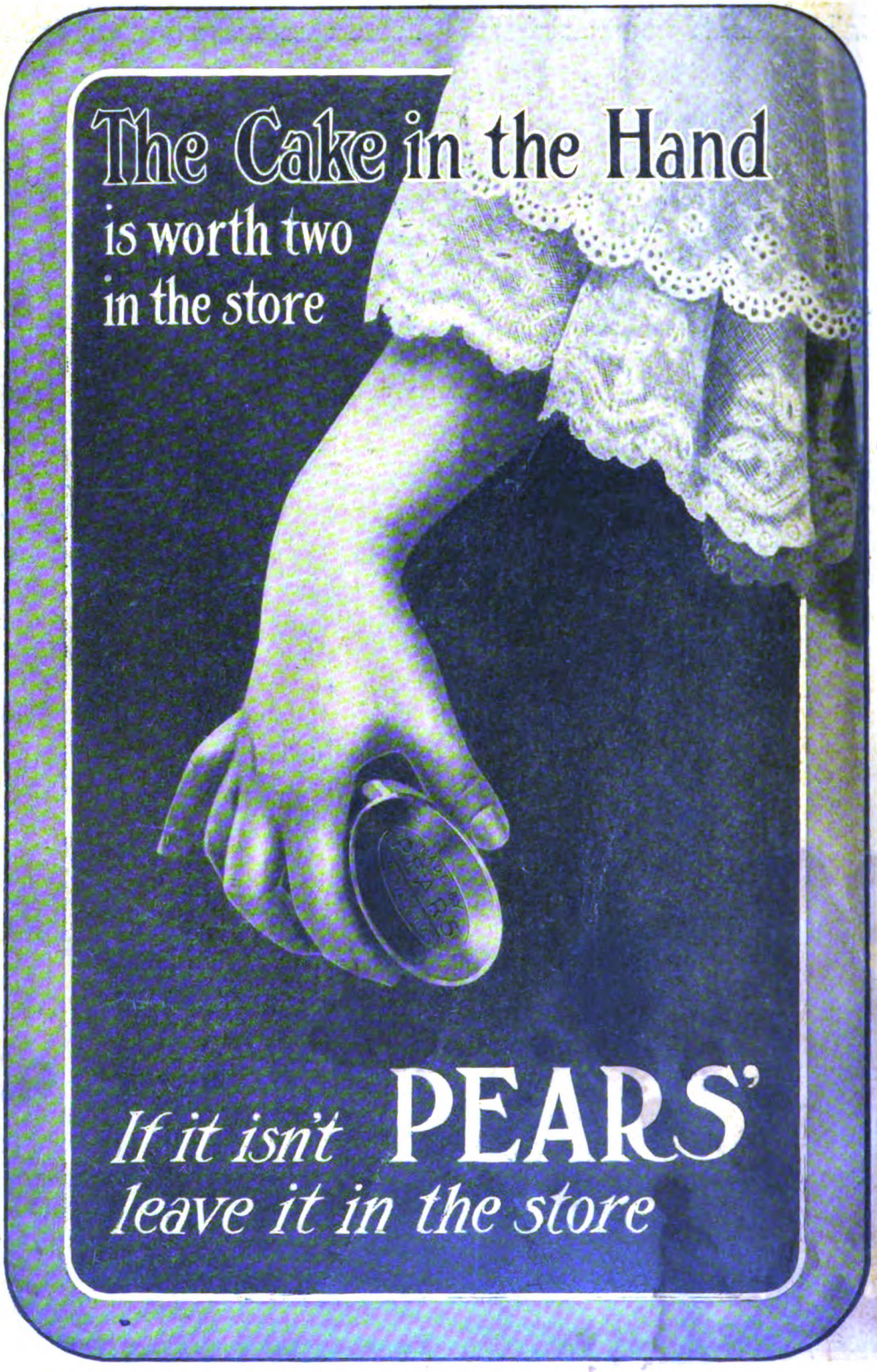
april 1907

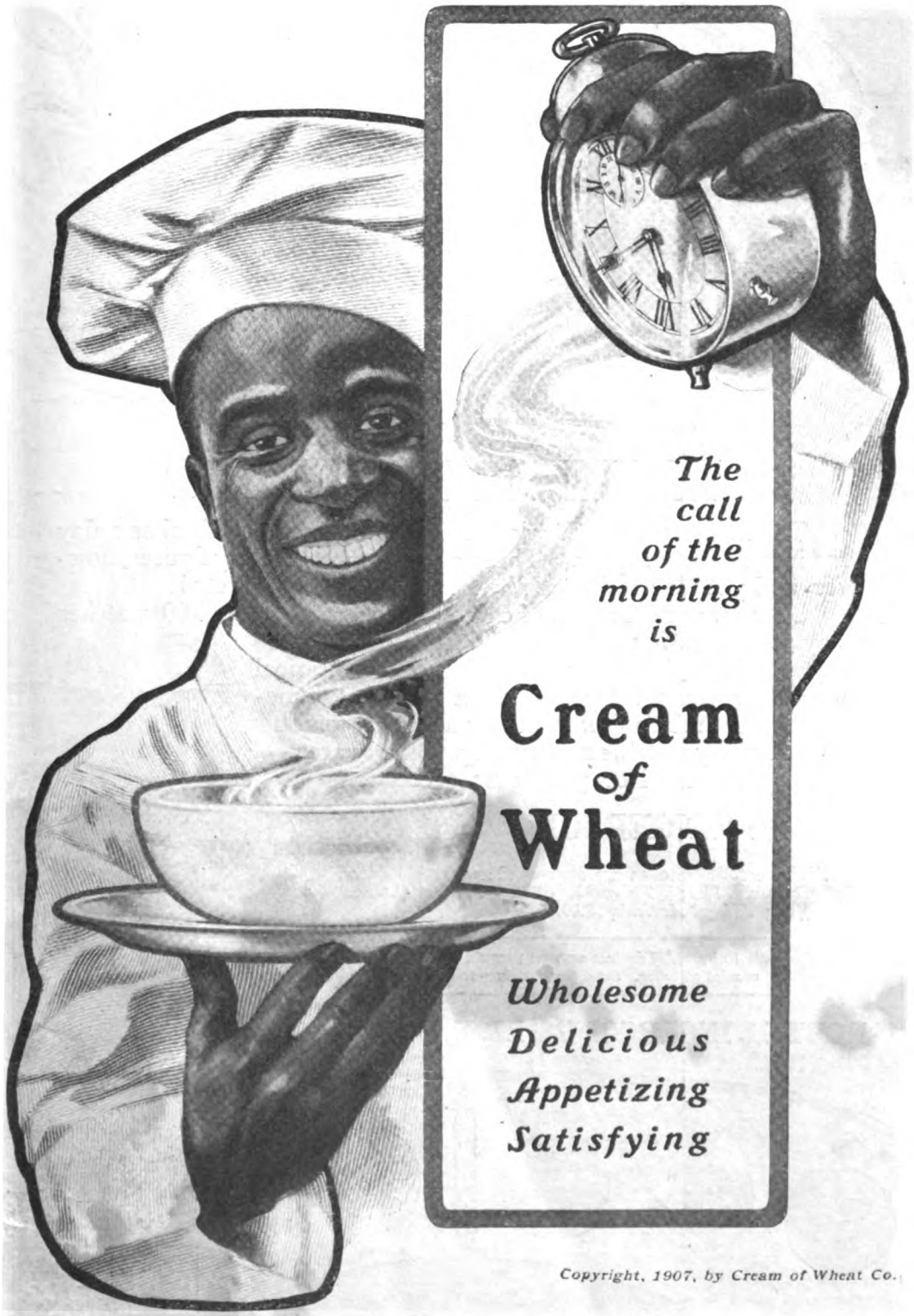
THE SHERIFF OF BROKEN BOW BEGINS IN THIS ISSUE

THE ARGOSY

FOR APRIL 1907



OF ALL SCENTED SOAPS PEARS' OTTO OF ROSE IS THE BEST.


The call of the morning is
Cream of Wheat
Wholesome
Delicious
Appetizing
Satisfying
Copyright, 1907, by Cream of Wheat Co.

The Argosy for April

One Complete Novel

Six Serial Stories

Eleven Short Stories

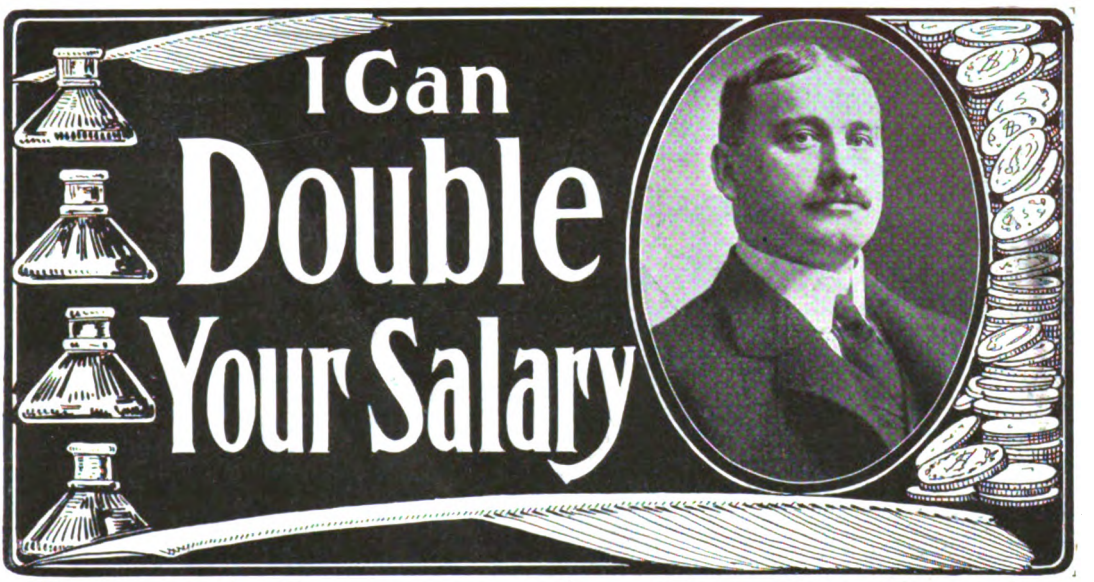
TWO NEW SERIAL STORIES

One of the sea, the other a hard-luck yarn, will begin in the May ARGOSY

ISSUED MONTHLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, - 175 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

SINGLE COPIES, 10 CENTS; BY THE YEAR, $1.00

ENTERED AT THE NEW YORK POST-OFFICE AS SECOND-CLASS MAIL MATTER.



Unusual Openings for Brainy People Who Have Been Trained by the Powell System

Never has there been such a demand for skilled ad writers and managers—those specially trained by the Powell System—as now.

And that this system of instruction stands in a class by itself—at the head—is so plain that no one need be deceived. A continuous stream of new and recent testimonials from my graduates in high positions is in marked contrast to the very old and doubtful ones which are the sole reliance of other institutions.

The young man or woman who is fortified with a reasonable education and a determination to work to win, and is attracted to advertising, will be benefited by writing me for complete details and proofs, showing how my graduates earn from $100 to $600 a month, and even more.

I want to interest the right ones, and as a slight variation I want them to note a couple of letters just laid on my desk as I write this ad (February 14, 1907). *Every day* brings others just like them from all parts of America:

Harry M. Hall, Advertising Manager of the Evening Chronicle, Charlotte, N. C., sends me a copy of his letter of February 12th, to G. E. Scurry, Fairmont, N. C., viz.: "I have yours of recent date requesting my opinion of the Powell System of Advertising Instruction. It gives me great pleasure to endorse Mr. Powell in the highest terms. There is no question that his school is the best of its kind in the country. I feel that all the success I have had in this business is due to Mr. Powell's excellent instruction."

The next letter is one sent on February 13th by J. W. Lindau, Jr., Advertising Manager of Rothschild, Meyers & Co., and the Automatic Pencil Sharpener Co., both of New York, to the same Mr. Scurry, who evidently adopted the wise plan of *investigating* testimonials. Mr. Lindau wrote him:

"I take great pleasure in saying that I consider any small success I have made in the advertising field, due to the thorough foundation given me by Mr. Powell's course of advertising instruction. I have not only taken the course, but am also personally acquainted with Mr. Powell, and have always found that he gives conscientious attention to the pupils he thinks worth while enrolling."

It must be evident that my reputation as the leading expert and instructor is based on solid worth. Ask the largest advertising agents as to the *best* instruction, and see if the Powell System isn't the "*only one*" endorsed

A Baltimore business man recently wrote the largest advertising agent in New York, and the largest magazine agent in America, about the value of advertising instruction, and on February 2, 1907, he received this reply:

"As a rule I do not think very much of the correspondence schools, for the reason that the bulk of them are run by people who have had no practical experience. However, there is *one man* who has had not only practical experience from the standpoint of creating and giving business to the publications, but also from the other side, having been in charge of the advertising department of a great publication, and receiving advertising from all sorts of people. I refer to George H. Powell."

I am not privileged to mention this agent's name, but his letter can be seen at my offices.

Every ambitious person who wants to double his salary, and every business man who wants to double his business should let me mail my two FREE books — Prospectus and "Net Results," the most explanatory ever published. Simply address me

GEORGE H. POWELL, 401 Metropolitan Annex, N. Y.

Bookkeeping to Advertising When Half Through.

Miss Edith M. Christian, Spokane, Wash., is another typical woman ad writer, who has doubled her income and prospects through the Powell System.

In her letter just received, she says: "I wish to tell you of my success in ad writing. I was hardly through the Powell System when I went from Columbus, O., to Spokane, and my original ideas and 'out-of-the-beaten-path' ads have brought me into prominence, and I have had praises enough to turn a girl's head, but it only incites me to further efforts. The Spokane Chronicle printed my picture last week. I am the only woman ad writer in town."

THE ARGOSY

Vol. LIV APRIL, 1907. No. 1

A DIET OF LOCAL COLOR.

By SEWARD W. HOPKINS.

The strange opportunity which came to a man just out of college, and the harrowing experiences that hedged its pursuit with discouragements.

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.)

CHAPTER I.

BEFORE THE TROUBLE BEGAN.

I DON'T for a moment suppose that had I been born extremely poor any of the things that have happened to me would have happened.

I would have been put to work at an early age, gone through the proverbial hardships of such a start, and wound up either as a deep-chested, arrogant, all important wealthy self-made man, or, else ground out a miserable existence at a trade or on a low salary, till a merciful Providence reaped me in to reward me with something better.

Or, had I been born rich, without the necessity of work of any kind, or with an inherited business to absorb all the talent I possessed, then, I am morally certain I would have missed all the experiences hereinafter set down. But I was neither of these.

My parents were fairly well-to-do, my father owning a farm and a village store with the post-office to run, and a life interest in the school trusteeship of Cornwood, a village of New York, the geographical situation of which has nothing to do with my history.

I was sent, like so many such sons of just such parents, to a boarding-school which was a little better than the village academy, and decidedly worse than the public schools of the big cities.

Here I imbibed big ideas from little men, and graduated with such honors as accrue to the prize essayist.

I was then sent to a distant college, where I was maintained at the cost of some little economy on the part of my loving parents, and imbibed smaller ideas from larger men.

At last, having reached the age of twenty-four, I graduated without any honors at all, barely skinning through, and started home to Cornwood to decide upon my career.

Now, I had made the trip from the college town to Cornwood a dozen or more times and nothing more exciting than an occasional hot-box had occurred to mar the placid serenity of the journey. But on my return from commencement the Fates had decided that something must occur, and this something had much to do with shaping my future life.

The railroad on which I traveled ran at one place through a tunnel. It was a single-track road, and, of course, the time-tables were so arranged that but one train would, under ordinary circumstances, try to pass through that tunnel at one time.

But I have known time-tables to go amiss, or rather the trains that are supposed to be bound by them, and the train I was on, No. 16, or the Buffalo Express, dashed into the tunnel just as though it had the right of way straight across the continent.

There was a sudden jar, a crash, and from my seat I went flying over the backs of two others and landed on something soft that let out a terrific shriek.

The train and tunnel were at the same

time plunged in total darkness, and yells of terror, moans of the wounded, and shouts of train-men made the stifling air of the place vivid. That is to say, vivid in sound.

"What is it?" was the cry of those who were not knocked senseless.

It took some little time to find out what, but after an hour spent in diligent research on the part of a dozen railroad men, armed with lanterns, the discovery was made that No. 16 had run into No. 111, which had been stalled in the tunnel by the breaking of an axle.

Of course, nobody was to blame. Proper signals had been set, but had gone out, or had been removed, or had taken a walk for their health, or something, and all damages were quietly settled by the railroad company.

The lady into whose lap I had been projected, and who had expostulated with so much ardor and reason, and so little success, proved to be a maiden of decidedly mature years. She took me severely to task after the few hours of waiting had passed and we were dragged slowly out of the tunnel by another engine.

I agreed with the lady that I should have held on to my seat. I agreed with her in everything: I had to. She didn't give me time to disagree and didn't seem to care whether I did or not.

Now this seems, perhaps, a very simple thing that might have happened to almost any one, but it is from such little things that the great events of life usually grow.

No romance grew out of it. I did not fall in love with the lady, and up to the latest news neither had she fallen in love with me. I did not sue the railroad, and no large, beneficent looking man ever came round at Christmas with a damage award of five thousand dollars just in time to save the farm from foreclosure.

I did not marry the president's daughter, nor did the lady into whom I crashed prove to be my long lost sister who had wedded a mining prospector and returned to make us all rich.

None of these things happened, although they might have happened just the same.

When I got a train to continue my journey in, I did so, and had the good fortune to arrive home in time for supper and with an appetite ready to do it justice.

Of course I had a lot to tell, and mother, like all other mothers, rejoiced that her son was not killed, and showed evidences of alarm even though it was all over and I safe at home.

After supper father and I had a smoke.

"Andy," he said, as we sat on the piazza, for it was June, of course, else it could not have been commencement, and the roses hung thick and sweet around, "I'm glad it's over. I am, Andy, for your sake and mine. I've skimped some, Andy, I don't deny it. I don't begrudge you a durn cent, Andy, but I'm glad it's over. Yes, I'm mighty glad it's over. And your mother is proud now, Andy, that you've got a college education. It ain't every boy as was born on a farm has a college education to start him off in this great battle of life."

I heaved a sigh.

"And now, Andy, that it is over, what do you think of doing?" father went on. "Of course, during these years you've been studying so hard you must have had some definite idea in your mind what you would be. You've the education, Andy. That's the main thing. I never had much. I always thought I'd be a lawyer, Andy, if I had the schooling. But you've got 'em all to choose from, Andy. Which do you think it will be?"

I smoked a moment and took a good sniff of the roses. As a matter of fact, the question of my future work had never seriously entered my head during my college course.

I was number four in the eight, I was half-back on the eleven, a good boxer, wrestler, jumper, and had had a finger in every athletic pie, but I had religiously and systematically overlooked the matter of a career.

"I'll tell you, dad," I said.

I always called him dad when I wanted to crawl gracefully, because he liked it.

"I'll tell you. I've done a lot of studying over the subject. It seems to me that it is a problem not to be decided on hastily. A young man armed with

the advantages you have given me, a good home, two loving parents, good teachings, and all I've enjoyed up to now, ought not to throw away all that in a hasty decision on a career that may be a failure in spite of all the advantages he has enjoyed.

"Of course I have studied hard, and I am as glad it is over as you are. And while I rather incline, as you did, to the law, still the other professions hold out such inducements, and offer such fields of noble effort and activity that I am reluctant hastily to rush into one, only to find after long years of drudgery that I was better fitted for another.

"You see, I looked at it in this way: I thought that if I took about a week, and just remained around home, loafing and resting, and had the benefit of a few good sensible talks with you and mother and Uncle Ben and Aunt Barbara, I could reach a conclusion with greater precision and less danger of error than if I plunged in on my own first inclinations."

"Andy," said my father, and a tinge of remorse went through me as I heard his voice tremble, "I like to hear you talk like that. It shows that the education and the knowledge you've got ain't spoiled you. You don't think you know more'n your father and mother. I like that, Andy. I'll tell mother."

He called her, good, stout, motherly soul, general adviser to all the village, and she came out on the piazza with a dish-towel in one hand and a bunch of knives in the other.

"What is it, pa?"

"I want you should hear Andy's way of looking at it. I asked him what he would choose fur a career, and he says he wants a week to get sensible ideas from you and me and Ben and Barbara before he makes his choice."

"I'm glad," said mother. "You men folks talk that over. It'd be career enough fur me if Andy set right on that piazza till I died."

With that she went back to her kitchen.

"That's the way with women, Andy, and your mother's one," said dad. "Anyhow, we've a week to think of it, so let's enjoy ourselves. I liked that city cigar, Andy."

So we smoked another, and I went to bed with a boyish feeling of freedom I had not felt in eight years before.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST SEED OF EVIL.

In the morning I was up bright and early.

"College life ain't made you lazy, Andy," remarked my mother. "My, but every time you come home you seem bigger—more of a man."

Now when a college fellow has reached twenty-four he has spent several years under the impression that he was a man, but when the loving admiration comes from a loving mother it makes him grow a little more.

I stooped and kissed her and wondered for the first time how I ever came to be the son of such a short mother. I was about five feet eleven.

Father and I ate breakfast slowly—slowly for him, I mean, and I walked to the barn with him, had a talk with Jim, the hired man, and then drove to the village with dad.

"Say," he said with a chuckle, "when we get down to the store like as not old Miss Butler 'll be waitin' fur her mail. Tell her that story how you dived into that old maid's lap."

Sure as fate, Miss Butler, a lady who had hated mankind ever since she had been jilted by the son of a minister fifty years before, was haranguing the clerk about the terrible slowness of the mails.

"It's a shame, John Nathing," she said, "that the guv'ment couldn't hurry up that train. I've waited half an hour."

To my own knowledge Miss Butler had waited twenty years, and the addition of another half hour was deplorable in the extreme.

"Can't be helped, Miss Butler," said dad. "Been an accident yesterday in the tunnel. Here's Andy, home from college, graduated. He was in it. He'll tell you."

"Andy Nathing! You home fur good? Well! Now what'll ye do with that collidge edication?"

"Something worthy of my parents, I hope, Miss Butler," I replied. "I shall try, at any rate. And what my father

said is true. We ran into a stalled train in the tunnel, and that is what causes the delay."

"It's a wonder ye wasn't killed."

"Oh, I don't think anybody was killed. There were some wounded."

"What a mercy!"

"But tell her, Andy. Miss Butler—he tumbled up against an old—I mean, a lady's lap."

Miss Butler looked severe, and I began to relate my experience. The more interested I saw her getting the more I enlarged on the story, until I had the old soul quite wrought up.

"That was enough to turn her hair white," remarked Miss Butler. "What with the shock, and the fright, and then havin' a man jump into her lap like that! I'd a died right there."

The recital, and the effect upon the old lady, so delighted my father that he trotted me over to the blacksmith shop, where I soon had an audience consisting of Jones, the harness man, Hooper, the butcher, and the blacksmith and his two helpers.

I again embellished the story to suit he needs of the moment. When I described how I had shot across two seats and nearly knocked the breath out of a woman my audience howled its delight.

"By gum!" said the blacksmith. "That's like a story out of a book. Couldn't be better."

I did not remain all morning at the store, but took the horse and made a few calls on old friends, promised Jed Skimm I'd go fishing one day, and Tom Taggle that I'd put in a day up the lake where he was building a boat, and so passed a pleasant morning, reaching home for dinner with my mother.

Now this recital of a simple home-coming may seem trivial, but it was not trivial at all.

In the first place it was very pleasant, as it must be to every decent fellow with a home like mine to come to. Then again it was fraught with consequences I never dreamed of, and the extent of which would have terrified me if I had dreamed of them.

That afternoon I wandered around the farm. The orchard was sweet, and old Bess (every well regulated farm has a pet cow named Bess), seemed glad to see me. I stroked her head, scratching between the horns where all pet cows love to be scratched.

I tried to think of a career. With the most insistent honesty of which I was capable I tried to spike my thoughts down to something like serious study.

But somehow the smell of the farm was in my nostrils and I couldn't think of Blackstone to save my life. As for the ministry, I had already decided that it was not for me. The study of medicine was attractive—but not in June.

And as I wandered on, visiting the old familiar places, taking a drink of cool water from the well, giving Jim a hand with a set of harness, or chatting in the kitchen window with mother, thoughts of the drudgery of a career became irksome.

And every time I tried to think of something serious, that confounded accident in the tunnel forced its way into my mind and I laughed.

When dad came home to supper, Jim having picked him up after making a business trip to another burg, he was full of grin.

"Andy, you're the talk of the village," he said. "I tell you, mother, our Andy's a regular story-teller. He's as good as that fellow we had down to church that night giving us funny yarns and things. Everybody's talkin' about him and that old maid. I thought Bill Silers would 'a' busted when I told him how you yarned it to Miss Butler."

"Andy Nathing," said my mother severely, "did you go and tell that experience of yours in the tunnel to Miss Butler?"

"Did he?" laughed dad. "And you ought to have heard the way he told it."

Mother's lips tried to be severe, but it is a hard task sometimes and I saw something else in her eyes.

Well, it seems that I was a born story-teller, and the thing grew until I became the hero of one of the funniest incidents in which an old maid ever figured. And had it not been a wholesome, clean, fun-loving community it would probably have grown into some kind of a scandal.

It did worse. The story grew on me, and I began to wonder how it would look in print anyhow.

I could not resist it. It slept with me, ate with me, walked with me, and drove all other thoughts out of my mind.

I resolved to try it. I had plenty of paper, so there was no necessity of any one knowing, and pleading the need of much letter-writing I sat up in my room nights when father and mother were in bed, and wrote.

Of course I enlarged on the truth, and made quite a short story of it.

I sneaked it down to another village, bought a big envelope and addressed it to the editor of the *Biverly Magazine*.

Then I tried to forget it. I strove to make myself believe that it had gone out of my life forever. But it stuck like burrs to a billy-goat's beard.

I had put in the large envelope a small one addressed to myself at Cornwood. I frequently received letters, and a small envelope would not cause remark. I had no idea of getting the manuscript back, and had not enclosed return postage.

My week passed and no more was said about a career. I spent a couple of days on Uncle Ben's farm.

Uncle Ben was my father's brother, a dry old bachelor, full of wisdom, well-to-do, and as penurious as he was wise. I have heard that the two go together. I don't know. I never was either.

Oh, those days between! Those days of that delightful time when the work of youth is over and the work of manhood not yet begun.

No man ever enjoys them but once. Almost every other joy of life can be duplicated or approximated. But that period of restful taking leave of the old life and not yet worrying about the new, is something that no man or woman can ever enjoy but once.

One day I sauntered into the store, and being a privileged character, of course, went to the family box after the mail.

"There's a letter from a magyzine fur you, Andy," remarked father.

Tremblingly I took out two or three letters addressed to me. How had he known it was from a magazine?

I looked at the envelope. It was not the one I had enclosed. I went outside where no one could see me. I tore it open.

It was from the editor of the *Biverly Magazine*, and ran:

> DEAR SIR: I enclose you check for fifty dollars, in payment for your short story entitled "In a Lady's Lap." There is a subtle humor and human interest in the narrative that makes it suitable for our magazine. Thanking you for permitting us to see the manuscript and trusting we shall have the pleasure of hearing from you again,
>
> We remain,
>
> THE EDITORS.

There was a name attached to give it authenticity.

The evil work was wrought.

I was a ruined man.

CHAPTER III.

THE EDITORIAL HAMMER.

THAT check was the first money I had ever earned in my life. It looked as big as a double roll of wall-paper and felt three times as thick.

I thrust it in my pocket and took a walk up past Loomis's hotel to compose my thoughts sufficiently to break the news to my father.

Everybody I met had something to say about that tunnel business and I would have taken an oath they all knew I had the check in my pocket.

There was something the matter with the sidewalks. They bobbed up and sank again under my feet like the ice on the flats after the water has drained away and left them what we used to call "tickely bender."

Having forced myself into something like calmness, I returned to the store. Father was weighing out sugar for Mrs. Haskins up Pope Hill Road, and I'll be hanged if he wasn't telling her all about the accident in the tunnel and my funny experience.

I waited till they had their laugh, and he had entered the purchase in her pass-book and his day-book, and then I went to him.

"Dad," I said, "I'd like a little money. I want to give mother a present. Can you cash this?"

I handed him the check, and saw a look of mild surprise come over his face. It was grave surprise, too.

He took the check and scanned it, and then, although it was perfectly light in the store, he went to the door, put on his spectacles and examined it again.

"Why, Andy, this is made out to you," he said. "How'd you come by fifty dollars? You ain't never earned no money I know of. I hope you got this honest, Andy."

"Honest enough, dad," I replied. "It's the pay for that story of the tunnel and the lady."

His hand dropped to his side and he stared at me as though I had dropped through the roof out of a balloon.

"Andy! You ain't gone and made a real story out of it fur a *paper!*"

"Why, yes. Everybody said it was good enough to be a story, so I made one of it and sent it to the *Biverly Magazine.*"

"And they—they—paid you for it, Andy? Honest?"

"Yes. Here's the letter from the editor."

Had it been from the President of the United States he could not have grabbed at it more eagerly. He went to the door again and read it till I could almost see the paper burning under his gaze. Then he disappeared.

I ran to the door, and he was over at the blacksmith's reading the letter to him. The blacksmith took the check, and then his two helpers.

It was a dirty enough looking thing when my father came back.

Without a word he went to his little money-box and solemnly counted out ten five-dollar bills.

He then with equal solemnity handed them over to me. There was a pitiful quaver in his voice when he spoke.

"Now, Andy, you *are* a man. The first money I ever earned was a nickel."

"Now, father, this money must pay a little what you've spent on me."

"Spent on you! Good Lord! The sight of that check paid me more'n forty times over. Don't tell ma, Andy, till I get home. I want to see her face."

Oh, would that those days might be lived over! My father's delight, my mother's simple pride, my own feverish haste to be at the work again! The longing to see the article in print! To parade it before my fellows!

There was nothing shrinking about my pride. I had won the first skirmish. And winning the first skirmish has ruined many a brilliant officer who might have led nations to victory over bloody fields of defeat.

But as the sunny days between school and work can never be lived over, neither can the joy of the first check ever again be experienced.

I have gone hungry, I have lived from hand to mouth, and clutched a smaller check than that as a drowning man clutches the life-ring hurled to him from the steamer's deck. But I have never felt the thrill of pride and the thirst for glory that I felt in Cornwood when that first check blinded me to the fact that I had limitations and made me think I had the world at my feet with a single stroke.

Well, the excitement passed off, and I was the celebrity of the place, and everybody saw in me the coming genius that would make Cornwood famous.

I bought mother and father a present, and then got down to business. A family conclave was held.

Aunt Barbara was mother's sister. She was widowed early, and now made speeches at sewing circles on women's rights, and wrote now and then for the *Advocate of the Female* such stirring articles on reform that one would expect her to be a virago in armor. In fact, she was a very pleasant lady, and generally my friend.

Well, Uncle Ben and Aunt Barbara were present at the conference.

"Of course," said mother, beamingly, "I always had an idea to have Andy a doctor. A doctor can do a lot of good."

"So can a writer," remarked Aunt Barbara. "The pen is mightier than the sword."

"I'd thought of the law," said dad. "But if a few nights' work pays fifty dollars——"

"Oncet," put in Uncle Ben, "they was a man I knew had an idee they was a fortune in bear skins. So they is if ye git enough. Well, this feller got one and sold it, an' went out fur more. He had a good farm, an' that all went ter weeds, an' nobody paid the interest on ther mortgage, an' the farm went, an' they wasn't no more bears, an' he died hungry."

"Benjamin!" shouted my father. "What in thunder's that got to do with a career?"

"Nuthin," said Uncle Ben, and he relapsed into silence.

It was settled. The lure of literature was too great, and I prowled around the farm, cudgeling my brains for another plot. I could think of nothing in Cornwood that was humorous enough nor thrilling enough. I struck at something higher.

I withdrew myself into my ideals. I wrote and wrote, and evolved from my now engrossed mentality a story that stirred even my own soul when I read it over.

It is well it did that much. It never had a chance to thrill anybody else.

I sent this to the *Biverly,* and this time I sent it from my father's store. I not only forebore keeping the thing a secret. I told my friends. Some even wanted to see the story in manuscript form.

But this was a sacred thing between me and the editors. I refused.

Every day some one would ask me if I had heard from the story.

Dad used to figure up every night. I told him how many pages the first story had, and how many made up the length of the second.

"Well," he would say, "those editor fellows know their business. If I get so much for one pound of tea, it stands to reason I'll get four times as much for four pounds. That's right, ma. Andy'll get two hundred dollars for that story."

Mother would swell up, shake her head sidewise smartly, and walk around as if she had been chosen Queen of the May.

At last the expected—no—the unexpected came.

It was the story back.

"Dear Mr. Nathing," the accompanying letter read, "we regret that your story entitled 'A Soul's Recompense' is not suitable for our magazine. We need good, lively, sprightly stories of life and color.

"Your first story gave us great hopes that you would prove a successful contributor, and we think so yet if you will cut loose from your idealistic dreams and search out new and interesting things of real life. Your first story had a touch and go about it that was irresistible. It was as if you had lived the story yourself. This last one nobody could live. We do not wish to discourage you, rather the contrary, or we would not take this trouble to write at length. Try again, and if you happen to be in New York and wish to call we would be glad to see you and help you with such advice as may be applicable.

"We are returning the manuscript, but advise against trying it again before a thorough revision, as the work is not nearly up to the standard you set in your first."

Then followed the usual polite ending and signatures.

Crushed, crestfallen, seeing myself a laughing-stock among my fellows, I sneaked home, and that night told my father and mother.

"Let me see that letter," said my father.

He read it carefully.

"Andy," he said, "Uncle Ben told a story t'other night about a man and a bear. I'll tell one. I knew a fellow who believed he could make a machine that would carry water up to a big hogshead on top of his barn. They wasn't no easy machine like now. He made one and the water wouldn't even go into it, let alone rise. He made another and the water got into it and froze and busted it. He made another and never had to lug water after that.

"This man is right. He says them things harsh, but a hard spanking at first is better than a lot of small ones. He tells the truth. You did it once. You can do it again. Cornwood is too small for you. You've got to live the story first. Then write it.

"I've brought the money from the store. Here's a hundred dollars. Tomorrow say good-by and go ahead. Come back when you feel like it, but live the stories before you write them. And go and see this man."

The next day I was on my way to New York.

CHAPTER IV.

I STRIKE AN IDEA.

ANY fellow with a hundred dollars in his pocket, all but twenty-four years of his life before him, and a career with

which he is already infatuated simply waiting for him to work out—any such fellow, I say—feels good. There is a reason to live, and to enjoy living.

The world seems a pleasant old place, after all, and the faces in it appear mostly to wear smiles.

I felt that way when I alighted at the Grand Central Depot, and not having eaten for several hours I went to a hotel near by and had a good dinner. Then I felt still better, lit a cigar and sauntered forth.

It was my intention to visit first the editors of the *Biverly,* the men who had roused my ambitions and then so cruelly scuttled them. The address of this publication was burned into my brain, and I did not need to look at the letter in my pocket for guidance.

The office was not a great distance from the hotel, and I enjoyed a stroll down Broadway smoking and studying the people I passed. I seemed to be more than a mere part of that throng. This was my world—I was its recorder.

The *Biverly* was located in a large building on Broadway, and I had finished my cigar just as I reached the door.

I stepped into the elevator and gave the number of the floor. I wondered if the operator thought I was one of the great writers who had helped make the *Biverly* famous.

The name of the magazine stared at me from a door, and at another door the word "Editorial" beckoned me. I opened the door. A young man sat at a desk. I remembered the name that had been attached to the letter containing my check, and I asked for that personage.

"Mr. Cammisson is in," said the young man. "I will take in your name."

I drew from my pocket my card-case and handed him a card, expecting to see a flash of recognition when he looked at it. I might just as well have been the iceman with a bill.

Nevertheless, Mr. Cammisson was at liberty and would see me. I followed the young man to another door, and there he left me.

I opened the door and went in. I felt some confidence before, but now it fled.

The office was without question the office of a man who worked. There was no carpet on the floor. There was something that must have been a desk at one end of the room near a window, but it was so covered with magazines, newspapers, manuscript, and other things of which I had no time to take note that I could not describe the style of it.

At the desk sat a man whose appearance made me quail.

He was tall, spare, dressed in a severely elegant black suit, his collar and cuffs were immaculate, and his white shirt-bosom was relieved by a black bow tie. His face was clean shaven, and exceedingly grave. He looked like a great church prelate.

I turned cold and almost trembled. I began to regret that I had smoked a cigar after dinner, because the odor of it must still be fresh on my mustache.

He was looking at a manuscript and I could see his quick eagle eye flash across the page and back again.

I stood with my hat in my hand, waiting. He read on. I still waited. He still read on. He finished the manuscript, and stood looking at me.

"Well," he said testily, "what in the deuce do *you* want?"

The shock was terrific, but the reaction was quick.

"I sent in my card," I said. "My name is Nathing."

"Nathing—have we anything of yours?"

"You purchased a story of mine. Then you returned one."

"Did, eh? Sit down. Nathing. Seems familiar. Where the mischief have I seen it? Oh. You wrote that fool thing called 'A Soul's Recompense.'"

"Yes, sir," I replied, dropping into a chair.

"Didn't like it. It was rotten. You didn't get enough life in it to scare a squirrel. The other—I remember now. We gave you fifty dollars for that. We did that because it was so apparently true, as I believe I explained in my letter."

"Yes, you told me that. You said you would be pleased to have me come in and talk matters over."

"So I am. I always like to have contributors come in. Get acquainted. Makes 'em take more interest. Do better work. Got anything new?"

"Not yet. What I came to speak to you about, Mr. Cammisson, first, is this: Do you really think I can write? Is there a chance?"

"There's a chance for everybody, but you mustn't expect to fall into luck every time. Now the *Biverly* has struck out on a line that we consider long neglected. We want stories of vivid interest. Stories that have a distinctive atmosphere. Something real, yet fiction. You get the drift of what I mean?"

"I think I do," I said, though I was dubious on the point myself.

"Give us stories we like and your fortune is made."

While he was talking he was fussing with some papers, and then some one came in.

"Yes, Mr. Nathing," he said as he rose, "I am glad you called. Come in again. Live your stories, or at least write them as if you did. That spells success."

I was dismissed. I knew that much, and wandered out to the elevator with an ill-defined feeling that I was no better off than when I came.

Yet he had not turned me down exactly. I was good for money if I could write the story he wanted.

I had no difficulty in finding lodgings, for I was no stranger in New York, and then I hammered my brain into subjection and got down to business.

I was not sufficiently familiar with city life to undertake its portrayal then. That must wait for the future. I felt that a stirring romance of history, or mystery, of the present day if possible, would make good reading. I pored over the newspapers for ideas.

There was everything to draw from. There were murders that remained unsolved. There were love episodes that would burn the paper they were written on. Even now men were fitting out expeditions that were to seek the treasures of the old buccaneers.

I had read all these things years ago. Yet they never seemed to grow old. The trick seemed to lie in the way of telling them.

One day a small article struck my fancy and stuck to me.

"One of the haunted houses of this century," the article read, "is a deserted dwelling standing on Mill Road, near Spyzers. It was inhabited at one time by the oldest branch of the Spyzer family, but since the disappearance of old Jacob Spyzer, the last of the younger branch of the mill owners, no one has been known to set foot inside the spacious grounds. The house is surrounded by a high wall, and the gate is rusted so that it would open only after considerable effort. Weird stories are told about the place of strange happenings at night; but no one has been found courageous enough to venture there to investigate.

"It has frequently been asserted that old Jacob Spyzer was murdered and buried on the place, but no one has been able to corroborate this."

That was all, but it bored into my brain with an augur-like effect, and my suddenly awakened ideas ran out of the hole and spread fan-fashion before me.

A haunted house, a mysterious murder, the history of an extinct race, all blended into one delightful possibility.

Here was my opportunity. Here was the chance to secure the vivid local coloring. Here was what I had lacked in my second story.

There are two ways of going at a thing—a right way and a wrong way. The first thing I had to decide was the right way for me to begin.

I decided upon secrecy.

Undoubtedly somebody somewhere had authority over the place, and would give me permission to visit it. I could even rent it for a short period.

But if I obtained permission, or rented it, the ghost, or the nightly visitant, whatever it was, would be frightened off. That would not do.

If the people of Spyzers were afraid to go near the place at night I was certainly safe so far as discovery by them was concerned.

And if I visited the old place secretly I stood a much better chance of obtaining the vividness of color I needed than if I went with the permission and knowledge of somebody else.

To decide was to act. I learned that Spyzers was a small town on the Hoolfy River, inhabited mostly by descendants of old Dutch settlers.

This was just as I would have wished it. These inhabitants, devoid probably of literary ambitions, devoid of super-

stition, phlegmatic and uninquisitive, would never bother their thick heads about a man who chose to wander about their place, even if they saw me.

Still, it was better to arrive after dark, and I planned my trip so as to reach the spot with as little fear of attracting notice as possible.

CHAPTER V.

THE SPELL OF THE MYSTERIOUS.

THE means of reaching the Hoolfy River are not essential to the merits of this true tale of my experiences. Suffice to say I learned that a few miles above the little town of Spyzers there was another and rather larger town called Moonville.

Now, I planned my campaign, as I called it, with a precision worthy of a Napoleon or an Alexander. I resolved not to go to Spyzers proper, but to Moonville by train.

Just how I should manage when I reached Moonville I left to my own ingenuity when I arrived.

I had a hamper packed with lunch, and I took care to have it a good one, and plenty of it. I did not know how long it would be before I would see the inside of a restaurant again.

I bought me a thirty-eight revolver, when a twenty-two would have done as well, and had the lunch put in a suit-case to avoid suspicion.

I left word at my lodging-house that I would not be back that night, and took a train that would land me in Moonville at eight o'clock in the evening.

There is an exhilaration about an expedition of this kind that cannot be explained to anybody who has not tried it. Almost any one knows the sensation of prowling through a graveyard at night. But to set out secretly and deliberately on a mission that is full of weird and perhaps deadly possibilities is something few have the temerity to undertake.

As the train sped on toward Moonville, I felt myself growing more and more into the spirit of the thing.

I reached Moonville on time, and at once discovered a fitness in the name for that night at least. There was no moon.

The place was as dark as any place could be, relieved only by the light in the railroad station.

Of course, I needed some guiding. I went into the station, where I found a young man in charge.

"I would like a place to stay all night," I said. "I want to cross the river to-morrow."

"Why don't you cross to-night?" he asked. "The bridge is there."

"Is there a bridge?" I inquired.

"Is there a bridge? How did you suppose we got across? Fly? Swim?"

"Er—what is the name of the town over there?"

"I thought you wanted to go there. Don't you know where you want to go? It's Nickors. Then down below is Fabers."

"Thanks," I said. "Where is the hotel. I guess I'll stay here to-night."

"Best place is Dudley's, at the bridge. He'll put you up. Take this road out here and you'll get there in five minutes."

I got on to what seemed to be a road, and after walking the time mentioned and passing a few houses in which the lights were in the rear, if there were any, I reached a small hotel and entered.

By this time I had added to my plan of campaign, and the information I had received from the young man at the station just fitted into my needs.

I spoke to a man behind the bar. It has always seemed to me the easiest way to get at anything in the average village hotel is to inquire at the bar.

"I have just left the train," I said, "and I wish to get down the river to Fabers. Which would you advise me to do? Cross to Nickors, or get a boat and go from here?"

"What—to-night?" he asked curiously.

"Well, I am in a hurry. I must get an early train back in the morning."

He shoved the register toward me.

"Stay here to-night and have a man drive you down in the morning."

"That won't do. Can't he drive me to-night?"

"No. Some of the planks in the bridge gave way this afternoon and they haven't been repaired."

How Fate was working to my advantage. I blessed that bridge.

"But the river is navigable, is it not? I am in a great hurry. How far is it to Fabers?"

"Oh, about three miles."

"Well, can't I hire a boat and row down?"

He looked at me as though I was an escaped lunatic, which no doubt he thought me. But I cared not what any man thought.

This was a night of all nights for a test of the mysterious house at Spyzers, and I was bound to get there. I had no intention of going to Fabers. And Spyzers was on the same side of the river as Moonville.

But it was not to my purpose to hire a man to drive me to Spyzers and have both villages talking about it the next day.

There was some more argument. I signed the register and left a deposit for a boat. The clerk called a man, who showed me to the landing.

"Queer sort of trip at night," he remarked.

"Why?" I asked. "I should think rowing on the river would be a favorite pastime here."

"So it is on moonlight nights. But they mostly are young fellows and girls."

"Well, I can enjoy a row without a girl."

No more was said. I put my suit-case in the boat, took my seat and the oars, and shoved off.

It was not a very wide river, nor did I suppose it was very deep. The current was swift enough to make rowing easy, and yet the water was not unduly rough.

I proceeded with as much speed as possible, and with the current to aid me the few miles were nothing.

If there is any appropriate beginning to an adventure in a haunted house it is a row on a strange river on a moonless night. I was certainly living my story, and the local color was roaring through my brain in greater volume and with greater swiftness than the river between its banks.

Already I had the first part of my story planned. There was the black night, the mysterious boat, the strange party drawing near the house by the river.

But besides dreaming, I had to do some practical thinking. I had not the slightest idea how Spyzers looked when you could see it. I certainly did not know how to find it in the dark.

But I kept close to the shore, peering from time to time through the darkness; and after rowing about an hour, I saw what seemed to be the turrets of an old mill standing out blacker than the night itself.

This must be the old mill of the Spyzers. I rowed a little farther and pulled for shore.

The boat ran up on a little shingle, and I stepped out with my suit-case.

There was no jungle. What was evidently a meadow came down to the river-side, and one could walk with ease in any direction.

I struck straight out, and was soon on a country road.

I had no way of knowing whether the house of which I was in search was to the right or left, and at once I discovered a flaw in my plan of campaign.

I need not have kept my first operations so secret. I might have gone to Spyzers on some business errand. I could have made inquiries, could even have driven to the old house and noted how it lay.

But I had not done so, and I was here, and I must make the best of it.

I did not believe I had passed the town.

While I stood there pondering I heard the shriek of a locomotive. I waited longer. In a few minutes I saw the lurid light from the engine as it shot out sparks, and it came to a standstill a short distance to the left. I was all right now.

Having the road entirely to myself I turned in that direction. I knew the village lay there.

Either it was growing less dark or I was becoming accustomed to the darkness, or it was darker on the river than on the land, for I could certainly see more plainly.

Having trudged along some time I hugged the side of the road, and at last discovered what I had come to find.

A high stone wall ran along the road and away from it toward the river. It was a solid wall, such as would en-

close a garden in Europe, and nothing could have been more secure or better adapted for secrecy.

Again that peculiar thrill seized me, and the clutch of eagerness led me on.

I went along the wall that ran with the road. I knew there would be a gate there.

The wall was long. If the gate was in the middle, it was a good-sized garden that was enclosed.

I found the gate, a massive iron affair, and I peered through. I could see nothing except the black outlines of a large house.

I found the latch of the gate—it moved—I pushed.

To my surprise the gate opened.

My task thus far was easy. I entered the mysterious precincts, and the last tentacle of the spell had me in its grip.

Come what may, I would see the night through. And what a story I would have for the *Biverly* in the morning.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STRANGE OCCUPANT.

I CLOSED the great iron gate behind me and stood for a moment contemplating my further steps.

It struck me that one of two things was true. Either the whole story was a myth, and this was simply a deserted old house left to decay, or the nightly visitant, whoever it was, was already there.

If the latter theory was correct, it disposed of the supernatural, for ghosts do not need keys to unlock gates.

Acting, then, on the theory that there was either nobody at all, or somebody human in the house, I had but these two plans to choose from:

If there was nobody, all I had to do was to go straight forward, try the doors, and if I found one open, enter by way of it. If I found the doors locked, break a window and get in that way.

If, on the other hand there was somebody human in the house, I had again to make a subdivision and this had two horns.

One was that the place was the rendezvous of burglars, river thieves, counterfeiters, illicit distillers, or some other kind of lawbreakers who would not hesitate to murder me to get me out of the way.

The other was that the whole published article was a canard, and the place was rightfully and legally inhabited, and I was an unauthorized trespasser.

Even this had its possibilities. I might be shot for a burglar, or I might run up against a couple of dogs that would delight in making chewing-gum out of certain tough parts of my anatomy.

I resolved on the safer course, and instead of making a line for the house, I struck off to one side, intending to make a détour of reconnaissance.

In this way I found myself among some trees still with the early summer perfume, while several flowering shrubs obstructed my way.

There was nothing ghostly about these, and had the grass not been long and rank I might have concluded that the place was not only tenanted but cared for as well.

I crept along cautiously, and reached the rear of the house. Here I paused a moment to study the dark, forbidding ruin.

Everything here smelled of age and disuse. There was a path through an arbor and this was overgrown and almost impassable. This fact dispelled the idea of occupation, at least by persons who would take care of the property.

There was a large shed attached to the kitchen, and I could see its sloping roof. By this time I was almost like a cat. My intense eagerness, the interest I took in my mission, the weirdness of it all, mingled with the possibilities, had my nerves at concert pitch.

What a magnificent setting for a story of mystery! Even if I discovered nothing. Even if there was no one in the house, and no one visited it, still I had the atmosphere, and what is atmosphere if not local color?

As I stood there I was suddenly conscious of a distinct chill.

Across a slatted window I saw a dim light move.

Certainly somebody was in the house. There seemed to be an uncertainty in the movements of the light that precluded the thought that it was carried by an inhabitant with any definite purpose in view.

It swung to and fro a moment and then disappeared.

Again it appeared in another window and swung to and fro again as though it was held in the hands of some one making a search.

Strange thoughts came to me as I stood watching.

Had murder really been done, and had the murderer failed to find the plunder for which the crime was committed? Had he, since the terrible act, come there every night to search for his victim's hidden treasure?

This seemed scarcely possible, for by this time the murderer of old Jacob Spyzer, if he had ever possessed a murderer of his own, would be either dead or decrepit with age and incapable of making nightly visitations.

There was one way to settle the matter—to investigate.

A fellow twenty-four years of age is more courageous under certain conditions than a man at forty. Or else he is less cautious, or more foolhardy. At any rate, he will rush in where a man of maturer years and thought would count the cost.

I believe I have heard something like that concerning fools and angels. But that has nothing to do with my story, for I hope I am not the one, and I certainly do not claim to be the other.

Taking up my suit-case, which I had set down on the ground while I studied the situation, I moved toward the shed. I saw nothing that indicated a rear door elsewhere. It was probably inside the shed.

I found I was right. Groping in what was now total blackness, I found the latch of a door, and again, to my astonishment, it yielded. The door gave a little creak of remonstrance when I swung it open, and I stepped softly inside.

No ray of light came from anywhere to guide me. I did not know whether there was a stick of furniture in the place or not. I took a chance, struck a match, and found myself in a great bare kitchen.

In the moment of doubtful light I saw the hole for the stove-pipe, but of stove, table, chairs, I saw nothing.

The house, then, was not inhabited. Then how was I to account for the moving light?

The adventure took on a new fascination. I felt for my thirty-eight. I knew it was loaded, for I had made sure of that before I left New York. I was at least ready for an encounter should one come to me during the night.

During the short moment I had the match lit I had located the door leading from the kitchen to some other apartment. I made my way to that and set down my suit-case just inside it.

Free-handed now, with my revolver well grasped in my right fist, I groped along the wall nearest to me, not knowing what I was to meet with next, but ready to make the best of what befell.

I came to an ending of the wall, and discovered that I had been going along a hall, and was now under a broad, old-fashioned staircase.

I got from under that and went around the great newel-post, and began softly to ascend. To my disgust the stairs did creak a little, and making my step as light as I could I took as many rises as possible with one upward stride in order to minimize the noise.

Thus I reached the top, and went to the right. I touched another wall, and felt my way along that.

After a few steps I came to a door. It stood open and I entered.

I dared not light a match now, for I knew that the person who had had the light was on that floor. I stood perfectly still for a moment.

My heart was thumping violently, and I was just about to take a step forward when there was a stir of air, and I seemed to feel a light form go swiftly past me.

I reached out my hand and clutched, but grasped nothing.

Now, almost as much disturbed as I was mystified, but not willing to relinquish an adventure that promised so much, I waited another moment and then stepped out. I came in contact with another wall, and felt my way along that as I had before.

My heart gave a leap that almost took it out of my mouth as my fingers came in contact with other fingers—human fingers—that were withdrawn before I could grasp them. I heard a quick indrawn breath, and leaped forward.

But as before, I failed to catch anything in my eager clutch.

I stood still again. Now that I had positive proof there was somebody in the building, I scarcely knew which way to turn.

I had not had sufficient contact with the hand to judge of it. I could not tell whether it was the hand of male or female, youth or age.

But the ends of my fingers had certainly touched the ends of other fingers, and then I had heard the intaken breath of alarm.

I thought of speaking. But this would act as a guide if the other person in the room wanted to shoot. Then I thought of shooting, but there seemed to be no reason why I should take the life of a fellow being who seemed to be more afraid of me than I was of him.

What had become of the light? Had the visitor discovered that of which he had come in search, or had he given it up and put out the light when he heard the creaking of the stairs as I ascended?

I don't know how long I stood there. It must have been fully a quarter of an hour. Then, feeling that it was useless to stand like a wooden image all night, I stepped forward again.

This time I felt my way from room to room, and just as I was about to go through another door I felt that same swishing of a light form and the stirring of the air as something passed me.

I could have fired, but again I knew the fellow, whoever he was, had as much right in the place as I had, and perhaps more. It might have been a caretaker.

I heard a slight sound. It was like the creaking of the stairs.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT I SAW IN THE OLD MILL.

I SPENT such a night as may not be described in the meager words at my command.

I groped through the old house in the dark, creeping cautiously for a time, and then more boldly. But I did not run across any more fellow visitors. I became so bold after a time that I lit a match.

I was standing in a square room absolutely bare of furniture. I could not tell in the flickering and feeble light whether it was in good repair or not. But it was certainly ghostly enough to suit any ghost-hunter on earth.

I walked through the rooms one after another, and they were all equally bare. There was no trace of the presence, either now or in the immediate past, of any person whatsoever.

I was now more bewildered than ever. I knew I had touched some one. I knew that no ghostly lips had expressed that sudden fear that can be expressed in no other way so well as by the quick indrawn breath.

Yet there was not a trace of any one.

Of course, while all this was passing the hours were passing too. My row down the river, the walk across the meadows and along the road to the house, had taken some time. It was midnight when I looked at my watch.

Then a sudden fear seized me.

This was no fear of ghosts, of robbers, counterfeiters, or any other lawbreaker. It was fear of the law itself.

Suppose some one had been in the house who had authority to take proper care of it. The stealthy noise I made on the stairs would naturally alarm him. He had undoubtedly fled the place, but for how long?

He would probably return with armed men, and how could I explain to the thick-headed inhabitants of Spyzers my presence in an empty house at night when I had absolutely no right to be there? I could not even claim that I had taken refuge there. I could not even assert that I was lost.

If I was arrested, and an investigation made, there was my name on the register of Dudley's hotel in Moonville, and the evidence at least two men could give that I had hired a boat to go to Fabers.

It was certainly all up with me if I was caught, and I made up my mind to get out in a hurry.

I thought about as rapidly as I ever had in my life, and after turning every possible plan over in my mind, reached the conclusion that my best chance for safety would be to make my way back to the row-boat, cross the river to Fabers, show myself to some one there, and row back to Moonville and take the morning train home.

I was rather put to it whether to re-

turn to Cornwood and do my writing, or go to New York. There were good arguments on each side.

I would save expense if I went home. I would have the benefit of plenty of room, good wholesome food, and cheerful companionship. On the other hand, I would have the attractions of the country in summer to weigh against my absorption in my work.

I had to go to New York anyway in order to take the train to Cornwood, and so I determined to reach the Moonville train first and then decide the other question.

I found the suit-case where I had put it, and though I was hungry, resolved to wait and eat in the boat.

When I reached the door I was relieved to find it unlocked. I had feared that the man, whoever he was, would lock me in, and so impede my escape until he could arrive with a force to arrest me.

Reaching the fresher air outside, I felt relieved. I started for the gate, but stood still in horror as I heard the patter of a trotting horse on the road outside.

As the sound drew nearer my first and worst fears were realized. The sound stopped at the gate.

I quickly left the path and dived in among some shrubbery, scratching my face and tearing my clothing.

The horse was driven in at the gate, and passed close enough to me for me to hear a man's voice say:

"He hasn't had time to get far. We'll land him, all right."

I let them reach the house, and then, making a curve across the park, I rushed through the gate and turned toward the direction whence I had come.

I walked as fast as I could with my suit-case, which felt now a good deal heavier than it did when I was taking things easy, looking for the house.

I was a good deal puzzled to judge where to turn to go to the river. If I went past the spot where I had struck the road I would miss my boat.

I decided, however, to make an error on the right side, if it could be called an error, and judging the distance to be something less than the stretch I had covered the other way, I turned toward the river.

I was again on meadow-land, and the way was not difficult.

I trudged on, now more slowly, and at last found myself on the shingle that seemed to form most of the river-bank.

I turned up stream, walking slowly and keeping a good lookout for the boat, walking as near the edge of the water as possible. I walked on and on until I came to an obstruction.

I had reached the mill, and the wooden trench of the race barred the way.

My heart took on a little more steam, for I knew I had left the boat farther down the river than the mill.

Back I turned, for there was nothing else to do, and I walked, walked, walked. The river with its gentle lapping of the shingle kept time to my steps, or I kept time to its tune, and I strode on until I came to a stone wall. It was the wall that surrounded the Spyzer estate.

Nowhere between the mill and the house of mystery was the boat in which I had rowed down the river and which I had left on the bank.

Turning again with a feeling that the Fates were devilish unkind, I started back, expecting to make a night of it on the river-bank or in the old mill.

As a matter of fact, I was stumped. I was absolutely at a loss what step to take first.

Undoubtedly they would be looking for a stranger at Spyzers, and I would be arrested. If I walked to Moonville, all sorts of questions would be asked, and I would have to explain the loss of the boat.

I remembered I had not fastened it, thinking its bow on the shingle was sufficient to hold it in place.

If word got to Moonville to hold a stranger, and I walked in on that side of the river instead of crossing from Fabers, I would have some more inquiries to answer, and the replies I must make if I told the truth seemed too trivial for belief.

I reached the old mill, and, groping around to the old door, struck a match and found a way to open it. The structure seemed very old, and the floor shook as I walked on it.

I thought assuredly I must be alone here.

I recalled what I had read of the place. Undoubtedly this was the mill of the ancient Spyzers. Here the old Spyzers, about whom there seemed to hang some kind of mystery, had made their money grinding the corn and rye of the surrounding country.

I was worn out. I wanted a place to sleep. Of course there was no such thing as bed or couch in an old mill, but one spot might be more desirable than another.

I struck a match, in perfect confidence that here I would be free from all interruptions. I could hear the water swirling in among the old posts on which the mill stood, and the noise as it ran through the race came to my ears.

Striking the match, I held it above my head so as not to have the glare obstruct my vision, and looked around.

It was a miserable old place. The timbers were rotten and the boards were warped and half off, and I doubted if such machinery as I saw would work, no matter how much oil was expended on it.

A slight investigation did not suffice.

I struck another match and stepped to an old door opening into a little waterway to the river channel, where I suppose boats had been moored to load and unload grain.

My blood froze. I recoiled in terror.

Clinging to something—I didn't look to see—staring at me with terrible eyes—lay a dead man.

CHAPTER VIII.

AS FAR AS THE TITLE.

Now, indeed, as my match went out, leaving me in total darkness with that dread presence, my position seemed precarious. If I had reasons before for not wanting to be found in Spyzers or Moonville, how many thousand times more reasons had I now!

Of course, if in the natural flow of events I had run across a body like that, I would rush for the nearest authorities and acquaint them with the facts.

But how was I to explain my presence in Spyzer's old mill with a corpse when I had hired a boat to go across the river to Fabers?

The thing was beginning to dull my senses with horror. Was the fellow I had touched in the old house really a caretaker, or was he the murderer of this man?

If he proved to be the murderer, then my own statement might go, provided the fellow was caught.

Then I came back to my senses again—I thought I did, though I was so befogged I could not be sure—and realized that a murderer would not go to the authorities and beseech them to come after himself.

I tried to get my thoughts straightened out, so as to have some kind of string on which to hang a few ideas.

The man might have been the murderer. But if he had not gone after the men in the carriage, who had?

There was the body in the water. No one of the authorities could know of the murder, or the corpse would have been taken out.

Then, who was the fellow in the house, and where was the murderer?

In the darkness, with the rotting old mill as a setting, my terror got the better of me more and more every minute. I was not capable of consecutive thought. I was not able to reason out anything, except that I must flee.

But how? Where?

To walk into either Moonville or Spyzers now would be walking into a trap.

Yet—there came a glimmer of sense through all the tumbled, jumbled thoughts—the authorities, not knowing of a murder, would not arrest me as a murderer.

That was something.

But what to do for the best? The boat was lost, and on that side of the river. The man was dead, and somebody killed him. From the point of view of the authorities, why not I?

That was the way it looked to me, and I defy anybody else to go through what I did that night and look at the situation in any other light.

Certainly, I must escape somehow.

It was by this time growing toward day. A sense of a duty left undone came to me, and I felt that simple humanity would move one in my position to do what I could for the dead man.

I waited till the light managed to fight its way into the miserable old mill, and went to the waterway again.

The body was gone!

There was a regular wash of the river across the slide of the landing, and it was an easy matter to realize how the current could have worked away at the unfastened corpse and carried it at last from its insecure resting-place.

And this fact seemed to have a reassuring effect on my battered nerves, for I began to think more clearly.

There was now a chance perhaps to escape.

I hunted around through the old ruins, knowing that in such a place there must be some kind of a boat.

To my extreme joy I discovered, just under an overhanging platform, used no doubt to unload grain, an old square-end thing known as a punt.

Two old oars were lying in it, damp and mildewed from want of use. The boat leaked, for there was water in her.

But this did not deter me. I drew it out, and with an old bucket I found I got most of the water out and found that it did not come in very fast.

It would not take long to get across the river. I saw a village on the opposite side and knew it must be Fabers.

Making the boat as dry as possible I put in my suit-case and got in myself, taking the bucket with me for an emergency.

Fate was decent this time, and I crossed the river. I expected to find a dozen boats out with armed men searching for me, but I saw nobody.

I made a landing in Fabers without any difficulty, and instead of tackling the lunch I had in my suit-case, I went to a small hotel and had my breakfast. I was nearly dead for the want of sleep, so I hired a room.

After a good bath and a few hours' sleep I was ready for the return trip, and decided that, instead of going to Cornwood, I would go to New York and write the story that was even now teeming in my head.

I hired a boy to drive me to Moonville, where I went to Dudley's to explain about the boat.

"You see," I said, "I made a mistake. As a matter of fact, I should have taken your advice and not gone last night at all. But my business seemed so urgent that it seemed to impel me. I had my trouble for my pains, because I went too far. In the dark I passed the village, and landed in the woods lower down."

I made a guess here, for I had certainly seen no woods on my travels.

"Well," said the fellow at Dudley's, "what did you do? Stay in the woods all night?"

"What else could I do? I didn't know the road. It was as dark as the inside of a vault. I waited till daylight, and then made my way to the village, transacted all the business I had to, had breakfast and slept awhile, and then came here. I'll pay for the boat."

"But you haven't said anything about a boat. Did you lose the boat?"

"Yes. It is down the river there."

This was true enough, but delightfully vague. The boat certainly did not go up the river of its own volition, and as I had seen no possibility of any one being near enough to take it, the probability was that it was still down the river—somewhere.

"I'll like enough get the boat again," he said. "They often get adrift and go down, but we all know one another along the river, and when we find a boat we give it back."

"But I am willing to pay something," I added.

"Well, five dollars will cover my chances of losing it."

I gave him five dollars. I wondered why somebody didn't pop out of some secluded corner and pounce on me. Every man I saw looked like a constable or deputy sheriff.

Nevertheless, strange to say, nothing of the kind happened, and I reached the railroad station all right.

I had a short time to wait, and still felt that every man in sight was an officer of the law.

I had never been inclined to play the rôle of eavesdropper, but now, whenever I dared, I walked as close to a group as possible and listened to the conversation.

Not a word did I hear about a murder, nor the mystery of the house at Spyzers.

This seemed strange. But then there was the probability that the body had not been found.

The murdered man was evidently not one of the well-known members of the community, or he would have been missed by his family at least and an alarm given. And knowing rural districts as well as I did, I knew the report would spread rapidly.

It was all a very deep puzzle to me, and yet it seemed that the Fates had sent me into it, for surely I now had the material for a story that even the ministerial-looking Cammisson of the *Biverly* could not sneer at.

The train came along in good time, and I took a seat in it.

I reached New York without further mishap.

I went to my lodgings, had my suit-case cleared of the lunch I had not touched, and proceeded to invest in a prodigious amount of paper.

I had at college acquired considerable knack with the typewriter, which after all isn't much of a knack, and feeling sure of substantial returns from this story—this story of stories—with local color to burn and thrills enough for anybody, I sallied forth and invested forty good dollars in a second-hand machine.

I pondered a good deal over the title, for I was firmly convinced that the name had a good deal to do with the success of a story. Anyway, it helps an author if he knows his title, for he can write around it and not wander off into some other fellow's pasture.

So, when my writing-machine came home I sat down, and the first thing I did was to bang out the title of my story in capitals in the middle of the first sheet, like this:

"A NIGHT OF TERROR,
"By Andrew Nathing,
"Cornwood, N. Y."

I put this address on it because, as soon as I had finished the thing, I intended going home for a good rest. I knew I would need it.

CHAPTER IX.

THE EDITORIAL ANVIL.

I HAD heard that some of the most celebrated authors worked spasmodically, by fits and starts, as the mood seized them. I had read that others had a systematic way, much the same as a man saws wood, the output of each day measuring about the same as every other.

I had read of all sorts of fads and fancies that authors possessed, which seemed either to assist them in their work or to attract attention to it after it was done. I resolved that I would have no fads or fancies. I would work as systematically as possible. The mood was on me, and would undoubtedly hold me in its grip until the story was finished.

Having written my title-page, I sat and admired it very much. There is something very pleasing in a good title in print, even if you do the printing yourself.

Then I began the story.

I had not settled on any particular length, I resolved to let it tell itself. I had no doubt that the thing would unwind like a ball of kite-cord into a goodly length.

But, as every boy knows, the length of a kite-cord seems a good deal greater when the kite is in the air than when it is on the ground.

I worked faithfully. No man or woman who ever wrote a thing that set the world a buzzing ever worked harder than I did on that story. I had the inborn knowledge that I had met all the requirements laid down by the editor. He knew—he ought to know—just what would make for success. He had liked my first story, and had given me fifty dollars for it.

The sting of the rejection of the second had passed now, and I realized just why it had fallen short. The story was not in any sense like this one would be. It had been born simply in imagination, and had unwound itself simply as a ball of yarn unwinds, because somebody pulls the end.

But my new story had fire, vim, and go in it. I knew it. I was as positive that in "A Night of Terror" I had a winner as I was that I sat there writing it.

I was very careful of my names. I chose high sounding ones, names that had a smack of aristocracy about them, that ought to stand for something if they were real.

I had lived and breathed the atmos-

phere, the setting of the story, and so I lived again in the atmosphere of love and mystery of the tale I was weaving concerning these the creatures of my imagination.

Every moment I was at work was a keen pleasure. Not a line of it came grudgingly. I loved it.

And at last the masterpiece was done. Carefully did I go over it, noting the little inaccuracies of the machine work, and adding a touch now and then, or striking out a jarring word.

When it was finished I sallied forth with the manuscript neatly done up in fresh manila paper, and proceeded to the office of the *Biverly Magazine*.

Mr. Cammisson received me with a little more cordiality than before, and smiled as I placed my manuscript before him.

"I see you've been at it," he said. "What's the idea now?"

"Well, it is something written after an experience of my own, based upon a mystery surrounding an old Dutch family of millers in this State. The setting is somewhat weird, the story is for the most part true, and the love interest absorbing."

"Good. You seem to have grown at least a foot. I knew it was in you. By gad, it does an editor good to get hold of a writer that isn't a crank. They are all cranks, sir, confounded cranks. Why, a fellow came in here one day with a story—said it was based on an actual experience. Well, I read it, and it turned out to be a story of a seventh heaven, of which I have heard somewhere, and the eighth, of which I have never heard, and in the eighth, after passing through all the stuff of the other seven, purified, made eternal, with all the glories of life and human love given back to us, we got down to business at the old stand and went on loving and living the same as we do now.

"I was mad, sir, mad. I sent for him and asked him what he meant by saying that that stuff was based on actual experience. He said it was a dream he had. Dreams are not experience, and so I told him. He went off in a terrible rage. Now, you are not that kind. You are amenable to editorial reasoning. I like that sort. I will read this story at my first opportunity and let you know my decision. But from what you say I think the outlook most favorable."

I left him, walking on air. I went to my lodgings and told the lady in charge that I was going to the country for a short stay, but wished to hold my room, and she agreed to do so, upon the payment of a small amount.

I found old Cornwood just the same.

At the supper-table my father spoke first on the subject of the story.

"Well, Andy," he said, "I didn't expect you back so soon. I suppose your money gave out. Ain't got another fifty, have you?"

"No, not yet. My money isn't gone, either. But I have lived out a story that is a good one, and I have written it. It is now in the hands of the editors of the *Biverly*. I talked it over with the chief and he thinks it will be a success."

"Good! Hear that, mother? Andy'll get another check before he leaves us. We'll be having the hull county talking about Andy yet."

"I hope so," said mother. "But when does the first one come out? All the ladies of the sewing circle want to see it. They are having lots of fun with Miss Butler. They tell her you've made her the heroine."

Dad chuckled and then haw-hawed.

Everybody had to know about the new story I had written that was sure to make a big hit.

But under all this exhilaration there was down in my own breast a strange uneasiness.

I had searched the papers in vain for any account of a murder at Spyzers. Yet I knew a murder had been committed. I had seen the staring eyes of the dead man. I had seen him clutching at something he had held in his dying grasp to save him. And yet I saw no mention of it.

Of course, the Hoolfy was quite a river. Possibly the body had been carried along and discovered at some place with a name unfamiliar to me. This would account for my failure to notice it in the paper.

It began to be clear, however, that I was not suspected of any murder, nor of being implicated in any wrong-doing at the Spyzer house of mystery.

My father took several weekly papers from different sections, and one afternoon I took up one called the Moonville *Atom*.

The name attracted my attention at once, and I looked through it eagerly. Imagine the interest I felt when I struck this:

AN OLD MYTH PROVED TRUE.

For years the lips of those who love fiction and the ears of the credulous have both been busy with stories of the old Spyzer homestead in the village of that name near Moonville on the Hoolfy. All sorts of wild and weird tales have been told about it, but have been laughed at by those in charge of the estate, and by the authorities.

It was said that old Jacob Spyzer was murdered there, and that his ghost wandered about at night seeking his murderer. Our neighbors of Spyzers have apparently disbelieved the story, or have not been brave enough to test its truth, for they have not visited the house at night. But the *Atom* is in a position to state positively that lights have been seen in the old mansion, and that some one does visit it at night.

Note the testimony of Mr. Zebulon Jones, our neighbor. He states that from his house, which stands on a hill, he can obtain a good view of the windows in the rear of the Spyzer house. He claims that he has seen lights there at night; that one night he saw lights, and aroused Constable Miller, who hitched up his mare and the two drove to the house.

Nothing was discovered, and the constable is inclined to think Zebulon saw the reflection of the moon on the window-glass. But Zebulon insists there was no moon.

As for the *Atom*, it is taking no sides in the argument, but hopes that if the spirit of old Jacob Spyzer is abroad it will be less miserly than old Jacob himself when in the flesh.

Now, here was something for me to think about. Zebulon was right if the night he meant was the night I was there. There was no moon, and there were lights.

But if it was Jones who aroused the constable, it was not the fellow whose fingers I touched. This made the thing still more creepy.

The next day I received from Mr. Cammisson a letter, which read:

MY DEAR MR. NATHING:

Your new story "A Night of Terror" is very good, especially in spots. The introduction of the love episode on the scene of the murder in the old mill is perhaps a little too gruesome, but that could be softened if the story were otherwise available. I regret, however, to say that it is too short for a long story and too long for a short story. If you do not dispose of it elsewhere, and care to rewrite the story remembering this fact, I should be pleased to give it another reading.

Yours very truly,
ADAM CAMMISSON.

I can't write what I felt. If you are in my class you have felt that way yourself. Let it go at that.

CHAPTER X.

A RETURN TO GHOSTLY HAUNTS.

I HAD read the letter in the doorway of my father's store, and as he was at the time waiting upon a customer I felt assured that he had not noticed my emotion.

My disappointment was so keen that I dared not trust myself to remain. I did not wish to meet any one.

I walked away, and taking a road that led well out into a wild portion of the country, through a heavily wooded section, I strode along with a long swinging step, so angry that my thoughts were muddled and incoherent.

"They don't know what they want, these editors," I said half-aloud. "They tell you what to do, and when you do it it is no good. Fudge!"

The air was cool for July, and as I swung along, the exercise and the beauty of the landscape gradually had their naturally soothing effect, and I brought myself round into something like mental calm.

But I was sore. No clear air and perfume of summer could ease that. I trudged on and on, scarcely knowing which way, and turned at a crossing.

This new road led me into a totally different section. It wound past large

farms, well tilled, and great meadows, where splendid cattle were grazing.

Any of these farms could be mine if I would consent to settle down to the drudgery of it. But the sting of ambition had entered my soul and I shook my head at the thought.

As I rose to the top of a hill I saw ahead a large, old-fashioned house, every board white with clean paint, the shutters a vivid green, the barns large and substantial.

This was Uncle Ben's.

I hurried on, and turned in at the gate. The old man was just walking from the barn to the house and he spied me.

"Well, well, young man! On foot, with four or five horses at the farm? What's the matter? Does city life make you so energetic?"

"Instead of being energetic just now," I said, "I am tired and thirsty. Give me a bowl of milk."

"Ain't lost your thirst fur good country milk, eh? Can't git much of that in the big city, I guess. Not like this."

He led the way to the spring-house, and I quenched my thirst with a great dipper of creamy milk as cold as though it had been on ice.

I watched the rugged face of the old man.

I knew he had in his crusty old heart a soft spot for me, and I knew that he was reputed to be a man of great common sense, though of less education than my father.

He watched me as I drank the milk slowly, as any one does who wants to get the good of it.

"You don't look partic'lar bright an' cheery," he remarked. "Guess it ain't all roses at that there writin' business."

"I have had a disappointment," I said.

Then I told him about it.

"Well—I see. Your mother's been harpin' on that thing, too. She 'lowed you'd make a big thing. Now let's reason it out. Let me see the letter."

I handed it to him, and he read it slowly.

"Well—I see," he said again, as he handed it back to me. "You was real mad when you got this, Andy."

"I certainly was put out some."

"Thought them editor fellers was dumb oxes an' all that."

"Something like that."

"Lemme tell you. That feller is runnin' that paper like I run my farm. Take a look at that farm. Purty good, eh?"

It was acknowledged to be the best farm around. I nodded.

"Well, now suppose I want a feller to do somethin' fur me. Suppose I have a feller come to drive a well. I tell him the kind of water I want. Well, he goes and gits his machinery and drives. He gits the water—the kind I want—but not enough of it. What do I do? I tell him he didn't drive fur enough. He must go deeper. See? Well, if he feels sulky an' quits he ain't no better off. If he goes an' drives till I git just what I want I pay him his price. That's what that editor feller is doin' with you.

"Now, Andy, I wasn't much took up with this here writin' business, because it's a makeshift business anyway. I've heard of great writers, an' I've read of 'em, but I ain't read of many as left anything 'cept debts. Still, I reckon it's more their way of livin' than the money they earn. But I know your dad and ma are stuck on this here business, an' I'm goin' to give you some advice you didn't expect."

"Go on," I said, smiling.

"Does your dad know what's in this letter?"

"No. I read it in the doorway, and didn't dare face him."

"Don't. That is, don't let on. I ain't no talkin' machine an' this'll be a secret between you an' me. Go home an' tell 'em you've got a order from that there editor feller to go an' do somethin' bigger yit. Don't put on no long face. Go back to this here house.

"You say it was in the Moonville *Atom* that they is somethin' in the blamed yarn after all. Well, we know it ain't ghosts. We don't believe in them things. But you felt some fingers, an' where they's live fingers they's a man or woman tied to 'em. Go back an' ferret the thing out. You made a purty good mess of it last time. This time go about it knowin' more'n you did.

"See what I mean? Chuck this story. Begin all over. When I write a letter an' it don't suit me I don't patch it up. I

just sail in an' write another. You do that. Git at the bottom of this mystery. Like's not it'll be somethin' surprisin'.

"Maybe they is some real secret in the family. Maybe you'll ferret out a old will ur somethin' that'll make some poor girl rich, an' then you'll marry the girl. I could tell 'em, too, if I was eddicated. Go on back and don't squeal like a pig over one burn. Show this editor feller what you kin do.

"Git away to-morrow. Don't waste no time. Git to that house an' stay there till you git the story. Don't make no short one of it. Make it twice, three times, four times as long. Don't let 'em say they ain't enough to it. An' don't send home fur money. I'll see you through."

I gasped. This was more than I had ever heard him say at one time in my life, and the first time I had ever heard him make a gratuitous offer of money.

I thanked him, talked over matters a little more, and walked home.

"Andy, you got a letter from your magazine to-day," said my father. "Any check?"

I laughed.

"Not quite so soon," I said. "They want me to go on a little quiet investigation for them."

The white lie pleased both my father and mother. The next morning I started for New York again, and soon after arriving went to the office. Mr. Cammisson shook hands with me.

"That was good stuff, Nathing, good stuff," he said, "but it wasn't the right length."

His manner was so much more cordial than his letter had seemed that I was cheered.

"I am going to try again," I told him. "I am going to rewrite the story and I will give you the first reading of it."

"Good, that's right. Don't give up."

I took the manuscript with me to my lodgings. I was hot and eager now to get at the thing again. I felt that there must be something more in it for me.

There was the real murder. The truth of that must be worked out. I had seen nothing about it in any of the papers, and the Moonville *Atom* had not mentioned it.

It was fair to assume then that I was the only person alive acquainted with the fact that a man had been murdered and thrown into the Hoolfy River. It would be a big thing to find out the details first.

The scent of the trail that must actuate hound, detective, and journalist alike was in my nostrils. I couldn't let go now.

I made my plans almost identically as before. I did not wish to go to Spyzers, for I felt assured that whoever was engaged in the mysterious goings on in the old house would know if a stranger arrived at the village and would make it their business to learn his.

I went as I did before, with a suitcase full of lunch, my thirty-eight, and a determination to remain until I had worked out the mystery to a complete solution.

I got a boat at Dudley's, in Moonville, on the same plea that I was going to Fabers, and although the bridge was fixed, the young man winked at me and asked no questions.

"I'll give you a boat," he said. "I take a sly lark once in a while myself. Give her my regards."

"Don't say anything," I whispered. "I don't want to get her in any trouble."

"Still for me," he said, and I departed.

This time I landed at the wall itself. Hauling my boat up high and dry I hustled round to the gate.

It was locked.

CHAPTER XI.

A LONELY NIGHT.

HERE was a situation that might of course have been expected. With all the notoriety the place was getting through the rural papers, it was no more than natural that those who had charge of the place should take such measures as were possible to keep intruders out.

Nevertheless, it was a disappointment.

Finding the gate a difficult one to scale, consisting as it did of very high iron spikes with sharp points at the top, I resolved before making an effort to climb it to go completely round the place and make sure there was no other entrance.

I knew there was none on the side along which I had just come.

So, keeping along the front to the farther corner, and finding nothing in the way of an opening, I turned once more toward the river and went along that wall, only to find it was as blank as the other side.

The most difficult wall to examine was that fronting on the river itself. Fortunately, it was a foot or two from the water's edge, thus giving dry footing if one went with care.

Nevertheless, to carry my suit-case and keep my balance as I groped along this wall were things difficult to accomplish. Several times I so far lost my equilibrium that to regain it I had to step out into the water.

I had gone about half the distance along this river-front when I reached a door.

I have said that I had made little change in my original plan of campaign. I had in reality added one important item to my outfit. This was a small dark lantern, such as burglars carry. It could be easily stowed in my coat-pocket.

The question now was whether it was safe to light the lantern.

The night was not so dark as that on which my previous visit had been made, and I peered out over the river in order to see if there was any one near. I could neither see any one nor hear the slightest sound, except the river itself as it slapped along.

I took the lantern from my pocket and struck a match.

Suddenly something hit my legs, almost knocking me down.

The impact was not powerful, but my knees were shaking with excitement, and when the shock did come it added so much to the strain of the moment that I stepped backward into the water. There was a slight splash near me.

I could see no one. Neither man nor beast was near me.

Concluding that the thing was a muskrat, or some other water animal, I lit my lantern and turned its bull's-eye first out across the river.

There is nothing more weird when the mind is ripe for weirdness than the gleam of a light on dancing waters, especially when you stand behind the light in darkness. All this tended to string my nerves tighter, and when I turned the light toward the door I was almost prepared to see any kind of a hobgoblin leap forth.

But nothing leaped.

The door was an old one. It had been massive once, but the weather had acted upon it and the hinges were loose.

Putting my shoulder to the thing I shoved it in without much difficulty, and entered with my suit-case. I darkened the lantern with the slide and made my way toward the rear of the house.

I stood in the same spot where I had stood before, at the end of the old arbor, but there were no lights visible in the windows.

After waiting for some time, and seeing no lights nor other sign of life, I became bolder and went to the door in the shed. This, like the front gate, was locked.

I now felt assured that I had the premises to myself, and after trying in vain to break in the door, I attacked one of the windows of the kitchen.

These were provided with the old-fashioned catches that never really fasten, and after working some time with my pocket-knife I got it open. I crawled in, and then locked the window as it had been before.

I was now inside the house, and there was no trace as to how I had entered.

I thought of my wet shoes. They would surely leave tracks on the floor to betray me, and perhaps lead an intruder to my hiding-place if I found one.

I sat down on the floor and took off my shoes and stockings. Making a bundle of these I opened the lantern to enable me to see, and stuffed them into the old stove-pipe hole, which was not too high for me to reach.

I had been intently listening, but no sound broke the impressive stillness. It was not only impressive but oppressive as well.

But I was determined now to see the thing through. There was a fascination about it that was superior even to all literary plans and projects.

Feeling assured that there was no one in the old house, I opened the slide of my lantern and went systematically from room to room.

There was absolutely not the least sign that anybody had been in the place since the last regular occupant had moved out.

I even went so far as to peer through the door to the cellar, and flash my lantern around. But it was cut up into bins and small store-rooms, and I resolved to leave the cellar till daylight to be explored.

I discovered a bolt on the cellar-door and shut that, so I felt secure from molestation from that quarter.

The house was in poor repair. The ceilings had been ruined by rain and snow-water from the roof, and what paper there had been on the walls was stained and streaked. In some places, high up, it had severed its connection with the wall.

I went through every room and found nothing.

Just above the landing of the stairs on the upper floor there was a scuttle leading to what was probably an attic.

Here, if I could reach it, would be an admirable place to hide, as well as a vantage-ground from which to watch the proceedings when the mysterious visitor next made his appearance.

The ceiling was not more than eight feet from the floor, but was too much of a reach for me to push up the scuttle.

A happy thought struck me. My suit-case!

I stood this on end, and at the risk of smashing a good portion of my picnic lunches I stood on it, and to my joy found the scuttle loose. I pushed it up, and slid it to one side.

Then grasping the edge of the coping I drew myself up and into the opening. I heard a noise, and resting half-way up, so that I leaned over far enough to obtain a purchase, I fished the lantern out of my pocket and flashed it around.

There was nothing there except what seemed to be a bat clinging to the big rafters.

I drew myself up, and found a flooring that was loose and incomplete, but sufficient to sustain my weight. I was up there, but my suit-case was still on the floor. Here was a fine quandary.

I looked around the attic. In all such adventures of which I had read a man would find either a ladder or a rope. I found nothing.

Of course, I could use a loose board, but could think of no way in which it would get that suit-case to the attic.

But I was not to be outwitted. I took off my coat and vest, and my suspenders. I lengthened these as much as possible, and tied my handkerchief to one end. Then, letting myself down again I fastened one end to the handle of the suit-case, and buttoned the other to a button on my trousers. I went up again, pulled up the suit-case, and there I was.

I arranged the scuttle so that I could drop it into place in an instant, and sat down on the board flooring to wait.

And I did wait.

The bat, if it was a bat, was either asleep or starved, for it did not move. I sat there hour after hour. The ticking of my watch was the only sound I heard, and that seemed to grow louder as the night advanced. But there wasn't a great deal of the night left.

Daylight came and found me a much disgusted man. I was not only disgusted, but I was hungry, and my back was nearly broken from crouching in one position listening.

In the morning I ate some of my luncheon, let myself down, and once more went through the house. It was just as it had been when I arrived.

I reached the conclusion that the Moonville *Atom* was inclined to be yellow. I was sleepy. Nobody had come. There was no sign of a tragedy or of any other kind of crime.

I pulled my shoes and stockings out of the stove-pipe hole. They were still wet. But I had determined to explore the cellar, and fearing rusty nails, rats, and other things provocative of lockjaw or blood-poisoning, I put them on.

CHAPTER XII.

THE VISITOR AGAIN.

I FOUND the cellar dimly lighted, because the shutters of the small windows were almost closed. Making sure there was no one in sight, I opened these.

I first examined the closed store-rooms to assure myself that there was no one hiding there. Finding all clear, I began an examination of the main floor of the cellar.

To my amazement the floor, which was of earth, had recently been disturbed, and leaning against the wall was a spade. And further to my surprise, it was a new spade.

Here was something. It was perfectly clear now that some one was making use of the old cellar for some secret purposes.

I was of course determined to solve this new mystery, but I did not wish to be surprised and detected in the work. I went above and, unlocking the window, stepped outside.

I went first to the gate fronting the road. It was still locked, and there was no one in the immediate vicinity—that I could see.

I went then to the door on the river and peered up and down the placid stream. There was not a boat in sight. Across the river the village of Fabers was beginning to take on an appearance of waking up. I saw smoke from various chimneys.

Feeling now quite safe, I returned to the cellar. Seizing the spade, I began my digging.

As in everything else connected with this mysterious matter, I went at the spading of the cellar systematically. I marked off the earthen floor in squares, and taking the square in one corner, I began turning up the earth in that section.

I was not content with merely overturning it. I dug it out and made a pile of it on another square. I dug down until I came to a hard clay bottom that had never, so far as its present appearance went, been disturbed by spade or plow.

Having exploited the first square to no purpose, I shoveled back the earth and proceeded with care to dig up the next one.

I kept at this till my back was nearly broken.

I had covered, or, rather, uncovered, and covered again, about half the cellar floor when, looking at my watch, I discovered that it was noon, and I was hungry.

Leaving the spade I returned above, and going to the old well outside, managed to wash my hands and take a drink by making the old bucket serve for a cup.

I had always—up to that time—been an admirer of that good old stand-by "The Old Oaken Bucket." There is something stupendously poetic in the idea of a moss-covered pail from which to drink the cool refreshing draft that comes from the depths of the well.

I lost some of my love for the song then. The bucket was certainly moss covered, but the moss was rank and smelled bad and was full of insects. I had to scrape away a lot of moss, slime, and green mold before I found a place to put my lips.

In a story—even if I wrote it myself—there would have been a cup hanging there. Perhaps of tin, perhaps of iron, or perhaps a forgotten heirloom of solid gold. Almost anything could have been rung in there to add interest, and I made a mental note of it for my story.

But as for the facts in the case, I had not even thought to put a drinking-cup in with my lunch.

Having quenched my thirst, I ascended to the loft or attic again and ate some sandwiches, a couple of hard-boiled eggs, and then went outside and smoked a cigar, leaving the hatch-cover, or scuttle, so that I could get my fingers on the coping on my return.

I then returned to my none too delightful task in the cellar and continued operations with the spade.

The longer I worked, and the more cellar I dug up without finding anything, the more disgusted I became with the whole business. I voted the Moonville *Atom* a fraud.

Yet, there was the new spade, and certainly the earth had been dug up. Either somebody had come there to dig for treasure and had gone away satisfied, or he had accomplished some purpose that I had not fathomed.

Anyway, I dug till every foot of the earthen floor was gone over and I found nothing.

Again washing myself at the well I ate my supper, and took a ramble in the garden.

By this time I was beginning to feel quite at home in my solitude. I had spent a night and day there without being interrupted, and without having seen or heard anything disturbing.

The owner of the spade had evidently

accomplished his purpose. Yet, it was scarcely probable that a man would leave a new spade there unless he had been interrupted and fled in alarm.

But then, I reflected, he would have dropped the spade, whereas I had found it propped up against the wall.

I made several turns among the trees, and went back to the house and up into the attic. I knew I had a long night before me, and as I did not think any one would come at all, and at any rate not till quite late, I stretched myself on the boards and went to sleep.

I slept soundly and awoke with a start. Hours had passed. The scuttle had been left with a small crack showing, so that I could look straight down to the hall, and also could hear if anything was going on below. I peered through the crack, and my heart began to thump.

I could see the gleam of a moving light, and I could hear the light footfalls of some stealthy person making the rounds of the rooms.

I hoped whoever it was would pass beneath me so that I might gather some idea of his size, appearance, and character. But he did not. He passed from one room to another so close that I could see the shadow of his legs as he walked, and I knew it was a man.

Now things began to look like business.

Certainly the fellow had some object there. He was evidently alone, and was undoubtedly looking for something.

But why this incessant search when I knew there was nothing there? He had been there oftener than I, and must surely know as well as I, at least, that the old house contained absolutely nothing.

Then I thought of secret panels in the walls. Here was a theory to hang a hat on. I had not thought of that before, and whether there were panels in the walls or not it was a rich idea for my story, and I made another mental note.

Here I had two good ideas for the story in addition to what I had already written. I had resolved to have a clue to the mystery of the old house hang on the discovery of an old family drinking-cup at the well, inscribed with names and dates that assisted materially in the search for the hidden will, or treasure, or whatever I should finally decide to have discovered in the cellar, where I had discovered nothing but a new spade.

And the second idea was a secret panel in the wall wherein my hero or heroine—I inclined to the hero—returned from a long sojourn abroad—should find a missing will that would place him in possession of the family fortune then being enjoyed by a reprobate relative who had thought him dead.

Here came in the dead man in the mill—and a case of mistaken identity.

My blood was on fire as I planned the story and watched the light below.

Suddenly the latter became stationary. I peered down as well as I could with the scuttle in its present position, but all I could discern was that the lamp or lantern was apparently resting on the floor. I saw a shadow, but it was such a peculiar one that I could not make out what the fellow was doing.

It was no time to falter now. I must see more.

I cautiously lifted the scuttle and drew it back, depositing it on the floor.

Then leaning over I bent my head downward, resting my two hands on the coping to prevent falling.

I could not see the lamp, but to my amazement I saw two legs stretched out on the floor and two feet shod in what seemed to be felt slippers.

Whatever the fellow was doing on the floor I could not imagine. He was motionless, and might be asleep. But he was lying on his face, and one would not expect him to choose such a place to go to sleep especially with his lamp burning.

My eagerness—my excitement—the whirling giddiness of the moment, augmented by the rush of blood to the head or something, made me lurch forward. I caught myself, but my fountain-pen slid from my vest-pocket and struck the hard-wood floor beneath with a sharp rap, then rebounded and the usual rat-a-tat followed as it settled.

Instantly the light was extinguished.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BLOW IN THE DARK.

NEVER in my life had I experienced such sensations as I did that minute.

There was now no question in my mind

that the fellow was some kind of lawbreaker, but what his "lay" was I could not imagine.

But I was too eager and excited now to be cautious, and I hastily, without noise, let myself down from the scuttle. I landed on my toes, making a slight sound, and stepped quickly to one side before he could catch me.

I feared that he might shoot, as most lawbreakers do when in a tight place.

I had my own revolver in my hand in an instant, and went cautiously about as I had before, rubbing my hand before me against the walls and stepping every few steps and swinging out to see if any one was within reach.

For a time all this was fruitless. I became bolder, and by now knowing the lay of the rooms pretty well I struck out more fearlessly, holding one hand out before me and the other with the revolver ready to fire in case I was attacked.

My thirty-eight was a self-cocking shooter, and I went along with my finger on the trigger.

I had passed through several rooms in this way, at first slowly, and then with more courage and speed, when——

To tell of the shock in proper words would be a futile task. My hand touched another hand. The fingers clasped. My hand suddenly received a terrific wrench, and I received a blow in the chest that sent me backward against the wall.

In the shock my finger pulled the trigger and my revolver went off.

Recovering myself, I snatched the lantern from my pocket.

I was the sole occupant of the room. I rushed to the next—there was no one there.

Half frantic with bewilderment and rage, I dashed like a madman from room to room, then down-stairs and into one room after another, but there was not the slightest sign of any one having been there.

I rushed to the door leading to the shed, and that was locked the same as it had been. I tried the front door, and that was locked. I tried every window, and the fastenings were all in place.

The perspiration was rolling off me in a torrent. My heart was beating as it had never beat before.

The hand that held the lantern trembled, and the finger on the trigger twitched beyond my power to control.

The man was in the house, but where?

I threw aside all caution now. Whoever and wherever he was, he knew I was there. The blow I had received showed that he was a man of great strength.

I began pounding on the walls, banging and pushing every foot I could reach in a frantic search for a secret panel or hiding-place.

Round and round I went, into every room, the halls, the closets, but I found nothing.

I hammered away on the two chimneys, but they gave out no sound except the beating of my clenched fists on solid brick.

I went to the cellar-door. That was bolted on the inside, showing that he had not escaped that way.

Now, once more the theory of something beyond the human insisted on getting into my brain. That the man had hit me a lingering soreness still proved. It was no dream. That much was certain.

The man was in the house—somewhere. Of that I was as sure as I was that I stood there myself.

I examined the floors. They were old, sodden with dirt, and there was no place where an opening could exist and be in use without detection.

Still unsatisfied, I continued, or rather repeated, my search, and went again over all the walls, this time more slowly and with more method and precision, but I found nothing.

By the time I had finished this second round it was daylight. I was exhausted more from excitement than from lack of sleep, for I had enjoyed a good nap before discovering the presence in the house.

I now rebuked myself for going to sleep at all. I resolved that I would not sleep again until I had got the fellow where I wanted him, and, whether he was natural or supernatural, wrest from him the secret of his eager search.

I tried to discuss calmly with myself the probabilities.

Had he committed a crime? Had he murdered old Jacob Spyzer and robbed him? Had he felt remorse and was this

his insane method of doing penance—coming each night, or nearly every night—to weep upon the scene of his crime?

Was there, then, on the other hand, such a thing really as reincarnation, and was this the reincarnated—reembodied—spirit of some murdered man coming nightly to search for his murderer to wreak vengeance upon him?

Would a reembodied spirit need a lamp? I had no theosophic knowledge to tell me that he would not.

The fellow had uttered no sound. I had heard nothing from his lips, save that quick inward breath I had heard the first night of our meeting, and even then, in my excitement, I believed I might have been mistaken. But there was a weak spot in almost every theory.

If it was the reincarnated spirit of a murdered man come to hunt for his murderer, it did not seem likely that he would be afraid and run away. I did not, as I have said before, have much knowledge of reembodied spirits. But it did not seem reasonable that one could be killed the second time.

Yet, on the other hand, there was every reason to believe—granting that the thing itself could be believed to begin with—that having been once murdered, and knowing something of the hereafter—he might stand in terrific fear of another experience of the kind.

I felt as if I was going insane myself. My head throbbed and I felt a pain at the base of my brain, which I had always understood was the forerunner of a nervous breakdown.

From this pleasant thought I jumped a foot farther to a worse one.

Was I sane myself? Was I imagining these things in a sort of waking hysteria? I had felt the man. I had seen him. He had not left the house. He could not be found.

The resistless grip of the mystery held me so in thrall that I stood like an image in the middle of the floor for at least ten minutes, gazing at the last spot in the wall where I had fruitlessly searched for a secret panel.

Then the reaction came and I laughed. I laughed immoderately till tears ran down my cheeks. I examined my revolver to make sure that one cartridge had really exploded. It certainly had.

But the laugh and the hysterical tears had acted as a safety-valve, and I came back to my senses with a jump.

"There is something going on," I said to myself, "that is more mysterious than all the mysteries of Eugene Sue. Some one, either natural or supernatural, is coming here almost every night, and his object is so powerful, his purpose so strong, that he will come again. I will go at this thing now with absolute fearlessness. With caution I can show myself, and will run down this mystery if it takes a year. I shall ask for no help. I shall give no clue till I have the secret myself. Then fortune and fame in literature are mine."

With this resolve, and a much calmer set of nerves, I climbed to the attic, ate a good lunch, and let myself down, leaving the scuttle apparently as though no one had touched it.

My plan was not yet formed. I doubt if I had a plan. But I did have a determination to succeed, and knowing what success meant to me, I was without fear. Absolutely, for the first time in my life without fear.

I did not even think of the possibility of arrest for the murder of the dead man I had seen in the mill. No one could connect me with that now. I could go and come as I pleased, and no one could say I had had a hand in the crime that was committed weeks before.

Having finished my breakfast, I got out of the window, closing it after me and putting the shutters in place again, and then letting myself out of the door on the river and carrying my suit-case to give me the appearance of a traveler, I walked along the narrow strip of beach to the spot where I had left my boat.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE TRAIL AT LAST.

I APPROACHED the end of the wall with the expectation, born of my previous experience, of finding my boat gone again, but to my extreme delight I discovered it, oars and all, just as I had left it.

As I have already stated, I had no settled plan. I could not see ahead clearly enough in the foggy situation to

formulate any plan. I resolved to be as cautious as possible, to feel my way along as circumstances and conditions seemed to direct each step.

Having found my boat all secure, the next question was what use to make of it.

I pondered for some time over this, for the manner of my entry into Spyzers would, I believed, have much to do with the success of my undertaking.

In the first place, it was necessary for me to have some definite and plausible reason for going to the place.

I could scarcely go as a traveling salesman. I did not suppose there would be more than one or two stores of any kind in the village, and more than likely one general store would cover all the trade, as my father's store did in Cornwood.

Knowing something about small villages and the manners of the inhabitants, I knew I must do all I could to satisfy the curious and inquisitive and make a prolonged stay reasonable.

My suit-case might serve in any capacity except for the purpose of carrying a prodigious amount of lunch. This I resolved to do away with, and to that end I dumped the whole outfit into the river.

Cleaning the inside of the case thoroughly, I put it in the boat, and, getting in myself, rowed across the river to Fabers.

I knew there was a store there, and several offices in the same building with the post-office and court. For Fabers, notwithstanding the fact that it was on the side of the river away from the railroad, was, owing to several reasons, a larger and more thriving place, apparently, than the Dutch settlement of Spyzers.

I made a few minor purchases at the store, for I was so intensely interested now in the great mystery of the Spyzer house that I did not wish to take time to return to New York. I wanted to be where I could visit the old mansion that night again.

Having eked out my wardrobe sufficiently, I returned to the boat and rowed across the river to Spyzers.

This, as I imagined it would, proved to be a small, struggling place, with little to recommend it except its gardens, which were certainly such as only the Dutch or their descendants ever have.

There was one main street that stretched away in a winding direction a short distance from the river, and was the continuation of the road on which the house of mystery faced. From this two or three short streets shot off into nothingness, with a house here and there to show that they were really intended to pose as streets.

The business portion of the place consisted of the railroad station, a store and post-office, the usual blacksmith-shop, and a small hotel.

I found the presiding genius of the latter to be a young man much given to making acquaintances when he had a chance, and of driving them nearly insane with his loquaciousness after he had made them.

"I would like to have a room for a day or two, with meals," I said, as I set my suit-case down by the bar.

He sized me up with considerable curiosity.

"Where'd you come from?" he asked, glancing out of the door to see if I had a horse standing there. "Ain't no train fur an hour."

"I did not come by train," I said. "I have just rowed over from Fabers, where I spent the night."

My reason for going to Fabers in the first place was to let those in Spyzers who might be hanging around the river and see me arrive be able, in case the gossip concerning me became rife, to corroborate what I said. And having been in Fabers, if there was gossip reaching even there, those who had seen me could add their testimony.

Thus my tracks (if there are tracks left by a boat) leading into Spyzers would be fully explained.

"I can give you a room, all righty righty," said hte genial young man, whom I learned in a very short time was the son of the owner of the hotel. "I'll give you the one Congressman Simmons had when he was here. Ever met Congressman Simmons? He's a dandy, all righty righty. He used to come down every morning and have his nip just like any ordinary man. Ever meet him?"

I assured him that though I had never met the Congressman personally, I had friends who were very close to him, and that I was myself a great admirer of his abilities.

We were on good terms at once, and he escorted me to my room.

It was a good, substantial one, furnished with old-fashioned and heavy furniture, with one window looking out on a broad garden and two on the main street.

"This must have just suited the Congressman," I remarked. "I know his tastes."

I had never heard him mentioned, but I immediately sized this young man up to be the very person who, if properly handled, would give me all the information I wanted in regard to the vicinity.

I deposited my suit-case, had a wash, and by that time dinner was ready.

There were several farmers from the neighborhood eating, but I was the only stranger. I came in, of course, for the usual amount of speculative study.

After dinner I purchased a cigar and treated the host to one of his best, and the young man, being off duty, sauntered out on the piazza with me, smoking also.

"What's your business?" he asked. "Ain't another life-insurance fellow, are you?"

"No," I said. "I am not. But the manner in which you say it leads me to believe that there is some kind of tale connected with life insurance as applied to Spyzers."

He laughed.

"Oh, I dunno as it's a tale exactly. But along about the middle of the month a fellow came here and said he was a life-insurance chap. He had that same room as you. Well, he trotted around to every house for a week, and tried to insure the people. But the people of Spyzers ain't got much use fur life insurance. He lasted only that week, and then he lit out."

"Went away disgusted, did he?" I asked.

"I dunno how he went away. He left his grip here. It's up there in the closet off your room yet. Nobody's opened it. I don't suppose he'd want anybody to open it. And he'd paid some in advance on his room, so it wouldn't be fair to open it, would it?"

"N-no," I said, doing some rapid thinking. "I don't suppose it would be just the thing to do. If I had paid in advance on a room and had been called away hurriedly by sudden news, I wouldn't like any one to open my satchel."

I was throwing out a hint for myself there, for though I had nothing of a tell-tale character in my suit-case, I did not know what might go into it before I had finished my researches.

"No, we thought that way. Pap said he'd let the old thing rot before he'd open it."

"Just what I would do," I assured him. "And when did you say the insurance man went away?"

"He disappeared—let me see—I think it was about the thirteenth day of—no, the fourteenth day of July."

I did some rapid mental calculating. It was, I remembered, on the fourteenth of July that I had come to the old house, and this would make it the fifteenth when I went back to Moonville by way of Fabers. I had no doubt that there was some connection between the disappearance of the insurance man and the dead man I had seen in the river.

"Was he a young man, this insurance agent?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, about like you. He had a smooth face, and plenty of hair, and was about as big as you."

"Smooth face and plenty of hair," I repeated to myself. Then to the clerk: "Did he seem to have much money with him?"

"Well, he had some. He was dressed pretty well, but he didn't spend much money."

"Did he have any jewelry?"

"Oh, yes. He had a splendid gold watch. It was a dandy, all righty righty. Told me his mother had given it to him. It was worth a couple of hundred, anyway."

I mused a while without speaking.

The dead man I had seen in the river had a smooth face and plenty of hair.

It was the insurance agent who had been murdered.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LETTER IN THE SATCHEL.

I THOUGHT I had pumped enough information out of the young man for a while, and, in fact, I wanted time to digest what he had told me.

I let him ramble on a few sentences more while I lit a fresh cigar, hoping he would not ask me again what my business was. I had not yet decided what line to adopt for the time being.

Having got my cigar going and a lull having come in the flow of words, I slipped away and strolled through the main street of the village.

I saw nothing except the utmost placidity. It was almost impossible to believe that a tragedy, or even a romance, had ever happened in the place. The men I saw were stolid, the women were ugly, and there seemed to be no young girls.

Surely beauty and passion had had no part in the sanguinary doings at the old Spyzer homestead if these were samples of the femininity that were there when old Jacob was alive.

In my travels I went a little beyond the confines of the settled village, and there I came upon a church. It was as near the real Dutch article as could be found in New York State, and the graveyard surrounding it was quite in keeping.

The gate was broken and lying on the ground, and I stepped over it into the burying-ground.

I searched among the headstones, and at last found what I was looking for—the family burying-place of the old Spyzers.

I had a note-book with me, and made a memorandum of the following:

There was Heinrich Spyzer, the date of whose birth had been obliterated by age, but who, by the inscription, had died in 1806. There was Katrina, his wife, who died a few years later. Then there was Johann, their son, also dead, and Lizbet, the daughter, who died after marriage and whose married name was Van Vechten.

I looked in vain for either the name of the Meinheer Van Vechten or Jacob Spyzer.

Here was another step, but entirely independent of the murder of the insurance man at so recent a date.

Just what connection there was I could not see, and there was probably none. But then—I had yet to work out the link between the missing Van Vechten and Jacob Spyzer and the spook or other visitant of the Spyzer home.

With these memoranda in my pocket, I made my way back to the hotel. By that time the host was at work in his garden and the young man was behind the little bar. I had something to drink and sat down for a chat with him.

"This is a queerly named village," I said. "Sounds Dutchy to me."

"It's Dutch enough," he replied with a grin. "Even the old man is Dutch. The right name for this place is Little Holland. But they are all right, all those old people. They live their lives and they don't meddle with anybody else. That's what I like about 'em."

"There seems to be a lack of young people here," I remarked.

"Sure. What would keep anybody here? I'm about the only one. But I'm fixed. This shanty pays, and it'll be mine some day. I could do worse. I've got my horse, and money enough to spend, and Moonville ain't so far."

"Lots of young people in Moonville?" I asked.

"Rabbles. Moonville has plenty of work for young people. You see there was never any manufacturing here. These old dubs made their money out of gardening for market—all but the Spyzers. Place was named after them."

I was getting nearer.

"So that's how it got its name. How did they make their money?"

"Millin'. There's an old mill up the river a bit. Ain't no good now. Nobody wouldn't take hold of it now, anyway."

"Why not? Isn't milling as good a business as it was?"

"Well, there's plenty of mills, but there ain't no use fur old-fashioned mills with a ghost tied to 'em."

"A ghost?"

"Yep. Well, the ghost ain't exactly tied to the mill. It's more in the house. You see, there was two branches of the Spyzers. There was Heinrich, he came to this country first. I've heard all this from the old man a hundred thousand times. Heinrich was a miller in Holland, and came here and built a mill just like they had there. He married a girl from Holland, and then his brother Johann came. Johann married, too, but he was a sailor, and his wife was alone a good deal.

"Anyway, this Heinrich had a son and a daughter named Johann, after the sailor brother, and a girl named Lizbet. Johann never married, but Lizbet married a man named Van Vechten, who was a rascal. He was a scamp, all righty righty, and used to spend all his wife's money. Well, Johann died, and Lizbet had a boy—just like his father. Well, Lizbet died and old Heinrich kicked Van Vechten and the boy out altogether.

"So much for Heinrich, and that's all I know about his end of it. Now, Johann had a boy, too, but he was born after Heinrich's boy, and so wasn't named after his father, but was named Jacob. So you see Jacob was heir to the hull shootin' match. And they all say—the old ones—that Jake was about as mean as they make 'em. He had the mill, and the house, and money everywhere.

"One day—this is what the old man says—a fellow came here and said he was Fred Van Vechten, the son of Lizbet Spyzer. But Jacob wouldn't have anything to do with him. The young man hung around a while, and then went away, and soon after that old Jake was found dead in bed, and people said he was murdered. That's all I know."

"How was it that Jake wasn't buried in the churchyard with the others?" I asked.

He stared at me with eyes that opened wide in astonishment.

"How do *you* know anything about that?" he asked.

"I chanced upon the old burying-ground and went in and looked over the names. I remember that there was no Jacob."

He did not seem satisfied. He came from behind the bar and whispered, though there was no one in sight, "Say, are you on the job?"

"What job?" I inquired innocently.

"I knew somebody would come along and dig up those old bones yet."

"Yes," I said in a whisper. "I am a detective. Keep your tongue to yourself. I'll tell you some great things before I leave."

It was like nectar to him to be on confidential terms with a city detective. After a time I went to my room and sat down away from his chatter to think it all out.

There was too much of it for me to gather into one compact mass and put it into shape. There were missing links, but still everything seemed to lead to the conclusion that somewhere and somehow the insurance man, the dead man in the river, and the murder of Jacob Spyzer were all connected in some way with one another.

Was the insurance man a descendant of the Van Vechtens come to claim his own? If so, who would wish to murder him, since there was no one now in possession of the property?

Or, was the insurance man simply an insurance man, and had he, while bent upon his business, gone to the Spyzer house and chanced upon the same person I had, and been killed for his temerity?

Smooth face and plenty of hair, the young man had said, and that suited the dead man in the river.

Either I was on the trail of a most complicated mystery, involving a romantic old estate, mixed with a modern collection of spooks, or I had to deal with an old crime, a modern crime, and a haunted house, which would mean the bringing together of three separate threads to make the skein of my own story for the *Biverly Magazine* a perfect one.

I had almost enough, but still I was under the spell of the mystery, and was determined to get a better line on the fellow in the house.

While I sat there I remembered the satchel of the insurance man in the closet. I had said to the clerk that I would not like my own suit-case tampered with, which was quite true. Still, determined as I was to get to the bottom of the mystery, nothing seemed wrong that might lead to something, and stealthily I went to the closet and opened the door.

On the floor was a traveling-bag.

I picked it up and found it locked, but the lock was a sickly affair, and I soon broke it open.

I found little inside the satchel. Some soiled underclothing and a few collars; that was about all, but underneath, as if carelessly thrown in, was a scrap of a letter.

I found that one side was blank, and on this had been written in pencil the

same notes of births and deaths that I had made in the churchyard.

Turning the leaf, or fragment of a leaf, over, I found written in the neat, pretty handwriting of a woman, as follows:

——you home. Of course, we need money so badly that almost any means seems right, but I shudder at what you have already told me. My God! my darling husband, suppose something should happen to——

The page was torn here, then it began again:

——baby cries more than ever—perhaps for you; perhaps because I am so weak, can't feed. . . . You say you have almost reached the point of murder and if nothing else will do you must—— Don't let your desperation——

This was all, but with what I had already learned it was enough to set my blood tingling.

Now, was the insurance man murdered? Or was he a murderer?

Or both?

And what had this to do with old Jake Spyzer?

It was supper-time, and I prepared to visit the haunted house again.

CHAPTER XVI.

A TRIFLING ACCIDENT.

I MANAGED to get through supper without having the son of mine host glue himself to me, and immediately after, obtaining a few cigars from the bar, I strolled out.

I had not yet determined whether to go to the old mansion by road or by boat. There was good reason for adopting either way.

If I went by boat those who saw me leave the village, and there were many out that lovely summer night, would know that I took the boat and rowed away toward Fabers, whence I had come. This would stifle all curiosity, or, at least, satisfy it in a channel that could not interfere with my plans.

On the other hand, if I went by road, I might stroll leisurely past the old house and seem to be merely an ordinary summer boarder out for an evening walk. In that way I might accidentally obtain a look at the strange occupant of the place as he approached.

I was thinking of this when I brought myself up with a short turn.

What reason had I to suppose that he would be on the road? He had not left the house. Of that I was certain, for the doors were locked.

Studying it all over, I concluded the better way would be to use the boat. This was not so much as an easy method of getting there, for I was fond of walking, but I happened to think that I had left the scuttle tightly closed, and without the suit-case or something to stand on I would have some difficulty in opening it.

While I had been in the house, with my suit-case in the attic, I had left the scuttle open sufficiently for a clutch-hold, and by springing up I could get my hands over the coping. I could not do this when I returned.

It would not do to excite comment by taking my suit-case when I might wish to return the next morning, and yet I wanted to carry something with me that would enable me to make the ascent easily. And this must be something that must be drawn up into the attic in a hurry if necessary.

Nothing could be so good for the purpose as a light ladder, and yet I did not wish to ask for one at the hotel and go through the streets with it, and thus excite further comment.

After all, I was compelled to fall back on my young friend.

"I am going across to Fabers tonight," I told him, "and there is a certain place I wish to land just below—you know where the rocks are."

"Yes," he said, with his eyes shining at being told what a detective was going to do. "I know. I suppose you are going to meet somebody there, eh? Another de—I mean a friend?"

"Yes, that's right, a friend," I replied. "I am glad you remember to be discreet. Now, it is a difficult climb to those rocks, and I want a ladder. But for reasons you understand I don't want these people to see me going toward the river with one. I tell you what I wish you would do. Get hold of a short ladder about

nine or ten feet long, and carry it down to the river. Don't let anybody know it is for me, and don't let on we are together."

"All right," he said.

It was easy to see that he was delighted at the chance of being a party to a detective's act. He soon obtained a ladder and without a word to any one started off. I followed at a leisurely pace, and found him waiting for me.

I got the ladder in the boat and rowed straight for Fabers.

Dusk was lingering off for a long time that night, and I took it easy, and after almost reaching Fabers turned around and rowed the other way.

It was scarcely dark when I reached the door of the wall, but I cared nothing for that, because I knew the fellow was in the house, and I was about as safe in dusk, or even in broad daylight, as I was in the dark.

I pushed the ladder through the door, then tied the boat with the short painter attached to her bow to an old spike in the door-frame, and went in myself.

I tried the door of the house, but that was still locked. I entered by way of the window, and carried my ladder upstairs, making as little noise as possible, which was almost none.

I set the ladder up against the side of the scuttle-hole and, going up, pushed open the scuttle.

Crawling through, I pulled the ladder after me, and let it rest across the floor.

Now I was ready to watch again.

The thing that bothered me most was why the fellow didn't show himself as long as he remained inside the building and knew I was there. I had no doubt, as I have said before, that he *was* there.

Hours passed. I kept close watch through the scuttle-hole, and about ten o'clock a sudden gleam of light shot into the hall beneath me. I was startled, it came so quickly and so noiselessly.

There were the same stealthy movements as before. Obviously, the man did not know I was there.

Was he deaf, then? No. He had heard my fountain-pen drop. That had made less noise than I had in drawing up the ladder.

I pulled the scuttle as far over the aperture as I could, and yet leave space enough for me to look down on what might happen below. But nothing much did happen.

The light went from room to room, and swung into the hall, but this time the fellow who carried it was evidently not coming up-stairs.

He meandered around below, still evidently seeking something, and then the light went out.

Here was a change of plan that startled me. He had not come to the second floor, and had not lain down on his face as on the night previous, so that his mission, whatever it was, seemed to be over.

I waited in silence for another hour, and suddenly the light appeared again. I saw it spread through the lower hall, and it seemed to be coming from the direction of the kitchen. I heard something heavy strike the floor, and then the wall.

I knew in a moment what it was. He had been to the cellar and had brought the spade.

It was beginning to be apparent that whatever part he had played in the double tragedy in which I had involved myself, he was about through his labors inside the old mansion.

He did not seem now to be taking extra precautions; he even hummed a tune. This struck me as being particularly amazing. Then there began that same stealthy movement of the light in the hall. He was coming up-stairs.

I could not see his face. He had on a broad soft hat pulled well down over his eyes, and he carried a revolver in his right hand and a lantern in his left.

I breathed as quietly as I could, and believed that the end of my search was at hand.

The lantern swung to and fro, and the effect, looking at him from above, was weird in the extreme.

He climbed the stairs noiselessly, and did not look up. He passed on into the room where I had seen him stretched on the floor writing, and here he stood for some little time, out of my sight.

I was undetermined what to do. The sight of that pistol deterred me from speaking. Of what use would it be to speak, anyway, to a man who undoubtedly would take my life if he knew that I was spying on him?

I drew back the scuttle again to make room for my head and bent down as I had before, and saw him evidently taking a look around the room.

Still, I could not see his face.

He then seemed to raise the lantern, and stepped to a side of the apartment that took him out of my sight.

I could leap down and surprise him, but he would have the best of me. I could not drop without making some noise. I might with extreme care lower the ladder and go down with my revolver in hand, ready for a sudden clash.

I decided to wait till he got downstairs. He seemed to be doing everything in a leisurely way, and pretty soon I did see him pass into the hall and down the stairs.

Now was my opportunity. Before he reached his hiding-place I could be upon him.

I did not need the ladder. I needed nothing. The position I had taken was upon a loose board; the scuttle was only half off the hole. I was in feverish haste.

I stood up, as straight as I could, to take away the ladder and scuttle. I lifted it, and in stepping to one side I inadvertently trod on one side of the ladder. My foot slipped off, and in an attempt to regain my balance and make no noise I raised the other foot.

My first foot had slipped from the ladder on to something yielding, and as it received the weight of my entire body the plaster ceiling gave way, and I went crashing to the floor below, with the noise of a falling building.

I struck my head on a beam, and lay for several minutes on the floor of the upper hall, almost unconscious.

CHAPTER XVII.

ARRESTED AT LAST.

THE noise I made in falling, and the crashing of the débris as it came in a blinding storm down on top of me, would have frightened away any man or devil in the place for an evil purpose.

I was not only frightened myself, but I was jarred and sore and dizzy.

As soon as I had gathered my scattered senses I pulled my lantern from my pocket and lit it.

I had no thought of pursuing the other fellow. I had not the slightest idea I should find him.

Instead, I sat amid the ruin I had wrought and looked ruefully around me. There was a gaping hole in the ceiling, the ragged edges hanging over in a leering grin at me.

The plaster was in my eyes and all over my clothes. I looked a good deal more like a ghost than did the substantial form I had seen going about with a lantern.

My chin was scraped and sore from striking a beam as I came through the ceiling, and my head ached from a crack it got against another. I picked myself up and stood still, gazing in a half-witted way around me where the gleam of the lantern lighted up the gloom.

Certainly, I had had enough of ghost hunting. Whatever the mystery of the old mansion might be, it might remain a mystery for all I cared. I was not hired to do detective work, so I told myself in an intense rage at the accident, and I had enough material for a first class story any way.

The next question was what to do about the hole in the ceiling. If I sought out the persons who had charge of the confounded old barracks and told them, I would not only get my name in the papers as the celebrated ghost-hunter of Cornwood, but would be the laughing-stock of everybody who wrote. There seemed to be a lingering idea in my somewhat battered mind that in some way or other I had been an ass.

But I had at least accomplished the real object for which I had come. I was assured now of success with the *Biverly*. That was enough. I resolved to go home.

I not only resolved to go home, but to do so in the least ostentatious way, so that no matter what might be the result of the smashing of the ceiling to others, it could not in any way be attributed to me and bring down upon me the ridicule of other authors.

This was after all a matter easy of accomplishment. All I had to do was to go. No one knew I had come; there was no one to say stay when I went.

But there was the blooming ladder, the cause of the trouble, and that had to

be returned to the hotel at Spyzers. For if it was discovered, an inquiry would bring about the fact that I had borrowed it ostensibly to go to Fabers.

This idea sent another chill racing up and down my spinal column, for if that was once established, then, if the body of the dead man was found near the mill, or near the house, which was farther down the river, it would be ascertained that I had, on the night he was killed, hired a boat to go to Fabers, and the alibi I had sought to establish would be torn to atoms.

There was no argumen. about the matter. I must sneak home like an undiscovered felon and hide my tracks and write—write as I had never written before.

I managed to leap up, catch the coping and draw myself into the attic again. Then I got the accursed ladder down, and came down myself.

I saw, as I passed through the kitchen to the door, that the spade had been left standing where I had heard it placed against the wall.

Much to my surprise I found the door unlocked and open.

Had the mysterious visitant of the house a key, then, after all? And had he been out of the house all the time I had supposed him in? It looked possible, but he must have made a quick exit.

But speculation about this was useless then, and I marched with the ladder on my shoulder to the door in the wall, put it in the boat, and began my return to Spyzers.

I arrived there in the small hours of the morning, and having made my boat fast to a landing picked up the ladder and started for the hotel.

I was passing a small coal-yard, when a man jumped out at me.

"Hold on," he cried, "where are you going with that ladder?"

My teeth rattled in my head as I tried to reply.

"Caught you, did I? Well, there won't be no roosts robbed to-night. Come with me."

"I am not a chicken thief," I said as vehemently as I could. "I borrowed this ladder from the young man at the hotel, and wish to return it. I board there."

"Oh, you do? Well, I ain't disputin' that. You wouldn't be the first thief to board in a respectable place. And the hotel ain't open now anyway, so come along. I'll give you a night's lodgin' you won't have to pay for."

"But I tell you I am an honest man," I insisted.

"Less danger to you to-morrow. I've been watchin' fur you some time, I reckon. I did suspect that you had a hidin' place in the old Spyzer house, but I ain't caught you there. Come along now. Come along."

The idea struck me as being extremely plausible. I was almost on the point of telling the fellow that I had seen his chicken-thief when discretion returned to me and I remembered the dead man at the mill. That decided me.

"I'll go with you," I said, "but I warn you that you've got to prove a crime against me or take the consequences."

"Consekences fur what?" he asked. "I'm the constable of this place, and there ain't no consekences fur an arrest on suspicion at one o'clock in the morning of a feller nobody knows carryin' a ladder. Come along."

I went along. He was a great, big, rawboned countryman, and what else could I do but go along?

"Can't we leave the ladder here?" I asked. "What's the use lugging that?"

"Oh, it ain't fur," he replied. "You've got along with it so fur. You might as well keep it."

So with the ladder as a burden and the constable walking alongside of me, I trudged through the dark, sleepy street.

"Where will you take me?" I inquired.

"I'm going to put you in the lock-up till morning."

There was no use arguing the matter. We reached a one-storied building near the depot, and he unlocked the door.

"Ain't had a prisoner in an age," he said. "The supervisors will be surprised when I send in a bill for your keep."

Once inside the building he found a lantern somewhere and lit it, and I had a look at my quarters.

They were not very spacious, consist-

ing of two rooms, in one of which was a hard bench for a bed.

"Let's see what you've got," he demanded.

His big badge of authority gleamed on his coat and I did not resist. I knew there was no use now trying to tell him the truth.

First he brought out the dark-lantern and chuckled. Then he found the revolver, and looked at me with a gleam of triumph in his eye.

"I knowed I had you. Game's up now though. We'll see what the justice has to say in the morning."

"What time does the justice hold his court?" I asked.

"Oh, about ten or eleven. Depends on the weather and how busy he is."

With this I had to be content.

He took my lantern and hung his on a wooden peg.

"I wouldn't leave you a light," he said, "but there's rats here, and I ain't so cruel as to want even a chicken thief to have his hands chewed off in the dark."

He locked the door and left me to reflections that were none too comforting.

There was no question that there had been chicken stealing going on. There was no doubting the lantern and revolver in my pocket.

I sat on the bench that was intended for my bed and rested my head in my hands—and thought.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

As I sat there my mind grew cooler. I could reason out the fine points of the situation with something like precision. The fine points that I reasoned out were these:

Given a certainty that the neighborhood had suffered from the depredations of a chicken thief, the bane of all farmers, the logical conclusion in the mind of every person in Spyzers who owned chickens would be that a man with a dark lantern and a revolver was the likeliest man to be that thief.

I was the man with the revolver and lantern. The circumstantial evidence against me was too clear and concise to be doubted by the people who owned chickens.

I even placed myself in their shoes and looked at it from their only point of view. Had my father also lost chickens, and had a strange man been found after midnight prowling through Cornwood with a dark lantern, a revolver and a ladder, that man would go to jail as sure as the next day arrived.

Even if he had a good story to tell, it would go hard with him, and I had none.

It would do no good, I reasoned, to tell the justice that I was in the deserted old Spyzer house to get local color. The chances were heavy that the justice would not have the slightest idea what local color was.

If he read anything it would be the Moonville *Atom,* and the Moonville *Atom,* having already taken up the haunted house story would make much of my arrest, and my disgrace would fly all over the State.

No one had sent me to investigate the Spyzer house. I could not drag in the editors of the *Biverly.* They had not told me to hunt a ghost. They had not told me to steal into private property armed with a revolver and burglar's lantern to write them a story.

Then I remembered that one empty shell remained in my revolver, and if the dead man of the mill was found and he proved to have been shot, it was all up with Andrew Nathing as sure as that individual was born.

I saw myself pilloried in the press, held up to scorn and ridicule. I saw myself ruined for life. I saw myself in jail.

These are not pleasant things to contemplate, especially with an aching head and a sore jaw.

I took the lantern and examined the place. It was substantially built, evidently with the sole object of using it as a lock-up. The window was too high to reach, and was barred.

There was a place for a stove, and upon examining that I discovered that like everything else in the village it was Dutch. That is, the chimney-flue was about three times as wide as it need be.

I pried away at the bricks at the bot-

tom, and they, having been put together many years ago, were not very difficult to move. I soon had an aperture large enough to crawl through.

The building was, as I have said, only one story high, and not a very high story either. But the top of the chimney was too high for me to reach.

But ideas come to a man in difficulties. I took the bricks I had pried loose, and pried out a few more, and with these made a little pile.

It was a ticklish stepping place, but after I got my head and shoulders squeezed into the flue I could steady myself.

To my great joy I could reach the top of the chimney and hauled myself to the roof. It was but a slight jump from that to the ground.

I dared not leave the village without my suit-case, for my name was painted on it. I recalled with unholy joy the fact that I had not registered at the hotel.

I made my way there and found it as dark, silent, and as gloomy as a tomb.

I knew where my room was located, and right under the window, opening out on the garden, was the shed of a porch.

I had by this time become so expert in doing things without making a noise, that it seemed but play to climb up a post of the porch and try the window.

Even though they feared chicken thieves in Spyzers, it was evident that they had little fear of any other kind. I found the window open.

With a suppressed chuckle of delight I crept in, seized my suit-case, and crept out again, letting myself down to the ground without any noise.

Now I was free once more, and again the question of what to do next confronted me.

I dared not go to the boat lest I fall into the hands of the constable. And yet if I went off without returning the boat the constable could learn from Moonville who I was. I must have the boat.

I sneaked in the shadows toward the coal-yard, and thought I saw the form of a man standing near the end of the road that led to the wharf.

Somehow this did not seem like the burly form of the constable and as I stood watching him he suddenly turned. Whether his action made me step out of the shadow or not, I don't know, but I did so, and he started to run in the opposite direction.

Undoubtedly he was the chicken thief.

Anyway I was well rid of him, and scurrying to the boat, threw in my suit-case and was soon going up-stream as fast as the oars could propel me.

Pulling against the current was harder than coming with it, and it was gray dawn when I pulled up at Dudley's landing.

There was no one there, so I tied the boat and walked to the station.

There was a milk train about half an hour after and on it I obtained passage to New York.

Having thus neatly escaped all terrors, I at once plunged into the plan of my story, and surely now I had lived the atmosphere enough to make it a roaring success.

There were some little things I wanted to talk over with my father and mother, for they knew a lot about matters pertaining to wills and estates. I reached New York early, and without stopping hurried to the other portion of the Grand Central Station and took the train for Cornwood.

People were getting around when I got there, and the first to greet me was the blacksmith.

"Well, well, well," he said, "I didn't expect to see you so soon. But where'n the name of all blazes have you been? Your face is black and your clothes are white."

I did not doubt it. I knew the plaster had stuck to my clothes, and I had been too excited to think of cleaning it off. And no doubt the chimney was full of soot and dust.

I did not wish my father to see me in any such fix, so went to the hotel, where I washed up and had breakfast.

I was sleepy, and after I had had a smoke I decided to let the story and the return home go for the morning and take a rest. The proprietor of the hotel readily gave me a room, and I slept the sleep of the just and the unjust without even a thought of the constable's consternation when he should discover

the loss of his chicken thief the next morning.

My dreams were a jumbled mass. I thought that I had shot the constable and he had fallen through the ceiling and that a dead man rose up out of the river through the floor and grabbed us both.

That kind of sleep is not very refreshing and I was glad when I had got through it, had another wash, a good dinner, and started down to the store to see my father.

He stared at me.

"Why, Andy! Ain't through that big job yet, are you? Say, Andy, they's a letter here fur you from your magazine. Mother and I was wonderin' if you wouldn't want it. Maybe it's a check, Andy."

With a great deal of doubt and misgivings I took the letter, which read:—

DEAR MR. NATHING:

We begin a new serial in the November number, and if you have not disposed of your story "A Night of Terror" and have reconstructed it along the lines I laid down for you I would be pleased to give you an opportunity. I can hold open for you till Thursday of next week.

Yours very truly,
ADAM CAMMISSON.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE EDITORIAL SLEDGE-HAMMER.

THIS was encouraging enough for anybody. All the past disappointments were swept away in the flood of enthusiasm that followed the reading of the letter.

"Is it good news, Andy?" asked my father.

"It *is* good news, dad," I replied, "but in order to make the best of it I must tell you something. When I went away I did so on the advice of Uncle Ben. The letter which I then received from the editors was not to undertake any great thing. It was simply a rejection of the story I wrote on my experiences at Spyzers. The story was too short, but had good stuff in it. I have been to Spyzers again, and now, with a quiver full of arrows, I am going to take you all in the scheme, and talk it over, and between us we will get out a story that will make the world hum."

"I like that idea, Andy, but why didn't you tell us when you went away? You might have wanted money."

"Uncle Ben said he would let me have what I wanted."

"An—dy! Did Ben say anything like that?"

"Yes. He said to go in and show them what I could do."

"Ben's getting different—but he always liked you, Andy. And now when's this confab goin' to begin?"

"Well, I thought with your—your style of putting things, and mother to furnish the good, matronly part, with Uncle Ben's hard common sense, and Aunt Barbara's—er—literary taste, we might get up a rattling good story."

"But what are *you* going to do, Andy?"

"Write the story."

It was settled, and I drove after my paternal uncle and maternal aunt.

It was rather a formidable and solemn conclave that gathered in our little parlor that evening. It was a warm night and the windows were open, and the hum of harvest mosquitoes added to the pleasure of the occasion.

Aunt Barbara had just bought a new gown to lecture in and she sat prim and severe in one corner. Uncle Ben had on big boots, and smoked a pipe. Father was undeniably nervous, and mother beamed on everybody and said she had a fine custard pie she would cut after we had finished.

I can scarcely classify the rôle I assumed myself. I sat in the center of the room, with a mass of notes, a pencil, and some clean paper.

"Now, to begin," I said, "we must understand that this story is to have pathos, humor, and tragedy combined in such degree that no one element overweighs another."

"Equipoise," said Aunt Barbara.

"Equine," said father. "Horse sense. Go on, Andy."

"Porpoise," said Uncle Ben. "All blow."

"Now," I said, ignoring these interruptions, "we have for a background

what we may call the old Dutch patroon coming to this country and establishing himself on the Hoolfy River, building a mill in the Dutch style, and marrying a Dutch woman."

Everybody nodded.

"Time brings success to him, and he creates an estate."

Everybody nodded again.

"There are two children, a boy who died unmarried, and a girl who marries a wicked man. She dies, and the patroon kicks the husband and her son out of the family."

"Shocking," said my mother.

"Wait," said Aunt Barbara. "There is a fine opportunity here to introduce an article on modern marriages."

"Then we have a brother and a nephew," I went on. "The nephew, by the death of everybody except the missing child of the daughter of the patroon, gains possession of the mill and the homestead."

"A nephew gets it, eh, Andy?" chuckled Uncle Ben. "I'd better be lookin' arter my acres, if nephews are gittin' things."

He chuckled again, and mother looked very pleased.

"Now," I continued, referring to my notes, "we have a lapse of many years. The nephew who obtained the mill is found dead—murdered. The son of the patroon's daughter has grown, had time to marry, and his son is old enough to fight for his rights."

"Ah!" came from everybody but Aunt Barbara. It was woman's rights she was interested in.

"Now," I went on, "we have the entire estate falling into decay, because there is no known owner. But the house, the old mansion, is haunted by a ghost."

"Nonsense," said Aunt Barbara.

"Not a real ghost," said my mother. "A make believe."

"Anyway, the ignorant people think so," I continued. "They are afraid to go near the place at night. Well, a young man appears as an insurance agent. He makes investigations concerning the murder of Jacob Spyzer, the last owner of the mill. He seems almost on the verge of discovering that which will place him in possession. He finds at the old well a silver cup inscribed with the date of his own birth. This has been left behind when his father and grandfather were sent away. This establishes his father's right, and all he needs to do is to establish the legitimacy of his own birth."

"Fine," said Uncle Ben. "Elegant. Andy, that ought to be easy nowadays. They record them things."

"Not always," said Aunt Barbara. "We are at the mercy of incompetent men. When women——"

"Having proceeded thus far," I said, "this grandson of the old patroon's daughter hunts through the mansion at night for a missing will."

"Certainly. A will left by a man who didn't know he was alive," said Uncle Ben.

"No," I replied, "I am coming to that. There is another element in the case I have thought out. Where it is necessary to add to the chain we must do so. I think this way: Jacob Spyzer, though supposed to have died a bachelor, had secretly married, and had really left a will cutting off the children of that marriage."

"Mercy, what a plot!" exclaimed my mother. "How can you carry it all in your head?"

"Because he hatched it all in his head," said Uncle Ben. "An eggshell holds the hull egg, but you can't put it all in a second one."

"Now," I went on, "we come to a secret panel in the wall of the old mansion where the will is supposed to have been left by Jacob and has never been found. Two parties are hunting for it. The descendants of the old patroon's daughter and the children of Jacob. Can you follow that?"

"Perfectly," said Aunt Barbara.

"Now, the fellow who takes up the search for the heirs of Jacob is a scamp and a thief. He murders the other, supposed to be an insurance man."

"Heavens, another murder!" groaned my mother.

"Let him kill," said Uncle Ben. "It's only paper killin'. It ain't like hog killin' time. You always made a fuss about that."

"And the body of the dead young man gets into the mansion or the mill from the river," I went on, "and fright-

ens the thief, and the mystery of old Jacob's will is never solved."

"Good!" everybody cried at once.

"I like it," said Aunt Barbara, "because there is no mawkish love sentiment in it, and you know I never did like love-stories."

"I like it," said Uncle Ben, "because it ain't got no endin' to it. Them stories that leave you guessin' is just like plantin' peas."

"I like it," said my father, "because it seems kind of different from all other kinds."

"I like it," said mother, "because it's Andy's."

We talked about it some more, and then we had the custard pie, which was better than the story.

I spent a sleepless night thinking and planning. Early the next morning I arranged a spare room for my writing, laid in a prodigious amount of paper, pens, and ink, and a good supply of blotters, and went to work. I also had a new typewriter sent on trial, expecting to pay for it, if satisfactory, out of the proceeds of the story.

I am not going to tell you how long it took—how many weeks of honest, earnest toil before that story was finished. I am not going to tell you of the family conclaves; the going over the story; the changes and suggestions.

Suffice to say that at last the story was finished. It lay before me, three hundred clean, neatly typewritten pages, full of spice and ginger, the story that would make the world talk.

Filled with something that must enter into the chemical properties of balloon gas, I tied the manuscript up neatly and sent it to Mr. Cammisson of the *Biverly Magazine*.

I spent three weeks in the pleasures of early autumn. There was good rabbit shooting. There was good fishing. I read in the Moonville *Atom* about the escape of the chicken thief and about the mysterious hole in the ceiling of the haunted house. But I saw nothing about the dead man at the mill.

At the end of the three weeks I received a letter from the *Biverly*.

I almost feared to open it. Would it be five hundred? A thousand? I had heard of great sums being paid for the best stories. Would it be two thousand?

Tremblingly I slit the envelope, and read:

MR. ANDREW NATHING:

We assure you that we are grateful to you for permitting us to read the manuscript of the story entitled "The Dead Man at the Mill." It is well written, and should, if other considerations were met, deserve a place in our pages.

It so happens, however, that the editors of the *Biverly* are not in the habit of being made the subjects of hoaxes. We received about the same time a story by another writer, entitled "The Dead Man's Mill and the Dead Man's Will," which was so similar to yours in every detail that it left no doubt in our minds of collusion on the part of the two writers. It is possible that you have made an error in both sending the manuscript to the same place.

It did appear at first that we would accept the other story. But the turning up of yours, with the similarity and indication of underhanded work we have mentioned, has placed us in the unpleasant position of being compelled to reject both manuscripts. We request that you send no further contributions to this office.

Very truly yours,

A. CAMMISSON.

CHAPTER XX.

THE STORY AT LAST.

YOU have undoubtedly read and heard of the proverbial thunderbolt out of a clear sky.

I was more stunned than when I crashed through the ceiling in the old Spyzer house. I could not understand.

How could it be possible, after all the pains I had taken, after all the experience I had been through, that another story should seem so much like mine as to kill both of them.

I had heard of coincidences. I had read of strange happenings. But this transcended anything in the mystery line.

I was a mental and nervous wreck.

I sought through the blue heavens, the green earth, and the limpid river and lake for some kind of an explanation.

My mother had little to say.

"It seems to me," she did remark, "that editors are queer fish. He told

you what to do and you did it. What more does he want? It is a good story. It is better than Kipling, Laura Jean Libbey, or any of them writers. What I think is that the *Biverly* is a one-horse affair and he can't pay the price the story is worth."

"Seems to me," said my father, "that there's something wrong somewhere. The story is a good one. We all know that. It sounds true, and whoever read any of Andy's letters while he was at school knows he can write so's to be entertainin'. It ain't the story. It's somethin' else."

"The whole matter," said Aunt Barbara, didactically, "lies here. The story is, without question, a good one, but it is not up to date. It is a romance of the old school, and the people are now being educated up to a point where they do not desire so much romance. As a matter of fact, the element of romance is largely becoming extinguished in human lives.

"Nowadays no one hunts around old wells for silver mugs. A secret marriage is almost an impossibility. What you want to do, Andy, is to write a story setting forth the wrongs of a downtrodden people. Make it strong. Go into the ranks of the workers and learn their sufferings, their privations. Learn how they are ground down by capital. Then set forth the proper way to reconstruct government. Take up socialism. Take up anything but romance. You won't find the secret of success in a secret panel nowadays. You will find it in the well-cultivated brain. See what I have accomplished for my sex. You can do the same for yours."

Sick at heart, weary, disgusted, I turned away. I had yet to hear from Uncle Ben. It had been his advice that led me into trouble. Perhaps he would help me out.

I had no money left. After making a complete fizzle of literary work, I could not ask my father for more, and I did not know how to earn a dollar.

"Where are you going?" asked my mother as I started out.

"Over to Uncle Ben's. He may give me a job haying. He isn't finished with it yet."

"Well, you tell Ben there's a tramp been seen around here lately. The last two days, I think. Jim saw him hiding behind some haycocks. And Mr. Jinks saw him near his barn."

"I'll tell him," I said.

I started off with none too light a heart.

What was I going to say to Uncle Ben, after all? It had been against his advice that I took up literature in the first place. He had, it was true, tried to help me out when failure seemed only half assured. Now it was certain, what was I to tell him?

I had not left the portion of the road that passed through my father's farm when a tall, somewhat haggard-looking fellow leaped from behind some elders at me.

"You! You!" he cried. "Now I have you! You tried twice to kill me, and now you starve my wife and child. Life is nothing to me. But before I die I will kill you."

It was of course evident that I had a madman to deal with. He dashed at me without any sort of skill, though he seemed to have prodigious strength.

I met him, and we clinched. I could not get a good blow in because he hugged me so tight.

We swayed back and forth on the grass and stubble, and I banged him a few times against the fence.

His breath was hot on my face and had that metallic odor I have since noticed in the breath of starving men.

He wore a soft hat pulled down over his face, so that in our struggles I could not see his features.

I shouted for help, and Jim heard me. He came running, and seeing that I was hard pressed, he picked up a piece of fencing and struck my assailant on the head.

He fell, stiffened out, and I saw that he was in convulsions.

"That's the tramp," said Jim. "I've seen him around here two or three days."

I uncovered the face. The eyes were staring at me. I drew back with a shock such as I had never felt before, and never have since.

It was the dead man of the mill.

"Here comes your uncle," said Jim.

Uncle Ben was driving along leisurely on the way to the village.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Uncle Ben," I said, wiping the perspiration from my head, "help me get this poor fellow from here to the house. It is the fellow I had for dead in the Hoolfy."

"The devil!" exclaimed Uncle Ben.

My assailant was soon at the house and in a comfortable bed. My mother nursed him around, and he ate some light, nourishing food as though he was on the verge of starvation.

"Now," I said, when he was strong enough to talk, "let us have some kind of explanation. I remember seeing you at the old Spyzer mill, but I thought you dead. I did nothing to you. Why should you attack me?"

"You tried to shoot me."

"Where? In the old mansion?"

"Yes."

"Well now, explain the whole thing. Who are you? What were you doing there? Are you a Spyzer or a chicken thief?"

"Neither one. I am a magazine writer. My name is Harpolk Harbick. I am married and have one child. But I have been ill, and have been up against a stroke of damnable luck. I couldn't hit 'em right somehow. I wrote two or three good ones for the *Biverly* and then slid down hill so fast I struck bottom with a bump.

"Cammisson, the editor, told me I was all off, and that my stories seemed unreal—didn't have the right touch of color or the atmosphere of real life. I tried everything. Then I saw an article about that Spyzer place and I went down there. I lived at Moonville.

"Then I went to Spyzers for a time as an insurance-agent. One night I was inside the mansion. I had the keys. I got them from old Tom Vivvle, at Spyzers.

"Well, this night I was in the mansion with a lantern and somebody came in. I put out the lantern and felt around in the dark and touched somebody's fingers. Then I ran like mad. I thought there was sure somebody after me, and I wasn't very well anyway, and I ran to the river. I stumbled over a boat somebody had left on the shingle, and I took it. I tried to pull up to Moonville, but I tipped the boat over in my haste. I swam with an oar to an old mill, and was just climbing in when you struck a match. I thought you were an officer of the law, and I sank back and got away.

"But I had to keep on. I had to make some money. We had none, and the wife wasn't strong, and, oh, everything was wrong. I went back to the house nearly every night. I dug up the old secrets: I got the history of the Spyzers. I had bought a spade and was digging up the cellar. Then I discovered that some one else was digging. I was going to be careful after that, but that very night some one caught me by the hand. I struck him, and he fired at me in the dark. I ran.

"I had had enough of it, and had enough material for a story. I did go back the next night, but something happened—I don't know what. I used to lie on the floor and write what came to me. I was down-stairs, and the whole upper part of the house seemed to come down. I ran away. I saw a man after me at Spyzers, near the coal-yard, and I ran again. I never went back. I was living in Moonville again then. I left my grip at the hotel in Spyzers.

"I wrote my story—threw my whole soul into it and sent it to Cammisson, thinking it was a sure winner. He sent it back, saying that he wouldn't stand for practical jokes, or something like that. I went to him and he told me you—Andrew Nathing, of Cornwood—had written the same thing. I came here—I watched—and I saw you was the fellow who was after me in the mill, and knew you must be the one who tried to shoot me."

For a moment we were all silent. Uncle Ben snapped his fingers.

"Where's them precious ones?" he asked suddenly. "Where's that wife and baby?"

"In New York," said Harbick. "I couldn't pay the rent. They are living with the janitor."

My uncle, who had been well known for his penuriousness, went down into his pocket.

"Never mind talk," he said. "I know how this thing is. I'm a farmer, but I've mated hosses and matched pairs. You two fellers has got to pull together

an' not agin' each other. Here's twenty dollars. Send for that wife an' baby, and have 'em come to my place. It's big enough. Then you git well, and you and Andy git together, and instead of writin' two stories just alike, write one that ain't like no other."

Harbick clutched the money and gasped.

But in two days a pretty, sad-eyed woman and a white-faced baby were at Uncle Ben's. In two weeks Harbick had his health and nerves back, and proved to be a companionable and brainy fellow.

In two months we had a story written entitled "The Last Grist of the Old Mill," and in two more we had the money for it from a large publishing house, he taking one-half and I the other.

We are still friends, we are both fairly successful, and our summers are spent at Cornwood.

We can afford to laugh now, but we often sit late at night over our pipes and live again the local atmosphere of our first success, going over our adventures at Spyzers, and then we laugh again.

THE END.

FRENCHY, THE COOK OF COOKS.

By ALBERT EDWARD ULLMAN.

The desperate device to which the guests of the "onliest hostelry" resorted when the law robbed them of their *chef*.

"TALK about cooking!" said my acquaintance Saunders, apropos of nothing in particular, as he buttered his sinkers. "I once knew a chef from the place chefs come from. His name was 'Frenchy,' and he was one of those talented geniuses that could take a rag, a bone, and a hank of hair, as the poet says, and make a fricassee or an *à la* something so tasty that it would get right up off the Dresden and tickle your palate.

"I ran into him when I was carrying on the good work of separating the wealthy parvenu, and sometime the accursed capitalist, from his tainted lucre without the aid of a crowbar, as I only use soft persuasion. The 'con' business was not any too brisk in this part of the hemisphere, and I hied out to the Great Lakes as a professor of something or other, with a gold-mine up my sleeve that would not have yielded enough of the said metal to fill a good-sized cavity in a molar.

"Then one day I blew into a dinky little summer resort with one hotel, a few yards of beach, and some water that belonged to Lake Michigan. It had a grudge against the census man for passing it without notice, and was so important that all the trains blew their whistles as they passed through. It was after I had meandered into the onliest hostelry and affixed my *nom de plume* to the register that I was introduced to Frenchy *via* the menu-card.

"Say; that first spread was enough to make any man forget about the things mother used to manufacture in the eating line. After you had waded through that rare assortment of delicacies of the season you would have seconded the motion that any idea that woman could cook should be buried beneath six feet of public opinion. It was the greatest, grandest galaxy of good grub, as the circus man would say, that merely mortal man ever masticated.

"Frenchy had been cheffoniering for two seasons, and his art was the only thing that had kept the resort in the resorting business. The gentle sex had deserted the place the season before owing to the absence of white duck trousers and the things that go with them, but the sterner members of the family circle, appreciating Frenchy's specialties and good fishing, continued to come.

"After the pie course they would straggle out on the spacious veranda, with toothpicks between their teeth, and talk about his dishes until you would have

thought they knew more than old man Epicurus, and then some more.

"I was doing a little monologue on Frenchy's cooking myself, for, honestly, I used to get up so tired from handling the knife and fork that I would have to go off and rest until the next meal came due. After dinner on the second day I had about decided that yours affectionately was willing to settle down there and dally with the bill-of-fare forever.

"Not that we knew what we were eating—no one knew that, but Frenchy—for the names all had a sort of a lily-of-the-valley sound to them and could only be pronounced by the natural-born chef. But we knew that everything was good several times over and made the inner man feel that there was some real pleasure in being an inner man.

"When the eatables were brought to the table they were garnished and decorated with parsley and other garden truck until they looked like flower-beds in a public square. We never bothered about that, however; we just tied our napkins halterwise and chased every bit of food out of sight, and then sent back for more orders of the same thing. My! but Frenchy was overworked.

"He seemed to like it, though, and once in a while he would come to the door and look us over, while his little mustache wriggled up an' his eyes rolled at the compliment paid to him by our amalgamated appetites as manifested by kitchen invoice. He was all smiles and courtesy itself, and it was never too much trouble for him to make a second or third ration of anything that ran out before our steady and continuous gastronomic feats.

"He seemed to exercise a sort of guardianship over us, and fed us as carefully as the cannibal chief does the captive white man in stories of adventure.

"Aside from his smiling and amiable self, Frenchy was nervous, and on some occasions about as excitable as a menagerie before feeding-time. This was only when some affront was offered him, or his honor questioned.

"His honor was purely impersonal—his art was his honor—and if any person was venturesome enough to question that there was trouble in large chunks, principally in the kitchen. A well-meaning but unappreciative old lumberman had on one occasion sent back his steak with the information that he wanted it fried with plenty of gravy, and it required the united efforts of all the guests present and a raise in pay to hold Frenchy to his job.

"Like the true artist, his mind seemed to be always on his work. Every afternoon, between masterpieces, he would saunter out for his stroll in a frock coat that looked like the pictures in the magazine 'ads' and a silk tile. He wore gray spats, and gloves to match, and atomized himself with the latest fashionable perfume of the month in Paris.

"His cane would beat the sand at his feet as he passed us, but an hour or so later we would see him on the horizon dashing hotelward with an armful of strange weeds and green things gathered from the beach and waters, which we would get, later, in soup and sauce and goodness knows what. There was an unusual joy in sitting down to a ragout of seaweed, or something or other, without fear or trepidation.

"There's no use talking, Frenchy was the *e pluribus unum* of the culinary world.

"The landlord of the onliest was a round individual, who waddled around like an asthmatic duck. He had no ideals that were above the level of his cash-drawer, and he failed to appreciate the esthetic soul of Frenchy. He knew that the latter could cook to the satisfaction of the guests, and that was all the knowledge he cared to acquire.

"They were constantly having little skirmishes, chiefly due to the landlord's invasion of the sacred precincts of the kitchen, which threatened to terminate at any time in one grand, glorious fracas.

"And then the thing happened without any warning. The bunch of contented diners were on the balcony enjoying that quiet moment that is appreciated after a full dinner, when a series of unearthly yells, followed by thuds and crashes, made us aware that something was doing.

"The next instant the landlord rolled through the door, breathless, and as pallid as a flag of truce, and informed us in one long gasp that Frenchy was carrying on something scandalous down in the kitchen. He said he had sent a scrub-

woman to curry down the floor and she had stopped in her labors to open a can of lye with one of Frenchy's pet carving-knives. Then he rolled out to shout for the police, while we dashed back to the scene, where the din was increasing in volume.

"When the police force arrived Frenchy was as busy as a red ant on a hot stove. He had a pile of kitchen utensils in the middle of the floor, and every little while he'd heave a skillet or something at somebody.

"The range and furniture were wrecked, and the glasses and dishes had become subjects that no advertised glue could remedy. When he saw the policeman he charged him, armed to the teeth with a cup-custard and a long knife.

"It was but the work of a moment for the brave department of public safety to disarm him and eat the custard.

"'*Misérable!*' cried Frenchy, shaking his fist in the custard-besmeared face of the minion of the law, 'Unloose me!'

"'Never!' replied that stolid person. 'You come with me.'

"Frenchy had worn himself out by this time, and went along—not, however, without muttering numerous strange words which left us in doubt as to whether they were maledictions or new-fangled French dishes.

"Well, sir, the next morning we were all in the little court-room, ready to pay any fine within reason in order to get our breakfast, but the judge sentenced Frenchy to thirty days in the city lock-up, and we went back to the hotel to choke down greasy ham and eggs cooked by some female.

"That evening I received a valuable piece of inside information, and the following morning I rushed out and kicked over the horse-trough in front of the post-office, sassed the police force, who took me in, got argumentative with his honor, refused to pay the fine, and was incarcerated according to the laws made and provided in such cases.

"And then I sat down in that six-by-four retreat for the wicked and waited for the thing I expected to happen, as I knew that news traveled fast. Right I was. Before sundown every famished guest of the hotel had been arrested for some violation of the law and were prisoners with me. It was the only time I ever broke into a jail knowingly."

"But what caused this epidemic of crime and imprisonment?" I inquired.

My acquaintance, Saunders, looked at me a moment and grinned.

"Oh!" he said. "I nearly forgot that. You know, Frenchy had been made cook in the jail."

THE SHERIFF OF BROKEN BOW.

By WILLIAM WALLACE COOK,

Author of "Rogers of Butte," "The Gold Gleaners," "Jim Dexter—Cattleman," etc.

Involving a rude awakening and a pursuit that was checked by a terrible affliction.

CHAPTER I.

THE SHERIFF PLEADS GUILTY.

"I DON'T mind telling you, Robert," said the sheriff of Broken Bow, leaning through his kitchen-window, "that I'm pretty soon to be married."

Bob Ransome was busy at a tin wash-basin, almost directly under the window. At these words he leaped backward, brushed the soapy water out of his eyes, and stared at the homely, sheepish face framed in the morning-glories.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed. "You don't mean it, Bruce?"

"Why not?" was the defiant response. "Because a man gets to be forty without ever falling in love, it's no sign he's never going to, is it? But maybe," and here Bruce Hackett's face flushed under its tan, "you think a little lame, crotchety specimen like me hasn't any business acknowledging the soft impeachment."

Something in the voice struck a quick pang to Bob's heart.

"Come out here," he ordered, grab-

bing for the huck towel that lay on the bench beside the wash-basin — "come right out here, I tell you."

The sheriff's face disappeared from the window and he came limping through the door. Bob made swift use of the towel and cast it aside.

"Bless your old heart," he cried, flinging his arms about the little man and giving him a bear's hug, "there's no woman on earth that's good enough for you. That's right! Don't I know? Say, Bruce, this is the best news I've heard since I got back from Denver. Here I've been for two days, and why didn't you tell me before?"

Bob's face was all aglow with surprise and pleasure; Hackett's was still red with embarrassment, and he shuffled his feet uneasily.

"Couldn't you see that I was trying to tell you something all the time, Robert?" Hackett returned apologetically.

"I was hoping Lin Pinney would get back; I knew he'd take the whole thing off my hands before he'd been in the house an hour. Now that I've confessed, though, and, as you may say, pleaded guilty. I'm glad it's off my mind."

With that he turned to go back into the house.

"Wait a minute, Bruce," Bob called. "You've said just enough to arouse my curiosity. Tell me something about the lady, can't you?"

"I'll leave that for Lin, Robert," Bruce called over his shoulder. "He won't lose much time giving you the particulars after he strikes camp."

On reaching the door the sheriff paused and faced about with a worried look.

"I suppose," he continued, "that reading law doesn't take up *all* a young fellow's time, does it? There are a few hours left for relaxation?"

"I managed to get a little leisure," Bob answered, wondering what Hackett was trying to get at.

"Must be a lot of nice girls in Denver, eh?" Hackett's voice took on a tone of raillery.

Bob flushed. A quick intuition showed him what Hackett was driving at, and he considered it a little unjust.

"I was too busy, Bruce," said he, "to go out into society very much; but, to my thinking, there are as nice girls right here in Broken Bow as any you can find in Denver."

Disappointment overspread Hackett's face.

"I am hoping great things of you, Robert," said he, "and one of the chief stepping-stones to success, in the law as in everything else, is a suitable marriage. A man ought to reach up for a partner in life, not down."

The sheriff vanished from the doorway. Bob started to say something, but bit his lip on the words; then he moved swiftly toward the entrance to the 'dobe house, but halted at the threshold, turned aside, and dropped down on the bench near the door.

With head bowed and hands plunged in his pockets, he fell into a train of thought that was far from pleasant. From this he was aroused by Hackett's voice, again reaching him from the window:

"Grub pile, Robert. Sit in, my boy."

He got up slowly and entered the house. Hackett smiled at him easily, as though to dismiss, for the time, their momentary disagreement.

Bob stepped to the table and stood for a space leaning over the back of his chair.

"Bruce," said he earnestly, "you're about the only father I can remember, and you've done more for me than a good many fathers would have done for a boy. It's hard for me, when all this is considered, to go against you in anything, but when it comes to the subject of Tonita——"

"A Greaser," broke in Hackett, with a shrug, "and her father's a wood-hauler. I had hoped in my soul that life in Denver would bring you to see the impossibility of the girl. Enough for now," he added sharply as Bob attempted to speak; "your dinner is getting cold."

Bob Ransome was red to the roots of his hair. Conscious of the great debt he owed Hackett, he swallowed his indignation and dropped into his seat.

"You're only a boy, after all, Robert," said the sheriff, leaning across the corner of the table and laying one hand affectionately on the youth's arm. "If

you were really my son I couldn't think more of you nor have a deeper concern for your welfare."

As though to draw the sting of his harshness, Hackett fell into a mood of the greatest good humor; and no subject that he introduced could have been parsed in the singular number, third person feminine. His amiability centered, for the most part, in his long-faced deputy, Pinney, who was a pessimist of the most rabid type.

The sheriff and his deputy lived alone, now that Ransome's sphere had broadened into something worth while, and there was little official work for them to do in Broken Bow, camp or county. But time never hung heavy on the sheriff's hands.

If there was no work forward in the interest of law and order Hackett and Pinney dug ore from the North Star ledge—which had an outcropping just below the house—and ground out the gold in a primitive arastra.

Of late a ripple of excitement had agitated the quiet waters of the settlement. Thieves had broken into the Chislett post-office and decamped with a small amount in government stamps and money.

Chislett was twenty miles away, on the railroad, and the sheriff of Broken Bow had been warned to be on the lookout for suspicious characters. Such a character had shown himself in camp three days before, and Pinney had left to keep an eye on the fellow and watch his movements.

Since that time, both the deputy and the man he was watching had incontinently disappeared.

The meal was finished, and Bob and Hackett sat back in their chairs and continued their talk over their cigars. Before these were half burned the sound of galloping hoofs aroused them.

"There's Lin now," observed Hackett.

But the sheriff was wrong. The dust-covered rider who presently ran into the room was not the deputy.

"You're wanted at Maxwell's, Hackett," said the newcomer.

"What's the trouble at Maxwell's, Pingree?" the sheriff inquired as he got slowly out of his chair.

"Two bars of bullion were lifted there last night."

Bob's blue eyes began to sparkle.

"I'll ride over there with you, Bruce," said he.

"I think I can handle this all right, Robert," remarked the sheriff dryly, "without calling in a posse. It's the first real crime we've had in Broken Bow County for six months. This happened last night, you say, Pingree?" he asked as he reached for his hat.

"Yes," was Pingree's answer. "It wasn't discovered until seven o'clock this morning."

"It's afternoon now. Why didn't you come for me before?"

"The old man took the matter in his own hands, but found that it was too deep for him."

A grim smile played about the sheriff's lips.

"Any one hurt?" he asked.

"The assayer—but he'll get over it."

Taking his spurs from a nail in the wall, Hackett began buckling them to his heels.

"I say, Bruce," spoke up Bob, "I'd like to go with you. It has been two years since I've been in Maxwell's mine, and I'd like to see how the old place looks."

"This is no kind of work for you, Robert," answered the sheriff, limping to a corner and picking up his saddle and bridle. "Besides," he added, pausing at the door, "I want you to stay here and wait for Pinney. If he comes before I get back tell him where I've gone."

This refusal was in line with Hackett's policy for keeping Robert immune, so far as possible, from the rough life of the camp. In this manner he had always screened him.

Ransome accompanied Hackett to the corral, stood silently by while the horse was made ready, and then watched the two riders as they galloped off down the ravine.

"If Bruce had his way," thought Bob, with a rueful laugh, "he'd have me in a glass case. And look at the shrewdness of him! He wants me to stay right here and wait for Pinney, when a note pinned to the door would fill the bill just as effectively as I could

do it in person. Bruce is afraid that I'll make a bolt in the direction of Garcia's."

Not a little discontented, Ransome made his way back in the direction of the house.

CHAPTER II.

THE SHERIFF'S ENTANGLEMENT.

HACKETT'S whitewashed adobe house was perched on the rim of a dry ravine, or arroyo—a long, squat structure whose projecting roof-beams and their "shake" covering formed wide eaves on all four sides. The front of the building was given up to living and sleeping rooms; the rear was a strongly constructed chamber, with barred windows, and was used as a jail.

Below the house was the corral, formed of the stakes of the okatea cactus braided together with wire. Between the house and the corral were the well and water-trough.

North of the well, against the sloping side of the arroyo, was a "blow out" of white quartz, and in the midst of this —marked by an oblong ore-dump— lay exposed the golden rib to which Hackett had given the name of the "North Star."

A long step, like a terrace, led to a "flat" in the arroyo's bed, and here were the circular horse-track and the ugly basin and timbers of the arastra.

Halting at the well for a drink of water, Bob leaned against the curb and swept his eyes over the old, familiar scene. His continued absence of a year in Denver had brought no change.

Everywhere about him was the same wearying solitude. West of the arroyo the bare, reddish hills rose peak on peak; to the eastward lay the sandy "rise" which screened the struggling town of Broken Bow, a mile away. A road, fetlock-deep in dust, traveled toward the town.

It seemed strange to Bob that he could step so abruptly out of the rush and whirl of Denver into that primitive wilderness. The contrast awed and depressed him.

And yet this was the scene, and these were the landmarks, which he had known for the better part of his life. How was he to account for the revulsion of feeling which had taken hold of him?

Did Bruce Hackett know him better than he knew himself? Must he cut loose from all his earlier associations and fight his way in the bustling world in order to achieve honor and place and even contentment?

In his heart Bob felt that this was true. He was young, he said to himself, and the wilderness was no place for a young man.

Besides, Hackett had trimmed the youth's sails and lashed his helm toward the law, and success in that profession must be won in the haunts of men.

Bob was beginning to understand how consistent had been Hackett's policy in dealing with the lad entrusted to his care. Years before, Hackett had made up his mind as to Bob's destiny, and had ever since hewed steadily to the line.

Keeping the lad clear of the rough life inseparable from the frontier was but one of the many details to claim Hackett's jealous care. To Bob this had often seemed like an unreasonable and foolish straining after trifles; yet now, when the first glimmer of the truth had come to him, his heart swelled with gratitude and he yearned to be all that his unselfish patron would have him.

Yet there was one exception. As he thought of it his eyes roved westward across the hills. In that direction lived Manuel Garcia and his daughter Tonita.

Recalling himself with a start, the young man relighted his half-burned cigar and continued his survey of the arroyo.

There was something in the rugged scene, scarred and primitive as it was, that reminded him of Bruce Hackett. His fancy drew a parallel between the man and this place that knew him best.

Hackett's figure, lean and little and imperfect, was that arroyo; in his generous heart was that vein of gold; his unbending will was the rough hills which could not change.

The young man had come thus far with his analogy when he was startled by a voice behind him.

"Well, now! By cracky, if it ain't Bob! Where under the canopy did *you* drop from?"

Bob whirled around. Within three feet of him stood a tall man, just dismounted from a jaded horse.

"Howdy, Lin?" cried Bob, reaching out his hand with a smile. "I've been here for two days, and came straight from Denver."

For one fleeting second Pinney's lugubrious face had relaxed with surprise and pleasure, but it became as long and as dolorous as ever when he released Bob's hand.

"Bruce wasn't expectin' you till next week," said Pinney.

"I took him by surprise," laughed Bob.

"And I'll bet he was tickled to death," went on Pinney. "But you've knocked him out of a celebration."

"Celebration?" returned Bob. "How's that?"

"Why, he was layin' to go over to Chislett and welcome you with all the pomp and panoply we could scare up around these diggin's. You'd never think what a vain old chap he's getting to be," and Lin wagged his head ominously.

"He's the very last man I'd ever accuse of vanity. Explain yourself, Lin."

"It kind of set in when he got that paper saying that you'd been admitted to the bar. He acted plumb scandalous then—everybody was talking about it.

"Being sheriff of Broken Bow don't call for such a mighty lot of dignity, and Bruce never had more'n the law allows, anyway; but he'd no sooner read that thing in the paper than he jumped right up in the air and howled: 'Robert's been admitted! That boy of mine has been admitted!'

"'Don't take it so hard, Bruce,' I says, 'for mebby it ain't so bad as you think. Many a young fellow goes wrong,' I says. 'Was it a confidence game,' I goes on, 'or did he put somebody else's name to a check?'

"Well, say," and here Lin Pinney gave a gesture of disgust, "you ought to've seen how that old maverick stumped up to me on his game leg and punched holes in my face with them gray eyes of his.

"'You blethering idiot,' says he, 'Bob ain't done no wrong—it ain't in him,' he says. 'He's been admitted to the bar! He's sailed into the legal fraternity with flying colors.'

"Then, mebby you won't believe it, but he began at the lower end of Main Street and limped clear to the other, hollerin' to every one as he went: 'Robert's been admitted to the bar in Denver!'

"I don't think he's just right in his head," Lin finished forebodingly, "and the people of Broken Bow didn't seem to understand whether you'd graduated as a drink-mixer, or what. And *that* ain't all."

"What else is there?" asked Bob softly, something catching him at the throat.

"Well," pursued Lin, "as soon as he got back from town he made me saddle up and scratch around in the outlying districts telling everybody that you'd answered a lot of fool questions and corralled a sheepskin. It's awful for a man to come to Bruce's age and take on like that. He couldn't be elected dog-catcher after the exhibition he made of himself."

A mist gathered in Bob's eyes. Lin peered at the youth with a beady twinkle that died out as suddenly as it had manifested itself. He heaved a long sigh.

"And that ain't the worst, either," he went on.

"Well, go on, Lin," said Bob; "tell me everything."

"Where is the old humbug now?" demanded the deputy, with a look around.

Bob told him, and Lin exploded a wrathful exclamation.

"It's astonishin' how important business turns up when I'm on the hike," he growled. "It almost seems, sometimes, as though Bruce got wind of these things and sent me off a purpose. But he won't do anything over at Maxwell's; he ain't in shape to do anything anywhere."

Thereupon Lin grabbed his horse's bridle and strode off in the direction of the corral. Bob knew the deputy through and through, and smiled after him indulgently.

There was never a friend more loyal to Bruce Hackett than this same Lin Pinney, nor one who would not have deemed it a *casus belli* to hear the half against Hackett of what Lin was always ready to say himself.

The deputy was six feet two, loosely hung and angular. His head was ludicrously like a carved coconut, with black beads for eyes, a wisp of tow for hair, and a smaller wisp at his chin.

A more oddly assorted pair than Hackett and Pinney could not have been brought together. The two were lifelong friends, and ever since Hackett had filled the office of sheriff Pinney had stood at his side as deputy.

Sitting down on the bench at the house-door, Bob waited for Pinney's return. The young man was curious and eager; something told him that Lin was about to touch upon Hackett's affair of the heart.

This, as it developed, was precisely what Lin was getting at. When he had rejoined Bob, flung down his saddle and bridle, and brought a rocking-chair from the house, he fished up the "makings" of a cigarette and prepared himself to talk in comfort.

"I'm dog-tired, and that's a fact," he admitted, after lighting his cigarette and leaning back in the chair.

"Did you find out whether the man you were watching had anything to do with the Chislett robbery?" queried Bob.

"No. The fellow calls himself Struthers, and he's a sneak from the ground up. I'll bet he's equal to anything from standing up a stage to snaking a game of faro, but I couldn't get much of a line on him.

"The first night he lead me to McKeever's cabin"—Lin shot a queer look at Bob as he spoke—"and the second night he passed in the hills. That's where he lost me. After nosing round a spell, I pulled out for home."

"Do you think the man had anything to do with what happened at Maxwell's last night?"

"I wouldn't put it past him any, Bob, but it's a long shot." Lin scowled at his cigarette, remained silent for a space, then shifted the subject. "To sort of come back to where we was before, I want to repeat that the way Bruce acts over your being admitted to the bar and taking your proud place among the licensed grafters ain't the worst."

"I'm waiting to hear the rest of it, Lin," said Bob.

"It's got to be told, I reckon," returned Lin, with a heavy air, "although I'd rather some one else had the telling of it to you. Everybody's talking about it, and thinking as how Bruce is unsettling himself so he can't do his sheriff work successful, or like it ought to be done.

"Not that the sheriff of Broken Bow has anything to do to speak of—we haven't had a man in the back room for eight months, and for six months the most we've done is to bully a Greaser for appropriatin' two cords of wood at the Three-Ply Mine.

"But at any minute there's liable to come a call on Bruce for all his sand and sagacity, and *then* where'll he be? Shucks?"

Spurred by a sudden thought, Pinney floundered to his feet.

"Come along with me, Bob," said he, and started into the house.

Bob followed through the living-room and into the small chamber where Bruce slept. There was a rag carpet on the floor and a neatly spread cot against the wall. Over the cot was a home-made frame of cactus-bark enclosing a photograph of Bob.

"That ain't what I got in mind," said Lin, observing that Bob's eyes were resting on his own picture. "This is it," he added, passing to a stand at the head of the cot and taking a tintype from a small easel. "Just look at that, will you?"

Bob took the object from Lin's hand.

"Miss Hattie McKeever," said the deputy, with a curling lip.

"So Bruce has lost his heart to this lady, has he?" Bob murmured, gazing earnestly at the pictured face.

"Lost his heart?" sniffed Lin. "Lady! Shucks, Bob, that ain't the way to put it. This McKeever girl is thinking of the North Star Mine, and she's playing her cards to get hold of it. *Sabe?* Bruce is a minor consideration, and the girl has to take him to get the mine. Now you've come, I hope you can stop it. *My* hands are in the air."

Bob pursed up his lips and grew thoughtful.

"Miss McKeever has a pretty face," said he, "and she's young——"

"Twenty," rumbled Lin; "Bruce is old enough to be her father."

"That may be," answered Bob, putting the picture back on the table. "It's the blessed privilege of this thing we call love to overlook certain inequalities of rank, wealth, and even age."

Bob was speaking out of his heart; indeed, there was a look on his face that suggested the wisdom of personal experience.

"Even if you could make out a case against the lady, Lin," Bob proceeded, "I could not interfere. No man has the right to dictate to another in such matters."

"You ain't got any right," snapped Lin, "even when you stand to get euchred out of one of the best mines in Arizona! Bruce has told me, time and again, that he intended to leave you the North Star, and here you'll let the whole business drop like a fat plum into the lap of that McKeever girl. Man, man! what are we all coming to?"

Lin's despair was tremendous. As he finished speaking he groaned and tossed his hands.

"Anyway," said Bob, "I would not be the one to speak."

"I know what you're thinking of," and Lin cocked up his round, bullet-like eyes with sudden inspiration; "you've just recollected how Bruce throttled your own little romance. Ah, ha! I've got you squirmin'. But that needn't hinder. Tonita Garcia has faded out of your sky-line, and, by all the laws of give-and-take, you're qualified to step in between Bruce and Miss McKeever."

"The fact that Tonita has *not* vanished from my perspective," returned Bob dryly, "upsets your argument. Let's get back in the shade, Lin. We'll smoke some more, and you can tell me what you know about Miss McKeever."

"There's only two of the McKeevers," pursued Lin, when he was back in his rocking-chair, "and one's Hattie and t'other's her father, old Ben. Old Ben ain't my style, and that's the long and short of it. Nothing steady about him. Sometimes he takes a spell working at Maxwell's, and sometimes he's in the hills prospectin', but most of the time he's loafing around home, letting the girl support him. Miss McKeever," he added, "makes a bluff at teaching the Broken Bow school."

"I think that's quite commendable in Miss McKeever," said Bob.

"If old Ben's honest," continued Lin relentlessly, "I reckon I'm shy a couple of chips."

"Bruce isn't interested in old Ben," commented Bob, "but in old Ben's daughter, so we might as well leave *him* out of the reckoning. What about the lady herself? Come, now, Lin; we're after the facts, and you mustn't quibble."

"I haven't been admitted to no bar," said Lin, pulling himself sharply together in his chair, "but I'm keen enough to foot up two-and-a-couple in this here case. The old man sizes up the North Star and gives daughter the tip to sail in and get Bruce thrown and tied, which is necessary in order to corral the mine."

"How do you know that?" demanded the young lawyer.

"Oh, how do I know!" snarled Lin. "Haven't I got eyes and ears!"

"So has Bruce, and sharp ones."

"There you go again. Bruce! Why, he's blind and deaf, and this McKeever plot never touches him."

With that, Lin Pinney mumbled and subsided into a foreboding silence. Nor could he be induced to resume the subject.

Bruce had not returned by supper-time, and whether he returned at all that night was, according to Pinney, a doubtful matter. As soon as Bob had finished supper he went into his own room, and presently reappeared carrying saddle, bridle, quirt, and a pair of silver-mounted spurs.

This riding-gear was all his, and ever since he had been in Denver it had hung from one of the walls of his rooms. No dust had been allowed to collect on the accouterments, and spurs and bridle-bit were clean and shining.

"This stuff has been kept in prime condition," remarked Bob as he sat down to make the rowels fast at his heels.

"Bruce looked after it," said Pinney. "Whenever the old fool got lonesome he'd fetch out that plunder and work on it. Said it sort of made him feel you wasn't so far away."

Bob's face paled a little in the waning light. The spurs adjusted, he sat silently for a time; then, with a half-sigh,

he arose slowly, picked up the rest of the gear, and left the house.

Lin did not make any comments, or even ask where he was going. Fifteen minutes later the deputy saw him from the door, mounted, and crossing the rim of the arroyo, headed westward.

"He's off for Garcia's," muttered Lin grimly, returning to his chair and getting busy with a cigarette. "Bruce might as well quit on that game and cut for a new deal."

With the sheriff at Maxwell's and Bob on the road to Garcia's, Fate, the dicer, had made a master-throw, and was sitting back to watch the result.

CHAPTER III.

THE SHERIFF'S CLUE.

MAXWELL, a large man in frayed corduroys, with the stem of a battered cob pipe between his teeth, met Hackett and Pingree when they reached the camp at the mine.

"I don't think it's a bit of use," said Maxwell as Hackett slid to the ground and dropped his looped reins over a post. "Ten to one the rascals that did the work are so close to the Mexican line they'll be right in the heart of Greaserdom before we could get shaped around and pick up the trail."

"What makes you think they started for the border?" queried Hackett.

Maxwell caught his pipe from his lips and stared blankly at the sheriff.

"Why, Bruce," he returned, "that's the way they all go. For a criminal, it seems to be the line of least resistance."

Hackett nodded, pulled out his brier pipe, and began loading the bowl from a buckskin pouch.

"Besides," continued Maxwell, "the trail, up to the point where we lost it, ran southward in a bee-line."

"Where did you lose it, Maxwell?" asked Hackett, puffing reflectively.

"In a bunch of cattle-tracks. Some outfit drove a lot of steers through the country yesterday."

"Steers headed south?"

"No, west."

"You couldn't pick up the trail of the thieves to the south of the cattle-trail?"

"No."

"Then it may be the thieves gave up Mexico when they turned to the left and followed the cattle."

"When they turned to the left, Bruce," said Maxwell, with conviction, "they did it for a blind."

Hackett laughed derisively.

"What was the use of a blind if the thieves were making a dash for the boundary?" he demanded.

"I pass," replied Maxwell, a trifle bewildered.

"Sure, you pass," said the little sheriff, fixing his gray, humorous eyes on the big mine-owner. "As a matter of fact, Maxwell, if those thieves had Mexico in mind they'd have hustled through for all they were worth, and wouldn't have side-tracked along a cattle-trail."

Most of the details connected with the robbery Hackett had already secured from Pingree during the six-mile ride to the mine. But he thought best to go over the ground again with Maxwell.

The assayer, a man by the name of King, had been retorting the amalgam of the week's clean-up and running the gold into bars. He was working late in order to have the bullion ready for Maxwell to take to Chislett on the following morning.

Two large bars had been turned out of the molds, and King was busying himself about the furnace, when he was struck down from behind. On regaining consciousness he found himself bound hand and foot, and with a twisted handkerchief between his jaws. The two bars of bullion had vanished.

Maxwell discovered the assayer's predicament about seven in the morning, released him, sent him to the bunk-house to look after his injuries, and then got together a force of mounted men and gave pursuit.

This much the mine-owner rehearsed for Hackett's benefit while they were walking to the little adobe hut dignified by the name of "laboratory." There was not much in the laboratory for Hackett to see.

"Where did you pick up the trail?" he asked, after noting the disorder in the assayer's quarters.

"This way," replied Maxwell, and led the sheriff to a low rise overlooking the camp. The rise was covered with

greasewood bushes, and the mine-owner pushed his way through them and halted at a stunted ironwood tree.

The trunk of the tree was scarfed and abraded, and the sandy soil at its base was tramped and broken by unshod hoofs.

"The way I figured it," remarked Maxwell, "the thieves hitched their horses here, made their raid, came back with the bullion, mounted, and rode off."

"There were two horses," said Hackett, his keen eyes sifting the arriving and departing trails from the mat of hoof-prints. "They came from the south, and left in the same direction."

"That's as plain as print," returned Maxwell.

"You followed the trail the thieves made when they left," pursued Hackett, "but how about the other one?"

"The other one didn't interest me, for when the scoundrels rode that they were empty-handed."

"If we could find out where they came from," explained the sheriff, "it might indicate the place they went to."

"Not unless they were amateurs," said Maxwell. "The way they did the work here proves that they were old hands."

"It proves, at all events," answered Hackett, "that the fellows knew your assayer was going to work on the clean-up last night. And they were tolerably familiar with the lay of the land. Do you suspect any of your own men?"

"I haven't given a miner or a mill-man his time for two months. Every one of my force is at work this minute. One of my wood-haulers was due out of the hills this morning, but he's the only laborer that's missing."

"Who is that?"

"The Mexican, Garcia."

Hackett straightened up and peered into Maxwell's face with gleaming eyes.

"Great Scott, Bruce!" exclaimed the mine-owner, "you're not suspecting *him*. He has neither the sense nor the sand for a job of this kind."

"You can't always tell about these Greasers, Maxwell."

From that on a fresh vigor seemed to be injected into Hackett's movements. He limped out into the greasewood along the diverging trails, suddenly paused, stooped, and raised himself quickly.

There was something in his hands.

"What you got?" came the excited query from Maxwell.

"It doesn't amount to much," answered Hackett, limping back, "but at the same time it may mean a good deal."

When close to the mine-owner he showed his find, which turned out to be an old wooden stirrup.

"Strange I didn't find that," said Maxwell, turning the object over and over in his hands.

"Oh, I don't know," drawled Hackett ironically; "that stirrup isn't the only thing you missed."

"This may have been in the brush for a long time," commented Maxwell.

"Sure, but the chances are it was pulled out of the stirrup-leather last night and dropped in the chaparral. The owner had no time to stop and hunt for it. It lay by one of the leaving trails."

"Maybe you are right, Bruce," said Maxwell.

"One of the thieves," continued Hackett, "may have mounted his horse there—at least, the hoof-prints are deeper, and look as though the horse had a rider from that point on.

"If we can judge by the appearance of the stirrup, it belongs with an old saddle. When the rider threw his weight in the stirrup to mount the stirrup-leather gave way. Notice the peculiar make of the thing, don't you? It was made on the other side of the Rio Grande."

Hackett relieved Maxwell of the clumsy affair and started down the slope toward the place where he had left his horse.

"Think it's a clue that will help any?" asked the mine-owner.

"Possibly," said Hackett. "I'll follow it up, at all events."

"So far as I'm concerned," went on the other, "I've charged that two thousand dollars' worth of bullion up to profit and loss. You may be able to do something, Bruce, but I doubt it."

Hackett met this discouraging comment with a grim look, but did not put his answer into words. He had barely swung himself into the saddle when a brown-faced boy came galloping into camp on a scrawny horse.

The boy ducked his head to the sher-

iff as he pulled rein, and the sheriff, with an answering nod, thrust the wooden stirrup under his coat. Then the sheriff listened while the boy, in peon Spanish, told Maxwell that his father, Manuel Garcia, had been sick at home for three days and could haul no more wood until he was better.

While Maxwell and the boy were talking Hackett wheeled his horse and started off. He had heard and seen enough. Deep down in his heart he believed that he knew where to go to lay hands on at least one of the thieves.

In order to make assurance doubly sure, he followed the trail left by the thieves in coming to the mine. This carried him several miles to the southward, and here the hoof-prints were swallowed up in the cluttering tracks of many cattle.

By then daylight was fading, and Hackett could not have proceeded farther if he had wished to. For a long time he held his horse stationary in the cattle-trail and with body drooping forward and one knee looped around his saddle-horn debated as to his best course.

"There's no doubt about it," he thought. "The thieves came this way and took the same route after committing the robbery. Garcia lives to the westward, and if the light served I believe I could follow the cattle-drive and find where one of the robbers left it and made straight for the wood-hauler's cabin.

"So, Garcia has been sick at home for three days, has he? That's a poor excuse to cover up his absence on account of last night's work. I'll ride over tomorrow and trade this wooden stirrup for one of the bars of bullion.

"I'm sorry for Robert," Hackett added half aloud as he pointed his horse toward Broken Bow and used the spurs, "but it's the best thing that could happen to him. Still, it would have been better if all this could have occurred while he was in Denver.

"His future prospects are too bright to be obscured by a girl like Tonita. The Garcias, root and branch, are all of a kind, and the boy must be brought to realize it."

It was hard for the sheriff that this duty should fall to him. As he galloped toward Broken Bow the unpleasant nature of the task was borne in upon him more and more.

Knowing Bob so well, Hackett feared that he would still refuse to listen to reason. It would be like him to continue to cling to the girl in spite of any crime that might be fastened upon her father.

The sheriff's heart grew heavy at thought of a final clash. Had Robert been his own son he could hardly have loved him more.

But he must give up the Mexican girl, who, Hackett firmly believed, was in every way unworthy of him and could prove only a drag on his career. Having decided on his course, the sheriff set his face to the issue with grim determination.

It was ten o'clock when he clattered through the straggling main street of Broken Bow. The settlement was quiet, and many of the stores and dwellings dark.

At the lower end of the thoroughfare Bruce, perhaps unconsciously, slackened pace. His eyes turned upon a shadowy house which was the very last of the ragged file on that side of the street and stood at a long distance from its nearest neighbor.

A light gleamed in one of the windows, and as he came abreast of the dwelling and continued to look a door was opened, revealing the slender silhouette of a woman. Hackett swerved his horse to the roadside and dismounted. As he did so the form left the doorway and hastened toward him.

"Is that you, father?" came an anxious voice.

"No, Hattie," the sheriff answered, securing his horse. "It's Bruce. Sorry if you're disappointed," he added in a jesting tone.

"Oh, Bruce," was the response in a tone of relief, "I'm so glad you have come! Father went to Chislett yesterday, on business, and hasn't got back yet."

"I wouldn't worry about it," said Hackett, stepping forward and taking the girl's hands. "Probably your father couldn't finish his business in time to return to-day."

"But his horse came back two hours ago," the girl answered apprehensively,

" and was so jaded it could hardly stagger into the barn. Not only that, but it was wounded in the shoulder, and—and one of the saddle-stirrups was gone."

Hackett's form grew rigid and he released the small hands he had been holding and recoiled a step.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHERIFF AT ODDS WITH DUTY.

So wrought up were the girl's feelings that she took no account of the sheriff's perturbation. On the whole, he was glad of this, and of the darkness that hid the changing expression of his face. He was enabled to collect himself without arousing his companion's mistrust.

Those artless words, " and one of the saddle-stirrups was gone," carried such a far-reaching significance, and so suddenly and completely subverted the theory which the sheriff had already evolved that they left him astounded and bewildered.

All that the words implied opened out to him by degrees while he was dissembling his real feelings and apparently listening to the girl with sympathetic attention.

Hackett was no stranger to the shiftless character of Ben McKeever. Unlike Lin Pinney, however, he considered this shiftlessness the full measure of the man's iniquity, and had not allowed it to weigh very heavily in the scales.

But if there was any foundation for the suspicion aroused by Hattie's words Hackett himself had dropped into the position to which he had before relegated Robert. The mere thought of it made him wince.

" You are sure," asked Hackett, " that the horse is the same one your father rode when he left Broken Bow yesterday? "

" Why, yes," Hattie answered. " It is the only horse we have, and I would know it anywhere. Have you any idea, Bruce," she added, with a catch in her voice, " what could have happened to father? "

" A hundred things might have occurred to send the animal back here with an empty saddle," Hackett replied, " and at the same time not be serious enough to arouse your apprehension."

" If it were not for the missing stirrup and the wound on the horse's shoulder I do not think I should be alarmed; but it looks as though father had experienced trouble of some kind, and—and—— Oh," she added brokenly, throwing her hands to her face, " I dread to think of all that *may* have happened, Bruce! "

" Come, come, Hattie," the sheriff said in a kindly tone, " we'll go into the house and I'll take a lantern and have a look at the horse. The brute may have fallen and hurt itself on the rocks, and even the stirrups may have been lost in that way. Keep a good heart, little girl; be brave, just as you always are."

She passed on with him into the lighted room, made the lantern ready, and gave it into his hand. But when he went to look at the horse he went alone.

The animal, spent to exhaustion, was lying down. The wound on the shoulder, Hackett quickly discovered, was of little consequence. It was merely a scratch a few inches long, and might have been caused by a thorn in the chaparral, or, as he had already stated, by a fall on the rocks.

The saddle, just as Hattie had removed it, lay on a bale of hay in one corner of the barn. Hackett took a step toward it, then paused with a foolish tingling of the nerves.

" I know too much already," he thought, brushing his hand across his forehead—" too much for Hattie's peace of mind and my own. Why go any further? Maxwell has given up the bullion, and has absolutely no idea as to the identity of the thieves; two thousand dollars is nothing to him, and it may be the price of Hattie's happiness and mine."

While Bruce Hackett stood in that ruinous old stable vacillating between the door and the evidence that lay in the corner a thought rushed in upon him with overwhelming force. Apart from his own happiness and that of the girl who had won his heart, Robert's welfare was also to be considered.

There were two of the thieves. If Ben McKeever were proved to be one it might very easily chance that Garcia was

the other; and right there began a damning train of cause and effect wherein the sheriff's fate and Robert's ran side by side.

Where was Hackett's consistency if he pronounced against Tonita and still cleaved to the one woman who had been so long in coming into his life? No; if he followed that clue to the bitter end and found that McKeever had been concerned in the Maxwell robbery he would have to wreck his own future in order to keep in a position to safeguard Robert's.

He may have been wrong, yet that was the situation as he saw it. But if he dropped the whole case at that point, if he allowed his suspicions to go unverified, then both Garcia and McKeever could keep their ill-gotten gains and the problem would be put aside.

It was strange how Hackett's convictions, based upon such meager evidence, centered in the Mexican's guilt. Antipathy for the man, born of Robert's infatuation for his daughter, must have pushed the sheriff hard.

How long Hackett struggled with his conscience he did not know. In the end, however, he thought of nothing but his plain duty, and went over to the saddle and examined it carefully.

The right-hand stirrup was gone. The other, which he found, matched the stirrup that had been picked up in the greasewood at Maxwell's.

Turning resolutely away, he left the stable and went back to the house. Hattie was still in the bare little sitting-room, waiting patiently for him to return.

"Do you know why your father was going to Chislett?" he asked.

His voice was hoarse and unnatural. He tried to meet the girl's eyes, but could not.

"You have found out something, Bruce," said the girl quietly, "that is not very encouraging. Please don't keep anything back."

"So far as your father's safety is concerned, Hattie," answered Hackett, "I don't think you need feel any alarm. Did your father give any particular reason for going to Chislett?"

"He merely said he was going there on business."

"Where did he get that old saddle?"

Hattie's eyes widened at this question.

"He got it from a Mexican, several months ago," she returned. "What has the saddle got to do with father's absence, Bruce?"

"Nothing, perhaps," he said, stepping toward the door. "You don't see many saddles like it in these parts, and I was curious to know where it came from."

"Must you go now?" As she spoke, she rose from her chair and came toward him. "This is the first time I have seen you for two days—since Robert came."

"I was intending to bring Robert over here this afternoon to see you," Hackett answered, "but an unexpected call to the Maxwell mine interfered."

"You know," Hattie smiled, "I have always been just a little bit jealous of Robert. You mustn't let him monopolize you entirely, Bruce."

"He doesn't intend to stay very long," Hackett laughed, "and we feel as though we can't see too much of each other, you know. He returns to Denver next week to put out his shingle and begin making a name for himself. I've given him five years to get into the State Legislature, and five more to get into Congress."

Nothing could have beaten down Hackett's constraint like the mention of Robert's name. It was his favorite topic; whenever it was brought up he was ready forthwith to light his pipe and sing the young man's praises.

Just now he had come in supperless from a trying ride; he was beaten with conflicting emotions, and his horse—whose comfort was always his first consideration—stood pawing in front, impatient for the home corral, yet Hackett faced slowly about and started for a chair. Before he could gain the seat a rear door opened and a man flung heavily into the room.

"Father!" exclaimed Hattie.

It was really McKeever. Without paying the slightest attention to his daughter, he whirled fiercely on the sheriff, one hand darting behind him, under his coat.

"Stand right where you are, Hack-

ett!" he cried menacingly. "Try to lay the weight of your finger on me and, by the eternal! you'll be sorry."

CHAPTER V.

THE SHERIFF RECEIVES A BLOW.

OLD Ben was an unkempt, shaggy sort of person; big, drooping, and with no ambition beyond plenty to eat and drink and smoke. Usually he was languid and spiritless, and this show of gratuitous hostility very naturally set the sheriff to thinking.

Hattie, also, must have had food for thought. But inasmuch as she was entirely ignorant of the important matters known to Hackett, her speculations and his followed widely different channels.

As became the mainstay of a household where shiftlessness would have resulted in ruin but for her own struggles, the girl could be firm, and even, on occasion, dictatorial. Stepping between her father and Hackett, she faced the former and pointed imperiously toward a chair.

"I think," she said coldly, "that you forget who Mr. Hackett is and the courtesy he is entitled to. Sit down."

"What's he doing here at this time o' night?" mumbled McKeever, backing warily toward the seat.

"He is my guest, not yours," said Hattie sharply. "Where have you been?"

"Chislett," snarled McKeever; "where do you s'pose?"

"The horse came back without you. How did that happen?"

"A man popped out on me in the hills and tried to steal the critter," answered old Ben, with a show of bravado. "We had a fight, and for a minute the air was plumb full o' lead. During the scrimmage the horse got clean away from both of us. I had to walk for about six miles, and then I borrowed a mount to bring me the rest of the way."

Old Ben was romancing. His story bore internal evidence of pure fiction.

"If that sort of work is going on in this county," observed Hackett, "it's my business to take a hand. Describe the man that tried to steal your horse, Mr. McKeever."

"Now you got me on the run, Hackett. It was too dark for me to see him very plain, and I made things so hot in his vicinity that he spent most of his time dodgin' around among the rocks."

Hackett knew that he ought to step up to old Ben, disarm and arrest him, and take him over to the arroyo. While he was debating the question in his mind Hattie turned on him.

"You'd better go, now, Bruce," said she, her face pale and her eyes appealing. "Come over to-morrow, and bring Mr. Ransome."

McKeever started to his feet with a gurgling oath.

"Ransome!" he muttered hoarsely; "what's that you're sayin' about Ransome?"

The girl turned on her father with a bitter reproach, and Hackett, after a moment's hesitation, left the house, mounted, and rode for the arroyo.

"The girl has all she can bear for to-night," he told himself, in an endeavor to ease his conscience. "To-morrow I'll take old Ben in hand. If I can get back the bullion perhaps Maxwell will be willing to drop the affair."

If McKeever evaded the consequences of the robbery it would likewise be necessary to spare Garcia, and this was a point that caused the sheriff much discontent. Garcia's guilt, brought home to Robert, would have been a telling argument against Tonita.

By that time it was approaching midnight, and there was no light in the house at the arroyo. Hackett rode quietly past and down to the corral.

The horse cared for, he dropped his trappings at the corral gate, returned to the house, slipped silently through the living-room, and gained his own chamber.

The stertorous breathing of a man in deep sleep came from Pinney's bedroom, and Hackett was glad to know that his deputy had returned. The sheriff, loath to disturb any one, did not strike a light. Believing that Robert as well as Pinney was in the house, he quickly disrobed and got into bed.

Weary as he was, Hackett went to sleep almost immediately. When he opened his eyes again it was broad day, and Pinney was standing beside the bed

looking down at him with a troubled face.

"When did you get back, Bruce?" queried the deputy.

"Midnight," Hackett answered.

"What does that trouble at Maxwell's amount to?"

"It's hard to tell yet. What about Struthers?"

"I tagged him around for two days, and then he lost me."

"Think he's straight goods?"

"He's anything but straight, if I know his brand. Mebby he's mixed up in that Maxwell business."

"No, I don't think so. Where's Robert?"

The look of trouble deepened in the deputy's long face.

"That's what I was going to tell you about, Bruce," said he. "Bob isn't around this morning. He slid out last evening, and, so far as I can see, hasn't been back since."

Hackett rose on his elbow and stabbed the deputy with his gray eyes.

"Where did he go?" he demanded sternly.

"Saddled up and headed west."

"You're about as near an apology for a full-grown man as I ever saw in my life," growled Hackett, bounding out of bed and scrambling into his clothes. "You knew I didn't want him to go to that Greaser's. Why didn't you stop him?"

"That's right," said the deputy morosely; "pile it on. I ain't going to be any club for you, Bruce, when it comes to bossing Bob Ransome. And you needn't expect me to do what you couldn't do yourself."

"Well," returned Hackett shortly, "get up my horse. I reckon you're equal to that."

"Breakfast's all ready. Don't you want to eat before you ride?"

"There's not much time to waste," said Hackett fiercely. "If I knew what the boy was up to we could lay out our work with some sort of system. Why didn't you tell me about this last night?" he broke off fretfully.

"Why didn't you give me a chance?" retorted Pinney. "You sneaked in here and went to bed without ever saying a word to anybody."

"Well, get the horse—get the horse."

The deputy hurried away grumbling, and Hackett, after he had dressed and ducked his face in a basin of cold water, swallowed a cup of coffee and ate a few mouthfuls of food. By that time Lin was at the door—with two horses.

"Stay here, Lin," said Hackett, as he ran out and climbed into his saddle. "You haven't had anything to eat yourself."

"I'm going with you," said Lin doggedly.

Hackett wasted no more words. Setting spurs to his horse, he crossed the arroyo, mounted the slope, and galloped for Garcia's, the deputy trailing at his heels.

Hackett was worried. Any one of a number of disagreeable things might have happened.

His talk with Robert on the preceding day had developed the fact that Tonita was still very much in the young man's mind. Had the sheriff exercised his best judgment he would have taken Robert with him to Maxwell's and not left him at home with the temptation to go to Garcia's.

Hackett was at outs with himself, and this in nowise sweetened his temper or lessened his forebodings. If Garcia was lying low, after the Maxwell robbery, his home might well be a place of danger for any one so intimately connected with the sheriff as was Ransome.

Now and again Hackett's mind would drift back to Ben McKeever, his mysterious absence, his wounded horse and missing stirrup, his excitement on bursting into the house and finding the sheriff there, the cock-and-bull story he had told, and his perturbation at the mention of Robert's name.

Was there a connection between these fragments of evidence and Robert's prolonged absence?

Under such a bombardment of mental questions the sheriff's apprehension increased, and found its natural vent in a quicker pace. His spurs rattled constantly, and his horse was finally covering the trail at a breakneck gallop.

Lin Pinney, although he was ignorant of the main source of the sheriff's worry, was himself not a little alarmed. But the gist of the deputy's thoughts all

trended toward an elopement and the tying of a matrimonial knot in Chislett.

That, as Pinney looked at it, would be the quickest and surest way for Bob to put an end to Hackett's hostility; and Bob, as the deputy well knew, always had the courage of his convictions.

The mere thought of such a coup on Bob's part caused Pinney's pessimistic soul to shrink within him. What would Hackett do if such a thing had happened? Lin's failure to answer this question to his own satisfaction lay at the root of his determination to ride with the sheriff that morning.

It was a rough country through which the two men traveled, the trail rising and dipping across the uplifts or writhing in and out among the rocky spurs. A matter of four miles lay in front of the riders at the start, and they had covered no more than half the, distance when their journey was brought abruptly to an end.

Pinney, who was perhaps fifty feet behind Hackett, saw the latter check his careering horse in half a length and stare at some object beside the trail. It was a moment or two before Pinney himself had come close enough to see what the object was, and then his heart leaped into his throat and an icy chill ran along his nerves.

Hackett continued to sit his horse like an image of stone. His face had blanched under its tan, and his eyes were wide with horror.

Pinney drew rein, gasped, and clutched at his saddle-bow. His own gaze followed the sheriff's, and then, weak and sick, he lifted his hands and covered his face.

Bob was lying face upward on the rocks, a smear of red at his breast, his head back, his eyes closed, his arms flung wide from the shoulders.

The deputy's mood passed in a flash, and without a word he started to dismount. Before he could get his feet on the ground a tortured cry burst from Hackett and he hurled himself from the saddle, stumbled to his knees, and caught up the silent form in his arms.

"God!" he moaned. "Robert—is this—is this the end of it all?"

It was fortunate that Pinney, in that hour, was so completely master of himself, and able to command the situation.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SHERIFF TRANSFORMED.

"BRUCE!" Lin bent over Hackett and dropped a hand on his shoulder.

The sheriff's head was bowed. Still clasping the limp form convulsively, he was muttering words the deputy could not hear.

"This will never do, Bruce," said Lin earnestly. "Let me have a look at the boy; mebby something can be done for him."

"Curse you!" said Hackett, looking up savagely, "I want none of your attentions. If you had done your duty this wouldn't have happened."

Pinney's jaws snapped together, and the firm lines deepened around his lips. Catching the sheriff's hands, he wrenched them away.

Hackett sprang up with an oath, an insane glint in his gray eyes. Pinney, on one knee, was opening Bob's shirt at the throat. Apparently, he was paying no attention to the sheriff, but in reality he was keeping covert watch of him.

There was no need, however. The shock had thrown Hackett into a condition where one mood succeeded another with lightning-like rapidity.

The sight of Pinney's lean fingers groping about Bob's breast with a touch as deft and light as a woman's caused the sheriff's clenched fists to drop. Turning, he limped slowly back and forth, a forlorn little figure that touched Lin to the heart.

"Just getting started," Lin heard him murmur brokenly; "just on the point of forging ahead for himself. And now —*this*. It couldn't have been me, warped and twisted as I am, with my life more than half lived, but it had to be him."

At that moment Lin rose on his knees with a sharp exclamation, tore a silk handkerchief from his neck, folded it hastily, and laid it over Bob's wound. Then he regained his feet and leaped to the back of his horse.

"There's life in him yet, Bruce," he called sharply. "Lift him up to me!"

"You say he's alive?" asked Hackett. "After lying there all night, for anything we know, you think it's possible he is——"

"Hand him up to me!" ordered Lin.

Hackett obeyed, and the deputy supported the helpless form across the horse, in front of the saddle.

"Now," Lin added, "climb on to your bronc and make the dirt fly in the direction of Broken Bow. See how quick you can find Doc Nickerson and get him to the house."

Such a call to action was exactly what Hackett needed. Already he had gained his saddle and was headed the other way along the trail.

"I'll have to come slow and careful, Bruce," Lin went on, "and if you have good luck in finding Nickerson you ought to be at the house pretty near as soon as I am. But ride, man—ride for all you're worth. It's a slim chance, but still, it's a chance."

Lin caught a final glimpse of Hackett's haggard face and burning eyes, and then horse and rider were away like the wind.

The deputy, while making the best of the situation, had little hope. The spark of life was so faint that it might flicker out at any moment.

So far as the wound was concerned, even Lin's untrained eye assured him that it was little short of mortal. It was a bullet wound, and had entered the breast dangerously close to the heart.

The flow of blood had thickened and stopped, but now it had begun again, and Lin was put to it to support his helpless burden in a position that would retard the flow as much as possible.

He could not proceed at a faster gait than a brisk walk, and the two miles or more which he had to cover dragged out interminably. But at last he reached the rim of the arroyo, saw the cabin on the opposite side, and beyond the cabin two horsemen approaching at speed along the Broken Bow trail.

"Bruce corraled Nickerson in short order," he muttered; "that's a little luck, anyhow."

Bruce and Nickerson were dismounted and at the door, waiting, when Lin halted his horse. He lowered Bob gently into their hands.

"You're not much good here, Bruce," said Nickerson; "you take care of the horses and leave Bob to Lin and me."

"Maybe I could do something," the sheriff returned, with an appealing note in his thick voice, "and you know I want to do whatever——"

"You're worse than an old woman," growled Nickerson. "Bob looks to me as though he is worth a dozen dead men yet, so you clear out and leave us alone. We've got something to do that won't be pleasant for you to see."

Nickerson and Lin started into the house, with Bob between them. Hackett hesitated, then stumbled after them to the threshold.

"I've got nerve enough to stand anything," said he in a shaking voice. "If you've got to do any probing, or anything like that, I might be handy to have around——"

"For Heaven's sake," fretted the doctor, "kick that door shut, Lin."

The door slammed in Hackett's face.

"I won't come in, Nickerson," Hackett called out, "but you bring that boy through and I'll give you a deed to the North Star."

Hackett turned and stumbled off toward the corral. When he had got as far as the well he realized that he had forgotten the horses.

Returning for them, he watered them at the trough, then went on to the corral. An hour later, when Nickerson came looking for him, the sheriff was stretched out in the shade of the okatea fence, his face in his arms.

"Bob has a fighting chance," said Nickerson.

"A fighting chance," Hackett repeated dully, lifting himself from the ground.

"That's it," went on Nickerson encouragingly, "and it's a pretty good chance for a young fellow who never had any bad habits to weaken his constitution."

"No," said Hackett, "he didn't have any bad habits. I've done my best to keep him clear of that sort of thing. You see, doc, he was just going to strike out for himself. I'd given him five years to get into the State Legis——"

"You've told me that a dozen times since we left Broken Bow."

"Nickerson," returned Hackett, bristling with injured dignity, "I've borne with your incivility enough for one day. If I find that professional incompetence is back of your insulting manner you shall square accounts, sir, with *me!*" and the sheriff glared upward into the doctor's face.

Nickerson whistled; then he laughed. "Shoo!" he murmured.

"With my boy lying there in that house like he is," cried Hackett, "this is no time for levity."

Nickerson laid his big hand soothingly on the sheriff's arm.

"Take me as I mean, Bruce, not as I say," he said. "You ought to know me by this time. Bob should have a nurse," he added after a pause.

"What's the matter with Pinney and me? Do you think for a moment we won't stand by him like we ought to?"

"You'd do the best you could, of course, but I think it would be better if you could interest a woman in the case."

"Woman?" Hackett said blankly.

Nickerson nodded.

"That would be better for everybody —and a great deal better for Bob. Whether he lives or dies depends largely, if not altogether, on the sort of care he receives."

"I'll go for Hattie," said the sheriff. "She'll come—I know she will."

"There's some one else I have in mind," observed the doctor, "and she'll do a whole lot better than Miss McKeever."

"Send her over, then," answered Hackett. "I don't care anything about expense; just remember that. Pull Robert through and you can have everything I got."

The little sheriff began to melt. His eyes blurred, and he choked on the last words.

"Bruce, old fellow," said Nickerson, "it won't do for you to give way. You must brace up and——"

"Who's giving way?" flared Hackett. "I'm no thin-skinned schoolboy, but a man that tries to shoulder whatever comes along, and to do it with a fair amount of saving grace."

"Grief has the same effect on you that whisky has on some others I know," Nickerson answered. "It makes you touchy, and sets you at cross-purposes with your best friends."

"I believe you're right, too, doc," said Hackett slowly. "I'm little, little all the way through; and did you ever know a little man who wasn't always looking for some one to jump on to him? And then I'm crippled—that may have something to do with it."

"Bruce, Bruce," cried Nickerson, reaching for Hackett's hand and reddening with self-reproach, "don't you ever talk to me like that again. Why, if I could get a game leg as you did yours I'd rather have it than a cross of the Legion of Honor! Now, as to Bob—have you any idea who shot him?"

"No," said Hackett.

"His horse has disappeared. Pinney thinks that the man who attacked him must have stood in need of a fresh mount."

"Lin has struck it about right. I don't think Robert has an enemy in Broken Bow County."

"I'm pretty positive on that point myself. He must have lain in the trail for the biggest part of the night, and it is a miracle you found him alive."

"May I go in and see him?" asked Hackett, with a furtive glance in the direction of the house.

"Sure; but it won't be much satisfaction to you. He's unconscious, and may remain so for some time. We got the bullet, though, and the wound is looking, I may say, better than we had any right to expect. With good nursing he has a fighting chance. I'm going back to Broken Bow, now, and I'll send for some one here who'll look after him to the queen's taste. And mind what I say, Bruce; if you don't let the young woman look after Bob you're going to diminish the chances of his recovery."

"Send the woman, and tell her she will be well paid for whatever she does."

Nickerson secured his horse and mounted.

"I'll be over again this afternoon," said he. "If you notice any change in the meantime, come after me, or send Pinney."

Hackett watched the doctor out of sight, then slowly made his way to the

house. Bob, very white and still, but breathing perceptibly, was lying in his own bed. Pinney sat near, plying a palm-leaf fan.

"You've been all morning without a mouthful to eat, Lin," whispered Hackett. "Give me that fan and get something for yourself."

Lin yielded up the fan and glided out of the room. There was a glass of medicine on a table near the head of the bed, and close to the glass was a square of white paper on which a slightly flattened bullet was lying.

As Hackett kept the air stirring over the face of the unconscious Robert he thought of the momentous results such a trifling thing as a bit of lead might achieve under certain conditions.

The sheriff's duty—and a very human desire for revenge which in this case went hand in hand with it—was still lingering somewhere at the back of his benumbed mind. He was groping passively from one point to another, breaking the shackles of inaction one by one.

Lin came back after a while, and without a word relieved him. Hackett got up and went aimlessly into the other room.

A morocco case lay on a table beside a student-lamp. He opened it, and his eyes rested on the carved meerschaum pipe which Robert had brought him from Denver.

On receiving the gift Hackett had smiled a little at the inconsistency of it. That fragile object was out of place in the hands of a rough man, used to corncobs and battered briers.

But now his eyes blurred, and he carefully removed the pipe, filled it from his tobacco-pouch, and sat down to smoke and think. Who knew what subtle magic might lurk in that meerschaum to clear his mind and inspire his hope?

Broken notions filled his brain, and bit by bit he began piecing them together. First he recalled what the doctor had said in quoting Pinney, to the effect that Bob must have been set upon by some one who wanted his horse. At just what time in the evening Bob had had his encounter Hackett could not know, but Pinney stated that he had left for Garcia's directly after supper.

This was one thread, followed as far as Hackett could go with it. The other thread had to do with Ben McKeever.

The sheriff had reached McKeever's house about ten in the evening, and Hattie had told him that her father's horse had come in riderless some two hours before. Therefore, McKeever's horse, with a gouged shoulder and a missing stirrup, had staggered home in the neighborhood of eight o'clock.

That missing stirrup had been left in the greasewood brush at Maxwell's, and presumably old Ben had pushed the horse to exhaustion in fleeing with his share of the stolen bullion. The course of his flight had been south to the cattle-trail, then west in the direction of Garcia's.

McKeever, the day after the robbery, must have been hiding out in the hills, hampered with a spent horse and awaiting the chance to secure a fresh mount. Then Bob happened along the trail. Unarmed as he was, he proved an easy victim.

Hackett was hours in bringing his reasoning thus far. He had lounged in a chair and smoked, or had wandered aimlessly about the house, silent, and absorbed in the problem he was working out.

Several times he had gone into Bob's room to look for signs of improvement, but nothing else could shift his attention from the subject he had in mind. Pinney left the bedside long enough to set out a frugal dinner on the table in the living-room, and Hackett had partaken of the food in a perfunctory way and then returned to his engrossing thoughts.

Early in the afternoon the deputy, from his post at Bob's side, heard a sudden movement and a stifled groan from the other room. Leaning forward so that his eyes could command the open door, he saw Hackett on his feet, with both hands clasping his forehead.

"Bruce!" muttered Pinney, from the door. "What ails you, man?"

Hackett might have answered that, so far as his tortured mind could discover, it was the father of the girl who had promised to marry him that had brought Robert so close to death. But he did not.

Turning his pinched, pain-drawn face

for a second upon the deputy, Hackett waved him to silence and went out of the house.

In the few preceding months Hattie McKeever had become like an oasis in the desert of Hackett's life. He had gone to her with his plans—his plans for himself, for her welfare, and for Robert's.

After Robert left him the sheriff's soul had starved for companionship. Then the girl had come, and had done far more than take Robert's place. Hackett had clung to her like a miser to his hoarded gold.

Love had been late in finding the sheriff, but in all the past years it had been gathering headway; when he realized that he had been caught in the current the very power of it amazed him. Now a malign fate had decreed that the father of the woman who was to become his wife should strike this blow at Robert—at Robert, who had always been first with him, and for whose future he had struggled and schemed for years.

While the sheriff stood before the house seeking dumbly to shape his course through the breakers that loomed ahead he became aware of a team and wagon on the western rim of the arroyo.

To descend the western slope, opposite the North Star mine, was impossible for a vehicle of any description. The wagon-trail made a détour of a mile to southward, where the ravine presented fewer difficulties.

Hackett watched the scrawny team and the rattletrap vehicle apathetically until he discovered that the driver was none other than Garcia. A shawled figure, slender and erect, sat at Garcia's side, but at that moment received little of the sheriff's attention.

The Mexican was plying a gad and urging the horses to their best pace, both he and the girl gazing often across the arroyo. Here was another call to action, and the sheriff responded grimly, and with his old-time vigor.

He was but a few minutes in saddling and taking the road. In order to intercept the fleeing Mexican, he galloped south along the eastern edge of the barren valley.

"I'll get one of the scoundrels, at any rate," he muttered. "When I have accomplished that I'll go after the other, no matter what it costs me."

(To be continued.)

A LION IN THE WAY.

By CHARLES CAREY.

How a man's past came to be a sealed book, and the dramatic circumstances under which he decided to open it.

THE BROKER AND THE HOBO.

HARRY PENDON, of the Wall Street brokerage firm Pendon & Cameron, kept the first three years of his career in Gotham a sealed book. To his associates in business and society he was known only as a prudent and successful operator on the market, a man of the world, young, handsome, and agreeable.

He was a regular attendant at St. Filigrane's Church, dressed in irreproachable taste, and could always be counted on to do exactly the proper thing at the proper time.

Possessed of a quick wit and a fluent tongue, he was always able, by some clever bit of repartee or flash of humor, to turn off any inquiry trending toward that period of his life concerning which he preferred to keep silent, and this, at the same time, without arousing any suspicions that he was making an effort toward concealment.

Indeed, most people considered him an extraordinarily frank and candid person. To only one was his peculiar reticence a source of baffling and irritating disquietude.

Mrs. Rosalie Merill Vance was a social "climber" who was staking all her hopes

for advancement on the beauty and charm of her daughter Caroline. Attracted by the glitter and glamour surrounding New York's famous Four Hundred, she had come to the metropolis determined to break into that exclusive circle.

She had neither money nor influential connections to help her, but she possessed full faith in Caroline's radiant loveliness as the bait by which to lure a millionaire husband and thus open up to her the realm of her ambitious dreams.

Nor was this project as illusory as might at first blush appear; for the daughter was really a girl in ten thousand, not only in the matter of personal appearance, but in her qualities of mind and heart.

All theories of heredity were instantly confuted when one came to compare Caroline Vance's absolute sincerity and lack of affectation with the character of the silly, scheming woman who had given her birth.

Therefore, in time it came to be that many men of the class whom Mrs. Vance considered eligible paid court at Caroline's shrine. The mother and daughter had taken a sitting at St. Filigrane's, and as both of them were assiduous in church work—the younger woman from an honest interest in it—they were thrown into more or less close contact with the members of its fashionable congregation.

But although the millionaires and the social lights paid court, Caroline, to her mother's distraction, would have none of them. Money can do much, but it cannot instil brains into a vapid head or render comely a hideous face, and the girl, young, ardent, and romantic, was dreaming of a possible Prince Charming.

Dreaming? Nay, although she scarcely yet confessed it to her own heart, she had found him.

And, ere long, Mrs. Vance, her perceptions rendered abnormally acute by her concern over the matter, began to "smell a mouse." What meant these musing abstractions on the part of Caroline, these shy smiles and occasional drooping of the eyelids, this frequent stealing of the color into her cheeks without cause or provocation?

"It's a man!" she announced decisively to herself; and by means of guarded questioning and a period of wary watchfulness she soon ascertained just which man it was.

But having discovered what she wanted, she found herself even more at sea than before. Harry Pendon had *entrée* into the circles to which she aspired, he seemed affluent, and every one spoke of him in terms of the highest respect; but she knew that many a single man will be received where he could not think of introducing a wife.

A woman, having scaled the social ramparts, can drag almost any kind of man up after her; but it is different with the other sex. Many a personable young fellow who has been taken up by the Smart Set and fêted and flattered in the days of his gay bachelorhood has been dropped like a hot cake the moment he took to himself a helpmeet who was not already inside the pale.

The question with Mrs. Vance, therefore, was whether or not Pendon was of sufficient importance to hold his place married as well as single, or whether, being accepted now only on sufferance, the impost of a wife and mother-in-law—she never forgot the mother-in-law—would throw him back into the ruck.

"Who is he?" she asked of all her friends and acquaintances; but none of them could tell her more than has herein been set forth, and which she already knew for herself.

In conversation with the young man himself she repeatedly drew the subject around so as to get him to divulge something of his past, and sought by every means in her power to trap him into some sort of an admission, but he skilfully evaded all her angling, and in the end she knew just as much of him as she had in the beginning.

Yet she was by no means ready to insist upon Caroline giving him up. It might be, after all, that he was just the person to gratify all her hopes, and since the girl already looked on him with favor, what more satisfactory dénouement could be effected, provided he were the eighteen-carat quality he appeared to be?

So, tortured by doubts, drawn first one way and then another by her desires, Mrs. Vance passed a miserable, anxious period.

Sometimes she determined that she would go to Pendon and demand that he give her a straight account of himself; but she feared to do this, lest thereby she might affront him and drive him away. She knew so little of the ramifications of kinship among the New York families, and had so little opportunity to inform herself, that she shrank from appearing absurd by asking for references from a man whose position might be as unassailable as that of the Astors.

Meanwhile, the young people, untroubled by any such considerations, were evidently preparing to take each other on trust. There could no longer be any doubt that Pendon was the cause of all those shy maidenly tremors on the part of Caroline, while it was equally plain from the assiduity of the young man's attentions and the ardor of his manner that he was equally smitten.

"Does Mr. Pendon ever tell you anything about himself?" finally asked the old lady, one day, her curiosity getting the better of her discretion.

"Oh, yes," replied the girl ingenuously. "Where he goes, and what he has been doing, and how many invitations he has, and," with a little laugh, "almost everything."

"I mean about his past," persisted Mrs. Vance. "Does he never speak of his early life or mention how it is that he has come to be received everywhere?"

"Why, no," and Caroline bridled slightly. "Why should he? I suppose he has always done just about as he does now and doesn't think it worth while talking about."

Mrs. Vance gave a disdainful sniff.

"Well, I think it very strange," she observed. "I have made a number of inquiries about him, and have gone so far as almost to ask him the pointblank question; but all I can discover is that he made his appearance here some five or six years ago and from the start has always been more or less in the swim. As to his previous station in life or what his antecedents may have been, nobody seems to know, or, indeed, to care.

"Now, I am not blind to the fact that you and he are becoming interested in each other, Caroline, and I am perplexed what course to pursue. A diffident reserve in regard to one's private affairs is one thing in a man, and making a mystery out of them is quite another. In the latter case, there is usually some disgraceful reason for it.

"So, I beg of you, daughter, be careful. Do not let things go too far until you are assured that this man is worthy of you. Could you not"—coaxingly—"could you not put a few questions to him yourself, in an artless, girlish way that would not lead him to suspect you were really trying to gather information? He might talk freely under such circumstances when otherwise he would be dumb as an oyster."

The girl's color, which had heightened noticeably at her mother's first reference to the state of affairs between herself and Pendon, flamed into two spots of vivid crimson at the other's words.

"Certainly I shall do no such thing," she broke out vehemently. "Unless he chooses to speak of his own accord, I shall never try to trick him into doing so. If he should ask me to marry him he will undoubtedly tell me all about himself, but whether he does or not, I shall feel no less trust in him.

"What do I care about his past? I know what he is now, and even though he may have been a beggar or a thief, I should love him just the same. For I do love him"—defiantly. "Do you hear? I love him, I love him; and if he asked me, I would marry him to-morrow!"

And with head up and flashing eyes she swept out of the room.

It was only natural that Mrs. Vance, however, should take a less romantic view of the matter; and more than ever alarmed by Caroline's outspoken declaration of her feelings, she determined that unless Pendon speedily vouched for himself she would force him to renounce his pretensions to her daughter's hand.

Caution still restrained her from questioning him directly or offending him in any way; but her suspicions, fed by a lively imagination, had now reached the point where she was almost certain there must be something disreputable, if not criminal, in the past he so sedulously concealed.

And as it happened, fate unexpectedly threw in her way a confirmation of her bad impressions.

One day, as she and Caroline were

walking down the avenue, they saw Pendon a short distance ahead of them and on the opposite side of the street. Just then a shabby, unkempt creature looking more than twenty per cent hobo shambled out from a side street, and, chancing to perceive the young broker strolling along, rushed up and seized him by the hand with every expression of delight.

Pendon halted a moment in surprise, then glancing about quickly, as though to make sure that he was unobserved, responded warmly to the other's greetings, and drew him aside up the cross thoroughfare.

When Mrs. Vance and her daughter reached the corner they could see the two standing back within the shadow of a doorway engaged in earnest conversation, and Pendon's arm was thrown affectionately about the tramp's shoulder.

"Ah, just as I thought!" exclaimed Mrs. Vance triumphantly. "Mr. Pendon is at last showing himself in his true colors. 'Birds of a feather flock together,'" with a significant nod of her head.

"Why, mama, I don't see what right you have to draw any such conclusions," contended Caroline, with spirit, although her own face was undeniably perturbed and her voice shaky. "That may be some poor man whom Harry is trying to help. He's awfully generous, I know. I've seen him give away considerable sums several times to men who approached him on the street."

"Humph!" snorted Mrs. Vance, with cynical disdain. "Blackmail, probably. Hush-money to keep his confederates from squealing on him. No, Caroline; men do not shake hands in that friendly way or step aside for a private conference with an object of charity. And that creature with him looks like nothing less than a desperate criminal. Why, I should not be surprised," giving her fancy free rein, "if this Harry Pendon should turn out to be one of those society burglars who are cropping up every little while!"

II.

LOVE LAUGHS AT LOCKSMITHS.

THE ladies did not continue their walk much farther. Indeed, at the very next corner Caroline insisted on hailing a stage in order to return home, and when they arrived there she proceeded at once to her own room, where she remained for the rest of the afternoon with the door locked.

"Let her have her cry out," commented the mother philosophically. "I shall not disturb her. And perhaps when it is all over she'll feel better, and more ready to give up this scoundrel who has so shamefully imposed upon us."

But along about five o'clock, and after the evening papers had been brought in, she became apprised of so startling a bit of information that she could not hold to her benevolent resolution, and accordingly, with a copy of the *Planet* clutched tightly in her hand, hurried to her daughter's door.

In response to repeated demands for admittance the door was at last opened a crack, and a very forlorn and swollen-eyed Caroline showed herself to ask what was wanted.

"Simply that Harry Pendon has been proved just what I said he was," declared Mrs. Vance, brandishing her paper as though it were a banner of victory. "Next time I pass my judgment upon a young man, Caroline, perhaps you'll believe me. I told you he was a burglar, and now I have the evidence to back it up. It is all here in this paper."

"Oh," wailed the girl, sinking down into a chair and covering her face with her hands. "Have they arrested him? Is he in prison?"

"No"—grudgingly. "Apparently not as yet, according to this paper, although it has been printed some little time, of course, and it may be that his arrest took place after they went to press, in which case it would be noted in a later edition."

But her amiable surmise fell upon deaf ears, for already Caroline had snatched at the paper, and, carrying it over to the light, was feverishly scanning the riotous head-lines.

"Why, mama," she exclaimed, glancing up in indignant amazement, "what a wicked, wicked falsehood you have been telling me! There is nothing here about Harry at all. It is an account of the arrest of some notorious porch-climber whom they call 'Dutch Fritz.'"

"Ah, is that so?" returned Mrs.

Vance, with malicious satisfaction. "Well, just look at that picture of 'Dutch Fritz' up toward the top of the page and tell me if you ever saw him before? Is it or is it not the fellow who met Harry Pendon down on the avenue this morning? Then, notice the concluding paragraph of the article, in which it is stated that the accused was released late this afternoon on bail furnished by a man whose name the authorities declined to give, but who was recognized by several people as a well-known broker and society leader.

"Who," with a shrill cackle, "do you suppose that could have been? No; as I told you in the first place, Caroline, this man is a bad lot, and the sooner you put him out of your mind the better. Now that he is definitely known to be a burglar, or at least in league with burglars, he will very speedily be dropped by all his decent acquaintances."

Caroline could not deny the similarity of the published portrait to the man who had accosted Pendon on the avenue, nor could she disavow that the description of the unnamed bondsman pointed almost unerringly toward her lover; nevertheless, she rose to his defense with a passionate energy.

"Bah!" she cried, tossing the paper scornfully aside. "What does all this prove? Nothing at all; at least, nothing which can make me change my opinion of Harry until he comes himself and tells me it is true. But if it should be true, if it should turn out as bad as or even worse than what you say, he will find that there is at least one of his 'decent acquaintances' who will not drop him. If he is in trouble of any kind, it is then he will need me most!"

"Caroline!" gasped her mother. "Do you mean to tell me that you still stand up for this abandoned wretch? That you would even consent to share his disgrace? Why, I would never have believed——"

But what it was that passed her credulity was not disclosed, for at that moment a maid appeared at the door and announced the presence of Mr. Pendon in the drawing-room.

Caroline gave a glad little cry and sprang toward the wash-stand, with the evident intention of removing the traces of tears from her face, preparatory to going down to meet him; but Mrs. Vance interposed.

"You are of age," she said icily, "and if you insist upon knowing, or even marrying, this fellow I suppose there is no way in which I can prevent you. But I beg you to remember that you are an inmate of my house, and so long as you remain such I must insist upon your obeying my wishes. Never with my consent shall you see that man under my roof, and I therefore order you to stay here in your room until he is gone. I shall see him myself, and shall tell him what I think of his conduct, and of his presumption in daring to come here upon the heels of this disgraceful exposure."

And in order to insure compliance with her mandate she whipped the key from the door, quickly slipped through, and locked it from the outside.

"You are acting like a naughty child," she informed her daughter sternly through the keyhole, "and until you have returned to something like a state of reason I shall be compelled to treat you as such."

Then, secure in the knowledge that the door was stout enough to withstand any assault the girl might be able to make upon it, she settled her ruffled plumage and sailed down to meet the intruder with blood in her eye.

Pendon, immaculate in well-fitting afternoon garb, rose easily to greet her as she entered. With alert perception he noted that the old lady's bristles were up and her claws unsheathed, so he hastened to ward off the attack.

"Ah, Mrs. Vance," he cried hurriedly, giving her no chance to edge in a word on him, "I am afraid I have chosen a very inopportune hour to call; but Mrs. Van Tuft—Mrs. Hermann Van Tuft, you know—wanted me to get your promise that you and Miss Caroline would join a little party we are arranging to occupy her box at the opera tomorrow night. She will send you a note herself in the morning, but she was so afraid that you might form some other engagement in the meantime that she insisted on my coming over to see you at once. I am dining there later on, so if you agree to the project I will carry back your acceptances."

It was almost ludicrous to note the way in which the irate lady gasped and strangled in the effort to choke back the words which had been upon the tip of her tongue. To sit with Mrs. Hermann Van Tuft in her box at the opera! Why, it appealed to her more than an invitation to heaven.

The reflection flashed upon her, too, that since Pendon had just come from the Van Tufts', and was returning there to dine, it was evident that that newspaper article which had so excited her, and which must be known by this time to all New York, could not have greatly hurt his social prestige.

Almost as though by a miracle, the belligerent set of her face relaxed, and she forced her lips into a gracious smile, while with a cordial motion of her hand she waved him to a seat.

"No," she said, feigning to reflect, although she could not entirely conceal a certain joyful flutter in her voice, "I do not think—in fact, I am sure that neither Caroline nor I have any engagement for to-morrow night. You may tell Mrs. Van Tuft, therefore, that we shall be only too delighted to join her little party; and let me thank you, too, Mr. Pendon, for your kindness in coming around to let us know. I should have been inconsolable had anything come up to prevent so charming an arrangement."

And in the latter statement she spoke nothing less than the exact and literal truth.

She noticed his eyes anxiously turning toward the door, and pondered whether or not she should release Caroline from duress and allow her to come down. On consideration, however, she decided against it.

This invitation for to-morrow night was all well enough, and she felt that in a party, that way, she could prevent the consummation of any definite understanding between her daughter and this man. Nor, for fear lest precipitancy might interfere with the chance offered her to associate with Mrs. Hermann Van Tuft, would she press him for an explanation now.

But until he did explain, the less her daughter saw of him the better.

Accordingly, she murmured with affected concern: "I am so sorry, Mr. Pendon, that you will be unable to see Caroline to-day. The dear girl went to her room with a severe headache after her return from a walk this morning, and I do not feel like disturbing her. When your name was sent up I hesitated for a moment whether or not I should arouse her, but finally concluded that it would be wiser to let her have her nap out. She will be all the better and brighter for it to-morrow night."

Pendon showed his disappointment in his face, but having no reason to doubt her word, politely expressed his concern, and with the hope that Miss Caroline might have entirely recovered when she awoke, prepared to take his leave.

But at that moment there came the sound of a light, quick step along the corridor, and a second later the door was flung open to show Caroline herself, her lovely face glowing with defiant triumph.

She paused bewildered, however, at the sight of her mother seated in apparently amicable converse with the man who was to have had vials of wrath emptied on his head, and in the brief space thus allowed her Mrs. Vance's generalship rose equal to the occasion.

Rallying from the consternation into which the girl's unexpected appearance had thrown her, she cried with maternal solicitude: "Is your headache better, dear? I was just apologizing to Mr. Pendon for your absence on account of it. I am so glad you have felt able to come down, though, for now you can receive in person the kind invitation he has brought us from Mrs. Hermann Van Tuft to go with her to the opera to-morrow night. Still, you are sure," anxiously, "that you are not overexerting yourself, my darling?"

"Oh, no," responded Caroline, meeting her mother's glance with one equally significant; "there was no particular exertion about it. Somebody had thoughtlessly locked my door from the outside, but I found very little difficulty in climbing down the fire-escape."

III.

A JEST OF FATE.

Now, not to make any mystery out of Harry Pendon or his career, it may be stated, Mrs. Vance's fervid fancy to the

contrary notwithstanding, that he was neither a burglar nor in league with burglars. He knew as little about blowing a safe, picking a lock, or manipulating a "jimmy" as he did about the principles of differential calculus; and that was just nothing at all.

If he maintained a certain reticence in regard to certain chapters of his life it was not because he felt ashamed of them; indeed, he was rather proud of the perseverance and pluck which had enabled him to overcome some of the obstacles then encountered. It was because he failed to see where they contained any especial interest for any one besides himself, and because, were they generally known, they might subject him to a lot of chaffing from the gay, mocking acquaintances he met out in society.

He fully intended to tell Caroline Vance all about himself, but he did not consider that the time had yet come. In his opinion, the hour for such intimate revelations, unless it were a "just cause or legal impediment" to serve as a bar to the marriage bond, should be subsequent to the exchange of mutual vows, and when the man is assured of a sweetheart's willingness to keep his confidences inviolate.

Nor did this imply any lack of trust in Caroline whether she should accept him or no; it was simply an adherence to a line of conduct which he had long ago laid down for himself.

That what he had to tell would in any degree change the nature of her feelings he had no fear. He had long since pretty well gaged the girl's character, and was satisfied that if she loved him it would make no difference to her what he had been or what he had done—not even though he should be proclaimed a beggar or a thief.

All of which shapes up as a rather portentous prologue, considering what is to follow; for, to tell the truth, Harry Pendon's secret was merely the summary of his early struggles to gain a foothold in New York.

He was an up-State country lad, who like many another had come down to the city at about the age of twenty with no other resources than a quick adaptability and a settled determination to succeed.

He had the usual experience of a newcomer at the start—the tantalizing daily search through the "Help Wanted" column for employment suited to his capabilities, the dreary trudging about from place to place only to find that the post had been already filled or that the concern had changed its mind about needing any one, and the final acceptance of a miserably underpaid job, with almost weekly shifts to others, each a little higher in the scale.

Ultimately, however, he landed a decent position in the office of a big downtown brokerage firm, where he received a salary of twelve dollars a week, and where the work and his associations proved congenial.

He could cover his expenses nicely with the stipend paid him, for Pendon was a chap who believed in patronizing the barber and the tailor, and extravagance in these directions is not so costly as in others which some young men affect; but he was not fully satisfied with making both ends meet. His idea was that he ought to be saving some money and preparing for the day when he should go into business for himself.

Accordingly, he sought for some occupation that would fill up his hours of leisure in the evening, and thus not only add to his income, but also keep him from spending foolishly any of his regular wages. But situations of the sort are not so plentiful as huckleberries in August, and it was some little time before he heard of anything that seemed to suit his purpose.

At last, though, chance threw in his way the job of a "checker" at one of the big restaurants, and he lost no time in fastening on to it. The hours were from seven until one every evening in the week, and he was paid at the rate of two dollars a night, which, when it is taken into consideration that he also had two meals thrown in gratis, allowed him to put by at the end of every month a very tidy little sum.

For his sleeping accommodations he secured a small but comfortable room in close proximity to the restaurant, and hurrying to it at the close of business, he would manage to put in a good seven hours' rest before it was time for him to get up and start for the daily grind down at the brokerage office.

On Sunday mornings he would attire himself in his best and attend service at St. Filigrane's, and in this way—although it is only fair to say that such was not his impelling purpose—he succeeded in making a number of influential acquaintances. The few brief hours on Sunday between dinner and seven o'clock formed really his only period of recreation, and he passed these reading in his room, taking a stroll, or calling upon some of the people he had come to know.

Almost as well be in the penitentiary and have done with it, some young men might have said; but Pendon had his eye on the future. Time enough for pleasures when he should have earned them, was the rule which he laid down for himself.

It was about this period that he entered upon the practise of borrowing money. That, as a general rule, marks the beginning of the downward path in any chap's career; but Pendon had a very definite motive in view.

He would strike almost anybody for a loan, from small sums up to considerable amounts, according as he thought the person would be likely to "give up"; but he always insisted upon making it a business transaction, and upon paying a fair rate of interest for the accommodation. Also, he never failed to meet one of these obligations promptly to the minute.

Saving money constantly, and with scarcely any expenses at all, it may be wondered to what use he could put these various loans; but the truth of the matter was, he never used them at all. He simply deposited the amounts he thus received to his own credit in bank, and when any of his notes came due drew out the sum required to pay it off.

True, he was always a little out of pocket by the transaction, as he paid a higher rate of interest than the bank allowed him; but he considered this difference money wisely invested. He was not only gaining the favor of his bank by keeping a heavy balance constantly on hand, but was also building up a system of credit for himself which could not fail to prove valuable in after years.

In time he came to be known down on Wall Street as "that well-dressed young fellow who never defaults in any of his obligations," and eventually as "Prompt Performance" Pendon, a nickname which, it will be agreed, was not without a certain distinct value of its own.

None of his friends or acquaintances, however, either at St. Filigrane's or down on the Street, ever learned how he put in his evenings. He often saw them come into the restaurant where he was employed, and he had occasion to smile cynically more than once as he noticed some of his office-mates ordering dinners which they could no more afford than could one of the monkeys at the Central Park Zoo.

But, concealed behind the tall screen where he received and checked off the slips of the waiters, he never took the trouble to enlighten any of them as to how close he had been while they were so magnificently playing the lord and nonchalantly chucking a tip to the waiter almost equal to a full day's share of their own salaries.

It was not, as has been previously said, that he was ashamed of the nature of his employment at the restaurant. It was honest and respectable work, and he picked up many a bit of profitable information chatting with the cheery, bustling waiters, many of whom he discovered, to his surprise, were graduates of famous foreign universities, and all of them more or less widely traveled.

He realized, though, that there were many small-minded people in the world he aspired to enter who might cherish a prejudice against him if they knew he had once filled what might be called a menial position, and he saw no reason to handicap himself in life with the disfavor of even the snobs.

Had it been anybody's business what he was doing with himself in the evenings, he would not have hesitated a moment about informing them; but since he regarded it as his own private and peculiar concern, he kept silent about it, both then and thereafter.

And at last came the time when he was ready to give it up. Three years of saving and pinching, together with some fortunate investments, had given him a fund sufficient to justify him in carrying out his long-cherished ambition of starting in business for himself.

By good luck, he was able to associate himself with a partner who had not only a little money, but also important connections, and under the firm name of Pendon & Cameron, they launched their venture upon the stormy seas of finance.

Believing that social prestige has a distinct value in dollars and cents, both of the partners made it a point to devote themselves pretty extensively to that side of New York life. Pendon now had an opportunity to accept many of the invitations which he had hitherto been compelled to decline; and as he was young, well-mannered, tactful, and entertaining, he soon became a great success.

It was said of him that he had no peer in the ability to order a dinner at a public restaurant. Also, whether it was through his society "pull," as he believed, or not, he steadily advanced in his business pursuits.

He no longer had to resort to the scheme of borrowing money he did not need in order to bolster up his credit. His standing at his bank was A No. 1, and his income was of flattering proportions.

He had handsome offices in one of the big buildings in the financial district, and he had long since moved from his hall bedroom to a suite of apartments in a fashionable hotel.

All that he now required was a wife, and it might have been supposed that with his careful, methodical ways he would have selected some big heiress or the daughter of a famous Knickerbocker family.

There were many such who would not have scorned his advances. But Cupid has a tricksy way of managing such affairs; and as it turned out, the woman Pendon came to want was a Miss Nobody, of Nowhere—Caroline Vance, without money and without position.

And by a jest of Fate the scheming old mother who should have been overjoyed at the prospect of securing so estimable and worthy a son-in-law believed him to be a burglar, or at least besmirched with some disgrace which he was trying to cover up.

That he was not is manifest, for herein has been set forth all of Harry Pendon's secret. What was the character of his relation to and association with "Dutch Fritz," the porch-climber, will be developed later on.

IV.

A LION IN THE WAY.

On the night of the opera, Mrs. Vance leaned back in the box and surveyed the animated scene below her with an air of serene satisfaction.

What gratified her, though, was not that some of the most noted musical artists in the world were filling the vast auditorium with notes of liquid sweetness, or that a majestic spectacle which had taken months of labor and cost thousands of dollars in its preparation was being presented before her.

No; she was only conscious that she sat in the famed "diamond horseshoe" at the Metropolitan, and that every one in the house, on consulting the program, must recognize that she was there as the guest of the great society leader, Mrs. Hermann Van Tuft. To-morrow the newspapers, in speaking of the occasion, would mention that "among those in Mrs. Van Tuft's box were Mrs. Vance and Miss Caroline Vance."

How little it takes, after all, to feed one's vanity. No need to smile at poor Mrs. Vance; we all of us have some foible or other that would not stand being dragged out into the light.

And so happy was the lady that not even Pendon's presence could dampen her elation. She had so maneuvered matters that he and Caroline had had no chance for a word alone together and were now separated from each other by the full width of the box.

Mrs. Vance must have forgotten, if perchance she ever knew, that love has a language of its own, and that sometimes a whole dictionary of words may not be nearly so eloquent as the single quick glance from a pair of half-averted eyes.

Still, it cannot be gainsaid that Pendon was not extracting any too great an amount of comfort from the situation. The best of women will play the coquette at times; it is as natural and instinctive with them as the passion of a kitten to torture a mouse.

So Caroline, out of sheer perversity, and because she loved him, was giving her adoring suitor a season of disquietude.

She sat toward the front of the box, her exquisite face aglow with excitement, and devoted all her wiles and fascinations to the greater subjugation of a certain Baron von Siselberg, who evidently had completely lost his heart with his first glance into Miss Vance's laughing eyes.

He was a stranger, brought thither by Mrs. Van Tuft; and since outside the glamour of his title he was tall, blond, and very distinguished-looking in his perfectly fitting evening clothes and with his "order" suspended on a narrow scarlet ribbon about his neck, perhaps Pendon could not be greatly blamed for feeling jealous.

It must have been that he scented a rival the moment the other appeared, for as the baron entered the box in the wake of Mrs. Van Tuft the broker started to his feet with a half-muffled exclamation, and although he recovered himself sufficiently to acknowledge the introduction, he kept constantly stealing glances of frowning discontent in the nobleman's direction.

Nor was he the only one in the house to appear interested in the handsome stranger. The occupants of another box across the horseshoe, whom Pendon recognized as the family of a very wealthy German banker, shot many a curious look in that direction, and were evidently discussing Von Siselberg among themselves with a good deal of suppressed excitement.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Vance, observing the manifest liking which had sprung up between her daughter and the foreigner, was fluttering with pride and allowing her vivid imagination to revel in all sorts of ambitious dreams.

"If only Caroline would give up this silly infatuation of hers for that shady Pendon," she mused, "who can say what might not happen? She must!" concluded the schemer, shutting up her fan with such emphatic vigor that she almost snapped the sticks.

The best that Mrs. Vance had hitherto coveted for a son-in-law was a wealthy New Yorker who might open to her the doors of the big mansions along upper Fifth Avenue; but now, with the widening of her horizon, such aspirations began to seem petty and inadequate.

A title, with the assured position it would give on both sides of the water? That would indeed be well worth while.

How she could queen it over other women if she were only able to speak of "my daughter, the Baroness von Siselberg!"

Of course, there was the question of money to be looked very carefully into, she reflected cautiously. Still, the baron had all the manners of a man of wealth, and she hardly thought it likely that he would be traveling in this country or associating with the Van Tufts unless he were abundantly supplied in that respect.

She wondered how she could ever have considered Pendon for a moment. She looked over to where he sat moodily in his corner glowering at the laughing, vivacious pair beyond her, and her lip curled in contempt.

What could he give her or her daughter, even if the doubts she felt concerning him should prove to be unfounded? At the most, an entrance into the whirl at Newport and New York. The idea of the baron suggested to her mind vistas of brilliant court life and dazzling ceremonials.

Thus the evening passed, no one of the party paying much heed to the performance in progress upon the stage—Pendon sore and resentful, Caroline recklessly flippant, the baron ardently sentimental, and Mrs. Vance lost in visions of conquest. Mrs. Van Tuft had long since succumbed to fatigue, and with her head upon the back of her chair had drifted away into peaceful slumber.

With the fall of the curtain, however, she roused up with assumed sprightliness, and suggested that they proceed to some restaurant for supper.

"What do you all say to the Winchester?" she added. "It is close and convenient, and one can always be sure of seeing some interesting people. It will give you," turning to the baron, "a better idea of our New York after-theater crowds than possibly any other place in town."

Von Siselberg dropped his hat just at the moment, and as it rolled under a chair, he was some little time in recovering it. When he rose to his feet again, his face hot and flushed—probably from his exertions—he brought his heels to-

gether stiffly with a click and made an embarrassed little bow.

"If you do not mind, and if it is on my account you go there, Mrs. Van Tuft," he said earnestly, "I think I should rather go to one of the more quiet and sedate places. All this turmoil and bustle," with a forced smile, "is a little confusing to a foreigner, so," almost pleadingly, "unless your plans are settled, may I not venture to request some other place?"

A quick, impulsive light sprang into Pendon's eye as he heard this objection, and he hastened to interpose.

"Nonsense, my dear fellow," he cried, laying his hand upon the baron's shoulder; "you simply don't understand what the Winchester is, and evidently imagine it a cross between a railway eating-house and a boiler-shop. Really, it is one of the nicest places in town, especially for such a little gathering as has been planned. I move, Mrs. Van Tuft," turning laughingly to their hostess, "that we pay no attention to the baron's groundless fears, but take him along to the Winchester and convince him in spite of himself."

He put the matter in such a way as to make it seem a sort of jolly lark to overrule the other's protests; so, although the German, manifestly ill at ease, floundered about and still endeavored to evade the proposition, Mrs. Van Tuft announced dictatorially that she intended to hold to her original idea.

Accordingly, they started to leave the house, Pendon leading the way and seeming, for some reason, to have recovered all his good spirits, while the baron, as incomprehensibly grown downcast and dejected, lagged to the rear.

But as they were waiting at the side entrance for their carriages they were startled by a sudden loud crash at the corner, and glancing in that direction they saw that a Broadway trolley-car had collided with and wrecked a tall van which had been attempting to cross its tracks.

At the same instant there arose a resounding and terrific roar from the interior of the shattered vehicle, and the next second they found themselves picked up and swept back by the swift rush of a panic-stricken crowd, while the air about them was filled with affrighted cries: "It's a lion! A lion! And he's loose!"

Pendon's brains worked abnormally quick, and even in that moment of alarm, when he clutched Caroline to him and strove to hold her up against the sweeping stampede, he found himself arriving at a swift estimate of what had happened.

"It's been some circus-wagon making its way across town from the Grand Central Station over to one of the West Side ferries," he muttered. "Ordinarily, there would be no danger, even though the beast were loose, for he would be too frightened to do anything but cringe and crouch, and the driver would soon be able to master him.

"But in this case the driver may be killed or unconscious, and the brute may have been hurt just enough to cause him to forget his fears and become vicious. At any rate, those roars he is giving out are not particularly reassuring. The thing to do, evidently, is to fight my way with Caroline back to the door of the opera-house and seek safety inside until the episode is over."

This sounds a little lengthy set down in type; but as a matter of fact, Pendon's speculations were accomplished and his purpose formed in a single flash of thought. Suiting the action to his decision, he caught the girl around the waist, and bearing over toward the wall, he struggled to regain the big entrance, past which they had been carried some little distance.

A few moments of strenuous work, the half-unconscious Caroline a dead weight upon his shoulder, and he had made it.

But just as he came into its shadow and the last of the terror-stricken fugitives ran on by him down the street the heavy doors were slammed to in his face, and he heard the rattle of bars and bolts as they fell into position.

He banged fiercely against the closed portal with his clenched fist and loudly demanded admission, but for answer an excited, hysterical voice from the inside shouted: "Go away! You can't get in, not if you were the King of England and stood there and hammered a thousand years! These doors will stay shut until that lion is out of the way!"

And at that moment, with a louder and more menacing roar than any he had yet uttered, the lion leaped with a graceful bound from inside the crushed wreckage and landed lightly in the center of the street!

V.

A JUNGLE SCENE ON BROADWAY.

IT was a scene almost theatric in its character, with that effect of unreality about it to the onlookers which the stage always holds.

The thronging Broadway crowds had been dispersed as though before the sudden blast of a cyclone, and the wide asphalted space loomed bare and empty in the midst of its garish illumination.

Traffic had stopped abruptly as at the wave of an enchanter's wand. The trolley-cars, deserted alike by their passengers and crews, were stalled in long rows in either direction; all the cabs and automobiles had vanished at the first alarm; and of the press of waiting carriages which had blocked the neighborhood of the opera-house a few moments before not one remained.

Either the horses had taken fright at the uproar or the coachmen, infected by the prevailing panic, had driven madly off, carrying in those luxurious broughams and coupés as many people as could thrust themselves inside or cling desperately to any point of vantage.

The policemen of the district, having emptied their revolvers with no more seeming effect than a fusillade from so many pop-guns, had left the scene either to obtain suitable weapons or to direct the movement of the fleeing people.

All the shop windows and doors, and the fronts of hotels, restaurants, and theaters were closed, their proprietors, patrons, and employees hidden in closets or under the counters, in an evident distrust of the efficacy of plate glass to keep out so formidable an intruder; and massed at either end of Fortieth Street, over toward Eighth Avenue on the one side and beyond Sixth Avenue on the other, could be descried the jostling press of fugitives, where the less timid among them had temporarily stayed their flight.

But in the foreground, within a radius of five hundred yards of the telescoped van and trolley-car, there were but three living creatures—the man with his back braced against the wide doors so inhospitably closed against him, the woman swooning on his arm, and the beast with crest upraised and tail slowly switching from side to side, standing there in the full glow of the electric arc-lamps.

Change the scene from a section of the "Rialto" to the arena of a Roman amphitheater, transform New York's glittering night into the golden glory of an Italian afternoon, garb the man in belted tunic and sandals and the maid in a snowy peplum with fillets bound about her brow, and one would have an exact representation of a certain famous painting. The lion which in both pictures occupies the center of the stage would remain unchanged.

Pendon's first impulse, of course, after finding himself barred out of the opera-house and realizing that the doorkeeper had no intention of opening up, had been to join the scramble which he had fought against only a minute before; but just then Caroline, overcome by fright, fainted dead away, and lay limp and helpless against his breast.

He called to her, shook her, strove to rouse her in every way; but she made no response to his frenzied appeals. He had believed it possible that they might make a dash around the corner to Seventh Avenue before the lion should sufficiently recover from his first surprise at his surroundings to take after them, but, compelled to stagger along under the weight of an inert burden, his progress must necessarily be so slow that he could not avoid attracting the animal's attention.

No, he swiftly concluded, by far his best plan was to remain where he was, trusting to luck to be overlooked by the brute until the arrival of the police reserves, who were already, no doubt, being hurried to the scene.

It must be confessed, though, that the tension on his nerves was something terrific, as he stood there stiff and rigid, scarcely daring to breathe lest he should draw in their direction the greenish glare of those searching, phosphorescent eyes.

And then, all of a sudden, the lion lifted up its head and gave vent to one of the most awe-inspiring roars he had

yet emitted. Deep, reverberating, ear-shattering, it proved too much for Pendon's equanimity. Picking up the unconscious girl in his arms, he started to run.

He had not progressed a dozen steps, however, before he realized his fatal mistake. Glancing back over his shoulder, he saw, to his horror, that the lion had spied them and was bounding in pursuit.

Instinctively adopting the best course, Pendon halted, and thrusting the girl between himself and the wall, so as to protect her as much as possible, turned about to face his enemy.

The big cat, seemingly surprised at this show of defiance, paused in turn, and came on more slowly, his body crouched close to the ground, his gaze fixed and glittering, his tail lashing wickedly against his sides.

Step by step he crept forward, his unwinking eyes never for a moment leaving his intended prey, until at last he crouched, every muscle tense for the spring.

Pendon stared back at him in a sort of paralyzed fascination. He realized dully that the spring was about to come, and planned within himself how best he might meet the onslaught.

He had, of course, no hope of escaping death for himself, but he had an idea that possibly he might engage the beast sufficiently to keep him away from Caroline until help should arrive.

Nor in those few seconds at the last was he cognizant of any particular feeling of fear. Indeed, a reflection tinged with grim humor crossed his mind to the effect that Mrs. Vance need no longer bother her head about his eligibility as a son-in-law, for he had for some time been viewing with secret amusement the perplexities and fears with which the lady was beset, and in his quiet way had rather enjoyed the game of baffling her.

So, the man and the beast poised for the coming conflict, each true to his nature—the one bloodthirsty, cruel, savage, seeking the combat only because he knew he had immeasurably the best of it; the other serene, brave, unfaltering, even though realizing that his only portion must be defeat.

One second passed! Two! The lion, his claws unsheathed, his mane bristling, was quivering with the blood-lust in every fiber of his body!

And now, just as he was about to pounce, there came a sudden whirr and rush of wheels, the rapid beat of machinery, a dazzling shaft of radiance from two lamps whose converging rays smote him full in the face.

Confused by the noise and blinded by the light, he turned his head from his victims with an angry snarl and would have slunk away. But he had no time.

A heavy motor-car, driven at the speed of an express-train, charged down upon him, and ere he could escape he had been struck down, ground beneath the wheels, and left behind, a mass of riven flesh and torn, tawny fur, upon the asphalt.

Quickly slackening speed and circling about, the bold chauffeur raced back, sprang from his car, and drawing a revolver, ended the brute's sufferings with a couple of shots through the head.

Then he straightened up and advanced toward Pendon. It was the Baron von Siselberg!

VI.

A CHALLENGE.

"Ah, but did not the baron prove himself a hero last night?" gushed Mrs. Vance admiringly, the next morning, when Caroline had sufficiently recovered from the effects of her thrilling experience to talk it over. "You should see what the papers say about him to-day, my dear! Why, he is the most famous personage in New York. And what modesty he showed," rolling up her eyes, "to disappear in that fashion as soon as he found you were safe and thus escape the ovation which would have been tendered him! It was all of a piece with his bravery."

"I don't think he proved himself half so much of a hero as did Harry," contended the girl, with spirit, "who stayed by me and tried to protect me, when he could easily have saved himself."

"Yes, and lots of good his protection did you," rejoined her mother with a sneer. "If the baron had not seized that motor-car and come to the rescue you would have been torn to pieces in another minute."

"Ah, but that is just where Harry showed his heroism. He knew that it

was death to stay by me, yet he never hesitated. Baron von Siselberg did a very brave action, and I appreciate it, and shall thank him for it, but he knew that the odds were largely in his favor."

"Humph!" scoffed the older woman. "Heroism, indeed! This Pendon was probably in such a funk that he found himself unable to move. And, Caroline," severely, "I am surprised at your persistent championing of that man. Why, girl, don't you realize that if you play your cards right you can be the Baroness von Siselberg?"

And upon this string she continued to harp all the rest of the day until the other grew almost sick of hearing the name of the young nobleman. Indeed, Caroline was evidently tempted to answer rather tartly once or twice, but on each such occasion appeared in some way to recollect herself, and resolutely closed her lips.

As Mrs. Vance continued, however, to dwell upon the merits of the baron, they became more and more magnified in her own eyes; and by the same token, poor Pendon's advantages shrank in proportion.

Consequently, it may be imagined with what sort of a different manner she greeted the two young men when they presented themselves together at the house about five o'clock to inquire concerning Caroline. To the baron, no one could have been more gracious—nay, almost tender; while the broker was received with only a frigid touch of her fingers.

Von Siselberg, learning that the daughter, under the physician's orders, would not be allowed to come down, did not remain long, merely lingering to extend an invitation for both ladies to dine with him on the following evening.

"Our little party was so inopportunely broken up last night," he said, with a smile, "that I think it only fair we should get together again. Mr. Pendon, whom I fortunately met at your door just now for the first time since last evening, and Mrs. Van Tuft have already consented, and now it only requires the agreement of yourself and Miss Vance to make our company complete."

"Why, certainly, baron," simpered the delighted lady. "Speaking for both Caroline and myself, I may say that we shall be charmed to accept."

"But, by the way, baron," broke in Pendon, "you forgot to tell me where you wanted us to rendezvous?"

"Ah, so I did," confessed the other. "Well, let us say, then, at the Winchester. Isn't that the place which Mrs. Van Tuft proposed last night?"

"Yes," admitted Harry, glancing up in quick surprise; "but," hesitating, "you seemed somewhat set against going there when it was suggested before, you know, and there is no reason why you should select it now on our account if you still feel the same way.

"Furthermore," he went on hastily, "I want you to understand, baron, that I did not intend to press the point last night after we had once got started. It was merely a stupid attempt at a joke on my part, for of course I knew your reasons for desiring to stay away, and——"

He stopped short, biting his lip, and flushing red with confusion.

The baron's eyes narrowed, and he drew himself up with considerable hauteur.

"I suppose you did know my reasons," he answered stiffly, "for I stated all that I had very fully to Mrs. Van Tuft. Therefore, Mr. Pendon, although it may be that I am lacking in a comprehension of the American sense of humor, I fail to see where there was any foundation in the matter for a joke, either stupid or otherwise."

And turning upon his heel, he made a brief adieu to Mrs. Vance and left the house.

"Dash take it!" muttered the broker disconsolately. "A fellow can't quarrel with a chap who has just saved his life. Yet, despite all he has done for me, I would like nothing so much as to give that guy a good poke in the nose. Somehow, he keeps setting all my teeth on edge. He might at least be on the square with me."

Mrs. Vance, however, was delighted with the manner in which her *bête noir* had been taken down, and turned to him with a smile of malicious satisfaction on her lips.

"Don't you think the baron charming?" she cooed. "One can see, though,

that he knows how to resent and punish an impertinence, no matter from whom it may come. He seems to have learned very quickly how to use the English language for that purpose."

Pendon caught at her last words, and seemed somehow to extract a sudden suggestion from them.

"Yes," he assented thoughtfully, "he seems to have learned very quickly how to use the English language for almost *every* purpose."

A puzzled frown deepened on his brows, and a look of perplexity came into his eyes, but after a moment's reflection he gave a quick shake of the head, as though laying aside for the present a consideration of the subject which had presented itself to him.

"It was not, however, to discuss the baron or his qualities that I came here to-day," he said, turning to Mrs. Vance with an entirely different expression on his face, "but to speak concerning a matter much nearer my heart. In short, Mrs. Vance, Caroline confessed to me last night that she loved me."

"Last night?" interrupted the amazed mother. "Why, when did she have the chance?"

"Immediately after we were rescued from our own common peril. It was an odd time and place, perhaps, in which to make such an avowal; but, after all, is it not at such moments that hearts are drawn closest together? I spoke of my love to her before I thought, and she answered in the same way; still," with a smile, "it is not so awfully abrupt as would appear. Both of us undoubtedly have realized what was coming, and have surely searched our own minds sufficiently to know the truth.

"As for the rest," he went on, in a somewhat more formal tone, "I am amply able to take care of a wife, and, if you require it, can refer you to people who will give you satisfactory assurances as to my character and habits. Therefore, although I am aware you do not personally like me, I ask you to give your sanction to our engagement."

Mrs. Vance, who for some moments had been trembling on the brink of an explosion, could here contain herself no longer, and broke in, shrilly indignant.

"And do you mean to tell me," she demanded, "that you propose to hold my poor misguided child to a promise extorted under such circumstances? Caroline explained to me to-day"—lying without a quiver—"how she had been led, out of gratitude and on the impulse of the moment, to accept you last night, and how bitterly she regretted her thoughtless step, now that she had had a chance to think it over. Her heart, you must understand, is really engaged in another quarter, Mr. Pendon."

The broker had grown deadly pale; for, although he knew her, Mrs. Vance's tone was so positive that he could not well doubt her assertion.

"But—but," he stammered bewilderedly, "there has been no other man. Caroline has given me every evidence that I alone was under consideration."

"Ah," murmured the mother, casting down her eyes, "you mean there was no other man until—last night. He has not yet spoken, it is true," she added, with an air of candor, "but I am almost sure he will, and her choice is one of which I can heartily approve."

Pendon started incredulously.

"Do you actually mean——" he cried, but broke off suddenly, and finished lamely with, "Von Siselberg? Why, Mrs. Vance, don't you realize——"

Again he stopped short, clenching his fists as though to hold back by main force some revelation on the tip of his tongue and groaning at his own impotence.

She raised her eyebrows in a sarcastic smile.

"Pray do not attempt to influence me against Baron von Siselberg, Mr. Pendon, for I tell you frankly I should put no stock in anything you might say. It would serve you better, indeed," caustically, "to explain some of your own peculiar actions. Who, for instance, was the disreputable-looking man with whom Caroline and I saw you engaged in such amicable conference just off of Fifth Avenue day before yesterday morning?"

Pendon had glanced up with quick surprise when she mentioned the incident, and now a strange light of excitement was growing in his eyes.

"Who?" he repeated, bending his face down to hers. "Would you really like to know?"

"Yes," she said sternly. She thought his manner mere bravado. "If you dare to tell me, I should really like to know."

He broke into a short laugh.

"Very well, then," he answered, picking up his hat and stick. "I will show him to you to-morrow night—at the Winchester!"

VII.

ON THE HORNS OF A DILEMMA.

PENDON strode away from his interview with Mrs. Vance, his head in a whirl.

Usually, his brain was quick to coordinate, and his mental vision exceptionally keen to penetrate to the bottom of any problem submitted to him, but here so many questions of casuistry and of fact had been presented to him that he had to confess himself muddled and at fault.

First and foremost, could it be true that Caroline had repented of the promise given him the night before? He could not believe it, when he remembered how the girl, awaking wide-eyed and startled from her swoon, had clung to him, and becoming conscious of the passionate, disjointed love-words he was pouring into her ear, had raised her face at last to his and surrendered her lips to him in a kiss of perfect trust.

They had had but a moment together before the curious crowd had closed in upon them; but it had been long enough for him to ask the all-important question, and for her to whisper a "Yes" which had thrilled him to the soul.

There had been no opportunity for any further exchange or ratification of their vows, for Mrs. Vance had immediately seized upon the girl and borne her home; but with her kiss upon his lips, and her whispered assurance ringing in his ear, Pendon had never for a moment doubted that Caroline was his until her mother, with specious lies, had turned his honey into gall.

It was hard for him to believe that she had recanted now; yet he could not blind himself to the fact that the climax of his love-making had been under circumstances calculated to overpower a sensitive and highly strung woman and perhaps draw from her a response which she did not really mean.

Nor, recalling her conduct which had so goaded his jealousy in the opera-box, could he say that she might not be greatly attracted toward Von Siselberg.

Von Siselberg! Ah, that brought up another question of ethics. And he ground his teeth savagely at the meshes in which he found himself involved.

Had he the right to permit a young and innocent girl to be drawn into an attachment which could mean nothing but misery and sorrow for her, viewed from no matter what standpoint? He knew Von Siselberg to be an impudent fraud and an imposter, and he had never been more surprised in his life than when he had seen this putative baron brazenly acting as an escort to Mrs. Van Tuft.

Yet how could he denounce the man who had saved his life; or if he did so, who would believe him in the face of the other's dashing exploit last night?

A cheat who had displayed such presumption and assurance as the baron would certainly be well fortified against exposure, and would no doubt meet any charges with the same *sang-froid* he had already shown toward Pendon when the latter had ventured to intimate that he was "onto the game."

Nor would he, it seemed to him, advance his cause with Caroline by bringing accusations against her lover. She would simply despise them as the fabrications of a defeated rival; and they might even have the effect of forcing her, in a passionate desire to exemplify her faith, into taking some hasty step which she would everlastingly regret.

And yet he knew Von Siselberg to be a fraud and a cheat, and believed him to be worse still—a notorious criminal; for the fictitious German nobleman was, in fact, none other than the disreputable hobo with whom he had been seen on the avenue by Mrs. Vance and Caroline, and who shortly afterward had been taken into custody as the widely wanted "Dutch Fritz."

In reality, the man was Otto Krause, an old acquaintance of Pendon's restaurant days—one of that contingent of "rolling stones," born rovers who foregather from every nation on the face of the earth, and who may be found to-day in New York, to-morrow at Montevideo, and the next day Heaven knows where.

These fellows are always naturally deft and handy, and when they strike a city of any size they generally secure a job as a waiter, partly on account of the ease in obtaining such positions, and partly because the remuneration is good, but chiefly by reason of the fact that the work is best suited to their peculiar capabilities.

And Pendon was the more surprised at Krause's present outrageous conduct from the fact that in the old days he had always considered the fellow a quite harmless, if somewhat mendacious, specimen.

At the restaurant he had persistently repeated that he was of noble lineage, and had once confided to Harry, for whom he seemed to entertain a great liking, that he belonged to the ancient German house of Von Siselberg and actually stood next in line to the title. But nobody about the place took any stock in his stories, and when he continued to reiterate them the other waiters would only indulge in a cynical smile and wink the other eye.

Pendon had not seen Otto for years when he ran into him that day on Fifth Avenue, but he immediately recognized the chap, and was preparing to extend the financial assistance of which the other stood so manifestly in need.

All at once, though, he recollected the tales of aristocratic birth which the waiter had been wont to spin, and a whimsical idea popping into his head, he interrupted the other's "hard-luck story," seized the fellow by the arm, and hurried him around the corner.

The project had struck him of using his former associate for the purpose of teaching Mrs. Vance a very salutary lesson on the score of her tuft-hunting proclivities. He would not carry the joke too far, he decided; merely introduce this fellow under the name and title he professed to own, then when she had kowtowed sufficiently to the supposed nobleman disclose the fact that he had been a waiter in an eating-house.

Then, by comparison, his own former position of "checker" would appear almost princely when he came to confess to her in regard to it.

Nor did Krause demur. He was in that position where he was ready to do almost anything for money, and when Pendon explained what was wanted he had very promptly given his consent.

"Id vill nod be false bretenses, anyhow," he announced, drawing himself up and striking his breast. "As you vill introduce me, so I am—Baron von Siselberg. Do you nod pelieve me?"

"Yes, of course," assented Pendon good-humoredly; "but for my present purpose it matters very little to me whether you are or not, so long as you look the part. Here is a hundred dollars," counting out a roll of bills. "Get along with you, now, to a Turkish bath and a barber-shop, and when you are cleaned and fixed up, and have got yourself some decent clothes, report to me at my apartment."

He never thought until after the fellow had scurried off around the corner and was lost to sight that he had failed to give him either his office or his home address. Nor, as he reflected, would his name prove any guide to the other, for during the period that he had worked at the restaurant he had been known there as Harry Peters.

"Oh, well," he told himself philosophically, "I'm a hundred out; but perhaps it's all for the best. That would have been a rather scurvy trick to play on my prospective mama-in-law, come to think it over, and take it all around, I'm glad I sha'n't have the chance to try it."

Still further did he thank his lucky stars for the oversight when some hours later he read the account of the arrest of the redoubtable "Dutch Fritz" and recognized in the portrait presented the lineaments of his intended protégé.

Consequently, it may be imagined what wrath and indignation possessed him when he saw the fellow coolly enter the box at the opera in the wake of Mrs. Hermann Van Tuft. Krause had simply taken up the masquerade he had proposed, and was following it out for his own ends.

It may be asked why Pendon did not denounce him as a fraud then and there; but the very brazenness of the imposture caused him to hesitate. The baron with a clean shave and got up in his "glad rags" was a very different spectacle from the dirty and unshorn tatterde-

malion he had met that morning, and Harry did not care to provoke a "scene" in the opera-house until he was sure beyond peradventure.

All he could get out of Mrs. Van Tuft, whom he took occasion to ask concerning her guest at the first opportunity, was that Von Siselberg had called on her husband with letters of introduction from people of importance abroad, and that the busy Hermann had, as usual in such cases, sent him up to her to be entertained; but to Pendon that was only further confirmation of his suspicions, for, as he shrewdly reflected, credentials of the sort have been forged before now and no doubt will be again.

Still he hesitated to speak, and sat writhing and grinding his teeth at the sight of this "crook" monopolizing the smiles and society of his own Caroline, until at last the question of going to the Winchester was broached.

Then he saw his opportunity. If this was Krause, he would never dare go to the place where every waiter and employee would instantly recognize him, and the baron's prompt demurrer settled the matter to his mind beyond the necessity for further argument.

He had intended, indeed, to call the chap aside immediately after the ladies had been escorted to their carriages and give him a "skiddoo" order then and there, but the lion episode had, unfortunately, intervened, and now he was all up in the air as to what course to follow.

It was an unpardonable thing practically to abet this fellow in whatever nefarious scheme he had afoot by keeping silent, yet how could he expose the man who had saved his life?

He had tried to give the baron a hint that it would be best for him to leave, but the latter had plainly showed him that he intended to disregard such intimations and brave the matter out to the end.

Nor had Pendon much belief that an exposure would now avail. Under the circumstances, people would be apt to put their tongues in their cheeks at any charges from him, for the nature of the feelings he had been cherishing toward Caroline Vance was a matter of common knowledge.

But although he could not openly speak, he had one hope left, and this he had grasped when Mrs. Vance had put her inquisitive question to him.

Suppose she and her daughter should recognize in Von Siselberg the hobo with whom they had seen him conversing on Fifth Avenue? That would be all the proof necessary.

Yes, he had still that hope; but suppose it should fail?

VIII.

SOME DOUBTS AND A DETERMINATION.

MEANWHILE, Caroline was likewise having her bad quarter of an hour; for, having caused all the mischief she could in one direction, Mrs. Vance diligently set about creating a similar feeling of distrust and uncertainty in her daughter's breast.

Nor did she lack a certain Machiavellian ability for her task, as will be shown by the sequel.

Returning to Caroline's room after the departure of the two young men, she remarked archly, her face wreathed in smiles:

"Harry had something to tell me after the baron left, my darling, which has made me feel very happy."

Caroline's first emotion was one of distinct surprise, in view of the attitude which her mother had recently held toward Pendon; but she instantly reflected that the young broker, in asking for her hand, must have explained about himself to the old lady's entire satisfaction.

Therefore, she buried her glowing face in the pillow and asked shyly: "What was that?"

"Why," replied Mrs. Vance unhesitatingly, "it seems that the two walked over here together, and Harry says that on the road the baron intimated to him that he—the baron, I mean—is deeply smitten with you. There, now, is that not a pretty compliment?"

The head came up from the pillow with a jerk.

"Er—is that all Harry had to say?" demanded Caroline, with a touch of indignation, her eyes bright and a patch of scarlet on either cheek.

"All he had to say? Oh, dear, no! He spoke at length about the baron,

and what a courageous thing he had done last night, but said it was no wonder, since he came from a line of heroes. Harry knows all about him and his people over in Germany, it appears, and he says that the Von Siselbergs are one of the oldest and wealthiest and most influential families in the entire empire."

The girl was lying back wearily, with her eyes closed; but she did summon up enough spirit to say bitterly: "According to your account, Harry almost shows up in the light of a marriage advocate for the baron. I suppose, though," with a faint lingering hope, "unlike John Alden under similar circumstances, he had nothing to say for himself?"

"No," laughed her mother. "He probably realizes that 'when the gods arrive, the half-gods must go,' and understands that he would have no show against such an antagonist as the baron. Indeed, although, of course, he did not put it into words, the whole tenor of his conversation pointed that way.

"And—oh, yes; I forgot," as though suddenly recollecting herself. "He did ask me, just as he was leaving, to tell you that he fully understood no importance was to be attached to the expressions of gratitude you tendered him last night; that both of you were laboring under stress of excitement, and could hardly be considered accountable for what you said or did. What did he mean by that, Caroline?"—searchingly. "What was it that either of you had said or done?"

The girl fretfully turned her face to the wall.

"Oh, mama," she cried irritably, "can't you see that you are almost driving me to distraction by your unending questions? I will answer them all cheerfully some other time; but really, just now my head is aching so fearfully that I can hardly think. Please go away and let me try to drop off to sleep."

And Mrs. Vance, content to let the seed grow, evacuated the field.

After her departure, however, Caroline seemed to lose the desire she had expressed for slumber, and lay back staring at the ceiling with hot, unwinking eyes.

So this was the end of her brief romance, she told herself, quivering like some wounded creature. She had been prepared to "have it out" with her mother, and to defend her choice of a husband against every argument and every opposition; and lo, the man had come and, instead of proudly demanding her, as he had told her last night he should do, had weakly withdrawn from his declaration, and had spent his time in urging the claims of his rival.

"Well," she muttered rebelliously, "since they are all so determined on marrying me to this German baron, I suppose there is nothing for me to do but acquiesce. I will not be the first woman who has gone to the altar with no love in her heart for the man beside her."

And then, as she contemplated this prospect, so different from the one her fancy had painted, two great tears welled up in her eyes, and she fell to sobbing like a disappointed child.

A crying spell, to a woman, serves the same purpose as a good cigar with a man. It soothes her nerves and clears up her brain.

So it happened that when Caroline became more composed, and was able to bring her usual good judgment to bear upon the situation, her credulity revolted at the tale which had been brought her.

Harry Pendon, whose love for her had been shown in his every glance and tone and action for weeks past, resign her thus without a struggle? The broken words of fond endearment which she had heard when she awoke from her swoon the night before mere utterances "under the stress of excitement for which one should not be held accountable"? The man who had so unfalteringly remained by her side in the face of almost certain death, and to whom she had given her kiss of perfect trust, now proving himself a coward and a poltroon?

Why, it was inconceivable!

Still, that was exactly the situation as her mother's report had outlined it to her; and although Caroline had had more experience than Pendon with Mrs. Vance's peculiar aptitude in twisting the truth to suit her own purposes and was accustomed to take statements from that source with a grain of salt, she never before had known her to indulge in downright falsehood.

So, tossed one way and then another,

still believing in her lover yet loath to doubt her mother's assertions, the girl passed a restless and uneasy night.

But with the coming of the morning a light came to her, and she made her decision. She would go to this dinner-party which the Baron von Siselberg was giving that night at the Winchester, and to which, when her mother had mentioned it to her, she had made up her mind wild horses could not drag her.

Yes, she would go; for Harry was to be there, and she thought she could tell from his manner and appearance whether or not his impassioned avowal of the opera night or the cool and judicial utterances which Mrs. Vance represented him as giving out best represented the true state of his feelings.

She could tell; oh, certainly she could tell. And if he did not want her, she affirmed proudly, there should be no question of her forcing herself upon him.

But if he did? Ah, then Paradise would open its doors to her again!

At any rate, the dinner should decide.

IX.

AN EXPOSURE THAT FLASHED IN THE PAN.

THUS, from a variety of different motives, and each with his own particular brand of fish to fry, the same company that had attended that memorable performance of the opera gathered for dinner at the Winchester.

Alone of them all, perhaps, was Mrs. Hermann Van Tuft, in that her sole consideration was the pleasure of the passing hour; for it is hardly to be doubted that the Baron von Siselberg—or, as Pendon would have it, Otto Krause, the former waiter—had a distinct and definite purpose in promoting the little reunion.

And for all his shrewdness and penetration, the broker had to confess himself unable to determine what that purpose might be.

The usual "game" of these bogus dukes and barons is to deceive some silly American heiress by their imposture, and then, upon some pretext or another, contrive a quick marriage, whereby they either manage to get the girl's money into their own hands or receive a good round sum to disappear, and in due time allow their dupes to obtain freedom in the convenient divorce courts of South Dakota.

But here was an instance in which the sham nobleman was paying ardent and devoted suit to a maiden who had neither money nor expectations. Could it be that his cold and calculating heart had been fired by Caroline's manifold witcheries into a sincere and disinterested passion, and that he was planning to reap the harvest of his fraud in some other fashion?

Or was it simply that he was playing a deeper game than the ordinary swindler of his class, and that his apparent devotion to Miss Vance was for some reason which Harry had not yet fathomed?

Pendon could not decide, turn the problem about in his mind as he would; but he realized that the conditions made it harder than ever for him to denounce the baron as a cheat and sharper. What effect would such an accusation have, when the very fact that he was wooing a penniless damsel proclaimed the man's singleness of purpose?

Again, there was that puzzling change of front on the part of Von Siselberg in regard to going to the Winchester.

When he had first balked at the proposition Pendon had understood his hesitancy, and had laughed to think how easy it would be, should the fellow prove obstinate, to tear the mask from his face.

But now the baron had come forward of his own accord, and moreover, without any necessity for so doing, to suggest the restaurant where he had once worked as the place for their assembly. It was, in effect, a gage of defiance to the innuendoes and hints which his rival had been directing toward him, and could only mean, as Harry reasoned, that in some way he had suborned the entire force at the Winchester and no longer had any fear that they might aid in his undoing.

Take it all in all, the proposition offered the most confusing and perplexing set of circumstances with which Pendon had ever had to cope, and it is therefore no wonder that after wrestling with the questions involved all day and all night and still failing to find any plausible solution the broker should have ap-

peared at the dinner absorbed and distrait.

Caroline, in her first glance of quick inquiry as he came forward to greet her, decided that he was cold and indifferent, and the blood receded to her heart in a great wave as she thus saw what she believed the confirmation of her mother's assertions. For a moment her cheeks grew pale as marble, and she swayed upon her feet as though about to fall; then a rush of pride came to her aid, and she caught herself together.

He should not see that she cared, she declared fiercely; should not know how deeply she had been wounded.

Therefore, she responded to his welcome in a tone as cool and with a manner as apathetic as his own, and turning to the baron, began to engage him in a conversation almost feverishly gay and vivacious.

Never had her beauty appeared to greater advantage; never had the battery of her smiles and glances been more enticingly displayed; never had her flow of wit and fancy been so brilliant and captivating. She was on her mettle; and she flirted recklessly, audaciously, with this other man, although her heart was well-nigh bursting and the tears were just behind the sparkle in her eyes and the coquettish smiles upon her lips.

And Pendon, almost beside himself with jealousy, his heart wrung with a conflict of emotions, had to sit there and watch it all. He had purposely restrained the ardor from his glance and the tenderness from his manner in his greeting of Caroline, in order to see what attitude she would adopt toward him, and when she accorded to him only a careless and formal "How do you do?" he had felt chilled and thrown back upon himself.

Now, at the sight of her flagrant dalliance with the baron, all his repressed yearning flamed up into a very passion of resentment.

Instead of showing it by the usual methods, however, a frowning brow and a face dark with anger, he became coldly quiet and undemonstrative, speaking little, but from sheer force of habit omitting none of the little courtesies and attentions to the others about the board for which he was noted.

And Caroline, stealing a covert glance at him from time to time to see how he was affected by her behavior, decided that her original opinion had been correct.

He did not care. Absolutely phlegmatic, he was quite willing that his rival should step in and take from him the prize he had already won.

Willing? Nay, she cried in an agony of humiliation, he was almost indecently eager to bring about such a consummation.

So, the comedy—although to Pendon and Caroline it seemed nearer a tragedy—of misunderstandings wound itself along with the slow progress of the courses; but at last came the climax.

The baron, flattered and excited by the attention lavished upon him, had been talking and laughing in the merriest sort of fashion, but all at once, upon a remark from Mrs. Vance, the smile died upon his lips and his eyes took on the hard glitter of steel.

The subject of a handsome automobile which somebody had just purchased had been brought up, and Mrs. Vance, with a little sigh of longing, had observed that she wished she were able to own a machine, even a very modest one.

The baron laughed at first, as though at a good joke, but seeing that she was in earnest, leaned quickly across the table toward her.

"Then, why do you not buy what you want?" he demanded. "The price of any kind of an automobile certainly means nothing to a lady of your wealth."

"My wealth! Why, what do you mean, baron? I am as poor as the proverbial church mouse."

"But—but," he stammered incredulously, evidently forgetting his pose in his perturbation, "Mrs. Van Tuft certainly told me that your daughter was a great heiress?"

"Oh, no, baron," interposed that lady, tapping him on the arm with her fan, "you are mistaken. I merely told you that I was going to have you meet one of our most richly dowered American girls. I meant, dowered with that quality which is more than mere wealth—the possession of surpassing beauty."

The self-deceived schemer sank back in his chair, unable to utter a word,

biting at his long mustache and flushing and paling by turns; but Pendon roused himself with a jerk from the apathy which had held him.

"Ah," he exclaimed, his eyes flashing in triumph, as he leaned over to point a denunciatory finger at the man across the table, "this makes plain to me your pursuit of Miss Vance, which I could not before understand; and since you were prompted by so despicable a motive, I hold myself absolved from any claims you might have upon me by reason of saving my life. Therefore, I propose to unmask you as a fraud here and now!

"Conrad!" He summoned the head waiter to him with uplifted finger, and when the man came up addressed him with rapid inquiry. "You know who I am, and that I formerly worked here as 'night checker'?" he said. "Speak up, man," as the other hesitated; "I am not ashamed of anything I have ever done.

"And," continued Harry, when the other had finally assented, "you also are well acquainted with Otto Krause, who was employed here as a waiter at about the same time?"

"Yes," Conrad once more acquiesced.

"Then," said Pendon, his voice ringing high with confidence, "I want you to look at that swindling fraud across the table and tell these ladies if he is not that very same Otto Krause."

But the head waiter shook his head.

"No, Mr. Peters," he said positively, "you are mistaken. I, too, noticed the remarkable resemblance when this gentleman came in, and could hardly believe that it was not Krause. But Otto, you will remember, had a tiny scar like a bullet-hole on his right temple, and your"—he hesitated a moment for a word, then used "friend"—"your friend has no mark or blemish of the kind at all!"

X.

HOW IT FIGURED OUT.

It was true. Now that Conrad mentioned it, Pendon, well recalled that little round hole about an inch to the right of Otto's eye, which the waiter had always claimed was the result of a wound he had received in a duel.

Vanquished, therefore, his great exposure a miserable fiasco, the broker was about to make what apologies he could to his now sneering and triumphant opponent, and to the others, and slink away from the table abashed and humiliated.

Mrs. Vance had already drawn her skirts aside and was regarding him with scorn as a result of the revelations he had made concerning his former employment in the restaurant, and although he did not dare look at Caroline, he knew how pitiful a figure he must be cutting in her eyes.

But just then he was startled to hear the name "Peters" uttered in a voice gladly, if unmistakably, Teutonic, and turning about, saw a figure disengage itself from a party of well-dressed people which had just entered the door and rush toward him with every demonstration of happiness.

It was Krause, the waiter. There could be no doubt of the identification in this case, for there was the little star-like indentation upon the right temple, gleaming white against his florid, beaming face.

"I haf for you everywhere been looking," he began tumultuously, as he dragged a roll of bills out of his pocket and began pressing them on Harry. "Nod only dis vich you haf loaned me to return, but also to tell you of the great good luck vich has me befallen. I now appear in my rightful colors, nicht wahr, for I haf mein uncle gefund, und——"

He paused suddenly, and his light eyes, which had turned inadvertently toward the other side of the table, took on abruptly an expression of almost murderous wrath.

"Ach!" he roared, making a lunge forward and seizing by the collar the baron, who, crouching low, had slipped out of his chair, and was now trying to make an escape.

"Ach!" he repeated, dragging his hapless victim back to him and shaking him as a terrier might a rat, "you geds avay from me de odder night, yes; but I haf you now, und I keeps you safe till de police comes und gets you. I don't dink you play me some more tricks yet already; no!"

By this time waiters had run up to separate the struggling combatants, and

Conrad the majestic came bustling to the scene.

"What's the matter, Otto?" he demanded peremptorily. "Don't you know better than to come in here and raise a row of this sort?"

"Yes, Conrad; but you don't understand," expostulated the panting German. "Dis is a rogue who has been cheating und swindling under my name all over de vorld. I hear of him in Paris, in Hong-Kong, in Cape Town, in Rio. Alvays he rob und steal, und alvays, because he is a vay-off cousin of mine und looks like me, he goes under de name of Baron von Siselberg.

"In dis country he geds down, und trains mit a gang of burglars for a vile; but de odder night, ven I vas vorking extra here, I see him come in all dressed up, und I know he is at his old game. I starts for him, but he sees me first und runs avay. I haf him now; und, by Himmel, I keeps him. You not know him, Conrad, hein? Vy dis is 'Dutch Fritz'!"

A couple of officers hastily summoned from the outside had arrived in time to hear Krause's closing indictment, and being deeply impressed by it, especially when it was backed up by a portly gentleman whom every one seemed to regard as a person of importance, lost no time in taking the unmasked and dejected crook into custody.

Then the full explanation came out.

Shortly after leaving Pendon that morning on Fifth Avenue, Krause had been picked up as 'Dutch Fritz,' and, being unable to satisfactorily explain the hundred dollars found upon his person, was locked up.

The afternoon papers, being short of news, made something of a sensation out of the arrest, and published the accused man's portrait, with the result that it was seen and recognized by a prominent down-town banker as the face of a nephew for whom he had long been searching in order to inform him that he had fallen heir to a title.

This uncle it was, and not Harry Pendon, as Mrs. Vance supposed, who gave bail for the suspect and was mentioned in the later editions as a "prominent Wall Street figure and society leader," and it was his family that had sat in the opposite box at the opera and had appeared so interested in the bogus Von Siselberg, under the impression that he was their newly found cousin.

But the real article had not been there. Proceeding to the Winchester, on his release from prison, in order to square up some small loans he had borrowed from other waiters, he had found Conrad short-handed, and with characteristic German thrift had offered to serve that evening as a substitute.

It was in this way that he had chanced to espy his double, who had promptly fled at the sight of him; and this, too, was the reason why the false baron had objected so strenuously to taking their after-theater supper at the Winchester.

Later on, having discovered that Krause was gone, and realizing that Pendon had certain suspicions of him, the fellow had insisted on going there, in order to silence any doubts which might have been raised by his original protest.

All these points came out rather confusedly, and with a good deal of question and comment; but at last everybody got it straightened out. Nor was it at the table in the regular restaurant that this was done, but in a small dining-room up-stairs to which they all adjourned as the guests of Otto's uncle; and since it was Mr. Adolph Krause who issued the invitation, even Mrs. Hermann Van Tuft felt herself honored.

"Still," commented Pendon when the talk and the explanations had died down somewhat, "bad as the fellow is, we must give him credit for a mighty brave action when he saved Miss Vance and myself from the lion."

"Who did?" demanded Krause, sitting up in his chair. "Did dat rascal steal de honor for dat, too? Vy, didn't you know, Harry, I vas de one to do dat. Ven I see in de papers next day dat de Baron von Siselberg vas de hero of de occasion I vonder how dey find out about my name."

"You, Otto?" exclaimed the broker. "But how did you happen to be in evening dress?"

"Dat vas my waiter's clothes. I heard de noise, und I runned out of de Vinchester to see vat vas up, und den it pop into my head to take de automobile

und knock out de lion. But I neffer knowed till dis minute dat dat feller vas you, Harry. You vas so busy mit de lady at de time dat you didn't show me your face, und de papers next day said de man's name vas Pendon."

At this, Mrs. Vance, who had been wriggling about uneasily for some time with a preoccupied expression on her face, saw her opportunity and seized it.

"Then I suppose I must congratulate you upon the star part you played as Cupid on that occasion, Baron von Siselberg," she observed, leaning toward Otto; "for," with a beaming smile, "when Harry was, as you expressed it, 'busy' with Caroline he was asking her to be his wife.

"Oh, I am going to make a secret of it no longer," shaking her finger playfully at the young people, neither of whom knew just how to take this sudden announcement. "I have practised a little harmless deception upon both of you in order to test the full strength of your feelings, but now I am fully satisfied, and I publicly and cordially give my consent."

"And by Jove," said Mr. Adolph Krause heartily, as he ordered fresh glasses for a toast to the bride and groom, "I speak now for the chance to give you one of the biggest receptions ever known in New York as soon as you are married."

And that, as a promise from such a source, was something which even Mrs. Vance could not but regard as the final badge of social recognition.

She had one more question to ask of Pendon, though, before she could feel fully satisfied, and this she put to him in the carriage as the three of them were driving home:

"Tell me, Harry," she said, almost fearfully, "were you ever anything worse than a—a 'checker'?"

"No," he answered. "That is absolutely the worst thing I ever did. It is the sole and only secret of my past!"

PREMONITION.

SOFTLY, my heart!
Last night across the star-strewn sea
A ship came sailing unto me
Without a compass, guide, or chart;
Softly, my heart!

Softly, my heart!
Oh, message sweet as spring's first call
To life a-dream 'neath winter's pall!
Oh, faint joy-buds that stir and start!
Softly, my heart!

Softly, my heart!
For he is coming, he for whom
My soul shall stir and start and bloom,
Whose throne has long been set apart;
Softly, my heart!

Softly, my heart!
I know, yet how I cannot tell.
His nearness holds me like some spell.
Oh, love, a prophet-seer thou art!
Softly, my heart!

Venita Seibert.

THEIR LAST HOPE.*

By ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE,

Author of "The Scarlet Scarab," "In the Lion's Mouth," "The Fugitive," etc.

A story of Egypt, in which Americans abroad find the Serpent of the Nile very much at home.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

MADGE BRANT, daughter of the late Henry Brant, once partner of, and ruined by, Jonas Fitch, has gone to Egypt as companion to Mrs. Chittenden, sister of Fitch and a well-known and overbearing New York matron. Accompanying them is young Barry Clive, a spoiled product of riches, Mrs. Chittenden's nephew, and heir both to her fortune and to that of Fitch. They are riding donkeys on the Gizeh Road toward Cairo, and Mrs. Chittenden orders the girl, as though she were a servant, to go to the hotel. Madge complies, though in anger, but loses her way in the Cairo streets and finds herself in a low district known as the "Fishmarket." Clive, who also wants to get back to the hotel, follows her and rescues her from the crowd. She thanks him, but receives an insult in return, whereupon she calls him a cad and whips up her donkey. Again she loses her way, goes round in a circle, and finds herself once more—this time alone—in the "Fishmarket." A villainous individual, Abou Saoud, lays hands on her, but is driven away by no less a person than "Chinese" Gordon, who takes her back to the hotel.

Meanwhile, Abou Saoud, Halil Sadik-Ali, the party's guide, and a negro named Farragh plot to capture Mrs. Chittenden, Clive, and Madge, by whom Abou is much attracted. Gordon sends Madge an invitation to a levee in his honor at the Khedive's palace, where she makes a big hit, to Mrs. Chittenden's disgust and Clive's embarrassment. He apologizes for his past rudeness and shows some contrition. Gordon, finding they are going south, laughingly asks Miss Brant to visit him in Khartum. The next day they set out up the Nile, Halil guiding them.

Just before the boat starts, Jonas Fitch comes aboard. He attempts to speak to Madge, but is snubbed by her, and retires. Clive becomes even more decent. Otherwise, the trip is practically uneventful until they reach Ibrim, where at about a two hours' donkey ride into the desert are some temples which they decide to visit. They go inland, explore the temples, and are about to return to the river, when they discover a line of villainous-looking mounted natives before them, and another behind. The natives are armed to the teeth, and the little party is entirely hemmed in.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MERCY OF THE MERCILESS.

THE dragoman, following the direction of Madge's eye, turned his head and beheld the second rank of horsemen. And now, moving quietly through the ruins at either side of the avenue, their horses picking their way among the débris, came more riders.

"There must be fully fifty of them, and they are all around us," whispered Madge to Mr. Gault. "Do you suppose they mean us any harm? They are so quiet, and they use none of the threatening gestures Mrs. Chittenden described the Amelook villagers as employing. Do you?"

"If I had not been told over and over that this country is as safe for travelers as America itself," answered the old gentleman in the same guarded tone, "I should take these picturesque-looking ruffians for brigands, and I should fancy they were about to make us their prisoners. And, on my soul, poor Halil's face seems to bear out this idea."

"Halil!"

It was Barry Clive who spoke, and his voice had a sharp, imperious ring as he wheeled on the cowering dragoman. The silence and the melodramatic ad-

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vent and disquieting want of aggressiveness on the part of the intruders had begun to get on Clive's nerves.

"Halil!" he repeated, "what does all this mean? Why do these men block our way? Are they beggars or lepers looking for alms?"

The dragoman shook his head dumbly, looking with fresh apprehension at the strangers, as though fearing they might understand the uncomplimentary appellations in the foreign tongue.

"Then, what are they? You don't mean—you don't mean to say they are robbers?"

The whole party hung on the dragoman's answer as Clive voiced the unspoken dread of all. To them, Halil formed the only possible link of comprehension between themselves and this odd situation.

"Are they robbers?" repeated Clive more imperatively, as Halil's chalky lips twitched in spasmodic wordlessness.

The dragoman jerked his head forward acquiescently.

"Well!" observed Mr. Gault, with a rueful grin, breaking the little hush of horror that had followed on Halil's assent. "Here's a pretty kettle of fish! A mile away from our party, two hours' ride from our boat, and surrounded with half a hundred comic-opera banditti! What's to be done? Eh?" looking from face to face. "What's to be done?"

"What d'ye mean by draggin' us into such a hole?" shrieked Jonas Fitch, venting his panic in a burst of wrath at Halil, as the one man worse scared than himself. "What d'ye mean by it? And"—the immobility of the horsemen again impressing him—"if they're robbers, what are they waitin' for?"

"They are waiting for their leader," responded Halil from between chattering teeth. "For their sheik. They are Bishareen Arabs. Perhaps they were to await their sheik here at the tombs and came upon us by chance. They will not act without his orders."

"But you said the up-country tribes were harmless."

It was Mr. Gault who made the somewhat needless remark.

"They are Bishareens," repeated Halil; "wicked men of the desert! Outlaws!"

The dragoman had been edging to one side of the open space as he spoke, toward a rift between two pillars of the nearest ruined temple. At the last word he bounded for the narrow opening with incredible alacrity.

A Bishareen six feet away swung his long gun about by the muzzle and struck the flying dragoman across the side of the head with the curved inlaid stock. Halil collapsed, a huddled heap of blue and gold, into the sandy avenue.

After this single deed of violence the ring of horsemen sat as inert as before.

"What's to be done?" quavered Fitch. "Shall we empty out our pockets and beg them to let us go? Maybe they'll do it, and——"

"No!" cried Clive, his tanned face reddening with wrath. "No! We're white men—Americans! Are we going to let ourselves be held up by a crowd of cowardly natives? We'll fight our way through them. They'll scatter at the first shot. Mr. Gault, stand beside me. You two ladies keep directly behind us; and you, uncle, guard the rear. Now, then!"

He drew his revolver, and old Mr Gault, fired for the moment by the foolish young man's fury, followed his example.

"*Don't!*" cried Madge commandingly, stepping in front of them. "You will only be shot down like rabbits. What chance would you have against such odds? The only thing to do is not to rouse them, and to await an opportunity to escape or to make terms with them. To try to fight your way past fifty armed men isn't courage—it is suicide."

"She's right, Clive," urged Mr. Gault, pocketing his pistol. "We'd only throw our lives away uselessly, and then who'd be left to protect these ladies? No, no! We must find some safer way."

The riders had viewed this little scene with amused indifference, but their expression changed as Barry Clive, maddened by opposition and by the humiliating predicament, shook off Madge's detaining hand and fired pointblank at the nearest of the Bishareens.

Like the average American, he had not fired a revolver twenty times in all his

life. Easy as was the mark, he scored a clean miss—the luckiest miss of his career, for it saved him from instant death.

But his shot had caused a marked change in the mental attitude of the horsemen among whom he had fired. By one impulse a dozen spurred forward.

"We're done for now!" gasped old Mr. Gault, pulling Madge behind him and once more fishing out his useless little revolver.

Clive was struggling madly with his own weapon. The rusty cylinder had become jammed, and refused to turn. Jonas Fitch crouched behind the shrieking Mrs. Chittenden.

It all occupied a bare second. The riders had been scarcely sixty feet distant, but before they could reach their prey the aisles of the templed ruins echoed with galloping hoofs. One of the Bishareens to the rear cried out, and the others checked their onrush.

A man who had been approaching in leisurely fashion had at sound of the shot urged his horse to a run, and now dashed into the very midst of the turmoil.

At his advent the riders drew back, saluting, and remained at attention. The newcomer brought his mount to a standstill and looked keenly about him, from his followers to the knot of frightened Americans.

He was, at first glance, the typical picture-book Arab. Of lighter skin than his comrades, he was tall, spare, and wiry, his face lean, hook-nosed and fierce of eye. The mouth alone softened the harshness of his stern visage.

In age he could have been little more than thirty. From the splendor of his dress and the stately beauty of his roan horse, as well as from the deference paid him by his compatriots, he was evidently a man of importance.

His quick gaze at once took in every detail of the situation, from the prone figure of the gaudy dragoman to the foolhardy Barry Clive, who was still working with angry ineffect to get his pistol in order. Last of all, the stranger's eye rested on Madge Brant.

She returned his look coldly, fearlessly, yet with a certain childlike curiosity awakened by his striking face and gaudy attire. As he gazed, the keen eyes seemed almost imperceptibly to soften, and a reflection of the girl's own frank curiosity dawned in them.

Apparently, this man of the desert was not wont to have women meet his eye in a manner so candid, so devoid of either fear or admiration.

From Madge he passed on to Fitch and Mrs. Chittenden. He appeared about to speak, when Clive, at length succeeding in restoring his revolver to order, raised and cocked the weapon, leveling it straight at the leader.

What next occurred was accomplished before the onlookers fairly understood what was going on. A revolver in the stranger's sash was drawn and fired in what looked like a single lightning gesture. Clive's pistol went ricocheting over the rocks, and Clive himself, white with pain, was grasping his own numbed and quivering right arm.

The Arab, without touching the young man himself, had calmly shot the revolver out of his hand, at the very instant Barry had been about to fire on him.

Replacing the weapon in his sash, the native, without bestowing a second look on the American, gave a brief order in Arabic to one of his men. The latter, dismounting, walked to the prostrate Halil, kicked him none too gently in the ribs, and hauled him to a sitting posture.

The dragoman, who had come to his senses almost at once after falling (though none but the newcomer detected the sham of his unconsciousness), rose to his feet and prostrated himself before the leader.

The latter spoke a few curt sentences to him, and then asked him one or two questions, to which Halil replied with tearful servility.

The rider addressed the dragoman in the tone he might have used toward a pariah dog.

"He says," reported Halil to the Americans, "that he is Sheik Darah, of the Mekheir Bishareens. He and his tribe are in the service of El Mahdi, and he and these men with him are only a part of a larger body on the way to the Sudan. He says you are his prisoners. If you make resistance he will kill you all. You must come away with him

at once, for the shots may have been heard by the others of your party, and he fears they may summon troops and——"

"That is a lie," interrupted the sheik, in fairly intelligible English; "I fear no one."

"You don't, eh?" shouted Barry Clive. "Then get off your horse and fight me like a man! It's easy enough to talk about courage with fifty cutthroats at your back! But come down and fight if you dare!"

"Young man," said the sheik, with infinite composure, "you have much to learn. But I fear you will never live to learn it."

"Do you mean," asked Madge, "that we are to die?"

"That is not for me to judge," he replied more gently. "I must carry you all to camp. There your fate will be decided."

"I'm not any too rich," whined Jonas Fitch, gathering courage from the astounding fact that he was still alive, "but I'm willing to pay a fair price for my ransom."

"So am I," wailed Mrs. Chittenden. "Not too much, but——"

"And," went on Fitch, "I'll pay something for the release of my nephew, here. What's your terms?"

"And these others?" asked the sheik, paying no heed to the question, and glancing toward Madge and Mr. Gault. "They are doubtless as able to pay handsomely if it is a question of ransom?"

"We neither of us have much money," spoke up Madge, as Mr. Gault hesitated; "I am afraid it is hardly worth your while to make us prisoners."

A look of reluctant admiration again crept into the sheik's piercing eyes as the girl made her intentionally careless response.

"Then," he went on, a moment later, "as I understand, these three are rich and you two are poor? Am I correct?"

"That's it, sir," assented Jonas, with eagerness; "we three can pay whatever's right to be let go. I'll give you a check——"

Madge, through all her terror, could scarcely force back an hysterical laugh at the idea of the panic-stricken millionaire proffering this savage a check in payment for his deliverance. But the sheik resumed:

"And these others?" again indicating Madge and Mr. Gault. "You will surely not desert them to their death?"

"Who? Gault and that girl?" screamed Jonas. "What are they to me? I've nothing to do with their ransom. I——"

"And you would escape by the payment of money and leave them to die sooner than to pay out a little dirty gold to save their lives?" queried the sheik. "Truly you Americans are a noble race!"

"I beg that you will not judge my country by this man!" broke in Madge, her cheeks aflame at the slur on her nation. "Not one American in one thousand would behave like that at such a time. I, for one, would rather die than be beholden to him for my liberty and——"

"If you will do me the honor, Miss Brant," observed Clive, his rage against the sheik checked by these unlooked-for developments, "I shall throw in my fate with yours, just to show these Arab curs what a real American is. Uncle, you can ransom yourself and my aunt, if you choose, but unless your offer includes the others I shall refuse to leave them."

"You talk like a fool!" stormed Fitch, who, now that the affair was apparently resolving itself into a mere matter of dollars and cents, was brave as a lion. "And maybe you think I won't pay you for it when we get back home. Your share of my estate may not be quite so large as you fancy, and——"

"Your estate has meant less and less to me for the past month," retorted Barry, "and if it can only be won by proving myself a coward you may keep it, for all of me."

"One moment!" intervened the sheik. "It appears to me you are all speaking much on matters of no concern. There is no talk of ransom. You are my prisoners, and we march at once for camp."

With a howl of terror, Jonas Fitch saw the cup of liberty snatched from his very lips. Mrs. Chittenden burst into tears. Clive, Madge, and Mr. Gault, in a little group by themselves, made no sign of disappointment.

A guttural order, and a dozen Arabs dismounted. Before the victims were fully aware of their captors' intentions, the three American men and Halil were seized and bound. A hand of each was strapped to the saddle-bow of one of the riders.

A rough litter, formed by swinging poles and saddle-cloths between a couple of the horses, was hastily arranged for the women. Then the horsemen closed in about the prisoners, and the march began.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SON OF HEAVEN.

IN 1881, a Dongola carpenter's son, one Mohammed Achmed, hitherto a lazy dreamer and mystic, suddenly declared that he was the long-promised Redeemer for whose advent all Islam has waited for more than a thousand years—the Messiah, heaven-born, sent by Allah and the Prophet to sweep the world clear of unbelievers and to give the faithful the earth as their heritage, with a sort of spiritual commutation ticket entitling bearer to all the vivid joys of the Moslem paradise.

Achmed accompanied this declaration with a few neat, hand-made miracles, took unto himself the title El Mahdi (the Redeemer), and set out to make converts.

He was successful beyond all measure. Within three years his doctrines had spread like wildfire throughout the whole of that vast fertile region bounded by the Sahara, Senegambia, Upper Guinea, and Abyssinia, and known as Belad-es-Sudan (literally, Country of the Black Man), or, more commonly, the Sudan. The entire region was transformed into a hotbed of Mahdists, and the false Prophet became at length so great a menace that active steps were taken for his destruction by the Egyptian government.

Expedition after expedition was launched against El Mahdi, and each failed. Every victory served to increase Achmed's fame and power.

The wandering desert tribes from the north—Nubians, Abyssinians, negroes, and Arabs, outlaws and political vermin from every quarter of Africa—flocked to his standard.

One after another, he subdued Egyptian garrisons throughout the Sudan, until at last it became patent that the government could make no successful stand against him.

Then, at England's instigation, the Khedive resolved to withdraw all troops from the Sudan. To do this without great loss of life, and to wind up local governmental affairs there with any show of credit or profit, was a task beyond Egypt's power. There was but one man on earth who could possibly accomplish the feat. And that man was hastily summoned to the rescue.

Thus it was that "Chinese" Gordon, who had been in Brussels and on the point of departing on a diplomatic errand to the Congo Free State, had hastened to Egypt in response to the appeal, had paid a flying visit to Cairo, and had then gone at once to Khartum, capital and chief city of the Sudan.

The Khedive breathed a sigh of relief. He and the rest of the civilized world knew Gordon's total ignorance of the word "fail."

In bygone years, Gordon Pasha, fresh from his triumphs in China, had come to Egypt to serve under the Khedive. He quickly made his mark, in that vilest and most corrupt of governments, by opposing fierce honesty and indomitable willpower to every subterfuge or plot of his enemies.

He was at last made governor-general of the Sudan, and in five years' time had crushed out that district's prosperous slave trade, put down the horrible abuses of the pashas, and made the whole land to blossom forth in newer and cleaner life.

His name became a word to conjure with, from the Mediterranean to Abyssinia. He was the one foreigner who had ever succeeded in winning the Oriental's full trust and love.

So it was that now he had entered on his new duties in the Sudan with full confidence of success, forgetting, as did the world at large, that a fanatical leader with fifty thousand fanatics at his back and a record of three years of unbroken victory is not as readily dealt with as are a mass of disorganized and unguided tribes.

It was Islam against progress; all bar-

barism against one man; the Prophet and his hordes against "Chinese" Gordon.

The sun was still high, and beat down with cruel intensity as the five Americans and their dragoman, surrounded by their captors, filed down the broad avenue and out into the Bishareen Desert, leaving the Temples of Ibrim behind them.

Darkness had long since descended before the cavalcade came to a halt. The way led over sand-dune and rock-hills; down cañons scooped out of the sand-drifts by the fingers of the wind; along ridge and over gully.

The desert horses kept their footing where a European or an American mount must have fallen or become utterly exhausted by the heavy going. The pace set was as brisk as possible under the circumstances, the perspiring captives slipping and sliding along with increasing fatigue, until each step became an agony and each breath a burden.

The litter which bore the two women was of the most primitive sort, and its uneven swaying and jolting called forth ever-increasing lamentations from Mrs. Chittenden. Madge, on the contrary, bore the keen discomfort in patience, breaking silence only now and then to comfort or cheer the poor old lady, whose nerves were in a state of pitiable collapse, and on whom this primitive mode of travel told more severely than on the girl. But Mrs. Chittenden refused to be comforted or to see any bright side to the unknown future toward which they were moving.

At length Sheik Darah, who was riding in advance of the rest, turned back and checked his horse.

"Madam," said he, in a wholly impersonal manner, as though imparting a bit of interesting local knowledge, "in this country, when old women are too noisy we drown them."

He trotted ahead without awaiting a reply; but his threat sufficed to silence Mrs. Chittenden's complaints for the remainder of the day.

The men, toiling on painfully, had scant opportunity or breath for speech. Moreover, they walked for the first part of the journey as if in a nightmare.

None of them could clearly realize that the mishaps they were undergoing wee not part of a horrible dream, from which they must soon awake.

The illimitable yellow-brown reaches of desert, the ferocious faces and bizarre dress of the men around them, the circumstances of their captivity—all went to enhance the unreality.

Barry Clive, youngest and strongest of the male prisoners, looked neither to right nor to left as he strode on. His eyes were downcast, and in his face was written a bitter mortification that drove out all thought of fear.

"Don't take it that way," begged Mr. Gault, as a stretch of smooth down-hill sand made conversation less impossible. "You did your best, old chap! It was no fault of yours—or anybody else's—that we were caught like rats in a trap."

"If I could be sure of that!" groaned Clive. "I can't help thinking I acted like an idiot. But for my foolhardiness we might have found some way out."

"It wouldn't have been possible. We were a mile away from our friends. These natives came on us in a breath. We had been told the country was safe. And once the Arabs got around us a troop of cavalry couldn't have rescued us alive. You showed pluck, my boy. And I hope," he continued, with an effort at gaiety, "you won't snub me *this* time for praising you."

But Clive did not even hear him. His thoughts were elsewhere.

"Two pistol-shots were fired," he said. "I wonder why the rest of our party didn't hear. Perhaps they did," he added, more hopefully. "Perhaps they gave the alarm. Even now a squadron of 'Gippies' may be on the way to rescue us."

"Don't count on it," counseled the older man. "We were a mile away from them, and the wind was in our direction. In such a case no pistol-report would carry half the distance over such broken country. No; if we want to escape it's to ourselves, and not to our friends, we must look. My only wonder is that the sheik didn't go back for the rest. I suppose he didn't know how small and how defenseless a party they were, though."

"By the way," commented Barry, "I don't see how that sheik happens to

you and Mr. Gault, though. It must be dreadful to be poor at such a time as this. I hope," she added, with sudden suspicion, "that you haven't been fussing around me like this and currying favor in hopes of inducing *me* to pay your ransom, for I tell you flatly I *can't*. I'll be lucky if I've money enough to pay my own."

Utterly disgusted—too much so to make disclaimer or to meet the sharp old eyes that were peering at her so cunningly from beneath the tangle of thin gray hair—Madge moved toward the doorway leading into the other room of the hut.

"I will get you something to eat," she said quietly.

Barry Clive was already at the threshold. With a gesture he signed her to step back into the room she had been about to quit. He followed her, and advanced toward the couch.

"Aunt Rachel," he began, "I could not help overhearing what you said just now to Miss Brant. I want to tell you in her presence how abominably you misjudge her, and that if you have one spark of womanliness in your heart you will ask her forgiveness. I wish also to repeat what I said to-day: unless Miss Brant and Mr. Gault are ransomed, I shall stay here with them.

"As for Miss Brant's seeking to 'curry favor' with you, there is but one person in all our party who has ever done such a thing. And that was not Miss Brant, but *I*. And, like every other sycophant, I have paid in self-respect for whatever favors I have won. I am just beginning to realize that. And the realization is not pleasant."

The unappetizing meal was at an end. At its conclusion Fitch fell asleep from sheer exhaustion, and snored resonantly. Madge had withdrawn to the room she shared with Mrs. Chittenden. Halil, of less steady nerve than the Americans, was crouched, monkey-fashion, in the darkest corner of the hut, his face hidden in his bent arms.

Mr. Gault was about to stretch his aching bones on the clay floor, when Barry Clive touched him on the shoulder.

"Look out there," whispered Clive, his voice too low to penetrate to the adjoining room.

He was pointing to the camp-fire, barely twelve yards distant from their guarded door.

The sheik was seated at one side of it. Opposite him squatted Abou Saoud. Between them were several men who, by their dress and bearing, were apparently personages of consequence. As the Americans looked, one or two others joined the conclave.

"That must be the council Halil spoke of," conjectured Barry; "the council that is to decide on our fate. The chiefs are gathering for it now."

"If only we could hear what they say," muttered Mr. Gault, in the same tone. "It's hard to have one's life thrown in the balance and not even be able to guess which way the scales are swinging. I've an idea! They're within easy earshot. Let's make Halil translate."

"I had thought of it. But I want to tell you something first: I suspect that dragoman's a scoundrel!"

"What? Poor old Halil a——"

"Just so. Do you remember when that fat man out there saw us? He was enraged for some reason, and rushed at Halil and said something in their infernal guttural jargon. I caught the word 'Amelook.' Now, Amelook was where Halil insisted on our stopping, three days ago. He said the engine was out of order and could not be fixed before next morning. He hurried ashore, on some errand of his own. After it was accomplished he got us out of that row with the natives, and then started off up-stream at once, in spite of the engine being, as he alleged, out of commission. How do you account for that?"

"You mean he had some understanding with this fat man?"

"He knew him. That was evident. And they said something about Amelook. There was a plot of some kind that our worthy dragoman was mixed up in. I mention my suspicions so that you will back me in what I'm about to do."

He crossed to where the dragoman crouched, leaned over him, and inserting a hand in the collar of the soiled blue-and-gold tonic, jerked Halil to his feet.

"I want you," he said bruskly. "We have found out all about your plot—that Amelook scheme you and the fat man, out there, had hatched up for our benefit—and——"

The miserable Cairene fell on his knees. His face was ghastly.

"Mercy!" he groaned. "Forgiveness, *howadji!*"

Mr. Gault and Barry exchanged a quick glance. The latter went on in the same compelling tone of command:

"My friend was for killing you at once. But we have decided to give you one chance for life. Come to the doorway, here, and translate for us what those sheiks say. And remember, Mr. Gault has some knowledge of Arabic, although he has kept it to himself, and if you lie to us or translate wrongly he will know. So sit here, just within the shadow. I will be behind you, and at a word from Mr. Gault I shall strangle you. The truth is your one chance for life."

The dragoman sank down limply in the spot designated, Barry kneeling behind him and watching the firelit group over Halil's shoulder. Mr. Gault (whose knowledge of Arabic was limited to three single sentences he had laboriously conned from Baedeker) stood near, fixing the dragoman with an eye that seemed to defy that wretched creature to make one error in translation if he dared.

And thus they waited while the last members of the council arrived.

Around the more distant fires they could see rings of bearded, bronzed faces. The stamping of tethered horses and mules was clearly audible on the still air, while from the farther gloom of the foot-hills came unceasingly the sharp, yapping bark of jackals, interspersed by the occasional howl of a wolf or the hysterical "laugh" of a prowling hyena.

Sheik Darah opened the council. He spoke briefly, directly, authoritatively, Halil translating his words in a mumbling whisper between teeth that chattered like castanets.

The sheik merely recounted the accidental discovery of the detached party of Americans among the ruins of Ibrim and their capture. He said that they were seemingly persons of great wealth, as were all Americans, and that he intended to hold them as prisoners until a ransom could be agreed on and sent for.

Abou Saoud spoke next. With many gestures, and in a shrill voice, he pointed out the dangers of sending for a ransom and the risk of bringing down upon them a regiment of government cavalry. The far wiser course, he declared, was to attach the prisoners to his own company, which was to go shortly into the Sudan on a slave-hunt; to transport them to Abyssinia or Kordofan, and there sell them at a high price to some pasha or petty king.

He further offered to pay Sheik Darah, there and then, a fair price for the unbelievers.

As he sat down, flustered and out of breath, a third man spoke.

He was incredibly old and wrinkled. His head was hairless as a billiard-ball, and his yellow-white beard fell in unwashed waves below his waist. His skin was like parchment, and his hollow eyes glowed with the maniacal fire of fanaticism.

"He is Zebehr, the fakir—the greatest of the Bishareen dervishes!" whispered Halil. "He is inspired of Heaven!"

The old man began to speak in a crackling, harsh voice that as he proceeded began to throb with fanatic fervor until it rose almost to a roar.

In unmeasured tones he denounced the impulse for wealth which had led the two previous orators to forget the Prophet's maxim, "Slay the unbelievers, and spare not!"

He reminded the council that they were even now on the march to join El Mahdi, the Redeemer of Islam, and asked if they wished to incur the displeasure of Allah and bar the gates of Paradise against themselves by pausing to hold barter or traffic with heathen Feringhee.

On the other hand, would not the instant and agonizing death of each and all of these unbelievers be as a breath of roses in the nostrils of the Prophet, and would it not insure them a prosperous and triumphant campaign?

More he spoke to the same effect, his shriveled body thrilling to his own wild eloquence. And the fanatic light in his

eyes began to find answer in those of more than one of his hearers.

With a shout of "Bismallah!" (in the name of the Most High!), a shock-haired Nubian next to Darah leaped up with drawn simitar. The sheik forced him back to his place. A babel of talk burst from about the circle.

Words and tones ran high. Many and mad were the gesticulations. The earlier dignity of the council was lost in the frenzy of excited debate. Through it all Sheik Darah alone sat speechless and unmoved.

Translation was out of the question. Halil gave up the effort and sat open-mouthed, forgetting his terror in the fascination of the scene before him.

At length the tumult died down almost as suddenly as it had broken out. For this is a peculiarity common to all Oriental disputes.

One man after another, apparently in order of rank, spoke a single word. Then the council broke up.

"That word?" asked Barry, shaking the paralyzed dragoman into sensibility. "That word each of them spoke in turn? It sounded as if it were some verdict. What was the word?"

And his parched lips writhing in the mere physical effort of articulation, Halil groaned brokenly:

"The word, *howadji,* was—*Death!*"

CHAPTER X.

ON THE WINGS OF THE GALE.

BARRY CLIVE and Mr. Gault looked into each other's eyes in the faint light from the dying camp-fire. The cowering dragoman was forgotten. They two were Americans, and in this moment race called to race.

"We are condemned to die," repeated the older man in an awestruck whisper.

Barry nodded.

"I am old," went on Mr. Gault, looking curiously at Clive, "and I had not long to live at best. Most of the road lies behind me. With *you,* it is different. Your whole life should be ahead of you."

"If I were destined to make as much of a mess of the rest of it as I have of the part I've already lived," said Clive, with a quick throb of self-contempt, "I'd rather end it all at once. But—well, lately, life has taken on a different look, and the world seemed to hold so much more for me than I once dreamed of, and my ideas were beginning to enlarge from their old narrow lines. It's hard to be cut off just at the threshold, isn't it?"

He spoke impersonally, as though commenting on some abstract proposition. He went on, a moment later:

"Shall we tell Miss Brant and——"

"There is no need to tell me," said Madge, close behind him in the gloom. "I was standing here and heard. I thought you both knew I was here. When—when is it to be, I wonder?"

"It may never be at all," spoke up Mr. Gault reassuringly, as he recovered from the surprise of her presence. "We may be rescued, or they may change their minds and accept a ransom, or——"

"You saw the look on that chief dervish's face and the excitement his words caused, and yet you speak of their changing their minds!" interrupted Madge. "And as for rescue, who is to find us here? It is kind of you to try to comfort me, and I appreciate it," laying her hand affectionately on the old man's, "but I am not a child, and I can stand the truth. If I must leave this dear old world, it is at least a joy to know that I go in company with two brave men—men of my own race, who would save me if they could."

At her simple words a wholly inexplicable thrill of pride in being thus included in her praise surged through Barry Clive. His head was erect and his shoulders squared. He felt that such a fate as awaited him might not, perhaps, in such companionship, be so very ignominious an ending to the troubled game of life.

"It is you who show us how to be brave," he replied. "You make it all much easier for us both. And now," he added, "let us try to get such rest as we can. Whatever ordeal is in store, we'll meet it better if our nerves are steadied by a few hours' sleep. I——"

He checked himself and peered out of the door. Noises of running feet and loud voices had caught his ear. Past

the dim glow of the fading camp-fires he could see men hurrying in divers directions. The tethered animals farther away were snorting and neighing in terror.

Guttural shouts of command sounded here and there throughout the encampment. Above and through it all, from far to eastward, could be heard a faint, indefinable hum, as of thousands of far-off bees.

"What is it?" asked Madge, joining him in the doorway. "Is the camp attacked?"

The stars were blotted out, and a blackness that seemed almost tangible had settled down over the camp. The air was dead, and the heat of the atmosphere had perceptibly increased within the past few minutes.

The guards on duty outside the hut were talking to each other in an excited way, and, from voice and gesture, were evidently in a high state of nervousness.

"Is the camp attacked, do you suppose?" repeated Madge.

Instead of answering her, Clive turned on the dragoman, who, forgotten, had returned to his corner, where he was again crouching by himself in mortal terror.

"Come here!" ordered Barry.

Cringingly Halil obeyed. As he reached the doorway the new sights and sounds of the night struck him for the first time. Through his fear appeared traces of the same restless excitement that had affected the guards.

"What is the matter out there?" demanded Clive. "Ask the guards."

"No need to ask them, *howadji,*" returned the dragoman. "Any one who has ever crossed the desert knows what is afoot. Praise be to Allah, we are under shelter! May his breath wipe out these tribesmen like——"

"What is it?" repeated Barry more imperatively.

"Why, the simoom, *howadji,*" replied Halil, in wonder at such ignorance.

"The simoom?" echoed Mr. Gault. "What is that?"

"The sand-storm, *howadji!* The sand-storm of the desert, when Scarramouche and his wind-devils ride the gale and strangle all in their path. And may they destroy——"

The distant noise from the east that had resembled a bee-swarm had steadily increased in volume. Now it had grown so loud as to drown the remainder of the Cairene's imprecation.

The blackness of the night took on a livid, sulfurous tinge, and the still air was stirred by an occasional fitful gust of wind.

Here and there men could be seen, near the camp-fire embers, throwing themselves face downward on the ground, their heads sheltered by saddles or baskets, and their bodies swathed in voluminous burnouses. All these prostrate forms lay facing westward.

The lurid light that had no place in the midnight desert glowed brighter. Then, in an instant, it was extinguished.

Halil darted back from the doorway. The guards without threw themselves to the earth, their faces pressed close against the hut-walls. By instinct, or profiting by Halil's example, Clive flung his arm about Madge and dragged her into the interior of the hut.

At the same instant a roar and swirl of tempest burst deafeningly on the ear. The hut was full of stinging, whizzing particles of sand.

The scream of Mrs. Chittenden, and the hoarser note of Fitch's lamentations, as the two were thus suddenly aroused from their sleep of exhaustion, were unheard amid the wilder din of the elements. The sand-storm in all its fury was upon the camp.

For a few seconds there was merely that deafening, earth-shaking roar; the stifling darkness; the myriad burning pin-points of sand that whipped face and body and choked back both utterance and breath.

Barry had instinctively kept his arm about Madge's waist. He could feel the girl's slender body tremble as he pressed her close to him amid that bedlam of uproar. The sensation drove his own fears away and gave him a strange sense of protection, even in the face of the mighty tempest before whose force his poor human strength had not a feather-weight of power.

Then, while the voice of the wind and the hiss of driven sand still banished every sense save that of touch, he felt the girl wrenched away from him.

He leaped forward, groping blindly for her. At his first step his arms were seized, dragged backward, and bound behind him.

He was snatched up as by the gale itself, and he felt himself moving rapidly through the air, the wind and sand-blast roaring past him like a cataract.

From the suddenly increased intensity of the gale, he knew that he was either outside the hut or the structure had blown to pieces about him.

Tossed and buffeted, his ear-drums in excruciating torture, the labor of breathing an intense agony, he felt himself slung upward. Then he struck against some unyielding substance.

The quick pressure of finger-tips could be felt here and there about his body. His arms, bound behind his back, swung again free at his sides, and blindly he clutched a bar or rail with which they came in contact.

Against his face he could feel a cloth. Then the hard substance on which he had been flung began to plunge forward in a heaving, jerky fashion, and once again the wind and sand whipped about him with redoubled force.

Too dazed by the roar to collect thoroughly his scattered wits, the young man continued to cling to the object his hands had by chance settled on. Then returned the memory of the girl torn from his side, and at the thought he struggled madly to rise. But he could not move the lower half of his body.

Powerless, deaf, dumb, blind, unaware of his direction or whereabouts, his mind like the mind of a man in a nightmare, Barry Clive felt himself whirled rapidly forward through illimitable space.

CHAPTER XI.

A CARAVAN OF GHOSTS.

FOR a period that might have been a half-hour or a half-century, so completely was time wiped out in that war of the elements, the storm raged on. And through it Barry Clive could still feel himself mysteriously propelled in that same plunging, swaying fashion.

Then—in the twinkling of an eye, as it seemed—the din of the gale died down. Died down so suddenly that the ensuing silence was well-nigh as painful to racked nerves and lacerated ear-drums as had been the Inferno of noise.

As the uproar subsided Clive ventured to remove one hand from the rail-like support to which he had been clinging. His object was to tear from his face the cloth or mask which shrouded it, and to learn where he might be—whether in this world or another.

But as he removed his hand another lurch of the great object on which he was perched nearly hurled him forward on his face. He renewed his grip on the rail, and clung there dully, while he felt himself whirled ever, ever onward.

So for a few minutes he remained inert, collecting his dazed faculties and wondering vainly what had befallen him.

At length, with awakening perceptions the suspense grew unbearable. Again he strove to rise, but could not. But now he knew the reason of his helplessness. His legs were strapped fast.

Just then he heard a most lamentable groan near by, that rose to a howl. The voice was the voice of Jonas Fitch.

This was too much for the maintenance of the unaccustomed awe that had taken hold on Clive's usually practical mind. Bracing himself with his left hand, he took advantage of a momentary slackening in the swaying and lurching movements of the object beneath him and lifted his right hand to his face.

His fingers came in contact with a coarse hood, its creases filled with sand. This hood hung loosely over his head and down to his shoulders. It appeared to be fastened only by a single drawstring passed about the neck.

One jerk of his fingers sufficed to break the string and to tear loose the hood. Then another heavy lurch brought his hand back in haste to the rail. The hood fell away, and he looked about him.

After the stifling darkness, his first sensation was one of a strong light. But a second look told him that day had not yet broken.

Above, the great white stars of the desert poured down a radiance never lavished north of the tropics. The waning moon, too, had risen, and its pal-

lid light flooded a scene whose strangeness once more gave the young man the sensation of being in some weird nightmare.

About him, on every side, stretched the endless miles of starlit desert. To right and left of him rode a troop of fantastic gray ghosts mounted on camels. He glanced down. The ground was far beneath him. In front of him was a long, swaying neck, terminating in a hideous head.

The sight gave him a momentary start, but on the instant he realized that he was strapped to the saddle of a camel. To his left was a fat, squirming, hooded gray creature similarly mounted. This rider twisted about in impossible postures and emitted a series of melancholy wails.

"The—the voice is my uncle's!" mused Clive, in amaze, "but the shape—the color——"

Then he looked more closely. It was indeed Jonas Fitch, strapped to the great shapeless saddle of a racing-camel.

The man's hood was gray with sand. His clothing was of the same uniform hue, and mounded over in many places by the drifting sand in such a way as to give him the appearance of some grotesque prehistoric monster.

Every rider bore the same unusual aspect. They were more like a company of gray goblins than human beings. Only on the outskirts of the little central group had they cast back their hoods.

Clive could there recognize the thin dark faces of Arabs. His eyes searched the nearer riders for one especial figure. He soon descried her.

Almost directly beside him, to his immediate right, she rode; slender, childlike, graceful, despite the shapeless hood and burnoose that had been cast about her; silent, yet very evidently conscious.

Clive reached far across and cast back the hood from Madge Brant's face. Very white she was, but unflinching of countenance; and her great dark eyes glowed like stars as they met his.

Long the two glances met and mingled, though surely never before since the birth of time did man and maid under such bizarre circumstances read each other's souls.

Then, as Clive had done, Madge surveyed her surroundings, clinging the while to the saddle-rail of her camel.

In front of her rode old Mr. Gault, crouching low and grasping the rail for dear life, his hooded face bent almost to the pommel. Beside him, swinging limply back and forth with each motion of her camel, was Mrs. Chittenden.

She, like the rest of the prisoners, had been lashed securely to the saddle; and it was well, for she had fainted.

A score of Arabs surrounded the five captives, the bearing-reins of each of whose camels were attached to the pommel of one of these tribesmen's saddles. Behind and in front the cavalcade stretched out.

Fully a hundred riders were of the party. All were mounted on camels save, far in front, one man who rode a horse.

"Where are we?" questioned Madge dazedly. "We were in the hut. Then came that terrific noise and—and I was snatched up and——"

"Miss Brant!" called old Mr. Gault, hearing her voice. "You are still alive, then? What has happened?"

He, too, began to claw at his hood, and after divers efforts wrenched it off.

"Oh, Mrs. Chittenden has fainted!" cried Madge, in distress, as her eyes fell on the inert figure before her. "Can't we——"

"Leave her as she is, for the present," counseled Clive. "She is happier so. Where can they be taking us?"

"Wherever it is, we are going like the wind," panted Mr. Gault, as he plunged to and fro in his saddle. "It is as if we were in flight from death itself. See how these men flog the camels on! Where is the camp?" he added, looking back into the trackless miles of waste behind them. "It is quite out of sight. Perhaps Halil can tell us something. Halil!"

But there was no reply. Closer scrutiny proved that the dragoman was not of the party.

"There's a man on horseback riding in front," suggested Mr. Gault. "Perhaps that's he?"

"No," corrected Madge. "It is too tall and too slender for Halil. Who—oh, he's turning and riding back toward us! It's—it's Sheik Darah!"

The equestrian had wheeled his galloping horse, and now brought the roan alongside the group of captives without slackening his speed.

"Ah!" he commented coolly. "You have come to your senses?"

He addressed the party in general, but his eyes were on Madge Brant.

"Where are you taking us?" she asked, as the rest hesitated for words.

"Away from death," was the terse reply.

"And to what?"

"To Khartum."

"Khartum?" she echoed in delight. "Then you are taking us to General Gordon?"

"I am taking you to El Mahdi, the Heaven-born. Gordon Pasha, by now, is a prisoner or dead. Khartum should be in the hands of Islam. El Mahdi rules there, as in time he shall rule the earth."

"Wait till he tackles that fragment of earth bossed by Uncle Sam!" growled Mr. Gault. "Then your divine friend El Mahdi will think he's hit a sandstorm. He——"

"Do you mean," Madge broke in, as she saw the sheik's brow knit with anger, "that we are to be taken to El Mahdi as prisoners?"

"I am El Mahdi's man," returned the sheik. "You are my prisoners. I demanded the right to ransom you. That right was refused me by the council, and it was decreed that you should die at the morning call to prayer. The simoom came up. Being desert-born, I smelled it many miles away, and I made my plans.

"My men took, by stealth, the hundred riding-camels of Abou Saoud—for which I shall one day pay him, but not in coin—and as the storm burst we entered the prison-hut, bound you all to the camels, and bore you away under cover of the tempest. No horse save Massoud, here, who was bred in the sand-storm country"—he paused to stroke the roan's arched neck—"could live in so great a simoom. Only camels could survive. So, we feared no immediate pursuit. But we must travel at full speed, none the less, and in a circuitous course, if we would wholly escape."

"And when we reach the Mahdi?"

"Then I shall plead my past services to gain his permission to hold you until a messenger can be sent for ransom."

"But if he refuses?"

"If he refuse, you will be no more unfortunate than you would have been even now but for the simoom. But I think he will not refuse me."

"Where is Halil, our dragoman?"

The sheik's stern face relaxed into a grim smile.

"When I was at the English school in Cairo," said he, "before I went to El Azhar (the university), the head master bade us, at meals, not to empty our dishes wholly, but to 'leave something for manners.' I have taken Abou Saoud's camels and the rich folk that he would have sold into slavery, but I have left him Halil—'for manners!' Besides, the Cairene's ransom would not be worth his keep during the months we must travel."

"The *months?*"

"The months. Khartum lies a full five hundred miles to the southwest as the bird flies. And by the route we must take the distance is fully a thousand."

"But," broke in Mr. Gault, "if, on reaching Khartum, Miss Brant and I cannot pay a ransom that you demand, what then?"

"Then," returned the sheik, with unaffected brutal indifference, "you will be put to death. Perhaps by torture. El Mahdi is just. You will die."

There was the faintest imaginable emphasis on the personal pronoun, which arrested Clive's attention. Still more did he note the complete change in the sheik's manner when he turned from Madge to address Mr. Gault.

Madge, too, had noticed the emphasis on the "you."

"Mr. Gault did not speak only of himself, sheik, but of me as well," she said.

"I understood him," replied the Arab lightly, "but *you* are far too beautiful to die. A spirit of prophecy tells me that you will live to wed a sheik and be sublimely happy, far from your native land."

"Sheik Darah!" exclaimed Barry, his face black with rage as he observed Madge's flush of distress at the strange

words and the look that accompanied them. "Sheik Darah, a spirit of prophecy tells *me* that *you* will die suddenly and with great violence in the very heart of your native land, and that *I* shall be most actively present at the time to see that the operation goes on without a hitch!"

(To be continued.)

THE COUNTERFEIT NOTE.

By GEORGE FOXHALL.

A case of jumping at conclusions, capped by a struggle for place between a horse and a motor-car.

"LETTER for Mr. Raymond!"

I heard the inner hall door of the quiet little hotel swing to and tail off in feeble little jerks as a messenger-boy walked hurriedly over the inlaid floor.

"Letter for Mr. Raymond in a hurry. Got to deliver it personally!"

"All right, kid! Leave it here," answered the clerk briskly.

"Look 'ere, birdie, wot yer chirpin' about? Didn't yer 'ear me say I got to deliver it in person?"

"Call *your*self a person? Pitch it here and get out. Think we can't deliver a guest's letters at this hotel?"

I was descending the single flight of steps from my room during these little pleasantries. How far the altercation would have developed had not my presence rendered it somewhat superfluous I don't know, though I was once a boy myself. I called the messenger, and gave him a sixpence as I took the envelope and slipped it into my pocket.

"Thank you, sir. I was to be sure an' put it into yer own 'ands, sir," said he.

"All right, my boy. I know what it is," I said, and passed on to the touring-car which was waiting for me at the door.

As a matter of fact, I had, half an hour previously, sent over to the American Express Company's office to cash an order for fifty pounds, and had asked them to send me five ten-pound notes as soon as possible. Of course, the boy's eagerness to deliver the note in person was due to a shrewd surmise of the contents, sent at my own risk, and the probable access of generosity which it would arouse in me.

Anyhow, I settled myself comfortably in the cushions of my car, promptly forgot the incident, and prepared to enjoy the luxury of my pet hobby.

My grip had already been tucked away safely in some mysterious corner, for I had determined to make at least a two or three days' tour of what would probably be my last automobile run in England before setting sail for New York.

Where we were going after we left London I had only the haziest idea, but I had arranged it all the night before with the chauffeur, making a pitiful attempt to appear as if I knew all about it.

For a long time I was in familiar quarters; Charing Cross, Waterloo Place, Regent Street skirting Regent's Park, then to the left past Lord's Cricket Ground, on St. John's Wood Road, and soon we were going on and on in what might just as well have been Long Island for all I knew about it.

However, I didn't care where I was. To feel the car vibrating soothingly and dashing easily at a moderate speed over the beautiful roads was enough for the present.

I had a general idea of my destination, the only coherent feature of which was Shakespeare's birthplace. I did not care for fast riding, as a rule, but toward nightfall the mania seized me and we dashed on at a dipping rate, regardless of everything, including our own necks.

We slept that night at a little country inn about eighty miles from London, and I changed my last piece of gold to pay the bill next morning.

"Can you change me a ten-pound note?" I asked the innkeeper, fingering the envelope which had been handed me as I left London.

"Yes, sur, I think so," was the reply, and mine host proceeded to drag to light various leather bags, purses, and boxes to provide the unusual wealth of change.

I tore open the envelope casually and drew forth—oh, ye gods! not the ten-pound notes, but a letter. With a chill at my heart, I read:

> MY DEAR RAYMOND:
>
> I am at last about to fulfil my long since made promise. Lady Fredericks is going to be at Hasteford Hall on Tuesday, but she will leave there Wednesday morning. She asked me if I would not get you to run over for the day and stay overnight, as she is most anxious to show you her wonderful orchids. She recalls with a great deal of pleasure our little dinner at Claridge's some weeks ago.
>
> You had better take the train from Paddington which arrives at Hasteford at eleven o'clock, as her ladyship will be about early and is desirous of having a good day of your society before you leave for New York. I will drive over from my place, which is about three miles away, and meet you at the station. Very sincerely,
>
> FRANK TOWNLEY.

I read it twice, too stunned and absorbed to stop the painful and elaborate counting of change which I was dimly conscious was proceeding at my elbow. Rather would I have lost a thousand dollars than miss accepting that invitation.

I was startled from my stupor by the voice of the landlord.

"Theer y'ar, sur! Seven pun ten in gold an' two pun ten in silver an' copper!"

For a second I stared at him, too embarrassed to speak; then I said:

"Look here, my man, I thought this envelope contained bank-notes, but I find it holds a letter. I'm awfully sorry to have troubled you, but I shall not need your change. Can you tell me how soon there is a train to London?"

"There's no train to Lunnon for two hours," he answered surlily, and with a suspicious look. "Last's just gone at a quarter to 'leven. An' if yer just nosin' round to get to know 'ow much money ther is 'ere I want to tell yer I've got th' biggest bulldog in these parts."

I was too agitated to be either amused or angry, so I merely inquired:

"How long will it take me to get to London in my car, driving fast?"

"Three hours if th' perlice don't get yer," he replied, still angrily.

"And how long by train from there to Hasteford?"

This seemed to be the limit of human endurance. Pausing a moment, he glared at me, then turned his back on me with a fierce:

"I ain't standin' for no coddin'!"

A loud guffaw broke from the half-dozen loungers in the room, and I turned angrily, but changed my mind and banged out of the place into my car.

"Drive like the devil back to London," I said, as I viciously slammed the door after taking my seat.

I had heard a great deal about the respectfulness of the English peasantry, and here was a fine sample of it.

If I could make London by two o'clock I might still reach Hasteford in time for dinner and offer my explanation. I remembered hearing Townley say that it was about two hours' railway journey. I could plead nothing but carelessness, because Townley had instructed the boy to deliver the note personally, and he would know that I had received it.

The matter would not have been so bad but for the fact that I had been trying, through Townley, who was her ladyship's most intimate friend, to get this invitation for the past six weeks, and he had promised to ask her to stop at the Hall one day between leaving her Yorkshire shooting-estate and going to the Continent.

Doubtless she was staying there now merely as a courtesy to me. The thought made me wild.

"Get everything out of her!" I yelled, and the chauffeur responded grimly.

We whirled along in a breathless vibration of speed, but the fates were against us, or appeared as if they were going to be. We were driving along at a fine speed, when from a road joining the main highway just ahead and going in the same general direction there appeared a dashing young gray horse

drawing a light trap, driven by an erect, broad-backed man.

The sound of our car evidently unsettled the animal's nerves, for it pranced across the road in a zigzag fashion and threatened to kick the vehicle to pieces.

To pass was impossible. The road was narrow, and the horse active enough to be at both sides of it almost at one time. I yelled to the driver to get out of our way, my voice hoarse with rage.

"Stop your car, you thundering fool, until I get her quieted down!" he yelled back without turning.

"Can't you drive? I don't know why they let a man like you come out with a horse!" I shouted at him, almost beside myself at the delay, though if I had stopped to think I should have noticed that only his skilful management prevented him from being mastered by the frenzied brute.

My temper was not at all improved by the whip, which was long and springy, flipping back and coming within an ace of my face as we turned the machine into the hedge in futile attempts to escape.

Never before did I realize the inadequacy of the language as admitted into dictionaries or my command of the unexpurgated edition. Neither did I realize that there was a person within the four seas of Britain who could eloquently and effectively respond to such a flow without repetition.

At last I saw the driver gain some control by a mighty effort. He dropped his whip, his hand flew to his pocket, something clicked, and as we took the opportunity to glide past he leaned over the side of the trap toward the car.

There was a report like thunder, and a sickening dragging as we lurched to one side. The man had leaned over and slit our tire.

I sprang up with a howl, only to fall back again as a head caught me amidships, and the other man and I rolled over on the floor of the car.

The report had caused the chauffeur to swerve sufficiently to knock the trap from under its leaning occupant, and he had plunged headlong into the auto.

Here was a pretty plight, and a second's review of the impossibility of reaching London caused my anger to stimulate my winded body. We recovered simultaneously, and there were things doing.

We had it over and over in the narrow space of that car to the best of our mutual ability. But my opponent was the stronger man, and in spite of the fact that I had secured a good hold from behind, he gradually worked round and was just about getting a strangle clutch on my throat when his hands dropped and he stared helplessly at me.

That was our first view of each other.

"What the—— Townley!" I ejaculated.

"What the—— Raymond!" he gasped.

For a moment we stared at each other as if undecided whether or not to renew the combat. Then the disheveled and ludicrous appearance of each was gradually taken in by the other and we burst into roars of uncontrollable laughter.

The tension relieved in this manner, I became serious.

"But look here, Townley," I said, in an aggrieved tone, "this is Tuesday, isn't it?"

"Certainly," he replied.

"Well, didn't you promise to meet me at Hasteford Station at eleven o'clock to-day? and here you hold me up as I am riding like fury to get to Hasteford within five hours, so as to be in time for dinner. Now we're both stuck at this God-forsaken place, which I can testify is inhabited by idiots, and of which I don't even know the name."

"Hasteford! you fifty different kinds of unblessed fool. Hasteford! Five hours! you old idiot! Have you gone mad? This is Hasteford. I was just driving to meet you."

I collapsed. The chauffeur had by now collected his somewhat scattered wits and clothing.

"Tom," I said, "why didn't you tell me this was Hasteford?"

"You never asked me, sir!" he expostulated.

I had not. Neither had I asked the landlord. I had asked him how long it would take to get to London, and then how long to get back to the place I was at. No wonder he thought I was either a fool or a rogue.

In spite of my reluctance, we were forced to call at the inn and wash up

after we had helped Tom replace his tire and had captured the mare, and as I slunk up the stairs I heard the wiseacre of the village affirming solemnly:

"Didn't I tell you fowks he were an escaped lunatic, an' bean't Mr. Townley, who's brought him back, a justice of the peace?"

THE EAGLE OF EMPIRE.*

By F. K. SCRIBNER,

Author of "The Ravens of the Rhine," "The Eleventh Rider," The Secret of Frontellac," etc.

A story of Napoleon during the one hundred days between Elba and St. Helena.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

NORMAN INWOOD, traveling through France on horseback, loses his mount by a fall into a ravine. The accident happens near a tower, where Inwood finds preparations to set off a flare as a signal. He also finds a dead man, and later the horse belonging to him, which he has no scruples in appropriating. But he has not gone far on his resumed journey when he is halted by a body of riders, among them no less a personage than Napoleon, just returned from Elba. Inwood is detained, and made to accompany the horsemen to a house where they halt for the night. Not liking the dirt floor where he has been bidden to sleep, he gropes about until he finds a ladder, which he ascends, and is set upon by some one in the darkness. He defends himself, and hears a body crash down. Presently a voice comes from below, and a man calls up to explain that he is the cuirassier who rode on his left, and that he has come to bring the American some supper. Before Inwood goes down to take the food a hand touches him on the arm and a woman's voice bids him not to tell that she is there.

When he returns he has borrowed a lantern from the giant cuirassier, and by its light discovers the woman bending over the man who attacked him when he first appeared in the loft. While the two are looking at him, Ettori, of Napoleon's party, comes upon them. He and Inwood fight in the loft; Ettori trips, and his knife enters the breast of the unconscious man on the floor. Inwood binds the colonel, and escapes with the woman on two horses they find. They are pursued, swim a river, and Inwood's horse is killed and the rider loses consciousness.

When he regains consciousness he is in a luxurious room. A surgeon tells him that he has lain for a long time unconscious in the house of Mademoiselle de Freron, the young woman he had met in the loft. In three days a servant comes to him, bidding him prepare to flee, as the houses are being searched for Royalists. He also gives Inwood a letter from Mademoiselle de Freron, in which she advises him that he is in danger from Ettori, who is powerful with Napoleon, and begs him to leave the country.

Inwood departs with the servant through an alley, where he encounters the cuirassier who, as follower of Napoleon, gave him the lantern that night at Cannes. Recognition follows, but Inwood, expecting capture, learns that the cuirassier has fallen into disgrace with the Little Corporal because of lies told to the latter by Ettori and is now discharged from the army. His hatred of Ettori is intense.

Inwood accepts an invitation to stay at the house of the cuirassier's brother, but in proceeding thither is seen by Ettori from a carriage-window. In his endeavor to escape he throws himself into a plain carriage passing and is dumfounded to find it occupied by Napoleon, who, admiring his nerve and taking a fancy to him, bids him come to the Tuileries at ten that evening and receive a private commission from him. Inwood is overjoyed, but suddenly remembers that he will see the emperor with his advisers about him. What if Ettori should be there?

CHAPTER X.

THE EMPEROR'S SERVICE.

NONE realized better than Norman Inwood that he was playing with fire; yet fire does not always burn. He had come to believe that a kindly fate walked at his elbow.

Yet it was not wholly Fortune on which he depended. The reckless daredeviltry of the man must be taken into account; his fearlessness of danger; his

*This story began in the February issue of THE ARGOSY. The two back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 20 cents.

quick wit, and the craving for activity. These things impelled him to keep his promise and present himself before Napoleon at the Tuileries. Again the good fortune which had stood him so well was manifest. Colonel Ettori was not there.

It had been in his mind to serve the emperor as a soldier, but Napoleon, while intimating that that should be the ultimate end, had chosen other work for him.

For the moment the American was upon the point of drawing back, let the consequences be what they might, but the words upon his tongue were unspoken. It was because he remembered what Mademoiselle de Freron had written: that but for her intervention they would have killed him as he lay unconscious. He desired to meet once more this French girl, and the best chance of doing so was in accepting the emperor's commission.

He did not pretend to conceal his surprise that he should be chosen for such a mission as it pleased Napoleon to entrust with him. Yet he did not try to hide from himself, unflattering as it was to his vanity, that should he be unfaithful to the trust no great harm could come of it—except to himself. His work was to lie outside the confines of Napoleon's designs. Did he bungle, or prove the traitor, the result of his actions must fall on others rather than the emperor. On the other hand, he might gain such knowledge as would thwart the plans of Napoleon's enemies. He realized fully that the Little Corporal had acted shrewdly in choosing the service which he demanded.

The emperor had received him in his private cabinet, where the lights burned low and a heavy carpet deadened all sound of footsteps.

"Ah, *monsieur*, you are punctual," said he, pleasantly. "I see I was not mistaken."

He walked once across the room, then stopped abruptly before Inwood, his hands clasped behind him.

"*Monsieur*," said he soberly, "it falls to the lot of a monarch to require varied services; to wear a uniform and charge a battery is not all, though even that may come in time. It has pleased me to require something of you. Have you guessed what that is, *monsieur?*"

"It is for your majesty to command," replied Inwood quietly.

Napoleon nodded gravely.

"Perhaps *monsieur* knows what goes with the position of authority which I hold; it is not all glory, power, and the right to rule, my friend. It is envy, hatred, and hidden dangers at every turn. That I do not fear, men have learned to know; but it is only the fool, *monsieur*, who does not take the necessary precautions. I have taken such precautions, but I would leave no turn unguarded. Those whom I have chosen work without open honor, but the honor will come, my friend. When the frontier is cleared of my enemies, when France is swept clean, then I shall not forget."

A flush had risen to his pale face; the dark eyes gleamed under the heavy brows. For the moment he seemed to be looking past the American, as if he would pierce the walls of the Tuileries and see beyond—beyond the days which were crowding fast upon him—far afield to where his destiny awaited him beyond the line of the frontier.

Then abruptly he spoke again, as though no pause had interrupted his words.

"You are a stranger to all in France, Monsieur Green, and that you have entered my service no one knows. I have enemies in Paris who would clear the way for the return of the Bourbon. I am well informed concerning these, but too much information cannot be obtained against those who would strike at France. It is given you to unearth the rats in their holes; to you among others who are in my service."

For a moment Inwood did not reply. Then, controlling his voice by an effort:

"It is *that* which your majesty desires of me; I had thought——"

A frown gathered on Napoleon's brow.

"There is danger; I would not hide it from you, for those among whom you will go strike in the dark. Are you willing to serve me, *monsieur?*"

And Inwood hesitated no longer, remembering *mademoiselle* and what he had learned in the house in the Faubourg St. Germain.

At first he had feared that he must,

from the nature of the service, come in contact with the police of Paris and their head, but the emperor relieved him of that uneasiness. He was to work alone, on certain information which would be furnished him by one close to Napoleon.

When he left the Tuileries that night, committed by honor to a task for which he had little liking, he took with him his first commission—took it to the second-story room in the Rue des Chanteurs, where the ex-cuirassier, chafing under enforced idleness, awaited him.

From the first he had resolved to make a confidant of this old soldier of the empire. Victor Rhoul knew Paris, he did not; this man loved the Little Corporal, and, being degraded as he was by the will of his general, he still venerated him.

The man's nature rang true; there was no thought of treason there, no weakness, no resentment. All he asked was to serve the leader whom he had followed at Austerlitz and Marengo. In what manner he did not care, so long as he served.

Inwood found him, in the little room in the Rue des Chanteurs. The two were waiting: the ex-cuirassier and the crippled grenadier, whose leg had been carried away during the return from Moscow.

They knew upon what errand the American had departed; he had told them of his strange meeting with the emperor. Each sat silently in his own place—waiting.

Inwood entered the room and took the vacant chair beside the table. He felt the old soldiers' eyes upon him. Had he not just come from the presence of the man who was to them a deity? And did he not carry with him the emperor's command?

The American glanced from one to the other.

"My friends," said he quietly, "I have seen the emperor; I am enrolled among his followers. I hesitated, but—you understand."

They did perfectly—these old war-scarred veterans; the magnetism, the greatness of the man. It was Rhoul who answered.

"And, *monsieur*, what did the Little Corporal say to you?"

Inwood told them—the service which was required of him. How, hoping to obtain a commission in one of the regiments, he had been selected for another task—a task against which his manhood rebelled. *Mouchard*—a spy upon the emperor's enemies.

For several moments silence pervaded the room. The old soldiers glanced at each other; the ex-cuirassier tugged fiercely at his mustache.

"And the emperor requires *that* of you, *monsieur?*" he asked.

"*That!*" Inwood replied.

Again a silence; then it was the crippled grenadier who spoke.

"Things are different; different from the old days, *monsieur.*"

"But conditions are different. Then all France served the emperor," Inwood replied.

The ex-cuirassier struck the table with his fist.

"*Bien! monsieur* speaks the truth. And I? What am I to do, *mon ami?*"

"I have thought of that," replied Inwood quietly. "Shall we not serve the emperor together, you and I? He knows best of all what service is most required at this hour; later, when he marches to the frontier, who shall say, my friend, that you will not accompany him; that he will not give back to you the sword and the chevrons?"

"It is as he says," broke in the crippled grenadier, gruffly. "Even now you may do something; as *monsieur* says, there is something besides carrying a musket."

Victor Rhoul's hand fell heavily upon the table.

"If *monsieur* requires me, I am ready," said he.

It was much which he conceded; he, a veteran of so many battles—one who always faced his foe squarely—to become a worker in secret. And Inwood, realizing this, marveled at the hold which Napoleon had upon his old followers.

Far into the night the three talked and planned, discussing the commission which Inwood had received from the emperor's secretary.

On its face, the thing was very simple. At St. Denis was established one of the great arsenals of the empire; the work accomplished there was of vital impor-

tance, and Napoleon visited the plant at all hours, frequently at night.

This was known throughout Paris; also, that the emperor often went to St. Denis practically unattended. Might not an assassin seize so favorable an opportunity?

Suspicion had indeed been directed toward certain quarters of St. Denis; it was assumed that Royalists were harboring there. What had been done by the imperial police—and that they had not been idle in that direction was a certainty—Paris at large and Inwood least of all could not know. But the latter understood perfectly what was expected of *him*. To discover who these presumed Royalists might be and to gain, if possible, an inkling of their plans.

There his duty ended for the time being. His report would be received at the Tuileries; the police, or a company of soldiers, would finish what he had begun.

The thing appeared, indeed, simple. To watch, to keep his eyes and ears open—so many would have judged it. But it required courage, coolness, and a quick wit when confronted with unexpected difficulties.

Napoleon had spoken of danger; the ordinary danger which one following such duty must brave. But the double danger he could not know; that at St. Denis might be congregated the very men who had occupied the house in the Faubourg St. Germain. That, and that alone, quickened Inwood's pulse when he contemplated the task before him. The thought of measuring strength with the men who wished to kill him, and—the hope that he might meet *mademoiselle*.

The ex-cuirassier understood—from Inwood's standpoint—the situation. In his brain another idea was working; a suspicion which he fondly cherished and which he had come to believe firmly.

In Paris there was little opportunity to prove it; but what might not happen at St. Denis? The police were there, a thousand workmen, Royalists, and spies. Truly, it might be of advantage to accompany the American to the great arsenal.

It was well toward afternoon when they left Paris; to all appearances, two ordinary citizens bound for an outing in the country. For the first time in many months the veteran of Austerlitz faced the world without a uniform.

Paris lay behind them; before, the great smoking chimneys, the roaring furnaces, the ever-blazing forges. At a little inn on the outskirts of the town they found a lodging—a pair of idlers whose interest in the mighty work of the arsenal had brought them to St. Denis.

It was no uncommon thing, the advent of curious visitors, to watch the forging of the shells and cannon with which the emperor would hurl back the hostile hosts beyond the frontier.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GRAY OVERCOAT.

VICTOR RHOUL was off somewhere, prying among the great workshops, watching the road which led from Paris, mingling with the half-nude laborers gathered around the forges.

Inwood, weary of the ceaseless roar, had decided on a quiet hour at the little tavern where they lodged. Later he would return to duty; to relieve the ex-cuirassier if need be.

And, again, it was Dame Fortune, as though to prove her constancy, whether on the wind-swept tower by the sea, in the guarded stable, in Paris, or at St. Denis, who proved his friend.

The night was a blustering one, with the wind driving and the rain pelting about the glowing buildings of the great arsenal. The nights before, and those succeeding, were the May nights of France, but this, when Inwood sat beside the little table in the inn, tasted of March again.

That night the downpour was to serve him—and the emperor; as again, on a fast-approaching day, it was to serve the allies—Wellington and Blücher.

The public room was poorly lighted, for candles were dear at St. Denis. The table at which Inwood sat was well in the shadow; behind, a great sideboard standing against the wall threw a triangle of blackness across the floor.

The wine was almost finished and, his fingers toying with the glass, he was idly watching the play of the flickering

candle-light upon the opposite wall, when the outer door was thrown open.

It was a common thing for workmen from the arsenal to drop into the tavern's public room. Glancing toward the door Inwood saw the first was one of these, begrimed and blackened by soot and smoke. But the second was plainly not of the forges, and seemed ill at ease.

As they passed into the light of the candle and, casting a hurried glance about, dropped down at one of the tables, the American leaned forward, his eyes riveted upon the face of the last comer.

It was a solemn face, heavy, impassive, as though covered by a mask—the face of the French serving-man who had accompanied him from the house in the Faubourg St. Germain.

Again, the man begrimed with smoke and soot glanced sharply around the room; toward every corner, at each table. Had Inwood not been seated in the shadow they must have seen him, but the black triangle cast by the sideboard had swallowed him up; within thirty feet of the others, he was invisible.

For with the recognition of the sphinx-like face of the man who had served the Royalists in Paris, quick suspicion laid hold of the American.

What was the fellow doing at St. Denis? Why the flash of uneasiness which had crossed his countenance as he stepped into the candle-light?

Who was the other, marked with the sign of the great arsenal? For an instant Inwood shrank from hiding; then he remembered why he was there, what the emperor expected of him, what Victor Rhoul expected; and he slipped noiselessly from his chair.

The workman rapped loudly upon the table; the landlord appeared, wiping his hands upon his apron.

"*Monsieur* called?" asked he.

"Yes," said the other gruffly; "a bottle of wine."

The landlord half-turned, when the man asked sharply:

"Are we alone in here? You have guests; where are they?"

"God knows, *monsieur;* not since supper have I seen any one. And you see no one is here," the landlord answered.

He crossed to the table at which Inwood had sat and picked up the glass.

"Go up-stairs and see if the rooms are vacant, then bring the wine," ordered the newcomer.

"*Monsieur,*" said the landlord in a pained voice, "do you think my house the harboring-place of thieves?"

"*Nom du diable!* who has said so; but one desires to talk in private sometimes. Would you have us remain outside such a night as this? You are a fool."

The landlord silently left the room; when he returned with the wine and two glasses the man from the arsenal spoke more pleasantly.

"There is no one up there, *mon garcon?*" making a gesture toward the ceiling.

"No one, *monsieur;* do you desire——"

"Only to be left alone; is it usual to find your place so empty?"

The landlord shrugged his shoulders.

"At this hour, frequently, *monsieur;* you should know that—coming from the forges. Earlier and later you will find plenty here, but between seven and nine every one is either busy or sleeping. When the squads shift for the night, why then——"

The other made a gesture of impatience.

"Then we have an hour, for it is now but little after eight," said he sharply.

The landlord uncorked the wine and set it on the table. Seeing him hesitate the other spoke angrily.

"Well, why are you waiting?"

The landlord coughed slightly.

"The wine is two francs, *monsieur;* you see——"

"*Sacré!* you fear we will leave so suddenly that you will be out your cursed francs. I have a mind——"

The landlord hastened to explain. Many came and went from the public room; he could not know, nor trust every one.

Only the day before three from the arsenal had ordered and consumed as many bottles of wine, leaving only a trio of vacant chairs to greet his eyes when he returned for a settlement.

Inwood heard the ring of a coin upon the table; the landlord's expression of thanks, and again the voice of the stranger.

"Keep the change, *mon garcon;* only so you depart quickly."

No ordinary workman from the forges would have overpaid. It was growing interesting—the Royalists' serving-fellow, the care concerning privacy, and now the tipping of the landlord. Inwood leaned forward in the shadow; unless the pair talked in the lowest whispers he could hear much of their conversation.

He saw the supposed iron-worker reach forward and fill the glasses with wine. The other drained his at a gulp; the first was scarcely tasted.

"You appear to be uneasy; it is unlike you, *mon garcon,*" said the man with a short laugh.

His companion mumbled something and wiped his forehead, though the room was not warm. The other shrugged his shoulders, arose, and crossing the floor deliberately blew out the candle.

The place became as black as pitch; Inwood could have seated himself at the adjoining table with safety had he so desired.

The scraping of a chair announced that the man had sat down again. His voice came out of the darkness.

"You have come straight from Paris?"

"Yes, *monsieur,*" was the reply.

"And he sent you?"

"Truly, *monsieur;* a horseman could not have come quicker."

There was a moment's silence. Then the question:

"And it is to be to-night; there is no mistake? Even on such a night as this?"

"It is that he told me; beyond, how can I tell, *monsieur,*" answered the other soberly.

"And when? Are you afraid, that I must drag the information out of you, word by word?"

The clinking of glass told that the empty wine-glass was refilled.

"*Monsieur* knows that I am not afraid, but on the road I passed two horsemen who looked at me critically. I fear, *monsieur,* that they followed me; if it was the police!"

"And have you never been followed before? In the Faubourg St. Germain, in—*mort du diable!* you are losing your nerve. You can see there is no one here; much less the police. He is coming to-night. At what hour?"

"It is to be after nine, when, as you know, he will visit the forges. I was to say that it might be alone, though that is not certain; anyway you can expect he will not fail to be here."

A silence followed; so long that Inwood almost believed they had slipped from the room. Then suddenly the man begrimed with the mark of the forges spoke.

"Not much time is given us; and we have failed before. Failed when success seemed certain. Shall we fail to-night?"

"Oh, how can I answer that, *monsieur?* It is you who know," replied the other in a strained voice.

His companion laughed unpleasantly.

"Perhaps I do not know either; I am beginning to believe I know but little. But to-night is given a great opportunity; whether it shall pass as the others have done—we shall see. It is black outside; blacker than it has been since that fateful night in March."

The other coughed slightly.

"So black, *monsieur,* that one might easily pass unseen," he ventured.

"Do not fear that; do you then know us so little? It will be light enough for what we have to do."

"Not by the light of the forges—surely not *that, monsieur!*"

"As well say in the Tuileries; in the midst of the army. No, *mon garcon,* not *by* the light of the forges, but *after* the light cast by the furnaces. Do you understand?"

"*Monsieur* will pardon, but——"

"You are dense to-night. There are many buildings of the arsenal; will he not visit them all? It will be in the light; the light which is forging the weapons he hopes to use. In the light—then in darkness—then in the light again. He will pass from house to house; if one cared to look carefully he might take note of the gray-clad figure standing in the ruddy, blinding glare. Will it be so difficult to follow—the gray overcoat—when it passes from the light into darkness?"

The wine gurgled again into the glasses. Inwood, crouching upon the floor, clenched his hands until the nails bit into the palms.

If he could but dash from his hiding-place and fling himself upon the man

who spoke so coolly of a deed which would shake Europe from end to end! There was no mistake, no chance for misunderstanding; the thing was planned too boldly to permit of two constructions.

The emperor would pass between the buildings of the arsenal. In the light they dare not strike; in the darkness—the knife.

In that moment Inwood's loathing for the men who could talk calmly of so dastardly a deed almost overcame his natural coolness.

What chance would they give their victim? They dared not even attempt the crime openly: where the light from the forges shone too brightly. He half rose to his knees; ready to spring forward and crush the men who faced each other at the table.

Then he remembered. There were doubtless others beside these two.

The man was speaking, giving his final directions.

"Of course you will not return to Paris to-night. You can do as you choose; sleep until morning, or wait near the arsenal. You will doubtless wish to know if anything happens."

Inwood could not see it, but the other moistened his lips under cover of the darkness; the hand which reached for the wine-glass trembled. For after all he was of the common people; not of the nobility of the Bourbons.

And the man who would wear the gray overcoat was the Emperor of France.

The noise made by a chair being pushed back came to Inwood; he heard some one get upon his feet.

"After all you had better wait outside; no one can tell what might happen."

The voice was drowned by a sharp pounding upon the table.

Several moments passed, then a door opened and the tones of the landlord came through the darkness.

"The light has gone out, *monsieur?*"

"As you see; a gust of air. Your candles are poor, *mon garcon.*"

The light flared up again. Inwood could see something now. The bogus workman standing near the door; the other, his companion at the table. The latter's face was as white as chalk, and his lips were trembling.

Inwood noted him more carefully; the other was already beyond his range of vision. The mask had dropped from the impassive face; there was cunning written there, and terror; but terror predominated.

The man rose and threw open the heavy overcoat which he wore. He seemed to be stifling, though a cold wind beat upon him through the open door.

He looked out into the night; in the direction of the red light which shone from the forges. For a moment he seemed to hesitate, then turned to the landlord.

"A room, a room where I may sleep for a few hours," said he hoarsely.

The landlord glanced at the wine bottle; he had seen such cases before now.

"As *monsieur* wishes; *monsieur* may sleep soundly without fear of disturbance," he answered.

When they were gone Inwood rose from his hiding-place. The hot anger of a few minutes before had passed; what lay before him required coolness, and coolness had returned.

At that moment he gave little thought to the man who had gone up-stairs. The fellow was a coward; unnerved, terror-stricken at what he had heard—the deed at which he shuddered, but to which he had lent himself.

Standing in the public room the American was thinking rapidly.

He could save the emperor; it was but necessary to meet him on his arrival at St. Denis, and a word would thwart the plans of the assassins. But to warn Napoleon was not enough; it must be more, something more lasting; a harder blow against the enemy.

The landlord returned and found him seated at one of the tables, his gaze fixed upon the flickering candle.

"*Monsieur* has returned," said he, "I did not know that such was *monsieur's* intention, and removed the wine unfinished."

Inwood nodded.

"I had drunk what I desired; it is a bad night outside, *mon garcon,*" said he.

He was looking at something the landlord carried across his arm.

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"Truly. It is the heavy coat of one from Paris; so wet that I must dry it before the fire."

He spread out the overcoat, turning the dark outer-cloth and then the lining toward the light.

"As *monsieur* may observe: quite wet through, and the cloth is thick," said he.

A strange look had come into Inwood's eyes; a flash of something which came and departed quickly.

"Then there is a guest—from Paris?" he asked quietly.

"In the room next to *monsieur's*. It is the wine; some heads are not strong, *monsieur*. He will sleep soundly till morning. But if not—if *monsieur* is disturbed, you have but to call."

"And the overcoat will be dry by morning? As you say, it is wet as though it had been in the river."

Inwood reached out and felt the garment: the outer-cloth and the lining.

"Dry as a bone, *monsieur;* I will hang it in the kitchen before the fire," the landlord replied.

Inwood stepped to the door and looked out into the night; then at his watch, holding the dial toward the light. It was a quarter to nine. Within an hour the emperor must arrive at St. Denis.

A step sounded on the wet ground outside; the American turned quickly to face the ex-cuirassier. The soldier entered, shook his broad shoulders, and threw his dripping hat upon the table.

"Ah! *monsieur* is wiser than I; a roof is a good thing to-night," said he gruffly.

"Then you have heard or seen nothing, my friend?" Inwood put the question carelessly.

"*Mort du diable,* no! the rats remain in their hole to-night."

"But the emperor comes from Paris."

"*Mille diable!* but it is like the Little Corporal. I remember a night before Marengo; it was raining and the emperor——"

"He will visit the arsenal, going from forge to forge, through light and darkness," interrupted Inwood.

Something in his face attracted the attention of the old soldier. He came a step closer.

"What is it? You have discovered something, *mon ami,*" said he gruffly.

CHAPTER XII.

A MEASURE OF STRENGTH.

Of the two, and knowing what he did, Inwood was calmer than the veteran of a score of battles. He repeated the conversation he had heard and told what had become of the men who sat at the table in the darkness.

During the recital varied emotions crossed the face of Victor Rhoul; twice he half rose, and once turned toward the door which opened into the passage from which the stairs led upward.

Inwood laid a restraining hand upon his arm.

"What are you going to do, my friend?" he asked sharply.

The soldier struck his fist upon the table.

"*Nom du diable!* and you ask me that?" he retorted hoarsely. "First to strangle this traitor who lies up there; then to drag from him the name of the other."

"And will that save the emperor? While you are up there he may have reached the arsenal; it is not the crow we seek, my friend, but the hawk," said Inwood quietly.

The ex-cuirassier tugged at his mustache.

"What then?" he demanded fiercely. "Had I been in the same room with them neither would have left it alive. Now one is gone, and the other may follow him; they are slippery, these Royalists."

"So slippery that while you netted the smaller fry the big fish would escape," Inwood replied. "Come, my friend, calm yourself; to-night we will strike a blow for the emperor."

The old soldier glanced longingly at the door, then made a gesture of assent. He saw that the American had some plan in his head; that his wit was keener than his own.

It was the same as taking a strongly entrenched battery; to rush blindly forward might accomplish something, but

a wise general might think of a surer way.

Inwood rose from the table. There was an expression upon his face such as his companion had not seen before; the expression of one who had marked out his course and would act upon it relentlessly. He turned toward the door opening into the passage.

"Come," said he shortly, "our first work lies up-stairs. Remember—I am the general to-night, my friend."

Rhoul followed him, striving to comprehend. But a moment before this American had stopped *him* from mounting the stairs; now he was leading him upward. He followed silently.

Inwood halted before a door half way down the upper hall; the next instant he had opened it and stepped across the threshold.

The ex-cuirassier, close upon his heels, looked over his shoulder. There was no light in the room, but objects could be plainly distinguished.

The open window faced the buildings of the arsenal; they were some distance away, but the fierce glow from the forges illumined everything. The walls, the ceiling, the furniture of the room glowed with a red glare. The white face of the figure seated at the window was bathed in crimson light.

As the door opened this face turned quickly toward it.

Inwood motioned to the soldier to close the portal behind him. Then, as the man at the window would have arisen, he commanded sternly:

"Sit down! you were watching the arsenal. Why?"

The glare fell full upon the American's face; the man recognized it and a stifled sigh, almost a groan, escaped his dry lips. It sounded like an expression of thankfulness that something he feared terribly had not materialized.

"*Monsieur!*" he muttered, and sat limply in the chair.

Inwood understood. The fellow believed him to be a Royalist, for had he not remained for many days in the house in the Faubourg St. Germain? Had he not received a letter from Mademoiselle de Freron, sufficient guarantee of what cause he served?

"You were watching the forges?" demanded the American, for the second time.

The fellow found his voice.

"*Monsieur* knows; permission was given me to remain here, if I chose. Permission from M. le Duc de Veris."

"So it was the duke; and you have seen him?"

"Not a quarter of an hour ago; the journey from Paris was difficult; I am good for nothing more to-night."

"Yet something is required of you. You will accompany us," commanded Inwood.

The ex-cuirassier was gazing at him in speechless astonishment; he opened his lips to speak, then closed them sharply. There was a grim look on his face which was not pleasant to see.

Why did this American, who served the emperor, talk so freely with the messenger from Paris? Why was the man to be permitted to leave the inn? He would wait a little longer; then he would know—and act.

"*Monsieur* desires that I accompany him?" The man's voice expressed hesitancy, even rebellion.

Inwood took out his watch; it was nine o'clock. The minutes were growing precious. The man seated on the chair shrugged his shoulders ever so little.

"Pardon, *monsieur*, but it was M. le Duc who has given me the permission," muttered he doggedly.

The old look of fear was creeping into his face—a terror so strong that he would risk much to remain in the room and watch the light of the forges from the window.

In the first few moments Inwood had hoped that he might accomplish the first part of his plan peacefully; that, believing him to be associated with the Royalists, the man would obey him without question. He saw that this had failed. The fellow's terror of what might happen outside was greater than his fear of disobeying. And the moments were passing.

He turned to Rhoul.

"You have a pistol, my friend; if in five seconds this fellow does not accompany us, shoot him through the head," said he sternly.

The ex-cuirassier thrust his hand into the bosom of his coat.

"Get up!" said he gruffly, and kicked open the door.

The man in the chair cowered, cast a frightened glance about the room, and rose, trembling, to his feet.

"*Monsieur?*" he stammered.

Suddenly the ex-cuirassier reached forward and grasped him by the collar, shaking him as a terrier does a rat.

"*Mort du diable!* why should a bullet be wasted; his neck will snap like a pipe-stem," he growled.

The man writhed weakly and uttered a low cry of terror. The grasp on his collar tightened, then loosened, and he dropped upon his knees.

Rhoul turned a questioning glance toward his companion. He understood perfectly well that it was not Inwood's intention to have the fellow shot as he had ordered; but what did he propose to do with him?

Inwood motioned toward the door, and the ex-cuirassier understood what his part should be. He stooped down, seized the cowering man by the shoulders, and, almost lifting him bodily from the floor, dragged him through the doorway and down the stairs.

The public room was empty; Rhoul jerked the prisoner to his feet.

"What the devil!" he growled; "if it is a morsel for the police, let them come and get it. Or what is it *monsieur* desires?"

"First, that we return to him his overcoat, which is drying in the kitchen," replied Inwood.

To the soldier's amazement he hurried from the room, to return with the half-dried garment across his arm.

"You will put it on!" said he sharply to the prisoner.

Rhoul muttered under his breath. Why should the fellow be permitted an overcoat? But he took it from Inwood and jerked it on the man roughly, though the coat was turned inside out.

"And now, *monsieur?*" he asked.

"We will go to the arsenal," answered Inwood shortly.

The soldier gulped down his surprise. It was well for the success of the plan the American was carrying through that years of service had trained the ex-cuirassier to blind obedience, when he had once elected to follow. Otherwise, mystified at his companion's actions, not understanding in the least why the prisoner should be dragged over the ground to the forges instead of being knocked upon the head, he would scarcely have followed each suggestion readily.

Much less would he, a few moments later, have remained alone with his captive, in a dark angle of one of the buildings, and watched Inwood pass on and mingle with the workmen around the forges.

Moving quickly from place to place, the American went through the arsenal, glancing sharply at each group of men he passed. At any instant he expected to come upon the emperor, walking as he had done many times before from forge to forge, asking a question here, giving an order there, examining every detail of the mighty machine which was forging for him thunderbolts.

But though it was already well past half after nine, the familiar gray coat was nowhere visible.

A trio of officers, in the blue and gold of the Imperial Artillery, stood near one of the great furnaces from which a glowing tube of iron had just been drawn. As Inwood passed them a sentence uttered by one attracted his attention.

"We may not expect the emperor tonight, as was planned; his majesty is unavoidably detained at the Tuileries."

So, after all, it would not fall to him to serve Napoleon that night. Inwood stopped, hesitated; then the line of his lips grew tense. He could not save the emperor, for the master of France was safe in Paris; but the other thing remained. To measure his strength against that of his enemies.

He would meet them on their own ground; adopt their methods. The daring plan which he had so carefully formulated should have its test; even with the principal character absent from the stage, the play would proceed to its sinister ending.

Retracing his steps, he hastened back to the spot where the ex-cuirassier and his prisoner were waiting.

"The emperor remains in Paris tonight," said he briefly; "we may return to the inn."

Rhoul's grasp tightened on the prisoner's arm.

"And this fellow?" asked he gruffly.

"It is possible that he may desire to look at the forges, having come with such haste from Paris," was Inwood's unexpected answer.

"*Mort du diable!* you were saying what, *monsieur?*"

"That I will take him to the forges; and you——"

He stepped closer and uttered a few whispered words into the soldier's ear. Rhoul started—so violently that his captive uttered a little cry of pain.

Terror had almost deprived him of his senses; it is probable that Inwood might have spoken openly and he would not have comprehended. He was, after all, only a wretched tool employed at will by his Royalist masters.

Of no mental caliber, when the crisis approached what little natural courage he possessed deserted him. He stood ready, a dumb, unresisting sacrifice for the sins of those whom he obeyed.

Beyond the angle of the building, shut off from the light of the fires, the red glare from the roaring forges lit up the night. Inwood took the arm of the unresisting captive.

Victor Rhoul, remaining in the shadow, looked after them. For several moments their forms were blurred in the gloom which stretched between the spot where he stood and the brightness beyond. Then they passed into the light: the man in front, the American a few steps behind.

The ex-cuirassier noted that the victim obeyed as one walking in his sleep—and thus they passed into the red glare of the forges.

Some of the smoke-begrimed workmen looked up from their task. They saw a little man followed by another. The first wore a gray overcoat.

They had seen the same sight often: the small figure in gray, walking among the forges. It is probable that few took note that the man in gray walked weakly, that he kept his back to the darkness behind, and that the man who followed him was speaking sharply.

For a moment the gray-clad figure halted beside one of the forges. The light shone full upon him. The critical moment had arrived.

Inwood took a step forward.

"The emperor is not at St. Denis tonight, therefore nothing is going to happen. Return to the inn, or where you please; but do not hurry as though you were afraid—the workmen are watching you," said he in a low tone.

The man obeyed mechanically—understanding nothing, considering nothing, except that he was free—when he had thought to find himself in the hands of the police.

He turned and faced the blackness behind, hesitated for a second, then walked dully forward, alone.

The gray overcoat, dark colored when the man had worn it from Paris—gray now because before leaving the inn Inwood had turned the garment inside out, exposing the lining—passed from the light into the darkness.

The American, standing back just on the edge of the zone of light, watched with bated breath. All hung on that last moment.

Had the man not followed the suggestion to walk slowly; had he, overcome with fear, with only escape in view, dashed madly into the friendly night, those waiting in the darkness must have hesitated, suspecting it was not the emperor.

The gray-clad figure was becoming dimmer; in another minute the blackness must swallow it up completely. Perhaps, after all, the deception had been discovered; perhaps the poor fool, so fear-stricken that he had not noticed the change from black to gray, might pass unscathed back to Paris.

Then suddenly a single cry rang out in the night; a cry, a fall, and the rush of heavy feet.

The workmen at the nearest forges left their tasks unfinished; some threw down their tools, others caught up heavy hammers. A cry, started somewhere and taken up by a score of voices, rang through that portion of the arsenal.

"The emperor! it is the emperor!"

In the wild confusion, the shouts, the rushing of many feet, Inwood remained immovable; standing just without the zone of light.

No need for him to join the frenzied throng rushing toward the spot whence the cry had come and from which now arose the sound of a desperate struggle.

He knew that Napoleon was safe in the Tuileries; that, in the place of the master of Paris, he had sent to his death the tool of those who wielded the fatal dagger.

And he knew the meaning of the noise issuing from the darkness.

As the knife fell, burying itself in the breast of the unsuspecting victim, the old soldier of the empire had sprung forward from his hiding-place and grappled with the assassin.

The cry for lights arose. A dozen torches flared up, carried by trembling hands. Workmen, soldiers, officers of the imperial army crowded about the spot where it was thought lay the form of the Emperor Napoleon, clad in its gray overcoat.

It was said afterward that it required the strength of three men to tear the grasp of Victor Rhoul from the throat of the unconscious man upon whom he had hurled himself. Inwood heard the cry of amazement which went up when others held the torches to the face of him who had received the knife-thrust in the heart.

It was only a dull, heavy face, stamped with a look of terror, even in death; the face of one none of the onlookers could recall.

What happened afterward, when it was discovered it was not the emperor, Inwood learned from Rhoul and others.

At the moment when the light of the torches was thrown on the dead face, a cry, not of the frenzied crowd which had rushed from the arsenal, came out of the darkness. Inwood dashed forward, almost stumbling over a form which crouched just beyond the zone of light.

He reached down and laid his hand upon the cowering figure.

"Ah, *mademoiselle!* we meet again," said he with forced calmness.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FLAME FROM THE FORGES.

THE girl was crouching upon the ground; under his grasp Inwood could feel that she trembled violently. There was no need of the light from the forges to tell him that in uttering her name he was not mistaken; he had recognized the voice, which came so sharply out of the night, and all the time he had half expected to find her in St. Denis.

In the first moment he was a total stranger to her; probably one of the police, whose whole attention was not taken with the scene under the torches. She did not catch the import of his brief sentence; and he repeated it.

"So we meet once more, *mademoiselle;* after many days."

Even then she did not seem to understand, but, with his grasp still upon her arm, sprang to her feet.

"It is the emperor! *mon Dieu!*—is it the emperor, *monsieur?*" she cried.

"So they think—over there; that your friends, who near Cannes were not to be assassins, have rid France of the man who stood between Louis and the throne. I do not need to tell *you* that, *mademoiselle,*" Inwood answered.

He felt her start violently.

"And *you*—it is *you*—at St. Denis!"

In the semi-gloom he could see her white face, lifted to his own.

"And why not?" he asked coldly. "To Mademoiselle de Freron it must matter little whether I am in Paris or St. Denis."

The torches were moving backward and forward restlessly, and a murmur of angry voices came from the crowd behind them. The girl shuddered.

"They have killed the emperor? In God's name, tell me, *monsieur,*" she cried piteously.

Inwood had looked for exultation; yet her distress seemed genuine.

It had been his purpose to harden his heart; to show no pity or forbearance, believing, as he did, that her presence at St. Denis was to add her voice to the councils of the conspirators.

But he could not banish from his mind the scene in the stable loft near Cannes; the delicacy of her face, her courage; how, believing it was Napoleon's soldiers who followed them, she had pulled up her horse on the shore of the river to wait for him. And what she had done in the house in the Faubourg St. Germain, and the warning against her companions and Ettori; these things crowded his mind and fought in her behalf.

He let go his grasp of her arm,

knowing that such precaution was unnecessary.

"It has failed; as it will fail again—it is not the emperor who has been assassinated to-night," said he coldly.

He read unbelief in her sudden movement.

"Then who? It was the emperor—he was to come to St. Denis to-night—is it not he, *monsieur?*"

"It is not the emperor, though the punishment will be the same; the punishment of the Duc de Veris—if they have not already killed him," he replied.

He thought *that* would move her, but her voice was calmer when she spoke again.

"But they said—it was to be the emperor who would come to St. Denis to-night; the emperor who would walk among the forges."

Suspicion grew strong again; she knew, and acknowledged that she knew, the plans of the conspirators. His heart hardened, and a tongue of flame from one of the furnaces lighted up his face. She saw it and read his thoughts.

"*Monsieur!*" she said hoarsely, "you think I am one of them—whose purpose it was to assassinate Napoleon to-night?"

He answered coldly.

"You have given the proof; do you expect me to believe else? Do you think I am a fool, *mademoiselle?*"

The crowd beneath the torches was moving; in its center towered the giant ex-cuirassier, his coat torn and a splotch of red upon his face. They were lifting two bodies from the ground; the dead man and the assassin—choked into insensibility.

Inwood spoke sharply, for the torches were approaching.

"They are coming this way, and you understand what that may mean, *mademoiselle*. These men love the emperor and will show no mercy, even though it be a woman."

She understood what he meant; that finding her so near the fateful place she would be made a prisoner. A prisoner to be taken to Paris suspected of being in the plot to kill Napoleon.

And Inwood himself was thinking of the same danger. He, too, would be arrested, for he was a stranger in St. Denis; the emperor could clear him, but before the emperor came Ettori.

"You will go, *mademoiselle?*" he asked sharply.

"And you, *monsieur?*" she answered. "If they find you here? Have you forgotten before whom they will take you?"

But it was already too late. Again that fatal tongue of flame shot up from the furnace, bathing them in a flood of crimson light. A hoarse cry rose from the crowd; those on its edge nearest them separated themselves from the main body and ran forward. To escape unseen had become impossible.

Inwood did not hesitate; moved by a reckless impulse, he bent forward, seized the frail form of the girl in his arms, and ran over the uneven ground in the direction of the more open country.

Fate had decreed that once again Mademoiselle de Freron should be his companion in a mad dash for liberty. But this time the odds were great—against the fugitives.

The crowd behind broke into an angry cry; twenty men were following them; in as many seconds the twenty would become a hundred. A heavy hammer, hurled by the foremost of the pursuers, fell short; a lighter weapon might prove more unfortunate; some might even be armed with pistols.

Stumbling over the rough ground, but running easily and with scarcely an apparent effort, Inwood kept well in the van. But he knew it could not last forever; powerful as he was, his burden must presently begin to tell upon his strength. It was to the darkness he must trust; a hiding-place which would throw the pursuers off the scent.

At the first moment when he caught her up in his arms Mademoiselle de Freron had tried to escape from him. But now she did not struggle, though in the first few rods she had begged him to set her down.

He had answered nothing: only one sharp spoken, imperative command:

"Put your arms around my neck, *mademoiselle;* we can travel faster thus."

She obeyed without question; lightening her weight as much as possible, she lay in his arms inert and passive. He felt her warm breath upon his cheek, and the rapid beating of her heart.

His lips set firmly; the old expression of determination came into his face. He would carry her forward until both were surrounded and made prisoners—he would take her safely beyond the reach of her enemies if he could.

The light cast by the forges lay well behind; the pursuers were neither nearer nor farther in the rear; so far he had neither gained nor lost. Once he stumbled and almost fell; the strength in his muscles did not diminish, but his breath was growing shorter.

The days spent in idleness in the house in the Faubourg St. Germain were beginning to tell.

As had been the case once before, when fleeing through the woods near Cannes, he had no idea of what lay before or around him; it was a blind race through the darkness, and yet this very blackness which hid the path hid him also from those who followed. Had it been lighter, escape would have been practically impossible.

The girl noticed that his lungs were failing; not by a diminishing of speed, but his breath was beginning to come in short gasps. For the first time since the race began, she spoke.

"Put me down, *monsieur;* I can outfoot them easily now, and this pace you cannot maintain many rods farther."

He felt she spoke the truth, but pride made him hesitate; what the outcome might have been remained unknown, for, even as she struggled to free herself, Inwood felt the ground vanish under him.

(To be continued.)

ON AN APRIL NIGHT.

By JOHN MONTAGUE.

A mix-up in theater tickets that precipitated an awkward predicament.

HANSLEIGH was in the act of scraping the lather from the left side of his face, when a yell of pain, emanating from an adjoining suite, caused him to pause in his operations and look surprised. By the time the cry had been repeated he was on his way to investigate.

He recognized the voice as that of his friend Jennings, editor of the *World Magazine*. Throwing open the door of the other's apartment, he stopped and stared in astonishment.

"What's the matter?" he demanded, seeing that Jennings was lying on his bed, his face contorted by an agonized expression of pain.

The editor left off groaning to reply.

"Rheumatism," he moaned.

"Oh," said Hansleigh, with a sigh of relief, "is that all? I thought you were in the throes of death."

"All!" yelled Jennings. "Well, I wish you were in my place. Then you would at least be able to sympathize with me. My left leg is completely paralyzed."

"Gad! as bad as that?" Hansleigh's voice was filled with concern and sympathy on the instant. "I didn't know it took you so hard, old man. Sorry, honestly, for what I said."

The editor groaned again—groans which ran the gamut from "very soft" to fortissimo, according to the degree of throb. He conscientiously believed that all existing rheumatism had concocted to enter his limb at that specified moment.

He turned to his friend.

"Hansleigh, you came just in time. You are my preserver. I have immediate need of you."

"What do you mean?"

The editor pointed to the foot of his bed, where lay a dress-shirt, a standing collar, a white cravat, and a satin-lined and padded muffler.

"See those things? Well, they go with a dress suit. A dress suit means 'something doing.' I was about to don the raiment and sally forth to the theater, when my leg decided it would rather remain at home. So, there you are."

Hansleigh looked at his friend blankly.

"Well?"

"Well! Don't you tumble? It is evident that I can't go, that somebody must go in my place. and that that somebody is you."

Hansleigh started.

"But, old man, I never had a dress suit on in my life. I haven't become used to the Eastern ways as yet. Can't you just send word that you are ill?"

"No, sir, I can't; not in this case. But calm yourself; it is only a cousin of mine—a dear little girl whom I wouldn't disappoint for anything. Besides, you will do just as well as myself. My clothes will fit you—we are about of one size—so don't offer any further argument. It's settled. Hand me that telephone and I'll call the little girl up and explain about your coming. Meantime, finish shaving."

Hansleigh felt helpless. He had never considered himself much of a lady's man. His small income as an architect would not allow of his running around and having a "good time," and he had to content himself with a single room at the same hotel where his friend Jennings occupied a suite.

While the other man was explaining to "Amy, dear," that he could not personally conduct her to the theater that evening, but that he was sending a "handsome dog" to take his place, Hansleigh finished shaving. He reentered the editor's apartment just in time to hear himself spoken of as "a most engaging beast," and he felt like throwing something at his prevaricating friend.

Fifteen minutes later he stepped in front of Jennings's mirror to tie his cravat, which finished his theater toilet, and was surprised at the decent picture he presented. The editor's clothes fitted him as if they had been made to his own measure, and except for a feeling that the lapels were too far apart and showed too much shirt-front, he was reasonably comfortable.

"Turn around," shouted Jennings from his bed as the architect succeeded at last in making his tie remain near the base of his collar; "let's get a squint at you."

Hansleigh complied with the request. and pulled his cuffs until they showed just the proper length. Jennings appeared satisfied.

"Great! She can't complain. You look nearly as good as I do."

"Thanks," replied Hansleigh dryly. "Is there anything more goes with this outfit?"

"The silk hat. You will find it in the clothes-press, there—top shelf."

The architect groaned.

"Do I *have* to wear that?"

"You certainly do. And I say, let me warn you to take especial care of that *chapeau*. I bought it in London summer before last, and just had it carefully ironed yesterday for this occasion, so, whatever you do, don't misuse the bonnet."

Hansleigh promised to care for it as if it were his own, and donning his overcoat, asked for the tickets. It was almost eight now, and he would have to rush to get to the theater with his charge on time.

"There are no tickets—it's a pass," replied Jennings. "You'll find it in that little envelope on the dresser. We editors never *buy* tickets—the theaters are only too glad to give them to us gratis. All you have to do, when you get there, is to present that bit of paper at the box-office and they will do the rest. Now begone and make up for lost time. Good luck."

Hansleigh was out of the door on a double-quick, but ere he had reached the elevator turned and came back.

"Oh, I say, Jennings," he exclaimed, bursting into the room, "would you mind telling me the young lady's name and where she lives?"

The editor gasped and smothered a "Well, I'll be jiggered!" Then, intimating that it was bad luck to return when one has once started on a journey, he instructed the architect how to reach the young lady, whose name, he explained, was Miss Amy Anderson.

Hansleigh left the hotel conscious that every one's eyes were glued on his shining head-gear. He made his way to the Elevated, considering it better to economize as much as possible, inasmuch as he had but ten dollars with him, and there was no telling what might happen before he got back.

Hansleigh's thoughts were centered mainly on the young lady. What would she be like? How would she greet him in his present capacity? Would she consider him merely as a convenience—as a sort of a guard to see that she safely reached her destination, like a policeman protecting a pedestrian crossing a busy thoroughfare, or would she be sociable and make him forget that he was attired in another's clothes and—above all things—that he wore a silk hat?

He felt that if she could do this she would indeed be a wonder. What was that?

He was dimly conscious that something had happened. He stopped short in his walk, and saw that he was directly under a portion of the Elevated structure that had been newly painted, and beneath which the scaffold was still hanging.

As he looked upward something descended and struck the ground before him. It was paint!

He hurried from the spot, and then very gingerly removed that silk hat—the hat over which he had been bidden to exercise the greatest caution. He looked it over, and an exclamation escaped him. It might have been a profanity, but there was no one near to determine. He felt weak.

For on the crown of the hat was a beautiful dash of color. Red—brilliant red; fresh, moist, and scintillating in the electric light. Evidently a painter's brush had been left lying on the scaffold, to be jarred off by a passing train.

Hansleigh was in despair. It would never do to call on a young lady in a hat smeared with paint. There was but one thing to be done, and he did it on the instant. He entered the nearest hat store and purchased a new tile, leaving Jennings's London article to be cleaned if such a thing were possible.

His ten dollars had now dwindled to two, and with this slender sum he hurried on.

Ten minutes later he was sitting beside Miss Amy Anderson as they were being whirled to the theater in a hansom. Now, his troubles were over.

Amy proved a charming companion, and they were soon talking as if they had known each other for years. Indeed, so interested was she in the substitute that she forgot entirely to inquire into the ailments of her cousin Jennings.

They arrived at the theater in due course, and after he had paid the cabman Hansleigh's remaining dollar felt rather insignificant and lonesome.

As they started into the lobby Miss Anderson laughingly inquired if he had the tickets.

Did he have the tickets? Had he not been holding that little slip of paper in his hand all the way? Whatever else befel, they were at least sure of their seats.

"Oh, yes," he replied lightly; "Jennings gave me a pass. If you will pardon me a moment I will obtain the coupons at the box-office."

Except for a countrified-looking couple, evidently man and wife, standing near the entrance to the auditorium, the lobby was deserted, owing to the lateness of the hour. So Hansleigh had no trouble in securing his tickets.

Armed with the pass and the coupons, he returned to his fair charge with a smile of serene happiness on his face. Nothing could now interfere with or interrupt their pleasure for the remainder of the evening, unless the theater took fire or something equally tragic occurred. He handed the doorman the pass and stepped aside to allow Amy to precede him. Her hands were full of a multitude of skirts, and her face was wreathed in a beautiful smile—for him.

But just then a hitch occurred. The doorman was actually barring their way! He was examining the pass in a very suspicious manner, at the same time motioning to the countrified-looking couple to step forward.

The stranger looked at the pass and nodded his head emphatically.

"That's it, that's it," he declared, and his wife corroborated his assertion.

The doorman was glaring at the surprised Amy and her stalwart companion, whose fingers had unconsciously doubled into a foreboding fist. This unlooked-for development was maddening.

"What's the matter now?" demanded Hansleigh, whose expression was anything but cordial. "Why this interruption?"

The doorman's tone was as cold as ice.

"You can't go in on this pass," he said.

"Can't go in on it! Why not?"

"Where did you get it?" went on the door-tender, ignoring Hansleigh's inquiry.

"What's that to you?" blazed the architect, and the countryman and his wife exclaimed "A-ha!"

Hansleigh silenced them with a look.

"It's just this much to me," answered the gateman. "This pass was lost by this gentleman, here. He reported the fact to me, and we have been waiting until it was presented."

"That man's a——"

But Amy interrupted what her angry companion might have said by laying her hand upon his arm. Hansleigh continued fiercely to the doorman:

"Why, that fellow must be crazy, and you, too! I received that pass from Mr. Jennings, editor of the *World Magazine,* to whom it was issued by this theater."

"Then how do you account for its being made out in favor of the Tallytown *Morning Breeze?"* demanded the door-tender, displaying the face of the pass to substantiate his assertion.

Hansleigh looked at the inscription on it for the first time, and saw that what the other said was only too true; the pass was certainly drawn in favor of the newspaper mentioned.

He felt helpless.

"There must be some mistake," he said.

Turning, he glared at the *Morning Breeze's* representative and his wife, but this action afforded little relief to the embarrassing position in which he found himself.

By this time Amy had grown tired of holding the edges of her skirts clear of the floor, and now stood with her hands clasped, looking in bewilderment from one to the other of the group. Hansleigh felt his face turning the color of a boiled lobster, and was possessed with the desire to squeeze his person, dress suit and all, into the tiniest crevice.

The doorman was the next to speak.

"As it is your pass, you can go inside," he said to the country newspaper man and his wife. "The others can't."

As has been said, Hansleigh had not been long in New York, and consequently was not up in matters such as those with which he was now contending. Otherwise, he would have at once demanded that the manager of the house be called, and matters would undoubtedly have been straightened out all around.

As it was, he felt that there was absolutely nothing more to do about it.

Incidentally, he remembered that he had but one dollar in his pocket, and that he could not have purchased other seats had he wished, thanks to that dash of color on Jennings's hat. Was ever man in such a hole?

Suddenly Amy seemed to have an inspiration. She touched him on the arm, and together they walked to the farthest end of the lobby.

"I see it all!" she exclaimed, when out of earshot of the obtrusive doorman. "We have forgotten something—something very vital."

"What in the dickens is it?" asked Hansleigh, thinking immediately that the oversight must be his.

"We forgot," answered Amy, emphasizing her words, "that this is April first!"

Hansleigh's eyes opened wider than usual.

"You mean——"

"That we have been fooled."

"Fooled?"

"April-fooled."

"By whom?"

"My brilliant cousin?"

"Jennings?"

"Yes; I see it all."

"I wish I did."

"Call a cab. I have an idea. We will turn the tables on him."

"Do you mean to say that Jennings has allowed us to make monkeys of ourselves as we have done?" asked Hansleigh as they rode homeward.

"I am sure of it," answered Amy, with conviction. "He is an inveterate joker; and now I remember I bet him a month ago that he couldn't fool me on April first."

Hansleigh couldn't see the joke, and he lapsed into silence.

They reached the Anderson home about nine-thirty. Hansleigh seated himself in a large leather-covered chair and watched Amy as she moved about the

room removing her hat and wraps. She then went to the telephone and called for Jennings's number.

As she received the connection she cautioned Hansleigh with her finger to her lips to make no sound.

"Hello! Is that you, cousin? . . . Yes, Amy. . . . You must have been asleep; I have been trying to raise you for ten minutes. . . . What? Theater? No, of course not. . . . I waited until nine o'clock, and your substitute didn't show up. . . . What? . . . How do I know what on earth became of him? I haven't set eyes on him as yet, and now, as it is nine-thirty, I don't suppose I shall. I was all dressed and ready, but he failed to materialize.

"I have taken off all my finery, now, and if he comes I shall not see him. . . . I just called you up to let you know. . . . I don't know. . . . He might have met with an accident. . . . What? . . . Perhaps you had better; but aren't you awfully lame? Oh, that's too bad! Wait! Hold the line a moment! Some one is ringing the bell now. Perhaps it is he. The maid is going to the door. . . . I can hear a man's voice. . . . It sounds rather thick. Gracious!

"Just a minute. . . . Hello! The maid says it is Mr. Hansleigh—and that he is fearfully intoxicated—he can hardly stand—he looks as though he had fallen into a mud-puddle, and his hat is crushed out of shape. She says he insists on seeing me; what shall I do? Oh, yes, do come immediately and take him away. I'll not see him—hurry!"

She hung up the receiver and turned to Hansleigh, who had buried his face in a sofa-pillow to smother his mirth. When he was able to check his laughter, Amy remarked:

"If he comes out in the damp night with that rheumatism the pain will just about balance the mortification to which we have been subjected."

"Yes, the sinner! He deserves even more, by far," replied Hansleigh, preparing to leave. "But, I say, probably those rheumatics were merely a sham, too."

Amy sank into a chair.

"I'll bet they were. But never mind; I have given him a good scare. He was awfully excited."

"Well, I suppose it will be best for me to be absent when he arrives," smiled Hansleigh. "Besides, I have just remembered that I left my walking-stick down there at the theater. I will go back after it."

Fifteen minutes after Hansleigh had departed Jennings's cab dashed up to the Anderson door. He hobbled out, and it was apparent that the rheumatism had not been put on. Almost as soon as he rang, the door flew open and he was greeted by a familiar voice, joyous and triumphant, which shouted "April fool!"

Had the house tumbled about his ears, Jennings could not have been more astounded. He stared at his cousin stupidly, and for a full minute could say nothing.

"Why—why—what do you mean?" he asked, finally.

"Mean?" asked Amy, with a rising inflection. "Why, that's what I mean—you are April-fooled, that's all. Does it hurt?"

"Where is the joke?" he demanded, supporting himself heavily with his cane as he made his way into the house and sank into the chair which Hansleigh had occupied during the comedy at the telephone.

"Why, cousin, dear, the joke is on you; can't you appreciate it? And so you really have the rheumatism? Oh, that makes it all the funnier! I must let Mr. Hansleigh know."

"Hansleigh! You told me you had not seen him."

Amy laughed again.

"That's part of the joke. You see, when you intended fooling us on that pass for the theater we caught on and simply turned the tables on you. There you have it in a nutshell. Mr. Hansleigh was right here all the while I was telephoning, and enjoyed it all immensely. So, you see, we were not fooled as much as you thought we would be."

Jennings looked at his cousin as though he suspected that her mental faculties were deteriorating; obviously, she was crazy.

"I can't make head or tail of what you are saying," he exclaimed angrily, as

the pain in his leg reminded him that he had been called from his bed on a fool's errand truly. "You tell me a bunch of nonsense about the pass for the theater and being April-fooled, none of which I can grasp. I wish you would make things clear."

Amy began to think that possibly there was a mistake somewhere.

"Why, of course you knew all along that the pass you gave Mr. Hansleigh was one that was made out to some country newspaper—I forget the name of it—didn't you?"

"I knew nothing of the kind," cried Jennings. "Wasn't the pass made out to my magazine?"

"No, it was not," replied Amy, "and that is what caused all the trouble. We were actually turned away from the theater and refused admittance."

"But I don't understand," blustered her cousin. "Come to think of it, I never looked at the thing when I received it, thinking it was all right. But I'll make that theater——"

What he would make the theater do was interrupted by a vigorous ringing of the telephone. Amy answered it, and from her conversation Jennings knew she was speaking with his friend Hansleigh. During the chat, which was doubtless some explanation or other, Amy frequently exclaimed "Oh, gracious!" "Mercy me!" and "Isn't that too funny?" When Hansleigh rang off she turned toward her cousin with a contrite and apologetic demeanor.

"I'm awfully sorry, cousin; awfully sorry. Who would ever have thought such a thing possible? The joke is on us, after all. Mr. Hansleigh tells me that when he went back to the theater for his walking-stick, which he had left in the lobby, the doorman pointed him out to the manager, who happened to be there just then. The manager apologized to Mr. Hansleigh, and told him that the wife of the country editor, to whom we had to give up the pass, you remember, in looking through her handsatchel for a handkerchief after being seated, found the pass which her husband had received for the same night, and which she thought they had lost. And, mark you, it was made out to the *World Magazine*. The manager said the mistake had occurred in his office when the passes were mailed. They were put into the wrong envelopes. The country people, thinking they had lost theirs, caused the mix-up. Isn't it too funny—such a complication of affairs?"

Jennings growled.

"Funny, eh? Yes, for every one but me. Think of the agony I have suffered in coming out into this dismal night with my rheumatism! Humph!"

Amy put her arms around his neck and soon had him in a better humor, despite his pain. She sympathized with him as only a woman knows how to do, and ended by compelling him to acknowledge that the affair was indeed ludicrous.

"And just to think," she added enthusiastically, "the manager, to make reparation, offered Hansleigh a box for next Tuesday night."

"Did he take it?"

"Well, I should say he did. And we are going to have a regular little party together."

"Am I in on it?" asked Jennings as he beckoned his cab from the stoop and prepared to descend, one step at a time.

"Of course you are in on it," laughed Amy, "if your rheumatism is better and you are in more genial spirits, Mr. Bear."

"Hum! It seems to me you are not overenthusiastic whether I attend or not. That fellow Hansleigh——"

"Oh, begone!" exclaimed Amy, blushing furiously.

Then, after closing the door behind her departing cousin, she fled precipitously to her boudoir, to examine, in her mirror, two reddened cheeks and wonder why certain words are so potent.

FROM THE PERSIAN.

On parent knees a naked, new-born child
Weeping thou sat'st, while all around thee smiled.
So live that, sinking to thy last long sleep,
Calm thou may'st smile while all around thee weep.

Sir William Jones.

WHEN SUSPICION STRUCK HARD.*

By STEPHEN BRANDISH,

Author of "At the Mercy of the Unseen."

A victim of circumstantial evidence, and his thrilling adventures in his pursuit of the man he felt to be really guilty.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

ROBERT and Albert Radford, of Bondville, own, respectively, a moribund newspaper and a prosperous drug-store. A slight trolley accident sends two evident friends into the drug-store, one of whom drinks an orange phosphate, is immediately taken ill, and blames the beverage. Robert and Albert both go for doctors, leaving the sick man with his friend; when the brothers return they find the man alone and dead. Physicians pronounce death to have been caused by poisoning. Things seem to point to Albert's guilt, even more so when it is learned that the dead man is Thomas Bandmann, professional exposer, who is now engaged in exposing the drug and patent medicine trust. Albert is subjected to a rigorous cross-examination, falls under greater suspicion, and finally Sherwood, the sheriff, comes to warn him that he is to be arrested for murder. Radford, convinced that the man who entered his store with Bandmann can throw light on the mystery if he can only be found, disguises himself and starts in pursuit by the trolley route. He ascertains that he goes by the name of Catterson, misses him in one town, and in Worman Center falls in with a scoundrel known as "Pig Ryan." From him, by judicious questioning, the druggist learns that Catterson is really Pender, and that the latter has gone on to Blackfield, where he may probably be found at Dunn's Hotel. Radford betakes himself thither by the next trolley, goes to Catterson's room, covers him with a revolver, accuses him of the murder, and commands him under pain of death to return to Bondville with him. Catterson glibly persuades Radford that though he was with the dead man in the drug-store, he did not know him, that he is a Chicago railroad magnate, and that he fled in order to escape being called upon to testify. Radford inadvertently lowers his pistol, and receives a blow that renders him unconscious. Upon coming to he finds himself still at large, though accused by Catterson of attempting his life. Catterson has disappeared, no one knows where. Disgusted, Radford goes aimlessly to the railroad station. There he finds a copy of his brother's paper, expressing the opinion that he—Albert Radford—is surely the murderer. So, his brother has turned against him? The blow is almost too much.

Just then Sherwood, the sheriff, reappears. He, too, is assured of Radford's guilt, and though the latter attempts to persuade him, for old times' sake, to allow him another week to hunt for Catterson, Sherwood insists on taking him back to Bondville, replying: "It's no good, boy; I can't do it! I can't do it, nohow!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRAIL AGAIN.

THERE was a pause. Radford seemed to shrink within himself. Then Sherwood spoke again:

"But hold on. There's one thing I *will* do, and most likely it will cost me my job as sheriff if it ever comes out—I'll give you just forty-eight hours to catch your man!"

Radford was on his feet instantly. The sheriff put out a restraining hand.

"Just a minute more," he remarked. "I can't let you go alone. I daren't do that, for my own sake. But for the next two days we'll hunt your criminal together, Bert. If we haven't found him at twelve, day after to-morrow, back to Bondville we go together, and no hard feelings. Is it a bargain?"

He rose and faced Radford. The druggist held out a hand, grateful now even for small mercies. They might not locate Catterson again in the short time—indeed, the chances were very much against it—but he was decidedly grateful. "It's a bargain," he said.

**This story began in the January issue of* THE ARGOSY. *The three back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 30 cents.*

In the veriest jiffy, matters had taken on a new and pleasanter aspect.

No longer pursuer and pursued, Radford and the sheriff were coworkers now, for however limited a time. They looked at each other, and each man smiled a little, and it would have been hard to tell which was the more relieved in the wiping out of unfriendly relations.

"Well," Sherwood asked, "where are you going to begin?"

"Where would you?"

"Well, as you said, I never threw the bluff of being a detective; nevertheless, where did you lose track of this—Catterson, was his name?"

"Yes. To all accounts, he left Dunn's last night about twelve."

"Trolley?"

"No, in a carriage. There's no telling where that infernal carriage went to, but I'm inclined to think it didn't travel very far, Sherwood. Catterson certainly wouldn't return in the direction he came, and he wouldn't try traveling around the country indefinitely in a hired rig."

"So, it appears that if he left town it must have been by way of the railroad, eh?"

"Very much so."

Sherwood shook his head rather dubiously.

"Seeing as it's twelve hours ago, you ain't got a—a glowing chance of locating him, Bert."

"I've got every chance in the world for the next two days!" the druggist exclaimed. "The agent that was on duty here last night isn't around, of course, but I believe the porter that was here is due about now, and——"

He squinted toward the front of the station as a darky shuffled around the corner of the platform and began to move some barrels in leisurely fashion. To judge by his vizored cap, this was the gentleman in question.

Radford hurried toward him, and the dark person ceased work without protest and turned toward him.

"You're the porter?" the druggist began briskly.

"Yassah."

"Were you here last night?"

"Heah every night, mostly."

"Well, what trains leave here after twelve?"

"Twelve-thirty-six, week-days, goin' East; twelve-forty-two goin' West, sah."

"And were you here when they left last night?"

"Yassah. Had t' put in some overtime las' night." The porter yawned, and sat down upon a box.

"Now, do you remember who went aboard these trains at this station?"

The darky grinned broadly.

"Wal, sah, we don' generally take down de names an' addresses o' de passengers when dey buy tickets."

"I know, but——"

"Howsomever, in dis heah case I reckon I kin tell ye, sah."

"Good!" Radford leaned forward expectantly. "If you can describe the men——"

"Yassah. Dat's easy. Dey wa'an't nobody got aboahd either o' them trains, sah, las' night!"

Radford's expectant air relaxed.

"You're sure of that?"

"Sure's yer bohn, sah. I got two eyes in mah head when dey's a chance o' tips comin'."

The druggist took the hint. He needed information, and this seemed about the only person capable of giving it. It was not a coin, but a dollar bill, that dropped into the porter's hand.

"Most likely, Bert, he took some later train, or else drove to some other station!" the sheriff remarked.

"But it's ten or twelve miles either way to a station, and at midnight——"

"You lookin' foh somebody, sah?" the porter remarked, with activity in his mien, as the dollar was tucked away.

"Yes. What was the next train?"

"Ain't any till fouh o'clock an' aftah, sah, an' it's mighty rarely people get aboahd that heah."

"Well, isn't there any way of finding out whether any one left last night?"

The porter thought laboriously for a little; then he nodded, and disappeared on the run.

He was back in a very few minutes.

"Ticket-agent says dey wa'an't no tickets sold foh anywhere on de early trains, sah. He says dey's only fouh ladies dun left heah since he went on—till de las' train went out just now."

"And on that?" Radford asked eagerly.

"Wal, dey was three gentlemen an' two ladies, sah. I dun helped 'em aboahd."

"Was one of them——" Radford began.

Sherwood interrupted.

"Bert, it ain't likely that feller hung around twelve hours and then came down here to leave."

"Never mind. Anything's likely, and when we have no clues at all even a poor one's some satisfaction." He turned to the porter. "Was one of the men on this last train a big, tall, stout fellow—maybe forty or a little over—with a grip and an overcoat?"

"Yassah!"

The reply came with unexpected promptness. Radford started a little.

"You didn't notice that suit-case, my man, did you?" he cried expectantly.

"I suttinly did!"

"Then——"

"The blamed thing dun fell out o' my hands—fum de car to de platform again!" the porter chuckled reminiscently. "Went plumb down t' de platform—smash! smash! smash! Wal, sah, dis yere big feller, he began t' cuss an'——"

"Never mind what he said," Radford cried. "Did you notice the initials on that case?"

"Cohse I did, sah; but dis big feller he cussed at me, an' he said——"

"The devil take that part!" the druggist fairly shouted. "What were the initials on that case?"

"Why—why—dey was—lemme see—dey was 'W. C.,' mistah!"

"And was that all?"

"Dat was all, 'ceptin' de word 'Chicago,' sah."

"And the fellow had a deep voice, did he?"

"I shud say he did! When he cussed at me foh droppin' dat case, sah, you might 'a' thought——"

The druggist turned to the sheriff with a bitter:

"Well, I'll be hanged!"

"The same man?"

"Undoubtedly! And he must have been somewhere around town all night. That's his way of doing things, apparently. He simply waited until it was his own sweet pleasure to get out, and then he got out!"

He turned again to the porter.

"How long did this fellow wait for the train?"

"Oh, he must 'a' been heah half a hour or so. He was heah when I landed, fifteen or twenty minutes befoh train-time—standin' out dah on de front platform."

"And did you notice anything peculiar about him?"

The porter fell into deep thought once more, and Radford waited with what patience he might.

"Well, not as ye might say *pecooliar*, sah!" came at last from the darky. "But he was sorter—*odd!*"

"How?"

"Wal, he was standin' aroun' dah in de front, whah de sun was hot, an' I must say he seemed wahm. So I ups and asks him why he don't go round back in de shade."

"Yes?" Radford said encouragingly.

"An' den he started foh de rear an' got jest to the cohnah o' de platform, heah, an' looked back—an' den he went round to his own place again like a streak an' stayed up at de far end till de train come!"

"All of which happened," the druggist sighed wearily, "because he saw me sitting on the edge of the platform, there!"

"What's dat, sah?"

"Nothing. Where did the man go?"

"I don't know, sah. I kin find out, most likely."

Once more the porter vanished within the station. Radford and the sheriff looked at each other.

"Well, he seems to have made a clean get-away," the latter remarked.

"It looks like it, Sherwood. But if we can find out where he's gone——"

"We'll have to hire a special train to overtake him, I'm afraid, Bert. These here things ain't trolley-cars."

"Nevertheless——"

The porter was returning briskly now.

"De gent bought a through ticket to Chicago, sah."

"Sure?"

"Yassah. De agent knew everybody else dat got aboahd heah. Dey ain't no doubt about it, sah."

Radford almost groaned aloud.

"Then he's gone for good, so far as

we're concerned," he muttered disconsolately.

His eyes sought the sheriff's. Sherwood looked at him for a little and dropped his own lids. He certainly could offer no encouragement.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ELEVENTH-HOUR HOPE.

THE porter gazed curiously from one to the other and waited for further enlightenment. Then, suddenly and without a sign of warning, he electrified the whole situation with:

"You-all want to see de gent?"

There was something odd in his tone. It seemed to suggest that such an impossibility was altogether possible. Radford suddenly faced him, almost open-mouthed.

"I'd give ten years of my life to see him within the next five hours!" he said sharply.

"Don' need t' do dat, sah. I reckon ye kin——"

"How?"

The porter glanced at a huge silver watch, pocketed it again, and awaking to the emergency, spoke rapidly:

"Dis yeah train's only been 'gone nine minutes, sah."

"Well?"

"Well, if de gent bought a ticket to Chicago he got ter change at Fairview Junction, ain't he? 'Cordin' t' de way I figger it, he's got t' wait better'n half an hour dah when he gits offen our train."

"Yes, but the Junction's a good fifty miles away."

"Dat's all right! You kin git dah befoh he does!"

"But how? How? How?"

The porter controlled his growing excitement.

"See heah, gentlemen, dese yeah Central tracks—dey's fouh stops between heah an' de Junction! All right! Y' know de oder road—de Sunflower Route?"

"Certainly, but——"

"Wal, 'tween heah and de Junction is whah dey's beatin' us all out foh time. Dey don't make a stop from de water tank t' de Junction!"

"By George, that's right!" Radford exclaimed. "That new opposition road does run almost parallel to the Central the whole stretch to Fairview from here."

"Theahfoh," the porter concluded triumphantly, "so bein' as dah's a train stops at the wateh-tank jest eleven minutes from now that gets into Fairview ten or twelve minutes ahead o' ours, why shouldn't you-all get dat and—get dah befoh him?"

Radford's eyes were glittering; even Sherwood's brown face darkened a little as he took in the situation. The druggist almost clutched the porter's brawny arm.

"Do you suppose," he gulped, "that it would be possible for us to make that Sunflower train and get to Fairview first?"

The porter waved a hand toward a distressed-looking vehicle.

"Dah's de hack, sah! 'Twouldn't be de first time his yeah Sunflower Special took on passengers at de tank! Dey ain't been able t' build no Blackfield station yet, ye know."

Like a shot, Radford's hand went into his pocket. The porter was five dollars the richer.

Before his delighted eyes had grasped the fact, the druggist was gone toward the hack, dragging with him the hurrying form of Sherwood.

"Come on! Come on! *Come on!*" Radford panted.

"I'm coming, but——"

"Here!" The druggist aroused the driver with a shake that almost overturned the vehicle. "You know where that water-tank of the Sunflower road is?"

"I do," gasped the startled individual, "but——"

"How far is it?"

"A little more'n a mile."

Radford groaned again. This particular horse seemed to be of the stamp that would drop dead in less than that distance."

"Can you get us there within seven minutes?"

"Hey? Seven——"

"Yes, seven minutes! Eight at the very outside!"

"Well, now looka here——" the driver began, in leisurely fashion.

And then something happened.

With a leap, Radford was beside him and had the reins and the whip. His grip and everything else was forgotten. Sherwood, taking the cue, leaped into the back seat.

"You tell me the way," the druggist said briefly. "I'll do the driving!"

The whip came down on the poor old nag, and the beast started with an amazed bound.

In a general way, Radford knew where the tracks were. He headed for them, shouting vigorously at such misguided individuals as chose to wander in the path of the superannuated cyclone he was guiding.

"Say, mister!" the proprietor of the rig shouted dazedly. "You'll——"

"I don't care if the whole blamed outfit goes to pieces, so long as we get there! I'll pay for it!" the druggist shouted. "Which way now?"

"Straight ahead!" came faintly from his side.

Sherwood chuckled. The surrey pounded along, the old horse warming to the work. With such an equipment it was bound to be a race against time, and Radford was well aware of the fact.

Still, there seemed to be a good enough chance. If the rattling carriage would hold together for ten minutes they could make the train and be at the Central depot before Catterson! That was all that Radford asked.

The outskirts of Blackfield flashed past them. They were on a country road now, and Radford turned again to the ex-driver.

"Straight ahead still?" he shouted.

"Yep, but for Heaven's sake be careful, mister; that left fore wheel——"

Radford did not hear him. The whip fell again, and harder than ever. The dumfounded relic of a horse literally leaped into the air and came down with renewed energy.

Isolated houses passed speedily. Telegraph-poles flashed by. Behind them there was a cloud of dust, extending, it almost seemed, for miles.

Ahead—Radford let out a shout. Just steaming to a standstill, a long train was drawing up at the water-tank!

"Get ap! Get ap, drat you!" he shrieked wildly.

The whip came down again. There must have been miscalculation somewhere! Even making all allowances, they should have made the tank before the special! Now, as it seemed, they would be tried to their utmost to make the train at all before she left the tank.

"Go on! Go on!" Radford screamed.

The horse went on with a terrific bound, and—crash!

Radford tumbled headlong to the dust and rolled to a standstill! The left fore wheel was off!

Like a rubber ball he was on his feet again, gasping. Sherwood loomed up suddenly in the dust beside him, choking and jamming his hat back into place. The driver of the rig was struggling to his feet, several yards away.

They neglected that driver and his possessions, did Radford and Sherwood. As a factor in the present problem they eliminated him altogether.

With common impulse, they turned their faces toward the tank and sped away as if the outfit had never existed.

A hundred yards distant, they saw the hose uncoupled from the water-tank. They shouted wildly and rushed along, waving their arms frantically.

Fifty yards, and a puff came from the engine. The pair bent low and took to running in a direction slightly ahead of the special.

Ten yards, and the train was in motion, although slowly.

Five, and she was gathering speed. At the door of the rear Pullman a conductor stood, amazed, excited, and waving them to make no attempt at a leap.

They recked as little of the conductor as they had of the driver and his rig.

One last terrific bound, a clutch of strong arms from above, and fugitive and sheriff were sprawling on the platform of the car!

And, barring accidents, they would reach Fairview Junction ahead of Mr. Catterson, of Chicago!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TWO BEHIND AND THE ONE AHEAD.

THE little smoking-compartment of the Pullman was, fortunately, altogether deserted.

Passengers were not many at that time of year, and Radford and Sherwood thanked their stars for it.

They paid for their tickets to Fairview, and for their chairs. They parried curious questions as best they might. Finally they settled down in the compartment at the end of the car, and a tip from Radford served to keep the curtain down before the door.

The druggist heaved a rather tired sigh. He was becoming, in a fashion, more or less used to his new position, but his head still ached from last night's terrific blow. However, he had secured the cooperation of Sherwood, if only for a limited period, and he was *en route* to head off Catterson. That was much, and he experienced a feeling of sincere thankfulness.

He smiled at the sheriff.

"Well, we're on the way, after all!"

"Looks like it," Sherwood assented dryly. "Wonder what the old chap thought when we left?"

"I'll square that part with him when we get back," Radford replied. "I'll soothe his feelings with cash. The great thing is that we're going to get ahead of Catterson!"

"And what are you going to do when we come face to face with him?"

"I don't know," Radford answered frankly. "I've been leaving that until the spur of the moment."

"You'd better get some plan into shape."

"Why?"

"Because the last time you tried this 'spur of the moment' business it came pretty near landing you in the hospital."

"That's true, but——"

"You'd better make up your mind, Bert," the sheriff said earnestly.

Radford closed his eyes for a little. When he opened them it was with rather a grim smile.

"Sherwood!"

"Eh?"

"I guess there's only one plan."

"And what's that?"

"When we come face to face with Catterson I'll request him to return and confess or——"

"Or?"

"Or I'll blow his infernal head off his shoulders."

"Good, sensible plan!" the sheriff commented acidly.

"It's the only one," the druggist replied. "Are you carrying a gun?"

"Sure thing!" grinned Sherwood. "I was going after a desperate criminal, you know, Bert."

"What's the caliber?"

"Thirty-eight."

"Lend me five cartridges, then."

"Eh?"

"Give me five of your cartridges. You've got more than what are in the gun, and you know it."

"What for? Goin' to shoot me up and escape?" Sherwood laughed.

"Hardly; but my gun is empty. It seems they emptied it at Dunn's, last night, after the fracas."

"Um-m."

"And I can't very well hold up this Catterson with an empty pistol, you know."

The sheriff did not reply. The train rolled on, gathering speed with every second. Radford waited for two or three minutes before——

"Where are the cartridges, Sherwood?"

"In my pocket, and that's just where they're going to stay, sonny."

"You won't give them to me?"

The sheriff looked hard at him.

"Bert, am I, a middle-aged and hard-headed man, and an officer of the law in addition, to furnish you with the means to do a murder you'd never commit, anyway?"

"I tell you——"

"You needn't, Bert. You'll never have money enough in this world to buy cartridges from me for such a fool scheme as that."

"And when we meet Catterson?"

"You'll have to take him with an empty gun, or—or some other way, my boy. I'll try hard to think of something between now and then, but—you don't get them cartridges!"

The druggist sat back, frowning. The sheriff regarded him with a rather whimsical smile, for a little, and waited for the frown to disappear.

It showed no intention of doing do, and after a mile or two Sherwood took to staring at the bare prairie country behind.

For a matter of minutes something seemed to absorb his attention altogether. Radford hardly noticed it at first.

Later, when some three or four miles lay between them and the water-tank, he began to watch Sherwood. The sheriff seemed wholly taken with the vista behind. He craned his neck and pressed his face against the glass.

Finally, when Radford's curiosity was wholly roused, he opened the window and leaned far out, regardless of danger.

He closed the window, finally, and settled back with:

"Thunder and Mars! I never thought they'd try it, Bert!"

"They? Who? Try what?"

"A race!"

"But——"

The sheriff smiled queerly for a second or two. Leaning forward, he placed a hand on the druggist's knee.

"Bert, when you acquired that nag and the carriage and started off in that highway fashion——"

"Yes?"

"You didn't look behind?"

"Hardly. I had all I could do to look ahead and keep from running down people and things."

"Just so; but—I didn't mention it because I didn't want to rattle you and smash the whole outfit—but I have a very strong notion that we were being chased even then!"

"Chased!"

"Yes. Just as we whirled out of sight at the depot a sort of thick-set little ottermobile came up and took our place beside the platform. There were two men in it."

"Know them?"

"Not personally, as you might say, but I do know the machine, and I'd swear every cent I have on earth that it was Ferns's car!"

"The prosecuting attorney's!"

"His and nobody else's. And having got that far, it isn't hard to reason out that they were two of those detectives he's employing—and after you, too!"

"But how could they——"

"They were talking to that darky, I saw, and we were out of the way. Most likely they had money, too, Bert. I guess that six dollars of yours was pretty near wasted."

Radford thought hard for a little.

"Well, I'm inclined to think it wasn't!" he said, after a little. "Even if they are after us, they can't keep up with this—at least, they can't for the fifty miles to Fairview Junction. We're running about sixty miles an hour right now, I imagine."

"Easy that, but they're hanging on like grim death, boy."

"All right; let them hang on, Sherwood. They're bound to arrive after us. If they turn up before I accomplish what I want——"

He stopped short.

"Well?"

"Well, they'll have to turn up, then. I don't believe that they will, anyway, Sherwood."

He leaned back again, and the sheriff was silent. Glancing occasionally out of the window, he himself finally settled down again with a grunt and a grin.

At least from appearances, the pursuit had been distanced for the time. The automobile hardly existed that could cover rough country at the same rate as the Sunflower Special at the fastest point of its run to the Junction.

"Have you changed your mind about those cartridges?" Radford inquired, after a time.

"Not a bit, son."

There was indomitable determination in that tone. Radford sighed a little and looked at the sheriff.

"Will you arrest the man, then?"

"It's outside my county now, Bert, and I haven't a warrant, anyway."

"But couldn't you take him as a suspicious person, Sherwood—a witness for the trial, perhaps?"

The sheriff scratched his gray head. The odd squint in his eyes seemed to indicate that he was wrestling with the problem.

"I dunno's I could, Bert. I ain't no lawyer, and I don't know much about them things. I'm only here to execute the law as it's handed out to me. I'd hardly dast t' do it."

Radford fell into a brown study.

To tell the truth, it dealt with nothing more or less than the finding of Catterson at the Junction, but it handled that proposition in many phases. He considered this means of attack and that.

He pondered an actual fist assault, were it possible to take the man by surprise, and he discarded it as impossible and absurd.

He fingered his empty weapon furtively, and glanced at Sherwood almost in anger, despite the concessions the sheriff had made. He thought carefully about——

"Bert!"

"Eh?" Radford started suddenly from his reverie.

There's the Central tracks—right over there; this here's the place where they run side by side, you know."

The druggist glanced out of the window with slight interest. Only forty or fifty yards distant, coming steadily closer to their own tracks, the four lines of shining rail denoted the path of the Central trains.

"Ah, yes," he observed. "I wonder how far ahead the other train is?"

"Not such a dickens of a way, at the rate we're traveling. We ought to pick her up while the tracks are in sight of each other, I should think."

Radford bent forward and looked out. He remained thus for a minute or two; then he turned to the sheriff with a somewhat excited smile.

"That train isn't a quarter of a mile ahead, Sherwood!"

"Y' don't say!" The sheriff surveyed the way ahead. "That's right, son. She ain't traveling to touch this affair, either. No wonder the Sunflower's carrying the mails!"

Side by side, sheriff and captive looked out of the window, watching the other train from their own hurrying car.

Slowly but surely, they were taking up the difference. In a very little time, now, they would have passed the train and—Catterson.

The thought made the druggist's heart beat more rapidly for a little.

"What wouldn't I give to be over there for a while!" he muttered.

"Guess I wouldn't risk it," Sherwood chuckled.

"Or even to see the man in the car and pick him off with a gun!" the druggist pursued savagely.

"Bosh!"

"It isn't——"

Radford bit off his words and took to watching the train again. Now they were almost abreast, running neck and neck. Radford glared at the other line of cars—and suddenly popped back out of sight."

"Sherwood!"

"Hey?"

"On that rear platform! See!"

"What?" The sheriff glanced curiously at him for a moment and looked back to the rear Pullman of the other train. "What's up?"

"The big man—he's got a gray suit on—see him standing on the observation platform at the end and looking over here, Sherwood?"

"Yes, but——"

"That's Catterson!"

The sheriff caught his breath.

"You don't mean it!"

"I'd know him at double the distance!" Radford muttered, from the rear side of the smoking-compartment. "Suppose he saw me?"

"It ain't worrying him if he did," Sherwood replied. "He's smoking along pretty calm. No, I reckon he's just watching us—most of the other passengers are doing that."

There was silence in the cab for a minute or so. Catterson, distinct enough now, continued to smoke placidly and to stare about in his large and patronizing fashion. Radford, watching him, fascinated, fairly ground his teeth at the sleekness of the man.

Oh, to be over on that platform with a loaded gun—for just two minutes! Just to have the pleasure, the heavenly pleasure, of jamming a revolver-barrel under Catterson's nose and——

"What the dickens is that for?" Sherwood exclaimed suddenly.

"Why, we're slowing down!" Radford cried.

That's right, and—wonder if there's anything ahead—or is it a water-tank again, or——"

His voice was lost as he leaned from the window. With remarkable agility, however, the sheriff bounced back into the compartment. His face was white and his eyes staring.

"Look! Look!" he gasped. "Over there! Ahead of the Central train! Great Heaven!"

Radford hurried to the window and

peered out. He, too, caught his breath in pure horror.

For things were happening quickly now!

Just ahead of that other train, coming for her on the same track at full speed, was a heavy freight! The cause was plain enough—confused orders and a foolish attempt to make a switch even at a risk.

The risk had been taken. Now—like their own train—freight and Central engine were jamming down brakes! People were looking about in the car and wondering what was up; whistles were screeching frantically; air-brakes ground and screamed.

But the crash, at the speed both had been making, was absolutely inevitable.

"The freight engineer's jumped!" Sherwood shouted. "There goes the passenger fireman, too, and——"

"Yes, and the passenger engineer's jumped, too!" the druggist cried. "Oh—oh——"

And his words were drowned in a crash, a grinding, a hissing of steam and smashing of iron and steel and wood; that fairly split the quiet air of the deserted countryside.

(To be continued.)

An Escape From the Frying-Pan.

By HOWARD DWIGHT SMILEY.

How two miners made a quick departure to new fields and the astonishing freak of chance that kept them there.

"BILLY," says Ike, as he dropped his pack and sat down on a rock, "after much consideration and due deliberation on all points pertinent to the question at hand, I——"

"Whoa, Ike," I interrupted. "My intellectual status, such as it is, ain't gaged to receive conversation of that caliber without an interpretorial back-stop to sort out and classify it as it comes in. Ease her down to words of three syllables or less, so I can catch the drift of your ruminating."

"I was just remarking that I believe I'll arrive at the conclusion that it ain't so."

"Oh!" I says, feeling somewhat relieved. "I'd begun to think that the high altitude had gone to your head. What ain't so?"

"That there are gold deposits of any kind, shape, or nationalities in the Sierra Madres."

"Well, with an experience based on six months of unremitting and conscientious search for it, over an area of about a million flat, concave, convex, undulated, and perpendicular square miles, more or less, I am coming to believe that I am in a position to agree perfectly with you in that respect."

"In which case, suppose we turn our backs on this unappreciative and flea-bitten republic and hike back to Idaho, where a man can at least grub out a living panning and stand a middling small-sized chance of making a strike in the bargain."

"I believe I am in the position to agree to that, too. When do we start?"

"Right now," answered Ike, rising. "Which way is home?"

"Seems to me that Chinipas ought to lay off in that direction somewhere," I answered, pointing down the mountain and over some lesser hills. "Suppose we try that way?"

"Suppose we do?" answered Ike. "I wish," he continued, looking ruefully down the steep slope to the bottom a mile below, "that we had some way of sliding down that hill—some sort of a toboggan that would slip over those rocks and things. It'd save a heap of mighty hard walking."

The promptitude with which he got his wish was surprising. He hadn't any more than spoken it, when the ground trembled under my feet.

"What's that?" I gasped.

"Earthquake!" yelled Ike. "Look out! Get somewhere!"

Where he expected me to get to was more than I knew, but I wouldn't have had time to do it even if he had told me, for just then the ground gave another heave and the whole side of the mountain started down-hill.

Before I could grasp the situation something hit me, kerslap, in the back, knocking me over, and I went bounding merrily down the slope with the rest of the slide.

I should like to have stopped along the way and taken observations, but things seemed to be in altogether too much of a hurry for that. Before we had gone a hundred feet I lost all grip on everything, and didn't even have time to wonder what was coming next. Seemed like I came into personal contact with every rock, tree, and anything else that was on the way down, and what I missed hit me, so it was all in the family.

Bet I turned a solid quarter-mile of somersaults without a break, and then I shot out into space and a second later hit water with a splash that carried me clear to the bottom.

I came up close to shore, scrambled out, and looked around, to see my partner splashing just behind me.

"Why, hello, Ike!" says I. "Taking a bath?"

"Sure," he answered as he climbed out beside me. "Got a towel?"

Another big splash just in front made us back up and take notice. Rocks and dirt were pouring over a cliff about fifty feet high into the water.

It was evident that we had come over the same cliff, and that the landslide was going to the right of it. If we had been straight ahead of that slide we'd have been everlastingly buried.

"Well!" remarked Ike, after he had observed the situation for several minutes. "Well!"

"What're you kicking about?" I asked. "You got what you were wishing for, didn't you?"

"Guess I did. Where are we, anyway?"

"Looks like a butt-end cañon," I answered, taking a squint around.

We were in a little narrow place, not more than a hundred feet wide, and half of it taken up by the river into which we had fallen. It was flanked on either side by smooth, perfectly perpendicular walls about fifty feet high, and about one hundred yards to the south the cañon ended in another sheer wall. The river flowed from a low, wide cavern at the foot of this.

Looking down the stream, I saw my pack drifting along close to the shore, and hustled over to rescue it. As I dragged it out a thought struck me that caused forty below zero to shoot up my spine.

"Ike," says I solemnly, "do you know that it is a wonder we are here?"

"I hadn't given it much thought, so far," he answered. "But now that you mention it, I believe it is. When two men undertake to coast down a high mountain of a full-grown landslide and come out of it with whole hides it's time for the world in general to open up its mouth wide and gasp."

"It ain't that, Ike. We've proved to our entire satisfaction that we can mix in with the forces of nature and come out on top. But when we come to commingle with the forces created by man himself it's a different matter. Ike, do you know that there are two full-grown sticks of dynamite in that pack?"

Then it was Ike's turn to shrink up.

"Bill," said he thoughtfully, "there's just one time when a man wants to fool with Providence, and that's when he can't help it. She's certainly been good to us this trip. If that dynamite had ever gone off—— Well, the results are too painful to contemplate. Let's get out of here."

"Sure," I answered, "if you know how."

"Well, there's just one way to go, and that's north. We'll perambulate in that direction and see what turns up."

We followed the river for about a quarter of a mile, to a bend in the cañon, and just around this we came suddenly upon a log shack. We both stopped and stared at it for several minutes.

"Looks like it might be deserted," remarked Ike.

"Guess it is," I answered. "Let's investigate."

We walked up and tried the door, which was not fastened, and entered.

The shack was a two-room affair, furnished with chairs, table, and a big bunk

with blankets on it. In the other room we found a stove and cooking utensils. Everything was covered with dust and rust, and it was evident that it hadn't been occupied for years.

"Now, what on earth is this shanty doing here?" demanded Ike.

"'Tis kind of curious," I answered. "Looks like a homesteader's outfit; but who'd be homesteading in such a country as this?"

"I'm sure I don't know," rejoined Ike. "Let's look around and see what's here," and he began rummaging about the living-room.

I went into the kitchen and discovered a big copper-lined chest. Opening this, I uncovered a sack of flour, several sides of bacon wrapped in oiled paper, and a lot of canned goods.

While I was sorting them over I heard Ike swear.

"Come here, Bill," he yelled.

I hustled into the other room, and found him bending over an iron bucket in one corner.

"Do I gaze aright," he demanded, "or am I dreaming?"

I stooped over and looked into the pail; it was full to the brim with chunks of quartz, and the gold was sticking out of them so thick it made my head swim. I straightened up and stared at Ike.

"Now, what do you think of that?" I asked.

"Think!" he answered. "Why, man, we've struck it! There's a mine in this vicinity somewheres, and if these are specimens of the ore they have taken out of it, and we can find the place, we've struck a regular Pegleg!"

Then we were two glad, happy men. We put our arms around each other and waltzed up and down the shack to the tune of "High-lee, high-lo," whistled by Ike. We congratulated each other for fifteen minutes straight without taking a breath, after which we proceeded to make ourselves at home.

While Ike was getting dinner I opened up the pack and got the things out where they would dry. The dynamite I shoved under the bed, for safe-keeping.

After dinner we took a look around the place.

About fifty yards down the stream we found a huge heap of tailings and an old sluice-box, but we couldn't discover anything that looked like a shaft, tunnel, or excavation anywhere. We hunted up and down the cañon until nearly dark, and then gave it up for the day.

I was down at the river getting a pail of water that night, when the strident tones of a man's voice in deep profanity and the sound of things being thrown reached my ears.

"What's the matter, Ike?" I hollered.

"Rat!" he yelled back. "Rat as big as a jack-rabbit. Tried to carry off a whole side of bacon."

I came in as he was picking up the frying-pan and other things he had heaved at his ratship.

"Where'd he go?" I asked.

"Blamed if I know. He got away somewhere."

Next morning we were on a still-hunt for the mine again. We followed down the cañon for three miles, and explored every inch of it, but found nothing that resembled a mine of any sort.

When we returned to the shack at sundown we found that the rat had finished off half a batch of cold biscuits we had made that morning. Ike caught sight of the varmint, and chased it out of the door and around the side of the shack, where it disappeared.

That rat made things interesting for Ike all through our stay in the cañon.

Well, the days rolled into weeks, and the weeks into months, and we searched and searched for that mine. We covered every inch of ground from one end of the cañon to the other; we examined the walls, and climbed to the top of them to explore the surrounding country. We panned the river, and didn't uncover enough color to plate a pin-head; as a matter of fact, we turned that cañon upside down in our efforts to locate the place those quartz nuggets came from, and in the end we were right where we had started.

"The only way I can figure it out," says Ike one night, "is that those blame prospectors just naturally rolled that mine up, shaft, drifts, timbers, and all, and carted it off with them when they left. If they'd left it we'd certainly have uncovered it before now."

We sized up the grub pile one day, and found that there wasn't any more

than enough to see us out of the hills. We had to admit to ourselves that we were beat, and that the only thing left to do was to give it up and hike for home.

It almost broke our hearts to do it, because we both knew that that mine was around there somewhere; the tailings, the sluice-box, and the shack bore evidence to that.

The morning we were to start Ike was inside, baking the last of the flour into biscuits to carry with us, and I was sitting just outside the door, trying to see how really downright sad and melancholy I could be when I took a notion that way.

Pretty soon I heard the merry tinkle of the frying-pan across the floor, and knew that Ike was communing with the rat again. While I was trying to work up a smile over the incident the varmint came skipping out of the door and made for the west wall of the cañon, about ten yards away.

I grabbed up a rock and let drive with all my might, and caught him right smack in the back with it just as he reached the foot of the wall.

"Bang!"

The next thing I knew I was lying by the riverside, with Ike pouring water into my features and begging me to come back again.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Something blew up," he answered.

I got on to my feet and took an inventory. I was pretty thoroughly shook up, and my face and hands were full of little cuts and bruises.

"What blew up?" I asked.

"Blessed if I know. I heard a report, and hustled out. It blew you clear into the river."

I looked over to where I had last seen the rat. In the face of the wall was a big hole; limping over to this, I stuck my head in, and saw at once that it was an old shaft.

"By cricky!" I yelled. "Here's our mine!"

"But how in blazes——" began Ike.

"Wait a minute," I interrupted. "It was that blessed rat."

"How——" he began again, but I had started for the shack.

Reaching under the bunk, I pulled out the dynamite; there was less than half a stick left, and the teeth-marks on the end of it told the story.

"Did the rat eat that?" demanded Ike.

"He sure did. He was jam full of it when last heard from."

"But what made him explode?"

"I hit him with a rock," I answered as I started for the hole in the wall again.

When we looked it over we understood why we hadn't found the mine before.

When the previous owners left they had walled up the mouth of the shaft with the natural rock and some sort of mortar whose color so closely resembled that of the rock that we could hardly distinguish between them, and the whole job was so cleverly done that we could barely detect it, even after we knew how it was done.

We lost no time in exploring our find, and, as we had expected, we came across a lead of quartz ore fully as rich as that we had found in the bucket, and it appeared to be well-nigh inexhaustible.

"As I have frequently remarked," says Ike that night reflectively, "the ways of Providence passeth the understanding of mortal beings. Supposing I had landed on that rat with the frying-pan just before you plugged him with the rock, where'd we be now?"

THE BRAGGART.

Out from the tomb crept vice with hideous leer;
"I am Heredity," he said, "whom all men fear.
I sleep, but die not; when fate calls I come,
And generations at my touch succumb."

A lofty shape rose sudden in his path,
It cried "You lie!" and struck at him in wrath.
Heredity, the braggart, stark and still,
Fell prostrate at the feet of mighty Will. *Ella Wheeler Wilcox.*

In the Mouth of the Gift-Horse.*

By CASPER CARSON,

Author of "On the Spur of the Moment" and "Playing Against the Colors."

The startling train of consequences that arose from the undesired loan of a musical instrument most people would give their boots to possess.

CHAPTER X.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE DIAMONDS.

DAVE'S nostrils began to twitch, and his eyes took on an ominous sparkle, at Ted Green's touch on his sleeve.

"Yes, and I have something important to say to *you*," he rejoined grimly, and, grabbing the other firmly by the arm, he started for the street.

Ted saw the fell purpose written on his face, and began to beg for mercy.

"Don't, Dave; don't!" he pleaded. "If you'll let me go I'll prove to you that old man Knipes never stole those diamonds!"

It speaks volumes for Dave Martin's love of Ellen Knipes, and for the desire he entertained to shield her from pain, that in order to attain this object he was willing to deny himself the pleasure of inflicting upon Ted Green the chastisement which the latter so richly merited.

Nevertheless, it was a struggle with him to do so, and he did not entirely release his grip upon the other's arm until he was assured, so to speak, that the goods promised could be delivered.

"Is this fact that you are handing to me," he demanded warily, "or only some new dope you have spun out of that joke you call a brain?"

"Fact. Fact, I swear to you," protested Ted. "I got it straight from McNamara to-night."

And Dave believed him; for he well knew that the lad, by his inquisitive prying about, managed to acquaint himself with a good many secrets of other people's, and that he could be trusted, in repeating them, to stick to the literal truth.

It was only when he let his fancy run riot and indulged in the hasheesh of his detective imaginings that he had to be guarded against as unreliable.

"Very well, then," said Dave, more graciously. "I had intended to lick you within an inch of your life, Ted, but if you are really giving me this on the square, and can prove that Mr. Knipes had nothing to do with the robbery, I'll agree to let you off, and even give you that jointed fishing-rod of mine you've been wanting so long."

"Oh, I'm giving it to you on the square, all right," asserted Ted eagerly. "And the surest proof that Mr. Knipes didn't take those stones is—what do you think?"

"That somebody else took them, and that the thief has either been traced down or has confessed?" suggested Dave.

"No; that the old necklace was never taken at all. The report of its loss has all been a mistake, and it has been in the store all the time!"

"What?" cried Dave incredulously. "You don't mean it?"

"Yes, I do," nodding his head sapiently. "I got it right from McNamara himself, and he was told by Charlie Hermann, who called him in and settled up with him.

"It seems," he went on to explain, "that they have some sort of checking system down there whereby every article in stock is labeled with a number, and when it is sold this number has to be scratched off a list which they keep to check up by.

"Well, in moving these goods around in the show-cases it happened in some way that two of these labels came off—numbers three hundred and twelve and six hundred and forty-two, as it happened. Very shortly afterward, number three hundred and twelve, a cheap trinket of some kind, was sold, and was duly

**This story began in the February issue of* THE ARGOSY. *The two back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 20 cents.*

marked off the list. But when the clerk came to take his goods off the counter at the end of the day he found its label lying there, and at once began to hunt around for some article without a label.

"Presently he came to the diamond necklace, and without giving very much thought to the matter, being hurried, perhaps, or maybe just merely careless, affixed the three hundred and twelve label to it. What happened to the six hundred and forty-two label, no one seems to know, but it probably slipped into a crevice somewhere or fell to the floor and was swept out or trodden into dust.

"At any rate, that is how the misunderstanding came about, and it was not until Charlie Hermann noticed, in checking up to-night, that Fred was still calling three hundred and twelve, although it was marked upon the list as sold, that he instituted an investigation, with the result that the missing necklace was brought to light."

"But I still don't see," broke in Dave, perplexedly shaking his head. "If the necklace was always in the store, and exposed on the counters every day, how could this fiction of its loss have been kept up?"

"Ah, but you don't understand," rejoined Ted. "Fred and Charlie handled the goods only at night and in the morning, when the boxes containing them were closed up, and the sole guide they had to what might be inside was the label on the case. Any clerk in their establishment could have told them that the necklace was still in the store; but they were so afraid of publicity that they didn't let on to the clerks anything about their supposed loss, and, as a consequence, worried themselves sick over nothing.

"But there still remains a feature of the case I haven't yet touched on, but which I think you ought to know," he continued, lowering his voice and assuming his favorite expression of profound mystery. "McNamara, in summing up what he had done, let out to me to-night that he had been utterly unable to trace Mr. Knipes from the time he left father's apartment. He says he is certain, from the investigations he has made, that the man never left town by any of the railroad or steamship lines, and, indeed, acknowledges frankly that he is completely puzzled—that to all appearances Knipes seems to have stepped off the earth.

"Now, that may satisfy McNamara," Ted went on. "I don't think very much of him as a detective, anyhow. But I am not so easily knocked out, and I have formulated a theory which I think will fully account for——"

At the word "theory," however, Dave started back and raised a protesting hand.

"Don't, Ted," he admonished significantly. "I have given you my promise, and I have restrained myself nobly so far, but if you start to spring any more of those 'pills' of yours on me I shall refuse to be accountable for what may happen."

"Oh, very well," returned the other, drawing himself up with an offended air. "I only thought you might be interested in what had become of Knipes. You seem to have been such a champion of the family throughout this entire affair."

"Never you fret your head about Mr. Knipes," advised Dave. "He will turn up all right in due time, and will no doubt furnish a very good reason for having been away. The only possible danger that could happen to him," with a laugh, "is for you to go spinning some of your fool theories in regard to him. That is pretty near enough to hoodoo almost anybody.

"And now," he broke off, with a tremendous yawn, "I am going to bed. I feel as if I could sleep a straight month without ever waking up."

Ted watched him with an obstinate expression on his face as he strode away to slip his arm in Hal's and draw the latter toward the elevator.

"All the same," muttered the amateur detective, "I am going to keep pounding away at that theory of mine. I don't care what Dave Martin thinks. I believe there is a good deal more in Knipes's absence than appears on the surface."

CHAPTER XI.

TED'S LATEST THEORY.

THE next morning—to adopt an Hibernianism, for the hands of the clock pointed to half past three in the after-

noon—when the boys awoke, Dave found a letter awaiting him from Mr. Green. It contained a forty-dollar check, and so many expressions of gratitude that Dave's heart smote him for the scurvy trick he had played upon his old friend.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he announced to Hal after thinking the matter over; "I'll send him up the piano-player I bought yesterday, instead, and tell him that the first, having been forwarded to him through a mistake, should be shipped back to me."

But when he came to carry out this excellent plan Mr. Green declined to acquiesce. He wrote back, stating that he had purchased Mrs. Knipes's piano-player "as it stood," and that since it was Mrs. Knipes's instrument which had come, and, moreover, since it had undeniably come "as it stood," he was content to abide by his bargain.

The second player, he added, he had no use for, and had not ordered, so he was consequently shipping it back at the sender's expense.

"The old boy is evidently a bit sore," commented Dave as he read this epistle aloud, "and I'm sorry, too, for he's been a mighty good friend to me, and I wouldn't offend him for the world. He'll get over it, though," he consoled himself optimistically, "by the time he gets back to town, and I'll make it up to him in some other way."

"I'll bet he gets even with you in some fashion, though," laughed Hal. "Pleased or offended, he will pay you back at some time in your own coin, and that, too, with interest. He makes it a point never to let a score of that kind go unsettled, and I have known him to wait months for a chance to even up."

"All right"—confidently—"let him settle this score if he can. He may wait months, but I think it will be a cold day in the summer-time before he catches me off guard. I flatter myself that I am foxy enough to side-step any traps which even Mr. Green may set for me."

And with that he dismissed the subject from his mind and went off to look after more important affairs, for Dave Martin was a busy man these days, and found his time pretty fully occupied. In short, he was about to get married.

There had been no adequate reason for a lengthy engagement in the case of Dave and Ellen. They had known each other for a long time, and no possible objection could be urged to the union, so both the girl and her mother had yielded to the young fellow's eager entreaties, and had consented to an almost immediate wedding.

The only thing that now delayed the final preparations was the continued absence of Mr. Knipes. He still remained away, and what is more, not a word or line had been received from him since the night he left.

Finally, even Mrs. Knipes, accustomed as she was to his erratic methods, and by temperament not given to undue worrying, began to feel anxious, and Dave, who saw day by day go by with his wedding still a matter of the undetermined future, grew absolutely frantic.

Only one thing restrained him from calling in detectives and undertaking a systematic search for his prospective father-in-law—the fear that Knipes might resent what he would likely term an invasion of his privacy and revenge himself for it by refusing his consent to the marriage. And Ellen had plainly told him that, much as she loved him, she would never marry him without the sanction of both her parents.

Finally, however, the matter became too serious to admit of further trifling. Mr. Knipes had now been absent for nearly a month, with no clue to his whereabouts, and it seemed almost certain that accident or illness of some kind must have overtaken him.

Consequently, Dave and the anxious wife started, at length, what under ordinary circumstances would have been begun long before—an investigation into the facts of his disappearance.

But although a substantial reward was offered, the result was undeniable failure. The detectives claimed that the reason they met with such poor success was because they had been called in too late; but whether that was so or not, they certainly did not locate their man.

In fact, they all agreed, as McNamara had put it to Ted Green, that from the moment Mr. Knipes had left Ezra Green's apartment he seemed to have veritably "stepped off the earth."

It was the repetition of this phrase that called up to Dave the memory that Ted had long since offered him a problematic solution of the mystery, and that induced him, rendered desperate now by successive disappointments, to consult the amateur Lecoq in the hope that for once he might offer something feasible.

"Yes, I remember very well speaking of my theory to you," answered Ted maliciously when the matter was broached to him, "and I also remember that you promised to lick me within an inch of my life if I ever dared mention one of my theories in your hearing again. So, I guess, for my own safety, I'd better not tell you what I have figured out in this instance."

He loved too well, however, the airing of his views to adhere long to such a policy of silence—indeed, it had been the severest trial of his life to keep his mouth closed for the period he had—so, when Dave had sufficiently eaten of humble pie young Green consented to lay aside his dignity and disclose the weighty conclusions he had reached.

"My starting-point, the first hint I had of what might have happened in this case," he began, "was when I learned of what had happened to Hal in being run in as a suspect. That remark of McNamara's about Knipes's having apparently stepped off the earth from the moment he left father's room recurred to me, and I questioned to myself why something of the same sort might not have happened to him?

"I began to run over in my mind the various prisons and institutions of the city in which a man might be illegally or unjustly detained, and while enumerating them, suddenly thought of the morgue.

"You see," breaking in upon himself, "how, to the trained mind, one idea suggests another?"

"But the morgue is not a place where one can be illegally or unjustly detained," objected Dave; "that is, unless one happens to be so unfortunate as to fall into a trance."

"True," admitted Ted; "but you fail to follow my drift. I said I was enumerating the city institutions to myself, and happened to think of the morgue. Now, what does the morgue suggest?"

"Oh, I don't know"—impatiently. "A number of unpleasant things."

"It suggests suicide"—with crushing emphasis. "Inevitably, and before anything else, suicide. With that clue to work on, the whole case was instantly as plain to me as day."

"Well, I don't see just how," commented Dave. "It doesn't seem to me that you have advanced a single step."

"Why, can't you understand? The motive that would prompt a man to self-destruction is so apparent that one cannot possibly evade it.

"Here was Knipes, an old and trusted employee, to whom the confidence and respect of his employers was more than anything else on earth. He discovered, no doubt, when he was assisting in checking up the jewelry the evening before he left, that number six hundred and forty-two was missing, and knowing unquestionably, from his long handling of them, the contents of each of those boxes, he realized instantly how serious was the loss.

"Dazed and bewildered for the moment, apprehensive lest the necklace's disappearance might be charged to him, he called the number, although the package was not there.

"Later on, when he came to comprehend what he had done, and that by his action he had certainly fastened the robbery upon himself, he became desperate. He could not stay at home to face the eyes of his wife and daughter, but, restless and uneasy, left the house, and came over to spend the evening with my father.

"While there he thrashed over the entire matter in his mind, and, unable to endure the prospect of disgrace, decided that the only way out of his difficulty was to take his own life.

"He left a misleading message for his wife, wrote an equally misleading note to his firm, and then slunk off quietly to some cheap hotel on the East Side, where, unknown and unrecognized, he could accomplish his purpose and be buried in a pauper's grave without any of his friends or relatives being any the wiser.

"That, at least," concluded Ted, "is the sort of theory I have formulated upon the rather insufficient data that I was able to gather."

For some moments, while the other talked, Dave had been pacing thoughtfully up and down the room. Now he turned to him with the question: "And how would you go about it to prove or disprove this theory of yours?"

"Well, I should very carefully examine the records of the morgue, and failing to locate my man there, would turn to the various hospitals, for we must remember that he may have been prevented from a consummation of his purpose."

But Dave would listen to no more.

"It's nonsense—sheer nonsense," he cried. "These theories of yours always sound plausible enough, Ted, but they never hold water. They never have, and they never will!"

"Is that so?" cried the other, springing to his feet. It was his hour of triumph. "Well, let me tell you that here is one that has held water. The whole experience of Joseph Knipes has been exactly that which I have described to you. And the proof of it is that I found him myself to-day, under an assumed name, in Bellevue Hospital!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE GIFT-HORSE'S TEETH.

FOR once, Ted Green was justified. There was no gainsaying the fact that he had succeeded, alone and single-handed, where the brightest detective minds of the city, with every resource at their command, had been obliged to admit defeat.

But an even more remarkable thing, to those who knew him, was that he consented to forego the fruits of his victory and modestly keep silence as to what he had accomplished.

In fact, none except a limited circle ever knew of the despairing act which Joseph Knipes had attempted when he believed that his reputation for honesty and trustworthiness had been irretrievably shattered, and that he would have to face an accusation of robbing the store in which he had worked so long.

Conducted by Ted, Dave proceeded at once to his bedside. He found him pitifully haggard and worn, for, unable to learn anything through the newspapers of what Hermann's Sons suspected or were doing in regard to the loss of their necklace, the man was literally worrying himself to death, apprehensive lest every person who entered his ward should be a police officer coming to arrest him.

Relieved of this haunting fear, and with a mind at ease, he rapidly grew better, and within a few days Dave succeeded, by satisfying the legal requirements of the situation, in having him released from the hospital and removed to his own home.

At Bellevue there was no suspicion of his real identity, although several of the detectives employed by Dave had searched the records there in an effort to find him; and as only two or three persons outside knew the real facts in the case, his disappearance was generally set down among his acquaintances as only another evidence of his erratic disposition.

Dave even concealed the truth from Mrs. Knipes and Ellen, for he did not think it would do them any good to learn it; and consequently, he and Mr. Knipes concocted a harmless fiction that, while not fully accounting for all the features of his absence, satisfied their simple and unsuspecting minds.

With the return of the wanderer, however, especially as he also cordially indorsed his daughter's choice of a husband, there was no further excuse for any postponement of the marriage, and the event was duly celebrated with all the festivity and rejoicing that could possibly attach to such an occasion.

There was only one circumstance that could dampen Dave's happiness at this time, and that was the fact that his old and valued friend, Mr. Ezra Green, still remained out of humor with him, unforgiving over the practical joke which he had played in shipping the piano-player "as it stood."

He must be very angry indeed, Dave decided, for he was not present at the ceremony, although Ted, who was there, stated that his father was not ill and was actually in the city, having come down from the country that day upon a matter of business.

Moreover, he sent no present, nor even a word of congratulation, despite the fact that he was most punctilious about

such matters and always made it a point to remember handsomely any of Ted's associates when they took upon themselves the fetters of matrimony.

"The old boy is certainly mad," observed Dave ruefully when Ellen commented with some wonderment on Mr. Green's remissness. "I never knew him to hold spite before, but he evidently has it in for me three ways for Sunday."

"And why has he got it in for you?" questioned Ellen curiously. "What did you ever do to him?"

But Dave evaded an answer. There are some things that one doesn't tell even to one's wife; and in Dave's case one of them was that all of his friends, with himself half-way included, had at one time suspected her mother of being a diamond thief.

Consequently, he discouraged any further discussion of Mr. Green's strange behavior, and in the excitement and absorption of their honeymoon trip both he and Ellen practically forgot that any such person existed.

On their return, however, and when they were duly established and settled down to housekeeping in their own apartment, there arrived one day the kindest and nicest letter from Mr. Green that could well be imagined.

It was filled with all sorts of good wishes, and concluded by stating that he was sending them a more substantial token of his regard; which he hoped would meet with their appreciation, and which might prove suitable for the decoration of their home.

"Well, the old boy has come around, all right, after all," observed Dave, with a smile of gratification. "I wonder what he has sent us? I'll bet it turns out to be something pretty nifty, though, for he evidently wants to show that he has got all over his hard feeling."

And when he returned home to dinner that night he was met by Ellen in a flutter of excitement to inform him that Mr. Green's present was there in a huge box, so large that it had to be left standing in the hall. Running to get him a hatchet, she insisted that he open it at once, for she declared she was so curious to see what it was that she simply could not wait.

Now, Dave, if he had had his usual keen perception about him, ought to have known what was coming; but either marriage had dulled his wits or else he had been wooed into forgetfulness by the honeyed phrases of Mr. Green's epistle, for Ellen herself was not more unsuspicious than he.

It was only when he had pried off the cover and had cast one glance at the interior that he realized how beautifully the tables had been turned upon him, and that the piano-player "as it stood" was once more in his possession.

Atop of that wreck of wires and screws and bolts, as though to mock him, lay Mr. Green's card, bearing the penciled legend: "A present selected by Mr. David Martin to be given to two young people contemplating matrimony."

"What does it all mean, Dave?" cried Ellen, her face a mixture of disappointment and bewilderment, hardly knowing whether to laugh or to cry; and then, of course, there was nothing for it except to tell her the entire story—all, that is, except the parts relating to her father which had verged so closely upon the tragic.

She took it all most good-humoredly, though, and laughed peal upon peal, when after describing the harassments into which that piano-player had led him Dave turned revengefully toward the machine and declared that it should find no abiding place in his house.

"It's a hoodoo," he asserted emphatically, "and I tell you flatly I won't have it around. I don't care what becomes of it, but it shall not stay here. Or, I know"—struck by a sudden thought—"your mother was always awfully fond of it. Let's have it fixed up and give it to her for a birthday present?"

But Ellen had to negative even this proposition. "Nothing would please mama better; but," with a dubious shake of her head, "she would have to give up her home to take it. That old Mrs. Black who owns the house would dispossess any of her tenants in a minute if she found a piano-player in their apartments. She is a perfect crank on the subject."

"But," cried Dave, "your mother certainly had this one there."

"Ah," and again Ellen giggled, "but

that was while Mrs. Black was in Europe. Then we heard Mrs. Black had unexpectedly returned home, and it was mama's frantic efforts to get rid of the machine that aroused all those suspicions of which you have just been telling me.

"Mrs. Black remained home one day, and announced that she was going to California; and mama, believing that the coast was once more clear, prepared to take her player back. She would never have consented to sell it to you at any price if I had not rushed in just as she was about to refuse and notified her that Mrs. Black had again changed her mind.

"Now, the old elephant is here as a fixture, though, so it would be no use to try to unload your hoodoo on mama. You will have to scheme out some other plan to get rid of it, my dear."

While Ellen was talking she had been prospecting a bit in the box, and now, with a little cry of surprise, she leaned over and drew out a paper tucked safely down at one side.

As she unfolded it, out rolled two handsome diamond rings, one ticketed "For Ellen," and the other, "For Dave," and on the paper which had enclosed them was written:

> You did not find any diamonds on your first search, but they must have been there, after all, for here they are. You see, it sometimes pays to look a gift-horse pretty closely in the mouth.

"That's what it does," assented Dave, with sudden recollection. "For it was in this same gift-horse that I found something a good deal more valuable than diamonds—a scrap of your writing, Ellen, which let me know that you loved me, and gave me the courage to go in and win you.

"I don't know, after all," reflectively, "that this piano-player has been so much of a hoodoo to me as it has proved a blessing. Why, if it had not been for this machine and Ted Green's fool theories, I might not have hoisted up my nerve to the point of asking you to marry me even yet."

"Bless Ted Green's theories, then," Ellen murmured, drawing down his head to kiss his brow. "And as to the piano-player, there is no question as to what shall be done with it. It shall be repaired and become our chief and most cherished possession. Hoodoo, indeed! Why, Dave Martin, it's our mascot!"

THE END.

THE FATES AGAINST ME.

By FRED V. GREENE, JR.

The strenuous night that befell a man bent on passing a quiet week-end with friends in the country.

CAN you imagine anything funnier to the other passengers or more embarrassing to me? I certainly was never in a more ridiculous position in my life—in my stocking-feet, running down the aisle of a well-filled railroad-car, my shoes in my hand.

Tom Bennett and I were old friends—we had lived together in bachelor quarters for four years. And many a good time we had.

Then Tom met Elizabeth Laire. Isn't it strange the changes a woman can make in a man?

Tom was always a happy-go-lucky, live-from-day-to-day sort of fellow—a true bohemian. He was a literary man—wrote stories for different magazines, when the spirit moved him.

But after he met Elizabeth—well, things absolutely changed around. And work—why, Tom was busy all the time. And he seemed to do better work than ever.

He used to say he was working for her. If he was, she proved a splendid incentive.

They decided that when they married

they would live in the country. Elizabeth just knew that Tom could write better there than in the city, away from the noise and bustle and turmoil.

So they picked out *real* country—a little isolated spot in the Litchfield Hills—a town too small even to be given a place on the map.

They had been married just two weeks, and were barely settled, when I decided to spend a week-end with them, as Tom had begged me to do when I could arrange it.

Accordingly, I despatched the following telegram:

> Will be in Colebrook Friday, seven-twenty-three P.M. If not O. K., wire.

When no reply came, I started for Colebrook on the four-thirty train, looking forward to a most enjoyable Sunday.

I happened to have on a new pair of shoes, and after we had got under way they began to pinch my feet unmercifully. Then came my foolish move.

As I had the whole seat to myself, I slipped them off. What a relief it was!

I settled back, took out the afternoon papers, glanced over them for a while, and before I realized it, grew drowsy.

An especially hard day at the office was beginning to tell on me. I roused up, and tried to shake off the feeling of sleepiness. But it was there, I could not seem to conquer it, and finally I fell off in a doze.

The next thing I realized was the announcement of the brakeman: "The next stop for this train is Riverton."

I jumped up, and realized we were just pulling out of Colebrook station, with Riverton, the next stop, eight miles farther on.

Without thinking of the ridiculous sight I would present, I grabbed my shoes, and in my stocking-feet tore down the aisle of the car.

By this time the train had gathered speed. I was already on the steps of the car-platform. It was very risky, but I must chance it. I jumped.

I landed safely on my feet, but the momentum of the train threw me. I stumbled, fell, and rolled down an embankment.

Fortunately for me, the embankment was only about four feet high, but my resting-place was the grand climax. It was in a boggy, stagnant swamp, and when I managed to gather my scattered senses I was literally covered with a nasty, foul-smelling slime.

The embankment was pretty steep, and it is always easier to go down anything than to work up. I realized now most decidedly that I was in my stocking-feet. The cinder ballast hurt me frightfully at every step.

And my clothes—what a condition I was in. But this was really no cause for worry. I had a complete change in my bag.

Where—— Heavens! the thought just struck me—I had left that bag in the train. This seemed almost the last straw.

However, there was one consolation—Tom was just about my size and build. He could fit me out, and I could at least be presentable until I reached the city again—or until my bag was returned to me.

As I reached the top of the embankment I saw something dark at my feet. I reached down, and found my hat, which I had lost in my tumble. At least, I had one article of wearing-apparel that was in good shape.

I eagerly clapped it upon my head, and sat down on the rails to pull on my shoes, to which I still clung desperately.

They had been immersed, too, and did not go on as easily as they might have. I managed to pull on the left one after a great deal of tugging—a wet shoe sticks like glue. Then the right one—that was not so easy. You see, I found my heel had been pretty badly cut in jumping.

I was growing desperate. It was bad enough to present myself at Tom's house with clothes all torn and covered with muck, but to have to go with only one shoe on—the other in my hand—was too much.

It *had* to go on. I pulled and tugged. A slip and the foot was in, but it pained severely.

I must go to Tom's house as quickly as possible. I picked myself up and started toward the station, hobbling along as best I could.

Then a new possibility struck me. Suppose Tom was not at the station to meet me? Of course, he had come down,

but not seeing me get off the train, he might have gone back home again.

There seemed to be absolutely no town, so far as I could see. There was only one light shining, and that at some distance away.

By this time I was in front of the little station. And it was all dark. The agent had gone. And Tom was nowhere in sight.

Where did he live? This was the question that was all-important at this moment. But, from the present outlook, I had not far to walk to find Tom's home. It seemed to me as if there were not half a dozen houses in the whole town.

The station-agent would surely be able to direct me.

Perhaps he lived in the little room over the station. I knocked and banged on the door, but got no answer. Just the creepy echoes on the still night air.

I stood for a moment deliberating.

What had I better do? Of course, there was only thing left for me—to make some inquiries and find out where Tom's house was.

There were no more trains that night. I had to find Tom. Yet I did not know anything about the location of his home. It might be two or three miles out of town. And when I recalled Elizabeth's ideas regarding the beauty of the simple country life—well, it did not seem very encouraging.

But there was undoubtedly a livery-stable where I could hire a conveyance. Then there certainly must be an hotel in town. If the worst came to the worst, I could put up there for the night.

But this did not appeal to me, with my clothing in its present condition. No! I *must* find Elizabeth and Tom.

I walked around to the little platform in the rear of the station. Yes, that one light was still there, and it seemed only a block or two away. I must make some inquiries, and that was the place to start in with.

Surely, in a little town like this everybody would know of newcomers. So, I started on my way, every step intensifying the pain in my right heel.

It seemed almost like chasing a will-o'-the-wisp. I could hardly realize that I was drawing nearer the light, step by step—the distance seemed doubled and trebled by the pain each one caused.

But at last I stood before the little country store—the little country store of tradition. It was a new experience for me, but one look convinced me that the descriptions I had read were not exaggerated.

Here was a low, rambling building, a story and a half high, with a long stoop or porch across the entire front, and containing a motley collection of farming utensils, wire, and hardware.

But the inside of the store was what interested me, or as much of the inside of the store as I could see through windows that looked as if they never were washed.

A long counter was on the left as you entered, and upon the end of it was the regulation United States post-office, consisting of the window and the letter-boxes. This seemed to be the only new thing in the place. Even the stock itself seemed old, and was covered with dust.

In the center of the store stood a large old-fashioned round stove, connected with a lengthy piece of stovepipe, which ran along close to the ceiling and ended in a turn around the corner.

Although there was no fire in the stove—it was late in the summer—there were grouped around it, seated on boxes and antiquated chairs, four natives, evidently discussing some subject of great depth.

I hated to thrust myself upon this little assemblage of absolute strangers in my present condition, but it couldn't be helped.

I had to find Tom. And although I knew my clothes were soaked and stained, perhaps I was not in quite the disreputable state I imagined myself to be.

I stepped on the first step. It creaked and groaned, but I kept bravely on, and pushed open the door.

Not a head was turned—not an eye lifted toward me. They evidently were used to people dropping in upon their evening discussions.

"I beg your pardon," I began, and at the sound of a strange voice they all turned around slowly toward me.

"Can any of you gentlemen tell me where Mr. Bennett—Mr. Thomas E.

Bennett, lives? I am most anxious to find him."

They all looked at me in the blankest manner. One old man—I afterward learned he was the keeper of the store and also the town constable—answered in a drawly, twangy tone. "Ain't never heard that name round these parts, mister. Guess you got in the wrong town."

This speech seemed to enliven the party. It was evidently considered very witty. The spokesman continued: "Say, young man, what in tarnation—my soul and body, where hev you been and what hev you been a doin'?"

This last as I stepped up under the rays of the lamp.

"Gentlemen, my name is Edgar Livingston, from New York," I explained. "My old friend, Tom Bennett, has just moved up here to live, and I came up to spend Sunday with them. I fell asleep on the train, and did not awaken till it was pulling out of Colebrook. I jumped off, tripped, and fell, and landed in the slough of despond you have at the entrance to your little town. I want to find Tom as quickly as possible. I left my bag in the train—forgot it, like a fool—so, as he is just about my size, I can borrow from him temporarily. That's my story. Can't any of you tell me where Mr. Bennett lives?"

No one answered. No one evidently knew.

"Waal, now, Mr. City Chap, none of us knows of any Mr. Bennett what lives in this town," answered the storekeeper slowly.

"Strange—very strange," I remarked thoughtfully. Could it be possible I had made any mistake in the name of the town? Then I added, more hopefully: "But perhaps there is an hotel here, where I can put up for the night. I can find Tom better in the daytime, anyway."

"No, there ain't no hotel here," was the reply. "People ain't much on stoppin' in Colebrook overnight. 'Bout the first thing they seem to think of after they git into town is to git out agin."

"Sort of a case of the song, 'He walked right in and turned around and walked right out again,' eh?" I remarked jokingly.

"Ain't never heard of that one," Mr. Storekeeper answered. "But, speakin' about lodgin', what'll you pay?" he added quizzingly.

"Pay? Good Heavens, man, I'll pay anything you ask. Why, here——" and I reached into my inside-coat pocket for my wallet.

I fumbled around, and my knees almost gave way. The wallet was not there.

My confusion was not lost on my listeners. I knew it, and it only added to my embarrassment.

"I—I—I must have lost my pocketbook," I said at last.

It had evidently slipped out of my inside-coat pocket as I fell and rolled down the embankment into the slough.

They didn't believe me—I could read it in their faces.

"Now, look here, young man," said the storekeeper, "I want to tell you what you'd better do. You'd just better get out of town 'bout as quick as you can git. I'm the constable here, and I don't want any trouble, so you'll save yourself and me by doin' as I command."

"Why, do you mean to imply that you doubt my word?" I answered excitedly. "That you don't think I am the man I claim to be? Here—I can identify myself."

I took my cigarette-case out of my pocket.

"Here are my initials on my cigarette-case. And here they are in my hat," I added, as I took it off and showed them.

"Yaas, looks real good, I suppose you think. But you can't fool me so easy. I'm a natural-born detective," Mr. Constable remarked. "My name is Perkins—Silas Perkins—and I kin see right through a two-inch pine plank sometimes."

I was so taken back by his audacity that I hardly knew what to say. I could only gasp: "For Heaven's sake, what do you mean, Mr. Perkins?"

"Waal, since you ask it, I s'pose I must answer. It's just this—I know—I know—them ain't your initials. You're all kivered with muck except your hat. How did that happen, eh?" And he looked around to his cronies for the congratulatory smile that he knew was on their faces.

"And then, that cigaroot-box. Now,

I'm a peaceable sort of a man and don't never look for no trouble, so you take my advice, young man, and git out of town afore——"

"Si Perkins, you don't mean to say——" broke in one of the party.

"Excuse *me,* Ben, but I hev the floor and am conductin' this meetin'. As I remarked afore, you git out of town afore the man who owns that hat and cigaroot-box comes round a lookin' for you. 'Cause if he does, I've got to do my duty."

"But let me explain," I began, but Mr. Perkins interrupted.

"Now, they ain't nothin' to explain, 'cause you can't explain nothin'. And I am a man what means what he says. I said *git,* and *you git,* tarnation quick!"

I realized it was useless attempting to remonstrate, and decided to go without further parleying. *I got.*

To think that I was taken for a crook —a thief! And by such a rival of Sherlock Holmes as Silas Perkins!

What was I to do? Where was I to go? I certainly did not relish the idea of staying out in the open, with the "blue, star-dotted sky for a coverlet," as the poets say.

I walked slowly down the road. Here on my right was a large old-fashioned house. As I approached it I could see there was a light in one of the side rooms.

I would try to get some information here. It was only the forlornest hope that buoyed me up; I could at least try, though.

But I was certain they would not know where Mr. Bennett lived. I had almost convinced myself that I was in the wrong town.

The house looked awfully dark and gloomy as I stood in front of it. The thought flashed through my mind—"I wonder if they have dogs."

I had always understood that a vicious dog was a very essential member of any country household. And they might have one, or even more, here.

While a personal encounter with a dog could not render my wearing-apparel much more unsightly than it was at present, I was by no means eager for an encounter with the brutes.

I put aside my fears, pushed open the gate—I'll admit I opened and closed it very quietly—and walked boldly up the box-bordered pathway to the front porch.

There was neither knocker nor bell that I could find in the darkness, so I tapped gently with my knuckles. Heavens, what a hollow echo reverberated through the rooms of the lower floor!

But no answer—no sound of life. So I knocked again, a little stronger, and more confidently.

This time I heard footsteps approaching the door. Then they stopped, and all was quiet.

Again I knocked. A thin, squeaky voice just inside the door answered:

"Waal, who's there?"

"I am a stranger in town," I replied, "and am trying to find a Mr. Bennett, who recently moved here."

"What that you say?" again spoke the voice inside.

I repeated my former statement, and waited patiently for the reply.

"I'm a little hard of hearin', and didn't get all that. What did you say?"

Again I repeated, only this time I fairly yelled it. If any one had been anywhere within range they would certainly have put me down as a raving maniac. And my temper had risen with my voice.

If the old fossil would only open the door so I could talk to him, instead of barricading himself behind it!

"Did you say there's a stranger in town? I ain't heard of him. I ain't been down-town in a couple of weeks. Been too busy harvestin'."

I waited for nothing more. In another moment I would have been tempted to throw myself against that door and knock it from its old rusty hinges. So, before doing anything like that, I rushed down the path and out into the street again.

Here I was, just as badly off as ever. I drew out my watch to see the hour. It was five minutes to nine.

My watch had no initials on it; consequently, I did not offer to show it to Mr. Silas Perkins. He would surely have placed me under arrest had I done so, certain of the fact that I had robbed some one of it.

As I continued my walk I came to a fork in the road.

I hadn't any idea which one I had come up on. And, anyway, it didn't matter much which one I took.

Here, off to my left, there was a small light shining. That decided me. I would try once more.

I hurried along as best I could. The dust of a country road didn't bother me a bit. I knew I was covered with it. And I also knew it was sticking to my wet garments. But that was the least of my troubles.

Yes, here was a little farmhouse, built right close to the road, with a high picket fence in front.

I walked bravely through the gate, up the steps, and rapped at the door.

A female voice answered: "Is that you, Jim?"

I could hear a snuffing at the door that I knew instinctively was a dog. But as long as the door separated us I was brave.

"No," I replied, "it is not Jim. I simply wish to inquire if you can direct me to Mr. Bennett's house."

At the sound of a strange voice the dog began to growl. Now, I'm not a coward, but I had absolutely no desire to have the business end of a ferocious dog connect with my anatomy.

I didn't even wait for the woman's answer. I rushed off the stoop and through the gate, taking particular pains to see that it was latched after me.

It was a wise precaution, because I had no sooner reached the road than the door was opened slightly and the beast tore out to the fence, rushing up and down inside of it, barking loud enough to wake the entire community.

I didn't wait to try to make friends with him. I hobbled up the road as fast as my injured heel would allow me.

I hadn't the slightest idea of direction. I might be heading back into the mountains, for all I knew. And for all I cared, so far as that was concerned.

Listen! I heard a wagon approaching. Once more I would ask. I waited impatiently, and when the wagon came up to me I called out:

"I say, can you tell me where——"

"Whow, Jerry! Whoo! Now stand still! What's that you say, stranger?"

"I asked if you could direct me to Mr. Thomas E. Bennett's house," I repeated.

"You mean that fellow that just moved up from New York last week?" the driver questioned.

Heaven be praised, I thought, he *knows* them!

"Yes," I answered quickly, "that's the party. Do you really know where they live?" I added, hardly able to believe it true.

"Sure. I'm a goin' right by their house, and if you'll hop in I'll give you a lift." The fellow spoke in the most friendly tone.

This was certainly unexpected, and I stepped into the old buckboard.

A little general introductory conversation, as it were, followed.

Then I asked: "Why is it that no one in Colebrook ever heard of Bennett and you know all about him? That's something I can't understand."

"Waal, I'll tell you," he slowly drawled. "You see, Mr. Bennett didn't really move into Colebrook. He moved into Marlboro. The reason of that is just this: Marlboro has a switch at the station—used to be used by the old tannin' factory—and Colebrook ain't got any. So Mr. Bennett had to ship all his furniture and stuff to Marlboro, and I was the man what moved him over to Colebrook. So, you see, I know," he added in an important, self-satisfied way.

"Yes, I should say you should. I'm mighty glad I met you as I did. Only I *do wish* I had met you earlier in the evening."

In the darkness, fortunately, he had not noticed the condition I was in, and I was being treated as a gentleman—a treatment I had not received in Colebrook up to the time I met my guide.

"Now, you can't see the house, but there's two of 'em right together there. Old Frank Thompson lives in the one this side, and Mr. Bennett lives in the other one."

"Well, I really cannot tell you what you have done for me. And I am more than obliged," I said, and then added: "You see, I injured my heel, and couldn't have walked out here. By the way, how far are we from the railroad station?"

"Oh, not fur," he answered. "Just

a bit over a mile, I guess. Whoa, Jerry! Whoa! Now, my friend, here's where you want to go."

I looked. Yes, I could see a house. But there was no evidence of light or life.

I shook hands with the old farmer and again thanked him for the lift and help he had given me.

"Oh, that's all right, stranger. 'Tain't no more'n I'd expect anybody to do fur me," he replied.

I had crawled out of the buckboard, and was standing in the road.

Then he continued, looking up at the house.

"Looks mighty like they've gone to bed. Waal, they's a good loud bell on that front door that would wake a dead person. I must be gettin' along."

He reached over and hit the horse with the stump of a whip. "Get up, Jerry!" Then he turned around to me with: "Good night; hope I'll see you in town again soon."

"Thank you; I hope I shall see you soon, too."

I walked up the pebbly pathway to the front door and pulled the bell.

After the sound I brought forth I fully agreed with my buckboard friend. It surely would almost wake the dead. The bell was a regular fire-gong.

But it didn't awaken Tom or Elizabeth. What if they were not at home? I didn't fancy any such thoughts. I was going to get in that house. I made my mind up to that.

I tried the door and windows that opened on to the porch. All were securely fastened. But I was getting desperate. I was determined to get in.

Around the house I walked, trying every window. I came to one in the kitchen that gave just a trifle. Upon a close examination I could see that there was a stick from the top of the lower sash to the top of the window-frame.

It was not wedged in very tight, though, and ought to be easy to shake out.

I shook it, harder and harder. It made an awful racket, but I hardly noticed it. The stick was working looser and looser, and finally fell down in the room.

The window was raised, and I was in the kitchen. From there I walked on into the dining-room, and then into the library.

I had no matches, and was continually banging my shins upon the furniture. So matches were more necessary than anything else at that moment.

I found the library table—the very one Tom had bought when we started our bachelor apartment. And after going over it twice I found the matches, lighted the lamp, and looked around.

How cozy it all seemed! And how familiar so many of the pieces of furniture and bric-à-brac were. But I must see if Tom and Elizabeth could have slept through the noise that bell made.

So up-stairs I went with the lamp. I looked in all the rooms. They were not in the house.

Well, the only thing left was to sit down and wait.

But the first thing was to go up and confiscate a pair of Tom's trousers and a coat. I would ruin the chair if I sat in it with my wet, dust-covered clothes.

I found an old suit in Tom's closet—washed up, and changed my garments. I certainly felt much better—and I know I looked more presentable.

I went all over the house. I wanted to see just how comfortably they were fixed. And I must say I envied Tom his little home.

After all, it is the only way to live. This bachelor existence—where you live only for yourself—was never the intention of the Creator.

I went down-stairs and pulled a large easy chair close up to the table, intending to read.

But instead, I fell to thinking. Tom and Elizabeth ought to be awfully happy here together. And I couldn't help comparing their life with mine.

I live for myself alone. Selfish? Well, yes, it certainly does make one so. And then, hotel and club fare—how tiresome it grows. And to dine alone, day after day. Why——

A crash of broken glass, and two pistols and a shotgun were pointed at me through a broken window. Outside the window, on the porch, were three men.

"Now, you just hold up your hands, Mr. City Chap, and avoid any further trouble. 'Cause if you try to git away you're liable to git hurt."

I recognized the voice. It was that of Mr. Silas Perkins.

"Well, Mr. Perkins, I have my hands up," I answered as I followed his advice. "What do you want of me now?"

"My soul and body! did you hear that?" he exclaimed, turning around to the other two men. "Cain't he be real innercent when he wants to be?"

My temper was getting up in great shape.

"Look here, you country gawk, what do you mean, anyway? You've knocked all the glass out of that window. Step in here—I want an end to this tomfoolery."

"You keep him kivered, boys, while I go in. If he gits disperate, shoot," said Perkins as he crawled through the window.

He then covered me with his revolver, and the others crawled into the room, too.

I still held my hands aloft, and it was getting tiresome, so I spoke up angrily. "Look here, if you people think I'm armed and am dangerous, search me—search me, and find out for yourself. I can't hold this position forever."

Perkins came up to me, went all over my clothes, and not finding anything, said: "Waal, I don't see nothin' there to worry us. Guess we might as well let up on him a bit. You kin put your hands down, but don't try to put up no new game on us. And I'd advise you not to say too much, 'cause anything you say now may be used 'gainst you later."

"But in the name of all that's good and holy, what does it mean?" I demanded. "Why do you act in this way—breaking windows in people's houses and——"

"Yaas, that's too bad—too bad," replied Perkins thoughtfully, "but we couldn't help it. 'Twas the only way to git you."

"To get me," I answered heatedly. "To get me! What the devil do you want of me? Why have you followed me up here, anyway?"

"That's the point I went wrong on," Perkins replied, with a certain tinge of regret in his voice. "I didn't follow you, but I had ought to." Then, turning to the others, he added: "If it hadn't been for Frank Thompson's boy Joe he might have got away with the stuff."

"Got away?" I exclaimed excitedly. "With what stuff?"

"Waal, just to show you that you city fellows can't put up any games on us, I'll tell you how we ketched you. Why, just as soon's I laid eyes on you to-night in the store I sez, sez I, 'That feller'll bear watchin'.' But I didn't want no trouble, so let you go. 'Bout an hour later in comes Frank Thompson's boy Joe all out of breath and pretty near scared into the middle of next week.

"'My soul and body, Joe,' sez I, 'what's the matter?' He sez, sez he, soon's he could git his breath, 'I want to take—and tell you—that you better take—and go right up—to that Beldon place—next to ourn—'cause they's a burglar—in there—takin' and clearin' out the house.'

"'Waal,' sez I, 'the very feller what was in here to-night, by gum!' So, up we runs, and ketched you, red-handed, as they say."

"Well, of all the jackasses that ever walked upon this earth, you certainly are the king-pin," I remarked, in the most disgusted of tones.

"Oh! Ho! I be, be I? Waal, I'll show you you can't pull the wool over Silas Perkins's eyes. Answer me this, where'd you git that new suit of clothes, eh? They ain't yourn—you *stole* em!

"What were you walkin' all over the house with a lamp for, eh? And examinin' everything in the place, eh? And the window you broke in through. Frank Thompson seen it all, so you needn't act so innercent. We've got you, and I'm goin' to take you to the lockup, so come along."

Things certainly looked black for me. It was useless to try to explain; they would not believe me. I simply had to go.

If I only had some money I could 'phone or telegraph to New York and things would quickly be explained.

"Mr. Perkins, I'll go with you, as you suggest, or rather, I should say, as you command, but won't one of you gentlemen advance me the price of a telegram. I will give you my cigarette-case, or my watch, as security till I repay you."

"Nope. Can't do it. Some feller will come along and claim the cigaroot-box and the watch, and then I'm out. Nope. That's an end of that."

I was up against it. I had no fears regarding the ultimate end of the scrape, but for the present I had to go where and do as Mr. Perkins commanded.

"Very well, Mr. Perkins," I replied "I am yours to command. What would you have me do? Shall we stay here till morning?"

"Nope; we ought to have a lockup in the town, but we ain't got it. But we'll go down to the store, and I'll stay with you till mornin'. Then we'll take the ten-twenty train for Riverton," Perkins said, in a very positive tone. "And what jail comforts you lack in my store you'll find there," he added, with a wink to his friends.

"Very well; lead the way—I'll follow. But how about that?" I added, pointing to the broken window. "Anybody can get in who wants to, the way it is. Is it safe to leave it that way?"

"Waal, I should say so. It's only the strangers that come to this town we have to watch. Oh, that's all right. Come along, now."

So we started for the store. I had become rather hardened—my only wonder now was as to what new experience was in store for me. The fates certainly seemed against me in every way.

The walk to the store seemed as if it would never end. And every step my heel pained more and more. Surely, my first visit to Colebrook was like to leave anything but pleasant memories.

Mr. Perkins unlocked the store-door and lighted the large lamp overhead. Although it was late in the summer, the night air had grown quite chilly. But I had to make the best of it.

"You sit down there, stranger, and make yourself comfortable for the night. I'll watch over you pretty well," Perkins ordered, with a laugh.

Then, turning to the others, he added: "You might as well go on home. They's no use of your stayin' any longer. I've *got* him, and I guess I can *keep* him," with a wink.

"Yes," I remarked rather bitterly, "you've got me, all right. But don't worry. I'll not try to run away. I'm quite comfortable now, and will be real good."

With that I settled down in a chair and closed my eyes in the attempt to sleep. I was tired enough to do so, but I felt it was out of the question.

The other three men filed out of the store. Perkins sat down in a chair facing me, with drawn and cocked revolver. A most pleasant sight, to say the least.

I eventually fell off into a troubled doze. How long I slept I do not know. But I was awakened by some one shaking me.

"Come, wake up; I've got to open the store now. And I want you to come into the back room."

Then, turning to a young rustic who was looking at me in open-mouthed astonishment: "You just watch a minute, Sam, while I take down them shutters. Use this if you have to," and he handed him the revolver.

"May I get up and stretch myself, Mr. Perkins?" I requested. "I'm all cramped up, and I ache in every bone of my body."

"Yes, but do it quickly, 'cause I cain't wait very long. Customers are liable to come in any minute now."

I got up and stretched. It was daybreak—I could not help wondering where I would sleep that night.

After a good stretch I settled back in my chair to await further developments. Sam took the revolver, and Perkins went about his early duties.

I hardly dared to breathe, for I could see that Sam was so nervous he was all in a tremble. And the slightest move on my part might cause him to press the trigger.

But Perkins came back in a few moments with a chunk of cheese and some crackers.

"Here's some breakfast for you," was all he said.

And that was the first thing I had eaten since before I left New York.

I was taken in the back room, and Mr. Perkins stayed with me until about quarter to ten. There were frequent interruptions from Sam, poking his head in at the door to inquire where this or that was.

About quarter to ten Mr. Perkins remarked, as he pulled out his large silver

watch: "Waal, guess we might as well move on to the depot. I've got a pair of bracelets here which I must request you to put on with me."

Saying this, he reached over and snapped a handcuff on my left wrist and the other on his right one. I was now an out-and-out criminal.

We walked through the store. In front of it was gathered quite a crowd of villagers. The news that a terrible desperado had been captured had evidently spread through the town.

Perkins held his head high up in the air. He seemed to consider himself the hero of the day as he strutted through those assembled to see us pass.

While I—well, I had never been in such a predicament before, and I felt my position keenly. I walked along with my head down.

While I knew I was innocent, I didn't care to face these people.

We were followed by a number of the curious ones to the station, where I was an object of great curiosity.

Silas Perkins fairly reveled in the importance that was thrust upon him.

When that train pulled in it was a great relief to me. The scenes of so much unpleasantness were soon to be a thing of the past. I knew the future would take care of itself.

Three people got off the train, but I didn't even see them. I hung my head and slunk along with Perkins into the smoking-car.

Riverton is only eight miles from Colebrook. So, the run was quickly made. I was paraded through the streets to the little country jail, where I was led to a cell to await further developments.

At least, I had seen the last of Mr. Perkins. But when—when was I to get out of this place?

To me, New York—dear old New York—seemed but a happy dream of the past.

The keeper of the jail and Perkins evidently had a heart-to-heart talk, because when John Kenny—that was the jail-keeper's name—brought my dinner I tried to get him to send a telegram to New York for me.

He absolutely refused to do so; in fact, refused to talk at all, and left me to myself.

This was about the last straw. I was becoming desperate. Where was this farce to end?

But let us go back to Colebrook—and Elizabeth and Tom. Because the rest of the story I got from them.

It just happened they got off the same train at Colebrook I had boarded. The station-agent rushed up to them and said: "This is Mr. Bennett, ain't it? Well, a burgular has been in your house, and Si Perkins ketched him, and he is takin' him to Riverton jail on that train."

"Oh, Tom! He was after our wedding presents. Let's get on the train and go see him. Perhaps he'll tell us where they are," exclaimed Elizabeth excitedly.

The train had not started yet—they were unloading some baggage—so they rushed back to it.

"Just think, Tom," went on Elizabeth, "won't it be terrible if he has stolen any of our silver? I wouldn't care one bit if he took that plated cake-basket Mrs. Harvey gave us. A cake-basket is so old-fashioned, anyway. And then, only plated! I should think she would have been ashamed to send it—a woman as wealthy as she is, too!"

"Now, Elizabeth, you shouldn't speak so—really, you shouldn't," Tom said reprovingly.

"Well, anyway, it's just exactly as I feel about it. And, Tom, do you suppose he took any of our cut glass? That big punch-bowl Mr. Williams gave us is such a perfect dream he may have taken that, too."

"Well, as far as the punch-bowl is concerned," answered Tom laughingly, "I don't see as it has done me any great amount of good, so far. There hasn't been anything in it as yet—at least, there hasn't been to my knowledge."

"Oh, I feel so worried and upset I hardly know what to do or say! Oh, why did mother have to get sick Saturday and telegraph for us to come to see her? And she really only imagined she was sick, anyway. If we hadn't gone you might have caught the burglar, Tom," and her eyes just shone with pride.

"Yes, I might have caught him—and he might have caught me, too. I never really had any great desire for close communion with a real burglar."

"No, dear, and I wouldn't want you

to, if I thought you would get hurt. But you're so big and strong, I just know he'd have no chance whatever. Of course, Tom, if I thought there was any possibility of his getting the best of you—but I know there wouldn't be."

"No, Kid, you're right, there wouldn't be—not if I saw him first."

Elizabeth evidently didn't see the joke. She nestled up a little closer, murmuring, "Aren't you brave!"

Then a sudden thought struck her. "Tom," she added, "why don't you go up in the smoking-car and talk to him now? Find out just what he's taken—and all you can."

"Well, I have my reasons, dear," Tom answered. "In the first place, I know neither Mr. Perkins nor our burglar. I haven't the slightest idea what they look like. And in the second place, I don't want to embarrass the burglar before a carful of people. No, deary, I will wait and interview him through barred doors."

"Of course, Tom. Perhaps it would be better," Elizabeth answered, fully convinced that Tom was always correct in everything.

There was quite a crowd to get off at Riverton. Tom and Elizabeth were among the last to alight from the train. They hurried to the jail, positive they would find incarcerated there a terrible desperado.

A short parley with John Kenny and they were taken to the little cell the burglar occupied.

It was rather dark, and they could not see very plainly the person who was in it.

Tom put on a very serious look, and in his deepest, heaviest voice opened the conversation.

"Look here, I understand——"

"Good Heavens, Tom, is that you—and Elizabeth, too? You're just in time. I had——"

"Edgar Livingston!" they both broke in.

Explanations followed. The city judge was hurriedly summoned, a carriage called, and I started on my second visit to Colebrook.

The fates had turned—and during this second visit and every succeeding one I had such a really enjoyable time that I almost forgot the occasion when the fates were against me.

DOWN AND OUT.*

By LAWRENCE G. BYRD.

The appalling consequences of a misunderstanding in the matter of table-legs; being the tale of an unhappy aspirant to high living.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FRIEND IN NEED.

WILBUR HARRIS'S mind was not yet adjusted to the sudden change that had overtaken him. When the first flush of joy over the fact of his release had passed he was smitten with the thought of his helplessness.

Inside the jail he had been moderately warm, and there was enough food to keep him from actually starving. Now he was penniless and ill, out in the open country, with no shelter in prospect even when he reached Fallowsea, and no way of getting money.

He could not go to the furniture store where he had been employed for a few days before his arrest. He had left that firm without an explanation, and he would surely be on their black list.

Besides, he could not appear at any establishment and ask for work in his present condition. The suit of clothes he wore, which had been so "nobby" when he went into the jail, were now out of shape and shabby; and, more important still, his shoes were broken, with a hole through the center of each sole.

He could expect no mercy from Mrs. Kempt. In his trunk, which she held for a week's board and lodging, were

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garments and shoes, nice enough to refit him decently. But Mrs. Kempt "knew her business" too well to allow him to take away any of these things without payment in full.

The room he had engaged and paid a deposit on would long since have been taken, and the woman would never pay back the deposit. There was not a penny owing him saving part of a week's salary and some small commissions at the place where he had last worked; and that sum he could not collect, for he had broken his contract with his employer.

Indeed, he felt quite sure that he could face nobody who had ever known him before. He was certain that his shame had been told about Fallowsea, so that people whom he might pass upon the street would turn and point him out as the fellow who had been sent to jail for a tailor's bill!

These thoughts stirred all the bitterness in his nature. The inhumanity of man to man had seared over all that was kindly in Wib Harris. Facing the storm, bitten by the chill wind, walking all but barefooted upon the fast-whitening road, *hell blazed in his heart!*

The very fruits of freedom had turned to ashes in his mouth. He was out of jail, it was true; but his condition—physical and mental—was worse than it had been under confinement.

He was a homeless and penniless tramp—and why? Because he had been treated unfairly; because men richer and stronger and more influential than himself had been unfair to him! Wib Harris's was a typical case leading to the beginning of vagabondage. Many a "hobo" has begun his idle, reckless, objectless existence through just such wrongs as Wib had suffered.

For, despite the unwisdom which had brought many of the young fellow's troubles upon him, he surely had been wronged. Lowther's anger, which had led to his discharge, was unfair. The firm's charging him for their loss on the lion table was an atrocious thing.

Oh, he had some foundation for his rage and desire for revenge! And revenge was in his grasp now!

Despite the cold, and his hunger, and the sickness which weakened him and made every step along the lonely road painful, there burned in his heart the desire to repay Lowther fourfold.

Lowther had been willing to sacrifice anything to keep the secret regarding Adrian's absence from town. But that secret would be kept no longer!

It was easy for Wib to figure out the mystery. Bella's story of her brother's arrest and conviction, with his companion, was fresh in his mind.

Jimmy Hoke and his fellow criminal had gone to the interior city of Banksburg, and had been captured by the police in trying to rob a jewelry store. Jimmy's companion had employed a lawyer and had got the best of the deal, although he had been the leader in the attempted burglary.

And that companion of the Fallowsea dock tough was Adrian Lowther! It seemed too improbable to believe; yet Wib had to admit the evidence of his own eyes.

Now, too, he remembered the night so long ago when he had run against Adrian on the street and had noticed that young Lowther was dressed roughly and hastened away without speaking to him.

Adrian had evidently done more than one job of the kind for which he finally had been arrested. He had certainly lived a Dr. Jekyl and Mr. Hyde existence!

And why? That question was easily answered. Adrian was dependent upon his uncle's bounty, and the uncle had doubtless cut down Adrian's income. The young man had taken to bad practises for the purpose of filling his depleted wallet.

Then the arrest came and Mr. Lowther discovered his nephew's disgrace, but desired to hide it from his sister-in-law and their society friends. Wib remembered that Mr. Lowther had been out of town for several days, and during that time, undoubtedly, and under an *alias*, Adrian Lowther was railroaded to the penitentiary for his crime.

Little wonder that Mark Lowther had done all in his power to keep Wib from discovering his nephew's whereabouts and refused to allow him to communicate with him. It was plain that even Mr. McCann did not know what had become of Adrian.

Only Peter Ware knew, and evidently he did not propose to tell. Mr. Ware had doubtless seen and recognized Adrian on Governor's Day when he visited the Brandon penitentiary.

"But they'll hide it no longer!" muttered Wib, fighting against the blast which made him cough and almost rocked him off his feet. "I'll blazon the thing all over Fallowsea if they don't settle with me. By Heaven, I will!

"Lowther discharged me, and he stole my commission. He'll make that commission up to me and pay that one hundred and eighty-five dollars to the firm himself or I'll give the story to the papers.

"I'll make as many people know about this mess Adrian's in as have heard of my trouble. I don't give a hang now whether Mr. Ware ever believes he was the one who made the mistake about that table, but I'll get my commission on it.

"And then I'll leave the blasted town —I'll leave the State! Any State that would have such laws—laws that shut a man in jail for debt and starve him and ill-treat him while he's there—isn't fit for a dog to live in.

"I hate it! And I hate the laws, and the men who make them, and the men who make money out of foolish people by practising them. Heavens! how I hate it all!"

He ground his teeth together, his free hand clenched tightly, as he plodded on along the snowy road. The satchel was growing heavy; his feet were numb with the cold; the wind drove the snow into his face, cutting it like particles of hot steel.

He passed a few houses, but he could not stop to beg for shelter or food. No wagon passed him headed cityward. In this storm which had swept down so suddenly upon the country few people were abroad.

He had to rub his ears and beat his hands now and then to restore the circulation of his blood in those parts. The temperature fell rapidly, and the snow turned to sleet, and then to tiny round hailstones which rebounded from the hard-packed drifts and almost blinded him when he strove to look ahead.

Once he halted in the lee of a high bank, where the swirling snow had not gathered, and stamped his cold feet hard on the bare ground. He opened his bag and fumbled in it—for what, he scarcely knew, until his stiffened fingers came in contact with one of the cigars which he had carried into the jail with him and had not been allowed to smoke.

He drew it forth eagerly. He could smoke now, and his stomach craved something soothing. He fumbled for his match-box, and tried to get farther out of the wind, so as to light the weed.

But the cigar was dry and the wrapper broken. He could not make it draw, and finally he was forced to give up the idea of smoking. He went on, chewing the cold tobacco viciously.

The fine particles of hardened snow seemed to search out every crevice in his clothing. His teeth chattered, and the pit of his stomach felt as if it contained a lump of ice and nothing else.

Never had Wib Harris been so cold before; never had he suffered such positive torture of body. He had ever been a robust fellow, but the experiences of the five weeks in jail, and the food on which he had been obliged to subsist, had pulled him down physically.

He grew a little light-headed after a time. He had got it in his mind that he would take the electric car at a certain corner, and every few steps he stopped to listen, thinking he heard the clang of the car-gong.

How quickly the warmed car would whirl him away to the city! He would transfer to the High and Myrtle Street line, and so get out at the corner of Gallup. No. 37 was only a few doors from the car.

How good the little room he had occupied so long at Mrs. Kempt's would seem after the bleak and barren cell in the jail! And he'd go to bed. Maybe Sarah, the up-stairs girl, would get him a hot drink.

And then suddenly, like the stroke of a sword through the mental haze which blanketed his thought, came the knowledge that he did not even have money enough to pay his car-fare to town! He did not possess a nickel!

Oh, that couldn't be true! He dropped the bag in the middle of the snow-shrouded road and began to search his pockets madly. His stiffened fingers

fumbled from one to the other. There was not a penny in any of them.

Finally he broke out into wild sobs, and picking up the satchel again, staggered on. The tears froze to his cheeks.

There were houses at frequent intervals now. He passed a roadside hotel, where lights were burning, although it was only mid-afternoon. There was the promise of warmth inside. But who would take in a penniless man? Wib could not beg for shelter or food. Such an idea never crossed his troubled mind, even at this juncture. His stiffened limbs almost refused to bear him up; but he turned aside into none of these places.

And so he staggered on, while the snow swirled about him and the wind buffeted his tottering figure. He did not realize that he was walking in the roadway instead of on the sidewalk until a shout behind him and a wild snorting close at his ear made him turn his head.

A pair of frightened carriage horses had been drawn in by their driver just in time to keep them from knocking Wib down and trampling upon him. The red nostrils of the animals, and the frothing bits, were just above his head.

He turned to one side, slipped in the drift, and after staggering in a perfectly dazed way, dropped in a heap beside the road. The driver was soothing his horses and did not notice the fallen figure, but from the closed carriage issued a feminine shriek.

"What is it, mem?" exclaimed the coachman, having partially controlled the horses. He turned in his seat, to see the door of the carriage open.

"The man—he has fallen!" gasped the occupant of the vehicle.

And then, light as a bird, before the carriage-wheels had ceased turning, the speaker hopped out into the snow.

Dainty, high-heeled low shoes, with openwork hose, silken ruffles—all these were in the snow-drift by the roadside in a moment. Above them, and above the rich furs which swathed the upper part of her body, was a jaunty hat set atop of gray hair and a rosy face.

Of all the apparently lightsome and irresponsible creatures in the world, this old lady, whose every motion and mannerism denied her age, was the last whom one would expect to play Good Samaritan. But down she went on her knees in the snow, with the blast shrieking about her, and pulled Wib's head and shoulders out of the smother of the drift.

"I know him! He is one of Adrian's friends!" she cried. "Thomas! can you leave those horses?"

"I daren't, mem."

"Then I will find help myself. Look out! see that they do not step on him—the brutes!"

Like a girl she flew over the drifts to the nearest house. The snow was everywhere more than ankle-deep now, but she minded naught of that. She rang the bell vigorously, and brought a man back with her to the side of the unfortunate wayfarer.

"Put him into the carriage. I shall drive him home," she cried, urging this helper to haste.

He was a big, lumbering man, with more muscle than keen perception. He evidently had scarcely looked at Mrs. Lowther.

"Why, sissy, he ain't nothin' more'n a tramp, I guess," declared the man. "Look at them shoes. Your folks won't thank me for letting you do this."

The lady was vastly pleased, and her merry laugh astonished the man greatly.

"I know him, I tell you. Put him in," she urged.

And when he had done so she whisked into the carriage likewise and told the coachman to drive on.

In less than an hour they arrived at the cottage on the side street which Wib had visited one memorable evening. He was wavering on the seat by now, not totally unconscious, but so dazed that he did not fully realize what was being done for him, when Mrs. Lowther and her maid helped him into the house.

CHAPTER XX.

THE OLD MAN AWAKES.

DREAMILY Wib knew that he was seated on a wide hall bench at the foot of the stairs. But even then he did not recognize the place.

He heard a clear voice say: "Ring for Robert, Mary. This poor boy must be taken up-stairs and put to bed at once.

"Yes, I know! I'm wet to my knees,

Mary, but he needs attention more than I do. Thank Heaven, I'm not old and rheumatic *yet*. And think how lucky it was! Mrs. Steuvenant sent me home in the carriage, otherwise the poor boy might not have been found until it was too late."

There was a period of unconsciousness, and then Wib knew he was being lifted by a strong man and carried up the stairs. He opened his eyes languidly and saw a black face above him.

"Hullo, Tom! I thought they'd let you out?" he muttered feebly, taking Mrs. Lowther's butler for Tom Glines.

"Right in Mr. Adrian's room—of course," the fresh voice said from the rear. "I shall telephone for Dr. Goodchild. Undress him and put him to bed, Robert. Put him between the blankets—Mary is heating them."

Wib knew that he was being undressed by the colored man; later a hot drink was forced between his lips, and then he dozed until before his veiled vision appeared a large professional man with a massive gold watch, which he held in his right hand while he counted Wib's pulse.

Then he went to sleep.

But there was no repose for him. The worst nightmare he ever experienced was not to be compared with the visions which rode him now.

Again Mogle, the deputy sheriff, was after him. He went through the arrest in the eating-house, and followed every incident of his later career up to the moment that he had recognized Adrian Lowther in the garb of a jailbird.

"I've got him now! He'll witness for me, or I'll tell the whole city that Adrian Lowther is a thief!" Wib cried aloud, and opened his eyes to find the rosy, gray-haired mother of the unfortunate man of whom he had been dreaming bending over him.

Not until that instant had Wilbur Harris thought of the effect his determination to ruin Adrian and his uncle would have upon this helpless, innocent little woman. He had opened his eyes to sanity, and in a flash he knew what he had cried aloud, and what it might mean to the woman.

He saw her draw back a bit, with horror slowly growing in her eyes. Then she smiled doubtfully.

"Mr. Harris—you have been dreaming," she murmured.

"My God!" gasped Wib, the sweat of fear oozing from his pores. "My God! *what* a dream! Why—why, *you* are his mother!"

"Adrian's mother—yes."

"I had an awful dream about him, Mrs. Lowther," stammered the young man. "I—I—ha! ha! dreams go by contraries, you know. I guess I must have been thinking a good bit about your son, Mrs. Lowther. Why," he cried, suddenly sitting up in bed, "you brought me home!"

"Of course I did. And I am sure Adrian will thank me for it when I write him. You are really better now, Mr. Harris? You have been quite out of your mind."

"Yes—out of my mind indeed," muttered Wib, falling back on the pillow. He trembled, but not from cold or any physical ailment.

Suppose he had gone on in his mad scheme of revenge and had blurted out to the public the story of Adrian Lowther's shame? How this little woman would have suffered! And she had been a friend in need to him.

The revengeful spirit in Wib Harris's soul was dissipated. His bitterness and hatred of mankind could not live under such ministrations as these.

The old man—the spirit that had inspired him before his trouble came—awoke now. He was still weak and dazed, but he struggled again to sit up.

"I—I can't stay here, Mrs. Lowther," he muttered. "Let me get up. I—I shall have to go."

"Mercy!" she cried, with a laugh like a young girl's. "I certainly will have to send for Dr. Goodchild again if you won't behave. He declares you must remain in bed until to-morrow. *Then* we'll see about your getting up.

"Lie down, my dear boy." Her soft, tiny hand on his chest bore him backward to his pillow. "I know you are Adrian's friend, and you must be in trouble. I am only too glad to be of help to you.

"I suppose I like to help boys so much because Adrian is away and is to stay out West, there, so long. I always *was* fond of boys.

"And as for your getting up," she added, her eyes suddenly dancing with mirth, "I instructed Robert to take your own clothing away. In the morning you can put on some of Adrian's; you two are about of a size, eh?"

Wib was too weak to fight against her determination for long; he sank to sleep again, and it was morning when he awoke, with a strange feeling of peace in his soul. This was far different from the unhappy awakenings in his cell during those terrible five weeks.

He awoke in a beautiful room, in a comfortable bed, with the luxuries of a tasteful and pleasant home about him. The world was all white drifts and sunshine without, and the sleigh-bells echoed on the frosty air much more pleasantly than the rising-gong had sounded in the jail corridor!

He lay there with closed eyes, "soaking in" this comfort, when the door opened and closed quickly. He heard a quick step upon the carpet, and looked up to see Mr. Mark Lowther.

The furniture man's face was pale, and he glanced back over his shoulder at the door in a hunted manner. When he turned to face Wib again he saw that the young man's eyes were open.

"My God, Harris! this is awful. I've just heard about it from Grace. Surely you won't tell that poor woman anything about—about——"

"About Adrian?" finished Wib, finding his voice, to his own surprise, still very weak.

"Yes. You—you have no reason to like me, I know, Harris. But surely I can be excused for what I did. I thought by discharging you I would get you out of the way. I had no idea what trouble you were in until yesterday.

"I heard of the attack made on—on poor Adrian by that young rascal who was mixed up in the mess with him, and I went out to Brandon to see how badly he was hurt. I had not been there since his incarceration. We had agreed that I should not visit him unless something happened, for fear of attracting attention.

"The foolish fellow is very repentant; he was before he went there. Think of his scorning such a home as this—and such a mother as he has—to become a common burglar! Just to get money—money to gamble with and throw away! Oh, he'll be a different fellow when he comes out of Brandon!

"But if you tell people that he is there he will be ruined for life. Even the prison authorities do not know his real name and condition. The very lawyer who defended him did not. I have hidden everything—or tried to.

"And now you—and Mr. Ware—have learned the truth. Think what it will mean to him—to his mother—Harris! I'll do anything in reason for you. I talked with Adrian in the hospital yesterday. He says he remembers perfectly the order Mr. Ware gave you, and that your claim is just.

"I'll make it up to you. You shall have your commission, and your place back if you like. And we'll pay you for the time you've lost, and anything in reason——"

"I want justice, that's all," interrupted Wib, at last, finding his breath. "Seems to me I haven't been having my share of that of late. I've had plenty of *law*—too much, in fact; but justice I can stand. What does Mr. Ware say?"

"I went to him last night. He recognized Adrian in the jail, four weeks ago; but he's said nothing about it, although he told me he hinted the truth to you in a letter.

"By the way, Harris, Mr. Ware seems to hold a very high opinion of you. He said, before I told him that Adrian believed your rendering of the order was correct, that a man as honest as you—too high-minded to take advantage of a legal technicality to escape from confinement such as you suffered up there at Brandon—was too honest knowingly to misstate that order. He insists upon settling for the mistake himself. He will pay half the loss, and the firm will pay the remainder.

"Come, Harris, I want your promise that you'll say nothing about my nephew's disgrace. You have some idea of what it means yourself, although you went there merely on a civil suit. Isn't he suffering enough without coming out finally to meet the scorn of everybody who ever knew him?" demanded the excited Lowther.

"He is indeed," replied Wib feelingly.

"And think of his mother——"

"I have, Mr. Lowther. I had already decided that in any case the truth of her son's whereabouts must be kept from her knowledge," Wib said gravely. "Trust me, sir. She shall never learn it from me. And tell Mr. Ware that I thank him for his efforts in my behalf with all my heart. He—and his lawyer—did not understand my position, or they would not have suggested my getting out of that place on the oath.

"It is over now. We'd best not speak of it. If—if I can come back to work for you, sir——"

"I'll fix it with McCann. I—I tell you, Harris, you're a very decent chap!" cried Lowther, suddenly seizing Harris's hand and shaking it heartily. "You've relieved my mind greatly. Poor Grace is so little able to cope with harsh things. If she knew anything had gone wrong with Adrian I believe it would kill her.

"And the boy will be different—entirely different—when he comes out of that place. It will change him."

"It will indeed," said Wib feelingly. "Pray God it doesn't make him worse," he added under his breath, and with the thought a determination came to Wib Harris's mind.

Out of that thought grew the habit he established of twice a month going to Brandon to see "Kelly" and talk with him for half an hour through the wire screen. Uncle Mark did not dare go, for fear it would attract attention, but Wib's semi-monthly talks with Adrian Lowther were what kept the young man straight and braced him for his entrance into the free world again.

Meantime, Wib became an active conspirator in the plot to blind Mrs. Lowther's eyes to the truth. His own uncle and aunt were in the West, and he renewed his correspondence with them, and through them had Adrian's letters (he was allowed to write weekly in the jail) sent direct to the mother of the prisoner.

Even Mr. Peter Ware approved of this subterfuge.

"A lie is a most contemptible thing, young man," he said to Wib on one occasion. "Even a bad memory can be condemned, eh?" and he smiled slyly at Wib. "But in this case I believe we all are attaining haloes by darkening the eyes of that poor lady.

"But, by Jove! if that local imitation of *Raffles* doesn't behave himself when he comes home I'll thrash him myself—I'll thrash him myself!"

"He will behave himself," declared Wib, with confidence.

But Wib did not forget the boy who had gone to jail with Adrian. Poor Jimmy Hoke had lost all his good-conduct time because of his attack upon Adrian in the jail-yard, and was booked to stay his full two years.

But through Mr. Ware's lawyer the attention of the court was brought to Jimmy's case, and the boy was removed from the totally bad influences of the jail to the better government of the reformatory. There he will be taught a trade and possibly learn, as well, to grow into a decent and useful citizen.

Bella was overjoyed by this change, which she considered brought about entirely by Wib's influence.

"I say! I knowed you for a gent de firs' time I clapped me peepers on ye," she told him. "You mighter been down, but ye wasn't out. Chee! I could see dat, all right, all right!

"There ain't many like youse comes inter this hash-house, Mr. Harris. I was tellin' Dutchy, de boss, that if it warn't for youse comin' here to eat your lunches I wouldn't stay wid him. Dis ain't no place for a lydy.

"Come in again, Mr. Harris, and if there's anything Bella Hoke's got thatcher want—w'y, say de woid!"

"And if there's anything Wib Harris has got that *you* want, Bella, it's yours for the asking," returned Wib, taking her hand across the lunch-counter. "You were the best friend I had when I was on my uppers. You'll always have the call on me, Bella."

And so the story of Wib Harris's season of hard luck ends. Yet, after the storm, one *does* like to get a glimpse of the sunshine.

It was hard for Wib to show up at the furniture store again, where he feared some of the clerks knew about his jail experience. But McCann & Lowther were very decent to him, and nobody mentioned his incarceration, even if the story had been told abroad.

In one thing he took considerable satisfaction. With the commissions and back pay which the furniture firm paid over to him he was able to appear at No. 37 Gallup Street, dressed in a brand-new suit, and demand of Mrs. Kempt his trunk.

His old room happened to be empty, and the landlady was much meeker than upon his last interview with her.

"Of course, we'd be glad to have you come back, Mr. Harris," she said. "You look quite prosperous, I declare!" with a smirk.

"I am—no thanks to you, Mrs. Kempt. I am going to board up-town, with a friend of mine—Mrs. Lowther. I am going to occupy her son's room while he is away. Your rooms, Mrs. Kempt, have no charms for me now."

"Oh, that's always the way!" snapped the lady as the expressman took the trunk out. "The more you do for folks the less they appreciate it!"

"You certainly did for *me*, Mrs. Kempt," admitted Wib, beating a hasty retreat.

But there was one other matter that continued to disturb Wib's mind. He had heard nothing from Lomark since his escape from Brandon. He knew that, legally, he had been purged of the debt for which he was shut up.

Nevertheless, he was not satisfied. Five weeks' imprisonment as a debtor, on the one hand, seemed to be sufficient punishment; yet, on the other hand, Wib could not feel that he had honestly satisfied the claim.

Finally he sent sixty-eight dollars and forty-three cents—the face of the bill he had owed Lomark before the tailor was foolish enough to take legal "advice"—to his old creditor, and received a meek note and a receipt in full. The man was glad to get so much, for it at least satisfied his legal expenses.

Then, Wib felt, he might look the whole world in the face. He held his head up and squared his shoulders. Some few people might know about his incarceration for debt, but they never mentioned it to him.

He had paid dearly for experience—we all do. Unlike many of us, Wilbur Harris was able to profit by what he had learned. He doesn't owe for a shoestring, and never will again!

THE END.

WHEN WHEELS GREW ROOTS.

By EDGAR FRANKLIN.

A mysterious hold-up on a trolley line with no intent at robbery and which involved only the president of the road himself.

THE freight had just rolled up the spur from the main line. Colden, returning on it from Paulsburg, strolled through the big steel-works and up to his managerial office.

The place was quite empty. There was nothing to demand his immediate attention. He walked to the window and stared out with a smile half humorous, half rueful.

There was little enough to see from that window.

The steel-works were located in the wilderness, where land is cheap. Ahead, precisely one farmhouse was visible; to the left or the right, not even one.

Far off, glistening in the afternoon sunshine, a single line of steel rails ran parallel with his gaze; faintly outlined there was also the little swell of track to one side—the switch where one trolley-car would wait for the other to pass when the new line from Paulsburg to Rowayne finally went into commission.

It was upon this double stretch of steel threads that Colden's gaze concentrated. He shook his head and muttered:

"Well, it's going to be rough on Hislam, all right enough. If I can get him on the wire——"

"You don't have to get him on the wire!" remarked a voice behind him.

Colden turned sharply. A sharp-eyed man, possibly ten years his junior, stood

just in the doorway, removing a pair of automobile-goggles.

"Hello—Hislam!"

"How are you, Colden?" He walked in and took a chair. "Well—what's rough on Hislam?"

The manager of the steel-works smiled again and walked to his own desk-chair. There he sat silently for a minute, trimming the end from a cigar and neglecting to face his companion.

Hislam coughed suggestively.

"What's up, anyway?"

"I—I say, Hislam!" Colden placed the cigar between his teeth and searched for a match. "You—well, you and I have grown pretty well acquainted, you know, since this concern has been furnishing the steel for the new trolley-road and you've been superintending the construction."

"Eh?" Hislam's expression was distinctly puzzled.

"You've told me a whole lot of things, and I've told you a whole lot of things—personal matters, I mean."

"Well?"

Colden scratched the match and lighted his weed. He sighed then and looked squarely at the other.

"Look here, my son. When you undertook the job of building this road you came from the East heart-whole and fancy-free, as it were. Very promptly, however, upon meeting Grace Malvern, daughter of the president of this new trolley-road, you fell in love with her."

Hislam, raising his eyebrows, did not altogether succeed in preventing the blush.

"Papa—otherwise John Steers Malvern, capitalist, magnate of Rowayne, and trolley-line owner—didn't smile on the suit. The very charming young woman did. What couldn't be done openly was done secretly. About this time Mr. Malvern, who had altogether different prospects for his eldest daughter, discovered that certain matters were under way. Thereupon, a few weeks ago he sent the aforesaid daughter for an indefinite visit to Chicago. Before she went, you two had vowed to wed."

"Well, what's the use of going over that?"

"I'm sorry to make you blush, Hislam." Colden studied his boots with a slight frown. "However, to continue. According to the confessions of your own overburdened soul, Miss Malvern is coming unexpectedly from Chicago to-morrow to Paulsburg. She will arrive on the noon train. You will be there with your machine. At twelve-fifteen she'll be Mrs. Hislam and you'll leave town after a telegram to papa, who will meanwhile sit unsuspectingly in his offices at Rowayne, confident that he has smashed the romance."

"Um-m. Yes?"

"Hislam, is it all arranged?"

"Yes, I presume that she has started from Chicago before this."

"Then I'm most infernally sorry to tell you that I'm afraid the plot has fallen through!"

"*What!*"

"Yes—right plump through."

"But how the deuce——"

"See here, my boy, you've confided in me. Any one else?"

"Only Graham, the station-agent at Paulsburg, Colden. He and I were at college together, you know."

"Then blame it on Graham, Hislam. He's a—he's a sneaky lot!"

"Graham!" Hislam's eyes opened. "Why, Graham——"

Colden straightened up with an angry frown.

"Well, never mind what he was or how well you know him. I'll simply tell you the facts, my boy. I've just come from Paulsburg—haven't been here fifteen minutes. I was talking with Graham down there. He—well, he was about half gone, I fear. Perhaps some of it was enthusiasm and some of it alcohol. At any rate, he had just had Mr. Malvern on the telephone, and he felt jubilant."

"Malvern! What did he tell Malvern?" Hislam's face was white now.

"Just this: that you had engaged two parlor-car chairs on the half past two train to-morrow. That you had confided in him—or hinted to him—that you and Miss Malvern were to be married in Paulsburg a little after noon!"

"Graham did that! Billy Graham——" The younger man bit his lips. "Why——"

"Because he's dead anxious to get into the offices of this new line of Mal-

vern's! He's so anxious that I believe he'd commit perjury to accomplish anything that would put him on the right side of the old gentleman. As it is, he's sold you out, Hislam!"

Hislam said things which in certain communities would have jailed him. The manager of the steel-works waited for the outburst to pass.

"I thought you'd best know, sonny. I was going to call you up at Rowayne, when you turned up here."

"I was on my way to Paulsburg in the motor," muttered Hislam. "I meant to stay there over to-night, and——"

He broke off and took to gnawing his lips again. Presently he looked up with a sour smile.

"Well—any more good news, Colden?"

"Only that Papa Malvern will be on hand at Paulsburg at half past eleven to-morrow. He told Graham that. He'll be at the station long before the Chicago train arrives. He—he'll put at an end—temporarily, at least—your pretty little romance."

"How's he coming?"

"Over the new trolley-line, Hislam. The power's on, you know, and they're going to open up for business next week. The terminal in Paulsburg is just beside the railroad station. Malvern will go from Rowayne to Paulsburg in his special car."

"And he'll be there when Grace——" Hislam stopped again and shook his head. "That—that infernal Graham! What an idiot I am, anyway, Colden! I've been so full of—of my own happiness——"

"That some of it overflowed. It's too downright bad, boy!"

"Bad! It's—it's—oh!"

He walked over to the window and glared at the sunset.

"You're sure he's coming over the trolley-line, Colden?"

"There isn't much doubt on that score. It's the handiest way, and he even said so himself. He'll take that route, fast enough."

"Then let's wreck his devilish car! Let's pile up the rails with rocks and smash——"

"Dry up, sonny," Colden remarked calmly.

Hislam turned back to the desk. He walked to it and slammed one hard fist on the top, and his eyes spat fire as they met the steel manager's.

"Colden, I am *not* going to give it up! I'm not going to dry up, either. That sour old curmudgeon can come to Paulsburg with a troop of cavalry to-morrow, if he likes. I'll marry that girl at noon!"

"Just how?" inquired Colden.

"I——" Hislam wilted into a chair. "I—don't know, at the moment, old chap!"

The steel man regarded him thoughtfully. He recalled fumbling a marriage certificate into his own inner pocket some fifteen years before, and he experienced a spasm of acute sympathy.

They would get on splendidly—Grace Malvern and this young fellow. Colden knew that, despite all objections on the part of the president of the trolley-road. They were eminently well suited, and —well, it was a downright shame, all around.

Still—Colden played with the cigar for a matter of five long, silent minutes.

"Hislam!"

"Well?"

"Put on your hat. I'm going over with you to take another look at the trolley-tracks!"

"What?"

The manager walked out of the office. The younger man followed. Within a matter of perhaps ten minutes the little motor deposited them beside the trolley-rails at the switch.

Hands in pockets, Colden stared at the switch, then up and down the line. It was a flat, barren sort of prospect.

"My boy, if a car—if that particular car—should break down in these wilds the occupants would be distinctly up against it in the matter of transportation facilities, wouldn't they?"

"Yes, Colden. And every car coming from Rowayne is bound to stop here and unlock this switch, unless they're going to run into it!" Hislam took the idea only too easily. "If we were to spike this devilish switch into place——"

"It would stay there until Malvern's crew removed the spikes and proceeded on their way. That's about all."

"It's true." Hislam's frown deepened.

"As for ripping up a stretch of track to-night——"

"Bosh!" Colden scratched his chin reflectively. "And still—if Malvern gets to Paulsburg on time to-morrow——"

His head took to shaking. Hislam walked moodily up and down the ties. He was some hundreds of feet away, when a sharp whistle recalled him.

"Hislam!" Colden's eyes sparkled a little. "See!"

He stood between the tracks and beside the opening of the switch.

"You've had more to do with the actual rolling-stock of this road than I have. Can you tell me to within a foot the distance from the front end of that private car to the center of the forward motor?"

"Why, about seven and a half or eight feet."

"All right—that's good. Now, it is a moral certainty that they'll not stop that car to-morrow until it's at the very edge of the switch, isn't it?"

He produced a rule and measured off eight feet on the cinder road-bed. Finding the desired point, he dug sharply into the cinders with his foot and cut a cross. Then he stepped back to Hislam's side.

"My boy, come back to the works with me. Then take your machine and go on to Paulsburg. Meet your girl and marry her. Then, when it's all over, call up the works and let me know—and be sure you don't leave town without letting me know at the earliest minute possible."

"But——"

"Never mind details now. Malvern won't turn up, I almost believe—at least, in time to spoil your game. You do as I tell you. That car'll have to stop at the switch to-morrow. It shall never move a foot beyond until I say so. And don't you forget that, sonny."

Hislam stared at him, amazed, half hopeful, and very eager.

"Whatever you smash, old man——" he began.

"I'm not going to smash anything beyond the cruel interference with this sweet romance," Colden said dryly as he stepped into the automobile. "I'm going to do a little stunt with the black magic. It either will or will not work. I believe the former, Hislam."

II.

TEN o'clock passed next morning, and the half hour as well. It puzzled Colden a little. If Malvern were to be on hand by noon at the depot he would have to do some speeding. Or perhaps he had elected to travel by the steam railway.

Then the trolley-wire began to sing softly, and on the horizon appeared the little black speck which represented the special car of the road's president.

It bowled on merrily, and in it sat a man of determined mien. Mr. John Malvern was accustomed to have things go as he said they should go. This matter of his daughter's marriage should be no exception to the general rule.

He smoked, and watched the track ahead. At this rate he would arrive at the depot with some fifteen minutes to spare. That was enough.

At the switch, the car rolled to a gentle standstill and the motorman descended to open the way. He unlocked the little box at the side of the track, tinkered for a moment with the mechanism, and returned to his platform. He gave a twist to the controller.

And the car stood quite still!

The motorman was puzzled. A glance at the switch-box overhead and another try at the controller. The handle twirled around easily enough, from side to side and back again.

But there was no response from the big motors below! The car seemed entirely satisfied with its present location, and declined to move further down the line in the direction of Paulsburg!

Another pause, and the man took to examining the interior of his controller-box. Nothing whatever was wrong. He replaced the front, and went at the handle-turning process again.

And at about this time Mr. Malvern's cigar appeared in the open doorway.

"Well, Murphy, what is wrong? Why don't you go on?"

The motorman turned apologetically.

"Well—look, Mr. Malvern!" he said, as he twirled the handle again.

The president bent over the controller and examined it thoroughly.

"Why—that seems all right. Nothing burned out—nothing out of place anywhere."

"I know it, sir."

Malvern chewed angrily at his cigar for a minute. His face reddened slightly, and a scowl appeared.

"Confound it, anyway! What's wrong with this trip? We started late, and now—get under that motor, Murphy, and have a look at it!"

The man scrambled beneath the car. For all of fifteen minutes he studied what parts were visible. He came up and lifted the flooring. In the end he turned helplessly to Malvern.

"Can you see anything wrong, sir?"

"Not a thing!" the president snapped. "I——"

He took to staring at the motor once more.

"Well, the power's given out. It can't be anything else."

The conductor stepped across and turned a switch. The dozen or so lamps of the car flared out promptly. Malvern shook his head.

"Then what on earth has come over the thing? Here! We can't fool with it any longer! Try that other motor. We'll run in on that!"

With alacrity born of his superior's frown the employee hurried to the other end of the car.

His success there was no greater. One perfectly sound motor having ceased to operate, its companion appeared to have followed suit! Neither twistings nor turnings, puzzled exclamations nor lurid oaths, seemed to have the slightest effect on the two obdurate electric engines!

For reasons unknown, both had simply stopped work. Current was there in plenty, and not a wire, not a nut, seemed out of condition—but the car had moved not one inch since the moment of its stopping.

Half an hour of tinkering and speculating, and the matter was growing decidedly serious. The fifteen miles that remained to Paulsburg would consume all of thirty minutes, with literal scorching—and eleven o'clock was behind.

After a time Malvern's rage worked off and he considered the situation in cold, calm silence.

"Now, if we had some kind of a repair-kit——" the motorman hazarded timidly.

"Well, what would you repair, Murphy?" the other inquired. "Do you see even a bolt-head out of place?"

"No, sir, but—them motors won't work, sir."

"No, I know blamed well they won't work!" Mr. Malvern responded amiably.

The motorman forbore further suggestions.

Another time of silent consideration, and the president turned to the motorman.

"Murphy, you walk over to that steelworks. Tell them that we're in trouble. Ask them to let you telephone to the car-houses at Rowayne. Then have them send the repair-car, and have them send it quick!"

The motorman started across the flat quarter-mile. Malvern seated himself on the steps of the ill-fated car and hurled after him an injunction to hurry. Then he lighted another cigar and stared at the dry grass.

If he had only taken the railway, or even his automobile! But the trolley-line had seemed best fitted for reaching Paulsberg without mishap, and—— He shrugged his shoulders, and muttered beneath his breath. If he could still get to Paulsburg in time to intercept the pair!

Nearly another half-hour had passed when Murphy returned. Malvern looked up—then stared hard at the dubious expression on the motorman's countenance.

"Their telephone's broken, Mr. Malvern."

"You couldn't call up Rowayne?"

"No, sir."

"Well"—the president's face fairly blackened—"there is another telephone somewhere else in this forsaken wilderness, isn't there?"

"I'm afraid not, sir. I asked them, but they said the nearest was probably at Allen's Corners, five miles away."

The president glared.

"How long would it take you to walk five miles, Murphy?"

"Anyway, an hour, sir. Maybe more—I suppose it would be more."

In the pause, the factory whistle came shrilly across the space. It was noon! Malvern started from the steps.

"That would be one at least, and another hour for the car to get here—— Bah! Stay here!"

He stalked away.

"You're——" Murphy ventured to call.

"I'm going to that steel-works to borrow a locomotive or a hand-car and make the railroad. You stay with the car until the repairers come."

The day was warming now, and Malvern mopped his forehead as he arrived at the door of the steel-works. He was met by the smiling and amiable Colden.

"Mr. Colden," he panted, "the most infernally remarkable thing has happened to my car out there. She's stopped dead—and I'm stuck! If you have an engine up here I want to borrow it and go down to the main line on a run!"

"An engine?"

"A locomotive—yes. For Heaven's sake, don't say——"

"My dear fellow, there is no engine here. It went down last night."

"Er — er ——" Malvern swallowed hard. "How long would it take to 'phone for one?"

"About five minutes," smiled Colden, "but our instrument has gone out of business. Didn't the man tell you?"

The president bit his lips and breathed hard.

"Where could I get a horse around here?"

Colden smiled compassionately again.

"Well, to tell the truth, Mr. Malvern, I don't believe you'll find one between here and Rowayne. The county fair opened there to-day, you know, and every blessed native started at daylight."

"And there is not even a beast to be had?"

"Well, of course, there may possibly be, somewhere hereabouts. I hardly think so, though. But what is the hurry? What's wrong with the car?"

"Wrong? The—the—— Bosh! I don't know what's wrong, Colden! The cursed thing has simply stopped! That's all!"

The steel man regarded him thoughtfully.

"Well, suppose I walk over and have a look at it?"

Finding his hat consumed all of ten minutes. Directions to one or another of the employees took fifteen more. Then, the sun was rather warm, and Colden was disinclined to hurry. All in all, another forty minutes were behind them when the steel man finally stood beside the special car.

His investigation was thorough, even exhaustive. He examined the controlling apparatus at either end of the car. He squatted before one bit of mechanism and another and pondered long and hard.

He had the flooring raised, and studied one motor and then the other. He even crawled beneath the car and surveyed the trouble from that uncomfortable view-point.

And at the end of another hour he was once more at Malvern's side. Frowning in palpable amazement, he said:

"I don't pretend to be an electrical expert, sir, but I'm blessed if I can see anything wrong with those motors! The connections are all perfect, and the fields and the armatures seem O. K. in every sense. The current seems to be there as well, and——"

"And it's five minutes past two!" came from Malvern's throat in a snarl.

"Is it?" Colden opened his eyes. "Then I shall have to leave you and hurry back. Shall I send a man to the Corners to 'phone for a repair-gang?"

He waited, sympathetically. Malvern reseated himself on the steps.

"Yes, if you will, Colden," he said drearily.

"Meanwhile," continued the steel man, and the corners of his mouth twitched unseen, "why don't you leave the current on at the first notch? It may be that it has weakened, or something of the sort, and then when it comes on again you'll be able to start."

Murphy adopted the suggestion hurriedly. Colden turned and walked away toward his steel-works.

And then a couple of peculiar episodes followed. A pair of pincers and two minutes' work and the telephone was ready for use once more.

"Hello, Paulsburg!" the manager said softly. "Anybody been trying to get this wire lately? Has, eh? All right; let's have him again, then."

He waited, chuckling for a little. Then:

"Hello! Hello! Oh, is that you,

Hislam? Married? Ah! Congratulations, and lots of them! Papa didn't appear? No, I hardly think he did. I have him here, car and all. Well, fly on the two-thirty, my boy. I'm going to release Malvern now, and he'll be there by three if he has good luck. By-by."

Colden replaced the receiver and gave way to a spasm of laughter. Finally he unslung the little desk-telephone and called up the power-room of the plant. A word or two and he stepped to the window.

The second queer thing was just occurring. Off across the flat the special car seemed to stir and shake herself. She moved a bit, and Malvern sprang from the step. Then she slid smoothly away down the track, and Murphy leaped to the platform and stopped her, while the president and the conductor ran after and climbed aboard.

For a minute or two they seemed to converse excitedly. Malvern disappeared within, shrugging his shoulders. The power was thrown on, and the special careered toward Paulsburg—far, far too late!

III.

It was precisely two weeks later that Hislam sat once more in the steel-works office. He was making his way by motor to Rowayne, there to conclude a peace which had been partially negotiated by telegraph.

"And you actually held that car for a matter of three hours!" he exclaimed. "It was our salvation, Colden; but how on earth——"

Colden laughed and rose. He motioned Hislam to follow.

Down the stairs they went, and through a corridor into the main section of the big works. For a while the manager looked about in silence. Then he pointed across the vast place and Hislam followed his gaze.

A traveling-crane swung along. At the end of the ropes depending from its upper end an electromagnet hung; and the current appeared to be on, for the magnet carried a girder that must have weighed well over a ton.

"You see, now?"

"No, I'm hanged if I do!"

The manager perched upon a pile of rails and grinned.

"Hislam, up to a year or two ago we used to move those big things around by means of chains and other tackle suspended from the crane. Then some bright mind conceived the idea of hitching on one of these huge electromagnets, letting it do all the pulling and lifting, without the bother of trussing up, anything you wanted to move, with chains and so on. It is mighty convenient, I can tell you. The magnet comes traveling along, picks up a twenty-ton piece of steel and walks off with it. We let it down where we want it, switch off the current, and pass on to the next."

"Well?"

"We have three of those magnets here. On the particular day of Malvern's mishap we were using only one. The other two——"

His eyes twinkled.

"Well, the other two were buried out there under the track, just in front of the switch, one approximately under each of the motors when the car stopped. And there was a cable running underground from that spot to our dynamo-room!"

Hislam stared.

"You mean to say that when the car stopped over them you simply switched on the current and literally froze the motors into place?"

"Just about that. And when once the pull of those two magnets got to working dynamite couldn't have moved 'em!"

He watched the magnet swing past again, bearing another girder.

"Oh, it was a dickens of a job!" he chuckled. "Some of the men I swore to secrecy here thought I'd gone daft, I presume. It was hard enough getting the magnets there, and harder still putting the ground into shape when they were buried. I don't suppose a man in the secret could have failed very well to find the traces.

"But—well, Malvern wasn't in the secret and it worked, and you've won the lady. I should hand you a bill for labor, too, but——" He glanced at his watch. "Say, you'd better make tracks to Rowayne if you expect to get Malvern into calm enough shape to go back to Paulsburg and dine with his daughter and her husband."

The Diamond in the Discard.

By C. LANGTON CLARKE.

In which Mrs. Scales jumps to a conclusion, Mr. Butterworth advises, and Mr. Scales, as usual, is the victim.

"OH, George," cried Mrs. Scales, as she waved her right hand in the air and allowed the light to flash and sparkle in a diamond which she wore on her third finger, "you don't know how happy you have made me! It's just the very thing I wanted. I *am* so tired of these old pearl things. I really do think you are one of the very nicest men in the world!"

Mr. Scales, who was watching his wife with an embarrassed grin, cleared his throat to gain time for thought.

"I don't quite understand——" he began.

"Now, don't scold, George," said Mrs. Scales brightly, laying her hand on his lips. "If you were a woman you would understand, but then you are only a nice, stupid man. I simply couldn't help it. I was hunting in your vest-pocket for your match-safe, when I found the dearest little morocco box, not even wrapped up, with Ambrose's name on it. Of course, I opened it—any woman would—and there was this perfectly lovely diamond."

"Bu—but how do you know it was intended for you?" demanded Mr. Scales obtusely.

"Why, George!" cried Mrs. Scales, in astonished tones. "Surely you don't think I would suspect you of buying a diamond ring at Ambrose's for any other woman?"

"No—no," returned Mr. Scales hastily. "Of course not. And I suppose you couldn't wait till I gave it to you," he added, with a tinge of bitterness.

"Wait?" cried Mrs. Scales. "Wait a whole week till my birthday, knowing that ring was in your pocket? My dear boy, you married a woman, not an angel. And besides, I hate pretending. When you gave it to me I should have had to pretend to be surprised, and I couldn't have done it a bit naturally. I can't bear deceit, and you would have found me out at once and been disappointed. Besides, I wanted to wear it to Mrs. Forester's tea, on Thursday."

Mr. Scales smiled grimly.

"All right," he said. "I suppose you know best, but I must say you rather took me aback when you marched in with that ring on your finger."

"That's the beauty of it," Mrs. Scales replied sophistically. "We both got a nice surprise."

Mr. Scales forbore to reply, and began filling a cigar-case from a box on his table.

"You're not going out, George?" Mrs. Scales queried, in some surprise.

"Just around to Butterworth's," Mr. Scales replied airily. "I won't be long. There's a little bit of business I want to consult him about. He's got a pretty good head."

"You're always trailing after Mr. Butterworth," the wife observed petulantly. "I'm sure I've got just as good a head as he has. Why don't you consult me?"

Mr. Scales laughed in a constrained fashion.

"Not about this," he said. "I'm afraid you would hardly understand."

"Try me," insisted Mrs. Scales. "What is this piece of business? Quick, now—tell me."

Mr. Scales looked embarrassed. He was in the main a truthful person, and disliked telling lies except when it was absolutely necessary.

"It's—er—it's about a recent purchase of mine," he said, after a brief pause. "Tell me, now, do you know the price of land on Potomac Crescent?"

"No, I don't," Mrs. Scales confessed reluctantly.

"A lot of good it would do to consult you," her husband cried triumphantly,

delighted at having got around the difficulty without committing himself to a deliberate untruth. "You stick to your own line, my dear."

"I suppose that's a polite way of telling me to mind my own business," Mrs. Scales replied, with some resentment.

For a moment she looked decidedly cross, but her eye fell on the diamond and her face cleared.

"Run along, then," she said brightly, "and talk your old business, and I'll sit here and look at my ring till you come back, and think what a real nice husband I've got."

"This is a nice mess," Mr. Scales grumbled under his breath as he left the room. "This is what comes of a woman's confounded curiosity."

Mr. Butterworth, a sleek, rotund, well-groomed bachelor of middle age, received Mr. Scales warmly, and from the depths of a luxurious armchair directed his visitor's attention, with the toe of a highly polished boot, to another resting-place of equally inviting appearance.

"Sit down," he said hospitably. "What brings you around?"

Mr. Scales, having lighted a cigar, settled himself comfortably.

"I'm in a deuce of a fix, Butterworth," he began.

"What kind of a fix?" demanded the other. "There are about two hundred fixes that bachelors can get into, and about the same number more for married men. What is it? Money?"

Mr. Scales shook his head sadly.

"It's the old, old story, from Eve down," he said. "Woman's curiosity."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Butterworth, with a slight pursing of the lips and a lifting of the eyebrows. "Drive ahead."

"My wife," said Mr. Scales, "took the liberty of looking through my pockets."

Mr. Butterworth smiled sardonically.

"And she found," continued the other, raising his voice in resentment at his friend's expression, "something which has put me in a devil of a fix."

"Read it all through, I suppose," commented Mr. Butterworth.

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. Scales. "Read what all through?"

"Why, the letter," replied Mr. Butterworth. "Not very compromising, I hope. Who's the lady?"

Mr. Scales started up in his chair violently.

"Confound you, Butterworth!" he cried indignantly. "Of all the uncharitable, suspicious beasts——"

Mr. Butterworth, quite unmoved by this display of heat, raised his hand for silence.

"When a man," he said, "comes into my room and tells me that his wife has been going through his pockets, and that something which she has found there has got him into a hole, I jump to the natural conclusion. Married men ought not to have any pockets. Now, go ahead and tell me what the trouble is."

"It's this way," rejoined Mr. Scales. "I have a little niece who will be fourteen years old the day after to-morrow. She is a nice little girl, and I make a point of giving her a present every birthday. Well, yesterday I happened to pass that new store where they sell those Alnazur diamonds—best imitations I ever saw—and the window was full of a lot of really swell-looking rings. You may have noticed them?"

Mr. Butterworth assented.

"I've often wished I could afford jewelry like that," he said, with an affected sigh.

Mr. Scales scowled at him.

"If you're going to play the fool when a fellow's in dead earnest——" he began.

Mr. Butterworth apologized.

"It's constitutional," he said. "Go on."

"Knowing," continued Mr. Scales, "how fond girls are of jewelry, and how vain they are, almost as vain"—with a glance at Mr. Butterworth's carefully manicured hand—"as fat middle-aged bachelors, I went in and picked out a ring, very pretty and rather uncommon setting, and a good-sized stone. Three dollars, it cost. Then I went to Ambrose's and got his head man, whom I know pretty well, to give me one of their ring-boxes, thinking the youngster would appreciate the gift more with a swell jeweler's name on it."

"Deceiver," commented Mr. Butterworth reproachfully. "I have a notion now what you are coming at."

"Remarkable perspicacity," sneered Mr. Scales. "My wife, as I said, went through my pockets and found the box,

which I had not wrapped up. With your wonderful powers of divination, can you guess what she did next?"

"Opened it," cried Mr. Butterworth, with an admirably burlesqued air of one correctly solving a difficult conundrum.

"Precisely," responded the other. "She supposed it to be genuine, and knowing, as she took occasion subsequently to remark, that I would not buy diamond rings for any one else, at once jumped to the conclusion that it was intended as a present for her birthday, which falls a week from to-day."

"Why didn't you tell her the truth?" demanded Mr. Butterworth. "Or have you got out of the habit?"

"I simply couldn't," replied Mr. Scales, ignoring the slur. "She was so intensely delighted, and said so many nice things which she would have had to take back, that I hadn't the heart. I just stood there like a chump."

"How else would you stand?" asked Mr. Butterworth, who had not forgiven the reflection on his personal appearance.

"If you would tell me what I am to do instead of trying to be funny I should be greatly obliged to you," replied Mr. Scales hotly. "I can't let her go on wearing that thing. She has a horror of cheap jewelry, and if she found it out she would never forgive me. Some kind friend would be sure to enlighten her before long."

"If I had a nice wife——" began Mr. Butterworth, and paused.

"It's a pretty wild supposition," said the other impatiently; "but we'll let it go at that. Supposing you had—what then?"

"If I had a real nice wife," continued Mr. Butterworth, unmoved, "I should go to Ambrose's and get a facsimile of that ring with a real stone in it. Then I should substitute the genuine for the spurious on the first opportunity. That will save your reputation for veracity, and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have done a generous act, even if it was against your nature and inclinations."

"I did think of that way out of it," replied Mr. Scales lugubriously; "but look at the cost. I don't believe I could duplicate that ring with a genuine stone for less than a hundred and fifty dollars."

"What's a hundred and fifty dollars to a woman's happiness?" insisted Mr. Butterworth sentimentally.

"Nothing so easy as generosity when the money comes out of somebody else's pocket," commented Mr. Scales, wrinkling his nose in disgust. "However, I don't see any other way out of the mess."

"Good!" said the other. "We'll go around and order it to-morrow. Nothing I enjoy so much as seeing other fellows spending their money; and now that that's settled to the satisfaction of both of us, let's talk of something cheerful."

II.

"WHAT a howling swell you are!" remarked Mr. Scales to his wife as they sat at luncheon two days later. "What's on this afternoon?"

"What a memory you have, George!" responded Mrs. Scales, who was radiant in silks and furbelows. "I am going to Mrs. Forester's tea. I wouldn't miss it for worlds. I am just dying to show her my diamond."

She breathed gently on the stone, and having polished it with her napkin, extended her hand toward her husband.

"Look at it, George," she said. "Isn't it a dear?"

"Very dear," replied Mr. Scales with feeling.

"I don't know how it is," continued the wife, "but it really seems to sparkle more than when I first got it. I suppose that's because I'm always polishing it."

"No doubt," replied Mr. Scales with commendable gravity. "Besides, diamonds are said to improve with age."

"I hope Mr. Forester is there," continued Mrs. Scales. "Mrs. Forester told me the other day that he was quite a connoisseur in gems. I shall ask him how much it is worth. You know, you refused to tell me."

Mr. Scales, with a jeweler's receipted bill for a hundred and eighty dollars in his pocketbook, received this intimation with equanimity.

"I'm afraid you'll have to wait," he said, laughing. "I happen to know that Forester is attending a board meeting this afternoon. However, you may run across another expert."

He kissed his wife and left the house whistling.

"It's all right," he said to Mr. Butterworth, whom he encountered in the course of the afternoon. "She never suspected a thing. I made the exchange last night, when she left the ring for a few minutes on her dressing-table. She did make a remark to-day on its added brilliancy, but she's got her own way of accounting for that. I'm glad now I saw the decent thing to do."

"Give me a little credit," protested Mr. Butterworth.

"You?" said the other somewhat morosely. "I don't see where you come in. Advice is cheap."

Mr. Butterworth shrugged his shoulders.

"The usual reward of friendship," he said. "However, I am used to ingratitude. The knowledge that one has made other people happy—you don't look as happy as you ought, Scales—is reward enough for me."

Mr. Scales grunted.

"Come home with me to dinner," he said. "My wife is putting in the afternoon at the Foresters' to show off *our* present. She doesn't know how much she is indebted to you, but I know she will be delighted to show it to you and repeat all the compliments she has received on it."

"All right," assented the other. "I'll pose as an expert, and shower unlimited praises on you and the diamond. The only drawback is that in praising you I shall be indirectly praising myself. As a modest man——"

Mr. Scales impatiently cut him short, and the two proceeded to Mr. Scales's office, where an unexpected pressure of work considerably delayed their departure.

Mrs. Scales was in the dining-room when they arrived, and her greeting was decidedly frosty. There were traces of tears about her eyes, at which her husband marveled.

The chilliness of her demeanor he ascribed to the lateness of the hour and the fact that he had brought Mr. Butterworth home without previous announcement.

"Have a good time?" he inquired with ostentatious cheeriness as they sat down to dinner.

"Very, thank you," replied Mrs. Scales, pronouncing the words with impressive distinctness.

"Glad to hear it," said the husband heartily. "And the diam—— Hello," glancing at his wife's hand, "where's the ring?"

In reply, Mrs. Scales smiled a wintry little smile and turned to Mr. Butterworth.

"What would you think, Mr. Butterworth," she asked—"what would you think of a husband who brought his wife home a diamond ring?"

"I should say," replied Mr. Butterworth, with great impressiveness, "that it was a trait in his character to be encouraged. I should say he was a pattern to be held up to all husbands."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Scales; "but supposing the diamond he gave her was worth about two dollars and a half?"

The two men exchanged startled glances.

"Supposing," continued Mrs. Scales, in tragic tones, "that he pretended it was a real stone—that he accepted all her expressions of delight, and her thanks, and exposed her to the humiliation of learning the truth from some one else. What would you say then?"

"I would rather say nothing," replied Mr. Butterworth, shaking his head gently, and secure in his knowledge of the facts.

"There, George," said Mrs. Scales, turning to her fuming husband, "you hear what your best friend thinks of your conduct."

"I don't know what you are driving at," replied Mr. Scales, meeting Mr. Butterworth's look of shocked surprise with one of fiery indignation.

Mrs. Scales uttered a mirthless laugh.

"Mr. Forester was not at the tea," she said. "I don't wonder you smiled in such a satisfied way when you told me he wouldn't be. I suppose you thought yourself quite safe. *He* wasn't there, but somebody else was."

"I presumed there would be," Mr. Scales retorted, with bitter sarcasm.

Mrs. Scales, who by this time was on the verge of tears, controlled her emotion with difficulty.

"I sat," she went on solemnly, "next to that detestable Mrs. Winzer. I hate her, and she hates me. I'm sure I don't

know why, because I always try to be as nice to her as I can. I noticed her looking at my ring, and I moved my hand a little, so that she could see it better."

Mrs. Scales's voice quivered in self-pity at the recollection, and both men waited breathlessly for the dénouement.

"She said," continued the aggrieved wife—"she said, 'Dear Mrs. Scales, how brave you are!' I asked her what she meant, and she answered: 'Why, to wear one of those Alnazur diamonds. I think them just lovely. So like the real thing—and so cheap. I wish I dared wear them. I always stop and look at them in the window, but I have such an absurd prejudice against imitation jewelry—for myself, I mean, of course.'

"I told her," continued Mrs. Scales, after a lengthy pause, "as nastily as I could, that the stone was genuine, and that you had given it to me as a birthday present."

"That ought to have settled her," interjected Mr. Butterworth.

"Settled her?" replied Mrs. Scales, sniffing hard. "She settled me. I had only made a fool of myself."

"Well, once is enough," interrupted Mr. Scales heartlessly.

Mrs. Scales glared at him.

"When I said that," she continued, "she laughed—that horrid, abominable little laugh—and said: 'My dear, take my word for it, your husband has been having a little joke at your expense. I was passing the store where they sell those things'—she said 'things'—'and I saw him coming out. I couldn't imagine what he was doing there, as he has such good taste.'

"I got up and left her, and as soon as I could I slipped away. I didn't go home—I went down-town to the store, and in the window I saw at least two dozen rings exactly like mine. That was enough for me."

She looked at Mr. Butterworth as she concluded, but that gentleman preferred to follow his friend's lead, and only shook his head in a non-committal manner.

"And so," said Mr. Scales bitterly, "you accuse your husband of meanness on the word of a wretched, spiteful woman who is notorious for her ill nature."

"Do you deny that you were in that cheap diamond store?" demanded Mrs. Scales fiercely.

"No," replied Mr. Scales, who thought he saw a happy way out of the tangle by a very slight perversion of the truth. "Certainly I was there. Why should I deny it? I bought a ring as a birthday present for Aileen Gresham. She is probably wearing it now."

Mrs. Scales gasped.

"And then," Mr. Scales went on in a loud voice, "I went to Ambrose's and bought a real diamond ring for *your* birthday present. I picked out that particular setting because I admired it in the other. You don't suppose the settings of the expensive rings are copyrighted, do you?"

He took the jeweler's bill from his pocketbook, and having unfolded it with great care, handed it to his wife with an elaborate assumption of politeness.

"There," he said, "perhaps if you don't believe your husband you will believe that."

Mrs. Scales, leaning back in her chair, regarded her husband with horror-stricken eyes.

"Such a fuss about nothing," continued Mr. Scales in tones of virtuous indignation. "I'm surprised at you. Get the ring at once, and put it on."

"I can't, George," said Mrs. Scales faintly.

"Can't?" echoed Mr. Scales. "Nonsense! Why can't you?"

"Because," said the wife, in the same still, small voice—"because I have given it away."

Mr. Scales turned pale and collapsed in his chair, while his knife and fork clattered noisily on the table.

"Given it away?" he shouted. "Given it away? A ring worth a hundred and eighty dollars! To whom did you give it?"

"To—to old Mrs. Desmond, the washerwoman," sobbed Mrs. Scales, breaking down.

"What do you think of that?" cried Mr. Scales, addressing Mr. Butterworth and wildly clutching his own chair. "She gives away a ring—a stone worth a hundred and eighty dollars—to a washerwoman. What are you grinning at?"

"I'm awfully sorry," apologized Mr. Butterworth, assuming a preternaturally

grave expression, "but you must admit there is a humorous side to it."

"Humorous!" ejaculated the outraged Mr. Scales. "Humorous! You'd see a humorous side in your own grandmother's funeral."

"I know I would," said Mr. Butterworth contritely. "I can't help it. But this doesn't seem to me to be so serious, after all. You've only got to get the ring back from the washlady. She can't know its real value. One would think it was gone for good, to hear you talk."

Mrs. Scales cast a grateful glance at the speaker.

"You are making far too much fuss, George," she said. "Of course Mrs. Desmond will give the ring back. I told her it was a cheap imitation. She was leaving as I came in, and I was so annoyed that I just pulled it off my finger and gave it to her. You ought to be glad I did; I might have thrown it out into the street."

"That's so," assented Mr. Butterworth with conviction. "I never saw such an ungrateful chap as you are."

Thus reprimanded by his wife, and basely deserted by his friend, Mr. Scales, after several spluttering remarks addressed to nobody in particular, began to see that the loss was not irretrievable, and resumed his dinner.

"I hope this will teach you," he said severely, "not to be quite so hasty in future."

To this admonition Mrs. Scales merely replied with a superior smile, and bade her husband hurry through his dinner and start as speedily as possible on his mission of recovery.

Mr. Scales sulkily obeyed this injunction, and after spending ten minutes in a fruitless attempt to induce Mr. Butterworth to accompany him, the latter pointing out that it was beginning to rain and that he was obliged to be careful of his health, set out in an extremely bad temper for a remote section of the city.

His temper was not improved when he returned, after a protracted absence, and his wife and friend, who had been waiting anxiously for him, divined at once that his mission had been a failure.

"Get it?" he snapped, in reply to Mrs. Scales's inquiries. "No, I didn't get it. I stood for half an hour battering at the old woman's door in the rain. Then some stupid, thick-headed ass of a neighbor, who must have heard me all the time, came out and said the woman was away, and he didn't know where she was or when she would be back. He invited me to step in and wait, but I saw some one putting a baby to bed, so I declined. Then I walked up and down the alley—you never saw such a beastly place—till I got nearly wet through, and at last, as there were no signs of the woman, I came home."

"You ought to have waited a little longer," said Mr. Butterworth severely. "We wouldn't have been in the least anxious."

Mr. Scales could not trust himself to speak.

"It doesn't matter," said Mrs. Scales, who looked, nevertheless, as if she thought it mattered a great deal. "All you've got to do, George, is to get up early to-morrow morning and go around again."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Scales sarcastically. "That's all, is it? What do you call early?"

"Six o'clock," replied the wife. "Now, it's no use going on like that, George. It'll do you good, once in a way, and if you don't, Mrs. Desmond may have started for her work."

Mr. Scales, who detested early rising, continued to protest, but Mr. Butterworth, who had gone over bag and baggage to the other side, backed up Mrs. Scales's arguments so convincingly, and so drew on his imagination to point out possible eventualities in case of delay, that he was forced to consent.

When he finally accompanied Mr. Butterworth to the door his manner was that of one who with difficulty restrained himself from forcible ejection.

III.

AT seven o'clock the following morning Mr. Scales rapped vigorously on Mrs. Desmond's front door, and after waiting several minutes listening to scuffling sounds within, was admitted by the aged charwoman, who, unattractive at her best, looked particularly so in the early hours, with thin wisps of gray hair about her shoulders and a dirty wrapper enveloping her spare form.

A glance at a tumbled couch in a corner convinced the visitor that he had disturbed her slumbers.

"Lor'—bless me—Mr. Scales!" Mrs. Desmond cried as she identified her caller. "What an hour for you to be out!"

"I wanted to be sure of catching you," Mr. Scales explained.

"Me?" returned Mrs. Desmond, with a cackling laugh. "Why, I'm a reg'lar lie-abed. I never leave the 'ouse before 'alf past eight or nine."

Mr. Scales, heartily anathematizing Mr. Butterworth's imaginative powers, hastily explained his mission.

"Of course, I'll pay you for it," he added. "Say three dollars."

"Oh, dear me! dear me!" cried Mrs. Desmond. "'Ow unfortnit!"

"Unfortunate?" echoed Mr. Scales, falling back a pace. "What do you mean by unfortunate? Where's the ring?"

"I 'aven't got it, sir," replied Mrs. Desmond, "else you might 'ave it back an' welcome."

"Where is it?" demanded Mr. Scales, with such ferocity that the old woman stared at him.

"I was over to my daughter's, Mrs. Brixley's, last night," she went on, "and my granddaughter Mary—eighteen years old, she is—is that fond of a bit of jool-ry, so I just 'anded the ring over to 'er."

Mr. Scales did not wait for any further conversation, but, having obtained the address of Mrs. Desmond's daughter, who, it appeared, lived on the opposite outskirts of the city, hurried off on the second stage of his pilgrimage.

"I'm real sorry, sir," said Mrs. Brixley, when Mr. Scales had explained the object of his visit; "Mary started for her work not ten minutes ago. She has the ring with her. You must have passed her with the young gentleman that's keeping company with her. She don't usually leave so early—she goes on duty at the central telephone office at nine o'clock—but her young gentleman is going out of town, and she went down with him."

Scowling darkly on the unoffending Mrs. Brixley, Mr. Scales impatiently brushed aside a swarm of children who had gathered about the door-step to gaze on the distinguished visitor and made his way down-town.

"Sorry, sir," said the suave manager at the telephone office, "but such a thing is strictly against our rules. Miss Brixley will be free at half past two. I couldn't take her away from her work, short-handed as we are, except in a matter of life and death. It's not that, I hope?"

"No, no," replied Mr. Scales, "nothing of that sort. The fact is, she has a ring of mine which I am anxious to get back."

"Oh—ah—yes, to be sure," said the manager, with an indulgent smile. "Well, I'm sorry, sir, but I'm afraid you'll have to wait to see your young lady till two-thirty. A little time for reflection, perhaps——"

"Confound you!" interrupted Mr. Scales explosively. "She's not my young lady. I'm a married man."

"Oh, indeed!" rejoined the manager, with some hauteur. "I certainly understood her to say she got the ring from a gentleman. She showed it to me when she came in. Tickled to death over it, poor girl. However, it's no business of mine."

"The fact of the matter is," said Mr. Scales grudgingly, "my wife gave the ring to this girl's grandmother by mistake, and the old woman passed it on to her granddaughter. My wife has a particular affection for the ring, as it was a present from myself."

To this somewhat obscure explanation the manager replied with a smile of such aggravating skepticism that Mr. Scales was obliged to imprison both hands in his trousers-pockets.

To his demands, and even threats, the other continued to turn a deaf ear, and he was obliged to leave without attaining his object, his parting intimation that the general manager should be apprised of his subordinate's conduct having absolutely no effect.

IV.

MR. SCALES spent the morning at his office in a state of extreme nervous irritation, and after a hurried lunch at a restaurant, presented himself at the telephone office at the appointed time.

"I spoke to Miss Brixley about that ring," said the manager. "She seemed terribly put out at first until I told her it was a gentleman pretty well on in years who was inquiring."

"Oh, indeed," curtly replied Mr. Scales, who was sensitive on the subject of his age.

"She said she couldn't understand what you could possibly want," continued the manager, with a malicious side glance at the other. "I described you as well as I could, but she said none of her gentlemen friends were short and stout——"

He broke off his description as a file of young ladies began to flutter past the doorway, where they were standing. A pretty girl glanced at the manager with a smile, and he beckoned her aside.

"This is the gentleman, Miss Brixley," he said.

He watched for some sign of recognition, and was manifestly disappointed by the blank stare with which the girl regarded Mr. Scales.

"Oh, indeed?" said Miss Brixley. "You wished to see me about my ring?"

She raised her hand, and fondly regarded a broad band of gold set with three large pieces of coral.

"Not that one," rejoined Mr. Scales impatiently. "I have nothing to do with that."

"But this is the only ring I've got," replied the girl.

Mr. Scales brushed his hand across his eyes in a weary manner.

"I mean," he said, with laborious distinctness—"I mean the ring which Mrs. Desmond gave you."

"Oh, you mean that old imitation thing," replied Miss Brixley, laughing. "I told Granny she was a goose to buy it."

"Where is it?" demanded Mr. Scales breathlessly.

The girl blushed and smiled and cast down her eyes.

"I haven't got it now," she said coyly.

"Where is it?" insisted Mr. Scales, performing a tom-tom solo on the door-panel in his agitation.

"I exchanged it for this one," Miss Brixley answered softly. "I came downtown this morning with my—with the gentleman I am engaged to. He noticed the ring, and insisted on giving me his in place of it. I told him mine was a worthless imitation, but he said it didn't matter—it would remind him of me when he was away, and I could give him a better one later on. Why do you want to know?"

"Oh, nothing," replied Mr. Scales, with bitter emphasis. "Nothing at all. It only happens that that ring is my wife's, she puts great value on it, and she gave it to your grandmother by mistake."

"Oh, what a story-teller!" cried Miss Brixley.

Mr. Scales, wrought up almost beyond endurance, glared at her ferociously.

"I don't mean you," corrected Miss Brixley hurriedly. "I mean Granny. She told me she bought it. But the ring was an imitation, wasn't it?"

Mr. Scales coughed.

"That's no reason why my wife should not value it," he said evasively. "It was a present from me."

He noticed the swift glance which swept over his prosperous-looking exterior and the expression of surprise in the girl's face.

"You'd better get it back as quick as you can," he continued. "Where is this young man to be found?"

"I don't know," replied the girl shortly.

"Don't know?" cried Mr. Scales, in extreme exasperation. "But you *ought* to know. You're engaged to him."

"The young *gentleman,*" replied Miss Brixley, strongly emphasizing the noun, "is traveling for a New York house. He has been in town for about a week, and has gone West. He left this morning."

"But you know where he has gone to, don't you?" interrupted Mr. Scales sharply. "You can write to him, I suppose?"

"I only know," replied Miss Brixley, eying her interrogator with great disfavor, "that he is to be in Centerville a week from to-day. I am to write to him there. Since you are making such a fuss about the old ring, I will ask him to send it back."

"Pardon me," said the manager, who had been hovering well within earshot. "Did I understand you to say that the ring was given away by your wife?"

"I don't know the limits of your powers of comprehension," replied Mr. Scales sourly, "but I thought I had made that clear to any person of average intelligence."

"In that case," said the manager judicially, "I don't see what right you have——"

"What the mischief business is it of yours?" Mr. Scales demanded, with such violence that the other hastily moved back several paces.

"You write to him," continued Mr. Scales, turning again to Miss Brixley, "like a good girl, and I'll give you another ring in place of that one—a much more suitable ring."

Miss Brixley accorded a cold consent, and Mr. Scales, having scribbled his name and address on a card, and caustically intimated to the disapproving manager that he might as well begin to look out for another position, returned home to report his failure to a tearful and reproachful wife.

V.

TEN days later, Mr. Scales, at breakfast, opened a letter directed in an unfamiliar handwriting, and containing a few lines and an enclosure. At the latter he sat gazing with such a horror-stricken countenance that Mrs. Scales, greatly alarmed, demanded to know the reason.

"It's—it's about the ring," replied Mr. Scales in a faint voice.

Mrs. Scales did not wait for explanations, but leaning across the table, twitched from her husband's hand the scrap of paper at which he was staring.

It was a section of a letter. A ragged edge at top and bottom showed where possibly more intimate communications had been detached, and the writing on one side had been so heavily scored through as to make it illegible. On the other side, however, it was all too plain.

"Sorry about that ring," ran the inscription, "but I'm afraid your elderly friend will be disappointed. The fact is, I met a stranger on the train who took a fancy to the ring and offered me a hundred down, take it or leave it. Naturally, I took it. It will help furnish when the time comes. They must have been joshing you about its being phony. Lucky you've got Whats-his-name's own admission that it was a present, or he might make trouble."

Mrs. Scales laid the scrap of paper down, and a dreadful silence followed.

"George," she began at last in devastating tones.

"Well?" responded Mr. Scales resentfully.

"Do you want to know what I think of you?"

Mr. Scales laughed harshly.

"Go on," he said. "Let's have it."

"I think," said Mrs. Scales, rising to her full height and glowering upon her shrinking husband—"I think you are the biggest fool in the whole of the continent of the United States of America."

She did not wait for a reply, but swept from the room with the air and port of a tragedy queen.

Mr. Scales, left sitting with a fierce scowl upon his brow, beat his hand vindictively on the table-cloth.

"I'll have that hundred back, anyway," he said between his teeth.

But he never got it, and Mrs. Scales is still wearing her pearls.

SHIFTLESS SAM, DESERTER.

By BERTRAM LEBHAR.

Concerning a jack tar who didn't like the sea and the boomerang arrangements he made to quit it.

WHEN the battle-ship Montana came steaming into port one hot summer's day and cast anchor off Tompkinsville there was not an enlisted man aboard who did not cast hungry eyes upon the shore.

Not that there was anything particularly alluring to a sailor about the shore of Staten Island in itself, but there was not a sailor among them who did not know that back of Staten Island lay New York, and that in New York—in the

very heart of that teeming, bustling, sky-scraper bedecked, howling metropolis—was the Bowery.

Now, in the eyes of many men who do not go to sea the Bowery is nothing but a dirty, squalid, low-caste thoroughfare—a highway of the slums.

To jack tar, however, it is an enchanted land, dear to every sailor's heart, and often, also, to his pocketbook.

It is the first place Jack heads for when he touches New York, and he can't get there any too quick to suit him.

When a sailor has been away from the Bowery for more than twelve months he begins to get hungry for the sight of it, and the battle-ship Montana had been in foreign ports for more than a year.

Hence the anxiety of every man aboard to be in the first "liberty party."

Of all the ship's crew, there wasn't a man more eager to get ashore than Shiftless Sam, seaman.

Shiftless Sam wasn't his full name. He had been christened Sam Anthony in his infancy; but he earned the title "Shiftless" two weeks after he had enlisted, so his messmates dubbed him "Shiftless Sam," and knew him by no other name.

Shiftless Sam gazed lovingly at the coast-line and wondered anxiously whether he would be in the first or second batch of bluejackets to go ashore.

He felt that he really couldn't wait. If his name was not called with the first liberty party he felt strongly inclined to jump overboard and swim ashore. No seasick saloon passenger of an ocean-liner ever yearned to set foot on land more ardently than did Shiftless Sam at that minute.

He wasn't seasick—he had got over that some months ago—but he was desperately landsick.

He was tired of rolling on the billowy main. He was sick of pacing the area of a deck—even as big a deck as those of the battle-ship Montana.

Poets could rave about the beauties of the deep and the awesome grandeur of the crested waves, but Shiftless Sam wasn't a poet. Whatever poetry had been in his soul had been knocked out forcibly by twelve months of scrubbing decks and other arudous tasks.

Shiftless Sam hated the sea and all that pertained to it. If Neptune had just then arisen from the deep and confronted Sam he would have met with a curt reception.

Shiftless Sam would have torn the pitchfork from the Sea King's hand and beaten him on the head with it. That was the ugly mood he was in.

He now leaned against a capstan and ruminated bitterly.

"I'd like to thrash that enlisting officer who got me to join the navy," he muttered. "I'd like to throw him to the ground and then jump on him with both feet. I wouldn't show him any mercy, I wouldn't. I'd like to leave this mad-house of a ship and never come back, I would. Don't know as I will come back, either, once I get ashore. If ever I get a chance, I'll show 'em!

"That enlisting officer stung me good and proper. He lied to me, confound him. He told me that a sailor's life was lots of fun. He said that it was the only life for a young man. He said I'd get a chance to see the world, and that I'd have a roaring good time in every port we touched at. He said the work was easy and the grub as fine as a Waldorf-Astoria dinner.

"And I, like a fool, believed him. In the last seven months I've been ashore only once, and that was at Kingston, Jamaica, and only for a day then. The grub ain't fit to eat, and they work a man as if he was a machine.

"Some day there'll be a mutiny in the navy, and when it comes I want to be a ringleader. I'll show 'em."

He scowled, and clenched his fists.

Jerry Bailey, a blue-eyed, fresh-looking able-bodied seaman, noted the scowl. He walked over and slapped Shiftless Sam heartily on the back.

"What's the trouble, messmate," he said. "You look as sore as a seasick ship's cook. All the rest of us are feeling mighty good at the thought of getting a liberty. What ails you, Shiftless?"

"I'm sick of the navy," growled Shiftless Sam. "It's no place for decent men."

There was a striking contrast between Shiftless Sam and Jerry Bailey.

The latter was youthful-looking, neat and natty in appearance, and smiled at the world out of joyful eyes. He looked like the jolly jack tar one sees in pictures.

Shiftless Sam was just the opposite. His uniform was untidy and ill-fitting. There were suspicions stains on his blouse, indicative of carelessness in conveying food from plate to mouth. There was a certain hangdog air about him. He was not yet thirty years old, but he looked like a pessimist.

An angry glitter came into Jerry Bailey's eyes as Shiftless Sam made answer.

"You lie," he said hotly. "It isn't the likes of you that can knock the navy in my hearing. What do you expect, you hulking landlubber? You get as good treatment as you deserve, and a darn sight better. The navy's a good enough place for a man that is willing to work and can stand a few hard knocks. Don't you go making any cracks about it not being a place for a decent man. I'm a decent man, and don't you forget it, and I'm satisfied to wear Uncle Sam's uniform. It's knockers like you as gives the service a bad name ashore."

He looked at Sam threateningly.

"The grub's bad," said Sam, a little timorously.

He wasn't a fighting man.

"The grub's as good as you could expect," retorted Jerry. "It's as good as the likes of you'd get in any cheap Bowery restaurant ashore, ain't it?"

"They work us like horses," growled Sam.

"Did you think you was coming aboard as a cabin passenger," said Jerry. "Hard work never killed a man yet, as I knows of. It's only shiftless lubbers like you as kicks. If you didn't expect to work, what did you enlist for?"

"I wish I hadn't," retorted Shiftless Sam bitterly.

"The navy wouldn't have lost much," commented the other. "I suppose you're doping it out that you're going to desert first chance you get. Well, if you take my advice you'll think it over twice before you do it. They'll get you again, and they'll put you in double irons and confine you to the brig on bread and water for weeks. If you take a messmate's advice you'll not do it, Shiftless."

"Pooh!" said the other, uneasily. "Who said I was going to desert? I wasn't even thinking of it."

"That's right. I'm glad to hear you say so. Cheer up, Shiftless Sam, and look at things in the right way, and you will get along all O. K. You ain't been in the service long enough yet to get used to it. You'll get to like it better by and by, I guess."

He crossed the deck, leaving Shiftless Sam leaning moodily against the capstan, not a bit encouraged. The scowl did not once leave his face until he heard his name called for "liberty" and crowded aboard the ship's barge with his happy messmates.

There is a little saloon at Tompkinsville near the boat landing. The place is not a gilded café; it has not even the pretentiousness of a Bowery dive; but you can get grog there, and the sailors aboard the Montana hadn't tasted grog for months.

They besieged the little bar, a merry, scuffling, eager mob. They consumed stale beer, and it tasted like nectar to them.

They smoked big fat cigars with flaring red-and-gold bands and fillings of grass, and they enjoyed them as if they had been the finest *perfectos*.

Most of the jack tars stood treat for the crowd until every man was satisfied; but Shiftless Sam, still nursing his grouch, stood at the end of the bar, apart from his messmates, and bought drinks for himself and nobody else. He was so sore on the navy that he hated the sight of even a sailor.

When the happy crowd left the saloon to take the ferry to New York Sam stayed behind.

It wasn't that he had anything against his messmates personally; but, as has been said, he was in such a mood that he hated the sight of a blue uniform or a pair of loose trousers.

The saloon-keeper seemed surprised that Sam did not go with the rest. He looked at his gloomy, taciturn customer searchingly.

"Have a good voyage?" he asked, plainly with the intention of starting a conversation.

"No," grunted Shiftless Sam, in a tone so unfriendly that the man behind the bar was temporarily abashed.

"Toothache?" he inquired sympathetically.

"No," growled Sam.

"Corns, maybe? They're bad things. I had 'em myself when I was in the service."

"'Tain't corns, either," snapped Shiftless Sam. He lapsed into silence for a minute. Then: "Say, mister," he remarked suddenly, "do jacks ever desert without getting caught?"

"They didn't do it very often in my time," replied the ex-sailor. "If they nab you they'll make it pretty hot for ye. I shouldn't advise you to try it, young feller."

"Who's talking of trying it?" growled Sam uneasily. "Can't a feller ask a question without it's being considered personal?"

When he had left the place, however, he said to himself: "I ain't going back any more if I can help it. If only I wasn't so afraid of being nabbed."

Sam was a hearty eater. The thought of being confined to the battle-ship's brig in double irons with a steady diet of bread and water made him shudder.

Having nowhere else to go, he went to New York, and to the Bowery. His liberty was only for twenty-four hours, so he hadn't too much time in which to make up his mind as to his future course.

He was slouching along the Bowery, lost in thought and scowling down at the sidewalk, when suddenly somebody hailed him by name.

"Hello, Sam," said the voice.

Shiftless looked up quickly, and started back with surprise as he recognized the man who stood before him.

"Well, I'll be hanged," he said dazedly. "If it ain't my twin brother Bill, what I ain't seen for ten years. Well, I'll be blowed!"

"That's what, Sammy," responded the other, chuckling. "Thought I was lost forever, I suppose, eh?"

"Yes," responded Shiftless Sam. "I didn't expect to see you again, Bill. What you been doing these ten years back?"

"I've been away—visiting—part of the time," said Bill sheepishly.

He looked at his brother admiringly.

"And so you've gone and become a sailor, eh, Sammy? Well, you always was a credit to the family. Is it a nice life?"

Sammy was about to express his personal views of the navy as forcibly as his vocabulary permitted, when he was seized with a sudden idea. It was such a Napoleonic piece of strategy that it made him gasp to think that he should have conceived it all by himself.

He looked at his long-lost twin brother searchingly. He was almost an exact counterpart of himself, save that Bill wore a shabby black suit and a derby hat, while he, Sammy, was decked out in the obnoxious blue uniform.

"It's a fine life, Bill," he said enthusiastically. "It can't be beat. It's the only life for a young man like you or me. The work is easy, and you get all the chance you want to see foreign parts. I've seen every country on the face of the globe, including London and Chiny, since I shipped."

"Do they let you go ashore?" asked Bill enviously.

"You can bet they do. The officers are as kind as if they was your own mother. They take a fatherly interest in us. Whenever we touch at any port the captain says: 'Run ashore, boys, and stay as long as you like; but don't get too drunk. Here's a bunch of money to buy booze with. When it's all spent, come back for some more.'"

"I didn't know a sailor's life was as good as that," sighed Bill covetously. "You always was a lucky dog, Sammy. Is the grub good?"

"The finest ever," replied Sam.

"The very best food, and as much of it as you can eat. Roast turkey three times a week, and ice-cream on Sunday."

Sam's twin brother sighed again.

"Sammy," he said, with sudden determination, "I'm going to be a sailor. I'm going to enlist this very day. I guess the navy's big enough to hold both of us."

"Well, see here," replied Shiftless Sam, as though struck by a sudden thought. "I've got an idea, Bill. What's the use of both of us enlisting? What would you say if I offered to let you take my place?"

"How do you mean?" asked Bill.

"We're as like as two peas. What's the matter with you slipping into my togs and going back to the battle-ship Montana, while I stay ashore?"

"What do you want to stay ashore for? If the navy is as fine as you say, why do you want to get out?" asked the other suspiciously.

"Well, I'll tell you, Bill," said Sam earnestly. "There's only one fault I've got to find with the navy, and it's this—that it gets tiresome after a time. A feller gets tired even of a good thing, you see. If you went to work and enlisted you'd get tired of it, too, after a while.

"Now, I've got a splendid idea. It's lucky we were born twins. We can have lots of fun. You can go back to the Montana at Tompkinsville, dressed in my uniform and take my place, under my name, for six months. At the end of six months I'll be hungry for the navy again and I'll come and take *your* place.

"I slips into the service for another six months, and then at the end of that time you gets into my togs again and takes my place and I comes ashore, and so on. In this way we'll each get six months of each year on sea and six months on shore. Ain't it a beaut of a scheme?"

"Sounds pretty good," admitted Bill. "But don't you think they'll notice the difference between us, Sammy? Do you suppose that I'll be able to do your work? You're experienced, you see, and I ain't."

"Bless your heart!" cried Shiftless Sam, laughing heartily. "There *ain't* any work to do. All you has to do is to stand on the deck in a nice clean uniform and salute when the captain goes by; that's all."

"By gum, I'll do it, then," cried Bill eagerly. "When shall I start in?"

"You can start in right away, if you like. My shore leave is almost up. Let's come into one of these lodging-houses and swap clothes."

He seized his twin brother by the arm and led him into the doorway of a Bowery "hotel."

It didn't take long to make the exchange. In ten minutes brother Bill was attired as a sailor of the battle-ship Montana and Shiftless Sam was rigged out in the other's black suit and derby hat. The two men shook hands.

"I'm much obliged to you for this, Sammy," said Bill feelingly. "It's very good of you to give me this chance. You always was a good brother. You're sure you can stand being ashore for six months?"

"I'll try to bear it," replied Sam, resignedly. "At the end of six months I'll expect you to be willing to change places again, you know. Turn and turn about is fair play. You're sure you know your way to Tompkinsville, Bill?"

"Sure," said the newly created sailor. "Well, good-by, Sammy. You're sure they give you turkey three times a week and ice-cream on Sunday?"

"I'll pledge you my word. Good-by, brother Bill; good-by, and good luck to you."

After his brother had disappeared Shiftless Sam laughed heartily for the first time in twelve months. He laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Turkey three times a week and ice-cream on Sunday!" he gasped. "Oh, my eye, what a joke. And he thinks I'm going to take his place again at the end of six months! Poor brother Bill," and he burst into another uproarious laugh.

II.

For two days Shiftless Sam was a very happy man. There was only one thing that bothered him. He had neglected to ask Bill what line of business the latter had pursued. As a result, Shiftless Sam was in some doubt as to how he was going to make a living ashore.

Still, he wasn't so very much worried at that. He didn't doubt but what he would find some easy job. At any rate, he had saved enough money from his pay to enable him to live a life of leisure for a week or so. He felt at peace with all the world.

"I wonder how Bill is getting along," he asked himself as he strolled along the Bowery. "I wonder if he's tired of the life already. I'll bet he ain't so much stuck on the navy by now. There's that haughty young lieutenant who had a grudge against me, for instance. I'll bet he's making it hot for brother Bill by this time."

Suddenly Shiftless Sam was seized by a horrible thought.

"Supposing brother Bill changed his mind and never went near the ship at all?" he gasped. "They'll nab me as a deserter. I'm two days over my shore leave. I see my finish."

The battle-ship Montana was still at Tompkinsville. Sam knew that she was to be anchored there for a week.

Still, he dared not go near her to find out whether brother Bill had actually gone aboard. He was afraid to take a chance.

He trudged along the Bowery, a very much worried man.

Suddenly he heard a woman's voice exclaim excitedly: "That's him."

Before he could turn around, a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder and a man's deep tones said harshly: "Is your name Anthony, old pal?"

"Yes," replied Shiftless Sam.

"I've got a warrant for your arrest," went on the man, and turned to a woman at his side. "Are you sure this is him?" he asked.

"That's him, the wretch!" exclaimed the woman bitterly. "I'll teach him to run away again!"

"What's the charge?" asked Shiftless Sam dazedly.

"Desertion," answered the man.

Shiftless Sam swore volubly.

"Confound that lying brother of mine," he muttered under his breath. "He couldn't have gone near the ship at all."

"You'll come along quietly, I suppose?" asked the man.

"Yes," said Sam gloomily. "I won't make any fight. Where are you going to take me?"

"To court," said the officer.

Sam walked along by the man's side in silence, a prey to the most bitter thoughts. The woman walked on the man's other side.

Sam looked at her curiously. She was middle-aged, cross-faced, shabbily dressed, and not at all good-looking. Sam wondered just what part she played in the proceedings.

The court was near by, and it was not long before Shiftless Sam was arraigned before the bench. The officer whispered in his ear.

"I'll give you a piece of friendly advice," he said. "If I was you I'd plead guilty and throw myself on the mercy of the court. Promise not to do it again. He might let you off."

"Thanks," said Sam gratefully, "I'll do it."

"What's the charge?" asked the judge, a kind-looking old man.

"On a warrant, your honor," replied the officer, "this woman accuses him of desertion."

"Desertion, eh? That sounds very bad. What have you got to say, my man?" said the judge to Shiftless Sam.

"I'll admit that I deserted," answered Sam timidly. He still wondered how it was that this woman came to be his accuser. To the best of his recollection, he had never seen her before.

"She must be a woman detective," he thought suddenly.

"Why did you run away?" asked the judge sternly.

"I couldn't stand the life, your honor!" said Shiftless Sam earnestly.

"Pooh!" exclaimed the judge. "You ought to try to make the best of it. I'm tired of hearing you fellows come here and say that. It's your duty to stick by her through thick and thin. I'll bet she treats you better than you do her. What is there about the life that you can't stand?"

"Well, there's the grub, for one thing," said Sam sullenly. "I can't eat the food; it ain't fit for a dog to eat, much more a human being."

"Pshaw!" said the judge impatiently. "Do your duty by her, Anthony, and you'll probably get better grub. I'm tired of listening to such paltry excuses."

"I've got to work like a horse," protested Sam, determined to tell all his grievances against the battle-ship Montana.

"Of course you've got to work, my man," said the judge. "That's what we're all here for—to work. Hard work never killed an honest man yet."

"I don't get enough liberty," continued Sam.

"You get probably too much," retorted the judge. "See here, my man," he added in a kindly tone, "I don't want to be too hard on you. I'm willing to give you another chance. If I let you go, will you promise to go back to her and try to do your duty by her?"

"I will," cried Sam eagerly.

He saw terrible visions of the brig, double irons, and a long diet of bread and water, and he was willing to make any promise to escape this dire penalty.

"All right," said the judge. "Now, clear out of here, Bill Anthony, and don't let me ever see you in here again, or it will go hard with you."

Sam noticed that the judge addressed him by his brother's name, but he was too dazed to attach any particular significance to the fact. It was enough for him that he had escaped the brig, the double irons, and the steady diet of dry bread and cold water by promising to go back to the Montana and "do his duty by her" in future.

Well, he would return to the ship right away, and try to do his duty. He had learned his lesson once and for all.

In future, no matter how hard the life, he would grin and bear it. He wasn't going to be arrested for desertion any more if he could help it.

He walked out into the street, followed by the woman.

On the sidewalk she turned to him triumphantly, a mocking smile upon her hard features.

"See?" she exclaimed tauntingly. "You had to come back, didn't you? If you try any funny business again you'll go to prison sure as fate. I'll show you I'm not a woman to take any nonsense before I get through with you, you villain! I reckon you won't run away again in a hurry."

"I reckon I won't, either," replied Shiftless Sam bitterly. "But what my affairs have got to do with you, woman, is more than I can understand. You've made trouble enough for me, confound you. I don't want anything to do with you."

"Oh, you don't, eh?" retorted the woman. "If you get gay with me, you scamp, I'll go right back and tell the judge."

She seized him finally by the arm.

"You come along home now, without any nonsense, or I'll make it hot for you."

Sam angrily shook off her restraining hand.

"You've made it hot enough for me already, I'm thinking," he retorted bitterly, "I ain't got any time to stand here chewing the rag with you, woman. I've got to get back."

"Get back where?" asked the woman, in surprise.

"To my ship, of course. Where do you think? I'm going right back to the Montana, as the court-martial ordered. Do you think I'm going to take any more chances after the narrow escape I've just had? Not me."

He started to walk away.

"Do you mean to tell me that you ain't going to keep your promise to the judge," cried the woman, in horrified amazement.

"Of course I am, you idiot. That's what I'm going back to the ship for, ain't it?" he called back over his shoulder, and he started for Tompkinsville, leaving the dazed woman standing on the sidewalk outside the court-house, rendered absolutely speechless by his audacity.

On his way back, Shiftless Sam's thoughts were very bitter.

"Confound brother Bill!" he growled. "I might have known better than to have trusted him. He always was a liar, even when we was boys together. I thought I was getting the best of him, but he's stung me good and proper. If ever I run across him again, I'll show him. I bet he never went near Tompkinsville at all. Probably he hocked my uniform at the first Bowery pawnshop he passed. Gee! but I was a lubber to trust him!"

But when Shiftless Sam reached Tompkinsville he had an experience which caused him to undergo a quick change of opinion.

It was a glorious summer's day, and the sea was calm and a magnificent blue. The battle-ship Montana, at anchor a half-mile from the shore, looked like a beautiful sea-gull.

If Sam had been a poet he might have stood still, in rapture, to admire the scene. But, as has been said, Shiftless Sam was not cast in a poetic mold.

He espied the inviting door of the little beer saloon at the landing-place, and feeling that he would like to fortify himself before he went aboard, he hurried toward it.

A group of sailors were lined up against the bar, and Sam recognized them as his shipmates. He was about to greet them, when to his surprise they rushed toward him in a body.

"I didn't know I was so popular,"

was his first gratifying thought; but it was only a momentary one, for he received a blow on the jaw from Big Tom, an able seaman, which felled him to the sawdust-covered floor.

He staggered to his feet, sputtering with rage and astonishment.

"What's that for?" he stammered.

He was answered by a punch in the eye from Joe Daly, which came with such force as to cause him to howl with pain. Then the whole crowd fell upon him and pummeled him unmercifully.

In vain he yelled to them to stop and begged for some explanation of this strange attack. When they got through with him there was not a part of his body that did not ache.

"What have I done? What have I done?" he groaned, writhing on the floor in anguish. "Oh, you cowards, to treat a messmate that way for nothing!"

"For nothing, eh?" growled Big Tom savagely. "We'll teach you whether it's for nothing, dod gast you. Where's our money, you thieving pirate?"

"Where's my fifteen dollars, which I was going to buy a goat with?" shouted Joe Daly.

"Where's my twenty dollars? Every cent I had!" shouted another.

"Give me back my ten dollars, you thieving whelp!" came from a third.

"And my eighteen dollars and fifty cents!" yelled a fourth. "You might at least have left me the fifty cents, you cheap skate."

"We'll teach you," cried Big Tom furiously. "I've a good mind to start whipping you all over again. You'll pay every one of us back, or we'll know the reason why. There ain't a man here as you didn't steal from, you dirty shark!"

"I didn't steal any money," groaned Shiftless Sam, still writhing on the floor.

"You didn't, eh?" shouted Big Tom. "You're going to deny it, are you? You're going to deny that you came into this here saloon and invited us all to have a drink with you, eh? We might have guessed that something was wrong to see you offering to buy drinks, you pirate!

"You're going to deny that you put knock-out drops in our beer and put us all to sleep, are you, you blankety-blank jellyfish? You're going to deny that you went through all our clothes when we was lying in a helpless condition and stole every cent we had and then disappeared? You better not deny it, Shiftless Sam, or we'll whip you to a pulp."

But Shiftless Sam did not deny it. He understood everything at last, and groaned aloud in his anguish. It was not only anguish of body, but anguish of soul besides.

"I guess I made a mistake," he sighed. "Brother Bill did come to Tompkinsville, after all, confound him. Oh, how I'd like to lay hands on you now, brother Bill. Just for five minutes, that's all!"

Shiftless Sam had to submit to the indignity of being searched by every member of the savage group before they were willing to believe that he had not their money on his person. The discovery was such a bitter disappointment that the more violent were for giving him another whipping on the spot. Calmer counsel prevailed, however.

"We've given him about all he can stand," said Big Tom. "Come on messmates. We'll have lots of chances to make it hot for him when he comes aboard. We'll teach him."

The infuriated jack tars strode out of the saloon, breathing terrible threats. Shiftless Sam staggered to his feet, still groaning with pain.

He was about to leave the place, when two marines entered.

"Ah, Shiftless Sam!" cried one, in surprise. "We want you."

"What for?" gasped Sam.

"For desertion," said the marine. "We've got orders to bring you back dead or alive."

"To Hades with you and your orders," cried the wretched sailor savagely. "I've been before the court-martial already and the judge told me that if I came back to the ship and did my duty in future he'd forgive me this once. Ain't that enough?"

"Not quite," said the marine, with a sarcastic laugh. "You come aboard and tell that pretty little story to the captain. He ain't in a very pleasant mood to-day, and I think he'll enjoy that joke. He don't like deserters. He always sends 'em to the brig, with double irons, and nothing but bread and water for meals week-days and Sundays. I see your finish, Shiftless Sam."

THE OLEO KING'S DYSPEPSIA.

By M. J. PHILLIPS.

Jack Holliday's scheme for a million and how it worked out.

JACK HOLLIDAY, club-man, cosmopolite, and spendthrift, sat in his luxurious rooms, alone. There was a puzzled frown on his brow, and an unlighted cigarette hung dolefully from his lips.

Two score of bills of varying sizes, of varying degrees of urgency, and invariably for large amounts, littered the round table in front of him. It was a day of reckoning, and Jack, like the most of us, disliked days of reckoning.

"I seem to be up against it," he mused, elevating his heels until they rested among the papers on which "Please remit" was a prominent feature. "In debt fifty thou, posted at two clubs for non-payment of dues, and my landlord, confound him! likely to set me into the street to-morrow. And now the governor shuts off my beggarly two thousand a month because I've overdrawn a year or so. Tough luck! I certainly do need the money!"

To give pause to gloomy reflections, Holliday picked up the Sabbath edition of the New York *Planet*, that saffron of the saffrons. Without, it was a snowy Sunday afternoon. For once Holliday did not feel like seeking the society of his kind, preferring the company of the blues—and the "yellows."

One full page of the *Planet's* magazine section was devoted to the story of Le Marron Burkhart, oleomargarin-manufacturer, and many times a millionaire.

Burkhart's slavery to dyspepsia was well known. Despite his money, he could not get rid of the disease. He was a bald-headed, long-faced man, and his likeness, with the confirmed dyspeptic's expression of despairing cynicism, stared at Holliday from a wreath of alleged remedies and pepsin tablets.

Beneath the picture was blazoned the fact that "Burkhart, oleomargarin-maker, will give a million dollars to the man who will cure him of dyspepsia!"

Holliday read the article, at first with indifference, then with sparkling eyes and keenest attention. It recounted many facts already well known—how the millionaire dined on crackers and skim-milk, while his family consumed food the cost of which would buy rations for an army; of the fast horses he dared not drive and the yacht he could not board because of the distress to his capricious stomach.

These facts were made timely by Burkhart's offer of a million for a cure, and by the hint that something was pending within the confines of the oleo trust—a Titanic struggle that would make Burkhart absolute master or would drive him back to the ranks, defeated.

The paper slid from Holliday's grasp, and he sat without a movement in his chair—mind concentrated, eyes unseeing.

Of the oleo war he knew nothing, nor cared; in the million-dollar offer he was deeply interested. Its genuineness was not to be doubted. Not in the habit of taking the newspapers or the public into his confidence, Burkhart's sufferings were nevertheless familiar to both.

The princely bonus from one so wealthy was a mere bagatelle could an absolute cure be effected. The *Planet* was usually reliable, despite the ocher tint.

Holliday arose briskly and surveyed himself in a long mirror.

"Dr. Holliday," he said, bowing low to the figure in the glass, "it's you for the million! We need it in our business."

Thereupon he despatched a telegram to a certain Montana town, the net result of which was the appearance at his door, the following Thursday evening, of a steady-eyed, thin-lipped young man who wore, among other things, a flannel shirt and a bulge on his right hip. The bulge, it might be remarked, was made by a large and capable-looking revolver.

On Saturday morning New York was paralyzed to read that Le Marron Burkhart, the oleo king, had disappeared. His chauffeur, waiting at dusk, on Friday, in front of the Burkhart Building, on Wall Street, had been snatched from the motor-car and hurried away in a cab by two desperate men. This much was learned afterward from the chauffeur himself.

When Burkhart entered the automobile, a few minutes later, one of the two kidnapers was at the lever, yet so disguised in the true chauffeur's garb that the oleo king knew not the difference; and he was straightway driven into oblivion.

There was more than a nine days' wonder. Oleomargarin stock performed all the gyrations on the calendar. The police, big rewards in sight, worked like men possessed.

They found hundreds in their drag-net who were reckless enough and needy enough to kidnap Burkhart. Unfortunately, none of the catch had done so. The bulldogs of the law looked everywhere except in the private car of Forrest Holliday, railway magnate.

In that vehicle, as it traveled westward, the missing millionaire lay, bound and gagged, behind darkened windows. A thin-lipped young man in a flannel shirt and other garments which somehow suggested the expansive and untamed West sat guard.

Elsewhere in his father's favorite conveyance Jack Holliday, duly announced in the papers as off for a tour of familiar haunts toward the setting sun, smoked many cigarettes. He also figured overmuch on the pleasing task of spending one million dollars.

About the time the private car was dropped from a transcontinental train at Quartz Hill, Montana, New York had another jolt. It was a telegram from New Orleans to Burkhart's family.

The message assured them that the millionaire was well, and was not being held for ransom; that he would be back in two months in better health than ever before. The tantalizing signature was "Willie Wise."

The New Orleans police failed to discover who sent the telegram.

Five days from the time of his seizure, in the early evening, the oleo king slid wearily from a burro in the lonely Smoky Range Mountains. He was in front of a rough but comfortable cabin, built with its back against a perpendicular cliff.

His nearest neighbors, outside Holliday and the man of the flannel shirt, who answered to the name of Buck, were ten miles away. Quartz Hill was twenty miles to the northeast.

While Buck stabled the burros in a small log barn near by, the debonair Holliday and his guest entered the cabin. A fire was soon blazing in the fireplace at one side of the single room. Burkhart's secret hope of escape was dashed, for the young club-man, unlocking a door of heavy iron bars which had been set in the living rock forming the cabin's rear wall, invited him to enter.

It was a prison-chamber hewn from the stone, stronger and safer than the Tombs itself.

Mr. Burkhart ate no supper. The jolting of train and burro had kept his delicate stomach irritated. He drank a swallow of water, and threw himself on a bed of pine boughs to groan in sleepless misery.

The next morning Holliday's long-delayed explanation of his outrageous conduct was forthcoming.

"Mr. Burkhart," he began, after the millionaire had breakfasted sumptuously on a cup of water, "was the statement in the *Planet* concerning your offer of a million dollars for the cure of dyspepsia correct?"

"It was," answered the wobegone prisoner; "but, you scoundrel, what has that to do with this crime of yours?"

"Softly, softly, Mr. Burkhart; I am going to cure that dyspepsia. At the end of two months you'll be released a well man."

"Two months!" shouted the oleo king. "Why, in two months Billings and his crowd will have deposed me from the head of the oleomargarin trust. I must get back to New York right away!"

He rose excitedly.

"Oh, not just yet!" grinned Holliday. "I guess that if they do get the jump on Mr. Burkhart you'll still have the wherewithal for crackers and milk. Here you stay until I say the word."

"You'll not get a cent! I'll have you jailed for this!"

Holliday yawned.

"Your word of honor must be passed on both those propositions before I release you."

Then began the strangest course of treatment over accorded a millionaire's pampered and petulant stomach.

It was a week before the oleo king received anything but water. The keen mountain air was working a change, and the eighth day he conquered a stubborn pride and asked for something more substantial.

Buck and Holliday, after consultation, allowed him a gill of soup, which they made from canned tomatoes. In another week, to his delight, the millionaire could drink a little coffee without evil effects.

In a month he had gained fifteen pounds in weight and was eating his share of bacon and "sinkers." At the end of six weeks the oleo king was a changed and happy man.

To all intents and purposes, he was cured. A few hairs even appeared on the bald and shining expanse which extended from his eyebrows in front to his collar behind.

Early in the second week Burkhart had been made to see reason. Wisely accepting the inevitable, he gave his parole, promising to make no attempt to escape or to communicate with his friends. After that, the three ranged the hills, gliding over the crisp, sparkling snow on snow-shoes, hunting the game which abounded.

From the taciturn Buck the oleo king learned something of woodcraft. His joy when he shot his first squirrel exceeded the elation which had followed the making of his first million. Holliday taught him to smoke.

Although apparently bowing to circumstances with a good grace, he had not forgotten or forgiven. Beneath a calm and cheerful exterior, Burkhart brooded upon the kidnaping—the indignity offered himself, the anxiety of his family and friends, the joy of his commercial enemies over his removal at a crucial moment, and at the laughter of the man in the street.

Despite the pomposity of the successful business man, Burkhart had a keen sense of the ridiculous. He flushed with anger as he thought of the countless jeers his kidnaping had evoked.

The ability to watch and wait had made Burkhart what he was. Now he watched and waited for an opportunity to repay Holliday in his own coin—to hold him up to ridicule in turn.

Physical means would not serve; Holliday, in that respect, was more than a match for him. And there seemed little hope in other directions. Holliday had no money of which to be deprived. In a battle of wits the trifler might score again if an attempt were made to repay him in New York. That would never do.

It would be a ticklish job to pay off Holliday neatly, thoroughly, and in such a manner that there could be no retaliation on the club-man's part.

As the time of his emancipation drew nearer Burkhart's impatience grew. It was part of "Doctor" Holliday's treatment to keep worry as far as possible from his patient.

None of the trio had seen a newspaper since leaving Quartz Hill. The oleo king, though it did not prevent him from disposing of three robust meals daily, wondered constantly whether Billings had overpowered his friends and wrested the oleo trust from the Burkhart claw. His other investments, comprising the bulk of his fortune, were safe, and caused him no uneasiness.

"Wait until I get back," was the millionaire's thought as the red blood surged healthfully through his body. "I'll have the Billings crowd on the run in ten days. I'll show them! The way I feel now, I'm as good as a dozen ordinary men. I wonder what Buck will have for supper?"

There were signs of spring in the valleys when the two months at last were up and Burkhart was free to go. As he bade his companions good-by at Quartz Hill, instinctively they assumed their natural, or Eastern, attitudes toward one another.

Burkhart, instead of being a charge and a dependent, was the superior mind, the suave man of affairs; Buck was only a crude Western adventurer; Holliday a trifling spendthrift.

"Buck," said the oleo king, "I want

you to bear witness to what I say. I promise Mr. Holliday entire immunity from arrest and prosecution for kidnaping. You, of course, are included. And"—very slowly and distinctly—"I will credit the account between us, Holliday, with one million dollars for curing my dyspepsia. Is that satisfactory?"

"Perfectly," replied Jack.

"Remember, I credit your account with a million," repeated the oleo king.

Holliday remained behind a few days; then he, too, went East. Even in so short a space of time, Burkhart had inaugurated a vigorous war on the enemies who had grown strong in his absence, and financial New York was rocking from his impact.

He was oleo king no more. Billings was in control of the trust, and Burkhart had sworn to give his rival no rest until command had been regained.

The ever-present cigarette was between Holliday's lips when he strolled into the Burkhart Building for his million. Burkhart the rejuvenated seemed glad to see him; yet there was a smug complacency in his greeting which made Holliday vaguely suspicious.

Five or six plain-clothes men, in attitudes of studied carelessness, were in evidence about the bustling offices. One big fellow stood just within Mr. Burkhart's door. But Holliday's fears were soon allayed.

"Ah, you're back, are you, Mr. Holliday?" said the millionaire briskly. "Sorry we can't visit a moment or two, but I'm busy—very busy. Haven't forgotten our little transaction. I was to give you credit for a million?"

He looked keenly at the younger man.

"My understanding of it," replied Holliday airily.

In imagination he had already outdone all former feats of profligacy with that million.

Burkhart handed over a sealed envelope.

"Good morning, Mr. Holliday," he said. "My sincere thanks go with it."

Two of the detectives sauntered along the busy corridors as Holliday preceded them to the door.

On the stone steps Holliday paused and tore open the envelope. He expected a check, but the enclosure was of the old familiar shape—a bill-head, by all the gods!

On it was written:

> John Holliday, to Le Marron Burkhart, Dr. To two months' absence from business, $1,000,000. Loss of control of Oleomargarin Trust, $4,000,000. Cr., Cure of dyspepsia, $1,000,000. Balance due, $4,000,000. Usual discount for cash.

And at the bottom stared back the hated phrase, "Please remit!"

Tearing the paper viciously into fragments, Holliday turned.

"I'll break the old villain's jaw!" he muttered, clenching his hands.

But the detectives barred the door. He tried to force his way in, and they hurled him back. And then Jack Holliday, who had in his brief career furnished the New York newspapers with much good "copy," placed these sheets under further obligations; for, rushing through the throng until a clear space was reached, he kicked his silk hat along the pavement for half a block, swearing savagely the while.

SPRING.

SPRING, with that nameless pathos in the air
Which dwells with all things fair;
Spring, with her golden suns and silver rain,
Is with us once again.

Out in the woods the jasmine burns
Its fragrant lamps, and turns
Into a royal court with green festoons
The banks of dark lagoons.

In the deep heart of every forest tree
The blood is all aglee,
And there's a look about the leafless bowers
As if they dreamed of flowers.

AFTER THE PLAY.

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART.

What happened when the members of a theatrical company attempted to find entertainment at midnight in what appeared to be a quiet hotel.

AT a quarter before midnight the leading hotel of a small provincial city is scarcely a scene of revelry. On this particular night the lights over the cigar-stand were extinguished, leaving that corner almost noticeably gloomier than the remainder of the lobby.

A solitary guest leaned over the desk, where a clerk was thumbing a railroad guide with the expression of a man who has done the same thing for eternities past and expects nothing else of the future.

The party of four trailed through the storm-doors and paused, disconsolate, just inside.

"Oh, joy! Oh, rapture!" sang Tommy Henderson from the depths of his fur collar. "Let's go out again; wherever you go in this town you think you'd be happier somewhere else."

"We could look in the windows," suggested Randolph, with an air of inspiration. "We passed an undertaker's shop, coming up, with the most stunning display——"

Up to this time neither of the two muffled feminine figures had spoken. Now one of them broke in, raising her heavy brown veil and throwing it over the top of her hat.

She was very young and very pretty; just now there were dark lines of fatigue under her rather childish clear eyes.

"I shall not stir an inch," she announced firmly. "I am starving."

"This isn't New York, you know, Helen," said Tommy. "If you feel any doubt on the subject, gaze around you. Look at the dining-room door; can't you tell by its very appearance that it's been closed since eight o'clock and won't be open until our peripatetic commercial friends get down to breakfast? Let's walk around the block, anyhow. There's a toy-store down the street where a wooden cat winks its eye and plays the fiddle—perhaps it works all night."

"Toys!" groaned the tall feminine figure in its tweed ulster. "Toys! There will be murder done if any one intimates that Christmas is coming!"

"Day after to-morrow," said Randolph. "Cheer up, Annie. That was a rousing box you sent the kids."

The little party had moved up the lobby slowly, and now grouped itself, as if loath to separate to the dreary emptiness of the gas-lighted rooms above. Helen Newmyer dropped rather limply on to a leather divan and unpinned her veil with listless fingers.

"It *was* a nice box," observed "Annie," otherwise Mrs. Randolph, with some complacency. "It cost a mint to express it; and that reminds me, Jim—have you seen Mr. Andrews since the performance? I'm out of money."

"Then there's no use looking for Andrews," replied her husband coolly, taking out a box of cigarettes.

There were only two in the box; he hesitated, glanced at the darkened cigar-stand, and put the box carefully back in his pocket. Tommy grinned.

"No, thanks, old man," he said cheerfully. "It's against my principles to smoke on an empty stomach."

Mrs. Randolph sat down beside the girl on the couch and yawned.

"Twelve o'clock," she said sleepily. "Twelve mortal hours until we leave——"

"And nothing to do between now and bedtime." Helen laughed, and leaning over, patted Mrs. Randolph's shoulder.

"It won't be long until you see the kiddies," she said. "And think of the joy they'll have with those hockey skates. Imagine *you* having youngsters old enough for skates!"

"Old enough!" Randolph broke in on the last sentence. "Old enough! Why, Jimmy, Junior, is over thir——"

"I *wish* Andrews would show up," said his wife hastily. "I can't leave

here to-morrow if he doesn't come. And if I'm held up for board, and there's no performance to-morrow night——"

"If Tommy will pay me back what he owes me I'll lend you a little," said Randolph magnanimously. "I'd rather lend to the first old lady than to the juvenile, any time."

Mrs. Randolph glared at him, and Tommy smiled, abashed.

"Cæsar's ghost! Did I hear music?" he exclaimed the next instant, and darted away.

Randolph looked after him pityingly.

"I don't think we'll take him home," he said sadly. "He's been getting worse lately. Music—in a place like this!"

"The harp that once through Tara's halls," hummed Helen.

"There's Mr. Andrews now." Annie Randolph's tone was relieved. "He's brought Jessie, of course. I hope he has cash; a check's no use here."

It *was* Andrews. He closed the heavy outer storm-door behind Jessie Dennison, and with his hand on the knob of the inner door, turned and looked at her.

The people inside saw the little tableau and watched curiously, while the light streamed through the glass of the door on to the girl's face.

Like the others, she looked fagged and weary. And there was something more—an expression of tension that made Randolph, big, lazy, warm-hearted Randolph, glance uneasily from her to the man with her.

"Jessie's going off in looks," remarked Mrs. Randolph, settling down in her ulster after a prolonged stare. "That's the trouble with being a beauty—you set yourself an awful standard to live up to. Your stock jumps up and down. You'll drop twenty points with a bad headache, and a cold in the head——"

"Produces liquidation," said Tommy smartly, at her elbow. "I say, what will you give me if I offer you something to eat, a little to drink, any amount of company, with music on the side?"

"Don't be cruel, Tommy," put in Helen. "Behave yourself. Here comes Mr. Andrews."

"Listen to me," went on Tommy cheerfully; "beyond that door is a long, dark hall, and beyond that long, dark hall is a door, and beyond that is joy and gladness, beer and skittles, fried eggs and tea—all the comforts of home. Come on."

As they trailed off behind him Jessie Dennison came through the inner door, followed by Andrews. Tommy's clear young voice floated back to them:

"Come on, my partners in distress—
My comrades through this wilderness."

"I wonder where on earth they are going." Jessie looked after the procession as she pulled off her gloves. "Tommy looks as if he scented a Welsh rabbit. Shall we find out?"

"Anything will answer, so it permits me to put off the inevitable good night," said Andrews ponderously. "I don't like to take that answer of yours away with me in the morning, Miss Jessie. Perhaps after you get warm and have something to eat you'll see things differently."

"I don't think anything will make any difference, Mr. Andrews." She was struggling with the hook of her fur boa, but as Andrews made a motion to assist her she drew back.

"I can do it," she said, giving the hook a vicious jerk. Then, more gently: "I'm not a very agreeable person these days. I—I think it's the weather."

Andrews laughed. Then he caught her elbow, and holding her thus, made a sweeping gesture that included everything in sight—the decrepit elevator; the rows of chairs, each with its cuspidor; the bare staircase, disappearing into the dark of the next floor.

"Weather!" he said scornfully. "Weather! No, it's this, Miss Jessie. It's the hours, the detestable food, the traveling, the bad houses. Look here, do you know what it means to marry me? It means your own play next year; it means New York, and a chance to show them what you can do. It means I'd never rest until my wife was at the top. And when she got there, I'd see she stayed there."

His broad, heavy face was unpleasantly close to her. There was no one near; the sleepy clerk had disappeared. Jessie pulled her arm free and faced him.

"I don't know why you want me to marry you, Mr. Andrews."

She was very tired, very discouraged. Perhaps—who knows?—if he had said he cared about her, that he wanted her because he loved her, she would have given him his answer then and it would have been forever too late. But Andrews failed to grasp the psychological moment.

"I don't know why, either," he said, "but I do, and that's enough for me."

"I say, Mr. Andrews," came Tommy's voice from the door, "don't you want to come in? I'm giving a party."

As they followed him through the narrow hall Andrews had an opportunity for a word with Jessie.

"I'm going in the morning," he said cautiously. "Remember, your own play next year, and I'll put you at the top."

Coming after the gloom of the lobby and the thick blackness of the little hall, the scene which presented itself as Tommy triumphantly threw open the door was almost dazzling—in its surprise rather than its brilliancy. For the electric lights dotted along the rafters were almost obscured by tobacco-smoke.

Jessie had an impressionistic view through the haze of a long low room filled with bare tables, walled and ceiled with wood; of a hundred boyish faces—good-humored, rollicking, and just now inquisitive faces—turned toward her. And somewhere, away off through the mist, a piano in a built-in wooden cage, with a man in an overcoat thudding out the final bars of a popular song:

"From old Cheyenne! OH! OH! *Oh!*" the boys sang, their eyes on the door.

Jessie gasped, and promptly choked and coughed.

"Atmosphere with a vengeance," Tommy whispered. "You can bite it off in chunks. These are men from the college—fellows who were at the theater, and are ready to eat you up."

He took her gently by the arm and led her the length of the long room. Here, at a table in the corner, the rest of the party had already assembled.

"Shy Ann, shy Ann, hop on my pony——" the college men sang.

From a table near them a fair-haired boy with a beautiful clear tenor took up the refrain, his eyes on Jessie.

"Why don't they sing something else?" Mrs. Randolph whispered sibilantly. "They've done that same thing over and over."

"They can't stop, you know," answered her husband. "Just when they think they're through, some idiot starts up that 'Oh! Oh! Oh!' business, and they have to do it all over."

Jessie leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. They were smarting from the smoke, and perhaps—it had been a trying day—perhaps, too——

Andrews bent across the table; his manner was almost tender.

"A glass of wine, Miss Jessie?" he suggested solicitously. "You look tired."

"A cup of tea, please."

She looked through partly closed lids at the bulky figure and mustached face of the manager. He was not so bad, she reflected; there was kindness as well as shrewdness in his heavy face. And there was the money; he had lavished it on his first wife—then she shuddered a little.

"Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten," sang the clear tenor near by.

The words were picked up by the boys, until all were singing, and the plaintive notes swelled and fell again. Jessie looked around the table.

The melody, beyond adding to the cheerfulness of the scene, meant nothing to these her chosen people. And Andrews was engrossed with a piece of celery, which he was packing with cheese.

"Die Lorelei gethan." The notes die away slowly, regretfully.

Helen took another sip of her ginger ale and looked over the edge of the glass at the boyish faces, turned admiringly in her direction.

"I'd like to live in a college town," she said, apropos of nothing.

Then, after a moment, she looked at Tommy, who was suddenly sulky.

"The girls have such good times," she went on innocently. "Always lots of men to take them to things, lots of attention—oh, I'd like to settle down right here. I want a little real love instead of make-believe. I'd have a house—a real house, instead of a back drop, two flats, and a practical door. I'd like the real things for a change; real people, real food, real love——"

"Don't," Jessie interposed suddenly.

"That's what I say," added Andrews, leaning forward. "This isn't life, is it? Not for a woman, anyhow. It's well enough in its way, but it's only preparation. You don't *live* until you're in New York. Eh, Miss Jessie?"

"What did I tell you?" whispered Annie Randolph to her spouse. "He's dotty about her. If she marries him——"

"'Sh!" cautioned her husband.

The man at the piano rose amid a torrent of abuse from the boys and firmly picked up his hat.

"It's one o'clock, gentlemen," he said, with an eye on the door. "It's an hour over time now——"

He ducked as a bit of crust flew by his ear. A dozen hands gripped the offender who had thus forgotten the presence of ladies and bore him, expostulating, to the door. There was no noise, only a subdued murmur, and the musician took advantage of the distraction to leave.

Andrews beckoned to the waiter.

"Bring all the checks to me," he said largely, waving a fat hand around the table, while the members of the company looked duly gratified.

The atmosphere was perceptibly clearer than when the party came in; there was little smoking, almost no drinking. The men leaned back in their chairs and watched the table in the corner with unaffected interest or drew out programs and surreptitiously passed them along.

Mrs. Randolph, having finished her sandwich, sat up and looked around her.

"It's fine, isn't it?" she queried of no one in particular. "I have a warm place in my heart for nice, clear-eyed college boys. They have so many ambitions, and they—they wear such nice clothes!"

But Jessie was not listening. She was back again in the old home town—the town that had seemed so deadly dull. Now she knew it was only peaceful.

She thought of the college on the hill, with its imposing majesty of halls and chapels, with its bursts of sporadic gaiety and its long vacant summers. It had all seemed prosaic enough before, when she had hopefully left it.

Left it—for what? She conjured up the evening that was just over; the theater, half empty below; its two balconies crowded with boyish faces. There had been a theater just like that at home.

It was a one-night stand, when the more courageous of the college men took their sweethearts, while the less fortunate ones lined up at the curb and watched their triumphant entrance.

To-night she was just a little bitter. She had bartered her seat in front of the footlights with—some one beside her for a dusty dressing-room and a colored maid for companionship; for the amusement-seeking of former days, the nerve-racking effort to please; and for the some one to take her home she had Andrews—Andrews, who wanted to marry her, to star her, to put her at the top——

At a table just behind her a group was eagerly discussing the formation of a new frat. The man sent to open the chapter was there, and half a dozen boys were doing him honor.

He had been entering into the spirit of the occasion with zest—singing, applauding, whistling, his auburn head bobbing in time to the music. But for the last hour he had been very quiet.

"You're tired, aren't you?" one of the boys said suddenly. "We're a set of barbarians here, keeping you out of bed. We'd better have some more beer all around and then clear out."

The older man put out his hand protestingly.

"Don't think of it," he said hastily; "I'm younger than any of you fellows to-night. Keep it up till the morning after, if you like. I'll stay, only—no more beer for me."

He had shifted his chair a little, and from where he sat he could see a part of Jessie Dennison's profile. The boys were singing again, without the piano, and under cover of the music he studied each member of the party at the next table.

He lost nothing. He saw the Randolphs, affectionately quarreling; he saw Tommy slip his hand under the table and, after a moment, Helen's hand follow. He saw Andrews, with the small full eyes and broad face of the gourmand, eying Jessie as if she were some delectable morsel of food.

And last, and for a long time, his eyes rested on the girl who leaned back wearily, her eyes partly closed, her hands clasped loosely in her lap.

Andrews was speaking.

"'The Parting of the Ways' is going to make good," he was saying. "It's a great play, with a woman's part that's wonderful — wonderful is the right word."

Jessie stirred uneasily. Helen sat up and dropped Tommy's hand; the confidences of the management were not to be treated lightly.

"And trust you to find the right woman," said Mrs. Randolph vivaciously. "I call your talent in that direction genius—positive genius—Mr. Andrews."

Andrews smiled sphinx-like.

"I have my eye on some one," he announced ponderously. And for the second time that evening Jessie shuddered.

"She'll be a lucky woman." Mrs. Randolph's response was in the tone of a person who has guessed a secret and pledges her silence. Suddenly the boy with the tenor voice began to sing again, this time softly.

"For it's always fair weather
When good fellows get together."

Jessie leaned forward abruptly; the man at the table behind, who had started a little as the clear words floated out, pulled himself together and watched the girl. The song rose and fell, and the girl's heaving breast rose and fell with it.

The men sang with restraint, their mellow tones subdued, as if they regretted that all things must end and that the evening of good-fellowship was over:

"'The Parting of the Ways,'" Andrews began didactically, and found no one was listening.

As the voices died away Jessie leaned forward. The man at the next table listened shamelessly.

"I think I'll go home after the holidays," she said clearly.

Andrews put down his glass.

"I'm—I'm tired out," she went on; "tired, body and mind. I've reached the period when I'm hateful to myself, and I'll soon be hateful to other people."

"Nonsense," said Tommy. "Don't you dare to leave us. We'll go to pieces if you do. If this is the effect my party has on you——"

"If you'll go right to your room and take a bath, a hot one, and then turn on the cold faucet," began Mrs. Randolph, "so as to cool the water gradually, and stay in it until it's ice-cold, you'll wake up another woman."

"In another world, you mean," said her husband disrespectfully.

But Jessie had made up her mind.

"I'm going home to start a millinery shop," she said, with an attempt at a smile. "I've always wanted to trim hats, and now I'm going to do it. And I shall ask such prices that people will know the styles are right."

Andrews leaned to one side while he extracted a roll of bills from his trousers-pocket. Only after he had paid the waiter did he look at Jessie.

"And 'The Parting of the Ways'?" he asked sluggishly.

"That's just it," replied Jessie. "Only—this is the parting of the ways."

The man behind upset his neighbor's glass.

"You see," Jessie went on, "I—I'm homesick, that's all. You've been kind to me, all of you, and I appreciate it. But just this, to-night, has shown me where I belong. Don't try to argue with me. I tell you nothing could tempt me; I want to live in a little house with a front porch where I can sit and sew; and I want to keep a maid-of-all-work, and go to church—yes, go to church. Why, you heathen in the profession, you don't even know the name."

Andrews got up, and muttering something about a time-table, went out. Randolph bent to the girl cautiously.

"You can't fool me, Jessie," he whispered. "It's a man."

Jessie smiled, to control an almost hysterical sob.

"It isn't even a man," she said, with a tremulous smile. "It's a boy—a red-haired boy! And only the memory of him at that!"

Mrs. Randolph and Helen rose, picking up their furs and looking around them with curious eyes.

"It's been great, hasn't it?" Helen's cheeks were flushed with excitement.

"Great!" Mrs. Randolph yawned. "Well, it's been a change; but what on earth's the matter with Jessie?"

Tommy looked at them both scornfully.

"You have as much intuition as a barrel of apples," he snapped, catching up his coat.

"Good night, ladies; good night, ladies," the boys sang regretfully, as the little party moved toward the door. "Good night, ladies, we're going to lose you now."

Just inside the door, some one touched Jessie's arm, and she turned to see a tall undergraduate holding out one of her own photographs. It was a flamboyant theatrical affair, with ropes of paste pearls everywhere.

"I wonder—I wish you would sign it," the boy said diffidently. "It's the way you looked when I first saw you, and I've had the picture ever since."

The others had gone. Jessie stood alone in the doorway, looking from her new heights at the picture of the self she had renounced.

It appeared such a tawdry thing somehow, the paste, the pose, the artificiality.

"I'm sorry it's that one," she said as she took the pen, "but of course I'll sign it."

The man at the table next, the man who had been so shamelessly eavesdropping, had left his seat, and he, too, was near the door. As Jessie slipped through he followed her, and the door closed behind him.

"Miss Dennison," he said softly.

In the blackness she stopped and turned.

"Did some one call?"

There was just a trace of uneasiness in her tone. Certainly, the hall was very dark, and there was something about the voice!

"Will you sign a picture for me?" went on the voice.

It was deep and masculine, and just now it seemed strangely moved.

"If you will come out into the light, certainly I will."

What a ridiculous fancy! Men's voices are much alike, and he lived a thousand miles away!

"I'll strike a match, a dozen, a hundred," said the voice, and struck one.

In its light Jessie saw the picture, and stood speechless. It was a funny little picture—a girl in a white frock, just to her shoe-tops, her heels stiffly together, her hair in two prim braids. From the picture she raised her eyes to the face of the man who held it.

"I want you to sign it," he said, in the words of the undergraduate. "It's the way you looked when I first saw you, and I've carried the picture ever since."

The match had burned down now, and the man dropped it as it scorched his fingers. Short as the distraction was, it gave the girl time to recover herself.

"Put your foot on it," she said suddenly, as she felt the man take a step toward her.

"Bother the match," he muttered.

But he put his foot on it, and in the darkness she even summoned a shaky little laugh. It told him how near she was, and in an instant he had caught her and held her close.

"You can't get away," he whispered triumphantly; "you can't. Not this time. It's Kismet; it's fate."

"It's not fate—it's accident."

She was making a useless effort to free herself.

"Accident!" His arms tightened their grasp. "It was design, premeditation—and fate, too. And I know you better than you know yourself! What about the house with the little front porch, and the boy with the red hair?"

He kissed her then, not once, but many times. The picture fell to the floor and lay unheeded; out in the lobby, Mr. Andrews was angrily wrestling with the railroad schedule, while beyond the doors the boys sang tirelessly.

"Oh, Jessie, Jessie!" he whispered, "to think that I have you in my arms again, after all the years! I love you, love you, love you!"

The girl's arms tightened around his neck.

"The little house with the front porch," she said softly. "Aren't we silly—and happy?"

From the grill-room came the boyish voices, singing of hope and eternal youth.

> For it's always fair weather
> When good fellows get together,
> With a stein on the table
> And a good song ringing clear.

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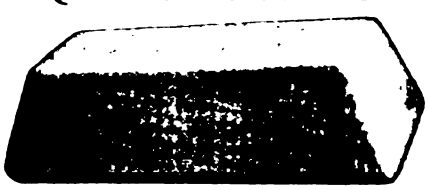

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I will pay representatives liberally, furnish free samples, tell you what to say, how and when to say it.

ONE APPLICATION PROVES ITS WORTH.

Write me personally today. Embrace this opportunity to make money quickly and easily. Secure your territory now. Send 4 cts. in stamps for liberal, free sample and get my fine offer to representatives.

Mrs. J. C. CARR, Pres.

Marietta-Stanley Co.,

408 Fourth Street, Grand Rapids, Michigan

...will presently discover it to be one of the ...places to spend a few days of winter ...ion.

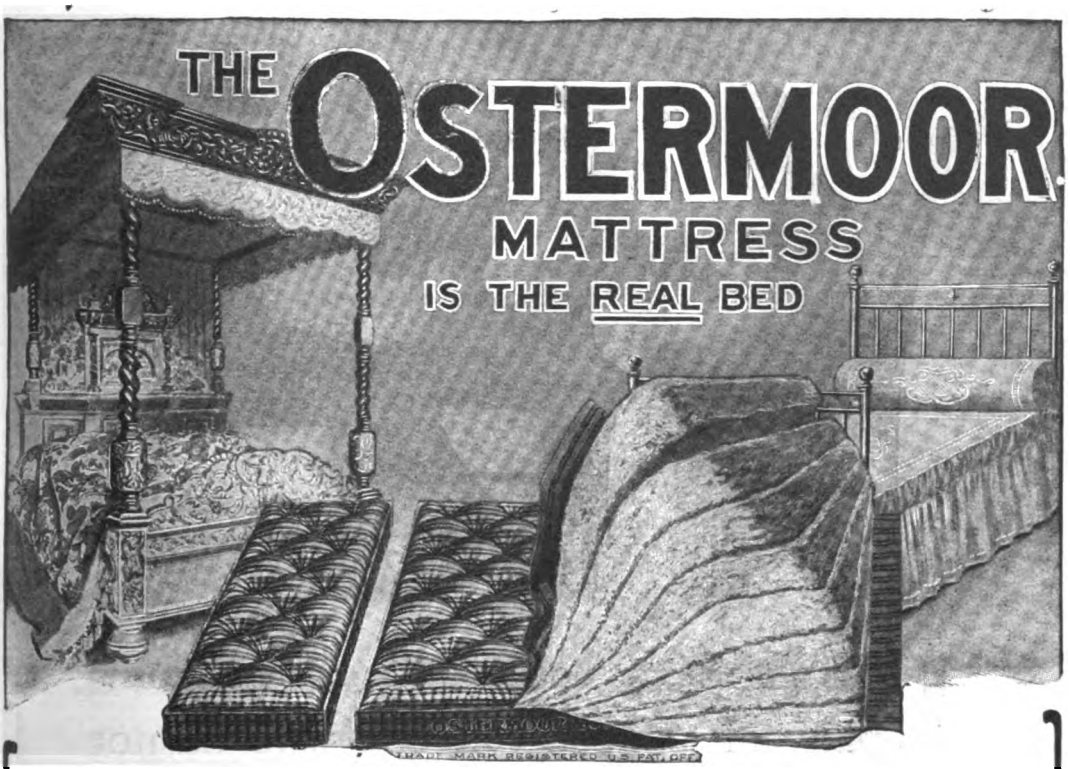
A BLINDFOLDED SHAVING MATCH

A unique contest was recently held at the offices of the American Safety Razor Company, Inc., of 299 Broadway, New York, in which four contestants using four well-known makes of safety razors, entered. After allowing one minute for lathering, each contestant was blindfolded. Speed and a cleanly shave were the deciding points, which was won by the Ever-Ready Safety Razor. In two minutes the winner finished with clean face and without the semblance of a scratch or cut. The regular Ever-Ready 12-bladed Dollar Safety Razor was used.

Clipped from the "Independent Feb 7-07

SEEDS THAT GROW.

The appearance of the various seed catalogues and farm annuals is one of the earliest harbingers of spring.



The BEDSTEAD is for the Eye—a thing to See
The MATTRESS is for the Body—a thing to Feel

Use any bedstead you like—ornate or plain—in a palace or cottage, but the mattress must be *right* or the sleeping goes *wrong*. The Ostermoor is clean and comfortable—all that a mattress can be and *more than any other mattress ever will be.*

Our 144-Page Book, "The Test of Time" and Samples of Ticking Sent Free

The book tells all about the Ostermoor, and explains why it fulfills these conditions. It contains facts of vital importance to any one who values health and long life, and the restful sleep that insures both. Your name and address on a postal will do.

Try an Ostermoor for thirty nights free. If it fails to satisfy in any particular, we will refund your money immediately and without question.

We Sell By Mail, or Through 2500 Ostermoor Dealers

Regular Sizes and Prices	
2 feet 6 inches wide, 25 lbs.	$8.35
3 feet wide, 30 lbs.,	10.00
3 feet 6 inches wide, 35 lbs.	11.70
4 feet wide, 40 lbs.,	13.35
4 feet 6 inches wide, 45 lbs.	15.00

All 6 feet 3 inches long.
Express Charges Prepaid.
In two parts, 50 cents extra.
Special sizes, special prices.

Exclusive Ostermoor agencies everywhere—that is our aim; the highest grade merchant in every place. We were compelled to this move by the necessity of protecting the public against a deluge of worthless imitations. Ask us for the name of the Ostermoor dealer in your vicinity—he will show you a mattress with the *Ostermoor name and label.* That alone stands for mattress excellence the world over. *Be sure to look for our name and trade-mark sewn on the end.* Mattress shipped, express paid by us, same day check is received, if you order of us by mail.

Ostermoor & Co., 110 Elizabeth St., New York

Canadian Agency: Alaska Feather & Down Co., Ltd., Montreal

IT'S hard to entertain a mixed company of people—people who do not know one another very well—a company not large enough to form a crush, nor small enough to make a group—just a roomful, the kind of neighborhood gatherings we all have often. It isn't hard with an Edison Phonograph.

Even that superior chap who has a musical ear and does not think much of mechanical music, is irresistibly drawn out of himself by the remarkable distinctness and clearness of the Edison Phonograph in reproducing vocal and instrumental sounds.

It is a lively circle of which the Edison Phonograph is the center.

We will be glad to send Free to anyone who asks a booklet illustrating and describing the various styles of Edison Phonographs.

National Phonograph Company
35 Lakeside Ave., Orange, N. J.

Buy the New Edison Records for March for Your Phonograph

If you haven't a Phonograph, go to some dealer and hear them. Then you will want both the Phonograph and the Records.

The March selections, a complete list of which is given below, cover the whole field of entertainment, from pathos to roaring comedy. Each is the work of an Edison artist. Everybody will enjoy Ada Jones' rendition of "My Irish Rosie," a new song hit made famous by Hattie Williams in her musical comedy, "The Little Cherub." It's an Irish love song, catchy and bright. All New York is whistling

"My Irish Rosie"

The power of the Edison Phonograph as an ever popular entertainer cannot be half appreciated unless its repertoire is occasionally replenished.

New Edison Records for March

On Sale February 27th

9482	The Uhlans' Call.....Edison Concert Band
9483	The Mountain King.....Stanley
9484	My Irish Rosie.....Ada Jones
9485	Memories of Home.....Edison Venetian Trio
9486	We Have No One To Care For Us Now, Byron G. Harlan
9487	Pedro, the Hand Organ Man.....Spencer
9488	I've Got a Vacant Room for You.....Roberts
9489	High School Cadets March, Edison Military Band
9490	In a Chimney Corner.....MacDonough
9491	Will There Be Any Stars In My Crown? Anthony & Harrison
9492	All In, Down and Out.....Collins
9493	Not Because Your Hair is Curly (Medley) Albert Benzler
9494	Good-Bye, Nellie Darling.....Thompson
9495	Flanagan's Troubles in a Restaurant.....Porter
9496	Waiting for a Certain Girl...Murray and Chorus
9497	Lalu, Me Lubly Queen.....Edison Concert Band
9498	We'll Be Sweethearts to the End.....Myers
9499	Bake Dat Chicken Pie.....Collins and Harlan
9500	I Miss You in a Thousand Different Ways, Gillette
9501	The Guardmount Patrol Edison Symphony Orchestra
9502	Merry Whistling Darkey.....Dudley
9503	Rudolph and Rosie at the Roller Rink, Jones and Spencer
9504	Beauty's Eyes.....Edison Male Quartette
9505	The Record March.....Edison Military Band

THREE BOOKS FREE—Send for the complete catalogue of Edison Records, the Supplemental Catalogue of Edison Records for March and the Phonogram, describing the Records for March. All published February 27th. They will give you a new interest in your Edison Phonograph.

National Phonograph Company,
35 Lakeside Avenue, Orange, N. J.

Thomas A. Edison

Curves of Comfort

The lines of The Stetson Shoe are refined and graceful in design and do not deviate from the natural curves of comfort.

The Stetson Shoe retains this dignity of character and symmetry of outline throughout its life, because the foot is not struggling to break down the restraining walls of an improperly made shoe.

$6.00 to $8.00
Some at $5.00

THE STETSON SHOE

is not only free from strains and pulls from within, but withstands the wear and tear from without, because it is made from the highest quality of materials obtainable and constructed with the utmost perfection of detail. The merest glance shows it to be The Better Shoe—close inspection brings out the reasons for superiority.

If not at your dealer's, order direct from The Stetson Style Book, which will be sent free upon request.

Send for Stetson Style Book.

$6.00 to $8.00
Some at $5.00

THE STETSON SHOE COMPANY,
South Weymouth, Mass.

TO THE DEALER

We will send a sample line to any reliable dealer wishing to take advantage of this advertising and to attract to his store the men's fine trade.

This is the jar druggists sell for home use.

Soap-and-water washing and shaving both leave the pores full of soap and other foreign matter. This matter hardens into blackheads, or clogs the pores so that the skin becomes muddy, sallow and unhealthy. To get the face **really clean** and to cure and prevent shaving soreness, have the barber give you a massage with

This is the jar the barber buys.

Pompeian Massage Cream

after you shave. It will clean your face thoroughly and scientifically, leaving the pores clear, the muscles pliant, and the blood-vessels active. It will remove wrinkles and blackheads, and that drawn, prematurely-aging appearance that comes from continued mental concentration in business or sport.

If you shave yourself or wish to massage yourself, you can get Pompeian Massage Cream of your druggist for home use. But do not allow either barber or druggist to substitute an imitation. No imitation has the qualities of the genuine and many of the imitations are actually harmful. Pompeian cannot possibly injure the most delicate skin and contains **no grease.** Look for the trade mark label on the bottle and be sure "Pompeian" is there, and not some other word similar in appearance or pronunciation.

Your wife or sister will be glad to have a jar of Pompeian Massage Cream in the house. Most women to-day recognize the value of this preparation in maintaining a clean, clear, healthy skin. It contains no grease and makes the use of face powders unnecessary.

SAMPLE MAILED FREE

Send your name to-day—we also send a complete book on Facial Massage

Regular size jars sent by mail where dealer will not supply. Price 50c. and $1.00 a jar.

POMPEIAN MFG. CO., 31 Prospect Street, Cleveland, Ohio

Men like Pompeian Massage Soap. A high-grade toilet article, healing and refreshing, but not highly perfumed. It is for sale by dealers everywhere.

THE PIANO

Do you understand the difference between A piano and THE piano? A piano is just an instrument evolved from clavichord and clarichord, harpsichord and spinet.

THE piano is a creation of genius.

The difference between the two is as great as the difference between an amateur painting and a canvas of Rubens or Titian.

Don't start out to buy A piano. Start out to buy THE piano.

Musical critics recognize the Behr Piano as an instrument of individuality—a creation of genius.

In scale and tone, in touch and brilliancy, in external beauty, the Behr Piano is without a superior.

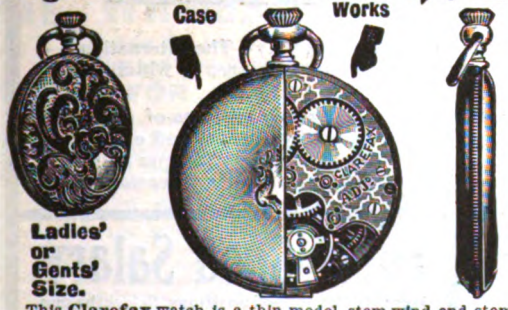
Our booklet, upon request, tells where you may hear and examine the instrument. We are satisfied that if you see and hear it—you will want it.

BEHR BROS. & CO.

290 11th Avenue (Established 1881) **New York**

Guaranteed Watch $5.40

Finely Jeweled Movement For Regular Wholesale Price, $12.



This **Clarefax** watch is a thin model, stem wind and stem set, well made, beautifully jeweled movement and finely balanced with patent regulator, dust band, enameled dial and fancy hands. Every **Clarefax** watch is accurately timed, tested and regulated before leaving the factory and guaranteed absolutely for **20 Years.** The case of the watch is a double hunting case, genuine gold laid and handsomely engraved.

This **Clarefax** watch for **$5.40** is the best watch ever sold for less than $12, and thousands of people have paid from $15 to $20 for watches not nearly so good. We are able to sell it for **$5.40** only because the manufacturers had to raise money in a hurry and sold us the entire output of their factory at less than cost of production.

Do not send money with order, but send us your name, post-office and nearest express office. Tell us whether you want a **ladies' or gents' Clarefax** watch, and we will send the watch to your express office, where you may examine it before paying any money, and after you are positive as to its value, pay the express agent **$5.40** and express charges.

If the watch does not please you after you examine it, have the agent return it at our expense.

GUARANTEE WATCH CO., Dept. 121 Chicago, Ill.

Pabst Extract

The "Best" Tonic

For the Convalescent

At no time during a severe sickness is the patient's vitality at so low an ebb as in commencing convalescence. It is then the system must be repaired by building up the wasted tissues and sending rich, red blood through the veins. The crisis is over, but there is still danger of a relapse. Nothing will do more to prevent sinking back into disease and fever than

Pabst Extract

The Best Tonic

combining as it does the nutritive and digestive elements of pure, rich barley malt with the quieting and tonic effects of the choicest hops. The system easily and thoroughly assimilates the nourishment offered in this predigested form. The patient is assured peaceful rest, and refreshing sleep. At the same time the appetite is stimulated, causing a desire for, and making possible the digestion of heavier foods, after which the road to recovery is short.

Pabst Extract

The Best Tonic

strengthens the weak, builds up the run down, cheers the depressed. It will nourish your nerves, enrich your blood and invigorate your muscles. It gives sleep to the sleepless, relieves dyspepsia and is a boon to nursing mothers.

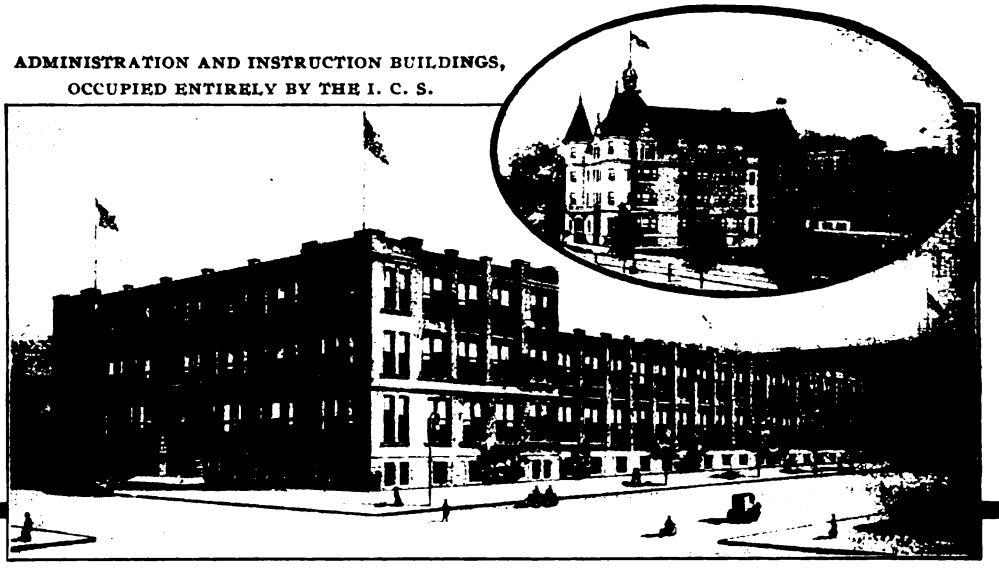
25c at all Druggists
Insist upon the original

Guaranteed under the National Pure Food Law U. S. Serial No. 1921.

Booklet and picture entitled "Baby's First Adventure" sent free on request.

Pabst Extract Dept. 42
Milwaukee, Wis.

ADMINISTRATION AND INSTRUCTION BUILDINGS,
OCCUPIED ENTIRELY BY THE I. C. S.



The Business of This Place is to Raise Salaries

That sounds queer, doesn't it? And yet there is such a place in reality—**The International Correspondence Schools, of Scranton, Pa.**, an institution the entire business of which is to raise, not merely salaries—but *your salary*.

To achieve that purpose the **I. C. S.** has a working capital of many millions of dollars, owns and occupies three large buildings, covering seven acres of floor space, and employs 2700 trained people, all of whom have one object in view—to make it easy for you and all poorly-paid men to earn more. Truly then—*the business of this place is to raise salaries.*

Every month an average of 300 **I. C. S.** students *voluntarily* report increased salaries. In 1906, **3376** students so reported. These students live in every section. Right in their own homes, at their present work, the **I. C. S.** *goes to them*, trains them to advance in their chosen line, or to profitably change to a more congenial occupation.

The same opportunity now knocks at your door. What are you going to do with it? Are you going to lock the door in its face and lag along at the same old wages, or are you going to open the door and give the **I. C. S.** a chance to show you? Perhaps you don't see how, but the **I. C. S.** does. That is its business—*to raise your salary.*

Here is all you have to do. From this list select the position you prefer and notify the **I. C. S.** by postal or letter. It costs you nothing but the stamp to learn how the **I. C. S.** can raise **your** salary.

For a Good Salary

Here is a list of good positions. Select the one you prefer, write a postal to **The International Correspondence Schools, Box 806 Scranton, Pa.**, and ask how you can qualify to fill it at a good salary.

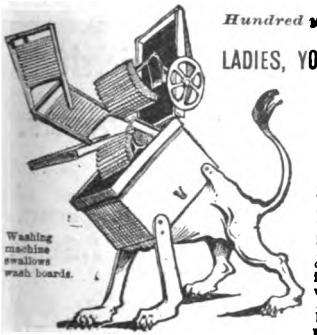
Be sure to mention the position you prefer.

Bookkeeper	Telephone Engineer
Stenographer	Elec. Lighting Supt.
Advertisement Writer	Mechan. Engineer
Show Card Writer	Surveyor
Window Trimmer	Stationary Engineer
Commercial Law	Civil Engineer
Illustrator	Building Contractor
Civil Service	Architect'l Draftsman
Chemist	Architect
Textile Mill Supt.	Structural Engineer
Electrician	Bridge Engineer
Elec. Engineer	Mining Engineer

Mechanical Draftsman

SOMETHING'S HAPPENED! SOMETHING MISSING! SOMETHING KILLED!

READERS LISTEN SHARP, DON'T MISS—BEST THING EVER HAPPENED!



Washing machine swallows wash boards.

Hundred years coming, here at last, full grown—so startling will say it's impossible—miracles don't happen, but wait, don't worry.

LADIES, YOUR PRAYERS ANSWERED—THERE'S NO MORE WASH DAY! IT'S DEAD! LAID AWAY! WIPED OUT FOR EVER.

Blessing the Inventor.

The world's watched for the man to cut wash day in two. He lives—taken more than half—left only minutes—cut so much **wash day's all over, changed**—there's **new way** cleaning clothes—different from anything known—new principles, ideas, methods, **NEW EVERYTHING.** Wonderful, but true, family washing cleaned with no more work than getting a simple meal, less time—**no rubbing, squeezing, pounding, packing, pressing,** no injury—**no drudgery**—that's past. **Good-by wash boards, washing machines, laundries**—throw them away—the **EASY WAY** is here to bless humanity. Women have prayed for death of wash day—for clean clothes without rubbing—ruining health, looks—when they could wash, get dinner, see friends, indulge in recreation without fatigue—when women thought no more of washing clothes than to get a simple meal. **That glorious day has come.** The world's full wash boards, so-called washing machines, yet wash day same as ever—still long, dreary day—no easier, no shorter, no better. Use wash board or washing machine, it's drudgery, long hours, hard work—backache—a day no woman forgets. **Invention that killed wash day named EASY WAY**—name tells whole story—**easy** on clothes—**easy** used—kept clean—handled—**easy** on women—makes washing **easy—easy** to buy and sell. Not called a machine—powers inside concealed—cautious the way it gets dirt—has awful appetite for dirt—increases more it gets—goes after all the dirt in all the clothes at same time—little, but mighty—silent, but powerful—uses no spirits, yet works in darkness. **Operated on stove**—move knob occasionally—that's all—scarcely anything to do but wait between batches—child can do it. All iron and steel—always ready—**sets away on shelf.** Entirely unlike old methods. **Verily, wash day is dead—EASY WAY settled that**—woman's joy, satisfaction, their God-send. **Less than an hour** cleans washing which before took all day—cleans all clothes, finest laces, curtains, etc., in about one-tenth time **without rubbing, squeezing, packing, pressing**—without chemicals to injure goods. Saves **52 days' drudgery** yearly—makes woman's hardest work easiest household duty—saves clothes, labor, fuel, health, looks. Surprises all—sounds strange, is strange, but listen, it's no experiment, going on daily. You can do it. **ANNA MORGAN, Ill.,** writes:—"I washed a **woolen bed blanket** in **EASY WAY** today in **just 8 minutes,** perfectly clean and ready for the rinse." **I. BECK, Ga.,** writes:—"Enclose order. Find '**EASY WAY**' as represented. Worked **4 days** and have **15 orders.**" **GUARANTEED,** everything proven, old house, responsible, capital, $100,000.00. **Price, only $5.00 complete, ready to use—sent to any address. Not sold in stores.**

Throw them away.

BEST EVER HAPPENED FOR AGENTS, SALESMEN,

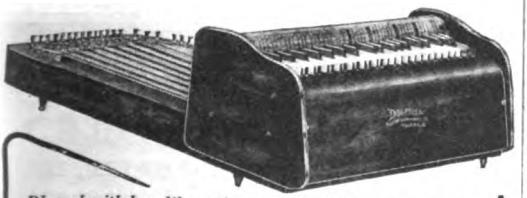
MANAGERS—MEN OR WOMEN—at home or traveling, all or part time—showing—taking orders—appointing agents. "**EASY WAY**" new. **Nothing like it.** Demand world-wide—agents reaping harvest of dollars. When operated, people stop, look, listen, crowd, push, squeeze, miss engagements, get excited—watch it as though a miracle occurred. **12 sec—10 buy. Write today** for **special Agents Plan.** World unsupplied. Act quick.

☞ **Write anyhow for famous copyright "Woman's Farewell," full description, valuable information, testimonials. All free.**

HARRISON MANUFACTURING CO., 352 Harrison Building, Cincinnati, O.

DOLCEOLA

A MINIATURE GRAND PIANO



Played with keys like a piano and having a similar action.

The **DOLCEOLA** is the only musical instrument ever invented that has been demanded and sold in nearly every country upon the globe, the first year it was on the market.

It is endorsed by leading musicians everywhere, as well as by the nobility of Europe.

FROM A MUSICAL AUTHORITY OF NEW YORK:—"I consider it an instrument of great merit. It will be of great assistance in preparing beginners for the piano."—Albert Gerard-Thiers.

Chas. K. Harris, author of "After the Ball," says: "My children are learning it without an instructor."

The Princess of Isenberg Darmstadt, Germany, says: "I have received the Dolceola, and am delighted with it."

The Dolceola, with its four full octaves, embodies the exquisite tone value of two guitars and two mandolins. Its action, while similar to that of the piano, is quicker and more simple, permitting effects impossible with the larger instrument. Any class of music can be played. Music lovers are delighted with it. You must have one.

Agents Make from $100 to $500 Monthly. Write for Proof.

HANDSOME ILLUSTRATED CATALOGUE FREE.

THE TOLEDO SYMPHONY CO.
481 Snow Flake Bldg., TOLEDO, OHIO.

Cleaned Instantly

With a *wipe*, not a wash, and are as good as new. Money, time and trouble saved.

Litholin Waterproofed Linen Collars and Cuffs.

Not celluloid. They realize the dream of the economist and the well dressed man. Never wilt nor crack. Cost little but save much. In all the latest styles.

Collars, 25c. each. Cuffs, per pair, 50c.

If not in stock at your shirt store, remit to us, stating size, style, and how many, and we will mail to your address, postpaid.

Catalogue, with cuts of styles, sent free on request.

THE FIBERLOID COMPANY,
6 Waverly Place, - New York.


The Shoe backs up the tag
SPECIFICATIONS
Good and strong, too That is being proved day in and day out by the gratifying increase in the sales of Regal Shoes in the 171 Regal Stores and Regal Mail Order Department.
The clean-cut elegance and custom style of Regals are something you can see at a glance. Everybody grants that. And now along comes the Regal Specifications Tag to *guarantee* the *quality* of the materials and *make-up* of Regal Shoes.
That tag does nothing less than give you our *signed assurance* of several specific things about those Regals you are trying on: that the inner and outer soles are the finest Oak-Bark-tanned leather; that the counters, lining, vamps, thread, and every material in them is absolutely the best that money can buy.
REGAL SHOE CO. INC. 4.00
EARL, $4.00
Style 4 E 5
(As illustrated). High Shoe, Lace Style. Made of Patent Calf.
Style 4 E 7
Same, except made of Black Wax Calf.
If you do not live near one of the 171 Regalstores order through the Regal Mail Order Department
REGAL SHOE CO.
Mail Order Dept.: 509 SUMMER ST. BOSTON, MASS.
Mail Order Sub-Stations: Factory, E. Whitman, Mass. Box 905
San Francisco, Cal. 780 Market St.—*New Store* Van Ness Ave. and Bush St.—*New Store*
New Spring and Summer Issue of the Regal Style Book Free on Request
¼ Sizes
$3.50 and $4.00
REGAL SHOES
$3.50 For Men and Women $4.00

31 YEARS OF SUCCESS

The Prudential

Foremost in Public Usefulness, Security and Public Confidence

THIRTY-FIRST ANNUAL STATEMENT, JANUARY 1, 1907, SHOWS:

Assets, over	**127 Million Dollars**
Liabilities (including Reserve over $103,000,000) **nearly**	**107 Million Dollars**
Capital Stock,	**2 Million Dollars**
Surplus (largely for ultimate payment of dividends to Policyholders), **over**	**18 Million Dollars**
Increase in Assets, nearly	**20 Million Dollars**
Paid Policyholders during 1906, over	**16 Million Dollars**
Increase in Amount Paid Policyholders 1906 over 1905, over	**2 Million Dollars**
Total Payments to Policyholders to Dec. 31, 1906, over	**123 Million Dollars**
Cash Dividends and Other Concessions not stipulated in original contracts and voluntarily given to holders of old policies to date, nearly	**7¼ Million Dollars**
Loans to Policyholders on Security of their Policies, nearly	**5 Million Dollars**
Number of Policies in Force, nearly	**7 Million**
Net Increase in Insurance in Force, over	**82 Million Dollars**

Bringing Total Amount of Insurance in Force to over

One Billion, Two Hundred and Fifty Million Dollars

Write for Information of Policies, Department 98.

The Year's Record Shows:

Efficient, Economical Administration.

Increased Payments to Policyholders for Death Claims and Dividends.

Large Saving in Expenses.

Lower Expense Rate than Ever Before.

Reduction of Expense Rate in Industrial Department nearly 3½% of Premium Income.

Favorable Mortality Experience.

The business operations of The Prudential are confined to the United States and strictly limited to selected lives.

Dividends to Policyholders during 1906 over	**$1,250,000**
Dividends payable to Policyholders during 1907 nearly	**$1,700,000**

Many letters from Policyholders receiving Dividends demonstrate that the results more than meet the expectations of the Insured.

THE PRUDENTIAL INSURANCE CO. OF AMERICA

Incorporated as a Stock Company by the State of New Jersey

JOHN F. DRYDEN, President — **Home Office, Newark, N. J.**

For Every $100 of Liabilities The Prudential has $119 of Securely Invested Assets.

There is Beauty in every Jar

A little care—a little daily attention—and a little Milkweed Cream will give the woman who cares, a perfect complexion

What attention do you give your face and hands? You wash them of course, but that's not enough. Exposure to the weather, to heat and cold, to dirt and dust, indoors and out, to the tainted air of the ball room or the steam of the kitchen, will take the bloom from any complexion. These causes and condition result in a sallow complexion, make the skin rough, coarsen its texture, and unless proper attention is given there comes lasting and unsightly facial blemishes.

Milkweed Cream

Used night and morning has proven to women everywhere that they can have a clear, bright and healthy skin, for it

Improves bad Complexions, Preserves good Complexions.

Milkweed Cream is a skin food with tonic properties. It is dainty, fastidious, refined; just a little applied with finger tips (no rubbing or kneading) clears the minute pores from dust and dirt, stimulates them into natural activity, and through them feeds the inner skin so that a brilliant and glowing complexion is obtained.

Sold by all druggists at 50 cents and $1.00 a jar, or sent postpaid on receipt of price. A sample will convince you; mailed free for stamp.

F. F. INGRAM & CO., 44 Tenth St.
DETROIT, MICH.

"Just a gleam of ivory in her smile."

Miss Adele Ritchie

One of America's Most beautiful Artistes, says:

"Zodenta will impart a radiance of dazzling white to the teeth that no other dentifrice can give."

ZODENTA

Is for particular people, for those who care about the little things, which add to the appearance of the well groomed man or woman.

It is a dentifrice in paste form, different from the ordinary pastes because the ingredients are blended together by intense heat, so that Zodenta is always the same.

It dissolves all injurious deposits which discolor and in time ruin the delicate enamel, causing decayed teeth. It prevents the formation of tartar and destroys all poisons and germs which cause softened and diseased gums.

If your druggist does not keep Zodenta, send us 25 cents for a large (2½ oz.) tube postpaid. Your money returned if you don't like it. Write for Tooth Brush Holder, mailed free.

F. F. Ingram & Co.
44 Tenth St. Detroit, Mich.

SEE YOU CAN HANG IT UP

EGG-O-SEE

10¢

Keep Step with Nature

Take your cue from nature when Spring sunshine and birds announce the warmer days. Lighten the diet from heavy meats and indigestibles and tempt the fussy appetite with Egg-O-See, the food with a relish to it. Let the appetite and digestion adjust themselves to natural food perfectly prepared. The Egg-O-See process takes selected wheat and makes it delicious and digestible. It gives energy at first hand. Children take to Egg-O-See and every one is delighted with it. Warm it in a pan before serving.

10 Liberal Breakfasts 10c

In Canada the price of Egg-O-See is 15c, two packages for 25c.

How to get well, keep well by natural means—bathing, exercise, food, etc.—and how to use Egg-O-See for every meal in the week is told in our expensively prepared booklet, **"-back to nature," sent free.** We are glad to send it. You will be glad to get it.

EGG-O-SEE CEREAL COMPANY
842 American Trust Bldg., CHICAGO, U. S. A.

-back to nature

The New Gillette Blade

(1907 MAKE)

We want every Gillette user to try the new Gillette Blade (1907 Make), no matter how well he's been pleased with Gillette blades of previous years. And we want every non-Gillette user to try the new blade and learn of a truer and keener shaving edge than he's ever known in a strop razor.

It's not a new model but a new make.

It is the result of two years' continuous and costly research by able steel metallurgists.

It is of the finest iron and the iron is converted into steel according to a new high carbon Gillette formula by the most skillful steel makers in the steel business. The layman will more readily understand the fineness of this new blade steel when it is explained that it costs 9 times the price paid for strop razor steel.

And these new blades are tempered by an improved, automatic, tempering method, which hardens them, not superficially but from side to side, from end to end, from surface to bottom, and hardens them to a degree of hardness only 20% less hard than the hardest known substance—the diamond—and brittles them to almost the brittleness of glass (break one), and distributes the hardness and brittleness so evenly and so uniformly that the blades are equally hard and equally brittle at every point. This unusual hardness and brittleness are due partially to the paper thinness of the blade (6-1000ths of an inch), as the thinner the blade the harder it can be tempered. This paper thin blade is an exclusive Gillette patent found in no other razor.

Then the sharp edges of the new blade are put on by automatic sharpening machines. Other razors boast of hand sharpening. Bottomless boast! Hands are weak, trembly, inaccurate, get tired, vary. But the Gillette grinding, honing, and stropping machines used on this new blade are powerful, steady, exact, tireless, uniform—hence work on a nearly unvarying edge and a much truer and keener edge than the old-fashioned hand-sharpened strop razor edge to which you are probably accustomed.

And these new (1907 Make) blades are expertly tested for seven defects and must split a hanging human hair before they're enveloped and sealed in damp-proof paper from factory to you with this inspector's ticket enclosed: "Should any blades in this package prove unsatisfactory, return them by mail with this ticket and explicit criticism."

In next month's ads. we'll explain why the new (1907 Make) blades are uniform and the same in hardness and keenness.

If you're not a Gillette user you ought to get one on thirty days' free trial and give it a thorough test. Most dealers make this offer. If yours doesn't, we will. It will prove itself. Costs about 2 cents per shave, first year and about ¼ of a cent per shave subsequent years for blades.

Triple silver plated set with 12 blades $5.00. Extra Blades 10 for 50 cents.

Gillette Razors and Blades sold by Drug, Cutlery and Hardware dealers everywhere.

GILLETTE SALES COMPANY,
254 Times Building, - - New York

Send for this book to-day. It is being read by thousands now and has gone through three editions in sixty days. It is worth its weight in gold to any man who doesn't wear a beard. A postal will bring you a copy, prepaid.

Gillette Safety Razor

NO STROPPING, NO HONING